

TALKING MAN TO MAN ABOUT SEXISM

I have heard innumerable times the saying, "You can't love other people until you can love yourself." It has some truth to it. But, paradoxically, the opposite is every bit as true; you can't love yourself until you can love others. Selfishness leads nowhere. On the surface it looks successful; selfish people end up with more of the desirable goodies in the form of wealth, or leisure, or other people's attention. But their inner impoverishment just grows and grows. The more people they hurt and the more that they refuse to share, the worse they feel in the depths of their being. In response, they increase their selfishness further. The cycle is vicious.

Many people say that, to get selfish people to change, you have to appeal to their self-interest; if there's not something in it for them, why would they work on it? But coming at the problem that way completely fails, and here's why: when we appeal to the self-interest of a selfish person, we are actually *reinforcing* the cage they're stuck in. We're telling them that what's good for them is what matters most, and that outlook is precisely what's driving their problem. They have to learn to love others in order to learn to love themselves; any other approach just solidifies their isolation.

This example is a metaphor for what I'll be discussing in the pages ahead. I've never seen any lasting success come from appealing to the self-interest of those who are acting oppressively. I specialize in working with men, and I assure you that the changes men make from a motivation of self-interest turn out to be superficial, and sooner or later they blow up in women's faces. The changes that we make that will be deep and lasting, the ones that will make real changes in how we treat women, will be based in understanding, and caring about, how our behavior affects women. In the process, we'll recover ourselves.

For this reason, I've chosen to express my thoughts here without mincing words, though I hope to never lack kindness. Men are likely to find the experience of reading this article an uncomfortable one. You are likely at times to feel angry and defensive; at times to feel pained for what women experience; at times to feel that I'm belittling how difficult some of the things are that men go through (although I never do); at times to feel guilty or depressed; at times to feel that I am somehow against you or against men in general (although I'm not).

Observe these feelings as they go by, release them if you can (in the PLN sense of "release"), and keep on reading. Some of my beliefs may collide hard against yours. But your ability to build effective alliances with women will be greatly increased if you hang in there with this process; the women who've commented on drafts of this article have told me that I'm discussing things that they wish badly for men to grasp.

I am not talking about what men *are*; I am discussing how men typically *think* and *act* with respect to women. I don't believe that any of these problems is inherent in men, and I believe that men are, at some level, eager to be find a way out of colluding with this system. But we can't get out if we aren't willing to look squarely and honestly at what we're in

Men's guilt doesn't do anything about ending sexism. In some ways it actually makes it worse, as it puts pressure on women to take care of us about how bad we feel about being men.

However, the effort to avoid feeling guilty at all costs gets in the way even more than guilt itself does. If we decide to go through a process of confronting how hurtful men have been to women, and become aware of our own collusion, we're going to experience some guilt; it's a natural reaction. And guilt feelings are just feelings, the same as any others; avoiding them will only interfere with our ability to think clearly. The solution is to feel and discharge the myriad feelings that come up when women tell the truth.

Intellectualizing also gets in the way. Avoid splitting hairs, quibbling with particular points, or overanalyzing. These are ways to disconnect ourselves emotionally. Keep breathing and try to absorb the big picture.

WHAT IS SEXISM?

I want to start by giving a definition of sexism, because I encounter great confusion in men about this term.

Sexism is a massive system for the exploitation of women. This exploitation takes economic, physical, and emotional forms.

Economic exploitation means that women do the greater part of the World's labor, but only receive a tiny portion of the world's resources. In fact, the UN estimates that Women do over 70% of the world's labor yet own less than 8% of the wealth. Men thus gain tremendous wealth and leisure time from women's labor. This exploitation is on a spectrum, ranging from outright slavery on one end, to low wages and minimal opportunities for advancement on the other. In the United States, the vast majority of the poor are women and children, and the percentage is increasing.

The exploitation of women's bodies includes, in particular, sexual exploitation and childbearing exploitation. *Sexual exploitation* means that women are used as objects for men's sexual pleasure, with little regard for their own humanity, wishes, or desires. *The exploitation of women's reproductive capabilities* means both requiring women to carry children when they don't want to, and prohibiting them from having children when they do want to. Prostitution and

pornography are examples of ways in which economic exploitation and the exploitation of women's bodies come together, as women are forced to work in dangerous and degrading conditions in order to survive.

Finally, *emotional exploitation* of women means using women to nurture men and children emotionally, while men return only a tiny portion of that love, support, and listening. Women pour so much into the people they love.

Because women do not consent easily to these kinds of exploitation, a huge apparatus of male violence against women is required in order to keep the system in place. (No oppressed group bows to oppression without being terrorized first and continually.) This violence includes rape, battering, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, pornography, and the confinement of women to jails and mental institutions.

The scale of this violence is something that men find difficult to grasp, so it is important to gather together the whole picture.

Rape: In the U.S., at least one woman in four will be raped at some point in her lifetime.

Battering: About 20% of heterosexual women report that violence on the part of their intimate partners is a recurring problem.

Sexual abuse: One in four girls is sexually abused by her 18th birthday.

Imprisonment: Over 90% of the women at the Massachusetts women's prison in Framingham are formerly battered, and most are imprisoned for acts related to their efforts to survive or escape the battering situation (such as forging checks for groceries). Eight are imprisoned for long sentences for killing their batterers in order to save their own lives.

Confinement to institutions: The population of mental institutions has typically been over 60% female; women have been defined as crazy by the male dominated mental health system for failing to conform to male norms, or for becoming "hysterical" in the face of rape, battering, or sexual abuse.

Pornography: Hustler, a mainstream pornographic magazine that enjoys particular popularity on college campuses, portrays women being beaten, electrocuted, raped, mutilated, and put through meat grinders, and shows them getting sexual pleasure from such experiences. Real live women are raped, tortured, and murdered in the process of production of pornography.

For all of these reasons, the term "the war between the sexes" is a horrible propagandistic distortion of what is taking place. We are talking about a male war on women.

Women are in no sense passive victims of this system. In fact, it is a testament to the courage and tirelessness of women's resistance to male domination that it takes so much violence to keep women down. Even in this atmosphere of terror, women don't stay down; women have carried

out periodic revolutionary uprisings throughout the 5,000 year history of male domination, one of which began in the late 1960's. But we should not underestimate the courage it takes for a woman to live a typical day in her life, surrounded by efforts by men to physically and emotionally intimidate her and moving through an atmosphere where being a woman is a source of shame.

