

Revolution of the Communal Heart:

***Dismantling Oppression
in our Catholic Worker Communities***



Anti-Sexism, Anti-Heterosexism Workshop

Sugar Creek
Midwest CW Gathering
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A Project of the
Recipes for the
Beloved Community Book

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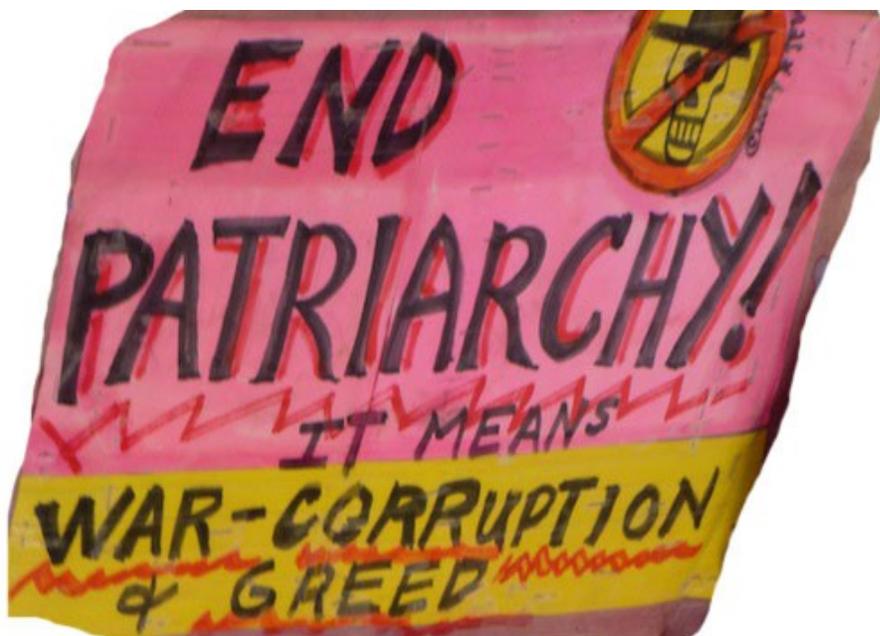
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Dismantling Sexism, Discovering Sisterhood

Carolyn Griffeth
RoundTable, 2013

Years ago I attended a talk by the renowned peace activist, David Dillinger on the anniversary of the Chicago 7 action. Dillinger shared stories of his participation in the anti-war movement beginning in the Vietnam era and described the faith-based resistance community that he and his wife had lived in. Of all of this, what meant the most to me was his closing comment; “Looking back I wonder: Why, when we were so committed to addressing injustice, did we not address our own sexism? The women of the community still did most of the domestic work and the men most of the activism.” I was 27 at the time and involved in social change work on several fronts, yet it had never occurred to me that addressing sexism might be as important as addressing such things as poverty, racism, militarism and the exploitation of the earth. I began to wonder why sexism was rarely addressed in the radical communities and social justice groups I was part of.

I would like to say that this epiphany compelled me to go forth and address sexism wherever I experienced it and to create connections between my own oppression as a woman, and other forms of oppression—but it didn't. I still didn't fully grasp the reality of sexism, and thus other issues still seemed more pressing. Also, it isn't easy to look at sexism as a woman; it means acknowledging my feminine wound, the way sexism has impacted me personally. It also means challenging my internalized sexism, the attitudes and beliefs I'd rather not admit I was carrying. Finally, it means pushing against my own sexist conditioning which taught me to take care of others rather than fight for myself.

I imagine that similar reasons prevent most well-intended individuals from addressing sexism. We lack both a good understanding of how sexism functions and the support system needed to delve into an issue that is bound to bring up a lot of pain and self-questioning. With men there is an additional factor: they have been taught to believe that they *are rightfully* fighting for themselves by deflecting attention away from sexism in order to maintain their privilege.

Considering these challenges I wonder: What will it take to make addressing sexism a top priority? This is an important question for me as I seek to prioritize my own liberation and to be a better ally for all women, especially those I live with in community. So far I've come up with the following: We must develop a clear understanding of what sexism is, how it functions, and how it affects us personally. And to do this we must create safe, supportive contexts in which people can openly share the hurt and confusion that we carry because of sexism, and find the support to let go of our sexist thinking. To this end, I'd like to share some definitions, analysis and experiments that I've found useful.

First of all, what is sexism? Simply put, sexism is the oppression of women. It is the systematic mistreatment, exploitation, and abuse of women, enforced by men as the conditioned agents of oppression, and encouraged and institutionalized by society. (1) Radical feminists argue that sexism is a “trans-historical phenomenon” prior to or deeper than other sources of oppression and thus “not only the oldest and most universal form of domination’ but the primary model for all others. (2) Like all forms of oppression, sexism arose because of the apparent benefit to one group (men) of exploiting another group (women) for its own material gain.

Sexism seems to have arisen along with class based societies. With the importance of property and inheritance came the desire for man to pass wealth on to “his” children and to control women for this purpose. Women's biological tie to birthing children, and the roles that developed from that, become the excuse for women's oppression. To this end, women have been systematically robbed of the right to control our sexuality and reproduction, or exercise political and economic power. (3)

Though the ability of women to birth children marks a true biological difference between the sexes, sexism takes roots not so much in biological differences but rather in the social construct known as “gender”. Through the process of gender formation, messages about what it means to be male or female are targeted at us by every institution in society from the moment we are born. These norms of masculinity (strength, assertiveness, competence, authority, sexual aggressiveness, rationality, transcendence) and of femininity (weakness, supportiveness, dependency, relatedness, sexually desirability, emotionality, and earthiness) are posed as opposites. Like other forms of oppression, sexism requires such binaries; it is much easier to maintain inequality between groups that are seen as diametrically opposed to one another. (4) Rigid gender categories also cloud the fact that that which unites men and women is vastly greater than that which separates us. We are all human, endowed with the full range of human characteristics. The masculine and the feminine live within us all.

Within patriarchal society the genders are also hierarchically positioned - with men, men's experience, and masculine-identified values at the top; and women, women's experience, and feminine-identified values at the bottom. When anthropologist Margaret Mead traveled from culture to culture, she found that the value of a particular form of work depended on who did it. If weaving was done by men in one tribe, it was a highly prestigious occupation. If in the next tribe weaving was done by women, it was a low prestige occupation. (5) In US culture this differential valuing can easily be seen by the prestige given to male sports team over female teams, the funding of war over education, and the centrality of business and economics over domestic life, relationships, and care of the earth. In questioning patriarchy we challenge many of the core values that our society is built upon—domination, competition, entitlement, and exploitation.

Sexism is also directly connected to gender by the oppressive nature of the roles assigned to women. Historian Gerda Lerner describes the situation as follows:

Both men and women live as if on a stage acting out their assigned roles. The play can't go on without both of them, yet "the stage set is conceived, painted and defined by men. Men have written the play, have directed the show, interpreted the meaning of the action. They have assigned themselves the most interesting, the most heroic parts." (6) One stark example of this is the field of theology in which women have been consistently excluded from the meaning making process and thus matters of the head, such as purity codes and ideological correctness, have been predominant; and matters of the heart, such as inclusiveness and relatedness, are largely neglected. Furthermore, the roles given to women are often defined only in relation to men: the nurturing and supportive mother and wife, the sweet and agreeable daughter, the attractive and desirable partner. No wonder it is hard for women to boldly go after their own dreams!

Although gender roles are relaxing in many societies, women continue to experience sexism in a multitude of ways: violence, economic inequality and exploitation, and sexist mistreatment by men. The scientific journal *Nature* recently published a study that concluded that violence against women has reached epidemic proportions. The following statistics are telling:

"Three in ten women worldwide have been punched, shoved, dragged, threatened with weapons, raped, or subjected to other violence from a current or former partner. Close to one in ten have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner. Of women who are murdered, more than one in three were killed by an intimate partner. (7)

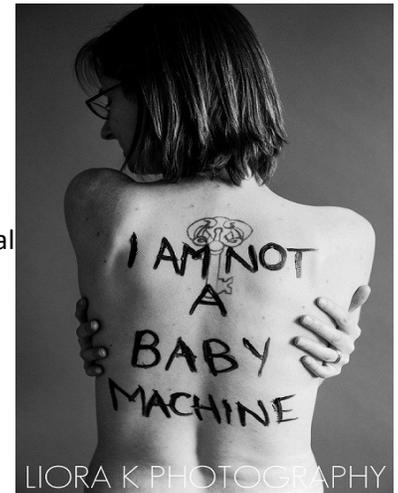
In the US, things look no better. One in three women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime. (8)

Women are also disempowered by the economic inequalities they face. Women receive a mere ten percent of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property. In the global economy, women constitute the majority of workers doing low-paid, labor intensive jobs. In the less developed economic "south," multi-national corporations increasingly exploit women workers who are also the victims of racism and thus doubly disempowered. For all these reasons, world wide the percentage of poor adults that are woman is growing.(3)

In the economic "north", women are told that they are lucky they don't suffer from sexism the way women do in less developed parts of the world. Yet in reality, most women in developed countries do both the majority of the unpaid work of homemaking and caretaking while also juggling jobs where they often earn less than their male counterparts.(3)

Women in the United States today are paid on average 77 cents for every dollar paid to men. This pay gap is even worse for African-American and Latina Women. (9) While some of this gap is due to a difference in education and training, it is interesting to note that a woman one year out of college makes \$7,622 less than her male counterpart. Considering how many women are single parents, this wage-inequality can be devastating.

Women are also targeted directly for economic exploitation particularly by the multi-million dollar beautification industry, which manipulates women to feel bad about ourselves so that we will buy their products. Women are inundated daily by media images showing "idealized" images of feminine beauty; images which are extremely unrealistic and often racist. The power of these distorted images lies in their ability to tap into the oppressive message that females have faced since childhood: that our worth is appearance dependent. This damaging message leads women not only to spend lots of money on beauty products, but also to often hate their own bodies and to develop a disordered relationship to food. Sex industries such as prostitution, the trafficking of women, strip joints, phone sex and



pornography also profit from the objectification of women, and manipulate men to view women as sex objects.(3)

Our starting definition of sexism says that it is “enforced by men as the conditioned agents of oppression.” It is important to stress that men do not mistreat women because they are bad, but rather because they have been hurt and manipulated. Men too are oppressed, though not by women, but by society as a whole, beginning with the gender roles assigned to them. Boys are pressured, under threat of rejection and violence, into narrow male gender roles such as being dominant, aggressive, competitive, and sexually compulsive. Furthermore, from a young age boys are expected not to be emotionally vulnerable which deprives them of the support and closeness everyone needs. Homophobia serves to further male isolation. Boys learn not to get too close to one another out of fear of being harassed for being “gay.” (1)

This deprivation of closeness prepares males to be manipulated by the sexualized images of closeness targeted at them. The message is, “only a women (or sex with a women) can meet your needs;” out of desperation men often unconsciously seek to control women for this purpose. Men also dominate because they have been dominated, first by adults and other boys and later by bosses and work situations that rob them of power. Without a chance to heal from their own oppression, men reenact it by dominating women.

