

## Stopping Male Violence

Every day in America men are violent. Their violence is deemed “natural” by the psychology of patriarchy, which insists that there is a biological connection between having a penis and the will to do violence. This thinking continues to shape notions of manhood in our society despite the fact that it has been documented that cultures exist in the world where men are not violent in everyday life, where rape and murder are rare occurrences. Every day in our nation there are men who turn away from violence. These men do not write books about how they manage to navigate the terrain of patriarchal masculinity without succumbing to the lure of violence. As women have gained the right to be patriarchal men in drag, women are engaging in acts of violence similar to those of their male counterparts. This serves to remind us that the will to use violence is really not linked to biology but to a set of expectations about the nature of power in a dominator culture. ✓

Over the decades no matter how many television shows and movies we have watched in which the hero is the good man who uses violence to win the fight with bad men, many people have long felt that feminist thinkers exaggerate the degree to which men are violent in their daily lives.

Radical feminist Andrea Dworkin has courageously and consistently dared to name the widespread scope of male violence against women. In *Scapegoat* she writes: "A recent United Nations report says that 'violence against women is the world's most pervasive form of human rights abuse.' In the United States the Justice Department says that 'one out of twelve women will be stalked at some point in her lifetime.' The American Medical Association concluded that 'sexual assault and family violence are devastating the United States physical and emotional well-being;' in 1995 the AMA reported that 'more than 700,000 women in the United States are sexually assaulted each year, or one every 45 seconds.'" These facts address actual physical assault and do not cover the widespread emotional abuse that has practically become an accepted norm in male-female relationships whether between husband and wife, father and daughter, brother and sister, or girlfriend and boyfriend.

In *How Can I Get Through to You?* Terrence Real includes a chapter titled "A Conspiracy of Silence," in which he emphasizes that we are not allowed in this culture to speak the truth about what relationships with men are really like. This silence represents our collective cultural collusion with patriarchy. To be true to patriarchy we are all taught that we must keep men's secrets. Real points out that the fundamental secret we share is that we will remain silent: "When girls are inducted into womanhood, what is it exactly that they have to say that must be silenced. What is the truth women carry that cannot be spoken. The answer is simple and chilling. Girls, women—and also young boys—all share this in common. None may speak the truth about men." One of the truths that cannot be

spoken is the daily violence enacted by men of all classes and races in our society—the violence of emotional abuse. In her groundbreaking work *Emotional Abuse* Marti Tamm Loring explains that emotional abuse is "an ongoing process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another. The essential ideas, feelings, perception, and personality characteristics of the victim are constantly belittled. . . . The most salient identifying characteristic of emotional abuse is its patterned aspect. . . . It is . . . the ongoing effort to demean and control, that constitutes emotional abuse." Significantly, emotional abuse in families is not just a component of the couple bond; it can determine the way everyone in a family relates. If a woman is patriarchal, it can be present in a single-parent home with no adult males present. In many homes patriarchal power resides with teenage boys who are abusive to single-parent moms; this is male violence against women.

When Real breaks the silence, the stories he shares are from family therapy sessions where clients openly reveal the way fathers have enacted rituals of power, using shaming, withdrawal, threats, and if all else fails, physical violence to maintain their position of dominance. In my family of origin our dad in a booming, angry voice would often scream repeatedly at Mom, "I will kill you." For years my nightmares were filled with an angry father sometimes killing Mom, sometimes killing me for trying to protect Mom. In our family, Dad was not consistently enraged, but the intense emotional and physical abuse that he unleashed on those rare occasions when he did act out violently kept everyone in check, living on the edge,



living in fear. Usually a cold, silent, reserved man, Dad found his voice when speaking in anger.

The two men I have had as my primary relational bonds in my adult life are both quiet and reserved like my dad and my beloved grandfather. Unlike my grandfather, whom I never witnessed expressing anger, much less rage, these two men I chose as partners both needed to exercise dominance now and then through rituals of power. One of them was physically violent on a few occasions, a fact he always felt did not matter, and emotionally unkind quite consistently. My second longtime partner I chose in part because he was a major advocate for stopping violence against women, but as our bond progressed he began to be emotionally abusive now and then. It was as though he felt that I was too powerful, and that perception empowered him to challenge that power, to wound and hurt. I was stunned that the past was being reenacted in the present.

In self-help books galore the notion that women choose men who will treat them badly again and again is presented as truth. These books rarely talk about patriarchy or male domination. They rarely acknowledge that relationships are not static, that people change through time, that they adjust to circumstances. Men who may have seeds of negativity and domination within them along with positive traits may find the negative burgeoning at times of crisis in their lives.

The two men I chose as partners, like all the men I have loved, were victims of various degrees of emotional neglect and abandonment in their childhoods. They did not love their fathers or truly know them intimately. Growing from young adulthood into manhood they simply passively

accepted the lack of communication with their fathers. They both felt that all attempts at reconciliation should have come from the father to the son. And yet as they matured into manhood, both these men began to behave not unlike the fathers whose actions they had condemned and hated. Observing them through time, I found that both of them had been rebellious and antipatriarchal in their twenties and early thirties, but as they moved more into the work world, they began to assume more of the patriarchal manners that identify one as a powerful and successful man. Though they had not been living with their fathers when it came time to be "men," the early models of their lives were unconsciously reenacted. They could have protected themselves from this intimate repetition only by consciously working to be different, only by being disloyal to the dominator model.