In addition to violence, a tremendous cultural apparatus is necessary to make the exploitation of women possible. Women are made invisible. Women's accomplishments vanish from historical, scientific, literary, and artistic texts. Men speak for women who are standing right next to them, as if they had no thoughts or voice of their own. Maleness is the norm. For example, almost everyone refers to any animal as "he" unless they have specific knowledge that the animal is female. (Try for the next six months to refer to every animal as "she" unless you specifically know that it is male. What you will notice is that by changing your language, you will gradually begin to perceive animals as female.)

The ability of those in power in society to determine what is visible and what is the norm shapes our entire system of perception. In addition to women's invisibility and to the cultural standard that maleness is the norm, the culture openly and pervasively ridicules women. Images of women in media portray them as inept, irrational, backbiting, and weak, or show them as humiliated, half-naked objects for men's sexual pleasure and use. Imagine existing in an environment where you almost never saw images of yourself other than these.

I am not painting a pretty picture, precisely because I think it is crucial that we stop dancing around these realities as if they weren't there.

One reason why it is so important to look directly at this system is so that we can make the crucial separation between *sexism* and *sex-role stereotyping*. Men do not often grasp this all-important distinction. If we look just at sex-role stereotyping, we can come to the mistaken conclusion that men and women are hurt more or less equally by sexism. Girls are put in shiny black shoes and told not to get dirty, and thus lose their freedom and physical self-confidence. Boys are told to be tough and not to cry, so they lose their feelings and have difficulty being close to people. Raw deal for both sides, right?

The answer is yes, but these restrictive roles are only the barest beginning of what women are subjected to by sexism. Oppression at its base is not about negative or limiting attitudes or stereotypes, which are merely the surface, but about the *power* to control and exploit. This is a power that is backed up by all the key institutions of the society; corporations, government, courts, police, the educational system, and cultural norms. Anyone can be prejudiced; prejudice just means a pre-judging, based on stereotype or some other preconception. But to *oppress* you have to have the social power behind you. And to be on the wrong end of such an all-encompassing system involves vast losses.

Communication between men and women about sexism often gets stuck in this precise confusion. I have many times observed women beginning to describe what gender oppression has meant in their lives, only to have the men who are listening respond by saying how hard things have been for them as men; the effect is to gloss over and trivialize what the woman is trying to express. Another effect is to protect the men from having to think seriously about women's experience. Men have not experienced what a woman experiences from sexism, and we should not claim that we have.

One way to begin respecting women's right to make their own oppression a priority is to stop using the term "sexism" to apply to men's experience, as in, "Sexism limits us too." If we use the term "sexism" to mean "sex-role conditioning," then we have no word left that means "the oppression of women," and thus women have been ripped off once again. Use the term "male sex-role conditioning" if that is what you are talking about.

The term "sexism" has unfortunately never had the social impact that the term "racism" does, precisely because of this confusion about what the word means. When we hear "racist," we think of someone who is hateful, who is intimidating, who is exploitative, who is dehumanizing. Hearing the term "sexist" evokes much milder things, such as pink vs. blue and dolls vs. dump trucks. I often choose to substitute the term "anti-woman," which calls up an image closer to the one that "racist" does, as it should.

CONTROLLING WOMEN'S ANGER

Men are sometimes willing to hear a little about sexism from a woman, as long as she expresses herself in a nice calm tone, explains things very "rationally" and logically, does not bring the subject up at an uncomfortable moment, and above all does not talk specifically about sexist behavior on the part of the man or men to whom she is speaking. In other words, she can talk to us about sexism as long as she does it on our terms and doesn't make us feel bad. Women who don't cooperate with these restrictions get labeled "too angry," "man-hating bitch," or other disparaging, discrediting names. But why on earth shouldn't women be enraged at men, given what sexism means in their lives? And why is it their responsibility to be nice to us about it?

The underlying issues here are threefold:

- 1) However progressive we may be, we have reservoirs of sexist conditioning that tell us that it isn't appropriate for women to be really angry - that is, angry the way men get angry. We're still not prepared to grant women that right.
- 2) We have not yet done the work of imagination that is required to begin to grasp what a woman's experience is. If we had to go through even one day of what women typically live with

from men, we would find ourselves feeling a wild fury. Why should we expect women's reaction to be any different than ours would be?

3) We are aware, at some level, of the tremendous liberating power that women's anger has, so we want to keep it down. The anger and outrage of the oppressed, when it is channeled towards resisting oppression, moves mountains.

We also tend to criticize or "correct" women when they talk about men as a group. When women say, for example, "Men don't respect our opinions," or "Men don't pay attention to childcare," we tend to get defensive and start demanding that the women say "some men." But when it comes to our impact on women, men are not just a collection of individuals; we are a social entity. When women talk about "men," they are talking about men as a political force, a force that controls the media, the government, the courts, the streets, and the home.

We also tend to get upset if women say anything that suggests that men are in a privileged position. Women are required, in order for us to give them space to talk about sexism, to always remember to mention that men are hurt too and not to suggest that we benefit in any way from the exploitation of women.

Notice that we don't usually attempt to place these same restrictions on other groups' expressions of outrage. For example, if poor people say, "We have to live in these conditions because rich people took our land," we don't jump in and require them to say "certain rich people"; we understand that they are talking about a political category, a power bloc in society, that has done oppressive things to them. But men tend to feel entitled to decide how women should express their resentments about sexism.

I recommend that every man read the chapter called "Telling the Truth," from Sonia Johnson's book *Going Out of Our Minds*. Besides eloquently describing what sexism looks like from her point of view, Johnson depicts sharply the hail that sprays down on women who commit the socially unacceptable act of attempting to speak bluntly and fully about what men do to women.

Telling the truth is the first step any group can take towards its liberation, and those who are protecting privilege know how risky the truth is to them if it spreads. The dominant group often says, "Your anger isn't leading to anything productive," precisely because it fears the opposite, that the anger is leading to liberation, and therefore wants to squelch it.