Feminist scholar, Bell Hooks describes Feminism as “the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.” This definition makes it clear that the problem is not men, but rather “all sexist thinking and action . . . whether those who perpetrate it are male or female.” (10) Internalized sexism is the way women re-play sexism towards ourselves and other women. One way this happens is through negative self-talk: I am not attractive, What I do isn’t so important... Women also commonly judge women more harshly than men, more readily support male leadership, give males more attention, and use masculine language for the sacred. Furthermore, white women tend to dominate and devalue the experience of women of other backgrounds, even within the feminist movement. All these tendencies serve to separate women from one another and prevent us from working together to dismantle sexism.

For all these reason, Hooks argues that feminism must not only address the structural manifestations of sexism, but also our internalized sexism. To do this it must bring women of all backgrounds together to forge a sisterhood or alliance that is both political and heartfelt. From the late 60’s to early 80’s, such a movement existed in the form of feminist consciousness raising (CR) groups. Within CR groups women of diverse backgrounds gathered regularly, often in one another’s homes, to discuss and analyze their lives. Each woman was invited to share about a particular subject such as work, sex, marriage, appearance, etc; then through often heated discussions the group arrived at a shared understanding of sexism and created actions such as the 1968 protest of the Miss America Pageant.

Once again, it is time to forge a movement in which women come together to better understand how sexism affects us and to reclaim our power to create wonderful lives for ourselves and impact the world. In recent years I, along with other woman in my community, have participated in women’s gatherings in which we give each other loving attention, take turns sharing, and discuss issues that affect us. This experience has helped me to heal from how I have been hurt by sexism, to confront sexism when I encounter it, and to unpack my internalized sexism, which has allowed me to become a better friend and ally to other women. It has also helped me to more readily take on leadership, including such difficult things as writing this article. In the words of the feminist consciousness raising movement: Sisterhood is powerful! (11)

1. *The Liberation of Men*, Rational Island Publishers, 39.
2. Willis, Ellen, “Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism,” *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays*.
3. “Draft Women’s Policy Statement,” *Sisters No. 12*, Rational Island Publishers, 50-53.
4. Heather Hackman, “Sexism” *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*. 316.
5. Sue Monk Kidd, *Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, 62, 45.
6. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 12.
7. Monya Baker, *Nature*, June 20, 2013.
8. RAINN calculation based on 2000 National crime Victimization Survey.
9. National Partnership for Women and Families.
10. Bell Hooks, *Feminism is for Everyone*, 1.
11. These women’s gatherings took place in the context of the Reevaluation Counseling Movement, which publishes *Sisters*, and the *Liberation of Men*.

Say it Ain't So: Sexism in Catholic Worker Communities

by Jenny Truax

RoundTable, 2013

Catholic Workers do a great job of taking personal responsibility to address the structural injustices of war, overconsumption and poverty. We do the Works of Mercy, host actions for justice, seek to live simply, resist war taxes, and learn to grow food. What would it look like for Catholic Workers to focus more on the oppression of sexism? This is a messier proposition; members of the targeted group (women) are in our communities, rather than just the (safe) recipients of our hospitality or solidarity actions. Examining sexism in ourselves and our communities is uncomfortable; we avoid doing it just as much as white folks avoid talking about our racism. When male domination or sexism is breached, we Catholic Workers (CW) often minimize it, or use the classic distancing behavior of “comparing oppressions,” which sounds this: “Sexism is simply not as important as drone strikes and homelessness. Women in the U.S. don’t have it as bad as (prisoners at Guantanamo, people in Afghanistan, our guests, etc.), so let’s focus on who’s really suffering.” This mindset ignores the reality that oppressions are interconnected - they are all about systems of domination that privilege (and value) one group at the expense of another. Unless we take the effort to examine and eradicate them, sexism, racism, ageism, and heterosexism will continue to be expressed in our organizations, CW communities, and personal relationships.

Teaching for Diversity and Justice describes sexism as “a system of advantages that serves to privilege men, subordinate women, denigrate women-identified values and practices, enforce male dominance, and reinforce norms of masculinity that are dehumanizing to men.” Over the years, a few (but not many) articles and writings have explicitly talked about sexism in the Catholic Worker. In 1993, interviewees in Voices from the Catholic Worker’s chapter on Feminism mused that perhaps the heart of the CW, the Works of Mercy, has a levelling effect on the sexes (aka, the Works of Mercy are typically considered “women’s work.”). Others in this oral history talked about the problems of male domination and patriarchy in their houses in terms of decision making. In CW papers throughout the years, some authors have expressed frustration, pointing out the hypocrisy that the CW focuses primarily on the sins of war and poverty without much acknowledgment or analysis of our communities’ own internal sins of racism, sexism, heteronormativity and ableism.

Interviewees in the Voices book note that liturgy seems to be an intersection of conflict on the issue of sexism in the CW. At both Midwest and National gatherings throughout the years, Catholic Workers have struggled to create meaningful liturgy that is not sexist. (This is tricky to accomplish in a big Catholic Worker gathering - some folks strongly desire a Catholic Mass, which is, by its nature, male dominated, while others have been deeply hurt by the Catholic Church and desire a different liturgical expression.) When feminist liturgies have been attempted, some Catholic Workers have reacted that they were not inclusive enough to men.

You can’t talk about sexism in the Catholic Worker without talking about the Catholic Church. Our spiritual roots lie in a Church that is an anchor of male domination, and that codifies sexism and heterosexism. As communities that are often supported by local Catholics, we are often hesitant to challenge the Church on issues like women’s ordination and civil rights for LGBTQ folks. Some of us decide we have “bigger fish to fry” (again, overlooking the interwoven strands of oppression) and some of us even go along with the sexist party line claiming excuses like “tradition,” “men’s special vocation” and the like. Noticing and addressing the Church’s manifestations of sexism is an essential part of our path to liberation.

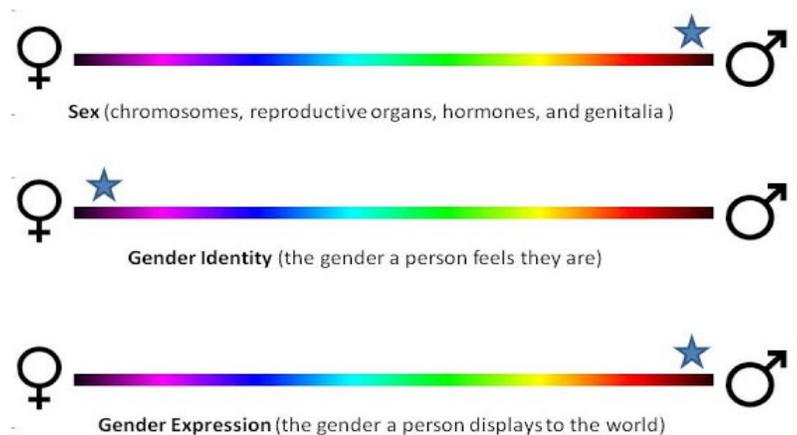
Patriarchy is the ideology of male supremacy that justifies male dominance: “To see the world through patriarchal eyes is to believe that women and men are profoundly different in their basic natures, that hierarchy is the only alternative to chaos, and that men were made in the image of a masculine God, with whom they enjoy a special relationship. ...It is to believe that men cannot feel a compelling bodily connection to their children, that on some level,

every woman wants a ‘real man,’ and that mothers should stay at home and that fathers should work out of the home, regardless of men’s and women’s actual abilities or needs.”¹ How do the layers of patriarchy percolate in our Catholic Worker communities? Here are a few ideas: 1) Patriarchy equates women with reproduction - are we appreciating the gifts and choices of all our members, whether or not they choose to have children? 2) Patriarchy encourages socially-constructed gender roles (that tend to benefit men in acquiring wealth). How are we mirroring these sexist gender roles? 3) Name five CW communities and the prime person you associate with each. How many of your answers are men? Patriarchy encourages male leadership, with women in supporting roles. Because they have been bred to be confident and feel entitled, men step more easily into leadership and public roles (writing in the newsletter, public speaking, getting arrested, etc.). How can we better encourage women to step into these roles, and additionally, how can we better appreciate the work everyone is doing, not just the superhero of the house who has the most public voice?

What does male dominance (patriarchy in action) look like in the day-to-day life of our Catholic Worker Houses? We might allow a joke about women (uttered by guests, volunteers, donors, or other community members) go unchallenged, our fear of “creating a scene” preventing us from interrupting and naming it as sexist and unacceptable. How many times have women been sexually harassed in our houses while men said nothing? In our meetings, we might be encouraging men to make the decisions, and women to enact them. We might expect women to be compassionate listeners, but not expect men to tend to the emotional needs of guests and other community members. Men may be found dominating conversations with long stories, strong opinions, or threats of anger in meetings, or socially. Male dominance can create a mindset of “there is one right answer, and I know what it is” which stymies conversation and consensus. While they seek out, and expect, counsel from women, some men may be stunted in their relationships with other men in the community, relying on joking and superficiality.

Male domination can be especially obvious at the larger CW gatherings and public resistance actions. We might not notice it, but sometimes it just happens (because we mirror the sexism in society) that the majority of the planners, the facilitators, and the spokespeople are all men. When resistance actions are male dominated, they can have an element of macho-ness (promoting a “hard core” attitude - “Who has done the most time?”), ego and self-promotion. Our analysis and public actions often challenge militarism and capitalism - a good thing - but we can and should go deeper, challenging the many facets of injustice, especially male domination and white supremacy. As we continue to evolve as a movement, it seems vital that Catholic Workers 1) each acknowledge and take personal responsibility not only for class privilege (for those who have it), but also for other, less talked about privileges, and 2) listen to, and follow the lead of people from targeted groups who are most affected by these oppressions.

