

Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression

bell hooks

A central problem within feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept definition(s) that could serve as points of unification. Without agreed upon definition(s), we lack a sound foundation on which to construct theory or engage in overall meaningful praxis. Expressing her frustrations with the absence of clear definitions in the essay "Towards A Revolutionary Ethics," Carmen Vasquez comments:

We can't even agree on what a "Feminist" is, never mind what she would believe in and how she defines the principles that constitute honor among us. In key with the American capitalist obsession for individualism and anything goes so long as it gets you what you want. Feminism in American has come to mean anything you like, honey. There are as many definitions of Feminism as there are feminists, some of my sisters say, with a chuckle. I don't think it's funny!

It is not funny. It indicates a growing disinterest in feminism as a radical political movement. It is a despairing gesture expressive of the belief that solidarity between women is not possible. It is a sign that the political naïveté which has traditionally characterized woman's lot in male-dominated culture abounds.

Most people in the United States think of feminism, or the more commonly used term "women's lib," as a movement that aims to make women the social equals of men. This broad definition, popularized by the media and mainstream segments of the movement, raises problematic questions. Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share a common vision of what equality means? Implicit in this simplistic definition of women's liberation is a dismissal of race and class as factors that, in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against, exploited, or oppressed. Bourgeois white women interested in women's rights issues have been satisfied with simple definitions for obvious reasons. Rhetorically placing themselves in the same social category as oppressed women, they were not anxious to call attention to race and class privilege.

Women in lower-class and poor groups, particularly those who are non-white, would not have defined women's liberation as women gaining social equality with men since they are continually reminded in their everyday lives that all women do not share a common social status. Concurrently, they know that many males in their social groups are exploited and oppressed. Knowing that men in their groups do not have social, political, and economic power, they would not deem it liberatory to share their social status. While they are aware that sexism enables men in their respective groups to have privileges

37

denied them, they are more likely among their peers as stemming from a lack of respect or respectability in relation to ruling male hegemony and illeged social status. From the very beginning, women were suspicious of feminism inherent in its definition. They recognize that equality with men might easily become a marginal way the social status of women.

In a recent article in a San Francisco newspaper, feminist Bob Greene commented on the state of feminism. Greene finds it curious that proud feminists believe in something that they do not often acknowledge that they have not achieved, which have improved the social status of women. They are seen as participants in feminist

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It's as if it has an unpleasant odor. If you were to present them with evidence that they believe to the letter—and even if they

Many women are reluctant to admit the meaning of the term. Other women are reluctant to use the term because they do not wish to be identified with feminism is often equated with white supremacy. Feminism as synonymous with less respectability with any group identified as radical because they shun identification with the term as radical. Of course there are many women in the rights movement in any form so they are more familiar with negative connotations of feminism. It is this term's association with the struggle to recover and maintain the term.

Currently feminism seems to be a "goes" approach to the definition of feminism. What is meant by "anything goes" with men regardless of her political or a nationalist communist) can be used to reflect the class nature of feminism and focus on the individual woman.

This definition of feminism is not the one many liberal women find appealing which is more acceptable than a feminism defined in political terms. This challenges women to enter a new world where the decrees is our lot and develop a new notion that the focus of feminism is emphasizing eradicating the culture

denied them, they are more likely to see exaggerated expressions of male chauvinism among their peers as stemming from the male's sense of himself as powerless and ineffectual in relation to ruling male groups, rather than an expression of an overall privileged social status. From the very onset of the women's liberation movement, these women were suspicious of feminism precisely because they recognized the limitations inherent in its definition. They recognized the possibility that feminism defined as social equality with men might easily become a movement that would primarily affect the social standing of white women in middle and upper class groups while affecting only in a very marginal way the social status of working class and poor women. . . .

In a recent article in a San Francisco newspaper, "Sisters—Under the Skin," columnist Bob Greene commented on the aversion many women apparently have to the term feminism. Greene finds it curious that many women "who obviously believe in everything that proud feminists believe in dismiss the term 'feminist' as something unpleasant; something with which they do not wish to be associated." Even though such women often acknowledge that they have benefited from feminist-generated reform measures which have improved the social status of specific groups of women, they do not wish to be seen as participants in feminist movement:

There is no getting around it. After all this time, the term "feminist" makes many bright, ambitious, intelligent women embarrassed and uncomfortable. They simply don't want to be associated with it.

It's as if it has an unpleasant connotation that they want no connection with. Chances are if you were to present them with every mainstream feminist belief, they would go along with the beliefs to the letter—and even if they consider themselves feminists, they hasten to say no.²

Many women are reluctant to advocate feminism because they are uncertain about the meaning of the term. Other women from exploited and oppressed ethnic groups dismiss the term because they do not wish to be perceived as supporting a racist movement; feminism is often equated with white women's rights effort. Large numbers of women see feminism as synonymous with lesbianism; their homophobia leads them to reject association with any group identified as pro-lesbian. Some women fear the word "feminism" because they shun identification with any political movement, especially one perceived as radical. Of course there are women who do not wish to be associated with women's rights movement in any form so they reject and oppose feminist movement. Most women are more familiar with negative perspectives on "women's lib" than the positive significations of feminism. It is this term's positive political significance and power that we must now struggle to recover and maintain.

Currently feminism seems to be a term without any clear significance. The "anything goes" approach to the definition of the word has rendered it practically meaningless. What is meant by "anything goes" is usually that any woman who wants social equality with men regardless of her political perspective (she can be a conservative right-winger or a nationalist communist) can label herself feminist. Most attempts at defining feminism reflect the class nature of the movement. Definitions are usually liberal in origin and focus on the individual woman's right to freedom and self-determination. . . .

This definition of feminism is almost apolitical in tone; yet it is the type of definition many liberal women find appealing. It evokes a very romantic notion of personal freedom which is more acceptable than a definition that emphasizes radical political action. . . . Feminism defined in political terms that stress collective as well as individual experience challenges women to enter a new domain—to leave behind the apolitical stance sexism decrees is our lot and develop political consciousness. . . . By repudiating the popular notion that the focus of feminist movement should be social equality of the sexes and emphasizing eradicating the cultural basis of group oppression, our own analysis would

her inability to either arrive at a definition(s) that could serve as a sound foundation on which to build praxis. Expressing her frustration, she says "Towards A Revolutionary

what she would believe in and how the key with the American capitalist gets you what you want. Feminism . . . There are as many definitions of feminism as there are chuckles. I don't think it's funny.¹

nism as a radical political movement that solidarity between women is has traditionally characterized

the more commonly used term is the social equals of men. This is a segment of the movement. . . . white supremacist, capitalist, . . . to be equal to? Do women share a simplistic definition of women's rights, in conjunction with sexism, discriminated against, exploited, or . . . 's rights issues have been satisfactorily placing themselves in the . . . anxious to call attention to race

those who are non-white, would social equality with men since . . . all women do not share a commonality in their social groups are . . . groups do not have social, political, . . . to share their social status. While . . . active groups to have privileges

require an exploration of all aspects of women's political reality. This would mean that race and class oppression would be recognized as feminist issues with as much relevance as sexism.

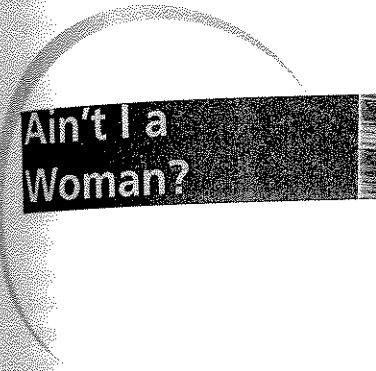
When feminism is defined in such a way that it calls attention to the diversity of women's social and political reality, it centralizes the experiences of all women, especially the women whose social conditions have been least written about, studied, or changed by political movements. When we cease to focus on the simplistic stance "men are the enemy," we are compelled to examine systems of domination and our role in their maintenance and perpetuation. . . .

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. . . . Feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression directs our attention to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression. Therefore, it compels us to centralize the experiences and the social predicaments of women who bear the brunt of sexist oppression as a way to understand the collective social status of women in the United States. Defining feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression is crucial for the development of theory because it is a starting point indicating the direction of exploration and analysis.

