

**MEN**

**AGAINST**

**SEXISM**

**BOOKLET OF IDEAS AND ESSAYS**

Fest in Chicago and with the push of many of my friends (mostly girls) ~~me~~ and a few other men in Chicago did our first men against sexism workshops. they went so well we decided to keep doing them. after a 2<sup>nd</sup> one, we decided to try to put something together for the Columbus fest.

This booklet consists of flyers, essays, and ideas on why men working against our sexism through these workshops, or however else we choose, is completely vital to our lives and in breaking patterns and cycles of violence against women and alienation and competition from each other.

This booklet is only another beginning of something that needs to continue.

Please read it and contribute your own ideas.

You can reach me or write to us about Chicago workshops at: BASIL / 1210 GREGORY PL / DOWNERS GROVE IL, 60515.

PART

1

some  
thoughts from people within  
our community

I want to write to other boys involved with hardcore and revolution about actually dealing with issues of gender and sexism. Sometimes I get frustrated and nervous bringing this subject up because I think the large majority of you will stop reading and toss this aside like you have so often done in the past. More times than not when I critically discuss gender roles and mens actions relating to them I get the, "Yeah, yeah. Whatever, Cornell." This very type of reaction is an example of problems that need to be addressed.

Hardcore boys play a lot of lip service to being anti-sexist. I bought that line for years as well. I thought that I was so different from "normal" men (people not involved in hardcore and its politics)--after all I had read the entire booklet to the Give Me Back compilation! Actually, a lot of my political consciousness came from records. Records may be a great accessible and inspirational starting place, but they cannot alone change the million subtle and not-so-subtle bits of sexist conditioning (or whatever other applicable problem) we all internalize by living in the society we do. In sheltered tunnel-vision hardcore talk: Just because you can rock out to Suggestion by Fugazi, doesn't mean you can't be a rapist and/or embody or support sexist ethics.

I'm relating all this to hardcore because this essay is meant specifically for the audience of the hardcore scene (the community I feel a part of, and feel fit to work critically within), but I want to make it clear that all of this goes way beyond our limited world view--it is about each of our lives and the lives of everyone we touch until we die.

The hardcore scene generally presents itself as (1) a non-sexist movement, or (2) as one working towards becoming non-sexist. Tell me that it (the people involved) is non-sexist and I'll laugh. WE ARE ALL SEXIST TO SOME EXTENT OR ANOTHER. I could give examples by the dozen about aspects of hardcore in general, not even getting into involved individuals specific personalities (myself included)--macho adrenalized moshing/kickboxing, how bands are almost always all boys, how girls often get involved as "girlfriends" and remain observers rather than participants, etc. The point is it's bullshit to say we and what we do aren't/isn't sexist.

Working towards becoming non-sexist? Some of us are, some aren't, some of us are completely dedicated and doing a lot, but most of us are either comfortable hiding behind the ideal of equality and respect and not willing to put energy into achieving it, or don't know what to do to implement real change. Then there are the guys that don't even front that they are somehow different--the ones who are openly sexist, hurtful, and feel they are right in their opinions and actions.

At least with those people it is more obvious that they are dangerous. This attitude of being against sexism without actually working on it that I've been talking about presents the facade of hardcore boys being different or not dangerous in regards to fucked up relationships and sexual abuse. I know, because my past actions are example of this, and I have seen it happen to lots of friends.

This seems to be building to some huge accusatory fingerprint, but really I want it to be an invitation. About a week ago I met with about 15 other males for the purpose of hanging out together, talking, learning, and supporting each other.

We didn't make up some slick name, and print T-shirts or patches for our group. We talked, and more importantly, listened to each other. We didn't talk about 7"s or our new amps, we talked about things like anger and how to effectively counsel and help our friends through hard times. We have decided to continue having these "meetings" to create a safe place to help each other deal with issues, and personal stuff, and to teach each other and learn from one another.

THIS IS REVOLUTIONARY!

Traditionally men don't talk about their emotions with other men. We are supposed to come off as all knowing and strong. Admitting that you are confused or sad, regretful, hurt, etc. is seen as admitting weakness. I think that is ridiculous. Admitting those things takes strength and courage, and a willingness to learn and grow shows for a truly impressive character! Besides, there is nothing wrong with admitting you are scared, regretful, or don't have all the answers. We are all human and I really think that helping each other out to grow past these things is what it's all about.

At our meeting we did decide to put this zine together as an effort to explain our ideas and hopes, and hopefully inspire you, other like-minded boys, to do the same--create a space where men can start (or continue) to redefine themselves and what it means to be men. We don't have any set agenda, or plan to change the world. This isn't some organization in which we want you to start your own chapter. It is just ideas. Part of the reason for creating this is to get you feedback. What I'm saying is we are figuring this all out as we go along--a sort of trial and error.

So far this has all been centered around sexism. After having an amazing talk with my new friend Heather, I feel the need to make it clear that we (at least I, but I think this holds true for others involved) don't want to limit this to dealing with just sexism. Obviously that has to be an integral part of coming to terms with ourselves because gender roles effect almost every aspect of our lives, but we have a million other boundaries to overcome too, and anyway its all connected.

Maybe I'm too damn cynical, but I bet a typical reaction to this will be, "They want to start Riot Grrl for boys!!? Yeah, right." Well, no this isn't Riot Grrl for boys, but obviously the similarities are there--single gender groups meeting and working together to deal with the effects of sexism personally and more generally, as well as fighting to redefine other aspects of our lives and education/assimilation.

I've heard a lot of resentment for Riot Grrl--the typical, "They hate men, they're sexist for not letting us be a part", etc. Recently I was reading a phenomenal book called Transforming a Rape Culture. Richard Orton, author of one of the essays said something that totally applies. Paraphrased, it was something like, "Men think feminists are against them, but really it is just that feminism is not about them. This is taken by many men as being against them because it challenges the notion that women's place is to take care of men." I don't know a whole lot about Riot Grrl or other punk girl groups, but the impression I get is that they are about making a supportive environment for women to heal, unlearn deadly lies, and throw the gender roles out the window that tell women to be silent, weak, and controlled by men, and to in turn replace these undesirable roles with healthy ones to protect women in the present and future. Riot grrl is

...g... about girls (women).

It isn't that they don't want men to be involved in changing things; I don't think anyone interested in working for equality would take that position. Again, I'm not a Riot Grrl (duh-), but I think a more accurate depiction of there ideas is that we should be working on dealing with our own thoughts and actions, and those of other males, not trying to empower women, show them how guilty we feel, or demand that they school us on our behaviors. Whether they feel that way or not, I do.

This isn't to say that males shouldn't talk to females and vice versa about dealing with these issues, that wouldn't get us far at all. But as men, and as women we are approaching the issue(s) from two very different places. Though we all grew up in different situations, there are very specific and far-reaching roles and behaviors that all men, and all women are socialized to act within. From these common roots, we can all start to realize certain patterns, and once we acknowledge and have a better grasp on these patterns we can help each other work towards a common goal, rather than hindering each other.

You see, sexism negatively effects everybody, male and female. It restricts and limits our actions. We all have a responsibility to do what we can to change this, and overcome it. In doing so we can provide a base for a new, more positive, and healthy culture. This isn't something as easy as buying a Downcast Lp or not buying that Pimento loaf or cheese log, but it certainly isn't impossible if we take time and make the effort. Obviously, talking and reading, and creating together isn't the end all, but I think it is very important, and a good "start-all", hopefully you do too.

by Andy Carroll

**IT'S OK  
NOT TO  
TALK  
ABOUT  
RECORDS  
(SPORTS)**

This (the following) is not a disclaimer, but an exclamation. The following series of paragraphs is not an attempt to dictate your thoughts to you, nor is it an attempt to apply a series of facts to people and criticize them according to an already-existing criterion. This an attempt to inform, and offer the option of education; a "self-education!" Every word is as applicable to myself, the author, as it is to you.

I say "self-education" because it would render me both uncomfortable and mistaken to assume I am educating someone - anyone. The decision to accept ideas and integrate them into a person's life is entirely one's own. That having been said allow me to relate a personal experience to you. For the past few years of my life I have come to find a great many things that are commonplace and, hence, arguably acceptable to my peers and the people around them; extremely unacceptable. At times I wanted to label them 'sexist' and in need of work, but was unable to because I couldn't justify the "hows" and "whys" of the allegation. I just couldn't put my finger on it/these "things."

Therefore I sought to define the problems, and, found out I wasn't capable of that.

And then, one day, at the Men's Workshop in my basement, the subjects that had been "troubling" me were addressed. Here is what I learned, the short form.

I often couldn't understand why I had a problem with so-called "consenting" relationships. These are defined, or have been defined for me by others as, relationships of two "consenting" people built entirely on sex, or the act of fooling around or... I don't really keep pinning in - him/her - but I just wanted to write for a little while and - she/he's pretty down with that too." so when I'd



These are examples of relationships BUILT on an act known as sexual-objectification.

Sexual objectification, in complete briefness, is the act of "reducing" an individual to an object, an object with which one can please or appease their sexual appetite, or satisfy sexual urges. Why "reducing"? Because when we objectify a person we no longer retain any interest in their ideas, personalities, thoughts, values or worth as people; save whatever worth we may derive from using them to satisfy "X, Y, or Z" sexual need. I.E., makes when you walk up to a Budweiser or Playboy display or even walk by a person (a female in this case) and say, "hey she's fucking HOT." Her personality is about the last thing on your mind. (Initially anyway.) One is only interested in her appearance and "sexual appeal." The reason a person says that is because they see that before anything else. The reason that occurs is because we have been socialized to see a person, in this case a woman as an object before she's a person. Thinking this statement is not necessarily bad, but it's the circumstances that construct such an act, like the ideas of women as objects that perpetuate statements like that. If we didn't first see a person as physically pleasing, which often (but not necessarily always) is the case, it wouldn't remark to that first. This doesn't make us EVIL or anything, but exemplifies our socialization - our conditioning to think a certain way. Similarly, a type of objectification occurs in so-called consenting relationships, two people objectify one and other and use one and other for sexual pleasure. The statement inherently admits it: "All I want is a fling (casual sexual relations) for now."



objects, tools, pleasure, worth is equated

Is this necessarily bad? Well no, not really, not at all  
harmful, but the act of objectification is, every act of  
objectification is, to some extent **SUPPORTING** sexism  
and the oppression of **MEN and WOMEN**. The same  
way meat eating and the consumption of dairy products  
and other animal tested goods is to some extent  
**SUPPORTING** anthropocentrism and the murder of  
Animals and the Ecosystem.

**HOW OBJECTIFICATION CONTRIBUTES TO SEXISM,  
AND THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN (AND MEN.)**  
Simply put, women have been objectified culturally  
and traditionally. It is because society has decided  
that women are objects that men can make laws  
deciding what women can do with their bodies  
after all if a woman's body was her own, then  
what **BUSINESS** would it be of any man what  
she chooses to do with her body?

Women are cultural property. -- "My girl; my women; my  
baby" are all statements involving possession. This  
makes it easy to **DENY** women self determination  
by ostracising them for exercising the freedom to  
speak, not get their cars pierced, not shave their  
legs. This perpetuates the paternalistic  
attitude men have towards their wives, culturally,  
that they're the man's responsibility. This  
creates a woman as a child and she is hence  
treated like a child; given a child's freedoms  
and a child's **RESPECT**.

defame, and abuse women, or property does not feel  
It only endures. So men feel no remorse when  
women are raped or beaten because their actions  
are culturally accepted because property is explicitly  
owned by one person and can be treated by anyone  
that one person any way they want. In Crime and  
Punishment by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the protagonist,  
Raskolnikov, is horrified by cruelty to an animal  
when he asks "Why?" the answer he receives is a  
resounding "it's my property!"

Similarly, men are property of the patriarchy, we're  
expected to look strong, act tough and not feel the  
"weakness" afforded by emotions other than anger.  
If we deviate from any of these we are labeled  
"unattractive" or "sissy" or "a faggot."  
Men are psychologically, physically and emotionally  
beaten & because of the fucked up stereotype  
they are like up to; that is perpetuated by  
objectification of men by the patriarchy.  
Locke, additionally, argued that a person's property is  
their body, and infringe of property, to dictate to  
another how to use their property is possession of  
person; otherwise known as slavery.

## CONCLUSION

The above are examples of why we objectify and  
that we do; reasons why; and reasons why it  
oppresses both men and women. I hope you  
have been able to agree or disagree with this  
and it's a brave and wonderful thing to explore  
our preconceived notions and ideas.

Lila Basil says "I have boy problems and I  
am one." That's the hardest part. But after that  
- It's one big epiphany. After mother, I didn't care  
too much about sexism before, and, for my sake

I'm glad I started caring because fighting oppression is fighting for my self.

unanswered screams, to lies,  
and to ideas and ways in which  
we are not. These are all in  
need of a response. So to  
popular media, to gender  
roles and to the belief that  
men are supposed to be  
caringless, emotionless,  
macho, controlling, etc...