To build anti-sexist communities, we need communal support to do the inner work. Women have lifetimes of internalized sexist stereotypes to work through, and men have a world of male privilege to address. Breaking free of sexist gender roles requires us to first acknowledge their presence in our lives, and then consider the question, “How can I most fully and completely be me? Where can I most joyfully use my gifts?” Regardless of our gender identity, we need to step out of our comfort zones at times - to learn new skills, take risks, challenge oppression, learn from our mistakes, and support others to do the same. We can host listening sessions, and discussion groups for men, women, or both on different aspects of sexism, and it’s connection to other oppressions. These actions are just as important as anything else we do to resist oppression, whether it’s growing our own food, sheltering people who are homeless, or holding anti-drone vigils. To send us off on our anti-sexist journeys, I’ve rephrased sections of “A Letter to Male Activists” from Sisters of



Resistance:

"In closing, we ask you to listen. Listen to us when we speak, listen to our criticisms, listen to our experiences as members of a group targeted by sexism and patriarchy - just as you would to a guest, an Iraqi or Afghani. Stop minimizing and ignoring sexism; acknowledge the privilege you have from being born male. Do not interrupt women when they speak and stop immediately disagreeing with us. When it comes to sexism, you are not under attack, women are. We need community spaces to be safe and respectful places in which we are treated *as equals*.

You can create these spaces of equality by actively challenging sexist gender roles, by taking over the chores and actions typically still carried out by women: cooking, tidying up, looking after children, doing the food shopping and the laundry, providing emotional support, listening to people, etc. Take the minutes at meetings and do the menial administrative tasks still disproportionately done by women.

Be committed allies to women - not testosterone-heavy saviors. Ask what the women around you are doing, feeling and experiencing and assist them however you can. Interrupt and name sexist comments and challenge male domination. Notice the male-female dynamics in meetings, demonstrations and conversations and actively address this imbalance. At your resistance actions and in your community meetings, ensure that the male to female ratio of speakers, facilitators, participants or chairs is 50/50. Do not attribute the hard work and ideas of the women in your community to men, who are often in the spotlight. Take sexism - and your responsibility to eradicate it - as seriously as you do imperialism, militarism and earth care. Incorporate an awareness of gender and feminism into your everyday life; for if you want to bring about revolutionary change, you must begin with yourself."

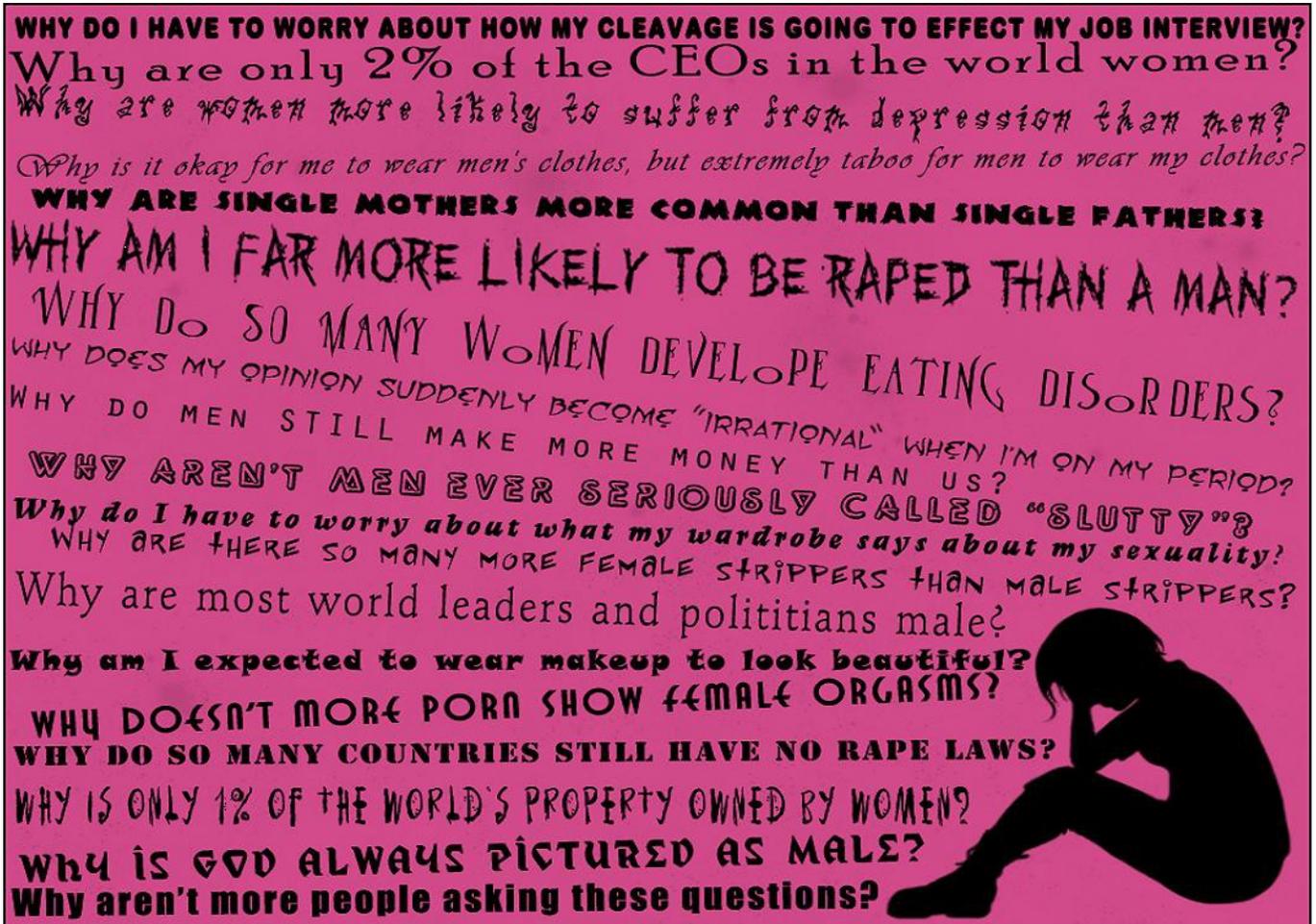


Image: <http://serenfae.deviantart.com/>

Homophobia and Heterosexism: Some Initial Concepts

“When they call gay marriage a threat to human civilization as we know it, they are referring to the fact that gender oppression in the form of heterosexism is the weapon that keeps them in power, and if those gender norms were considered essential, there would be no way to enforce that oppression. It is precisely because we live outside the basic unit of the very nuclear family structure that would otherwise permit capitalism to continue unchallenged, and because our community experiences oppression, that we are most capable of creating an alternative culture outside of the culture of exploitation, resolving it for ourselves so that it can be expanded for those outside of our community.”

- Deepali Gokhale, “A Vision for a Queer Progressive Agenda”

Lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender, and questioning people (LGBTQs) are among the most despised groups in the U.S. In our capitalist-based culture that requires multiple systems of domination, **patriarchy** stands as one of the most obvious systems of control. As a social system promoting male dominance, it serves to maintain class, gender, racial, and heterosexual privilege and the status quo of power – relying both on crude forms of oppression, like violence; and subtle ones, like laws; to perpetuate inequality. Patriarchal beliefs of male, heterosexual dominance lie at the root of gender-based violence. Patriarchy is a structural force that influences power relations, whether they are abusive or not.

None of us is only defined by one slice of our identity. We are each **intersections** of different identities, including class, race, nation of origin, sexual orientation, gender expression, and many more factors; we're comprised of both targeted and dominant group identities. This idea hamstrings our societal compulsion of **binary thinking**; very little actually occurs in a black-white, right-wrong, good guy-bad guy motif, including sexual orientation and gender. The binary thinking of our culture is hierarchical, with a winner and a loser, a trusted “normal” and a slightly suspicious “alternative”.

Sexism and heterosexism are the prime manifestations of patriarchy. **Heterosexism** is the overarching system of advantages bestowed on heterosexuals. These advantages are based on the institutionalization of heterosexual norms that privilege heterosexuals and exclude the needs, concerns, cultures, and life experiences of lesbians, gay males, and bisexuals. Some examples of heterosexism include parents who automatically expect their kids to marry a person of the other sex, media portrayals of only heterosexuals in positive and satisfying relationships, teachers and others in positions of authority assuming that all their students are heterosexual, etc. Check out the “Straight Privilege” page for more examples of heterosexual privilege. **Heteronormativity** is a form of heterosexism – it's the normalization and privileging of all things heterosexual.

Privilege is a tricky subject! Devon Carbado says that those of us who unquestionably accept the racial, gender and heterosexual privileges we have are implicated as perpetrators of discrimination. When we take our identity privileges for granted, we legitimate assumptions about entitlement – aka, when I assume as a heterosexual that I should enjoy the right to marry, it helps entrench societal expectations and norms. Sexism requires male privilege, and homophobia requires heterosexual privilege. We each need to become familiar with the different aspects of our identity, and how each influences our privilege. We can acknowledge our privilege, and avoid exploiting it as much as possible. When we do choose to “compromise” or participate in structures that discriminate, we can do it in a spirit of “**critical acquiescence**,” becoming agents of change within these structures as we participate in them.

Biphobia by Marcia Deihl & Robbyn Ochs

I told a heterosexual male friend that I was bisexual. His response was to make repeated attempts to sexualize our relationship. He made the false assumption that since I was bi-SEX-ual, I was attracted to everybody.

I was in a feminist bookstore. As the woman rang up my purchase, she asked me if a “lesbian discount” was appropriate. I was somewhat taken aback, but I said (half in jest,) “Well, I’m bisexual, so how about half?” She didn’t smile and I didn’t get the discount.

I came out to my brother, and he seems to mostly accept my bisexual identity. However, a year ago I was visiting him, and he took special care to request that I not discuss my bisexuality in front of his friends.

Homophobia is the more active component of heterosexism – including prejudice, discrimination, acts of violence and micro-agressions against LGB people. (**Transphobia** refers to these discrimination aimed at transgender people.) Society targets LGBTQ people by denying them civil and legal protections, excluding them, promoting negative beliefs about them, through “**micro-agressions**” (you know, the averted eyes, the disapproving tone of voice, and small decisions made by individuals) and hate crimes. LGBTQs often internalize these negative messages; this is termed **internalized homophobia**. Internalized homophobia occurs in LGBTQ people when they involuntarily internalize, and replay these negative stereotypes, beliefs, prejudice and hateful messages.