The foundation of future feminist struggle must be solidly based on a recognition of the need to eradicate the underlying cultural basis and causes of sexism and other forms of group oppression. Without challenging and changing these philosophical structures, no feminist reforms will have a long range impact. Consequently, it is now necessary for advocates of feminism to collectively acknowledge that our struggle cannot be defined as a movement to gain social equality with men; that terms like "liberal feminist" and "bourgeois feminist" represent contradictions that must be resolved so that feminism will not be continually co-opted to serve the opportunistic ends of special interest groups.

Notes

1. Carmen Vasquez, "Towards a Revolutionary Ethics," *Coming Up*, January 1983, 11.
2. Bob Greene, "Sisters Under The Skin," *San Francisco Examiner*, May 15, 1983.



Well, children, where there is so think that 'twixt the negroes of rights, the white men will be in a That man over there says that ditches, and to have the best plow over mud-puddles, or gives me my arm! I have ploughed and plowed me! And ain't I a woman? I could get it—and bear the lash as well and seen them most all sold off to none but Jesus heard me! And ain't Then they talk about this thing one whispers.] That's it, honey rights? If my cup won't hold but not to let me have my little half- Then that little man in black 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! V come from? From God and a woman If the first woman God ever r all alone, these women together again! And now they is asking to Obligated to you for hearing me

Personal Voices

38

Ain't I a
Woman?Sojourner Truth
(1797–1883)

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head: what's this they call it? [Intellect, someone whispers.] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negro's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

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Up, January 1983, 11.
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I'm Not Fat, I'm Latina

Christy Haubegger

I recently read a newspaper article that reported that nearly 40 percent of Hispanic and African-American women are overweight. At least I'm in good company. Because according to even the most generous height and weight charts at the doctor's office, I'm a good twenty-five pounds overweight. And I'm still looking for the panty-hose chart that has me on it (according to Hanes, I don't exist). But I'm happy to report that in the Latino community, my community, I fit right in.

Latinas in this country live in two worlds. People who don't know us may think we're fat. At home, we're called *bien cuidadas* (well cared for).

I love to go dancing at Cesar's Latin Palace here in the Mission District of San Francisco. At this hot all-night salsa club, it's the curvier bodies like mine that turn heads. I'm the one on the dance floor all night while some of my thinner friends spend more time waiting along the walls. Come to think of it, I wouldn't trade my body for any of theirs.

But I didn't always feel this way. I remember being in high school and noticing that none of the magazines showed models in bathing suits with bodies like mine. Handsome movie heroes were never hoping to find a chubby damsel in distress. The fact that I had plenty of attention from Latino boys wasn't enough. Real self-esteem cannot come from male attention alone.

My turning point came a few years later. When I was in college, I made a trip to Mexico, and I brought back much more than sterling-silver bargains and colorful blankets.

I remember hiking through the awesome ruins of the Maya and the Aztecs, civilizations that created pyramids as large as the ones in Egypt. I loved walking through temple doorways whose clearance was only two inches above my head, and I realized that I must be a direct descendant of those ancient priestesses for whom those doorways had originally been built.

For the first time in my life, I was in a place where people like me were the beautiful ones. And I began to accept, and even like, the body that I have.

I know that medical experts say that Latinas are twice as likely as the rest of the population to be overweight. And yes, I know about the health problems that often accompany severe weight problems. But most of us are not in the danger zone; we're just *bien cuidadas*. Even the researchers who found that nearly 40 percent of us are overweight noted that there is a greater "cultural acceptance" of being overweight within Hispanic communities. But the article also commented on the cultural-acceptance factor as if it were something unfortunate, because it keeps Hispanic women from becoming healthier. I'm not so convinced that we're the ones with the problem.

If the medical experts were to try and get to the root of this so-called problem, they

39

would probably find that it's part American, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Hispanic culture. While our food v change is its role in our lives. You fe *bien cuidada*, you have been fed well.

I remember when I used to be en on the skinny side. When I confided when she was growing up, she had getting dates with Latinos in high s tie, the other kids in the neighborho dry one." I'm glad I never had any c

Our community has always been we feel beautiful? You only have to that beautiful for most of this cour know it's the magazines that are v sure that *mis hijas*, my daughters. v

The Body Politic

Abra

My body possesses solidness and c pull, drawing me onto the sand. I once, for five years, and swirled n wind. I wafted, dried out, apathetic

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Who disputes the ocean's fullne Growing up in New York City, I attended an all-girls high school, v men. Embracing mainstream culta fashion magazines, Madison Aven

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would probably find that it's part genetics, part enchiladas. Whether we're Cuban-American, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican or Dominican, food is a central part of Hispanic culture. While our food varies from fried plantains to tamales, what doesn't change is its role in our lives. You feed people you care for, and so if you're well cared for, *bien cuidada*, you have been fed well.

I remember when I used to be envious of a Latina friend of mine who had always been on the skinny side. When I confided this to her a while ago, she laughed. It turns out that when she was growing up, she had always wanted to look more like me. She had trouble getting dates with Latinos in high school, the same boys that I dated. When she was little, the other kids in the neighborhood had even given her a cruel nickname: *la seca*, "the dry one." I'm glad I never had any of those problems.

Our community has always been accepting of us well-cared-for women. So why don't we feel beautiful? You only have to flip through a magazine or watch a movie to realize that beautiful for most of this country still means tall, blond and underfed. But now we know it's the magazines that are wrong. I, for one, am going to do what I can to make sure that *mis hijas*, my daughters, won't feel the way I did.

40

The Body Politic

Abra Fortune Chernik

My body possesses solidness and curve, like the ocean. My weight mingles with Earth's pull, drawing me onto the sand. I have not always sent waves into the world. I flew off once, for five years, and swirled madly like a cracking brown leaf in the salty autumn wind. I wafted, dried out, apathetic.

I had no weight in the world during my years of anorexia. Curled up inside my thinness, a refugee in a cocoon of hunger, I lost the capacity to care about myself or others. I starved my body and twitched in place as those around me danced in the energy of shared existence and progressed in their lives. When I graduated from college crowned with academic honors, professors praised my potential. I wanted only to vanish.

It took three months of hospitalization and two years of outpatient psychotherapy for me to learn to nourish myself and to live in a body that expresses strength and honesty in its shape. I accepted my right and my obligation to take up room with my figure, voice and spirit. I remembered how to tumble forward and touch the world that holds me. I chose the ocean as my guide.

Who disputes the ocean's fullness?

Growing up in New York City, I did not care about the feminist movement. Although I attended an all-girls high school, we read mostly male authors and studied the history of men. Embracing mainstream culture without question, I learned about womanhood from fashion magazines, Madison Avenue and Hollywood. I dismissed feminist alternatives as

foreign and offensive, swathed as they were in stereotypes that threatened my adolescent need for conformity.

Puberty hit late; I did not complain. I enjoyed living in the lanky body of a tall child and insisted on the title of "girl." If anyone referred to me as a "young woman," I would cry out, horrified, "Do not call me the *W* word!" But at sixteen years old, I could no longer deny my fate. My stomach and breasts rounded. Curly black hair sprouted in the most embarrassing places. Hips swelled from a once-flat plane. Interpreting maturation as an unacceptable lapse into fleshiness, I resolved to eradicate the physical symptoms of my impending womanhood.

Magazine articles, television commercials, lunchroom conversation, gymnastics coaches, and write-ups on models had saturated me with diet savvy. Once I decided to lose weight, I quickly turned expert. I dropped hot chocolate from my regular breakfast order at the Skyline Diner. I replaced lunches of peanut butter and Marshmallow Fluff sandwiches with small platters of cottage cheese and cantaloupe. I eliminated dinner altogether and blunted my appetite with Tab, Camel Lights, and Carefree bubble gum. When furious craving overwhelmed my resolve and I swallowed an extra something, I would flee to the nearest bathroom to purge my mistake.

Within three months, I had returned my body to its preadolescent proportions and had manipulated my monthly period into drying up. Over the next five years, I devoted my life to losing my weight. I came to resent the body in which I lived, the body that threatened to develop, the body whose hunger I despised but could not extinguish. If I neglected a workout or added a pound or ate a bite too many, I would stare in the mirror and drown myself in a tidal wave of criticism. Hatred of my body generalized to hatred of myself as a person, and self-referential labels such as "pig," "failure" and "glutton" allowed me to believe that I deserved punishment. My self-hatred became fuel for the self-mutilating behaviors of the eating disorder.