☆ this is a response. ☆  
why this is good to respond as  
a group: we can share ideas  
and emotions and expect an  
honest answer. We can teach  
and learn. Because it gives a  
safe space to feel community  
and express what we feel and

☆ DECONSTRUCT. ☆  
Why this is important to me:  
I feel I am truly dedicated to  
blocking sexism in my life and  
realizing that it is an on going  
process in which I will always  
be fighting, and that almost  
every action that I make has an  
effect (either positive or  
negative) on sexism in my life.  
so a group like this gives me  
inspiration, motivation, and  
education. And these are  
things that I need. I didn't go  
into deep detail because that's  
what conversation is for.

adam ray mullett/4842 n.168th/  
holland MI/ 49424. 616 399-2541

dear boy/male/guy/whatever....

I've been thinking about being a boy lately, and all of the stereotypes and gender roles that go along with being a boy, and how a lot of these roles and images really bother me. I think that the media and culture define how we are supposed to act and who we are supposed to be, and I have a lot of problems with these definitions. I think that ~~sex~~ sexism affects us, and oppresses us in many ways, and I think that we should consider these ways and look at ourselves and think about how we act and react and why we are like this. I think that us boys have a lot of work we must do with ourselves, and we must start with ourselves.

I have a lot of problems with boys and I am one too. So, what am I talking about?

Well, I'm talking about male argumentation, and machoness, and being told not to open up or ~~cry~~ or to really connect with other people. I'm talking about how we're supposed to feel like we ~~know~~ know it all, or have all the answers. I'm talking about how we feel like we're supposed to be right, and how we're supposed to act like we always know what we're ~~doing~~ doing, or be ~~suave~~ suave or cool.

I'm talking about how the media portrays images of men as being powerful and articulate, or "manly", and how when I use the word "manly" an image of this muscle-man who knows what he's ~~really~~ talking about appears, and how a different image will appear in your head, and what is that image of?

I think ~~the~~ culture and the media sell us an image of who we are supposed to be, and I have a problem with this image and with the gender roles men are supposed to follow. I have a real problem with not being able to really have ~~close~~ close boy friends because I don't feel like I can really connect with other boys. I always feel a competition thing or a closed up (I can't release my feelings to you) thing get in the way. I think these images tell me not to really connect with other boys, and not to be close with any other boys in an intimate way, and I'm not talking about kissy-kissy intimacy (but I could be too), I'm talking about intimate in the form of hugs and holding, but besides touch, I'm talking about intimate in the form of really close personal conversation dealing with me and you and with fear and hopes and dreams and how we ~~feel~~ FEEL about anything and everything from a really big deal to really menial, trivial things, and I think that these gender roles and ~~the~~ media images tell us not to be honest about our emotions and not

open up about how we really feel inside or tell who we really are. and i think that the media creates violence in me, and my frustration dealing with being a boy who is having a hard time ~~connecting~~ connecting with other boys creates emotions inside of me that i don't know how to deal with. and i wish that i could talk to other boys to know how you feel too. and there is so much more to this, and i can't deal with it all in one small ~~essay~~ essay. ~~dealing~~ dealing with sexism, and my own sexism and how sexism affects me is an ongoing process that will take more than just me thinking and writing about it. because i know that there is so much more to deal with and i know that it's ~~not~~ not going to stop here, and that i will keep figuring these things out for me and i hope that you will help me too, and teach me and learn from me, so we can figure this all out and really deal with it.

and this ~~is~~ is why i care...

i care because i don't feel safe around other boys, and i want to. i want to be able to talk openly with other boys, because i think that we go through alot of the same things in our heads and i would like to be able to really relate to another boy. i don't want to feel at competition with other boys, and i don't want to feel uneasy around other boys, and i don't want to feel closed up around other boys, and i don't want to feel insecure around other boys, and i want to feel like we can connect and share and help each other through our problems.

and i care because i think ~~that~~ that with community and communication we can really begin to end the sexism inside of us, and we can break these cycles of power and violence and loneliness and we can really begin to work on who we are and why we do the ~~things~~ things we do.

do you care?

please tell me that you care...

(okay, i want to take a moment here to say that there are already ~~many~~ many boys who are working on ~~their~~ their sexism and on who they are, and i ~~want~~ want to say that i think that is so wonderful and empowering. and i want to say that alot of these boys act as rolemodels to me in alot of ways and that i really ~~learn~~ learn from them and hope they can learn from me. and i don't want to leave anyone out, and i just wanted to say thank you, and that i hope you keep trying, and i wanted to say that i will keep trying and you are not alone in this ~~struggle~~ struggle.)



so, where do i start, because there is so much we need to work through and figure out that one article isn't ~~going~~ going to fill everything, or even hardly anything. ~~so many~~ so many books could be written about this. but i do have a good start...

the other day i started taking these counseling classes and at my class i picked up a zine/book called men. this book ~~xxx~~ is all about the oppression and liberation of men. it's all about the different ways men are defined and generalized and how that is controlling to how men act and what they are told. it's over 100 pages and it's amazing, and i'm not going to reprint the pages here, but i will print the address in case you want a copy...

but besides this book, a good start for me is to recognize my male role-models and figure out why they are important to me and to tell them that. and i've noticed ~~xxx~~ that alot of the qualities in these role-models are openness and affection to me and other men, willing to talk about their fears and dreams and everything that is personal to them, the way i don't feel like i have to compete or feel macho around them, the way they listen to me talk and let me listen to them talk, and overall, the easiness and comfort of our communication. and i'm trying to be my own rolemodel too.

okay, so this article is really just an introduction for me. an introduction to figuring out how ~~xxx~~ men/boys are sexist and how sexism and oppression affect us. and i really want to know what you think, and i really need your input on this, and i really want to know if you feel like you can relate to anything i said here. and i want ~~x~~ you to know that i will continue to think and write about this, and i think it is very important.

and before i end this, i want to start something else. i want to ask a few questions that i've been trying to figure out and think about, and i hope you can maybe give me some input on it, ~~or~~ or just think about it.

how do ~~xxxxxx~~ we use/define power? how do you define love? is it easy or difficult for you to open up to other boys? are more of your close friends boys or girls, why? do you have any male role-models. what are they like? what ~~x~~ do you like about them? how do you think the media has affected you and the people who raised you? what are some of the general characteristics of men/boys and how do you fit in? what about your image, persona, and thoughts do you not like? what are you ~~xxxx~~ comfortable and uncomfortable with around other males? what are your limits and boundaries around other



~~important~~ men/boys? ~~how~~ now does that compare to how you act around women?

okay, i'll stop there for now, but these are all things that i'm thinking about and dealing with within my relationships with other boys.

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

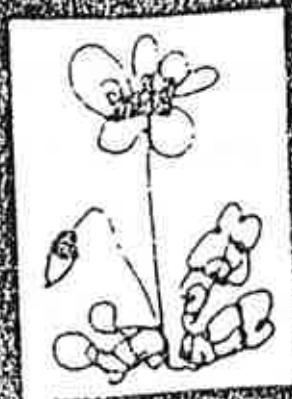
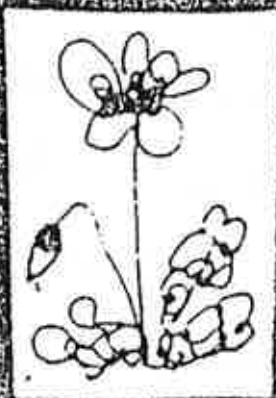
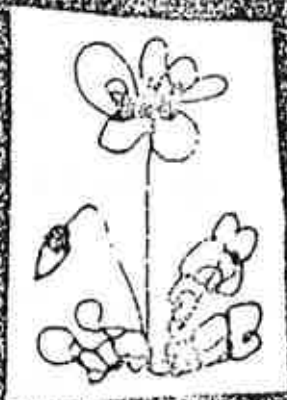
~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

so, i hope that you want to learn about this and work on it as much as i do, but i guess that doesn't matter. i just hope that i can learn more about ~~the~~ sexism and men and teach more about it and discuss it as much as possible because it affects ~~me~~ right now and everyday. and it completely affects how i communicate and interact. and this is so important to me. i hope it is important to you also.

☆ basil

p.s. the address for that magazine called 'men' is: Rational Island Publishers . P.O.Box 2081 . Main Office Station. Seattle, Washington 98111. usa.  
it's issue number four and three dollars.

p.p.s. two books that i just got that i'm reading on this same subject are Refusing to be a Man by John Stoltenberg. and Boynood, Growing up Male, a multi-cultural anthology edited by Franklin Abbott.



CONVERSATIONS I'VE LEARNED THAT TWO  
VERY IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO WHILE  
SETTING UP WORKSHOPS ARE GUIDELINES  
AND SAFE SPACES.

GUIDELINES ARE RULES SET BY AND  
AGREED UPON BY ALL PEOPLE INVOLVED  
AND OFFER A SENSE OF SAFETY. THE  
TWO GUIDELINES AT OUR CHICAGO ~~SM~~  
WORKSHOPS ARE WHATEVER IS SAID AT THE  
WORKSHOP STAYS THERE AND IS NOT  
REPEATED, AND ONLY ONE PERSON TALKS  
AT A TIME WITH NO ONE CUTTING THEM  
OFF. THESE GUIDELINES OR ANY OTHER  
ONES ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO MAKING  
EVERYONE FEEL SAFER TO OPEN UP.

SAFE SPACES ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT  
PROVIDES AN ATMOSPHERE THAT IS  
WELCOMING AND COMFORTING TO THE  
PEOPLE PARTICIPATING. A GOOD STEP IN  
CREATING A SAFE SPACE IS HAVING  
THE WORKSHOPS REGULARLY, IN THE SAME  
PLACE, AT THE SAME TIME, WITH A LOT OF  
THE SAME PEOPLE, ETC... ALSO, TO  
RESPECT EVERYONE TALKING MAKES THE  
SPACE SAFER.

THERE WILL PROBABLY NEED TO FEEL  
MORE COMFORTABLE BEFORE PARTICIPATING  
SO HAVE WORKSHOPS CONTINUELY AND  
DONT GIVE UP. MAKE EACH OTHER  
FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE.

THESE ARE SOME REALLY QUICK  
OBSERVATIONS FOR STARTING MEN'S  
WORKSHOPS ANY WHERE.

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on a more personal level, i  
need these workshops because  
i want to deconstruct my own  
sexism and how i treat others.

i never want to hurt anyone,  
and so this means so much to  
me.

i'm willing to help in any way and  
work in any way to help doing  
workshops. and really opening up and  
really connecting and making friends.

i hope you feel the same.

i really do.

☆ basil.



PART

2

Some  
essays and fliers from different  
sources

# MEN RAPE

If you are a man reading this flier and are offended by the above title, you should consider:

There is a qualitative difference in being a woman in America and being a man. If current trends continue, one in every three women will be raped sometime in their lives. Women live in fear of rape twenty-four hours a day. They fear every strange (and many familiar) men they pass on the street. Women are constantly aware of rape. Men are not. When men first realize that their actions and attitudes have hurt women, their first reaction is likely to be guilt. But that guilt serves no purpose. It is a fear and emotion that breeds resentment, not change. Rather than guilt, what men need to feel is responsibility. We cannot change the past, but we can take responsibility for the future.

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## INDIVIDUAL ACTION

How can we take individual responsibility for the future? What can individuals do to replace the attitudes that encourage and accept rape?

**ON'T** listen to or tell rape jokes. There is nothing funny about rape. These jokes depict women as objects, as less than human. They portray women to be nothing but a sexual function. Rape jokes perpetuate ideas that make the acceptance and toleration of rape easier.

**ON'T** allow yourself to be entertained by rape. Rape is a common device used in the media. Many of the myths about rape are depicted in the media. Refuse to watch shows that use rape to "turn on" the audience.

**ON'T** allow little rapes to occur or commit them yourself. Little rapes consist of verbal harassment of women, whistles, kissing noises, heavy breathing comments and stares. These are all assaults on any woman's sense of well-being. The underlying intention is to intimidate the woman. Little rapes, like rape itself, are not sexual. They are power plays couched in the language of sex.

**ON'T RAPE.** Seems too obvious or offensive to mention maybe, but rape can be an elusive subject. Where does seduction stop and rape begin? Sexual intimacy is a free exchange between free people. Persuasion, intimidation, coercion, and force have no place in love-making and bear no resemblance to it. If you have to use them, you are making hate, not love.

**SUPPORT** a woman who has been raped. They have problems enough without your adding to them. Rape is never the victim's fault. It is a traumatic experience that causes a woman to lose her sense of self-control and security. Offer her our support and acceptance but don't make decisions for her.

**CHANGE YOURSELF.** We are not static individuals. Examine your attitudes and see if they make sense. People once thought the world was flat. Now we know better. Remember when most people thought women were inferior to men and men had the right to control them? That's what we've been told all our lives. Now we are learning better.

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Information taken from: Men's Program Unit, Y.W.C.A., University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois and A Rape Information Packet, Women for Women, Bowling Green State University.)



# AM I A RAPIST?

As men, we need to realize our responsibility for rape. We need to ask ourselves if we have in any way been rapists— given other men permission to rape, or helped to create a climate where rape is accepted.

Have I ever used physical force to have sex with my partner, wife, date?

Have I ever used physical force to have sex? —

Have I used intimidation (unspoken threat implied by size, strength, status) to have sex?