Interpersonal Homophobia occurs between people; it can range from homophobic jokes to withholding support, from landlords refusing to rent to LGBTQs to school bullying. A National Gay and Lesbian Task Force study found that more than 90% of respondents had experienced some form of victimization based on their sexual identity, and 33% had been threatened directly with violence.

Institutional Homophobia refers to the systematic discrimination on the basis of sexual identity or orientation by governments, educational, religious, and professional organizations. Currently, there is no federal protection in the areas of employment, housing, insurance, credit and public accommodations for LGBTQ people.

Cultural Homophobia works in several ways for various targeted groups. Society informally deters frank, open discussion of topics related to targeted groups, and frequently under-resources these groups. It seeks to either exclude or negatively portray LGBTQ people. The societal blanket of heteronormativity ensures that LGBTQ people will be accused of flaunting or pushing their sexuality on others. Society tends to force targeted groups into ghettos, where there is little possibility of integration into the general life of the community. Stereotyping is used as a means of control and a further hindrance to understanding and meaningful social change.



Homophobia limits all of society, including heterosexuals. It inhibits the ability of heterosexuals to form close intimate relationships with members of their own gender. It locks people into rigid gender based roles and stereotypes that hamper creativity and expression. Homophobic conditioning - like racism, sexism, and other oppressions, pressures people into treating others badly, which contradicts our basic nature to be kind and just. It unnecessarily strains family relationships when LGBTQ people come out. It prevents LGBTQ people from developing an authentic and healthy self-identity, which can lead to self-destructive behaviors that affect their families, and society as a whole. It is one reason for rationalizing the elimination of school based sex education, which is vital for young people. It prevents heterosexuals from receiving the gifts of the LGBTQ community - spiritual insights, contributions to art, culture and media, to religion, and to family life. It inhibits appreciation of other kinds of diversity, making it unsafe for anyone who falls outside of dictated norms.

This article is sourced by Jenny Truax from the Heterosexism chapter of Readings for Diversity and Social Justice and <http://www.apiidv.org/>

Coming out and Growing up in the Catholic Worker

Annjie Schiefelbein & Jenny Truax

February 1, 2010

We begin with a few images, in no particular order. The first takes place in December, 2001. After living together in community together for three years, we make the decision to begin dating. As we tell each of our community members (who have known us as straight women until now,) reactions are very supportive, and to our shock, no one is surprised. One difficult comment came from a Catholic community member, who told Annjie, "You know, you don't have to choose this." Besides this reaction, the community acts as if we just had a baby or some equally mammoth milestone; we awake the next morning with gifts of bottles of wine and supportive notes outside our door.

The next image occurs in 2003. We have been dating a few years, and half a dozen community members have transitioned both in and out of the Karen House community. A 22 year old community member writes a note in the Karen House log (read daily by housetakers and community) that says, "Our guest Mary is very concerned about having gay people live in the community (Annjie and Jenny). She feels threatened by it and would like the community to talk about this." At the meeting, he asks what we should do, indicating that it is fair for guests to have reservations about our 'lifestyle', and that the community should have a response. A long silence ensues, and when no one responds, Jenny asks what he thinks we should do if someone doesn't like living with African Americans or Latinos. We feel harmed both by both him and the lack of a firm response from our community members.

The third image is on June 25th, 2005. Over 200 people gather on the side of a hill in the country, music plays, and Dorothy Day is read. It is hot – one of the hottest days of the Missouri summer. The crowd includes representatives from all aspects of life at Karen House Catholic Worker; people who have lived, cooked, taken house, or just donated clothing are present. The Catholic Worker community itself is all present. Many current and past guests are there, as are their children. They join in song with the other guests in attendance; our families, college and work friends. It is our wedding day, and despite the heat, folks say later that it was a great celebration. We sure think so! Karen House, and our community, was a bustle of activity in the weeks before the wedding. Tablecloths and candles, coolers and napkins, and other assorted goods were stored in a room in the Karen House basement designated as "wedding central". From our thrift-store wardrobes to our vows to the music to the dish washers, there was not an aspect of the day in which our community was not intricately involved. It was a great day.

Fourth image: Three weeks before our wedding, our community welcomes two live-in volunteers from a religious community in New York. This group sends members into the outside world for a few months of service. The two young women are sweet and demur, good with the children and hard workers; we feel lucky they've chosen our community.

All of our community members work closely with them, enjoying the time. After a few days, though, they tell one of our community members that they are uncomfortable, and disagree with our "lifestyle". They have reservations about staying at all, since we house openly gay people, and tell us they will in no way participate in, or do anything directly or indirectly to promote the wedding, including filling in for people who are involved. In our community meeting, we discuss whether the volunteers should keep staying with us. The community is primarily concerned with our comfort – whether we can handle the continued presence of the volunteers - and finally asks us to decide. We, with support, think it best to ask the women to leave.

This time is painful – rather than pre-wedding excitement, logistics planning and anticipation, our heads are filled with renewed internalized homophobia, reminders of what the world thinks of us, and lines from confrontations we will



never personally have with the volunteers themselves. Although we can't articulate it during that community discussion, we later wished that our community would have felt more affronted on our behalf. We wished folks would have said, "Of course we will not have the volunteers stay if this is how they feel," advocating for both us and for LGBT rights, rather than placing the decision back into our hands and asking us to advocate for ourselves.

What is the difference between these images - a few years, different communities? The truth is that there is no difference, or at least not very much. Both of these realities are as true in 2010 as they were in 2001. Is it news to anyone reading this that it can be hard to be gay, even at the Catholic Worker? Both of these realities represent our lives as gay people in the Catholic Worker; it is a constant dance.

Our community is a place of freedom for us. At this point we are, for the most part, accepted as a couple with little thought. At the same time, Karen House is also a place where we need to decide, almost daily, how "gay" to be. Should I come out to the confirmation class I'm giving a Karen House/community talk to? Should we mention to the volunteer that the picture in the hallway she likes is from our wedding? The dance makes for funny stories, to be sure. Like the



time we were desperately trying to come out to a Just Faith group, who just weren't getting it. "Oh, you're married!" they said after our 3rd attempt, "Yes!" we responded, grateful they finally got it. "That's great! What do your husbands think about all of this?"

We have started to think of coming out to volunteer groups as a responsibility to help challenge the heterosexual assumption. It feels like adding to the oppression to hide this basic truth about ourselves. Volunteer-types who come to Karen House are often looking to expand their knowledge and awareness. So when we are telling people about our lives at Karen House, it feels right (but probably a little surprising to the audience,) to include the

fact that we're married. It's a really scary thing to do (we both have to gear ourselves up to do it), but it's conversely damaging to have relationships with volunteers while suspecting they would disdain us if they knew we were gay.

This dance is very present in our daily lives with the guests at Karen House. In 2003, we decided to come out to the guests. We felt very comfortable with many of them, and we were tired of pretending, of being fearful of being "found out". We had many fears about coming out to the guests. At best, we feared that it would alienate us from the very women with whom we so desired to continue sharing our lives. At worst, we worried about darker things; we feared the guests would base their opinions on homophobic stereotypes. We worried that our relationships with their children would be viewed with contempt or mistrust, or that a culture of mockery would begin. Karen House had been our home for over a decade combined, and we had no desire to change that. Would the decision to come out to the guests make the house of hospitality we called home an inhospitable place for us? It was conceivable, and we were afraid, but we did it. And it was one anti-climactic scene. Each of the women we told (many of whom later came to our wedding and remain in contact with us now,) had a family member, friend, or personal experience with someone who was gay, and they were each kinder to us than we had been to ourselves. It was another example of the "recipients" of hospitality showing the "givers" how hospitality really works. It was, simply put, holy. Since then, we have not needed to have additional coming out conversations with guests. It is a part of the reality of the life of the house, and is passed from one group of guests to the next without our involvement, and usually without difficulty.

It doesn't always go well. Over the years, we've had both volunteers and guests, both misinformed and mentally ill who have had an issue with us or with gay people in general. We've also struggled with feeling judged by some community members over leaving the Catholic Church. We've felt simultaneously like the Catholic Church not only kicked us out, but considers us disordered, and that it was our fault that the community was becoming less Catholic. It has been awkward apologizing for not attending the Catholic Mass that Karen House hosts weekly. It's at times felt like a double oppression.

But year by year, as we've grown more comfortable with ourselves, and grown in our analysis of oppression, it has become less of an issue. Or maybe we, and our community, have become better-practiced in the answers we give, whether it's to innocent questions from the kids living at Karen house, to more difficult accusations from guests or volunteers.

Our public 'outing' has been greatly aided by the newsletter of Karen House, *The Roundtable* (RT). Since 2005, photos from our wedding (prominently labeled as such) have made their way into almost every issue! *The Roundtable*

addressed the issue of homosexuality in both 1995 and 2007. The first issue responded to the Toronto Catholic Worker's *Mustard Seed* newsletter entitled "Homosexuality & the Church: a Catholic Worker Response". Annjie has an article in the RT, written as a single, straight, Catholic woman defending the right of individuals to love whomever they want (hello, foreshadowing). The RT issue was put forth as a discussion on the issue; no position was taken, and several different opinions were presented in what the community hoped was an open way. When we read it now, honestly, we cringe at parts, but it represents the community at that time. In 2007 the community, not satisfied with how we left things in 1995, decided to take a stronger position on the issue. We published a new issue entitled "Living the Beloved Community: Homosexuality," which unequivocally supported the dignity and rights of LGBT people. The difference in the RTs demonstrates where we have come as a community; the first is a representation of several opinions on homosexuality (ironically, in the midst of a community with gay members), and the second is a strong, positive pro-gay issue.

Our relationship, we hope, has been a positive influence in where we've come as a community, but we didn't start the process. One of our longstanding community members was the lone gay person for a long time before us, and has handled the position with much more grace than we have. Now, looking at our community and house in 2010, we feel nothing but pride. We've had several community members who are out, and we have welcomed many lesbian and transgendered women as guests, becoming more proactive in addressing any bashing, jokes, or unintended discrimination that has arisen. The homophobia of those two volunteers back in 2005 would not be given audience in our community these days. If that situation were to occur now, our community would probably say, kindly but firmly, that we do not welcome homophobia – the issue would be taken up as an all-community issue, rather than one that affects only the gay minority. It is no longer our issue within the community, but a community issue. It is incredibly gratifying to see where we've come.