No man who does not actively choose to work to change and challenge patriarchy escapes its impact. The most passive, kind, quiet man can come to violence if the seeds of patriarchal thinking have been embedded in his psyche. Much of the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde behavior women describe in men who are alternately caring, then abusive has its root in this fundamental allegiance to patriarchal thinking. Indoctrination into the mind-set begun in childhood includes a psychological initiation that requires boys to accept that their willingness to do violent acts makes them patriarchal men. A distinction can and must be made between the willingness to do violent acts and actually doing them. When researchers looking at date rape interviewed a range of college men and found that many of them saw nothing wrong with forcing a woman sexually, they

were astounded. Their findings seemed to challenge the previously accepted notion that raping was aberrant male behavior. While it may be unlikely that any of the men in this study were or became rapists, it was evident that given what they conceived as the appropriate circumstance, they could see themselves being sexually violent. Unconsciously they engage in patriarchal thinking, which condones rape even though they may never enact it.

This is a patriarchal truism that most people in our society want to deny. Whenever women thinkers, especially advocates of feminism, speak about the widespread problem of male violence, folks are eager to stand up and make the point that most men are not violent. They refuse to acknowledge that masses of boys and men have been programmed from birth on to believe that at some point they must be violent, whether psychologically or physically, to prove that they are men. Terrence Real calls this early indoctrination into patriarchal thinking the "normal traumatization" of boys:

When I first began looking at gender issues, I believed that violence was a by-product of boyhood socialization. But after listening more closely to men and their families, I have come to believe that violence *is* boyhood socialization. The way we "turn boys into men" is through injury: We sever them from their mothers, research tells us, far too early. We pull them away from their own expressiveness, from their feelings, from sensitivity to others. The very phrase "Be a man" means suck it up and keep going.

Disconnection is not fallout from traditional masculinity. Disconnection *is* masculinity.

This indoctrination happens irrespective of whether a boy is raised in a two-parent household or in a single female-headed household.

The perpetuation of male violence through the teaching of a dominator model of relationships comes to boy children through both women and men. Patriarchy breeds maternal sadism in women who embrace its logic. A great many women stand by and bear witness to their sons' brutalization at the hands of fathers, boyfriends, brothers, and so on because they feel by doing so they show their allegiance to patriarchy. No wonder then that male rage is often most directed at women in intimate relationships. Such relationships clearly trigger for many males the anger and rage they felt in childhood when their mothers did not protect them or ruthlessly severed emotional bonds in the name of patriarchy.

Contrary to popular myths, single mothers are often the most brutal when it comes to coercing their sons to conform to patriarchal standards. The single mom who insists that her boy child "be a man" is not antipatriarchal; she is enforcing patriarchal will. Researching boyhood, Olga Silverstein observed: "In single-parent families, it's common to see boys who have become their mother's 'little man.' Often these boys are very bossy children who patronize their mothers, who in fact do uncanny imitations of a certain kind of husband, being alternately possessive, protective, and seductive." Whether in single-parent or two-parent households, boys who are allowed to assume the



role of "mini patriarch" are often violent toward their mothers. They hit and kick when their wishes are not satisfied. Obviously, as small boys they do not have the strength to overpower their mothers, but it is clear that they see the use of violence to get their needs met as acceptable. And while mothers of boys who hit them may feel that hitting is wrong, they may simultaneously feel that it is their job to meet the needs of any male, especially one who is coercive.

Many teenage boys have violent contempt and rage for a patriarchal mom because they understand that in the world outside the home, sexism renders her powerless; he is pissed that she has power over him at home. He does not see her autocratic rule in the home as legitimate power. As a consequence, he may be enraged at his mom for using the tactics of psychological terrorism to whip him into shape and yet respond with admiration toward the male peer or authority figure who deploys similar tactics. In patriarchal culture boys learn early that the authority of the mother is limited, that her power comes solely from being a caretaker of patriarchy. When she colludes with adult male abuse of her son, she (or later a symbolic mother substitute) will be the target of his violence.

Years ago the television show *The Incredible Hulk* was the favorite of many boys. It featured a mild-mannered scientist who turned into an angry green monster whenever he felt intense emotions. A sociologist interviewing boys about their passion for this show asked them what they would do if they had the power of the Hulk. They replied that they would "smash their mommies." In her groundbreaking work *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* feminist theorist Dorothy Dinnerstein highlighted the extent to which

boys respond to the autocratic power of mothers with rage. Like many feminist researchers today, she insisted that male engagement with parenting was needed to break this projection onto the mother as an all-powerful figure who must be rebelled against and in some cases destroyed.

Clearly, patriarchal mothers who have rage at grown men act out with sons. They may either force the son to enter into an inappropriate relationship in which he must provide for her the emotional connection grown men deny her or engage in emotional abuse in which the son is constantly belittled and shamed. These acts of patriarchal violence serve to reinforce in the mind of boy children that their violence toward females is appropriate. It simply feels like justifiable vengeance. Feminist idealization of motherhood made it extremely difficult to call attention to maternal sadism, to the violence women enact with children, especially with boys. And yet we know that whether it is a consequence of power dynamics in dominator culture or simply a reflection of rage, women are shockingly violent toward children. This fact should lead everyone to question any theory of gender differences that suggests that women are less violent than men.