As my body shrank, so did my world. I starved away my power and vision, my energy and inclinations. Obsessed with dieting, I allowed relationships, passions and identity to wither. I pulled back from the world, off of the beach, out of the sand. The waves of my existence ceased to roll beyond the inside of my skin.

And society applauded my shrinking. Pound after pound the applause continued, like the pounding ocean outside the door of my beach house. . . .

By the time I entered the hospital, a mess of protruding bones defined my body, and the bones of my emaciated life rattled me crazy. I carried a pillow around because it hurt to sit down, and I shivered with cold in sultry July. Clumps of brittle hair clogged the drain when I showered, and blackened eyes appeared to sink into my head. My vision of reality wrinkled and my disposition turned mercurial as I slipped into starvation psychosis, a condition associated with severe malnutrition. People told me that I resembled a concentration camp prisoner, a chemotherapy patient, a famine victim or a fashion model.

In the hospital, I examined my eating disorder under the lenses of various therapies. I dissected my childhood, my family structure, my intimate relationships, my belief systems. I participated in experiential therapies of movement, art and psychodrama. I learned to use words instead of eating patterns to communicate my feelings. And still I refused to gain more than a minimal amount of weight.

I felt powerful as an anorexic. Controlling my body yielded an illusion of control over my life; I received incessant praise for my figure despite my sickly mien, and my frailty manipulated family and friends into protecting me from conflict. I had reduced my world to a plate of steamed carrots, and over this tiny kingdom I proudly crowned myself queen. . . .

I spent my remaining month in the hospital supplementing psychotherapy with an independent examination of eating disorders from a social and political point of view. I

needed to understand why society was punishing me. In the bathroom, a mirror reflected me over the sink. Vertebrae protruded from my back, ribs from my chest, pelvic bones, the two sides of my buttocks.

In writing, I recorded instances of my life and thwarted my relationships. Five years' worth of *I wouldn't do that*: I needed to go jogging; I told Derek no; I almost failed my comprehensive exam with my head in the toilet bowl. I missed my tenth birthday because I knew I'd miss my college graduation because I didn't eat my meal. And on and on for hundreds of pages.

This honest account of my life was naked in the truth of my pain, my weakness, my defeat. I also recognized my connection with the trivialities of calories and diets that involved themselves in extracurricular activities for jobs and graduate schools. I did not even consider joining in sports, music and literature, despite ranking high in the sciences. Despite my adolescent days as a cheerleader, I became a silent, hungry young woman.

And society preferred me thin. I began reading feminist literature in our culture. I digested the ideas of other women and the continued search for alternative models of womanhood. My life rose from printed pages into feminist consciousness.

I had been willing to accept the terms of a society that profited from my punishment. Punished more than "personal psychology," my emaciated body, I observed a woman become a starving, self-obsessed and powerful figure. No one except herself. Despite her Manhattan sophistication, I had to achieve the sickly impotence of anorexia, love and success. And even then, I had every thought and every passion.

As long as society resists feeling, I am flawed. As long as society accedes to the demands of popular culture will prefer women who are thin, I will die. I am dying to grow small.

Armed with this insight, I determined to recreate myself. I went to the ocean, and I took my first bite.

Gaining weight and getting healthy were things I have ever committed. . . . Eating was a new level. The majority of my pieces

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needed to understand why society would reward my starvation and encourage my vanishing. In the bathroom, a mirror on the open door behind me reflected my backside in a mirror over the sink. Vertebrae poked at my skin, ribs hung like wings over chiseled hip bones, the two sides of my buttocks did not touch. I had not seen this view of myself before.

In writing, I recorded instances in which my eating disorder had tangled the progress of my life and thwarted my relationships. I filled three and a half Mead marble notebooks. Five years' worth of *I wouldn't sit with Daddy when he was alone in the hospital because I needed to go jogging; I told Derek not to visit me because I couldn't throw up when he was there; I almost failed my comprehensive exams because I was so hungry; I spent my year at Oxford with my head in the toilet bowl; I wouldn't eat the dinner my friends cooked me for my nineteenth birthday because I knew they had used oil in the recipe; I told my family not to come to my college graduation because I didn't want to miss a day at the gym or have to eat a restaurant meal.* And on and on for hundreds of pages.

This honest account of my life dissolved the illusion of anorexic power. I saw myself naked in the truth of my pain, my loneliness, my obsessions, my craziness, my selfishness, my defeat. I also recognized the social and political implications of consuming myself with the trivialities of calories and weight. At college, I had watched as classmates involved themselves in extracurricular clubs, volunteer work, politics and applications for jobs and graduate schools. Obsessed with exercising and exhausted by starvation, I did not even consider joining in such pursuits. Despite my love of writing and painting and literature, despite ranking at the top of my class, I wanted only to teach aerobics. Despite my adolescent days as a loud-mouthed, rambunctious class leader, I had grown into a silent, hungry young woman.

And society preferred me this way: hungry, fragile, crazy. *Winner! Healthy! Fantastic!* I began reading feminist literature to further understand the disempowerment of women in our culture. I digested the connection between a nation of starving, self-obsessed women and the continued success of the patriarchy. I also cultivated an awareness of alternative models of womanhood. In the stillness of the hospital library, new voices in my life rose from printed pages to echo my rage and provide the conception of my feminist consciousness.

I had been willing to accept self-sabotage, but now I refused to sacrifice myself to a society that profited from my pain. I finally understood that my eating disorder symbolized more than "personal psychodynamic trauma." Gazing in the mirror at my emaciated body, I observed a woman held up by her culture as the physical ideal because she was starving, self-obsessed and powerless, a woman called beautiful because she threatened no one except herself. Despite my intelligence, my education, and my supposed Manhattan sophistication, I had believed all of the lies; I had almost given my life in order to achieve the sickly impotence that this culture aggressively links with female happiness, love and success. And everything I had to offer to the world, every tumbling wave, every thought and every passion, nearly died inside me.

As long as society resists female power, fashion will call healthy women physically flawed. As long as society accepts the physical, sexual and economic abuse of women, popular culture will prefer women who resemble little girls. Sitting in the hospital the summer after my college graduation, I grasped the absurdity of a nation of adult women dying to grow small.

Armed with this insight, I loosened the grip of the starvation disease on my body. I determined to recreate myself based on an image of a woman warrior. I remembered my ocean, and I took my first bite.

Gaining weight and getting my head out of the toilet bowl was the most political act I have ever committed. . . . Eating disorders affect us all on both a personal and a political level. The majority of my peers—including my feminist peers—still measure their beauty

against anorexic ideals. Even among feminists, body hatred and chronic dieting continue to consume lives. Friends of anorexics beg them to please start eating; then these friends go home and continue their own diets. Who can deny that the millions of young women caught in the net of disordered eating will frustrate the potential of the next wave of feminism? . . .

As young feminists, we must place unconditional acceptance of our bodies at the top of our political agenda. We must claim our bodies as our own to love and honor in their infinite shapes and sizes. Fat, thin, soft, hard, puckered, smooth, our bodies are our homes. By nourishing our bodies, we care for and love ourselves on the most basic level. When we deny ourselves physical food, we go hungry emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and politically. We must challenge ourselves to eat and digest, and allow society to call us too big. We will understand their message to mean too powerful.

Time goes by quickly. One day we will blink and open our eyes as old women. If we spend all our energy keeping our bodies small, what will we have to show for our lives when we reach the end? I hope we have more than a group of fashionably skinny figures.

"The Rape" of Mr. Smith

Anonymous

The law discriminates against rape victims in a manner which would not be tolerated by victims of any other crime. In the following example, a holdup victim is asked questions similar in form to those usually asked a victim of rape.

"Mr. Smith, you were held up at gunpoint on the corner of 16th & Locust?"

"Yes."

"Did you struggle with the robber?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He was armed."

"Then you made a conscious decision to comply with his demands rather than to resist?"

"Yes."

"Did you scream? Cry out?"

"No. I was afraid."

"I see. Have you ever been held up before?"

"No."

"Have you ever given money away?"

"Yes, of course—"

"And did you do so willingly?"