In the end, we are reminded of a lesbian friend who says that she spent years wishing that people would treat her and her partner like a married couple. They finally did, she reports, when she started acting like a married person, rather than hiding her life so that people wouldn't be uncomfortable. It was a tremendous process for us to accept ourselves individually, to begin dating, and to face the world – within and beyond the Karen House walls. Dealing with our individual insecurities, heterosexism, and homophobia has been a process, and our community members had to go through their own respective processes. The beauty of community is that we waded together through awkwardness, misunderstanding, and at times, hurtful comments, with a basic belief that we wanted the best for each other, and that we wanted to love each other well. We got hurt by mis-worded advice and concern, and we're sure that we hurt others as well. But where we are now, as a couple and as a community, is worth every difficulty we experienced in the progression. We think our community is better than ever for the process.

Within all of this, we know that we have had it much easier than most. We have heard so many stories of homophobia and fear in past and present Worker communities. We sat with a large group of LGBT folks and supporters at the National Catholic Worker gathering in Iowa in 2007 and felt both joy and despair at the stories and examples of hatred people have experienced. Despite whatever hurt and loss we felt, we never feared we would be asked to leave community or that we would be excluded. We always knew that those closest to us in community were willing to engage in this process of understanding with us. We never felt the trepidation that so many have had to face within the Worker. We know this and we're both so grateful. The images of our coming out process are both positive and negative, and we wouldn't change this, because of the great place the journey has brought us as a couple and a community. It is a journey we are not taking alone. We are happy to be and to represent gay Catholic Workers, and proud still that our community stands unequivocally with us. Dorothy said we are not alone anymore, and we agree, and hope that the Worker continues to move in a direction where no one feels outside of the amazing circle.



Confronting Heterosexual Privilege

Christen E. Parker

RoundTable, 2007

We wrote in our wedding program:

"We have chosen, like some couples, solidarity with our brothers and sisters in same-sex relationships who cannot marry in the eyes of the State and many churches. We marry today as they can - with family, friends, and God as witnesses to the love and life we promise to share. We will continue to advocate for the day when all couples can enter into legal union and or the sacrament of marriage with the person they love and want to share life with."



We decided shortly after our engagement that we wouldn't obtain a marriage license or marry in the Catholic Church, While most heterosexual couples take these proceedings for granted, our relationships with deeply committed same-sex couples that cannot legally marry gave us pause to participate in such selectively available options. It was a quick, mutual decision to stand in solidarity.

Our families did not see our decision in the same logical light, and it was a source of considerable tension in the weeks and months leading to our wedding. Many made their best efforts (and some still do) to instill the importance of the conventional legal and religious sanctions to marriage such as health care coverage, mutual custody of children, tax benefits, etc. They begged us to be "practical" and "just go ahead and get a license." Some encouraged us to make a statement of support if we so wanted, but that surely our friends in same-sex unions would want us to take advantage of what they are denied. (We wondered if they'd really polled

any same-sex couples before making such a bold assumption.) They questioned if it was a "real wedding" without the legal and religious trappings.

Were we shying away from commitment? What would we tell our children? Would we really be married? We replied, as calmly as possible, that just as we could not eat at a "whites only" diner, we could not marry in a "heterosexuals only" system. Would our African-American friends have wanted us to enjoy the meal they couldn't? We would rather stand outside together, thank you. One of my Aunts and her wife (did you bat an eye?) helped us greatly before our wedding. They told us how heartened they and many of their friends were by our decision. They had exchanged rings without public ceremony. Their strength and support were the community we needed then. While many others in my family were praying for us to get over this "phase," these Aunts celebrated our values and our solidarity with them.

We felt grateful to experience even a shade of the struggles of our homosexual friends and family members. In having to set up power of attorney and living wills to be allowed to make medical decisions and such, we now had to think as many other couples do -of how to publicly entwine our lives without the package deal of legal marriage. The hardest part for me, though, was wondering if my larger family took our wedding "seriously," and my heart ached to imagine so many other-couples facing that doubt.

Humility was on the heels of this gratitude as we knew that we were not being rejected for loving our partner. which is sadly what many other couples face. Like many same-sex couples, we choose to claim the titles of "husband" and "wife" but we know that. in our case, no one bats an eye at these, as they didn't when we were boyfriend, girlfriend, and then fiances. We know we hardly know marital discrimination.

What will we tell our children? We hope to tell them about a time when people were told who they were allowed marry based on gender, just as we'll have to tell them about a time when people were told what they were worth based on skin color. We will ask them to look out for unequal privilege and I always stand as one human family amid creation.

Straight Privilege Checklist

- ✓ I can be pretty sure that my community members, guests, neighbors, co-workers, and fellow activists will be comfortable with my sexual orientation.
- ✓ I do not have to fear that if my family or friends find out about my sexual orientation there will be economic, emotional, physical or psychological consequences.
- ✓ I am not accused of being abused, warped or disordered because of my sexual orientation.
- ✓ I can go home from most meetings, classes, and conversations without feeling excluded, fearful, attacked, isolated, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, stereotyped or feared because of my sexual orientation.
- ✓ I do not have to fear revealing my sexual orientation to community, friends or family. It's assumed.
- ✓ I can easily find a religious community that will not exclude me for being heterosexual.
- ✓ I can count on finding a therapist or doctor willing and able to talk about my sexuality.
- ✓ I can choose to not think politically about my sexual orientation.
- ✓ I can express affection in any social setting without fear of repercussions.
- ✓ My sexual orientation can have access to any level of leadership in any organization.
- ✓ My sexual orientation is never mistaken as the only aspect of my lifestyle.
- ✓ My family does not love me "in spite" of my sexual orientation.
- ✓ There is a socially accepted language for my relationships (wife, husband, etc.)
- ✓ I can't be fired because of my sexual orientation.
- ✓ My spouse and I can celebrate an anniversary and expect approval.
- ✓ My sexual orientation has never been considered or scrutinized as a choice.
- ✓ I receive social acceptance and over 1,138 benefits, rights and protections provided on the basis of my marital status.
- ✓ Every day is (white) Heterosexual Pride Day.



Dismantling Heteronormative Language: Some Terms to Know

We want to build bridges and form relationships with others. To that end, it's important to be fluent in the language of the community, as much as possible. Here are a few terms used in the LGBT community to get you started.

- **Gay** A man attracted to another man; often used as an umbrella term for lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals.
- **Lesbian** Women who are attracted to other women.
- **Bisexual** Attracted to both men and women.
- **Transgender** Someone's psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with.
- **Transvestite** Individuals who regularly or occasionally wear the clothing socially assigned to a gender not their own, but are usually comfortable with their anatomy and do not wish to change it.
- **Crossdresser** The preferred term, rather than transvestite.
- **Drag King** Male-emulating woman.
- **Drag Queen** Female-emulating male, usually exaggerated or performative, often (not always) gay.
- **Drag** The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically. This is gender as purely performance, and doesn't necessarily reflect the person's gender identity.
- **Butch** Masculine-appearing person.
- **Femme** Feminine-appearing person.
- **Androgynous** An appearance and/or identification neither man nor woman, presenting a gender mixed or neutral.
- **Transsexual** A person whose sexual identity (yet not necessarily their orientation) is opposite their assignment at birth. Not all TS people undergo sexual reassignment surgery.
- **FTM (female to male)** Transgender man assigned "female" at birth.
- **MTF (male to female)** Transgender woman who was assigned "male" at birth.
- **Intersex** A term used to describe a person whose sex chromosomes, genitalia, and/or secondary sex characteristics are determined to be neither exclusively male nor female.
- **Heterosexual** A person who experiences the human need for warmth, affection, and love from persons of the opposite gender. Sometimes this includes sexual contact.
- **Queer** Once used in a derogatory way, queer is being reclaimed by many LGBT+ people in an attempt to blur rigid labels. Many who choose to use the term feel that it is more inclusive, allowing for diversity of race, class, and gender that are often underrepresented in the LGBT community.
- **Gender Queer** A person who redefines or plays with gender, or who refuses gender altogether. A label for people who bend/break the rules of gender and blur the boundaries.
- **Questioning** Someone who does not identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual -- either because they haven't determined how best to identify themselves or simply because they do not wish to associate themselves with any one category.

FOR EVERY GIRL WHO IS TIRED OF ACTING WEAK WHEN SHE IS STRONG, THERE IS A BOY TIRED OF APPEARING STRONG WHEN HE FEELS VULNERABLE. FOR EVERY BOY WHO IS BURDENED WITH THE CONSTANT EXPECTATION OF KNOWING EVERYTHING, THERE IS A GIRL TIRED OF PEOPLE NOT TRUSTING HER INTELLIGENCE. FOR EVERY GIRL WHO IS TIRED OF BEING CALLED OVER-SENSITIVE, THERE IS A BOY WHO FEARS TO BE GENTLE, TO WEEP. FOR EVERY BOY FOR WHOM COMPETITION IS THE ONLY WAY TO PROVE HIS MASCULINITY, THERE IS A GIRL WHO IS CALLED UNFEMININE WHEN SHE COMPETES. FOR EVERY GIRL WHO THROWS OUT HER E-Z-BAKE OVEN, THERE IS A BOY WHO WISHES TO FIND ONE. FOR EVERY BOY STRUGGLING NOT TO LET ADVERTISING DICTATE HIS DESIRES, THERE IS A GIRL FACING THE AD INDUSTRY'S ATTACKS ON HER SELF-ESTEEM. FOR EVERY GIRL WHO TAKES A STEP TOWARD HER LIBERATION, THERE IS A BOY WHO FINDS THE WAY TO FREEDOM A LITTLE EASIER.