In patriarchal culture women are as violent as men toward the groups that they have power over and can dominate freely; usually that group is children or weaker females. Like its male counterpart, much female violence toward children takes the form of emotional abuse, especially verbal abuse and shaming, hence it is difficult to document. Maternal sadism must be studied, however, if we are to understand the roots of adult male violence toward women. To some extent the reformist feminist thinkers



who have focused on women as the more ethical, kinder, gentler sex have stood in the way of an in-depth study of maternal sadism, of the ways women in patriarchal society act out violently with boys.

In our household growing up it was clear that our mother believed wholeheartedly that it was the role of the man to be a disciplinarian, to be in charge. When our dad used excessive violence, she merely saw it as his right. Lots of women who believe that it is the right of men to dominate feel that they should not resist male violence toward themselves or their children. Not surprisingly, these women, my mother included, use all manner of violence to discipline children. Fearful of being the objects of a grown man's rage, they may desire their children to be perfectly behaved so as not to arouse Daddy's ire.

In conversations with men whose mothers were passive as their sons were victimized by fathers or other male parental caregivers, I found that the men were far more likely than other men to idealize their moms, seeing them as victims without choice. While they did not direct anger toward their mothers and were often unable to even consider that she could have acted to protect their rights, these men were themselves violent in their intimate relationships with women. Their behavior affirms Terrence Real's insight that "the choreography of patriarchy, this unholy fusion of love, loss, and violence, spares no one." Mothers who ally themselves with patriarchy cannot love their sons rightly, for there will always come a moment when patriarchy will ask them to sacrifice their sons. Usually this moment comes in adolescence, when many caring and affectionate mothers stop giving their sons emotional nurturance for

fear it will emasculate them. Unable to cope with the loss of emotional connection, boys internalize the pain and mask it with indifference or rage.

Usually adult males who are unable to make emotional connections with the women they choose to be intimate with are frozen in time, unable to allow themselves to love for fear that the loved one will abandon them. If the first woman they passionately loved, the mother, was not true to her bond of love, then how can they trust that their partner will be true to love. Often in their adult relationships these men act out again and again to test their partner's love. While the rejected adolescent boy imagines that he can no longer receive his mother's love because he is not worthy, as a grown man he may act out in ways that are unworthy and yet demand of the woman in his life that she offer him unconditional love. This testing does not heal the wound of the past, it merely reenacts it, for ultimately the woman will become weary of being tested and end the relationship, thus reenacting the abandonment. This drama confirms for many men that they cannot put their trust in love. They decide that it is better to put their faith in being powerful, in being dominant. In *Man Enough* Frank Pittman says of men that "while most of us want to be loved, controllers are willing to forego love if that is what it takes to be the boss." Being the boss does not require any man to be emotionally healthy, able to give and receive love.

Ever since I started writing about love, I have defined it in a way that blends M. Scott Peck's notion of love as the will to nurture one's own and another's spiritual and emotional growth, with Eric Fromm's insight that love is action and not solely feeling. Working with men who wanted to



know love, I have advised them to think of it as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust. Most of our relationships have one or two of these aspects. Patriarchal men are schooled in the art of being responsible and giving instrumental care. As a teenager, when I complained about Dad's emotional neglect and abuse and his sporadic violence to Mama, she was always quick to remind me that he worked hard and provided for his family, that he was home almost every night, and for that reason alone we should respect and honor him. The fact that men often mix being caring and being violent has made it hard for everyone in our culture to face the extent to which male violence stands in the way of males' giving and receiving love.

The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem. Feminist movement offered to men and women the information needed to challenge this psychic slaughter, but that challenge never became a widespread aspect of the struggle for gender equality. Women demanded of men that they give more emotionally, but most men really could not understand what was being asked of them. Having cut away the parts of themselves that could feel a wide range of emotional response, they were too disconnected. They simply could not give more emotionally or even grasp the problem without first reconnecting, reuniting the severed parts.

Describing a couple in family therapy, Real recalls the qualities the wife wanted from her husband: "Sensitivity to others, the capacity to identify and share his feelings, a willingness to put his needs aside in the service of the family." These are the same qualities, Real points out, that "most boys, even in these enlightened times, have had stamped out of them." He concludes: "In our culture, boys and men are not, nor have they ever been, raised to be intimate." Women seeking intimacy from men often find their expressions of longing belittled. Many men respond to females' wanting emotional connection with emotional withdrawal and, in worst case scenarios, with abuse.

Emotionally self-mutilated, disconnected, many men make overtures of emotional connection only to later undermine these with emotional abuse. They simply do not get that love and abuse cannot go together. And why should they get it, when television shows, movies, and so much else in popular culture gives the message that any time there is intense passion between a couple, violence can erupt? Teaching men to understand that women and children do not feel loved when they are being abused, is one of the primary goals of groups that work to end male violence. Kay Leigh Hagan's autobiographical essay "A Good Man Is Hard to Bash" begins with the story of her dating a man who she felt was abusive and was potentially capable of physical violence. She calls his best male friend for advice about how much abuse she should endure, saying, "If I'm serious about him, and if I want the relationship to work, to last, there will be ups and downs. I don't think I should run away when it gets hard. I should be willing to tolerate a little abuse if I really love him." The friend looks her

directly in the eyes and tells her, "Kay, in a loving relationship, abuse is unacceptable. You should not have to tolerate any abuse to be loved."