Have I used a position of power or financial advantage to obtain sex?

Have I taken advantage of someone sexually (such as having sex with someone who was drunk and not aware)?

Have I not listened to a woman saying "NO", and badgered her to say yes to my sexual advances?

Have I been physically sexual with someone (such as pinching, patting, touching, or pressing against a stranger) in an unexpected or unwelcome way?

Have I been verbally sexual with someone (such as making sexual remarks or whistling to a stranger) in an unexpected or unwelcome way?

Have I condoned rape by telling or laughing at rape jokes?

Have I condoned rape by seeking it as entertainment in movies or TV?

Have I talked, thought, or fantasized about rape as a sexual act rather than an act of violence?

Have I encouraged men in doing any of the above (such as laughing or remaining silent)?

**Most men answer "yes" to some of these questions.  
What can we do to stop these things from occurring?**

1. We can acknowledge our actions and accept legal responsibility for them.
2. Show this ad to men and ask them to answer the above questions.
3. Help support the work of agencies, groups and individuals working to help stop violence against women.
4. Join with other men to end violence against women.

JOIN MEN STOPPING RAPE, 257-5718 FOR INFO.

5. Strive to be clear in our daily personal and public lives that rape is an act of violence, not a sexual act.

**THE VICTIM OF RAPE IS NEVER RESPONSIBLE  
FOR WHAT HAS HAPPENED. THE RAPIST IS  
WHOLLY RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OWN ACTIONS.**

Men Stopping Rape printed this poster by permission of  
BROTHER TO BROTHER:

Ending Men's Violence--Enriching Men's Lives.

903 Broad St., Providence, RI 02907.



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# Sexual Objectification and Male Supremacy

When a man looks at a person's body as if he wants that body to belong to him, or as if the body does belong to him—not as if the person is *somebody*, an independent, volitional person whose flesh belongs to that self only—and when a man looks at that body as if it were an object, a thing, and the man becomes sexually excited, what does that mean?

What does it mean that a man becomes sexually aroused when he looks at a body in that way, and what does it mean that he looks at a body in that way *in order* to become sexually aroused?

When a man is in a public place, and he sees a person from some distance, a person whom he has never seen before, and he applies his attention to the person's body, and he scrutinizes the person's body with a particular intensity, with deliberate curiosity, with unequivocal intent, and inside his body there begins a pounding, a rushing of blood, a

craving, and what he craves is to have sex with that stranger, what does that mean?

What does it mean when a man is in a darkened theater, watching a film, and he is watching pictures of a performer who has a certain appearance and behaves in a certain way, and he studies that body through the performer's clothing, and the image of the performer's body, the shape of it, its softness and solidity, the definition of its sexedness, is more real, more present to him at that moment than any other aspect of his conscious life, and in gazing at that image he feels more urgently virile, more intensely connected to his manhood, than he feels in relation to any actual person, what does that mean?

When with one hand a man is paging through a magazine, a magazine containing photographs of naked and nearly naked bodies, bodies posed with their genitals concealed and bodies posed with their genitals showing, bodies posed with props and with other bodies, bodies posed with their faces looking at the camera and not looking at the camera, bodies posed by a photographer to look available, accessible, takeable, in color and in black and white, and with his other hand the man is masturbating, and he is searching from picture to picture, searching from body to body, from part of body to part of body, from pose to pose, rhythmically stroking and squeezing and straining, seeking some coalescence of the flesh he is looking at and the sensations in his own, imagining his body and one of the bodies attached, joined, tenderly or forcefully, and he masturbates until he is finished, and when he is done he is done looking, and he stores them away until next time, the magazines, the pictures, the bodies, the parts of bodies, what does that mean?

When a man stands at a magazine rack, and his eyes roam from image to image, from photograph to photograph, pausing over the bodies that make him palpitate the most, the bodies that make his insides sensate, the way a great and sudden fright does, the way a sonic boom does, the particular bodies that astonish him, that jolt him, that make him tremble with sexual longing, exacerbating an ache, a pelvic congestion that never

seems to leave him, bodies that he can count on to do that, bodies that will be there to do that when that is what he needs done, and the magazines that are not wrapped in plastic he opens, he thumbs through, until he finds the ones that are effective, the ones he wants at home, and he takes some, he buys some, what does that mean?

When in order to feel like having sex, a man requires sex partners who look a certain way, who have a certain build, and when as they age he discards them, and when as he ages he becomes increasingly obsessed with obtaining sex partners who are the specific body type, the color, the age that he requires, and he obtains them however he can, by buying them, by buying pictures of them, by owning them somehow, what does that mean?

When a man is in a public place and he observes a particular person, a person he has never seen before or a person he sees there regularly, a person whose body triggers his sexual curiosity, and he seeks out opportunities for surveillance, obviously or discreetly, to look at a part of the body in more detail, or several parts, or to see the person less clothed, or to be nearer to the person so as to touch, brush against, press next to, or grasp, and he remembers the body that he has seen, he memorizes its details, the particular shapes of its sexual parts, and the memory continues in him vividly, in his imagining, during his subsequent episodes of sexual arousal, alone or with someone else, and he carries that picture with him, that picture and the pictures he has taken in his mind of other strangers' bodies, and they stay with him, they are his, and he reviews the pictures mentally, and the reviewing helps him come, what does that mean?

What does it mean when a man calls up pictures in his mind when he is having sex with someone's body, in order to imagine a different body, a body that is not there, pictures of a body that suits him, a body he thinks about in his mind in order to feel like having sex?

When a man is feeling tense or angry or anxious, or withdrawn and isolated and irritable and unhappy with himself, and so to make himself

feel better he has sex by himself, with pictures of other people's bodies in his mind, with pictures of other people's bodies in his hand, pictures of particular parts and poses, and as he masturbates he uses the photographed or mental pictures to help him imagine a body there with him, a particular body he can seem to be with, to touch and feel, a body he can do things to, a body to connect to, an imaginary body more real than his own, and the more vividly he imagines the body the more aroused he becomes, until he comes, having sex in his mind with a body in a picture, and he feels a moment's relaxation and resolution, a fleeting consolation, then, gradually or suddenly, he feels unease again, disconsolate, incomplete and cut off, and the body he had imagined has vanished, there's nobody else there, and he doesn't *want* anybody else there, he wants to be utterly alone now far more than he had wanted to have sex with someone before, what does that mean?

What does it mean that a man's most routine, most repeated, most reliable, perhaps even most intensely "personal" erotic experiences are those that happen in relation to things, to bodies perceived and regarded as things, to images depicting bodies as things, to memories of images of bodies as things? What does it mean that he responds sexually to bodies as things and images of bodies as things in a way that is more or less constant, no matter whether another human being is actually with him? What does it mean when a man's inner life is obsessively devoted to his sexual objectifying? What does it mean when a man arranges much of his life around his sexual objectifying, to make sure he will periodically and often be in circumstances where he can become sexually aroused in relation to bodies he imagines as things? What does it mean that a man's appetites, attention, opinions, and buying habits have become almost completely manipulable simply by triggering his habit of sexual objectifying? What does it mean that in his sexual responsiveness to his sexual objectifying, such a man is quite ordinary? What does it mean that such a man is "normal"?

Of course, not all men's *selections* of sexual objects are considered normal. There is much psychiatric, religious, and legal disagreement over which sets of parts or body types a man is entitled to sexually objectify. From various points of view, various sexual objects are taboo: depending upon their gender; depending upon their age; depending upon their color, creed, or class; depending upon how much force or violence the man wants to use against them in fantasy or in fact; depending upon which sex acts he wants to perform, which genitals and orifices he wants conjoined; depending upon whether another man has a prior claim to exclusive possession of the sexual object; and so on. But sexual objectification in and of itself is considered the norm of male sexuality. Men's sexual objectifying is deemed a given, a biological mandate, having the same preordained relationship to male sexual responsiveness that, say, the smelling of food has to a ravenous person's salivation. Men's sexual objectifying—apart from hair-splitting quibbles about which sex objects are inappropriate—is seen as a “natural” and “healthy” way of looking at other people. In fact, sexual objectifying is considered to be as natural as the sense of sight itself: Typically, men believe that whenever one is responding sexually to visual stimuli, one must by definition be sexually objectifying, despite the obvious fact that vision is not at all essential for sexual objectification to occur (after all, it can happen with the lights out; and, for that matter, someone blind from birth can regard another person as a sex object, as a thing). Male sexuality without sexual objectification is unimaginable. Male sexuality without it would not be male sexuality. So of course there is never inquiry into the *activity* itself, the actual *doing* that is sexual objectification. What is the act that is done and how is it done—and what are its consequences? If all we know about sexual objectification is that when a man does it he becomes sexually aroused, perhaps to climax, then we really don't know a lot, because we really don't yet know anything about the process, the dynamic, the event, the



sense in which "to sexually objectify" is a *verb*. To probe the matter further, we don't yet know anything about the *ethical meaning* of the act: In what sense is it *intransitive*—merely a private and perhaps inconsequential mental event—or in what sense it is *transitive*—a transaction in which there is a *doer*, a *deed*, someone the deed is *done to*, and certain *consequences*, which should and can be evaluated?

Needless to say, trying to delineate the ethical meaning of sexual objectification is very difficult. On the one hand, there is no tradition of public and truthful discourse about men's sexual response to their perception and treatment of people as objects. There is scarcely even a vocabulary. And on the other hand, trying to think about sexual objectification in a conscientious way can make the mind want to give up, go blank, and shut down. Trying to unlock and unblock the function of sexual objectifying in a man's life and trying to trace the effects of sexual objectification, particularly on women's lives, can be to risk recognizing too much that is too deeply disturbing. Trying to think about the reality and experience of sexual objectification can be like struggling to untie a knot that has been pulled too tight over too many years by too many hands—and like having one's own fingers bound up someplace in the knot.

There are much easier ways of discussing sexual objectification—types of discourse in which troublesome questions of ethical responsibility need not arise. For instance, a natural scientist can speak of evolution and genetics in terms that provide social scientists with a vocabulary for rendering the function of sexual objectification ethically neutral. A zoologist can state that sexual objectification serves an evolutionary purpose in the natural order, in the selection of mating partners who will improve the species. An anthropologist can state that sexual objectification in humans is analogous to the way animals respond to one another's odors, especially pheromones released during estrus. And a sociobiologist can state that there is a genetic basis for sexual objectification: It is an expression of our DNA and its hell-bent drive to be present at the conception

of the next generation's gene pool. In such ways as these, one can discourse with ease, and one can evade the ethical issues entirely.

Evaluation of the ethical issues in men's sexual behavior has fallen on hard times. It is the fashion nowadays to presume that an act is more or less outside the pale of ethical examination if at any point along the course of it there is an erection or an ejaculation. It is also the fashion to describe human conduct in language that obscures the fact of acts, the fact that acts have consequences, and the fact that one is connected to one's acts whether or not one acknowledges it. Also, it is fashionable to call acts "reactions," as if the agent really responsible for the act were someone or something else. So it is that in matters of men's sexual behavior there is talk of "feelings," "emotional reactions," "expression," and "fantasies" in situations where it would be more accurate to speak of actions that are *actions*—that is, susceptible to ethical interpretation and evaluation: Who is doing exactly what to whom? is the act fair or unfair? what is the consequence of the act for the person to whom it is done? and is the person who is doing the act paying any attention to the act, its consequence, and its impact on someone else? This sort of ethical interpretation is not synonymous with ascribing "sinfulness" or "righteousness" or "damnation" or "beatitude." Such lofty categories—which hang by a thread from supremely suspect cosmologies—are rarely clear ways of articulating matters of nitty-gritty justice between human selves. Rather, to inquire into the ethical meaning of sexual objectification is to attempt to identify that aspect of sexual objectifying which is a transitive *doing*—an act that someone does, an act that someone does to someone else as if to some thing. Just because the act treats another person as not a real person does not mean there is no real person to whom the act is done. To be sure, technology today can significantly change the time and space continuity in which acts of sexual objectification and their consequences might ordinarily be considered to have a connection. For instance, the act of sexually objectifying the body of someone who is actually "there," actually alive and present to the one who is doing the sexual

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objectifying may have a somewhat different ethical meaning from the act of sexually objectifying someone whose body is now represented in a photograph or film (which exists as documentary evidence that an act of sexual objectification was done to a particular person at some other time and place by someone else). Nevertheless, both acts have an ethical meaning. Someone—the one who is doing the objectifying—is doing something, and what he is doing is an act—he is not simply reacting, he is not simply into a feeling state, he is not simply expressing his sexuality, he is not simply having a fantasy. And whatever his feelings, reactions, expression, or imaginings, they do not disconnect his act from its impact on other selves.

When a man sexually objectifies someone—that is, when he regards another person's body as a thing, not another self, for the purpose of his own subjective sexual stimulation—he is not terribly likely to be perceptive of what is happening to anyone other than himself. Actually, the man is likely to be completely oblivious to what is happening to the person he is objectifying, because once he objectifies that person—once he reduces the person in his mind to the object he desires—then the person, to him, is by definition not a real *subject* like himself. If he considers his objectifying to have any effect at all, he may project onto the person a rather asinine reveling in what he is doing; and indeed, the person objectified may be duped into feeling “flattered” at having been singled out for a particular man's depersonalization—a dubious distinction often confused with being “desired.” But to him, this person is not worth any real empathy at all because this person simply does not exist as someone who could have a valid experience apart from, much less contrary to, his own. “What is happening” is his own sexual arousal, period. Given his subjective self-absorption at this point, in his own mind there is literally no real other self present to whom anything *could* be happening.