I'm going to add an important point now that is a source of considerable tension between men and women, especially among liberals but even among radicals: Men do not have the right to express anger or criticism toward women as a group. Members of an oppressed group have the right to express resentments against the dominant group *as a group*, but the dominant group does not have that right in reverse, because to do so is to blame the victim and perpetuate oppression. Members of a dominant group are conditioned to channel their resentments towards the

oppressed, both as a way to perpetuate the oppression and as a way to divert attention from the true causes of our discomforts. Let's declare that women are no longer an acceptable dumping ground for our frustrations and disappointments.

Give this point some careful thought and your alliances will be strengthened.

(Note: A man of course has the right to be angry at individual women, but even then he needs to take a look at how that anger is likely to have been intensified by sexism, and he needs to give up the habit of using his anger to intimidate.)

CONTROLLING CONVERSATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING

I see sexism at its most persistent and relentless in male styles of conversing and arguing with women. I've seen the world's most "pro-feminist" men trotting out the whole range of conversational control tactics when dealing with an individual woman or group of women. It's second nature to us. Our tones of voice start to get impatient and condescending. We become know-it-alls. We laugh at women's opinions, or we let out amused, superior smiles. We interrupt, we talk too long, we shake our heads and roll our eyes, we jump in too quickly leaving inadequate pauses for others to participate. We give the final, definitive word. We "correct" women's memories of events, giving them our more "accurate" memories. We get loud. We find so many ways to get our disrespect across, and to intimidate when all else fails.

These male behaviors have changed little in what I've observed, even as of 2015. Many men love to say pro-feminist slogans, but don't you dare point out what they themselves do. The time is long overdue for us to take responsibility for our bullying ways of communicating.

When I challenge men about their conversational politics, they often counter with, "That's just my style, I argue like that with everybody." This excuse ducks the issue in two ways. First, although men are often controlling in arguments with other men, there is a particular tone and a particular set of tactics that they use against women. Women recognize them. Second, even behavior that really is the same has a differential impact; because of the power imbalances built into male-female relationships, the same tactic has a different effect when used with a woman than it does with a man. If you laugh at me, for example, I'm likely to feel kind of bad, but mostly I'll just decide that you're a jerk and move on. If you laugh at a woman, on the other hand, she's likely to get intellectually intimidated, begin to feel stupid, and start to lose her train of thought. Your chances of winning the argument increase, so you like the result. Meanwhile, you are damaging your alliance with her and perpetuating sexism.

Men's level of disrespect for women, and sometimes outright contempt, leaks all over the place like oil from a drum. I'm frequently struck by the expressions of disgust, or contemptuous

amusement, or superior impatience, that men have on their faces as they look at women. Given how tired I am of seeing these attitudes, I can scarcely imagine how sick women must be of it.

Men's arguing tactics sometimes cross the line into telling a woman that she does not think what she says she thinks, and is not feeling what she says she is feeling. Men, in effect, give themselves permission to define who women are, and become annoyed when women insist on the right to define their own thoughts, feelings, and identities.

Men also simply take up more than their share of the space. A frequently-cited study of verbal interactions between men and women found that men make 90% of the interruptions and women ask 90% of the questions.

EXCUSES

Men's excuses for their controlling, violent, or contemptuous behavior towards women don't line up with the real reasons for the behavior. Having to deal with these excuses is one of the more frustrating and anger-producing experiences that I hear women describing. Some of the most common excuses therefore deserve some careful examination and deconstruction.

"I did it because I was too upset." "I am just too insecure." "I have a lot of bitterness towards my mother." "I was abused as a child. I'm just passing it on." Feelings are not the cause of oppressive behavior, though they are the leading excuse. Oppressive behavior comes primarily from two sources; negative attitudes and beliefs about the oppressed group, combined with the desire to protect privilege. Privilege means getting to do less than your share of the work or other effort while receiving more than your share of the rewards. It also means getting to feel powerful and superior. Without these dynamics, we might experience almost the exact same feelings, but we would choose very different behaviors.

Oppressive behavior occurs when someone feels entitled to unequal relationships. If a man feels entitled to have sex with his wife, for example, he is likely to assault her sexually sooner or later. If he realizes, on the other hand, that his wife has the right to refuse to have sex with him anytime she chooses, he will not exploit her sexually no matter how frustrated or starved for sex he begins to feel. After all, women get very frustrated and starved for sex too; this is not an exclusively male emotion. However, it is almost unheard of for a woman to attempt to require an adult man to have sex with her; women are not socialized to believe that men owe them sex.

Anger is probably the feeling most frequently used as an excuse for sexism. One way this goes is, "If I hold in all my anger, that will just give me an ulcer, or maybe it will build up and come out in a worse way later." But anger is not a zero-sum game; we are constantly producing new anger. Anger is created inside of us when we fail to get something that we believe to be our due. If I feel that I have the right to be treated decently, and someone is nasty to me, I feel angry.

If I am eating in a group of four people and they prevent me from having roughly one-fourth of the food, I feel angry because I failed to get something that I was entitled to. This works fine as long as we have a correct perception of our rights. But men are socialized to feel entitled to all kinds of things from women that we actually have no right to (obedience, deference, sex, caretaking, and on and on), so we constantly build up new anger when women fail to come through on every expected detail. This is why men's anger at women never decreases. A man's efforts to "work on his anger" tend to be counterproductive in this area, because every time people in privileged positions "let out their anger" about the things the oppressed have failed to do for them, their sense of entitlement just gets even worse. Therefore, the only way men's anger will be reduced is if they become aware of their unfair entitlements towards women and agree to relinquish them.

Having been raised by an abusive or controlling mother, or father, or both, is an increasingly common excuse for sexism. It follows the same lines as the other "feelings" excuses; when you explore more deeply, the attitudes towards women are a much more accurate predictor of how men will treat women. Some people from abusive backgrounds are actually *less* willing to participate in the oppression of others, because they remember what it's like; so having been abused is no excuse.

Insecurity is also an oft-heard excuse, used to cover attitudes of possessiveness. Men's jealous accusations, control of women's movements, suspicious questioning, and refusal to accept the end of an intimate relationship, have nothing to do with insecurity; everybody struggles with insecurity in relationships. "I'm insecure" is just an excuse for an attitude of "You belong to me," which is the real cause of possessive and controlling behavior.