With characteristic boldness and radical honesty Hagan shares that her "understanding of love and power changed forever in that moment." She had imagined that her lover's friend would take his side: "Instead, his reaction encouraged me to love myself, to take responsibility for my own well-being, and to reject violence even in its subtler forms." Hagan was lucky to receive this wisdom early in life. The fate of most women is dramatically different, especially females who worship at the throne of patriarchy. These women feel, as Hagan did initially, that to choose to be with a patriarchal man is automatically to sign up for some level of abuse, however relative. Every day women explain away male violence and cruelty by insisting on gender differences that normalize abuse. Heterosexual women who are single and want to be with men feel that they cannot escape being victimized at some point by emotional and/or physical abuse at the hands of male partners. Collective female acceptance of male violence in love relationships, even if the appearance of acceptance masks rage, fear, or outright terror, makes it difficult to challenge and change male violence.

When the seemingly mild-mannered professor I lived with moved from emotional abuse to physical violence, I felt I should be understanding, forgiving. Like me, he had been raised in a dysfunctional family. However, even though he went to therapy, even though his physical violence stopped, he never really believed that he had done anything wrong. He harbored the notion, as many men

who act violently do, that I was responsible for his bad behavior. In Donald Dutton's work with men who are violent, he identifies women's seeing behind the male mask as a catalyst for male violence:

He may apologize and feel shame immediately after, but he can't sustain that emotion; it's too painful, too reminiscent of hurts long buried. So he blames it on her. If it happens repeatedly with more than one woman, he goes from blaming her to blaming "them." His personal shortcomings become rationalized by an evolving misogyny. . . . At this point the abusiveness is hardwired into the system. The man is programmed for intimate violence.

Often men who have been emotionally neglected and abused as children by dominating mothers bond with assertive women, only to have their childhood feelings of being engulfed surface. While they could not "smash their mommy" and still receive her love, they find that they can engage in intimate violence with partners who respond to their acting out by trying harder to connect with them emotionally, hoping that the love offered in the present will heal the wounds of the past. If only one party in a relationship is working to create love, to create the space of emotional connection, the dominator model remains in place and the relationship just becomes a site for continuous power struggle.

Women who stay in long-term relationships with men who are emotionally abusive or violent usually end up clos-



ing the door to their hearts. They stop working to create love. Often they stay in these relationships because a basic cynicism, rooted in their experience, affirms that most men are emotionally withholding, so they do not believe that they can find a loving relationship with any man. When I wanted to leave my first longtime partner, who had been continuously emotionally abusive and occasionally physically abusive, it was other women (my mother, close friends, acquaintances) who cautioned me about ending the relationship, letting me know that the man I was with was better than most men, that I was lucky. Leaving him was a gesture of self-love and self-reliance that I have not regretted. Yet I found that the observations of the women who cautioned me about what most men were like were fairly accurate.

The man I had lived with in partnership for almost fifteen years exhibited a mixture of patriarchal masculinity and alternative masculinity. We met during the heyday of feminist movement, and he was willing to work at creating gender equality. As it is for many men today, it was much easier for him to accept equal pay for equal work, sharing housework, and reproductive rights than it was for him to accept the need for shared emotional development. It is more difficult for men to do the work of emotional development because this work requires individuals to be emotionally aware—to feel. Patriarchy rewards men for being out of touch with their feelings. Whether engaged in acts of violence against women and children or weaker men, or in the socially sanctioned violence of war, men are better able to fulfill the demands of patriarchy if they do not feel. Men of feeling often find themselves isolated from other men.

This fear of isolation often acts as the mechanism to prevent males from becoming more emotionally aware.

When large numbers of young men in this nation rebelled against patriarchy to oppose the war in Vietnam, many of them were concerned with justice, many of them did not want to kill, but a great many simply did not want to die. To oppose war and the imperialism that promotes war placed these young men at odds with imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. They suffered by choosing to take a stand. They were ridiculed by other men, more often than not represented as traitors. In the past ten years mass media have produced a number of movies aimed at boys that glorify war (*Saving Private Ryan*, *Independence Day*, *Men in Black*, *Blackhawk Down*, *Pearl Harbor*, to name a few) that once again make it appear heroic to die alone, away from home, fighting for a cause you may or may not understand. These movies are part of patriarchal antifeminist backlash. They glorify the patriarchal masculinity that enlightened women and men critique. They serve as propaganda, recruiting the hearts and imaginations of boys. Like gangsta rap, they celebrate male violence on all fronts, including the domination of women.

Conservative mass media offer daily lessons in patriarchal pedagogy; they tell boys what they must do to be men. In those homes where enlightened fathers daily work to repudiate violence, television reaffirms its importance, making courting death glamorous and sexy. Poor and working-class male children and grown men often embody the worst strains of patriarchal masculinity, acting out violently because it is the easiest, cheapest way to declare one's "manhood." If you cannot prove that you are "much of a



man" by becoming president, or becoming rich, or becoming a public leader, or becoming a boss, then violence is your ticket in to the patriarchal manhood contest, and your ability to do violence levels the playing field. On that field, the field of violence, any man can win.

Men who win on patriarchal terms end up losing in terms of their substantive quality of life. They choose patriarchal manhood over loving connection, first foregoing self-love and then the love they could give and receive that would connect them to others. Feminist researchers have long since exposed the widespread domestic violence in our society. Yet since that exposure, violence against women has not declined and in some cases it has intensified. Antifeminist pundits seek to blame the intensification of male violence on women's greater equality. Yet most studies of family life indicate that in that sphere gender relations did not undergo any major revolution. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild has provided important data showing that domestic gender dynamics between men and women remain fairly sexist; women work outside the home but continue to do the lion's share of work in the home. Of course men who were covert misogynists before feminist movement felt more entitled to unleash their rage overtly as the movement gained momentum, but the rage was already present.