Sexually objectifying a person makes them seem absent, not really “there” as an equally real self, whether or not the person is physically

present. In this way, the one who is sexually objectifying interposes a distance between himself and the person he sexually objectifies; it is a gulf between someone who experiences himself as real and someone whom he experiences as not-real. Then, if while sexually objectifying he proceeds to have sex, either alone or "with someone," he experiences the reality of his sexual arousal and release as a mediator, a sensory go-between, which produces a transient feeling of what seems to him like personal, sexual intimacy. But it is essentially a solipsistic event, a completely self-referential sexual experience.

Men's predisposition to sexually objectify, combined with modern image-making technologies, has created a vast commerce in photographic documents of people being turned into things. The camera has become both medium and metaphor for men's sexual objectification: It can be used to take a picture of an actual person being sexually objectified, then the image can be duplicated and sold to millions of men so they can vicariously be sexually "present" to the body of the person made "absent" in the picture. In this way, the consumer is connected—both viscerally and ethically—to the act of sexual objectification that took place in front of the camera. The picture is taken the way it is taken so that it can be sold the way it is sold so that it can be used the way it is used. Each consumer, each purchaser of a reproduced documentation of the original sexual objectification, is complicitous in the commerce, a link in the chain of profit, and hence he bears some responsibility, however widely shared by others, for the act of sexual objectification that took place in front of the camera to begin with, even though it happened before he paid. The act was not done *by* him, but as soon as he buys a documentation of it he becomes someone it was done *for*, someone whose intent—along with that of many others—was collectively expressed and acted out in the original, particular act. Knowing that he shares this intent with other men—a class of consumers who are similarly situated, both viscerally and ethically, vis-à-vis the person pictured—is in fact a

significant element in the "pleasure" he receives; and his identification with those other men's subjectivity is the extent to which his perceptions are even remotely empathic. When men—individually and collectively—have sex looking at a photographed sex object, they are literally having sex with a thing, the photograph, and they are figuratively having sex with the thing that a photographer has turned someone into. The whole point of consuming documentations of sexual objectification is *not* to empathize with the person who is being objectified. To call this mass-marketed necrophilia is only a slight exaggeration; in differing degrees, men who sexually objectify through pictures tend to respond to images of "ecstasy," "wantonness," and sexual accessibility that are actually photographed signs of *lifelessness*. Certain druggy and drowsy facial expressions, postures of languidness bordering on paralysis, dull eyes that stare off emptily into space—these are all popular symbols—or, perhaps more accurately, commonplace symptoms—of a cancelled-out consciousness, an absence of self-possessed selfhood, a lack of independent volition, a kind of brain death.

### Male Supremacy and Male Selfhood

How does a man's history of sexual objectifying begin? Toward whom? in what context? and why? There are doubtless as many different details as there are individual men, but all men's psychosexual histories share a set of common themes because all men's psychosexual histories occur within male supremacy.

Male supremacy is the honest term for what is sometimes hedgingly called patriarchy. It is the social system of rigid dichotomization by gender through which people born with penises maintain power in the culture over and against the sex caste of people who were born without penises. Male supremacy is not rooted in any natural order; rather, it has been socially constructed, socially created, especially through a socially

constructed belief in what a sex is, how many there are, and who belongs to which.

Sexual objectification has a crucial relationship to male supremacy. Sexual objectification is not rooted in the natural order of things either; rather, sexual objectification is a habit that develops because it has an important function in creating, maintaining, and expressing male supremacy. The relationship of sexual objectification to male supremacy works in two mutually reinforcing ways: (1) Men's habit of sexually objectifying serves in part to construct the male supremacy of culture, and (2) the male supremacy of culture urges males to adapt by adopting the habit of sexually objectifying. This habit becomes as strong as it does in each man's lifetime precisely because the habit serves most forcefully to locate his sense of himself as a peer in relation to the supremacy he perceives in other males. Once he knows that location palpably, he knows what can be called a male sexual identity—a sense of himself as having dissociated sufficiently from the inferior status of females.

Here's how the habit emerges: First, there comes a time in the life of the child-with-a-penis when it dawns on him that his world is organized into two discrete categories of people—male and female, or however he conceptualizes them at the time. Somewhat later he realizes, through social cues of varying weight, that he had better identify with one (male) and disidentify with the other (Mom). There also comes a time when he experiences this state of affairs and his own precarious relationship to it with no small measure of confusion, stress, anxiety, and fear. Call this his gender-identity anxiety—his particular terror about not completely identifying as male. (Of course, boy children are not actually on record about this point, but it is an inference that can reasonably be drawn from memory and observation.) Next, there comes a time in the course of the growth of his body when various conditions of risk, peril, hazard, and threat cause his penis to become erect—without his understanding why and without, as yet, any particular sexual content. (This much is not conjecture; it has been documented in interviews with prepubescent



boys.<sup>1</sup>) Among the events or experiences that boys report as being associated with erections are accidents, anger, being scared, being in danger, big fires, fast bicycle riding, fast sled riding, hearing a gunshot, playing or watching exciting games, boxing and wrestling, fear of punishment, being called on to recite in class, and so on. Call this his basic fight-or-flight reflex, involuntarily expressed at that age as an erection. The catch is, of course, that this humble flurry of anatomical activity just happens to occur in the context of a society that prizes the penis not only as the locus of male sexual identity but also as the fundamental determinant of all sacred and secular power. Call this, therefore, feedback from the boy's body that is loaded with male-supremacist portent, to say the least.<sup>2</sup>

In his early years, a young male's involuntary "nonsexual" erections (those that arise from peril, for instance, as against touch and warmth) can be so distracting and disconcerting that they trigger even more panic and anxiety, which in turn can make detumescence quite impossible. At some point in his life, if he is developing "normally," he learns a physical and emotional association between this dread and his "desire"; this is the point when, perhaps irrevocably, his gender anxiety and his reflex erections become linked: In relation to other people's bodies, he experiences acutely his anxiety about his identification with authentic maleness—particularly in relation to those details of other people's bodies that he perceives as gender-specific. Somewhere in the moment of his perceiving what he regards as another body's unambiguous sexedness, he experiences a jolt, an instant of panic, a synapse of dread, as if reminded that his own authenticity as a man hangs in the balance. The panic, the physiological agitation, produces an automatic erection. He eventually learns to desire such erections because he experiences them as a *resolution* of his gender anxiety, at least temporarily—because while he is feeling them, he is feeling most profoundly a sensory affiliation with what he infers to be the sexedness of other men. Nevertheless, he continues to depend upon his gender anxiety as a source of the physical

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and emotional agitation that he knows can be counted on, if properly stimulated, to make his penis hard.\*

### The Promise of Violence

Sexual objectifying in people born with penises is a learned response in a social context that is male-supremacist. Male sexual objectifying is not biologically ordained, or genetically determined. Rather, the male supremacy of culture determines how penile sensations will be interpreted. The meaning of those sensations becomes variously encoded and imprinted over time, such that a male will develop a characteristic habit of responding with an erection to his perceiving of gender specificity in other bodies. In his quest for more reliable repetition of such erections, he may cultivate a private iconography of gender-specific bodies and body parts, particular emblems of gender dichotomy that revive his buried anxiety about whether he really belongs to the sex he is supposed to. The particular iconography may vary greatly from man to man—for example, the emblematic body images may be predominantly female, in which case his objectifying is deemed heterosexual, or the images may be predominantly male, in which case his objectifying is deemed homosexual. In any case, all male sexual objectifying originates in the common predicament of how to identify and feel real as a male in a male-supremacist culture. The predicament can be resolved either in contradistinction to a female object or through assimilation of a male object. Either way, the resolution strived for is a body-bond with men.

Male sexual objectifying is not simply a response to male supremacy;

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\* The elective "forbiddenness" of homosexual encounters, as for instance in public places, and the objective physical danger of many sadistic sex practices can also be seen to preserve the role of risk, peril, hazard, and threat in effectively inducing erections.

it functions to enforce male supremacy as well. Everywhere one looks—whether in mass culture or high culture—there are coded expressions of male sexual objectification—primarily presentations of women and girls as objects—displayed like territorial markings that define the turf as a world to be seen through men's eyes only. There are some constraints on male sexual objectifying of other males; most men do not want done to them what men are supposed to do to women. Meanwhile most women find their economic circumstances determined to a large extent by whether and for how many years their physical appearance meets standards laid down by men—standards that both heterosexual and homosexual men conspire to decree. And for many women, male sexual objectification is a prelude to sexual violence.

Sometimes the mere regarding of another person's body as an object is not enough; it does not satisfy a man's habituated need to experience physical and emotional agitation sufficient to set off sensory feedback about his sexedness. At times like these, a man learns, he can reproduce the erectile result of feeling threat, terror, and danger as a child simply by being threatening, terrifying, and dangerous to his chosen sex object. It works even better now, because now he is in control. He can successfully do this in his imagination, then in his life, then again in his memory, then again in his life. . . . It works even better now; the more dread he produces, the more "desire" he can feel.

Before a man commits a sexual assault or a forced sex act, that man performs an act of sexual objectification: He makes a person out to be an object, a thing less real than himself, a thing with a sex; he regards that object as sexual prey, a sexual target, a sexual alien—in order that he can fully feel his own reality as a man. Not all sexual objectifying necessarily precedes sexual violence, and not all men are yet satiated by their sexual objectifying; but there is a perceptible sense in which every act of sexual objectifying occurs on a continuum of dehumanization that promises male sexual violence at its far end. The depersonalization that begins in sexual objectification is what makes violence possible; for once

you have made a person out to be a thing, you can do anything to it you want.

Finally, the dirty little secret about sexual objectification is that it is an act that cannot be performed with any attention to its ethical meaning. Experientially—from the point of view of a man who is sexually objectifying—sexual objectification and ethical self-awareness are mutually exclusive: A man cannot reflect on what he is doing and its real consequences for real people and at the same time fully accomplish the act of sexual objectifying. There's no way it can be done, because his own subjective reality is too contingent upon the *unreality* of someone else. All that can be left "out there" in his field of awareness is the other person's sexedness—an abstract representation of a gender—in comparison with which his own sexedness may flourish and engorge. So it is that a man shuts off his capacity for ethical empathy—whatever capacity he may ever have had—in order to commit an act of depersonalization that is "gratifying" essentially because it functions to fulfill his sense of a selfhood that is authentically male.

If there is ever to be any possibility of sexual equality in anyone's lifetime, it requires, minimally, both the capacity and the commitment to regard another person as a whole self, as someone who has an integrity of independent and autonomous experience, as someone who is, simply, just as real as oneself. But as a society we are as far from realizing that requisite in matters of private sexual behavior as we are in matters of public policy. When private sexual arousal becomes predicated on imagining that a particular other person is *not* real, not there, not an inhabitant of his or her body as an equally active subject; when most of the sex that men have takes place between their own imagined reality and their so-called partner's imaged unreality; when completely self-referential orgasmic release can pass for "a meaningful sexual

relationship"; when private sexual objectification has become tacit public policy, our agreed-upon criterion of "liberated" sexuality; when the consumer market is saturated with pictorial documentations of sexual objectification specifically merchandised for men's use in masturbation, for repetitive conditioning of their sexuality to respond to alienation from other people's real lives . . . it means that all of us are in deep trouble.

The ethical issues in any sexual relating are complex and varied. There may perhaps be no way to be absolutely certain that one is acting completely fairly or responsibly in any particular sexual encounter. We are, as the saying goes, "only human." But our shared humanity does not obviate our obligation to try; on the contrary, it is what *creates* our obligation: because *all* of us are human. In sexual objectification, we suspend our belief that that is true, and we violate our mutual rights to reality. But there's also a sense in which we cut ourselves off from our own human individuality, because we cut ourselves off from our responsibility for our acts. Responsibility is personal; it is who we are. We disappear to one another as persons when we cancel out our personal responsibility; we disconnect, we lose hold; we stop interacting as subject and subject. The way out of our insularity is not as subject and object, nor as taker and taken, nor as real-self and sex-toy. That's not intimacy; that's merely adjacency. What connects us, what relates us, is our certainty that each of us is real—and how we take that profound fact into account in whatever, together, we do.