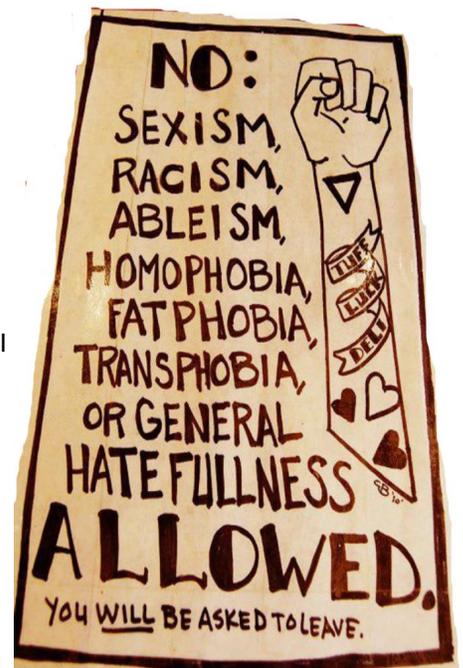
Being An Ally
James Meinert
Roundtable, 2013

As noted elsewhere in this Round Table, sexism is the systematic cultural and institutional mistreatment of women in society. Being an ally means fighting against this systemic oppression in spite of the fact that its not directed at you. Being an ally and fighting against sexism is something I think all men want deep down. We got confused being raised in a system of male domination and we are used by this system of oppression as the oppressors. And that sucks. Nobody truly wants to be in an oppressor role. Below I'll share some of my insights and growth from my journey towards being an ally. If you are wanting a list of things to do or not do, well there isn't one, but I'll put some online links at the end to articles that may help in that direction.

When I was a sophomore in high school, a close friend of mine told me and a couple other guys she trusted that she was raped by a guy we all knew. I felt so much rage and didn't know what to do with it. I just sat and listened and reassured her that it wasn't her fault, she didn't do anything wrong etc. Later I talked with those guy friends about how messed up it was and how we would never do that. This fierce desire rose up in me that I now recognize as the desire to end sexism and male domination -- at the time I just knew I had to do something about it in my life, rather than doing nothing. I never reported the guy or told him I knew or punched him in the face (though I wanted to). But I began realizing the importance of being a friend to women and being available. I think somehow that is a first step toward being an ally-- being someone who can be trusted by women even though you mess up.

Over my four years in college, five more of my female friends confided in me about being raped. All of them asked me not to do anything or say anything. They just wanted support and to have it known by some people that it happened. My sense of futility grew though, and so I joined UNA, a feminist organization. We males in the group didn't do much, but I could tell it was significant that we came, that we participated, and that we backed the ideas and leadership of the women in the group. I think part of being an ally is moving from the personal to the political; organizing and supporting anti-sexism work wherever you may find it. Also a key part is affirming women's leadership. Because of our different conditioning, women will lead differently than men and men often will critique and tear down their leadership. Being an ally means not only creating space for women to take charge but supporting that leadership.

A little while back I was sitting in a circle of people (something that happens more often than you may think in the groups I run in) and we were working on making a decision together. We were trying to move towards consensus and we were gradually making our way in the meandering fashion it often goes. I was feeling pretty relaxed about the process, participating and observing at the same time. So I was surprised when one of the other men in the group began to complain. What he said went something along these lines: "Its been really hard for me to sit in this meeting because I'm trying to be a respectful man and a good ally by stepping back to let the women step forward, but its been really hard on me to watch the women flounder in this meeting and to feel so frustrated that the meeting isn't going anywhere." "Oh Sh** " I thought to myself. I could see what was happening. Here was a man feeling frustrated because he wasn't acting on his enculturation to be dominant, and to go against that enculturation felt so hard he began demanding the attention and acknowledgement of the women in the group for how hard he was trying and how hard it was on him. I thought I should do something to stop it. I knew it would be better to do something than nothing. But I wasn't feeling



courageous and I didn't feel the trust in this group to do anything. So then I felt bad for doing nothing and I stood up and walked out of the group.

Being an ally means noticing when it feels hard to go against your conditioning and not getting women to nurture you through that difficulty. Find some other men to process that with. It also means not doing nothing. I was scared to do the wrong thing or to interrupt something that seemed charged. In retrospect it's easy to see that I should have done something; at least I might have pointed out my analysis of what was happening.

Being an ally can mean feeling frustrated a lot and failing a lot, but that's no reason not to do something. When I have had the courage to interrupt sexism it has felt almost life threatening, so I know why men don't do it all that often. We've all seen, either in real life or in movies, women and other men get beat up and sometimes killed for standing up to a man. So I understand why a man may not want to. Too bad. Its time to start checking your privilege. Whatever may happen when you interrupt sexism taking place, you'll probably live through it and it may even strengthen your relationship with all the other people involved. We trust people more when they stand up for what they believe in rather than avoid conflict. So no more excuses.

I live with a woman so I get to see some how internalized sexism makes her question herself, feel bad and blame herself, feel like she has to take care of me etc. Being her ally often means reminding her that she gets to be pissed off at me when I mess up, that whatever she feels bad about isn't really her fault, and that she is extremely intelligent, courageous, and a good leader. All these things are true, so its easy for me to see it. I used to get so impatient with women in my life for not being able to see how amazing they are, but I've realized that part of being a good ally is being able to think clearly enough about the particular women to see what holds them back and gently remind them the truth about them they have forgotten. A friend described this as, "singing them their own song when they have forgotten the words."

Recently a good (female) friend of mine asked me to talk to two men whose lack of awareness around sexism and male dominance was really starting to bug her. I listened and affirmed that being around those guys must be difficult. And then did nothing. I didn't want to be the guy that had to initiate that conversation. It's one thing to swoop in like a superhero and stop sexism in the act, its a whole other thing to pull a guy aside and have a conversation with him. So a while later she told me how frustrated and disappointed she was with me. I wanted to make excuses but didn't even have any. I think being an ally means listening to the targeted group when they are telling you 'what's up' about your own sexism and not trying to defend it and it also means doing the uncomfortable thing. Men want to stop sexism if it looks heroic and we still get to be saviors and in charge. What our culture needs to shatter sexism's hold on us is normal guys to start having conversations with each other.



Finally, and maybe I shouldn't even ask this question, but why be an ally? Sometimes this question is implied by other men. What's in it for me? If men have it so good then why should we rock the boat? Well, I don't think we have it that good really. Sexism has set us up to be agents of oppression. There is a severe psychological toll on all of us whether we embrace or resist the role. To fight against sexism begins the process of getting our full human selves back. Fighting sexism also starts the process of having full and free friendships and relationships with women which are much more fulfilling than ones where both sides are acting out their prescribed role of oppressor and oppressed. That freedom and fullness is worth it.

Internalized Sexism

Mary Densmore

Roundtable, 2013

Last spring on a warm day in the middle of a children's yoga class I lifted my arms over head to lead us all in some side stretching and was overwhelmingly intrigued by my third grade students' reaction to my unshaven armpits. Perhaps because of their age and inhibition hold back, their comments were loud, honest, and cruel. I momentarily froze hearing them say "disgusting!" or "gross!" or "she looks like a man" but then quickly I relaxed and invited them to come closer for a better look and ask more questions. As I later recounted the experience, I realized their comments were a mere reflection of my own thoughts at times. Raised as a woman in our culture, I didn't get the message that it was beautiful and feminine to have body hair. In fact I often will examine my leg hair, trying to find the longest one like it's some sort of game, but doing it with fascination that I am looking at my own body. Pretty strange how someone like me, in tune with sexism and how it functions in the world and actively giving my best effort to put an end to it, can still catch myself struggling at times with something so basic as not shaving my legs.

Just recently, I emailed Teka to apologize for not coming to Winter Outreach meetings. In the past I often attended them (or at least tried to). I would often leave the meetings not having had contributed or having said anything and uncertain of a role I could play in the group, and ultimately I made the decision to spend my time other ways.

Reflecting now as I write this article, I was struggling to validate that my presence as a young woman was a positive and necessary part of the meetings. I don't doubt for a second that others at the meetings would assure me I had a lot to contribute, but the story I was telling myself was that there was no point of me going because I never have any good ideas, and even if I did somehow manage to convince myself I had a good idea or two, I probably wouldn't even have the confidence to share them with the group.

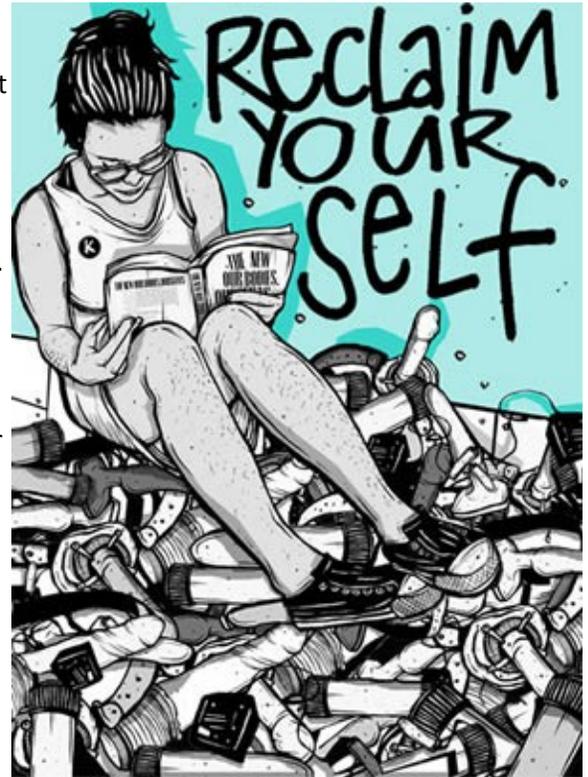
I am sure I could come up with more stories like these. Stories that I'm not particularly proud of or inspired by because they fail to express who I really am and my own giftedness. Instead, it's just a confused me struggling with internalized sexism. If sexism tells us that we need to look a certain way, or that we are not intelligent, or strong or powerful, we have to be careful not to take in these untrue ideas and start believing them. Simply put, internalized sexism is the way we are left with sexist attitudes towards ourselves and each other. And because sexism exists in our society, almost every woman has some feelings or ideas rooted in her about the systematic mistreatment and invalidation of women.

Internalized sexism can take two forms. First, we take up sexist attitudes towards ourselves. The examples in my own life are abundant: I forget to remember how hard working, strong, capable, intelligent, good or brave I am, noticing it in others but not in myself. I sometimes settle for less than what I really want, deferring to other's preferences over my own desires and invalidating what's true to me. In group settings with people I like or admire but don't know very well, I feel like I don't have much to say, fearing whatever I say will sound unintelligent and be invalidated. I may devalue my own work with attitudes like "I am just a teacher, and I only really work part-time anyways" (instead of recognizing the impact my job has on over 400 kids lives every week) or "I guess I know a little about gardening" (versus claiming the importance my role has in New Roots Urban Farm.) I also constantly think I am not good at explaining things, but have the idea that James, my male partner, is very articulate and can explain things well.