Male violence in general has intensified not because feminist gains offer women greater freedom but rather because men who endorse patriarchy discovered along the way that the patriarchal promise of power and dominion is not easy to fulfill, and in those rare cases where it is fulfilled, men find themselves emotionally bereft. The patriarchal man-

hood that was supposed to satisfy does not. And by the time this awareness emerges, most patriarchal men are isolated and alienated; they cannot go back and reclaim a past happiness or joy, nor can they go forward. To go forward they would need to repudiate the patriarchal thinking that their identity has been based on. Rage is the easy way back to a realm of feeling. It can serve as the perfect cover, masking feelings of fear and failure.

My father and mother have been married now for more than fifty years. Dad has never relinquished his patriarchal status and she has never challenged it. Yet by clinging to patriarchal thinking, they forfeited their chance to be happy together. The threat of violence, of emotional abuse, is always there, standing in the way of intimacy, keeping them from forgiving one another and starting over. Sadly, they are stuck in the trap of patriarchy. And it remains the breeding ground for everyday violence, the subtle, intimate terrorism that intensifies resentment and closes off the possibility of knowing joy.

It is not easy for males, young or old, to reject the codes of patriarchal masculinity. Men who choose against violence are simultaneously choosing against patriarchy, whether they can articulate that choice or not. In his insightful essay "Gender Politics of Men," R. W. Connell calls attention to the fact that men who oppose patriarchy remain at odds with the world they are living in:

Men who try to develop a politics in support of feminism, whether gay or straight, are not in for an easy ride. They are likely to be met with derision from many other men, and from some



women. It is almost a journalistic cliché that women despise Sensitive New Age Guys. They will not necessarily get warm support from feminist women.

Ultimately the men who choose against violence, against death, do so because they want to live fully and well, because they want to know love. These are men who are true heroes, the men whose lives we need to know about, honor, and remember.

## Male Sexual Being

Most men and women are not having satisfying and fulfilling sex. We have all heard the notion that men come to relationships looking for sex and not love and that women come to relationships looking for love and not sex. In actuality, men come to sex hoping that it will provide them with all the emotional satisfaction that would come from love. Most men think that sex will provide them with a sense of being alive, connected, that sex will offer closeness, intimacy, pleasure. And more often than not sex simply does not deliver the goods. This fact does not lead men to cease obsessing about sex; it intensifies their lust and their longing.

If women have been taught through sexist socialization that a journey through the difficult terrain of sex will lead us to our heart's desire, men have been taught that their heart's desire should be for sex and more sex. Coming in the wake of sexual liberation, women's liberation seemed to promise heterosexual and bisexual men that women would begin to think the same way males do about sexuality, that female sexuality would become just as predatory, just as obsessive as male sexual desire. Lots of men thought this was the promise of paradise. Finally they were going to be

able to go for the sexual gusto without having to worry about commitment. Sexist logic had convinced them and convinces them still that they can have connection and intimacy without commitment, that "Have dick will travel" meant that their needs could and would be met on command, at any time, anywhere.

In our culture these attitudes toward sexuality have been embraced by most men and many post-sexual liberation, postfeminist women. They are at the root of our cultural obsession with sex. When I first began to write books on love, to talk to lone individuals and then large audiences about the subject, I realized that it was practically impossible to have a serious discussion about love—that discussions of love, especially public conversations, are taboo in our society. Yet everyone talks about sex. We see all manner of sexual scenes on our television and movie screens. Talking about sex is acceptable. Talk shows engage audiences daily with explicit discussions of sexuality. Discussions of sex are fundamentally easier to engage in because in patriarchal culture sex has been presented to us as a "natural" desire. Most folks believe we are hardwired biologically to long for sex but they do not believe we are hardwired to long for love. Almost everyone believes that we can have sex without love; most folks do not believe that a couple can have love in a relationship if there is no sex.

Feminist movement was able to challenge and change notions of female inequality on many fronts, particularly in such arenas as work, education, and religion. However, sexism continues to shape the ways most people think about sexual relations. No matter how many men in our

nation are celibate or have only occasional sexual experiences, people still believe that sex is something men have to have. Underlying this assumption is the belief that if men are not sexually active, they will act out or go crazy. This is why male-on-male sexual violence is accepted in our nation's prisons. This is why rape—whether date rape, marital rape, or stranger rape—is still not deemed a serious crime. This is why the rape of children, especially when conducted by mild-mannered, nice men, is allowed. If this were not so, celebrities accused of sexually abusing children would no longer be cultural icons. The assumption that "he's gotta have it" underlies much of our culture's acceptance of male sexual violence. It is why many people continue to believe that anyone who is raped may have "asked for it" by "seductive" dress or behavior, no matter how many television programs have aired the facts about sexual violence.

Children today learn more about sex from mass media than from any other source. Whether watching daytime soap operas, a porn channel, or X-rated movies, children in our nation are more aware of the body and of sexuality than ever before. Yet much of what they are learning about sexuality conforms to outmoded patriarchal scripts about the sexual nature of men and women, of masculine and feminine. They learn that in the world of sexual relations there is always a dominant party and a submissive party. They learn that males should dominate females, that strong men should dominate weaker men. They learn that whether he is homosexual or heterosexual, a man deprived of sexual access will ultimately be sexual with any body. If deprived long enough, even if he is straight he will have sex with



another man; if he's gay, deprivation will lead him to engage in desperate sexual acts with women. Again and again children hear the message from mass media that when it comes to sex, "he's gotta have it." Adults may know better, from their own experience, but children become true believers. They think that men will go mad if they cannot act sexually. This is the logic that produces what feminist thinkers call "a rape culture."

