

economic need, so they're participating is "voluntarily" in the same way that a worker who's dying of exposure to asbestos at his or her factory job is doing so "voluntarily."

Pornography spreads degrading and hateful images of women. It teaches that women enjoy being used and are sexually excited by violence. It erases women and children as people. It is, along with rape and battering, the most powerful communicator of contempt and hatred toward women that is endemic to our society.

Do not give the pornography industry a penny of your money. Do not rent pornographic videos or visit pornographic websites, don't purchase pornographic movie options in hotels. Every cent you spend goes to support a massive anti-woman industry (\$10 billion per year).

Looking at pornography leaves you feeling bad anyhow, if you really pay attention to what's going on inside you. If you need support to give it up, get counseling on it or participate in a group for men who are giving up pornography. (One may exist in your area; if not, form one. See the Rus Funk book in the bibliography.)

Prostitution follows a similar pattern to pornography, and in fact there is considerable overlap in the participants. Most prostitutes are slaves to pimps, and even those who are not are there out of economic need. Don't support the industry. If your excuse is, "my money is helping a woman to survive," go spend it at a woman-owned business or contribute it to an organization working for economic justice for women.

Call Other Men Out

We need to take responsibility for interrupting the anti-woman behavior of other men. That work should not keep falling all on women's shoulders. We also can sometimes get men to listen when they aren't willing to hear it from a woman.

Refuse to allow women to be talked about in a degrading way in your presence. Don't allow woman-hating (and gay-hating) words like "bitch", "whore", "pussy", or "cunt" to be used without strongly challenging the person doing so. (And it doesn't matter if they are being used against a man; women are still being degraded in the process.) Refuse to do any bonding with men that is based in making fun of women, feeling superior to



them, or using degrading language about them. Don't laugh when sexist jokes are told, point out that the joke is sexist, and ask that it not be told again. When someone says, "This joke is sexist, but...", immediately interrupt and say, "Then please don't tell it."

Challenging men does not always have to be awkward and tension-producing; there are sometimes humorous ways to point out someone's negative attitudes. As long as you don't make light of the oppression, a light touch can sometimes succeed in getting a message through that wouldn't have been heard otherwise.

Recognize Men's Stake in Ending Sexism

The outstanding benefit to men (and to everyone) of overcoming sexism is that the world desperately needs women's leadership. The whole world is in a deeply precarious position. Unless we head in a radically different direction quickly, we will destroy human life on the planet and take countless other life forms with us. Men's leadership is not getting us out of this mess.

We become more effective activists as we increase our understanding of the interconnection between the different forms of oppression.

We benefit from centuries of women's wisdom when we stop silencing women. We get back the richness of women's political organizing abilities, women's art, women's knowledge about health and natural healing, women's appreciation of nature and spirituality.

EXPLORING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES AS TARGETS OF OPPRESSION

One powerful way for men to gain insight into women's experience of oppression is to do explore our *as children*. Children are among the most heavily oppressed members of society. When we were children, we faced treatment from adults that is in many ways similar to what women face from men, such as:

- * *we were considered less than fully human, just because of being children*
- * *we were ridiculed and controlled by adults, who used their power over us*



- * *we were in physical danger from adult violence (including "spanking")*
- * *most of us were sexually mistreated by adults (usually, though not necessarily, by males) at some point during childhood, or had our boundaries invaded in other ways*
- * *our opinions, our loves, and our outrage carried little or no weight*
- * *we were not permitted to express anger at adults*
- * *we were subjected to degrading images of children in media and in conversation*

As we uncover these experiences of adultist oppression, we become able to move beyond the strictly intellectual to an intuitive understanding of sexism, and our desire to stop participating in oppression deepens.

Many men have also experienced oppression as people of color, poor and working class people, LGBT, people with disabilities, and on down the line. Exploring these experiences is not an excuse to mistreat women, and any time we fall into saying, "Well, I know what it's like for you, because I've experienced oppression also," we are making a mistake. But our healing work *can* help us gain insight to deepen our alliances with women.