"What are you getting at?"
 "Well, let's put it like this, Mr. Smith, you have quite a reputation for trying to have your money taken."
 "Listen, if I wanted—"
 "Never mind. What time did it happen?"
 "About 11 p.m."
 "You were out on the streets at that time?"
 "Just walking."
 "Just walking? You know that's not true. Weren't you aware that you could be asked for money?"
 "I hadn't thought about it."
 "What were you wearing at the time?"
 "Let's see. A suit. Yes, a suit."
 "An expensive suit?"
 "Well—yes."
 "In other words, Mr. Smith, you were wearing that practically advertised the fact that you weren't that so? I mean, if we didn't know you were asking for this to happen, might we have asked you for it?"
 "Look, can't we talk about this?"
 "I'm afraid not, Mr. Smith. I would you?"

Naturally, the line of questioning is not a case of cross-examination. The time of night, the victim taken by force, the clothing—after all, rape, and the manifestation of so few rapes are reported.

Pornography and Consciousness

I'd rather talk about pornography as an important influence in my life. Unfortunately, we rarely discuss discussions about pornography in a setting, the talk quickly goes to

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41

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h his demands rather than to

"What are you getting at?"
 "Well, let's put it like this, Mr. Smith. You've given away money in the past—in fact,
 you have quite a reputation for philanthropy. How can we be sure that you weren't con-
 triving to have your money taken from you by force?"
 "Listen, if I wanted—"
 "Never mind. What time did this holdup take place, Mr. Smith?"
 "About 11 p.m."
 "You were out on the streets at 11 p.m.? Doing what?"
 "Just walking."
 "Just walking? You know that it's dangerous being out on the street that late at night.
 Weren't you aware that you could have been held up?"
 "I hadn't thought about it."
 "What were you wearing at the time, Mr. Smith?"
 "Let's see. A suit. Yes, a suit."
 "An expensive suit?"
 "Well—yes."
 "In other words, Mr. Smith, you were walking around the streets late at night in a suit
 that practically advertised the fact that you might be a good target for some easy money,
 isn't that so? I mean, if we didn't know better, Mr. Smith, we might even think you were
 asking for this to happen, mightn't we?"
 "Look, can't we talk about the past history of the guy who did this to me?"
 "I'm afraid not, Mr. Smith. I don't think you would want to violate his rights, now,
 would you?"

Naturally, the line of questioning, the innuendo, is ludicrous—as well as inadmissible as
 any sort of cross-examination—unless we are talking about parallel questions in a rape
 case. The time of night, the victim's previous history of "giving away" that which was
 taken by force, the clothing—all of these are held against the victim. Society's posture on
 rape, and the manifestation of that posture in the courts, help account for the fact that
 so few rapes are reported.

42

**Pornography and Men's
 Consciousness**

Jackson Katz

I'd rather talk about pornography than the First Amendment. The former has been an
 important influence in my life and the lives of most of the men I know.

Unfortunately, we rarely discuss that influence. Too often, when I've been involved in
 discussions about pornography with groups of men, usually in a college or high school
 setting, the talk quickly goes to a debate about free speech and the Constitution.

Sometimes that focus, while evading the more difficult personal issues, can be enlightening and productive. But most of the time such debates are dominated by knee-jerk invocations of the Bill of Rights and the need to combat "censorship." The subject is framed as one of "individual rights" versus "government control," and the entire exercise is then dominated by men (and less frequently, women) who compete with each other to see who has the most compelling grasp of constitutional principles.

And no one talks about pornography.

For many of us who grew up with magazines like *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, this comes as a relief. It's a lot easier to talk politics and legal issues than it is to discuss masturbation, fantasy, and the sexual objectification of the women we work with, sleep with, and love. That stuff is . . . private. For many of us, it's shrouded in shame. And let's face it, it's embarrassing.

Conversational avoidance is one of the ways that men, myself included, have managed to dodge the kind of introspection that feminists have been engaged in for decades. Only in the past decade or so have a number of men begun to apply some of the feminist ideas linked to the insight that the personal-is-political and started talking about our own experiences and attitudes in an honest and self-revelatory way.

When the subject is pornography, this sort of critical male self-disclosure can lead to new insights both about sexism and men's violence against women, and about the sexual and emotional problems of many men.

But before I get to some of these, I have to acknowledge that my focus here is the effects on men of heterosexual pornography aimed at straight men. The consumption of pornography by gay males has its own dynamics, as does the consumption by lesbians of lesbian porn. There are common issues of sexual objectification, the commodification of people's bodies, domination and submission, and so forth. But the overwhelming percentage of pornography consumed in our culture today is heterosexually oriented, and that is the sphere with which I'm best acquainted.

So what kinds of things can we learn when men talk about our use of pornography and not the First Amendment? I realized when I first read seriously and considered the ideas of anti-pornography feminists that it is naive and facile to equate pornography to media representations of "sex" and not deconstruct further its function within the system of gender relations. This insight seems obvious in retrospect, but I never thought about that when I was growing up in the 1970s. Even today, despite more than a quarter century of feminist anti-porn writing, teaching, and political activism, most young men I talk with think that the only people with a reason to oppose it are uptight and prudish religious fanatics and man-hating radical lesbians.

This ignorance is partially based in a defensive form of denial. It is unsettling to learn that what we experienced as so pleasurable, masturbating to images and videos of nude women, has harmful effects. If it really is harmful to women, and to our relationships with them, we'd rather not think about it.

How is our private pleasure harmful to women? One way to conceptualize this is to consider pornography as an industry. It is a huge industry, taking in an estimated \$10 billion in annual revenues. (According to the *Los Angeles Times*, nearly 10,000 new porn videos were released in 1999 alone.) And who are the workers in this industry? They are contrary to our convenient stereotype of high class models, largely poor or working-class women, many of color, who are often treated with outright contempt and coercion by the men who control the business. Further, the vast majority of women who pose for magazines or act in porn movies have been sexually abused as children and may have been raped or abused as adolescents. So we need to be aware that by purchasing and using pornography, whatever our motives, we are perpetuating the exploitation of women and girls who have already been victimized by male domination and violence.

But apart from these exploited women? Some people argue that consumed pornography at some women. While technically accurate: pornographic representation to women. Visual imagery is pornography information contained in a picture.

Most white people I know accept media representations of Africa they are: racist. We understand individual actors. Rather, we recognize about the entire race are in the same reasoning when it is 1930s.

But when many men consider quickly discard logic and the color "It's sex. Can't you understand that about pornography and men's ascribe the exact same causal effect make when the subject is race.

Furthermore, arguing that their ignorance about the deep misogyny. One representative e-mail soliciting internet service provider advertising here and we have the college students their legs and taking it live on camera sluts. It's what they want."

Men who are not troubled by those who consume some of the pornography know at some level that the women (i.e., sexism).

But for some men, including violent pornography, the reasoning myself. Initially I found it difficult violent can be harmful. The statement I'm not going to rape anyone; that

When I began listening to someone was forced to reassess my thoughts, for whom pornography was had no choice but to take this sex

Some of my friends' discomfort with their consciousness about the subjugation of women, feminist political consciousness, the baggage of living in a male-dominated culture, issues of body image and sexual violence, which then contributes to all sorts of

One woman I was close to who was in the media. This included me and pornography. Whenever we'd see a particular video, she'd feel personally violated to some degree, but I rarely had the same

personal issues, can be enlightened by knee-jerk "censorship." The subject is "control," and the entire exercise who compete with each other principles.

boy and *Penthouse*, this comes than it is to discuss masturbation we work with, sleep with, and in shame. And let's face it, it's

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But apart from these exploited women, does pornography "cause" violence against women? Some people argue that, after all, most of the 90-odd percent of men who have consumed pornography at some point in their lives do not rape and sexually assault women. While technically accurate, this misses one of the central points that feminists make: pornographic representations of women affect the way that all men see and relate to women. Visual imagery is powerful. It's not harmless fun. There is a vast amount of information contained in a picture or a video.

Most white people I know accept the concept that blatantly demeaning and degrading media representations of African-Americans are unacceptable. We see them for what they are: racist. We understand that the problem is not simply the injury done to the individual actors. Rather, we recognize that all African-Americans suffer, because our feelings about the entire race are influenced by those images. Most Gentiles I know accept the same reasoning when it involves popular caricatures of Jews in Germany in the 1930s.