Males, whether gay or straight, learn early on in life that one of the primary rewards offered to them for obedience to patriarchal thought and practice is the right to dominate females sexually. And if no female is around, they have the right to place a weaker male in the "female" position. In the anthology *Victims No Longer: Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse*, men who have been victimized by stronger boys, brothers, and other male peers share how the logic of patriarchal thinking about the right of the strong to do as they wish with those whom they deem weak was presented to them by their abusers. This same logic has usually shaped the thinking about sexuality embraced by adult abusers. Ed writes of his older brother's sexual abuse of him: "I learned about sex when I was nine years old. I was giving blow jobs at ten. While other kids were out playing with guns, I was learning how to 'please' a man. I was taught how to be a 'woman.' My brother liked to act out fantasies in which he was the 'man' and I was the 'woman.'" This older brother married and took with him into marriage the notion that it was his right to have sex with anyone he desired, whether they wanted to or not. His need to dominate was the salient feature in all his sexual relationships.

Within a culture of domination struggles for power are enacted daily in human relationships, often assuming their worst forms in situations of intimacy. The patriarchal man who would never respond to demands from his boss with overt rage and abuse will respond with fury when intimates want him to change his behavior. Men who do not daily lie and cheat at their jobs do so in their intimate bonds. This lying is usually connected to inappropriate sexual behavior or to discomfort about sexual behavior. In his powerful essay "Who He Was," Eric Guitierrez recounts how he told lies to cover up the reality that his father was gay: "About the same time I began lying about my father I began lying about myself. I didn't offer my lies indiscriminately. . . . Rather than making up comforting details that would portray my flashing, gay father more like the hardworking, lawn-mowing dads that lined our street, I instead embellished his shortcomings, his weaknesses, his rages, into real perversity. . . . I enthralled my classmates with stories of how my father would tie us up or throw crystal goblets at my terrorized mother. . . . I was an accomplished liar, building false identities for my father and myself by overstating truth on its own trajectory." Lying about sexuality is an accepted part of patriarchal masculinity. Sex is where many men act out because it is the only social arena where the patriarchal promise of dominion can be easily realized. Without these perks, masses of men might have rebelled against patriarchy long ago.

Little boys learn early in life that sexuality is the ultimate proving ground where their patriarchal masculinity will be tested. They learn early that sexual desire should not be

freely expressed and that females will try to control male sexuality. For boys this issue of control begins with the mother's response to his penis; usually she does not like it and she does not know what to do with it. Her discomfort with his penis communicates that there is something inherently wrong with it. She does not communicate to the boy child that his penis is wonderful, special, marvelous. This same fear of the boy's penis is commonly expressed by fathers who simply do not concern themselves with educating boys about their bodies. Sadly, unenlightened approaches to child abuse lead many parents to fear celebration of their child's body, especially the boy body, which may respond to playful physical closeness with an erection. In patriarchal culture everyone is encouraged to see the penis, even the penis of a small boy, as a potential weapon. This is the psychology of a rape culture. Boys learn that they should identify with the penis and the potential pleasure erections will bring, while simultaneously learning to fear the penis as though it were a weapon that could backfire, rendering them powerless, destroying them. Hence the underlying message boys receive about sexual acts is that they will be destroyed if they are not in control, exercising power.

Adolescent sexual socialization is the vulnerable moment in a boy's life when he is required to identify his selfhood and his sexuality with patriarchal masculinity; it is the meeting place of theory and practice. During these formative years, when a boy's sexual lust is often intense, he learns that patriarchal culture expects him to covertly cultivate that lust and the will to satisfy it while engaging in overt acts of sexual repression. This splitting is part of

the initiation into patriarchal masculinity; it is a rite of passage. The boy learns as well that females are the enemy when it comes to the satisfaction of sexual desire. They are the group that will impose on the boy the need to repress his sexual longings, and yet to prove his manhood, he must dare to move past repression and engage in sexual acts.

Sexual repression fuels the lust of boys and men. Shedding light on the negative impact of this socialization in the essay "Fuel for Fantasy: The Ideological Construction of Male Lust," Michael S. Kimmel demonstrates that sexual repression creates the world in which males must engage constantly in sexual fantasy, eroticizing the nonsexual. Exploring the link between sexual repression and sexism, he explains:

Sexual pleasure is rarely the goal in a sexual encounter, something far more important than mere pleasure is on the line, our sense of ourselves as men. Men's sense of sexual scarcity and an almost compulsive need for sex to confirm manhood feed each other, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of sexual deprivation and despair. And it makes men furious at women for doing what women are taught to do in our society: saying no.

Despair and rage are the feelings men bring to sex, whether with women or with other men.