Diagram I  
Rape Domain

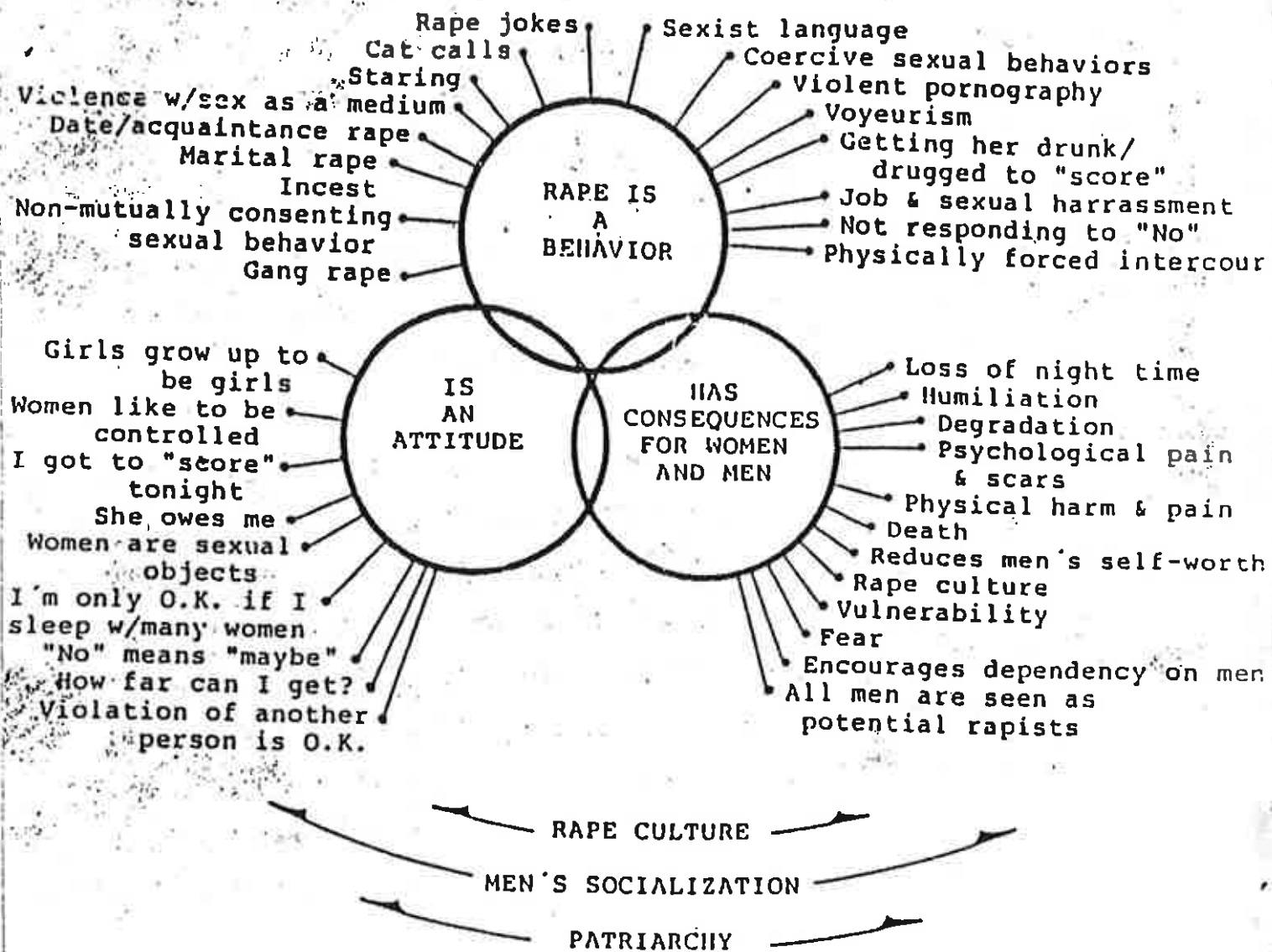
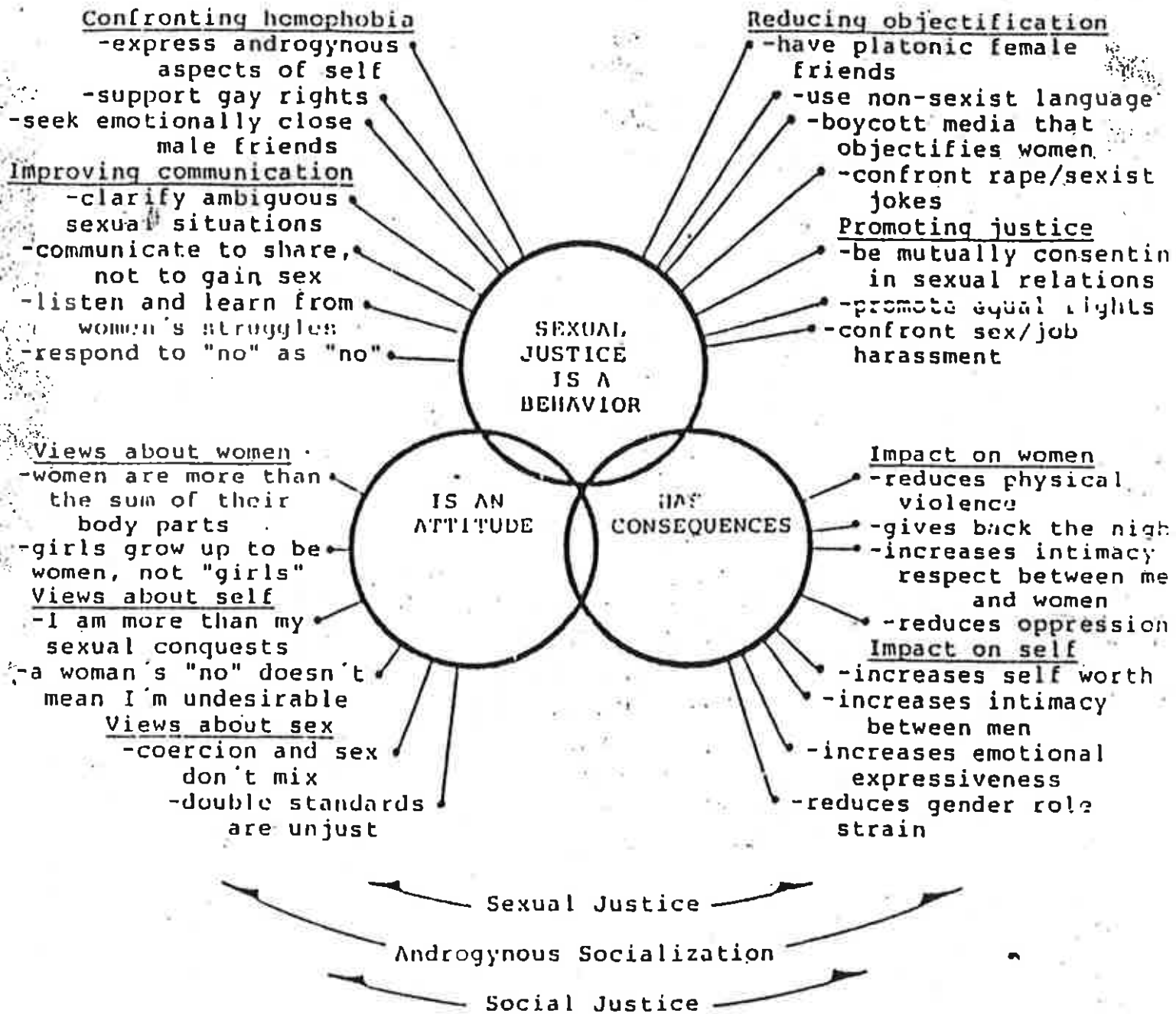




Diagram II  
Sexual Justice Domain



# TEN THINGS MEN CAN DO TO END SEXISM AND MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Understand how your own attitudes and actions perpetuate sexism and violence, and work toward changing them. Examples of typical sexist/abusive behavior:

- Pressuring a woman to have sex (includes Rape, Date Rape).
- Taunting or whistling at women, following women around, embarrassing women in public (Sexual Harassment).
- Controlling women by using threatening gestures, by shouting women, blocking doorways, driving recklessly (Intimidation).
- Verbally assaulting women by name-calling, swearing, mocking, ridiculing, criticizing, accusing, trivializing (Psychological Abuse).
- Confront sexist, racist, homophobic, and all other bigoted remarks or jokes. Boycott comedians such as Andrew Dice Clay who verbally assault women in their acts. Boo in comedy clubs when male comedians tell sexist jokes.
- Recognize and speak out against homophobia and gay-bashing. Discrimination and violence against lesbians and gays is wrong in and of itself. It also is directly linked to sexism (eg. men who speak out against sexism are often subject to homophobic abuse—One reason why so few men do).
- Fight for increased state and federal funding for battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers. Volunteer where men are needed, in public schools, youth outreach programs, and political lobby groups. Contact local shelters and crisis centers to inquire about volunteer opportunities (see list on back page).

- 5) Don't band sexism. Don't purchase any magazine, rent any video, or buy any piece of music that portrays women in a sexually degrading or violent manner. Protest sexism in the media.
- 6) Support candidates for political office who are committed to the full social, economic and political equality of women. Actively oppose candidates who are not.
- 7) Read about yourself. Read articles, essays, books about masculinity, gender inequality, and the root causes of sexual violence. Educate yourself and others about the connections between larger social forces and the conflicts between individual women and men. Suggested readings: M. Miedzian, *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence*; P. Kivel, *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence That Tears Our Lives Apart*; D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*; M. Messner, *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*; J. Stoltenberg, *Refusing to Be a Man*.
- 8) Propose curriculum changes, at every level of the educational system, which mandate courses and programs dealing with sexism and sexual violence. Urge coaches of boys and men's athletic teams to require their players to attend workshops and seminars on sexism and male violence against women.
- 9) Organize or join a group of men—in school, at your workplace, or among friends—to work against sexism and violence. Contact local anti-sexist men's organizations for resources and support (see listing for resources).
- 10) Support feminists, who are at the forefront in working to end all forms of violence against children, women and men. Commit yourself to ending oppression in all its forms.

the following article is a reprint from magazine called Men, issue number four. the article is titled How Males are Hurt... (only a part of the article is reprinted here though).

Our attempts to heal ourselves are interrupted

To cry and pay attention to being hurt gets boys labelled as "sissies." It is unacceptable to acknowledge that males feel as deeply as females, so our feelings are seen as a sign of weakness and of not being fully "male." Since the pain is not "real," it is shameful for us to seek out attention. Thus, it is okay to punish boys for trying to recover from being hurt by crying or shaking. This is perhaps the most damaging effect of our oppression because it keeps us from using our natural healing processes. Thus the hurt tends to build up on us instead of being healed and learned from.

We're told, "males are aggressive and violent by nature."

Although aggressive or violent behavior is a sign of how males are hurt and then pressured into acting towards others, it is seen as evidence that males are inhuman, and the appropriate choice for killing and being killed. Boys ~~showing~~ playing war or playing with guns are assumed to be acting out their natural aggressive inclinations rather than trying to prepare for and resolve their feelings about the lives they see for themselves. As a result, boys are punished and criticized and left alone to deal with their problems.

We're told, "A boy only wants one thing."

Men and adolescent boys are viewed as insatiably driven ~~to~~ towards sex. The attitude is that we are ~~not~~ like animals. We are ~~not~~ assumed to be untrustworthy, that we will do anything to manipulate someone into having sex. Conversely, the person who understands this weakness can manipulate us ~~and~~ into doing anything by taking advantage of this compulsion. This is seen as an inherent characteristic of all males. We are expected to be aggressive sexually by ~~most~~ males and females. If a male isn't like this, he is suspected of being gay, i.e. "not male". if he is like this, however, he is regarded with disdain, as a slave to sexual desire.

There are a whole ~~series~~ ~~of~~ series of reasons men are tense around sexuality. None of them are part of our nature as males. They are all a result of external forces on us.

Society dictates that the male is to initiate relations and the

~~for~~ female is to resist. Most girls get a talk about boys from either their mother or father that sets them up for this. Females are supposed to not want sex and to ~~xxx~~ use it as a bargaining tool. This denies the reality ~~xxx~~ that both males and females sometimes want sex and sometimes don't. Many males do act compulsively around sex, but this is not inherent. This is a result of being hurt in a series of experiences that together add up to a difficulty with being relaxed sexually.

We are separated ~~for~~ from each from each other and from females so thoroughly that we get desperate around this one activity in which we are allowed to get close physically and emotionally: sex. This activity is supposed to fill all our needs for intimacy, affection, touch, etc. With no other approved sources, we get tense and urgent when we see a chance for some closeness.

We are judged by the "attractiveness" of the women around us. Presumably, the more a "man" we are, the more "attractive" the women will be. The advertising media cultivate and exploit our difficulties around sex, for profit. Products are ~~xxx~~ sold with the implication that "beautiful" women will be attracted to you if you have them. Further, the message is that only "beautiful" ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ women are desirable, devaluing our relationships with the vast majority of women who do not look like the irrational models. This focuses ~~■~~ us on the appearance ~~xxxxx~~ x rather than the humanity of each woman, no matter how ~~xxx~~ she looks.

We are pressured toward acting like a "man".

Our identity as males is constantly in question, as something to prove again and again. It is not recognized as something inherent, but rather treated as dependent on our actions and duties.

From early childhood and even infancy, we are being prepared to "be a man" ~~x~~. From the most innocent gifts of trucks and blue clothes to the harshest rejections as "a faggot." we are being treated differently so we will take our "proper" place in society as adult males. The roles we are expected to fill require us to be willing to ~~xxx~~ kill or be killed, and to work ourselves to death, if necessary, to support our families.