But when many men consider demeaning and degrading images of women, they quickly discard logic and the consensus breaks down. "That's not sexism," they'll say. "It's sex. Can't you understand that I like looking at nude women's bodies?" In the debate about pornography and men's violence against women, many men simply refuse to ascribe the exact same causal connection between objectification and violence that they make when the subject is race.

Furthermore, arguing that the pornography industry is not sexist requires a willful ignorance about the deep misogyny that pervades porn culture. It's not just the images. One representative e-mail solicitation I received through my regular account with a leading internet service provider aimed this message at young men: "Summer vacation is here and we have the college sluts to prove it! Their idea of a 'summer job' is spreading their legs and taking it live on camera. . . . It's so easy to get those hot little bikinis off the sluts. It's what they want."

Men who are not troubled by this type of blatant anti-woman aggression, including those who consume some of the really outrageous pornography available today, probably know at some level that they are "getting off" on a celebration of their power over women (i.e., *sexism*).

But for some men, including the majority who have not been exposed to overtly violent pornography, the reasoning process is more complicated. I know. I went through it myself. Initially I found it difficult to understand how pornography that is not explicitly violent can be harmful. The standard arguments were sufficient to soothe my conscience: I'm not going to rape anyone; these women are consenting adults.

When I began listening to some of my women friends' feelings about pornography I was forced to reassess my thoughts. These were intelligent, urbane women, far from prudish, for whom pornography was saddening and degrading. Because I respected them, I had no choice but to take this seriously.

Some of my friends' discomfort with pornography was linked to their level of consciousness about the subjugation of women. But it was more than that. Women with a feminist political consciousness, like all women, carry with them the personal scars and baggage of living in a male-dominated world. Some of the most painful of these involve issues of body image and sexuality. Women inevitably internalize the culture's misogyny, which then contributes to all sorts of problems in their relationships with men.

One woman I was close to was deeply disturbed by the sexual exploitation of women in the media. This included media far more mainstream than hard- or soft-core pornography. Whenever we'd see a particularly "exploitative" beer commercial or MTV music video, she'd feel personally violated, then morose. As a man I could empathize to some degree, but I rarely had the same visceral response. This inevitably affected the way we

related to each other, including the way we related sexually: how safe she'd allow herself to feel, how vulnerable.

But it's not fair to say that pornography worked only on her psyche. It touched mine as well. The reduction of women to body parts for men's consumption can significantly damage women's self-respect. But repeated exposure to pornography also can reduce men's ability to form intimate relationships with women. Such exposure conditions us to relate sexually not to unique, complex women, but to interchangeable bodies who are "fuckable" to the degree that we like looking at their breasts, vaginas, and buttocks. I'm sure that few men who use pornography ever pause to consider how their long-term consumption of it contributes to the impoverishment of their relationships with real women.

For many men, the short-term pleasure provided by pornography overshadows any harm it might cause. As the saying goes, if it feels nice, don't think twice. How bad can it be if it gets you off?

If a consumer of child pornography made that argument, we would have a ready rebuttal: we don't care if you get off to it, it's wrong (and you have serious problems). There are more important matters here to consider beyond your immediate sexual gratification. And though the arguments can get tricky when considering the case of consenting adults, the moral, if not the legal, principle holds: your right to get off sexually has to be balanced against women's rights to live free and dignified lives.

How does pornography perpetuate the subordination of women? The level of male violence against women in this society is out of control. Despite decades of feminist activism, boys and men are still sexually abusing, battering, raping, and murdering girls and women at an alarming rate. While this violence has no single cause, the dehumanization and objectification of women in the media is surely one of the contributing factors. Consider the pervasiveness of sexual harassment that women suffer from men in school, the workplace, on the street. Men aren't born biologically programmed to sexually harass women. We learn it. We learn it through continuous exposure to a media culture that is profoundly influenced by the ideological and stylistic conventions of pornography. It is impossible to discuss the way American boys have been socialized into manhood over the past three decades without talking about the effects of pornography.

I know that many of my thoughts and feelings about women, men, and sexuality were shaped by some of the dominant themes of the genre. For example, one of the more popular themes is that while they might like "sensitive" guys for friends, most women are sexually attracted to rough, aggressive men.

This didn't cause me to become a jerk, but it did cause undo self-doubt and insecurity. For other young men, this same media message is taken as a license to be sexually callous if not abusive toward women. This isn't to say, simplistically, that men see women in movies and magazines enjoying rape and sexual harassment, and are thereby encouraged to go out and assault them. That happens, but the long term effects of media messages are even more troubling. The blatant sexism and misogyny of the pornography industry has pervaded all other forms of media, inevitably permeating our consciousness.

But we're not passive agents. We can't reverse the entire process overnight, but we can choose to stop supporting the degradation of women and the dehumanization of our own sexuality by refusing to purchase or rent porn magazines and videos, or subscribe to porn sites on the World Wide Web. There's no getting around it: the personal is political.

At the same time, personal change on the part of a handful of sensitized men is insufficient. We need also to express publicly our unhappiness and outrage at the way the pornography industry fuels sexism and violence against the girls and women we claim to love. This can help stimulate discussions among men about our sexual and gender iden-

ties, utilizing some of the growing just like women, men go through toward politicization.

This isn't going to be easy. The wonder: what do men have to gain?

It's really pretty simple. If we we eye and say that we respect them ar we really have no other choice.

Why I Fight Back

"Take a look," he said.

My fingers stopped on my combi from the waist down, standing a fo

For years I'd heard about girls school. When it had happened to r and she and her girlfriends laughed it was dark and we were alone.

All I could do for a moment was over his left arm, and his right hau ning jacket. Was he holding a wea he move closer? Did I hear someon

"What do you want?" I finally n

"Just take a long look."

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tities, utilizing some of the growing body of pro-feminist men's research and literature.
 Just like women, men go through a process of consciousness-raising as the first step
 toward politicization.

This isn't going to be easy. The question of motivation is especially problematic. People
 wonder: what do men have to gain by making these changes? What's in it for them?

It's really pretty simple. If we want to be able to look the women we care about in the
 eye and say that we respect them and support their struggle for dignity and equality, then
 we really have no other choice.

Next Steps and Action

43

Why I Fight Back

Whitney Walker

"Take a look," he said.

My fingers stopped on my combination lock as I looked to my right to see a man, naked
 from the waist down, standing a foot away from my locker.

For years I'd heard about girls getting flashed near my suburban California high
 school. When it had happened to my sister a few years earlier, it had been broad daylight
 and she and her girlfriends laughed until the man ran away. It was not like that tonight.
 It was dark and we were alone.

All I could do for a moment was follow his orders and look at him. He carried his pants
 over his left arm, and his right hand was shoved into the pocket of his grey-and-blue run-
 ning jacket. Was he holding a weapon beneath his jacket? Was he going to rape me? Did
 he move closer? Did I hear someone else?

"What do you want?" I finally managed.

"Just take a long look."

I stood frozen in front of him for a long time. I thought about running or yelling for
 help, but told myself it wouldn't work: He would be too fast, no one would hear. I was
 feeling desperate. My car keys were cutting into my hand. Were they a weapon?

"I could stab you," I warned him, gripping my keys.

"I'd like to see you try."

I recoiled, shaking with both fear and anger. He was right, I wasn't going to try. "All
 right, I saw you, just leave."

"Close your locker."

I did, and was relieved when the next order was to walk away slowly and not look back.

When I began to run, he disappeared into a dark hallway and did not follow me. I went home and told my mother what had happened, and we called the police. To my knowledge, he was never caught.

It would be several years before I'd take my first self-defense class and stop seeing myself as a failure that night. I wanted to stab him, stop him, scare him the way he scared me. I wanted to be unafraid of him. But he overpowered me, ordered my obedience and received it. "I'd like to see you try." His words followed me long after I stopped hearing his voice. It was typical teenage insecurity that made me freeze up during tests, get tongue-tied during arguments, fumble the winning shot during soccer games. But I'm sure those words contributed. They taunted me, pushed me down, reminded me: He won.