This is just a slight taste of what internalized sexism directed at myself looks like in my own life, but each woman has her own story and history of ways she was told she's not entirely perfect. Sexism is merciless and benefits from us continually feeling bad about ourselves. Everywhere we turn we are bombarded with pictures of the most unnatural women--thin, tan, tall, and covered in make-up without the slightest bit of body hair and wearing the most trendy clothes. It's no wonder that around 7 million women in the US suffer from eating disorders; we are stuck when the messages given to us don't line up with reality. At some point we tell ourselves there must be something wrong with us and thus begin the cycle of internalized sexism.

The second face of internalized sexism is when we take up sexist attitudes towards other women. This can include when we feel or act competitive towards each other; either openly competing or withdrawing from competition all together. But also includes how we are drawn to compare ourselves to each other in often unhelpful ways. When I stopped shaving as an intentional choice to not go along with the way women's bodies are objectified, I then really began noticing other women's leg hair...each time seeing my own as the darkest and most unattractive.

Also, it's sometimes hard for us to rejoice in each other's successes and achievements, notably around women leaders. This likely occurs out of painful emotion: Because of sexism, women are not encouraged to take on leadership roles or step into places of power in our society. As we see other women take on leadership and live in ways that push against sexism, it increases our own feelings of inadequacy, or because we are used to not noticing our own achievements, we resent someone getting the attention we never had. I was out of the country for the 2008 election and the two years prior, but when I came home that December just after Obama won, I was really struck how Sarah Palin was portrayed in the media as a big joke. My relatives who likely voted for her, were in near hysterics showing me youtube spoofs of her. While I might not personally agree with her politics, I questioned how many of the jabs made at her were because she was a woman. After all who heard anything this past election about Paul Ryan? I don't recall any Saturday Night Live skits about his personal life.



Lastly, a big way internalized sexism exists and continues to do so is by failing to acknowledge that sexism is real. We are told that it's all in our minds, but many people still don't have accurate information about the reality of sexism for women. It's confusing for us because after so many years of struggling with sexism we come to enjoy cleaning, raising children, taking on supportive tasks, etc. rather than fixing something, taking time for ourselves, and taking on leadership. While we shouldn't starve ourselves of the things in life we love, we must have a critical eye and question why is it that we love taking on these tasks? Is it because they feel so natural and comfortable for us? Is this because of the way we've come to internalize sexism?

Despite the harsh reality of sexism and the way we might have come to internalize it, there are many small and big steps we can take to move away from it's negative impact on us. The following are just a few ideas: We can consciously create space in our lives to appreciate ourselves and our accomplishments; taking time at the beginning or ending of each day to recall the significance of our work. We can decide that our relationships with other women are essential to our lives and spend time developing these friendships and listening to each others' life stories. We can take action in the world on the things that are most important to us, not leaving room for discouragement or doubt. We can decide that the exact way we are is totally female and totally perfect in every way, not just making room to appreciate our magnificent bodies but also our thoughts. We can learn about the ways in which women who are different from us have been oppressed and become reliable allies to each other, actively working against racism and classism. We can love the men in our lives, but also expect that they be informed, active allies for our liberation. And lastly, because internalized sexism looks differently for everyone, the best thing we can do is find specific ways to counteract and work against the way internalized sexism looks in our individual lives.

You might not know that I struggle articulating my thoughts or explaining things, but instead of believing that to be true, I chose to write this article. And while that is just one small step towards working against my own internalized sexism, I know that everyday I will continue to make choices to reaffirm the woman I really am; embracing my past and the pain and struggle that goes along with it, but looking into the future where we all stand arm and arm together reminding each other that we are perfect, reminding ourselves that we need each other, and not being afraid to fight for it.

Feminist Spirituality:

- Regards the human race as one humanity in (varied) genders and sets out to make the fullness of humanity available to (all) of them.
- More than that, it undertakes to release the energy of the human race. When female talents, gifts, and ideas become accessible to the human enterprise unhindered by social barriers or official limitations, then, and only then...will we get a glimpse of the full face of (the Divine).
- Commits itself to the equality, dignity, and humanity of all persons to such an extent that it sets out to secure the societal changes necessary to achieve that reality for both women and men...
- The real development of the human race...depends on the equal partnership of women and men, not the oppression of one for the indulgence of the other. Feminism makes humans of us all.

Joan d. Chittister:

Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men



Sexism in the Catholic Church - Jenn Lay

What the world knows today as the Roman Catholic Church, wasn't always Roman or a Church for that matter. The community that came together inspired by the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ, didn't set out to create a global patriarchy of men in fancy robes leading worship in gold and marble palaces. We know from the scriptures that Jesus sought to create a beloved community of equals, where sharing and simplicity were valued, where all were welcome to the table, where prayer and action were important, and where two by two his followers were sent to spread the good news to all with ears to hear. It is also known that women played an important role in spreading the message of Jesus and building communities far and wide. There was Junia (Romans 16:7), Pheobe (Rom 16:1-2), Priscilla (Romans 16:3-4), Nympha (Col 4:15), and many women deacons (1 Tim 3:11), just to name a few mentioned in scripture. There are many more unnamed women who have been discovered through archeological and historical research studies.

Yet, the institution of the Roman Catholic Church that we find ourselves with today is a far cry from the model and practice of this early Christian community. It is easy to identify the blatant sexism that exists when the institution of the Church is comprised of an all-male hierarchy of concentrated power and control. Women are not welcomed or respected in their vocational call to the priesthood or diaconate. Women's Religious Orders not only have no voice at the table when it comes to decision making and Church teaching, but are also under the control and scrutiny of Vatican watchdogs trying to limit the prophetic work they are doing in the world. The Vatican mandate appointing a team of three bishops to oversee the reform of the Leadership Conference for Women Religious explicitly stated that one of the three main areas of concern was "radical feminism," stating there was "a prevalence of certain radical feminist themes" in their conferences and presentations sponsored by LCWR and also citing concern about their "commentaries on 'patriarchy.'"¹ What this letter to LCWR seeks to do with its mandated reforms is to silence the prophetic voice and witness of women in our Church who challenge the patriarchy and sexism of the Church. In addition to women religious, feminist theologians who offer new insights and scholarship on the divine feminine and women's experience of God are also often silenced and shunned for challenging the traditional all male image of God.

It is this prevailing male image of God and the masculine language used to speak about 'Him,' that I think is the most harmful part of the sexism that exists within the Catholic Church, because its not about what you can or can't do, it's about who you fundamentally are in relation to your Creator and all of creation. This mode of sexism is hidden in the Church under the guise of Truth, or God's ordained hierarchy of God – Man – Woman. It is lived out in speaking of God solely in male images and language, and the combined belief that women due to our anatomy cannot as fully image and act in the person of Christ because Christ was a man. God's maleness becomes contingent on Christ's penis, as if the most important part of Jesus' divinity are the sex organs he was born with. Drawing on Mary Daly's famous words, "If God is male, then male is God," I would suggest that the theology of the patriarchs of the Church have determined that if a man was God, then God must be a man.

This is the message I took in, whether consciously or subconsciously, since I was born and raised in the Catholic Church. I was not aware of how deeply this internalized sexism penetrated my life, my faith, and my understanding of self until it was challenged in a very direct way by a woman doing the very thing that I had been told growing up women could never do: act in the image of Christ by being a priest. This woman who rocked my world was an Anglican priest working and ministering in a small community in El Salvador. What years of male language, images, and teachings had done was lead me to believe that men were closer to God, could more fully image God, and had different God given gifts and talents that put them in leadership roles which women simply could not participate in. And that was all ok, because women had our special place in the church too; sort of a separate but equal type mentality. But once my eyes and mind were broken open to a new reality, I was able to more fully love and embrace my own holiness and the holiness of all women. Hungry to learn more, I went on a divine feminine binge.

I wanted to learn everything I could about women and the Church. I sought out literature and images of God as mother, God as woman, women in the Church, and women's experience of the divine. I took classes in Theology and Women's Studies, and explored in greater depth women in scripture and feminist theology. There is a wealth of information out there, and growing by the day. There are many brilliant feminist theologians and new branches of theology in womanist and mujerista theology, offering the perspectives of black and latino women in their experience of the divine, and ecofeminist theology looking at the connection of environmental destruction and the oppression of women.

I felt as though half of humanity and hence half of divinity had been denied and hidden from me all these years, and I wanted that other half in which I could find myself and a wider understanding of the mystery of God. I started speaking of God solely in feminine language and images to combat years of the opposite. It became painful to sit through a traditional Roman Catholic mass with all the Hes, Hims, and Fathers, and not seeing anyone who imaged myself up on the altar in celebration. Thankfully there were brave women within my city who followed their own vocational call and created a Roman Catholic Church where all were welcome and all manner of language was used to describe the mystery of God.

I was blessed to have attended the ordinations of two of these Roman Catholic Women Priests. For a young Catholic woman to be sitting in the pews and look up at an altar lined with women in priestly garments, saying the prayers, and blessing the bread and wine brought tears to my eyes and moved my soul. Because I knew that if I had a daughter some day, unlike me, she would never doubt her place at the table, her holiness in the divine image, and her God given gifts and talents to continue what the early Christian community set out to do: spread the Good News and build communities of equals where all was shared and justice and prayer were a part of every day life. So where do we go and what do we do as a people of faith who want to combat the sexism within the Catholic tradition?

We must support one another in challenging the sexism of the Church. It is not only women who need to know about the amazing women throughout the history of our Catholic Church, about the many words and images we can use to speak about God and share our experiences, and about our God given right to follow our vocational call, whatever that might be. Men in the church equally need to learn about these things for themselves and for the larger community. God is not limited to the male experience. In denying the important role of women in the Church and the divine feminine, the Church is limiting itself and its members in their knowledge and experience of God, and thus limits the impact we can have in the world. All of humanity was created in the image of God and all of humanity thus reflects the divine image. If the Church genuinely seeks to follow the words and life of Jesus Christ, then it must work to create a community of equals where we love one another, listen to one another, and encourage one another to continue exploring and growing in our understanding and relationship with the infinite mystery of God while using the gifts and talents we have been given.