"You humiliated me." Again, this follows the lines of the "feelings" excuses. I separate it out because it is so common and it sucks in people's sympathy very effectively. When I explore this excuse with men, I find that underlying problem is an attitude of, "She has no right to say what she really thinks if it hurts my feelings, and she has no right to point out what I do to her."

"You took it the wrong way. You're too sensitive." This is simply a way to avoid dealing with what he did. A man who is interested in overcoming sexism would ask himself, and the woman criticizing him, "What did I do that made my behavior have a sexist effect?" Then he would take the feedback that he received and apply it to future interactions. Other people cannot read your mind. When you say to someone, "You took it the wrong way," you are saying in effect, "It is your responsibility to know what I intended." In fact, the responsibility to communicate with women in a respectful way is ours. The comment "You're too sensitive" is equally simple to analyze; it is a put-down of the woman intended to make her feel defensive and belittled, so that she will be intimidated out of pursuing her current complaint or bringing up new ones in the future.

"My intentions were good." This excuse more or less follows the lines of the previous one. You are responsible for the effects of your actions, not just your intentions. If you are playing catch and you break a neighbor's window, you have to fix it, even though you obviously didn't intend to do any damage. Your responsibility is even greater in cases where the effects of your actions are predictable. For example, if you yell at a woman and she says, "You are frightening me," don't yell back at her, "I'm not trying to frighten you." What you are trying to do is not the issue; when a man yells at a woman, fear is an entirely predictable result.

At the same time, we are often in denial, with the woman and with ourselves, about what our real intentions are. Often we can see that our intentions aren't really so good once we get honest with ourselves about it. Our intention is often to bully, and the woman can tell.

"You don't give me any room to express my feelings in my own way. It's not fair to expect me to be totally rational and measured all the time in how I say things." This is a popular cop-out. How emotional you get during an interaction is not the issue. There are ways to express rage, or profoundly hurt feelings, or other strong emotions, that do not show contempt and do not intimidate. You do not have to talk to the woman as if she is stupid; you do not have to interrupt or talk over her; you do not have to express your opinions as pronouncements, as if you are the final authority and only a fool could disagree with you; you do not have to roll your eyes or look disgusted when she's talking; you do not have to yell; you do not have to get right in her face, or throw things, or make violent physical movements, or do other scary or contemptuous things. It is your responsibility to be respectful and non-intimidating. Doing so does not restrict how emotional you can become in any way; that is just an excuse. I've seen plenty of people (mostly women, but sometimes men) in absolute rages or in states of bitterly hurt feelings who pour out their emotions without being degrading or scary.

"You weren't listening to me, so I was just trying to make you listen." First of all, you have no right to make a woman listen; she has every right to choose not to. You don't have to like it, but you don't get to overpower her to get your way. Besides, often the reason why she stopped listening was that you were ridiculing or intimidating her, and now you are getting worse in order to force her to listen. Secondly, if a woman continues to disagree with a man through an extended and heated discussion, the man will typically take that to mean that she is not listening. After all, it's completely clear to him that he's right, so if she's still disagreeing she obviously must not be listening, right? Finally, men lack respect for women's opinions, so we have difficulty accepting that a woman might have valid reasons for seeing things differently than we do. She may be listening beautifully and still disagree:

Give up making excuses for sexist behavior. No one is saying that men are terrible people; we are being confronted for the things we do, not for what we are. So listen to the feedback, think about it carefully, and figure out how to be a better ally the next time.

BACKLASH: THE MEN'S MOVEMENT

The overall movement in the male power structure to attempt to roll back the gains made by the feminist movement has been so well described elsewhere that I won't attempt to cover it here; every man should read *Backlash* by Susan Faludi, in order to see the consciousness, deliberateness, and shamelessness with which men in positions of influence have set themselves to protecting male privilege. With ample documentation, Faludi debunks the notion that sexism is some kind of individual, unaware activity, rather than the well-organized structuring and maintenance of male-domination. What I want to address briefly here is the "men's movement," which has been in so many ways an attempt to strike back against women. Leaders of this movement are fond of claiming that feminism has turned men into "wimps," and blames male difficulties on our mothers who have supposedly controlled and smothered us instead of allowing us "to become men."

This view is abhorrent in myriad ways. First of all, men already blame women for their problems. Second, while there are individual mothers who are controlling or abusive towards their children, to blame mothers in the aggregate is to ignore that fathers have far more power socially to determine the nature of childhood than mothers do, and are more frequently the primary source of fear and intimidation in boy's lives. (And there is interesting research showing that men's negative attitudes toward females come from their experiences with males, not from their experiences with females.)

Worse than these things, though, is that the men's movement is perpetuating the idea that men are inherently different from women, and that we have needs to feel strong, competent, independent, and warrior-like that women don't have and don't understand. It also suggests, by targeting feminism, that women are somehow hurting us by standing up for themselves against our oppressiveness. The message comes down to, "If you won't let us oppress you at least somewhat, we can't be real men." Rather than being fired up against our mothers, we need to be encouraged to go back and really get to know our mothers as people, and remake a bond that sexism has worked so hard to sever. We need to learn about our mothers' lives and experiences, and learn about how the oppression of women has affected them. In the process, we will regain a huge and crucial pieces of ourselves.

The men's movement communicates the idea that men can't really be themselves around women, that we need to get away from women in order to develop our identity. Imagine a similar argument being made that, for example, white people who grew up in mixed neighborhoods are struggling because they have not gotten to become "fully white," and in order to move past the debilitating experience of integration they need to go to "whites only" weekends. We wouldn't tolerate it for a minute.

I have indeed observed that some men lose some of their self-confidence around women if those women are outspoken in their resistance to sexism. But feminism is not to blame. What we need to ask these men is:

- 1) Why are powerful women so threatening to you?
- 2) Why do you only see two ways to relate to women, either as one who dominates or as one who kowtows? In other words, why is a respectful, equal, mutually challenging way of relating to women out of the question?

Their own sexism is what is paralyzing them, not feminism. Besides, to become horrified at the thought of men being softer is sexist and heterosexist in itself; the problem is that these men are acting "like women" or "like gay men." What's wrong with men going through a period of personal uncertainty while they learn new ways to relate to women?