As a kid with an equal-rights, athletic mom and a dad who wanted daughters rather than sons, I was raised on feminist children's books like *Free to Be . . . You and Me*, and I knew boys weren't better than girls. I also refused to believe they were stronger. When bullies picked on me or my friends, I hit them in the knees with my Holly Hobby lunch pail and that was that. But as with most girls, my self-confidence decreased as I grew. I continued to believe in equal rights, but—since I didn't excel on the playground and wasn't allowed to hit boys—I gave up on being athletic or tough. . . .

That all changed my junior year, when I took my first self-defense class with Karla Grant. A fifth-degree black belt in karate who has taught self-defense for fifteen years. Karla explained to me how tradition and the media warned me not to fight back against men. She told me how I could fight back, where and when to strike and with what. She told me why I must fight back, both to save myself and to help stop the growing number of attacks on women every day. Then she taught me how to punch and kick; how to block a blow from a fist, a club, a knife or a gun; how to fight two attackers, or three, or five, or a gang. At the end of eight weeks, I broke a two-inch-thick wooden board with my fist, and Karla told me, "If you can break a board, you can break his nose."

I've carried that message with me ever since, through three years of martial arts and self-defense training. When I hear the words of my attacker attempting to push me down, the voices of my three feminist teachers—Karla, Kathy and Roberta—tell me to push back. I see that night in high school differently now: I was not a failure, I was brave. I did not risk my life. I got away. . . .

I feel more independent because of my self-defense training, not less so, and I am grateful for the female senseis who encourage questions and focus on women's strengths. Women's bodies are perfect for karate: We have more lower-body strength and tend to be more agile than men. Most important, our attackers do not expect us to fight back, so women have the element of surprise.

I've been a pacifist all my life, and yet I relish the knowledge that my front kick can reach someone's head, my punch can knock someone to the floor. These are not completely incompatible notions. Passivity does not mean submission—it means de-escalation. Fighting back does not mean warfare—it means handing over the money if I'm mugged, but going for the testicles if he grabs me. Equal rights means women should be equal to (not the same as, but equal to) men in all ways—including equal fighters. . . .

Women who study martial arts say they are calm in the world and that they wear their training like an extra layer of protection, a warning: I can take care of myself. Women have long been striving to say that with confidence on an economic level. Self-defense provides the strength to reinforce it on a physical level. Living with the fundamental knowledge that I can protect myself against a man has changed my life completely, inside the dojo and out. I no longer question my instincts. I know them to be good when my arms block a punch before my eyes see it. I don't apologize for being in the way; I have seen the usefulness of my body. Knowing that I am strong, I refuse to be weak.

It's self-confidence that doesn't come from a gun or a can of Mace, and it won't leave

you fumbling through your purse responded to the marketing tactics. Cultural "wisdom" has always held we are constantly vulnerable to sex the ending: She beats his chest and runs away but trips; he walks slow character and lands a swift knee to his second, smiles, and then keeps cor

These are ridiculous scenarios. I every woman and still succeed in: does this warning: Don't fight back the most well-meaning of sources, who speak to first-year female stu brutal rape and torture, you may g my first self-defense class, an attack gainer. He may say, "Don't scream the law; why should he keep his pr expecting it—when he puts down rope to tie you up. After that poi there's the double standard that c defense. If you get raped, the first then is usually, "You must have wa

When I began seeing the hypocr also began to see the hypocrisy it became connected to my awakenin and have similar answers. Why is a ened? Whether referring to reprod control back. With self-defense, I

Karla also told my class that the ty that women can successfully ta One in four women between eigh lifetime. And every time a woman is whittled down even further. The that women make up 30 percent c not enough, but it's up from 10 pe When rapists are thwarted because victims will be intimidated into obe

I was flashed again recently, on me, his coat draped over his arm t was trying to show only me, but I was doing. I immediately thought perfect position for me to break i karate chop his neck. And I coul ed, well-lit car, and he was no thr that he had not succeeded in fright have been. At the next stop, he c laughed to myself.

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Mace, and it won't leave

you fumbling through your purse in a dark alley. It's not surprising that women have responded to the marketing tactics of gun manufacturers and deterrent-spray dealers. Cultural "wisdom" has always held that women's bodies were not made to fight, and that we are constantly vulnerable to sexual violence. With that kind of setup, movies supply the ending: She beats his chest and hysterically pleads for mercy; he doesn't grant it. She runs away but trips; he walks slowly and still catches up. Even if she's a strong female character and lands a swift knee to the groin, he's the Terminator; he stumbles for a millisecond, smiles, and then keeps coming.

These are ridiculous scenarios, but they've made their way into the consciousness of every woman and still succeed in scaring us and preventing us from fighting back. So does this warning: Don't fight back, you'll only get him angry. Everyone's heard it from the most well-meaning of sources, like the high school sex education teacher or the cops who speak to first-year female students in the dorms. The idea is that if you submit to brutal rape and torture, you may get away with your life. *May*. But as Karla explained to my first self-defense class, an attacker is already angry and not very trustworthy as a bargainer. He may say, "Don't scream and you won't get hurt," but he's already breaking the law; why should he keep his promise? The best time to fight back is when he's least expecting it—when he puts down the gun or the knife to assault you, when he gets the rope to tie you up. After that point, you don't know what he's going to do. And then there's the double standard that comes from the same sources that advise against self-defense. If you get raped, the first question is, "Did you fight back?" "No." The response then is usually, "You must have wanted it."

When I began seeing the hypocrisy of these messages from male authority figures, I also began to see the hypocrisy in all of patriarchal society. My self-defense training became connected to my awakening as a feminist. The questions began to sound the same and have similar answers. Why is a woman's right to control her body constantly threatened? Whether referring to reproductive rights or sexual violence, the answer is to take control back. With self-defense, I am in control.

Karla also told my class that the one-in-four statistic left something out—the possibility that women can successfully take down their attackers and get away. It should read: One in four women between eighteen and twenty-four will be targeted for rape in her lifetime. And every time a woman isn't attacked because she defends herself this statistic is whittled down even further. The National Women's Martial Arts Federation estimates that women make up 30 percent of all martial artists in the United States. To me, that's not enough, but it's up from 10 percent ten years ago and one percent twenty years ago. When rapists are thwarted because women fight back, attackers will stop assuming their victims will be intimidated into obedience.

I was flashed again recently, on the subway in Manhattan. An older man stood next to me, his coat draped over his arm to hide his fly, which was open to expose his penis. He was trying to show only me, but I didn't notice for a while. When I finally saw what he was doing, I immediately thought about all I could do to take him out. His knee was in a perfect position for me to break it with a kick. I could smash his elbow with a punch, or karate chop his neck. And I could certainly knee him in the groin. We were in a crowded, well-lit car, and he was no threat to me. Instead I looked to his face and showed him that he had not succeeded in frightening or arousing me, whichever his purpose might have been. At the next stop, he covered himself up with his coat and exited the car. I laughed to myself.

Adopting the Principle of Pro-Feminism

Ian Law

When I was first asked to speak at a seminar on the issue of "pro-feminism," I was hesitant. I was unsure if I, as a man, should be talking about what it might mean to be pro-feminist. I discussed it first with a number of people close to me, particularly women, to get their advice on the matter before making the decision.

When I reflect on this, it struck me how different my response would have been in the not-too-distant past. I would have confidently accepted, sure in the knowledge that the right to make that decision in isolation was mine, confident that I, as a man, could assert what being pro-feminist was and was not. I had, after all, been claiming my support of feminism as an ideology since my early adolescence. I would engage in political debate and action in support of feminist causes.

Yet, when I look back on that time, I am ashamed to recognize my own sexism and perpetuation of male dominance through my lifestyle, in relationships, and in how I conducted myself in my daily life. In retrospect, the contradiction between what I did and what I said I supported seems embarrassingly clear. However, at the time I was completely blind to it.

Gradually, over time, I have had pointed out to me the way in which I have been caught out by the ways of thinking and acting of dominant male culture, and have come to recognise some of these ways and challenge them in myself.

Some of the ways of thinking and acting that I, like so many other men, have challenged, involve:

- dominating airspace, making sure it is my voice and views that get heard;
- feeling a responsibility to come up with a solution, to problem-solve rather than listen and understand;
- keeping control of decision-making, seeing co-operation as a loss of control;
- not being able to accept responsibility for perpetuating injustice, either deliberately or unwittingly;
- not being able to apologise, to say that I was sorry;
- assuming that another person's or group's silence meant that they had forgotten about my wrongdoing and that I could carry on my relationship with them without doing anything to redress the injustice;
- searching for a woman's opinion that supported my own opinion, rather than listening to women's opinions which were different;

44

- dividing women from each other, reported my own, to other women;
- undermining or silencing women, "hard-line" or over-critical;
- dismissing issues raised by women, not in the right manner or context.