Encouraged to relate to sex in an addictive way by the patriarchal thinking which says "he's gotta have it," males



must then adjust to a world where they can rarely get it, or never get it as much as they want, or where they can get it only by coercing and manipulating someone who does not want it, usually someone female. In *The Heart of the Soul* Gary Zukav and Linda Francis describe the characteristics of individuals addicted to sexual obsessions: "They cannot rest from thoughts of sex. They move from one encounter to the next. Each sexual experience brings only temporary relief from their craving, and it quickly returns. No amount of sexual activity can satisfy it." They explain that the "sexual craving is not for sex, but for something deeper." The fact that the craving always returns is the clue that addictive sexuality is not simply about getting sex. For the patriarchal male, be he straight or gay, addictive sexuality is fundamentally about the need to constantly affirm and reaffirm one's selfhood. If it is only through sex that he can experience selfhood, then sex has to be constantly foregrounded. Zukav and Francis explain: "The more intense the pain of fear, unworthiness, and feeling unlovable becomes, the more obsessive becomes the need to have a sexual interaction."

Sex, then, becomes for most men a way of self-solacing. It is not about connecting to someone else but rather about releasing their own pain. The addict is often an individual in acute pain. Patriarchal men have no outlet to express their pain, so they simply seek release. Zukav and Francis stress that the sex addict fears being inadequate and he fears rejection: "The stronger these emotions are, when there is no willingness to feel them, the stronger becomes the obsession with sex." Male sexual obsession tends to be seen as normal. Thus the culture as a whole colludes in

requiring of men that they discount and disown their feelings, displacing them all onto sex. Steve Bearman makes this point in the essay "Why Men Are So Obsessed with Sex," explaining that "even if we do not engage compulsively in anonymous casual sex, pornography, masturbation, or fetishistic attempts to recover what has been forgotten, sex nevertheless takes on an addictive character." Whether straight or gay, male sexuality assumes this addictive character.

Since it is neither possible biologically nor practical, given the few hours in a day available for leisure activity, for men to be in sexual interactions constantly, patriarchal pornography available in myriad forms becomes the site of sublimation, the place where the sexual addict can get a quick fix. Patriarchal men can do pornography anywhere all day long. They can watch movies, look at magazines, look at real females with a pornographic gaze, undress them, fuck them, dominate them. Kimmel contends that male consumption of pornography is fed by the sexual lust males are taught to feel all the time and their rage that this lust cannot be satisfied:

Pornography can sexualize that rage, and it can make sex look like revenge. . . . Everywhere, men are in power, controlling virtually all the economic, political, and social institutions of society. Yet individual men do not feel powerful—far from it. Most men feel powerless and are often angry at women, whom they perceive as having sexual power over them: the power to arouse them and to give or withhold sex. This

fuels both sexual fantasies and the desire for revenge.

Many men are angry at women, but more profoundly, women are the targets for displaced male rage at the failure of patriarchy to make good on its promise of fulfillment, especially endless sexual fulfillment.

Men may be too terrified to confront the facts of their lives and tell the truth that possessing the right to engage in rituals of domination and subordination is not all that patriarchy promised it would be. If, as Terrence Real says, patriarchy were a disease, it would be a disease of "disordered desire"; to cure this disease, then, we would all need to reconsider the way we see men and male desire. Rather than seeing the violence men do as an expression of power, we would need to call it by its true name—*pathology*. Patriarchal violence is a mental illness. That this illness is given its most disordered expression in the sexual lives of men is powerful because it makes it hard to document since we do not witness what men do sexually like we witness what they do at work or in civic life. To take the inherent positive sexuality of males and turn it into violence is the patriarchal crime that is perpetuated against the male body, a crime that masses of men have yet to possess the strength to report. Men know what is happening. They simply have been taught not to speak the truth of their bodies, the truth of their sexualities.

Robert Jensen's powerful and courageous essay "Patriarchal Sex" drives this message home. Defining patriarchal sex, he writes: "Sex is fucking. In patriarchy, there is an imperative to fuck—in rape and in 'normal' sex, with

strangers and girlfriends and wives and estranged wives and children. What matters in patriarchal sex is the male need to fuck. When that need presents itself, sex occurs." Boldly Jensen explains:

Attention to the meaning of the central male slang term for sexual intercourse—"fuck"—is instructive. To fuck a woman is to have sex with her. To fuck someone in another context . . . means to hurt or cheat a person. And when hurled as a simple insult ("fuck you") the intent is denigration and the remark is often a prelude to violence or the threat of violence. Sex in patriarchy is fucking. That we live in a world in which people continue to use the same word for sex and violence, and then resist the notion that sex is routinely violent and claim to be outraged when sex becomes overtly violent, is testament to the power of patriarchy.

One might add that it is a supreme testament to patriarchy's power that it can convince men and women to pretend that sexual violence satisfies.

Much popular music from rock to rap shares this message. Whether it's Iggy Pop's lyrics, "I got my cock in my pocket and it's shoving up through my pants. I just wanna fuck, this ain't no romance" or the rap group Mystikals' lyrics, "When it's finished, over and done with it, I'm gonna smash a blount and knock the pussy off some bitch." Of course the truth of men's lives is that patriarchal sexuality has not satisfied. It has fueled the compulsive need to be



more sexual, to be more violent in the hopes that there is a way to be more satisfied. Patriarchal pornography, no longer isolated but ever-present in popular mass media, has become so widespread because males brainwashed by the patriarchal mind-set cannot find the courage to tell the truth. They cannot find the courage to say, "I can't get no satisfaction." Patriarchal pornography has become an inescapable part of everyday life because the need to create a pretend culture where male sexual desire is endlessly satisfied keeps males from exposing the patriarchal lie and seeking healthy sexual identities.