MEN AS VICTIMS

Part of our social conditioning as men is to be taught to put our own interests ahead of the interests of women. We learn that women's lives should revolve around meeting our needs, and that we should always be the center of women's attention. We thus are culturally taught to be self-centered with respect to women. This conditioning leads men to say "Me too!" about sexism. We sense the focus of attention shifting somewhat towards women, and we are eager to get back in the spotlight where we are most comfortable. We start to compete for the status of victim, saying for example, "Women just don't understand what things are like for us," even though they have been doing most of the listening all along.

I'm not saying that we should never talk about what's hard about being male, just as I wouldn't say that rich people should never talk about the difficulties of being rich; but we should keep these feelings out of discussions of oppression, and stay focused on the experience of the oppressed. Oppressive systems always emphasize the feelings, needs, and experience of the dominant groups; we are not contradicting oppression if we continue that emphasis. Picture a stockbroker going down to the soup line and telling the starving people about the burdens of being rich. His or her distresses may be real, but members of an exploited group should not be expected to provide a supportive ear for whining about how hard it is to be in the privileged position. It rubs salt in the wound of the oppression.

"BUT I HAVE RENOUNCED SEXISM"

I have sometimes heard men say that they are not participating in sexism, and therefore they are not responsible for fighting it. But it is impossible to be male in this society, be you rich or

poor, gay or straight, and not have unfair power over women. We can work very hard to reduce that power, and we must, but aspects of our oppressiveness are structural and thus are unavoidable until sexism itself ceases to exist. If I pass a woman who is alone on a quiet street at night, she has to consider the danger I might represent to her; thus my simple presence there steals from her some of her sense of safety and enjoyment of life. If I am in a conflict with a woman, people around us are going to tend to take my opinions more seriously than hers, and that strengthens my position. I am compensated better than a woman for doing the same work, and I receive favoritism in hiring and promotion decisions; these benefits are beyond my immediate control. I also receive subtler, emotional benefits from sexism. Because men tend to treat women so contemptuously, I come out looking great in women's eyes just for acting half-way decent. The fact that so many men batter women, for example, increases the power that non-battering men have in their relationships; it does so because she has to consider the possibility that if she leaves me, her next partner may be quite a bit worse, and also because the pervasiveness of male violence keeps her being a little bit wary with me, even if I have never been violent before. I personally get a lot of positive attention from women for being "so different from other men." Positive attention feels good, and it's attention that I'm getting because of sexism.

Because I participate in sexism in these ways, even if I do so unwillingly, I have the responsibility to see to it that my effort to end sexism outweigh my contributions. And that's a serious undertaking.

There is also an arrogance in a man who declares that he is in no way sexist. How has he become such an expert on women's oppression that he can be sure that he's completely separate from it? Thus it isn't surprising that the men who make these kinds of claims invariably turn out to be people whose sexism is obvious to me.

Kidding yourself that you have finished the job of overcoming sexism creates an excuse to fall back into sexist ways of interacting. I have seen it used particularly as a smoke screen to continue making unfair emotional demands on women for attention, approval, and understanding, and as a way to refuse to hear women's grievances about continued sexist behavior.

MEN'S EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

The various concepts I've been covering lead me to two proposals for men's work. One is that every event or publication that is focused on men's issues should include a substantial portion devoted to discussions of overcoming the oppression of women. (The journal *Voice Male*, for example, has moved sharply in this direction, I have been pleased to observe.) If this discussion is absent or receives inadequate emphasis, we are failing to take responsibility for the privileges

we have as men. We are also headed on the road back to self-centeredness and collusion with sexism.

Secondly, no future event or publication should exclude women's participation; women should be welcomed to attend men's workshops, and write for men's journals and blogs. Women's participation keeps us honest, helping us to see where our focus is drifting away from sexism and where we are falling back into woman-blaming and heterosexism, as men's work has tended to do.

Holding men-only events is not parallel to all-women's gatherings. Women need an escape from male control, a place to think and feel without the impediments placed on them by male power. Women are also not re-creating an entire societal system of exclusion when they shut us out. We can always go for a walk around the block or in the woods; it is women who are forever having to calculate where it is safe to go. There are already far too many realms on this earth where women are not welcome, and we should play no part in adding to these.

BUILDING ALLIANCES

Unity between men and women in liberation struggles is a challenge. Sexism, like all forms of oppression, is divisive. The quality of our alliances with women is going to be up to us; women will trust us to the extent that we earn their trust. Every time they attempt to work with us, women may be wondering, "Are our concerns going to be gradually pushed aside? Is our leadership going to be undermined? Are our working relationships going to be sexualized? Are we going to feel silent and invisible?" Women have these concerns because these dynamics unfold in almost every mixed-gender organizations, no matter how conscious the men appear to be.

Women often have to pay other prices to have us along as allies; we insist that they temper their outrage, we expect that they should be grateful to us, we demand that they listen to us whine. If we step outside of these habits, we will find ourselves gradually less and less on trial.

The quality of our listening will be the other key determinant; our defensiveness is one of the biggest obstacles to effective alliances.

"DIVISIVENESS"

The division between men and women was not women's idea. Women who speak bluntly about sexism, or who demand opportunities to gather without men present, get accused of "divisiveness." These women are not causing divisions; they are acknowledging the ones that

sexism has created. They are refusing to continue the charade of unity. When women get opportunities for separateness, the possibility for true unity actually increases, as women gain the centeredness and solidarity to operate from their own reality instead of from pretense. They then come back to their relationships with men able to insist on redefining them, instead of having to accept them on men's terms.

This same principle holds across all lines of oppression: genuine unity is only possible as we learn to better understand and respect the different experiences of the oppressed, their different cultures, and their different relationships to social power.

WORKING TOWARDS EQUALITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

A completely equal relationship between a man and a woman, whether it is a personal relationship or a political one, is next to impossible now and will continue to be until sexism itself is erased from the globe. Because of the social context in which the relationship exists, including our different levels of access to power, respect, and opportunity, the effects of sexism will always be present in the relationship. (The same can be said of any relationship across oppression lines.) The effects creep into almost every interaction and have to be struggled against, communicated about, and learned about. Recognizing this fact is in itself a step towards making our relationships more equal.