Now, I have not said much so far. It can be suggested that acting in a sexist way than in a pro-feminist way.

So when I look back in my life in a pro-feminist way, I was at the time a poor judge of whether I was acting in a pro-feminist way or not.

I could clearly not rely on men to hold me accountable for my actions, not only in me but also in themselves. I experienced the effects of my sexism, acting in a pro-feminist way or not, back on this current period in my life, the perpetuation of sexist practices, which is clearly through the ongoing process.

However, if I as a man leave my sexism, is that not shirking my responsibility, power perpetuated by my gender?

Yet, if I take on this responsibility, I know I am challenging and not accepting.

To return to the beginning, the process of speaking on the issue of pro-feminism might have been to challenge the way it could have been:

- gathering a group of men to discuss feminism;
- having a group of women to discuss their opinion among themselves about feminism;
- the men would be an audience to listen to themselves their responses;
- finally, observers who had to be present to reflect upon the whole process.

Such a process of partnership, respect, trust, partnership, and responsibility for taking action. The knowledge and partnership are occurring are not men, but women, and the knowledge, wisdom, and shared processes of accountability.

- dividing women from each other by quoting or representing a woman's view that supported my own, to other women who had a different view;
- undermining or silencing women's challenges of my behaviours by labeling them "hard-line" or over-critical;
- dismissing issues raised by women because they were not raised in what I believed to be the right manner or context.

Now, I have not said much so far about how I can act in a pro-feminist way, but I think it can be suggested that acting in the ways I have just outlined would fit more with acting in a sexist way than in a pro-feminist way. . . .

So when I look back in my life I can see that, although I believed that I was acting in a pro-feminist way, I was at the same time blind to my own sexism. It is clear that I was a poor judge of whether I was acting in a pro-feminist way or not.

I could clearly not rely on myself to hold myself accountable. I could not rely on other men to hold me accountable for my sexism when they were blind to these practices, not only in me but also in themselves. It is clear that it was women, those persons who experienced the effects of my sexism, who were in the best position to judge whether I was acting in a pro-feminist way or in a sexist way. I have to say, of course, that when I look back on this current period in my life, from some future point, there will be aspects of my perpetuation of sexist practices that I am at present blind to that will become embarrassingly clear through the ongoing efforts of women to challenge me.

However, if I as a man leave it to women to take on the responsibility to educate me in my sexism, is that not shirking my responsibility to take action against the abuses of power perpetuated by my gender?

Yet, if I take on this responsibility as a man, or with my gender in isolation, how can I know I am challenging and not perpetuating our abuse of male privilege? . . .

To return to the beginning, I spoke of how I consulted women on their views of my speaking on the issue of pro-feminism and their views of what needed to be said. A better process might have been to apply a partnership accountability process. Such a process could have been:

- gathering a group of men to discuss what it might mean to adopt a principle of pro-feminism;
- having a group of women observe this discussion and, following this, have a discussion among themselves about their responses to what the men said;
- the men would be an audience to their responses and would, in turn, discuss among themselves their responses to the women's experience of their initial discussion;
- finally, observers who had witnessed the entire proceedings could be called upon to reflect upon the whole process.

Such a process of partnership accountability with men and women, in a context of respect, trust, partnership, and openness to critical analysis, can lead to men taking the responsibility for taking action against the abuse of male culture while gaining access to the knowledge and partnership of women. . . . The best judges of whether these practices are occurring are not men, but the women who experience the effects of these practices; and the knowledge, wisdom, and partnership of women can be achieved through structured processes of accountability.

Revving Up for the Next Twenty-Five Years

Gloria Steinem

We who like the children of Israel have been wandering in the wilderness of prejudice and ridicule . . . feel a peculiar tenderness for the young women on whose shoulders we are about to leave our burdens . . . they will have more courage to take the rights which belong to them.

—Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Feminism isn't called the longest revolution for nothing. I hope this more realistic perspective is something the second wave has gained in the last twenty-five years, because we certainly didn't begin with it. We had come out of various movement stages that were focused on immediate goals: the anti-Vietnam war movement to stop the body bags arriving home every day; the reenergized and more militant civil rights movement's efforts to desegregate and fight for voting rights; and a male-led intellectual Left that sometimes practiced what Robin Morgan humorously called "ejaculatory politics"—*revolution tomorrow, or I'm going home to my father's business.*

We also lacked women's studies, black studies—all the courses that might better be called remedial studies—to teach us that suffragists and abolitionists had struggled for more than a century to gain a legal *identity* for women of all races and men of color, so we had better be prepared for at least a century of struggle to gain a legal and social *equality*. (Not to mention the newly demanded human right of reproductive freedom, which attacks the very foundation of patriarchy.)

I don't regret one moment of those early firecracker days when explosions of consciousness lit up the sky. Somewhere, women go through them again every day when they discover how much of female experience is political, not inevitable. Even we golden oldies reexperience this excitement when new perceptions and issues arise. But bursts of light tend to flatten out the subtlety of differences between and among women, and a movement fueled only by adrenaline burns out its members—as many of us can testify.

On the other hand, younger women and newer activists checked into a world that already has a degree of feminist consciousness. They have higher expectations and an acute awareness of the backlash to the growing power of the women's movement. They generate a steadier light that exposes the tangled patterns of race, class, sexuality, and physical ability in women's lives. Where my generation externalized almost everything and used this energy to confront injustice, younger and later activists admit how much of that injustice has been internalized, and use this energy to dig deeper into individual

45

psyches and family patterns. We hadn't dug out its personal and family patterns, and they neglected its politics.

Thanks to feminist parents as well as feminist culture, we occasionally pay tribute to a feminist culture, and the resistance to it, which makes no more sense than the resistance to feminism."

Without the excitement and energy of the past, the next generation and future generations won't have the energy for a lifetime. On the other hand, we can't raise money to keep generations from winning—and we can't either.

That's why old or young, expect the next quarter-century: between the short-term and long-term planning. We need to link; beyond such artificial labels, we need to go into a full circle of tactics that work in both directions. We need *both* excitement and energy, national organizations, bursts of energy, and the satisfaction of repeating what we have done before.

To accomplish this, we're going to need more women working inside seem realistic alternatives; radical feminists who build bridges for women who focus on the shared origins of sexism in intimate depth within their communities. The System of National Accounts plan is a good one, and women who expose their own vulnerabilities that have made generations of women feel supported, angry, and lectured ideas here—each one of its own. My hope is that one or two of these will become a long-distance runner.

Making Men Equal

In the last twenty-five years, we have learned that women can do what men can do—and ourselves—that men can do. We have learned of working inside and outside the system, one for middle-class women. American women nationwide will never be really equal.

This journey has even more to do with nurturing men (and women) to divide their human qualities in a way that challenges the dominant/passive model for men.

It's a journey that can start with a condition for bearing children.

psyches and family patterns. Where we risked repeating the same behavior because we hadn't dug out its personal and family roots, they risk re-creating a social pattern because they neglected its politics.

Thanks to feminist parents as well as to women's studies and a popular culture that occasionally pays tribute to a feminist worldview, this new generation has a better idea of the complexity involved in making lasting change. But now that's countered by a soundbite culture, and the resistance to equality that is ever ready with terms like "postfeminism," which makes no more sense than "postdemocracy."

Without the excitement and mutual support of early, small-group feminism, I fear this and future generations won't have the personal rewards and fireworks that hooked us for a lifetime. On the other hand, without large organizations to turn out the vote and raise money to keep generations of struggle going, suffragists and abolitionists couldn't have won—and we can't either.

That's why old or young, experienced or brand-new, we have to achieve balance in the next quarter-century: between present and future, external and internal, spontaneity and long-term planning. We have to get beyond *either/or* to *and*; beyond ranking to linking; beyond such artificial labels as "equality feminists" versus "difference feminists," and into a full circle of tactics that surround the goal instead of approaching it from one direction. We need *both* excitement and steadiness, small feminist support groups and national organizations, bursts of new consciousness that are rewards in themselves, and the satisfaction of repeating what has been planned and perfected.