Notice that I'm saying that men experience oppression as part of *other* groups we belong to, including the fact that we all went through childhood. We do not experience oppression *as men*. There are things that are hard about being a man, but the concept of oppression loses its power for liberation if we start to apply it to all hard experiences. It will become especially meaningless if we apply it to groups that are in the privileged position, which is to say to groups that are actively keeping other groups down. *The single most devastating aspect of oppression is being taught that you are inferior, and then having that inferiority enforced.* Society does not teach us, through laws, images, religious texts, early cultural training, and so forth, that we're inferior *as men*. Quite the opposite, in fact, we get messages constantly, and from the tenderest of ages, that our maleness makes us superior.

I also believe that the proof is in the pudding. I have seen so many men respond to learning about sexism by going off and doing emotional work on the hardships of being male, and I've never seen it result in improvements in how they support women in their lives.



One other area of emotional work that I have seen be helpful (besides exploring our own experiences of true oppression) is to process painful childhood memories of times when women or girls we cared about were being harmed. Herein lies a bitter but important irony: One of the reasons why we take part in sexism is, paradoxically, as a way to numb the pain we have about what it does to women, and to numb our guilt about not being able to make it stop. Processing and discharging that pain help increase our determination to not participate in keeping women down.

See, then, what you can remember about the sexism faced by your mothers, your sisters, your playmates, and other females when you were a kid. And through that channel, *get in touch with your own bitterness about the oppression of women*. There is power in that outrage that will help take action in the world.

Finally, unearth memories of times you were pressured to participate in mistreating or talking badly about females, or were ridiculed for refusing to go along. Boys are intimidated into taking part in hurting or disrespecting girls, and that residue of emotional injury needs to be healed.

MEN AND SELF-ESTEEM

None of us thought up sexism. If we'd had our way as young children, we would have unhesitatingly erased gender oppression and all other divisions. Children hate prejudice, hate separations, hate anything that is unfair; we were no different. So we don't need to feel ashamed now to be men. But we do need to accept the responsibility that being male brings us. It's as if someone lit a stick of dynamite and put it in your hands; you can complain all you want that you never wanted that stick of dynamite in the first place, but the reality is you've got it now. The decisions you make about what to do with it are going to have a big impact.

Despite my outrage, I feel powerful love and compassion towards men. But I don't confuse men's pain with our behavior. Not only is our pain not the cause of our participation in sexism, it is to a great degree *the result of* that participation. So when we allow a man to continue acting sexist, when we let him use his feelings as an excuse,



when we support his anti-woman attitudes, we're not only abandoning women, we're abandoning that man.

CULTIVATING OUTRAGE

The realities of sexism should make us furious. I'll just pick one: Roughly *two-thousand* women are killed per year in the U.S. by their current or former partners, and over two hundred children are killed by men during those homicides of women.

How can we let this hatred continue? Are women simply expendable beings? The killings are the product of *possession* and *ownership*, of men seeing women as things that belong to them. Women are not things. They were not put on this earth to do things for us, to meet our needs. We do not have the right to insist that they get out of our way. We do not have the right to go fishing or go to our secret lover while women raise our children. We do not have the right to take their children away from them after divorce. We do not have the right to examine their conduct when they are raped, or battered, or killed. We do not have the right to dismiss the perpetrators of these acts as "crazy," when their actions are the predictable outcome of a society that exploits women and holds them in contempt, and when we play a role in making it possible for them to do what they do.

If I sound enraged, just imagine how women must feel.

Get on the right side of these questions and start making your voice heard. We want you along in the struggle.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

These are some of the books that have had the greatest influence on my thinking:

* *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* by bell hooks

* *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* by Suzanne Pharr

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- * *What's Wrong With this Picture?: The Impact of Viewing Pornography* by Rus Funk
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