An effective alliance thus depends on our understanding that the person in the position of privilege always has certain special responsibilities, and the person in the oppressed group always has certain special rights. This does not mean that we turn the tables, giving the oppressed person all the rights and the privileged person none of them; it means rather that we are always conscious of the social context, never pretending that it has gone away, never claiming that "in our relationship we have risen above all that."

Oppression dynamics can sometimes cut two ways. A straight woman has certain kinds of power over a gay man, just as a white woman has over a man of color. Which person is in the more powerful position depends on the context; testifying in court, for example, the word of a white woman is likely to be believed over that of an African-American man. The different power dynamics going on in a specific interaction need to be addressed and unraveled.

COMING TO TERMS WITH SEXISM

Learning about the full extent of sexism can be overwhelming. Some men become defensive or angry and simply refuse to think about it further. Others equate sexism with sex-role stereotyping, and focus on fighting "sexism" as a way to benefit themselves by freeing men from sex-role limitations. Many others are willing to take a more direct look at the oppression of

women, but end up feeling paralyzed by guilt and the fear of doing something wrong. They start almost to idolize women, the way some whites idolize Native Americans; idolatry, however, is not respect. Still another group of men become vocal proponents of women's rights, but are unwilling to examine their own complicity, and thus their personal and political conduct does not progress.

There is a challenging contradiction in what we have to accomplish. On the one hand, we need to quit the "men's team." That way we can stop feeling criticized when women say "Men do such and such," because we have chosen to switch which side we're on. At the same time, we need to not dissociate ourselves so completely from men that we start to consider ourselves above reproach, as if we had no complicity in sexism.

The Emotional Process of Overcoming Sexism

One way to get past this apparent contradiction is to recognize and accept the painful aspects of our own personal process. The range of feelings that may rise up in you from struggling with what I say in this article are an example of the things we go through. Giving up sexism feels bad; we feel as though we ourselves and our entire gender are being criticized harshly, and we feel as though important things are being taken from us. However, letting go of privilege is like confronting a hill that is very steep on one side yet has a gentle slope on the other. When we first are giving up privilege we feel that we are losing something of tremendous importance, but once we look back from a distance we see that nothing of lasting value has been lost, and something major has been gained.

I still go through this process myself even after years of making the struggle against sexism the top priority in my life. When a woman (or sometimes a man) points out something sexist that I have done, I immediately feel resentful; the criticism always seems unfair at first, especially given how hard I work to treat women with respect. I feel that my behavior has been judged incorrectly and that the person bringing the issue up is making an error. Next, I start to feel bad about myself; a kind of shadow goes over my mood. I feel that if I'm not perfect, I'm no good. Next, I often start to feel sad about giving up the thing I am being asked not to do.

For example, I was criticized once for switching the subject of a conversation about how sexism affects girls to how hard things were for me as a boy. My feeling right after the criticism was, "This means I'm never going to get to tell about what I went through." But that wasn't actually true at all; plenty of people, both women and men, have listened to me well about the mistreatment that boys face. All I was being asked to do was give up was my habit of using those stories as a response to women's efforts to talk about sexism.

The next step is usually that I give up doing what I was asked not to do, but I continue for a while feeling resentful and misunderstood about it, and feeling that something was taken away from me.

After this all passes, I come eventually to a place of feeling glad that I was called on what I was doing. I feel that I've gotten rid of a behavior or an attitude that I didn't want or need. I feel lighter. My relationships with women get another step closer, my effectiveness as an ally moves up another notch. My pride in myself improves. My ability to articulate the nature and workings of oppression improves, including my ability to describe what adultism did to me. I feel relieved of the burden of defending myself and men as a gender, because I realize that there is nothing to protect; we could give up every bit of sexism and still be completely fine -- in fact, we would feel better than ever.

Like many men, I'm doing the best I can to switch sides in the war on women. Some white people will happily say, "My heart lies more with people of color in interracial struggles," and some upper-middle class people will say, "I'm really behind the poor in the class struggle," but it's less common to hear a man say, "I side with women in the gender struggle." I think one reason for this difference is that white people tend to lead lives that are largely separate from people of color, and rich and poor are almost always kept well apart, but the lives of men and women are intertwined. This means that to switch sides, a man has to do much more than just take political stands; he has to examine personal ways of operating, and this is a more unpleasant process. The rewards, however, are great as well.

Dealing With Our Own Rage at Men

Each man has an internal reservoir of anger at men, an important subject but one that I've never heard discussed anywhere. Buried under all of our disrespectful attitudes we have a heart that hates sexism and what it has done to girls and women whom we love. Uncovering this outrage can be a great help, as it draws us away from the idea that feminism is a movement against men rather than a movement against oppression.

At the same time, those feelings create inner conflict. Is it possible for me to simultaneously feel outrage about sexism and awareness of my own complicity in it? Does this mean that I hate myself? "Yes" to the first question, "no" to the second. I forgive myself for the past, demand of myself absolutely that I do better in the future, and channel my resentment in the direction of the patriarchal system that produced this mess. I try not to hate men, but I allow myself to hate sexism with all my heart. Moreover, if hating sexism means that there are some days when I do feel that I hate men, no harm is done. Feelings are feelings. I continue to treat individual men well; so, by the way, do the most angry feminist women I know (contrary to the popular myth of the "man-hating feminist"). The fear that we will use our political rage as an excuse for personal mistreatment has little basis.

WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

For us to understand sexism and know how to be effective and loving allies to women, we need to learn about how women have resisted and fought back against sexism, not just about how they have been its victims. Every oppressed group fights back in courageous, creative, and tireless ways, and these acts of resistance are carried out in the face of tremendous threat of (and reality of) retaliation.

As men it's important for us to be able to hold these simultaneous views of women in our perspective, seeing how badly women have been harmed but also how inspiring and brave they have been in their efforts, over thousands of years, to recover their stolen rights. Women want us to get how bad certain aspects of their experience have been, but they don't want us to feel sorry for them, and they don't want us to see them as collections of injuries. Make sure that each day you are noticing women's strengths, their intelligence, their courage, and their creativity. Notice how well they have survived against the odds. They don't need us to rescue them; they need us to join their cause as allies and support their leadership.