The ways boys are pressured into acting confirm our attitudes that males don't hurt and are naturally aggressive and violent. These attitudes are ~~xx~~ the justification for assigning males the adult roles of provider, protector, and producer, and for excluding males from the roles of nurturer and caregiver. Any divergence from those ways of acting challenges the society's assumptions about males and disturbs the security of knowing who will fill what roles.

Gay oppression is intimately involved with the ways all males are hurt. If we refuse to comply with the pressure to conform, we are accused of being Gay, in other words, "not a man". The rejection and violence towards anyone labeled "not a man" enforces compliance with the restrictions about how we should be as males. Most of the ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~REASON~~ ~~FOR~~ reasons boys are called Gay or attacked have nothing whatsoever with sex. Gay sexual practices are used as a pretext for savagery of the violence against those who diverge from the rigid definition of what it is to "be a man."

okay, here is another reprint, but this time from  
the book Boyhood, Growing Up Male, a multicultural  
anthology edited by Franklin Abbott:  
it's titled Boyhood Questionnaire.

go ahead, answer them...

1. At what point were you aware that you were not a girl but a boy?
2. Who taught you more about your gender role? Mother, Father, peers or others?
3. Before puberty, what was your awareness of the male body- both yours and others? What was your awareness of the female male body?
4. Do you remember any recurring dreams or fantasies from this time?
5. How did you feel about being out of doors? At school? At home with family? By yourself?
6. Who were your best male friends? Who did you look up to among your elders? Whom did you avoid or fear?
7. Whom did you have fights with? How often? Who disciplined you? How? How often?
8. Who would you go to if you were in trouble? Where did you go to be safe? Who cared for you when you were sick?
9. What music did you accomplish in elementary school? Did you excel in games, music, school subjects? Were you well-liked? What kinds of problems did you have?
10. What were you told about your race/ethnicity/religion(/ or class)? What were you told about other races, ethnic groups, or religions(or economic classes)?
11. Who taught you about religion? Did you believe it? What were the hardest parts to believe?
12. Did you go through a time when you didn't like girls? Did you have friends who were girls? Girlfriends? Were you ever called a girl or a sissy? By whom? How often?
13. What toys did you play with? What games did you play?
14. What were your clothes like? What kinds of haircuts did you have?
15. What TV shows, movies, or stories did you like?
16. What did you want to be when you grew up?
17. Did you have heroes or idols? (Who were they?)
18. Did you have sex play? With whom? How often? Were you ever caught? Punished? By whom? How?
19. Were you ever forced to have sex or seduced by someone older than you? How did you feel about it? Was there anyone you could talk to who would help you?



20. Did you hunt, fish or garden? Who taught you how?
  21. Did you have pets, hobbies, special treasures?
  22. Did you have favorite teachers or relatives? Teachers or relatives you disliked or feared? ~~forget~~ (who and why?)
  23. What was x one of the best things that has happened to you as a boy? What was one of the worst?
  24. What happened to you as a boy when you reached puberty?
  25. Assuming you have or could have a son or foster son, how would you want his boyhood to be different than yours?
- \*\*Be patient with yourself in answering these questions. Get support if painful memories surface. Every question holds a xx story that needs to be told carefully. Add questions or amend these to respect the issues of your boyhood more accurately.\*\*

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# **THE DATE RAPE PLAY:**

## **A Collaborative Process**

*by Carolyn Levy*



We thought we were prepared for the response, but we were amazed at the outpouring of emotion from spectators. They greeted the play with joy and pain. For some, it reaffirmed that they were not alone in their experiences. For others it opened a topic for discussion that had previously been closed tight.

For still others, it raised questions about behaviors and attitudes.

(House lights down. Eight actors enter and face the audience. A man steps forward.)

Man: Every six minutes someone in America is raped. The vast majority of them are raped by someone they know.

(He checks his watch. A bell rings. Blackout. Throughout the play the bell will ring every six minutes.)

**I**N 1992 I created a play with a group of my students at Macalester College about the troubling issue of date rape. We titled our play *Until Someone Wakes Up*. The project grew out of our department's interest in community-based theater; we wanted to create an experience for our students that was outside the Broadway model of a five-week rehearsal period of a set script.

My own background had been in another form. For eight years I was the artistic director of the Women's Theater Project in the Twin Cities where we had created new plays by and about women. As a collaborative enterprise, we had worked with a wide variety of writers, designers, performers, and directors as well as community groups and women's organizations. It was this experience I wanted to bring to my students, to teach them another mode of working, one that is central to some of the best theater being made in this country. We chose to do a community-based project and then cast about for appropriate subject matter.

The subject of date and acquaintance rape seemed to be everywhere around us. When I read Robin Warshaw's book, *I Never Called It Rape*, and learned that one in four college women has been or will be the victim of rape or attempted rape, I found I could not walk into any gathering of students without mentally counting off the women ("One, two, three, *four*"), knowing that a fourth of them had likely experienced this violence in their lives. But I read on and learned that women are not alone in being victims: men are raped, too. I found that if I looked hard at the society and culture in which we are living, if I really examined forces at work on our students as they grow up, then the rape statistics were not a surprise. The climate is ripe for such things to happen. We are not taught well what it is to be a man or a woman. We don't have a lot of good models for healthy relationships. We receive confusing messages about whom to be and how to be—both men and women. The issue had lots of gray areas—perfect for theatrical exploration.

Mom: Georgie Porgie, pudding pie,

Boy: Kissed the girls and made them cry!

Voice: One in twelve of the male students surveyed had committed acts that met the legal definition of rape or attempted rape.

Girl: Mommy, Gary threw snowballs at me today and it hurt.

Mom: Oh honey, that means he likes you.

Voice: Only twenty-seven percent of the women whose sexual assault met the legal definition of rape thought of themselves as rape victims.

Many groups collaborated on this project. Foremost was the support of the Dramatic Arts and Dance Department; the process owed its existence to the department's philosophy. In addition, many other groups helped in the research and development of the piece: the Sexual Assault Work Group, and their sponsors in Residential Life and Health Services, provided invaluable assistance, as did Campus Programs, the dean's office, and members of other academic departments who provided their expertise, notably anthropology, sociology, and the Women's Studies Program. Finally, we enlisted the support of organizations in our community—rape crisis centers, treatment facilities, counselors, and the media.

The collaboration of all these groups made this a truly community-based project. In addition, however, we found that the work was intensely personal. All of the participants examined their own lives and behaviors, and our collaborating groups not only helped us in our research but also made it possible for us to get support and counseling for the participants in the process and ultimately for the members of the audience who found they needed it.

Man: . . . It's not as if I am some rapist or something. It isn't like I beat her up or anything. And I was comforting her the whole time. I told her I didn't want her to miss out on a perfect opportunity. . . . It bothers me. I thought the first time having sex was supposed to be something great. Something special.

I spent fall semester 1991 deep in my own research on the subject. Assisted by several students, I began to work out the details of an interim class (our intensive January term) to research and develop the play. We assembled books, videotapes, and speakers, and we put classified ads in the student newspapers of the seven colleges in the Twin Cities for rape survivors and their loved ones who were willing to be interviewed. A counselor in a treatment center for sex offenders brought perpetrators who agreed to speak to us. As the project proceeded and word of what we were doing spread, more and more people sought us out to share their stories.

In interim term 1992 I taught a course with the cumbersome title "Community-Based Theater: Script Development Workshop." Twenty-one students (ten men and eleven women) participated in what turned out to be a crash course on date rape and sex in our culture. We began with the research in books and tapes. We heard speakers and learned about interviewing. Every member of the class conducted at least one interview with a rape survivor or perpetrator. They transcribed these and used them as the basis for monologues. We created improvisation based on this material. We examined different aspects of our culture—TV, music, commercials, magazines, toys, novels, and children's literature, etc. We discussed the lack of adequate sex-education programs. We noted the way our language expresses society's biases about sex and relationships. And we talked about ourselves and our own lives.

Writing began to pour out, some of it intensely personal. Some grew from the interviews we conducted. Some came in response to our "culture watch." Some was filled with agony, and some spoke to our desperate need for humor. By the end of January we had enough material for ten plays, maybe more.

Barbie: (Giggles.) Hi.

GI Joe: Well, hello.

Barbie: Where are you going?

GI Joe: On a dangerous secret mission to slay my evil enemies.  
And you?

Barbie: Malibu.

GI Joe: Perhaps we should go together.

Barbie: (Giggles.) You'll have to put my shoes on first.

GI Joe: No! I'll carry you! (Slings her over his shoulder.)

Barbie: Ooo! You're much more interesting than Ken!

What followed was a period of writing, rewriting, editing, and organizing. Ultimately I worked with a small group of students to synthesize the material that had been generated in the class. From that work, we created a spine of scenes that examined how we grow up in this culture, from earliest nursery rhymes to college dating. We arranged them chronologically, as if one set of children were growing up through a series of scenes, and then we took the stories of rapes told by survivors and perpetrators in monologues, scenes, triplets, and duets and placed them between the scenes in the spine. What emerged, with humor where we found it appropriate, chronicled the years of maturation and simultaneously told female and male tales of painful experiences.

The rewriting overlapped with the casting and rehearsals. When I cast the show in February, I knew I needed four men and four women to play a variety of roles. I looked for a diverse group of actors to tell the many stories in the play. The cast included some members of the interim class and some new people. With a production team, many of them class members, we began the next phase of the project—workshop rehearsals for public presentation. We always billed our play as a work-in-progress and allowed ourselves the freedom to change material right up until the closing performance. The whole company experienced the workshop process, where their own input in a given rehearsal might be reflected in the next night's rewrites. New scenes were born from rehearsal improvisations, and old scenes were reconceived.

Waiter: Would you like some coffee?

Woman: Yes, please.

Waiter: Just say when. (*Starts to pour.*)

Woman: There. (*He keeps pouring.*) That's fine. (*He pours.*)  
Stop! (*She grabs the pot; there is coffee everywhere.*)  
What are you doing? I said *stop*.

Waiter: Yes, ma'am.

Woman: Well, why didn't you stop pouring?

Waiter: Oh, I wasn't sure you meant it.

Woman: Look, of course I meant it! I have coffee all over my lap! You nearly burned me!

Waiter: Forgive me, ma'am, but you certainly looked thirsty. I thought you wanted more.

Woman: But—

Waiter: And you must admit, you did let me *start* to pour.

Woman: Well, of course I did. I wanted some coffee.

Waiter: See, there you go. A perfectly honest mistake.

We thought we were prepared for the response, but we were amazed at the outpouring of emotion from spectators. They greeted the play with joy and pain. For some, it reaffirmed that they were not alone in their experiences. For others it opened a topic for discussion that had previously been closed tight. For still others, it raised questions about behaviors and attitudes. The groups that had helped so much with the research were also there to help at performance time. The Sexual Assault Work Group and the Rape Crisis Center provided volunteers to hand out literature and to provide immediate help to any audience member who needed to talk. We created a program with steps to take if rape has happened to oneself or to a friend. For everyone, the play seemed to provoke discussion. We handed out response forms. Most poignant were those from several college students who said they wished they had seen the play in high school. Another woman wrote, "I wish I had seen this when I was a lot younger (I'm fifty-six). I was raped when I was twenty-one and had to deal with it alone." One woman wrote, "As a victim, it forced me to go back, get in touch, deal, and move forward to become a survivor."

In addition to informal responses from the members of the audience, we also asked two outside reviewers to critique the piece. A director and a playwright, both of whom have a great deal of experience workshopping new scripts, wrote critiques and met with us to discuss the play. From their ideas and from our own perspectives of how the play worked in



front of an audience, we took a new look at the structure and the content. As we studied what we had done, several scenes seemed unnecessary; others seemed to need more focus in the writing; and still others needed additional material. Overall, our evaluation was positive: we felt that the piece accomplished what we set out to do and, with a minimum amount of rewriting, could be staged again.

The responses from the Macalester campus and from the other young people and educators who saw the show prompted our decision to take it on tour. We tackled the demands of rewriting and streamlined the staging to make the production more portable, and then we hit the road in September. Again, the purpose was twofold. We were anxious to bring the play to audiences who would benefit (we had already performed the play for one high school group that discussed it for months). In addition, the theater students who enjoyed the experience of creating and working on a new play were able to take that play on the road and learn about touring, about doing long-term work on a role, and about meeting the variety of audiences outside the walls of our college. The whole notion of "community-based theater" comes full circle when you create a play out of the words and experiences of a community and then take the play back to that community for performance.

Woman: When we're babies, we're born knowing that if we scream at night, someone will take care of us. And I just want to know where that ability goes. Because sometimes I feel like screaming now, just yelling, until someone wakes up.

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All quotes are from the play *Until Someone Wakes Up*, conceived and directed by Carolyn Levy and written by Carolyn Levy, Laura Bradley, C. Todd Griffin, Marcy Laughinghouse, David Page, Josh Schultz, Deborah Sengupta, Elizabeth J. Wood, Cara McChesney, Christopher Berg, C. Brianna Merrick, P. Jeffrey Nelsen, Philip Park, Tina Pavlou, K. Siobhan Ring, Alejandro Aguilera, Matt Lewis, Andrew Lyke, Laura E. Meerson, Jessica Mickens, Danielle O'Hare, and Jonathan Saltus.