To accomplish this, we're going to need crazy women marching in the street who make women working inside seem reasonable *and* inside negotiators who turn street demands into practical alternatives; radical feminists who confront the roots of injustice *and* liberal feminists who build bridges for reforms that are radical in the long term; feminists who focus on the shared origins of sexism, racism, and homophobia *and* feminists who work in intimate depth within their own communities; feminist economists who take on the System of National Accounts plus the structural readjustment of poorer nations' debt *and* women who expose their own childhood sexual abuse in order to end abusive cycles that have made generations of women believe "I'm good for nothing else."

Your part in this next quarter-century depends on the groups, issues, and styles that make you feel supported, angry, inspired, or energized. I'll briefly list some new or neglected ideas here—each one of which demands balance and deserves a bibliography of its own. My hope is that one or more might incite, invite, enrage, and tantalize you into becoming a long-distance runner. So here's to the year 2022:

Making Men Equal

In the last twenty-five years, we've convinced ourselves and a majority of the country that women can do what men can do. Now we have to convince the majority of the country—and ourselves—that men can do what women can do. If we don't, the double burden of working inside and outside the home—always a reality for poor women, and now one for middle-class women, too—will continue to be the problem most shared by American women nationwide. Let's face it: until men are fully equal inside the home, women will never be really equal outside it.

This journey has even more importance in the long term. Children who grow up seeing nurturing men (and women) and achieving women (and men) will no longer have to divide their human qualities into "masculine" or "feminine." Gender will no longer be the dominant/passive model for race and class.

It's a journey that can start with women who make the presence of nurturing men a condition for bearing children—whether the men are biological fathers, friends and

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relatives, or workers in child care centers. It can start with boys who are raised to raise children, and with young men who ask the same question that young women do: "How can I combine career and family?" It's a journey we have begun by the demands for parental leave, shorter workdays or workweeks, and other structural changes needed to make both work and parenthood possible—for both men and women.

We'll know we're getting there when an article like this tries to convince readers that women were once more responsible for child care and family than men were, and younger readers say, "Give me a break."

Daughter of "The Personal Is Political"

In the last twenty-five years, we've learned that patriarchy and racism politicize almost every facet of life, from who does the dishes to the definition of a war crime. Now we need to begin rescuing whole areas of human experience from being devalued by association with women—to the detriment of everyone. The personal/private sphere has been divided from the political/public sphere; the "feminine" from the "masculine." As a result, the importance of the first has been lost, and its impact on the second has been ignored.

Nowhere is this more disastrous than in the failure to link child-rearing methods to political structures; to connect democracy (or the lack of it) in the family to democracy (or the lack of it) in the nation. Except for works like Alice Miller's *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, or Philip Greven's *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse*, there have been few studies of, say, German child-rearing methods as a source of Germany's political history, or the link between child abuse in the U.S. and the apocalyptic thinking now found in fundamentalism and the militias.

We need political science courses that include child-rearing changes in the study of the decline of totalitarianism in the former Soviet Union, plus the absence of abusive child-rearing methods in many of the indigenous cultures that govern through reciprocity and consensus. So far, we rarely even have psychology courses that routinely explore the link between the abusive intertwining of pain and love in child-rearing and traditions of sado-masochism in sex. We need the personal is political—but writ much larger.

Beyond Reproductive Freedom

Opposition to women's control of reproduction isn't going to end in the next quarter-century. Patriarchal, racist, classbound, and other birth-based hierarchies must exert some control over women's bodies as the most basic means of production—the means of reproduction—if they are to perpetuate themselves. That's the deepest reason for women's oppression.

But while we fight for reproductive freedom, we can expand this demand into the larger right of bodily integrity, a principle that includes freedom from involuntary testing, unwanted medical treatments, unchosen life-prolonging methods, capital punishment, pressures to provide organs, eggs, sperm, blood, other body products, and more. Not only will we gain new allies for reproductive freedom, but we will eventually benefit from a new legal principle: the power of the state stops at our skin.

How We Use Our Money

For the last twenty-five years, we've fought for equal pay, pensions, and benefits—to equalize the amount of money we earn—all of which must continue. For the next twenty-

ty-five years, however, we must think about other liberal products to African Americans, some of that in the women's the Nestlé boycott, and more progress in itself.

In fact, the question should be "How do we spend it?" Are we spending on health and learning? More on instant satellite religions but not to ferret out companies with fair independence? In other words,

Welfare That Deserves

I'm proud of the women's more punishing than the for staging a hunger strike from President Clinton. But the system or the punishing system with nothing. We need a

How about legislation to declare the minimum need then provide it. We know that a floor income for everyone exist: foster care payments who remain with their employed single mothers

Yes, such a bill would could keep us from reinvesting and years to pass, but the single mothers—and definitely adults. At a minimum, we to oppose. At a maximum

Economics—With Values

Once we understand the question: Why don't we in this country that is done product would go up by a replacement cost. There impossible by keeping this

Why don't we attribute standing there giving us and only acquires a value is on the side of environment

From the work of Valerie Hazel Henderson in the tions, demystifying nation

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pensions, and benefits—to continue. For the next twen-

ty-five years, however, we need to add a focus on how we spend.

Think about other liberation movements, from Gandhi's refusal to buy British-made products to African American efforts to support black-owned businesses. There has been some of that in the women's movement—boycotting states that failed to ratify the ERA, the Nestlé boycott, and more—but in general, we've assumed that earning more was progress in itself.

In fact, the question should not only be "How much do we spend?" but "How do we spend it?" Are we spending more on our outsides (clothing and appearance) than our insides (health and learning)? More on Hollywood movies than feminist political candidates? More on instant satisfaction than long-term security? Are we tithing to patriarchal religions but not to feminist groups? Supporting women-owned businesses? Seeking out companies with fair hiring and environmental policies? Saving for our own independence? In other words, are we using our dollars as consciously as we would our votes?

Welfare That Deserves the Name

I'm proud of the women's movement for opposing two welfare reform bills that were even more punishing than the current one. I'm proud of the National Organization for Women for staging a hunger strike outside the White House in a vain attempt to elicit a third veto from President Clinton. But many people on welfare don't support the original national system or the punishing state-based one that has succeeded it. You can't beat something with nothing. We need a positive alternative.

How about legislation that attaches a minimum income to every child? It would declare the minimum necessary for a child's shelter, nutrition, and health care—and then provide it. We know that investment in childhood saves money later. We also know that a floor income for every child would end the cruel and crazy inequities that now exist: foster care payments that are higher than welfare payments—thus punishing kids who remain with their biological parents—and welfare that provides health care that employed single mothers can rarely afford.

Yes, such a bill would require a broad coalition to design, but similar models in Europe could keep us from reinventing the wheel. Yes, it would require a national mobilization and years to pass, but the political climate is probably more open to aiding kids than single mothers—and definitely more open to providing health care for children than for adults. At a minimum, we would have a positive goal to support instead of only a danger to oppose. At a maximum, we would have a New Deal for children.

Economics—With Values Added

Once we understand the secret that economics is only a system of values, we begin to question: Why don't we attribute value to the roughly 50 percent of productive labor in this country that is done in the home? Some economists predict that the gross national product would go up by about 26 percent if homemakers' labor were included at only its replacement cost. There are also many kinds of economic planning that are rendered impossible by keeping this huge segment of the economy invisible.

Why don't we attribute value to the environment? If a tree has no value when it's standing there giving us oxygen—not to mention serving as a home for many species—and only acquires a value when it is cut down, then the entire force of economic motive is on the side of environmental destruction.

From the work of Vandana Shiva in India to Marilyn Waring in New Zealand and Hazel Henderson in the U.S., feminist scientists and economists are asking these questions, demystifying national and international finance, and attacking such pillars of the

current system as the Census (which decides what is visible) and the System of National Accounts (which decides what is valuable). We've been learning how to play the game. Now we have to change the rules.

There are so many more magnets to draw you into the future. I hope to be with you—dreaming, fighting, planning, laughing, and transforming all the way. But as Elizabeth Cady Stanton understood at 72, with no chance of living to see victory: If any of us make it, we all will.

Heterosexism

Introduction by

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