WHAT CAN MEN DO?

There are countless actions that men can take to contribute to the dismantling of sexism. Here are some of the key moves I would like you to consider making.

Treat Women With Respect

I struggled for a long period with the question, "How can I take in what I've learned about gender oppression and still be myself? If it's impossible to be completely innocent of sexism, does that mean I have to patronize women, allow them always to have their way, and walk on eggshells all the time?" Respect is the one key to what men need to do differently. Respect is very different from patronizing. Women do not want us to kiss up to them, placate them, or abandon our own opinions and beliefs. They are not interested in having us tip-toeing around asking, "Oops, did I do something sexist?" Our guilt and obsequiousness just become another burden on women. There is no substitute for equality, love, and listening. Rather than attempting to always agree with women, we need to learn to disagree in a way that respects women's intelligence and validates their perspective. We have to argue in respectful ways, be angry in ways that don't intimidate, be outspoken in ways that leave room for other people's opinions. We have to give up the male compulsion to win and to be right. I have found that I agree with women more and more, but not from "letting them win"; rather, my perspective changes from beginning to consider seriously what women are saying, with the result that I begin to realize how much sense they've been making all along.

And above all, men need to talk to women less and listen more. (I am struck by how often I observe a man will dominate an entire conversation with a woman, or a group of women. I'm reminded of lines from a Malvina Reynolds song, "He thinks my head is all full of nothin', he can't wait to put his special stuff in.")

Respect is also shown by concrete behaviors, not just attitudes. One of the loudest indicators of your level of respect is whether you do your share of all childcare, housecleaning, shopping, laundry, cooking, dishwashing, birth control, communicating with relatives, planning the social calendar, buying gifts, and on and on. A disturbing proportion of men claim all kinds of pro-woman credentials while continuing to exploit women's labor *which is the central piece of what sexism is all about.*

Emotional caretaking is also hard work. Another way you show your level of respect is in the amount of emotional giving you do, the proportion of time you spend listening, the supportive comments you make, the appreciation you express. The flip-side is that you communicate disrespect by demanding that women take care of you emotionally, acting as if it were their job to make you feel loved and cared for, keep your ego massaged, and protect your feelings. Examine the place inside of you (we all have it) that feels that it's women's obligation to meet your needs. Increasing your level of respect for women means decreasing your attitude of entitlement; you get only what you give, and it won't always be on your terms.

Support Women's Leadership

Our next most important role in overcoming sexism, next to examining ourselves and ceasing our own participation, is to support women's leadership. This means listening to women and supporting them in the issues that come up about taking leadership; encouraging women to believe in themselves and in their abilities; *taking care of children* so that women can attend meetings and events; and contributing in other logistical ways so that women have time for their leadership efforts. The emotional support we give is just lip service if we aren't willing to do our share of the work so that women can lead -- in fact more than our share, really, since we have a lot of old debts to pay off. Support women's leadership even when it is in conflict with your own, or perhaps especially then, for at these times men usually begin to undermine.

Educate Ourselves

Reading and digesting this article is a step towards understanding sexism, but there is a vast amount to learn. I include here a bibliography of some of the books that I have found to be the most valuable. Your best source for learning, along with books, is the women in your life and the feminist political events in your area. Listen, listen, listen. Education about heterosexism is also essential, because it is a crucial weapon of sexism. The oppression of lesbians helps keep all women afraid of the social consequences of attempting to live free from male control. The oppression of gay men helps to intimidate men who might choose not to participate in their socially-assigned role of controllers of women. (See Suzanne Pharr's book in the bibliography.)

Give Up Pornography and Prostitutes

Pornography is deadly to women and children. People are killed in the production of pornography, sometimes by "accident" (torture that got out of hand), and sometimes on purpose for the effect (the famous "snuff films"). Women and children are enslaved, producing pornography against their will. Other women work in pornography out of economic desperation, so they are participating "voluntarily" only in the sense that a worker who is dying of exposure to asbestos at his or her factory job is doing so "voluntarily." Pornography also helps to spread hateful, degrading images of women. It teaches that women enjoy being used, that they are sexually excited by violence, that they are play things whose very existence is about pleasing men. It erases women and children as people. It is, along with rape and battering, the most powerful communicator of contempt and outright hatred towards women that is endemic to our society.

Do not give the pornography industry a penny of your money. Do not rent pornographic videos or buy pornographic magazines, do not patronize pornographic movie houses or pornographic movie options in hotels. Every cent you spend goes to support a massive anti-woman industry (\$10 billion per year).

The use of pornography reinforces within us a way of looking at women, and communicates disrespect to the women in our lives. Looking at pornography leaves you feeling bad anyhow, if you really pay attention to what's going on inside of 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.)

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 desperation. Don't support the industry, and don't support your own view of women as a commodity. 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. In some situations men have to be the ones to speak up because it isn't safe for women to do so. Men need to make their voices heard. We can accomplish a great deal by being, in a sense, traitors to our gender. Men will not generally listen to women about sexism, whereas they may listen to other men. This is true both in confronting individual men and in challenging men in positions of social influence, the ones who provide the institutional back-up to the sexist conduct of each individual. Men can get a lot of respectability in high places where women find it much harder to come by; we thus can be infiltrators of the current system.

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", "sissy", 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 often humorous ways to point out someone's negative attitudes. As long as you don't make light of the oppression, a humorous touch can help get a message across that might not get through otherwise.

Recognize Men's Stake in Ending Sexism

Although men have a tremendous amount to gain in the long term from ending sexism (in spite of the loss of privileges in the short-term), I choose to keep pretty quiet about it, as I explained at the beginning of this article. As men we're socialized to put our needs first and women's needs second--or tenth--so appealing to men's self-interest reinforces sexism. Men have to decide that women's oppression counts in itself.

However, I do believe that there's a time and a place for talking about what ending sexism has in it for us. 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; if we don't literally destroy human life on the planet we will certainly destroy any enjoyable quality of life unless we head in a radically different direction soon. Men's leadership is not getting us out of this mess.