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**CAROLYN LEVY** is a theater director, teacher, and writer. She is the founder and artistic director of the Women's Theatre Project, which from 1980 to 1988 produced new plays by women about issues of importance to women and brought those plays out into the community in the Twin Cities and beyond. Most notable of these works were: *The Women Here Are No Different*, about battered women; *Red Light/Green Light*, both a play and videotape about adolescent girls; and three touring shows, coauthored by Levy: *Life in the Pink Collar Ghetto*, about women and work; *Make It Better*, about nurses; and *Daughters Arise*, about women in religion. These plays were performed all over the country, often in workplaces, and at schools and conferences.

As a teacher, Levy has developed theater programs for students in kindergarten through graduate school. She has taught at Macalester College and Hamline University. She has also consulted on curriculum development and has created programs for training in the arts. Levy lives in St. Paul with her two daughters, Rose and Georgia.

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# **CONVERSATIONS OF CONSENT:**

## **Sexual Intimacy without Sexual Assault**

*by Joseph Weinberg & Michael Biernbaum*



We can't control someone else's feelings, though the rapist may have the illusion that he does. One astounded male college athlete demanded, "Do you mean that if I grab a woman's crotch, that could be rape? That's unfair!"

**A**men about rape, providing honest and factual information about sexual assault. (We use the terms "rape" and "sexual assault" interchangeably throughout this article.) Clarifying what constitutes sexual assault is necessary, for there is an astounding lack of information about it out there among men. Examples abound. We still hear, for example, that the rape of women is an "excess of sex," and how could that be bad? And when we talk about the males who are raped, many—particularly high school-aged men—assume the perpetrator to be a "beautiful, older woman"! Most men still don't know or *haven't had to know* what constitutes rape. This doesn't excuse or exonerate our behavior, but does point to education as the most important way to break the cycle of sexual violence.

Until now, rape has been an invisible issue for most men. Say the word *rape* to most women and there is a shudder, an involuntary muscular reaction, or some other visceral response. Certainly not all women understand the dynamics of rape culture, but most have a strong body sense of what rape means. Mention rape to most men and there is not a comparable physical response. (The twenty percent of men who have experienced incest or other sexual assault by age eighteen, and older male survivors, often carry a palpable imprint. To them rape is not invisible. Nor is it invisible to partners and friends of those who have been raped, who increasingly are identifying themselves and seeking to know more about the monster that has entered their lives and the lives of the survivors.)

Since most of us men do not carry the body-centered terror and pain of rape, the idea of "not raping" also carries little psychophysical feeling or relief. It's an idea or vision that stays intellectual for most of us. One young man wanted to know, "What's the payoff?" "That you don't rape," we replied. "Yeah, but what's the payoff?" Exasperated, we countered, "That you don't rape!" "But what's the payoff?" he persisted. "That you don't rape," we shouted. What more did he need? *What more do we need?*

## INTENSIFYING THE CONFUSION

We were recently called by a magazine editor. "Are men reeling?" she asked. "In light of the William Kennedy Smith, Clarence Thomas, and

Mike Tyson cases, are men reeling?" "No," we had to tell her, "we don't exactly see men reeling, but there are rumblings of doubt." Pressure cracks are appearing in the "real man" facades many of us live behind, and unsightly feelings of uncertainty, fear, and vulnerability are beginning to show through, particularly among younger men. For all our past bravado, we now have questions and doubts.

We were in a high school the day the William Kennedy Smith verdict came down—when he was found rich and white. From the twenty-four young men there that day, questions came pouring out: "What is consent?" "What if a girl says yes, then changes her mind?" And "How do we know what they want?" (Echoes of Sigmund Freud.) It's great to hear these questions. While the threat of legal sanction may get men's attention for a moment, that distant threat does not start the changes in behaviors and attitudes that stop the raping. We encourage uncertainty and confusion, allowing a man to see that what he has accepted as normal can be rape—that he may be raping by doing exactly what he thinks he is "supposed" to be doing. This can shake him from his insouciant "hey-no-problem-with-me-man" mask. This can make it more difficult for him to continue his high-risk activities just because he has "gotten away" with rape in the past (i.e., has not been accused or charged with assault).

These responses can be part of a psychological disruption in which the stereotypes about rapists that keep *them* distant from *me* (a rapist is the stranger out there, the isolated "sick" guy, someone—anyone—else) begin to fall apart. At a gut level men may begin to feel this is me we're talking about; I think I've done this.

This discomfort is something we are happy to see, for if the normal expression of male sexuality is seen as a moving, even runaway, train—linear, rushing forward, with "too much momentum to stop"—then braking to a halt and even rolling backward a little is a desirable response. In our experience, nothing gets men to put on the brakes like the combination of clear, factual information and emotional confusion.

## EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

When men begin to experience this confusion, they may identify one or more of the following feelings: resentment, panic, anger, or shock.

Some express resentment at male figures in their lives—fathers, brothers, uncles, and male friends—for feeding them lies about sexual “conquest,” “the hunt” for women, and all the other strategies for obtaining sex that were laid on them as they were growing up. Their anger draws on feelings of belittlement by older men for the younger one’s possibly inadequate masculinity. (Remember being asked, “You younger guys must be getting it all the time, *aren’t you?*”) Here some of the lies that form the foundation of our participation in the patriarchy can begin to be named, identified, and rejected.

Hopelessness and panic can be seen in the response of one fraternity man: “If this is rape then every one of us has raped! We can’t do anything.” This moment of incipient recognition is familiar to us; a large number of us have done something that could qualify as rape. His fearful pronouncement resonates for many men. One man’s fear and panic was so strong—and so illustrative of the multiple and confused expectations about being a man that he’d internalized—that his response reached a truly absurd height, and he exclaimed, “With this new definition of rape, we could end up in prison for not satisfying a woman sexually!” (Now while that could be a wickedly funny discussion for some women or men, we felt we had to reassure him that no man is in prison anywhere in the universe for premature ejaculation.)

A fear of false charges also arises. “We have no protection. All she has to do is say we raped her.” But statistically, the false report is a minute occurrence. We find it important here to talk of the hellish experience reported by women (and men) who report an assault to disbelieving, insensitive, and unprofessional authorities, and the further indignities they experience in carrying the case through our judicial system. The fact is that the odds are extremely small that any middle- or upper-class white man in this country will ever be imprisoned for rape. Racism and a racist judicial system make the story entirely different for African-American men: in the U.S., where ninety-six percent of the reported perpetrators of rape are white, eighty percent of the men in prison for rape are black!

We also hear anger expressed by some men at all or some women for “causing” a problem (rape) where, in their opinion, none exists. In the discussion of sexual assault it is important to separate this bogus and reactionary blaming of women from the issue of the responsibility of female perpetrators (twenty percent of sexual violence is perpetrated by

females upon male victims, usually boys or infants). The same power/experience differential necessary for abuse is present. While there is no excuse for denying women's pain and these men's anger is misdirected, some angry men (and others who are defensive or seemingly resistant to hearing the truth about rape) are themselves survivors or "significant others" of survivors. Some angry men may be reactionary jerks, but not all are. It is dangerous, fatuous and perhaps even willful to pretend otherwise. If victims can only be female, then females can only be victims.

Perhaps men's most remarkable reaction is amazement that having assaulted her, they cannot "unassault" her. It comes as a rude shock that they can't "un-say" her feelings, interpret her experience for her, and have the last word on what happened. We are entitled to our perceptions, but it is not under our control to decide for our partners whether they have been sexually assaulted.

We are slowly moving to a new paradigm: if our partners feel assaulted, then they *have been* assaulted. Men are aghast that their intent doesn't really matter, whether they rape with a *complete* sense of what they are doing or *no* sense. We can't control someone else's feelings, though the rapist may have the illusion that he does. One astounded male college athlete demanded, "Do you mean that if I grab a woman's crotch, that could be rape? That's unfair!"

## CONSENT: EXPLICIT AND VERBAL

Often, when the accused in a date rape case is interviewed in the media, he says (no doubt under advice of counsel), "Well, I had consent and then she changed her mind." Whenever we hear this, we shout back, "What was the *conversation* like that established consent?" His assumption is that since she (1) ate dinner with him; (2) went back to his room; (3) didn't say "no" (even though she had passed out or had fallen asleep); and (4) etc., she must have wanted sex and was agreeing to whatever he had in mind.

The old saw "She got herself raped" reveals the operating paradigm: it's all *her* responsibility to say "no" and to attempt to set *my* limits. Rape occurs when *she* doesn't succeed. This is an analysis that is familiar to many men and women whose victim-blaming usually revolves around this point. The process of consent seeks to redress this disastrous imbal-



ance, charging men with the responsibility for our behavior and for respecting the integrity of our partner.

To us, consent is the continual process of explicit, verbal discussion, a dialogue, brief or extended, taken one step at a time, to an expressed "yes" by both parties and a shared acknowledgment that at this moment what we are doing together is safe and comfortable for each of us. Consent is what establishes that the interaction (including sex) is between equals in power. We feel safe enough to say anything we need to—without incapacitation of either party, coercion or threat, implied or actual—to protect ourselves from violation. Both parties are autonomous at each moment and can change their minds at any time. We share control of the situation with each other. Our responsibility is to be as sure as possible that what we are doing is not felt as violation.

This process may be new historically. When (or if) Dad sat us down for *that* talk, he never told us about having this kind of discussion nor did he admit his own questions. We have learned instead to "read" body language, a too often self-fulfilling prophesy that invites us to hear and see only what *we* want to. How many of us think we can read our partners' body language as confirmation of their desire for sexual contact and their (implied?) agreement with what we have in mind? Using body language this way is a sham; we're merely justifying self-deception or pretending that we've established more than mere acquiescence or submission.

Consent is not a panacea. Teaching men the process of explicit verbal consent for sexual contact will stop much rape, but will not stop all rape. There are men who know exactly what rape is and will persist. "You need this, you deserve this, you asked for this, and you will be a better wife after this." These are the words of men who know exactly what they are doing. But even for these men, convicted or not, this persistent discussion of consent can bring home the meaning of rape in a new way. Due to the myths about who the "real" rapist is and what rape is, the definition of rape is often misunderstood even by the convicted rapist!

Most of the men in prison are there for the rape of strangers, though stranger rape represents less than twenty percent of reported rapes. We have found in our workshop experiences in prisons that some rapists, admittedly guardedly and tentatively, are perplexed by the idea that most rape is forced intercourse or sexual contact without consent with an *acquaintance, partner, friend, or spouse*. Some of them begin to understand they have *also* raped people they know and can begin to see this as

similar (in the effect on the victim) to the stranger rape that they're in for. They show the same shock that other men do when they begin to feel the truth about rape. (After all, the main difference between them and most of the rest of us men is that they were caught.)

Can any man become empathetic to women and their experience of rape? The process of consent offers a challenge to men who hate women, who say that women "don't know what they want," are "vindictive," "out to get us," etc., to look at themselves. We ask, what is sex like when we feel this way? Sex will remain terrifying and fraught with danger, with high risk for those of us committing sexual assault, as long as we don't care about ourselves. Consent opens up possibilities for a man to understand and love himself as a person, to recognize the riskiness of the choices he has been making and become empathetic to his own state—frightened, lacking communication skills, unsure of what he wants from women. Consent raises the issue of personhood—ours *and* hers. The linkage is unavoidable. If we men have not been taught to be empathetic to ourselves, how can we extend that empathy to women, who are seen as alien or "other"? Facing or accepting our own fears of vulnerability and intimacy, our own histories of victimization *and* abusing, can open men to hearing women's experiences with us and other men, to hearing their fears and desires. We have seen many men move out of a hardened, defensive posture through this process and start making the connections.

## WHAT ARE WE ASKING?

What is going on when we "ask"? Many men explain that they don't ask because they might hear "no." We respond, "Would you rather rape than risk hearing 'no'?" Nobody wants to be turned down—especially for something as potentially pleasurable as sexual contact—but asking a question means being prepared to hear what we may not want to hear. Asking for an answer and then refusing to accept it is *not* asking. The exact question is not as important as: am I prepared to accept the answer, whether or not it's one I want to hear?

"No" is only the least of what we might hear. We may hear that she (or he) is a survivor of incest or other sexual assault. Our own intimate history together may be brought up for review and discussion. There may be some revelations, some surprises. It's important to take all the

time we need to vocalize our feelings and questions when we are feeling unsure about how clear or truthful we or our partner are being. After all, most of us don't have lots of experience in this sort of frank and honest exchange of feelings.

The question and answer is the first step in a trust-building exchange. The discussion has to be allowed all the time necessary to be as sure as we can be that we are both clear and OK with what is happening. Sometimes the exchange will take far longer than we might imagine or desire, particularly if we are used to very little, if any, verbal exchange around consent, or if there is a history of unsafe experiences (e.g., unwanted touches, groping, forcing, etc.) between us.