Gay subcultures have historically articulated with greater honesty and boldness male compulsive sexual desire. And contrary to popular imagination, rather than being antipatriarchal, homosexual predatory sex is the ultimate embodiment of the patriarchal ideal. Jensen observes that "gay-or-straight doesn't much matter. The question of resistance to patriarchal sex is just as important in that gay men fuck in about the same way straight men do. We all received pretty much the same training. . . . Fucking is taken to be the thing that gay men do; some might even argue that if you aren't fucking, you aren't gay." More often than not, gay males, unless they have consciously decided otherwise, are as patriarchal in their thinking about masculinity, about sexuality, as their heterosexual counterparts. Their investment in patriarchy is an intensely disordered desire, because they are enamored of the very ideology that fosters and promotes homophobia. Now that patriarchal straight men have been compelled through mass media to face the fact that homosexual males are not "chicks with dicks," that they can and do embody patriarchal masculinity,

straight male sexual dominance of biological females has intensified, for it is really the only factor that distinguishes straight from gay. Concurrently, homophobia becomes amplified among heterosexual men because its overt expression is useful as a way to identify, among apparently similar macho men, who is gay and who is straight.

Patriarchal pornography is a space of shared masculinity for straight and gay men. The images gay men seek are male, but males positioned in the same way as the male and female bodies of straight pornography. Whether catering to gay or straight males, patriarchal pornography is fundamentally a reenactment of dominator culture in the realm of the sexual.

Male "need" of patriarchal pornography that eroticizes domination is no show of male power. While hatred of women can lead to acts of domination that hurt, wound, and destroy, there is no constructive power here. Tragically, if masses of men believe that their selfhood and their patriarchal sexuality are one and the same, they will never find the courage to create liberating, fulfilling sexuality. It is this reality that leads men of conscience in patriarchal society to fear sex with the same intensity that females often fear sex. As Jensen testifies:

I am afraid of sex as sex is defined by the dominant culture, as practiced all around me, and projected onto magazine pages, billboards, and movie screens. I am afraid of sex because I am afraid of domination, cruelty, violence, and death. I am afraid of sex because sex has hurt me and hurt lots of people I know, and because I

have hurt others with sex in the past. I know that there are people out there who have been hurt by sex in ways that are beyond words, who have experienced a depth of pain that I will never fully understand. And I know there are people who are dead because of sex. Yes, I am afraid of sex. How could I not be?

Despite the courageous testimony of Jensen and others, despite the radical critique of patriarchal sex, most men are not breaking through denial and telling the truth about sex. They are choking it down, the pain, the despair, the confusion: they are following the patriarchal rules.

Rather than change, patriarchal males and females have exploited the logic of gender equality in the sexual realm to encourage women to be advocates of patriarchal sex and to pretend, like their male counterparts, that this is sexual freedom. Music videos and televisions shows like *Sex and the City* (written and produced by patriarchal men and women) teach females, especially young females, that the desirable female companion is one who is willing to play either a dominant or a subordinate role, one who can be as nonchalant about sex as any patriarchal man. Socializing women to conform more to patriarchal male sexual norms is one way patriarchy hopes to address male rage. Since this rage covers up the pain that could be the catalyst for critical awakening, it has to be assuaged. It is not just antifeminist backlash that has led to the normalization of pornographic sexual violence in our mass media and in common sexual practice; the desire to keep men from feeling and naming their pain fuels the need for consistent brainwashing.

Male despair, often initially expressed as anger, is a far greater threat to the patriarchal sexual order than feminist movement. While masses of men continue to use patriarchal sex and pornography to numb themselves, many men are weary of numbing and are trying to find a way to reclaim selfhood. This process of recovery includes finding a new sexuality. The assault on the male body by modern diseases, lowered sex drive, and out-and-out impotence has caused individual men not only to question patriarchal sex but to the find new ways of being sexual that can satisfy.

If unenlightened men are suffering their version of the "problem that has no name" when it comes to sexuality, they can ease their pain by breaking through denial and repudiating the patriarchal script of domination and submission. With keen insight Bearman in the essay "Why Men Are So Obsessed with Sex" reminds males that they have a choice:

Directly and indirectly, we are handed sexuality as the one vehicle through which it might still be possible to express and experience essential aspects of our humanness that have been slowly and systematically conditioned out of us. Sex was, and is, presented as the road to real intimacy, complete closeness, as the arena in which it is okay to openly love, to be tender and vulnerable and yet remain safe, to not feel so deeply alone. Sex is the one place sensuality seems to be permissible, where we can be gentle with our own bodies and allow ourselves our overflowing passion. This is why men are so obsessed with sex. . . .



But in no way can sex completely fulfill these needs. Such needs can only be fulfilled by healing from the effects of male conditioning and suffusing every area of our lives with relatedness and aliveness.

Compulsive sexuality, like any addiction, is hard for men to change because it takes the place of the healing that is needed if men are to love their bodies and let that love lead them into greater community with other human bodies, with the bodies of women and children.

Bearman reminds men that "no matter how much sex you encounter, it will not be enough to fill your enormous need to love and be close and express your passion and delight in your senses and feel life forces coursing through your muscles and skin." If masses of men could recover this fundamental passion for their own bodies, that shift away from patriarchal sex might lead us toward a true sexual revolution. To recover the power and passion of male sexuality unsullied by patriarchal assault, males of all ages must be allowed to speak openly of their sexual longing. They must be able to be sexual beings in a space where patriarchal thinking can no longer make violation the only means of attaining sexual pleasure. This is a tough job. And until males learn how to do it, they will not be satisfied.