We also benefit in our self-respect. Acting oppressively does not feel good except on the most superficial, addictive level. If we pay attention to ourselves we find that just a little deeper down, being sexist feels rotten. As we participate in sexism less, we stop feeling like we are caught up in some rushing current, and instead take more and more charge of our own decisions. Our lives thus come increasingly to stand for something that we can be proud of.

We benefit in our relationships with women, as they become less mired in miscommunication and distance and more grounded in genuine alliance and trust.

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 which has mostly been denied to us, thereby impoverishing our own lives. 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. These are all aspects of the human legacy that we regain when we start to seek out women's contributions and take them seriously.

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 our own deep emotional work on our experiences *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. Healing from our own experiences of having been oppressed also tends to deepen our desire to stop participating in the oppression of others.

Many of us have also experienced oppression as members of other groups we've been part of: people of color, poor and working class people, GLBT, 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 grave mistake. But our healing work *can* help us gain insight, clarity, and strength that can in turn improve the quality of our alliances with women.

It does not work (and I've seen it tried a lot) for men to go off and work on their experiences of being "oppressed as men," because men are not an oppressed group. Such work will bring help relieve you of some of the limitations of your sex-role, but it will do nothing to help you

understand women's experiences or to strengthen your alliances. *The outstandingly destructive aspect of oppression is the treatment of people as inferior, and the indoctrination of people to see themselves as inferior.* And men are never taught that we are inferior *as men*; in fact, we get messages constantly that our maleness makes us superior. So if you are going to do internal emotional exploration as part of your healing, and with an eye toward improving your ability to fight oppression, dig into your experiences as a child facing adultism and into other experiences you have had of truly facing oppression.

The other important emotional work is to explore and heal our painful childhood experiences of witnessing the hammer of sexism coming down on girls and women that we cared about. 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. By joining in with the oppression, we are able to convince ourselves that it is necessary and justified. *This collusion relieves our discomfort, but deadens us at the same time.*

The alternative is to explore our memories of sexist treatment faced by our mothers, our sisters, our playmates, or other females who meant something to us. If we had fathers who were controlling or abusive towards our mothers, or towards us and our siblings, our memories of his actions are a good way to get at our hurt about patriarchal power and how it touches the lives of women and children; but if not, we can awaken many other memories of what we had to witness in our younger days. *Get in touch with your own bitterness about the oppression of women.* There is power in that outrage that will help you to heal emotionally and to take action in the world.

Unearth memories of being pressured to participate in sexism, or of being ridiculed for refusing to. Boys are often intimidated into taking part in hurting or disrespecting girls, and that residue of hurt needs to be cleaned out.

MEN AND PRIDE

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, and we were no different. We don't need to feel ashamed to be men. But we do need to take on 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 whine all you want about how you never wanted that stick of dynamite in the first place, but the reality is you've got it now and the decisions you make are going to have a big impact.

OF LOVE AND RAGE

If women dare to sound angry, men won't listen. Nor will we listen if women dare to sound too passionate, or too loving, or too hopeful, or too blunt. One of the ironies of our stereotypes is that man can actually get away with being much more emotional than women without being discredited in their thinking.

So I have the luxury of being able to tell you about some of my love and rage. Though I sometimes may not sound this way, I feel powerful love towards men. We are human beings, and our distortion is great. We are bundles of fear and hostility, we hold our bodies like fortresses against assault. We are reluctant to let anyone touch our hearts. Men exist in a cage of numbness and loneliness. And none of us wanted any part in oppressing others at the beginning; we were dragged into it kicking and screaming, we were humiliated when we attempted to avoid taking part, though most of us have forgotten our early histories in this respect. We were yanked away from women by sexism, and from each other by heterosexism. We were left alone. We were forced first to witness, and then to take part in, the oppression of girls and women; to have to watch human mistreatment does great damage, and to have to contribute to it does some of the deepest damage that there is.

So gradually we turned cold and hard.

This tragedy in turn helped to prepare us to go to war, to steal the wealth of the world, to join in with racism and adultism. I love men, and I hurt for them.

But I don't confuse men's pain with their behavior. The mistreatment of boys helps to prepare the ground of sexism, but the seeds and plants are cultural; a boy is brought into a vast system of contempt for women; of boys' being given respect that girls are denied; of excuses for male privilege; of the worship of domination; of men's refusal to do a fair share of the world's work; of the social message that women simply do not count. All of these complex societal patterns go far beyond the individual experience of any boy.

Not only is men's pain thus not the main cause of their participation in sexism, it is to a great degree *the result of* that participation. The reason men are so emotionally stuck is that their collusion with sexism, past and present, acts like a lock on their healing and development. The guilt, the distorted perceptions, the self-loathing, all of these things are constantly recreated by our continuing sexist conduct.

Therefore, 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 are not only abandoning women, we are abandoning that man. When you confront a man about his sexism, you are not contributing to his feelings of guilt or self-hatred; rather, you are bringing to the surface feelings that have been there since he was young, and that are paralyzing him. He will not be able to move until someone makes him look at the exploitation of women.

As adult men we have incredible opportunities for freedom because we don't have sexism and adultism attempting to stop us at every turn. We just have to find a route back to our tenderness. But to do that we must first overcome our contempt for women, so that we can respect the aspects of our ourselves that have traditionally been associated with femaleness.

Women are not to blame for the shape that we are in. It is the male power-structure that needed us to come out this way. The majority of the world's mothers have tried in whatever ways they could to protect their sons from the worst of the hardness that patriarchy tries to force us into.

Making room in yourself for both love and rage towards men will help you to understand that both of these feelings go on inside of women. I love men, but I also feel tremendous rage towards us, and I feel sickened by our actions. I worked for a living for fifteen years counseling men who abuse women, and I learned more about male ways of thinking and operating than I ever hoped to. A few years back, only thirty minutes from where I worked and lived at the time, a man stabbed his wife to death in front of their child. This kind of terrorism by men of women and children goes on all the time; about fifteen hundred women are killed per year 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, of men seeing women as things that belong to them. Women are not things. They were not put on this earth to do 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 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," ignoring that their acts are the predictable outcome of a society that exploits women and holds them in contempt, and that 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.

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And so many countless other great books; some authors that come to mind are Audre Lord, Michael Kimmel, Jackson Katz, Alice Walker, Simone de Beauvoir, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and an endless list of others.