We hear many men complain or worry about getting "mixed messages." Aside from a statement that patently and absurdly contradicts itself, such as "Touch me, don't touch me," the claim of a mixed message is an excuse, an after-the-fact justification. Regardless of how we interpret or want to read our partner's physical movement or expression, direct explicit language is the only sure way to ascertain our partner's intent and meaning. If we are uncertain for any reason about the answer we've received, there's plenty of time to check it out with another exchange. We might ask, "Are you sure?" or "Did you mean that. . . ." The less sure we are of what's been agreed to, or the more we are disbelieving of the answer, the *higher* the risk of assaulting and the *more* responsibility we have to ourselves to establish verbal consent to sexual contact. There's a legal implication, too. In the William Kennedy Smith case, for example, the more the defense team tried to establish Patricia Bowman's instability/insanity, the more they proved his guilt. Smith called her "a real nut." According to the *New York Times*, "At other times, [Smith] said, the woman was erratic, hysterical and irrational." If she were those things, then legally she *couldn't* consent to his supposedly "innocent" advances.

Of course, absolute safety cannot be guaranteed. As in all interactions between people, there is no 100 percent guarantee of mutual understanding. The process of establishing consent is not a fixed legal contract that can obligate the parties to "consent" to their own assault (see "Warning on 'Dating Contracts'" in *Changing Men* #20), and the idea of taking lawyers to bed with us (as witnesses?) is really a perversion.

There's going to be some resistance to asking, even for those who want to try. It's new and can feel awkward at first, so practicing and

becoming comfortable with asking is critical. The process seemed so mysterious to us when we began that we found it useful to start with general questions, such as "How do you feel about this?", "How are we doing?", and "Is everything OK?" These kinds of gentle "check-in" questions allow us to open the process of consent with our partner without feeling so foolish or weird that the purpose is lost. We can also adopt a slower pace, so a mistake or confusion has less chance of becoming a severe violation or assault.

Since the principle underlying this process is the sharing of power, we seek out the "little" moments when we can check in and negotiate a consensual moment together. We ask about holding hands or exchanging hugs: "I'd like to hold hands. How would you feel if we did that?" We are not only holding hands; we are agreeing to, wanting to, even looking forward to holding each other's hand—and we're telling each other so. Depending on the answer, the experience is being entered into consensually, and more than that, with desire. If she says "no," we've gotten some information that has helped us to avoid unwanted touch, and suggests, in case we had it in mind, that she's probably not interested in intercourse (!) at that moment. Think that you know that she/he absolutely wants to hold hands? Then what's the harm in asking?

One way to begin is to ask a question about the question "one step removed" from the actual move. We are asking about asking, finding out how receptive our partner is to hearing something we want to ask. "Would you be interested in hearing something about the way I feel about you?" "How would you feel about kissing?" instead of saying, "I want to kiss you" or kissing without checking it out first. If the answer is "no," it is the opening that has been rejected—not me or my opinion. I have not made myself prematurely vulnerable again. The rejection was about "asking about," not a rejection of my feeling or idea. I am protecting myself when I ask first about whether my partner wants to even hear what I've got to say or how I feel, rather than shoving right in with it without asking.

## CULTURAL BLOCKS TO CONSENT

There's lots of discussion nowadays among the mythopoetic folk about initiation. It's the foundation upon which Robert Bly and other

male essentialists and apologists build their edifice of anger-driven reaction. We are poorly initiated, they insist. To us it's not that we have been poorly initiated, but that we've been initiated *too* well—though certainly not the way we might be by some wise, caring, gentle, humorous father. We have grown to be the men that patriarchy needs and forces us to be, "real men," angry at and frightened of women, other men, and ourselves. We inflict rape and other violence; we are cannon fodder in war and compulsive consumers of worthless products, unquestioningly remaining within oppressive gender, racial, and economic systems. Oh, we are brilliantly, coldly, efficiently initiated! We are initiated by our fathers and brothers with the same scarring, humiliating rites that they experienced. We are calling for men to examine how the process by which each of us becomes a man can hurt all of us; we are calling for men to refuse to rape.

Maybe millions of rapes have soured the possibility for an idealized, nonverbal, intuitive interaction with a generous, sensitive partner. Maybe that model of romance has always been a pornographic myth. Using pornography is one of our stickier rites (rights) of passage. It helps keep us on the Masculine, Straight-acting Path. A potential partner is reduced to *something* to ejaculate into. The sex language men use—I *porked* her, *stuck* it to her, *ripped off* a piece of ass—mirrors pornography's purposeful blurring of sex and violence. Men are also *bilingual* when it comes to sex talk: we use one set of words to talk to men, and a second, cleaned-up, insincere version to talk to women. Is honest communication possible with this kind of split? Pornography and locker room double-talk may teach us that rape is sex, but the process of consent we're talking about here makes possible a sex that is not rape.

Consider also the insidiousness of the "double standard" for women that we've been taught and that's encoded in our language. What are the positive words for a sexually active woman? There aren't any in popular usage, though we hear some fascinating attempts: liberated (!), mother (?), generous (!). Contrast this with the dozens of supposedly positive words for a sexually active man: stud, stallion, player, womanizer, pile driver, lady's man, Don Juan, Romeo, Casanova, etc. There are more than a thousand negative words for a sexually active woman. We say we crave a partner who initiates sex, yet we have no positive words or images to express the reality of a fully embodied, complex, active partner! What sort of joyous, spontaneous, self-defined sexual expression does this

forced invisibility allow women? We have chosen to settle for far less in our language and our conceptions, and to this degree we are constantly recreating a rape culture inside our heads.

## EROTICIZING CONSENT

Can we be turned on by sex that is not violent? Is sex inevitably violent? Can power-*with* (instead of pornographic power-*over*) be erotic? We will not be able to break the addiction to aggressive, violating sexual behavior unless the new feelings of power-*with* are felt to carry the same sort of sexual rush and pleasure.

Talking to each other can be hot, especially for those for whom emotional trust intensifies our expression of passion. And for many of us, feeling safe and more in control of our choices in our intimate sexual play can be a real turn-on. The situation is full of possibility. It can be an extraordinary emotional/sexual rush to open to each other in ways that we did not dream of doing before. The conversations of consent open the door to this kind of information and feeling exchange.

The erotic charge of our interactions also may intensify. Nothing is forbidden because nothing is forced. Within the “safer space” we create as part of the consent-exchange between us, we have abundant time to check things out. Being together in close, intimate, verbal—even humorous—presexual ways can intensify the erotic charge between us. Checking in often with each other becomes one of the intimate things we like to do together, and it may be one of the things we do really well together. By opening this space we also open a new place in which to play together with lowered risk of violation.

“No” is hard to hear. But what about a heartfelt “yes!” What about “more” or “now!” or “harder” or “faster” or any other expressions that we may have longed to hear in our fantasies and dreams of desire. What would it be like to create a space where partners can speak their wishes, express what feels good, and tell us how to help pleasure them? Here is communication in a safer space that can be trusted and played with. “Kiss me this way.” “Touch me here.” This is information that can bring us closer in sexual intimacy, without assault.

And what about romance? Can consent be romantic and safe? Can safety be romantic? Some men and women have said, “The uncertainty,

the ambivalence, the hunt, is exciting, even romantic." Ironically this is how many men defend what they've been doing, as if their planned scenarios, which too often result in assault, were genuinely "spontaneous and romantic." We need to jettison "romantic" as it has been practiced, replete with abuse and confusion, no one getting what they want.

Let's *reinvent a romance* that is safer to play with than false images and silence. When we experience what consent feels like—some deep and abiding body sensation of openness and safety—we may feel a body warning when it is not present. Its absence can be felt, and we can do what we have to do to restore that sense of comfort and minimize our risk of raping. We may start to feel adventure and excitement in this feeling of comfort. We may find it "sexy" *and* "romantic."

When young men plaintively ask, "Isn't there some way, other than asking, to find out if she wants sex?" they're saying that communication sounds like a crazy idea and a losing proposition.

Well, consent sounds crazy because it hasn't been tried. And the real losing proposition is the way that men have done it for the last five thousand years.


And what might we gain?

Deeper, more trustworthy relationships based on intimacy without assault, a new way of being together.

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PART

3

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ideas for workshops . . .

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WHETHER IT BE THE ESSAYS, FLYERS,  
BOOKS.

READ FROM THESE BOOKS AND DISCUSS IT.  
MAKE IT PERSONAL. TRY TO OPEN  
UP.

TALK ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT, RAPE,  
RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOUR PARTNERS,  
AGGRESSION, VIOLENCE, YOUR HISTORY  
GROWING UP, BOUNDRIES WITHIN SEX,  
WHAT SEX MEANS, YOUR PERSONAL  
EXPERIENCES, MALE ROLE MODELS,  
SHOWING YOUR EMOTIONS TO OTHER  
GUYS, WHY WE TALK "SHOP TALK"  
(RECORDS, SPORTS, CARS, EQUIPMENT, ETC...),  
ABUSE, GOODS AND BADS IN YOUR  
LIFE, THE PATRIARCHY AND HOW  
YOU DO AND DON'T FIT IN, SOCIETIES  
STANDARDS OF MEN AND BOYS, YOUR  
DREAMS AND HOPES AND FEARS AND  
WANTS AND DISLIKES AND LIKES AND  
ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN THINK OF.  
MAKE IT CHALLENGING.  
INVOLVE THE WOMEN IN YOUR LIFE.  
WORK ON BEING SAFE WITH OTHER MEN,  
WOMEN, AND YOURSELF.

PART

4

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your thoughts

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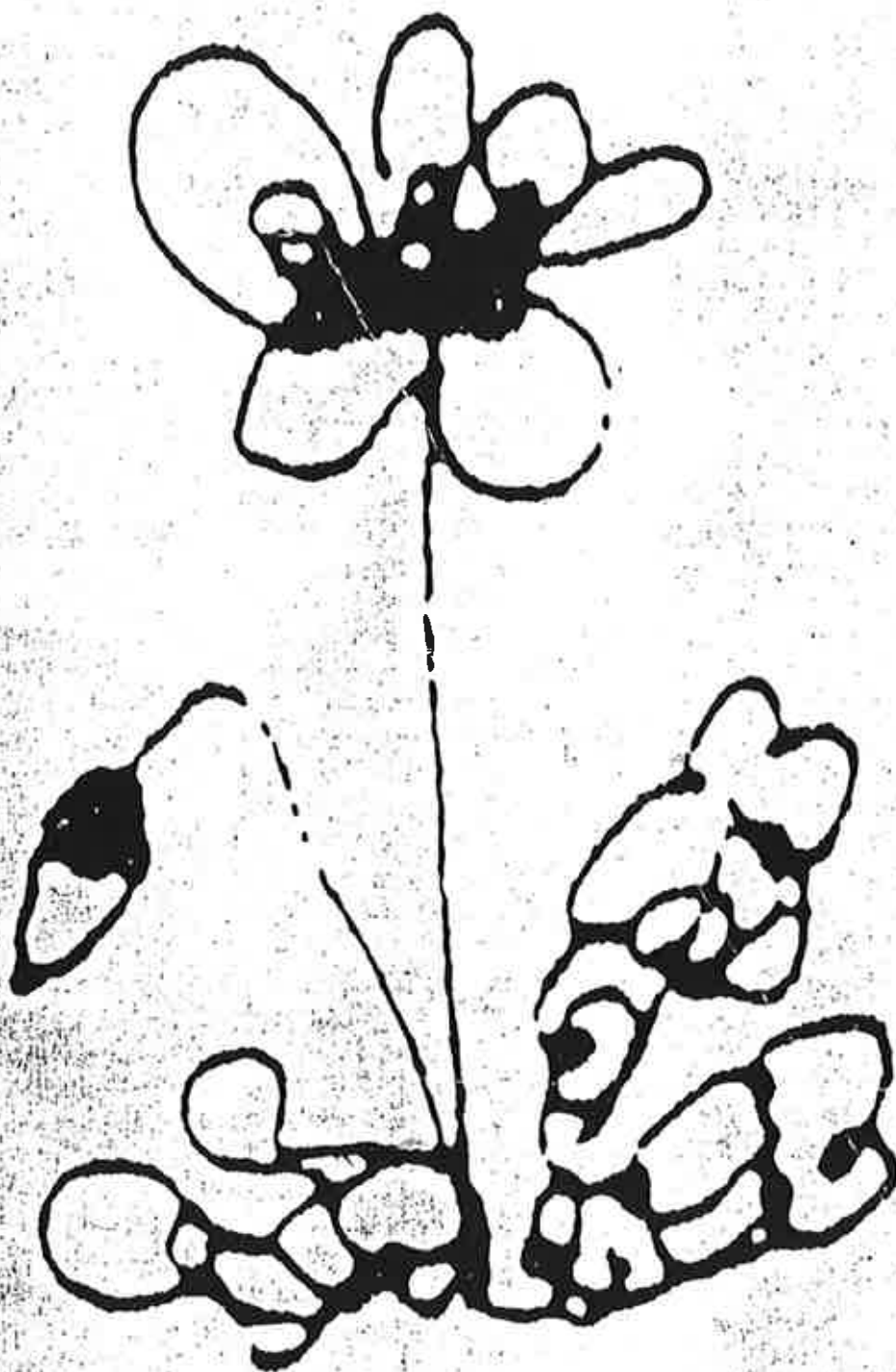












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