1. (<http://www.usccb.org/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=55544>)

The Anti-Sexist, Anti-Heterosexist Community Checklist:

How Inclusive is your Community?

Leadership & Decision Making

1. Patriarchy encourages male leadership, with women in supporting roles, making the decisions happen: “Man proposes, woman disposes.”
 1. Does your community reflect this saying? Who are the strong voices, are all voices heard?
 2. How can you amplify the voices of those folks in your community that are less heard?
2. Male dominance can create a mindset of “there is one right answer, and I know what it is” which stymies conversation and consensus. Does this mindset influence your community? How do you deal with it?

Resistance

1. Who are the leaders in resistance campaigns- do you take the steps to ensure equal representation of genders?
2. Do you address the intersectionality of oppression, and seek to challenge all forms of oppression?
3. Does your community pay as much attention to process as it does outcomes of resistance campaigns?

Our Public Interactions

1. Do you publicize that your community accepts and affirms LGBTQ people, both as community members and as guests - in your newsletters, online presence, signs in the house, etc?
 2. Do you publicly support equal rights for women, especially in the realm of religion?
 3. Do you have a communal understanding and agreement about how you will respond to homophobic, sexist, or transphobic language, from guests or volunteers, as individuals and as a community?
-

Liturgy

1. Does your community host opportunities for prayer and spirituality that are not male dominated?
2. Do you use non-sexist language in liturgy and worship?
3. Challenge sexist and homophobic policies in Church?

Work

1. Patriarchy encourages socially-constructed gender roles (that tend to benefit men in acquiring wealth). How are you mirroring or defying these sexist gender roles?
2. If you do hospitality, do you provide restrooms that are strictly within a gender binary (one for males, one for females,) or do you provide a restroom for people of all gender identities?
3. What work is most celebrated and prized in your community - nurturing or building/repairing, hospitality or doing resistance?

Community Culture and Relationships

1. Patriarchy equates women with reproduction - how do you appreciate the gifts and choices of all our members, whether or not they choose to have children?
2. Boys and men in a patriarchal society are taught to rely on joking and superficiality to forge relationships with other men, often in order to “not be gay”. Are men able to forge deep, authentic relationships with other men, rather than mirroring this phenomenon?
3. Do you provide safe spaces where community members (from both dominant and targeted groups) can share about their wounds from sexism and heterosexism?

For Allies: Dismantling our Distancing Behaviors

People within dominant groups (males, “white” people, people without disabilities, heterosexuals, etc.) often employ these techniques to avoid acknowledging and acting on oppression.

Tactic	Explanation
Denial	Denial of existence or responsibility for the oppression. When an issue involves LGBTQ justice: “It’s not straight people’s fault” or “They can get married in some states, so they should be satisfied”
Requiring Specific Definitions	Nitpicking about definitions of oppression to prove their existence, when you wouldn’t do the same for other subjects. “Is he really so oppressed? After all, he is a male-to-female, pre-operative transgender person.”
Minimizing or Deflecting	Asserting that other social problems are just as, if not more serious than this oppression: “Women in the U.S. don’t have it bad at all – just look at Afghanistan.” “Poverty is a much worse problem than sexism is”
Blaming the Targeted Group & Competing Victimization	When faced with police brutality, our first question is, “What was the ‘victim’ doing wrong?” “The marriage equality issue is taking the spotlight from our anti-war work – can’t they take it easy?”
Over-Analyzing	Debating the problem ad nauseum without taking any action
Scapegoating	Shifting conversation to an extreme example of <i>someone else’s</i> oppressive behavior. The accusing person feel righteous, and meaningful discussion is closed down. “Sure, heterosexism is present everywhere in society, and in the church. But you should listen to my mother-in-law - she’s so homophobic! It’s terrible!”
They Just Didn’t Know	When soup line guests make sexist or derogatory comments towards women volunteers: “It was only a joke, don’t take everything so seriously. They don’t know any better.”
Targeting the Expert	Without a real relationship, asking a member of a targeted group to represent all others, in a tokenistic way. “What do bisexuals think about this?”
Claiming Innocence	“We don’t have any LGBTQ people in my community, so we don’t have a problem with heterosexism or homophobia”
Savior Complex*	Unrealistic view of self as indispensable to targeted group without acknowledgment of privilege dynamics present. Desperation to help, without being asked. “White hero” complex.
Superiority Complex*	Inappropriately taking leadership positions within communities of targeted people; overestimation of our education and skills with an “I know best” attitude
Sympathy Trap*	Outrage over injustice morphs into pity, causing us to act in disempowering, paternalistic ways: over-analysis without action, focusing only on oppression of targeted groups and ignoring groups’ resources and successes.

*From Witnessing Whiteness, Shelly Tochluk

Attitudes of Allies

I do not expect to be absolved for my own heterosexism or sexism, or for the oppression my dominant group has incurred, either by the targets of this oppression, or by the good works I do.	My work is not a penance for the sins of white, wealthy, or straight people. I don't need to anyone's thanks to challenge oppression.
I intentionally seek to educate myself on issues of sexism, and heterosexism - especially those oppressions with which I'm uncomfortable or inexperienced.	I don't expect members of targeted groups to advocate for themselves to members of dominant groups. I consider "ally" to be more of a journey and an attitude than a final, static goal.
I talk about sexism and homophobia at community dinner, at work, and with friends. When I do, I acknowledge that people in targeted groups have been talking about these subjects for a long time, and have been routinely ignored in the process.	I remember that privilege is not having to deal with "-isms" all of the time. I do the inner work and examine how my own attitudes reinforce or combat oppression.
I ask for feedback from the women I work with, and I'm willing to change based on that feedback. I don't ask them to prove that sexism exists.	I contribute time, talent, or treasure to organizations that confront homophobia and sexism.
I am hyper-vigilant about interrupting oppression (challenging sexist and homophobic jokes, comments or references, etc), but not hyper-arrogant about the badge of "ally".	When I say something that is unintentionally sexist or heterosexist, I accept challenge graciously, knowing that challenge provides an opportunity for growth.
Despite my best intentions, I have blind spots and make mistakes. I realize "it's not about me," and I avoid over-personalizing issues that folks from targeted groups raise.	I choose to overcome my fear and guilt, and seek out relationships with people of targeted groups that are genuine and honest.

Questions for Reflection

- Distancing Tactics: In what situations have you used any of these distancing tactics?
- Have you seen the distancing tactics used in your community? How did people respond?
- What is your reaction to "Attitudes of Allies" - uncomfortable, inspired, angry, daunted? Why do you think this is your reaction?
- What are your individual strengths and weaknesses in regards to "Attitudes of Allies"?
- Have you seen these attitudes put into action in your community – if so, how? If not, any guesses why?

Characteristics of Internalized Sexism and Internalized Homophobia:

Internalized Sexism: the involuntary belief by girls and women that the lies, stereotypes and myths about girls and women that are promoted within a sexist society, Are TRUE; and the replaying of these messages at oneself and other females, which reinforces sexism and may manifest in the following ways:

- Belief that you are incapable or less capable than a man
- Belief that you are unattractive or valuable because of your appearance
- Hatred or feeling of being uncomfortable with your own body
- Judge women more harshly than men
- Greater willingness to support male leadership
- Greater comfort with male theology and language for the sacred
- Feeling uncomfortable with women of different racial/class backgrounds
- Feelings of superiority on the part of white women/ young women
- Feelings of inferiority on the part of women of color/ older women
- Belittling one's accomplishments
- Feeling like you have nothing to contribute or can't be articulate
- Giving males more time and attention
- Seeking validation/attention from men
- Believing that the needs of others are more important than your own



Internalized homophobia: the involuntary internalization of the negative stereotypes, beliefs, prejudice and hatred targeted at homosexuals and the replaying of these messages at oneself and others who are perceived as homosexual. Internalized homophobia may manifest in the following ways:

- Doubting your goodness
- Feeling unwanted and that you don't belong
- Doubting that your relationships are as significant as heterosexual relationships
- Believing stereotypes about people with your sexual orientation
- Horizontal hostility: judging and criticizing others of your targeted group
- Self hatred (the extreme version is *dystonic homophobia*: when one's sexual orientation is at odds with society's heteronormativity and one's self self-image of heterosexuality. The discordance can cause clinical depression and is linked to a higher incidence of suicide upon LGBT youth (up to 30%).
- Feelings of isolation/ not being understood
- Defensiveness—feelings of being under attack
- Denial of one's sexual orientation
- Distancing oneself from other people in the LBGTQ community
- Devaluing your life choices and accomplishments
- Perfectionism, in response to being scrutinized.

Interrupting Oppressive Moments: Assertiveness Model

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

- Desmond Tutu

Allies who choose not to interrupt oppressive moments are complicit in allowing oppression to go unchallenged. We want our fellow community members to have empathy for who we are, and we want to be allies for each other, our guests and volunteers. With practice, and built upon a foundation of a loving and trusting community, confronting oppression can be less intimidating; your community might even develop a shorthand for it.

Assertiveness Model

- **Breathe** - Ground yourself
- **Name the behavior** - Call out the remark, not the person. Naming a comment as sexist or homophobic is difficult; it counters our social conditioning to fit in and please.
- **Name how the behavior makes you feel OR describe the impact of the behavior** - It helps the relationship and interaction to name your feelings. It can also be helpful to educate the person on why the comment is oppressive.
- **Give a Direction** - Ask for the person to reconsider their comment, to avoid making such comments in the future, etc.
- **Stay** - Depending on the nature of your relationship (is the person a close friend, or someone you've just met?) be willing to stay in the conversation, keep engaging in the email conversation, or pursue it later.

Example

- **Volunteer:** I'm glad you're reaching out to black churches for the Close Guantanamo campaign, but they're too busy with their food pantries and other social services to think about international issues. Maybe you should focus your organizing energy in other directions?
- **You:** (Calming breath). You're making a generalization that African Americans in these churches don't think about the world around them, and I'm uncomfortable with that idea - it has racist undertones. I'd think we need to be careful about these kinds of generalizations and the harm they can do. What do you think?



Practice Scenarios for Interrupting Oppression

In groups of 3, take turns responding to each scenario, using the Assertiveness Model, if it's helpful. Discuss different options for each. Respond as if you are really responding to the situation - don't paraphrase. We're practicing different language and phrasings to get more comfortable confronting oppression!

1. A Boy Scout Troop wants to volunteer at your CW house. At the community meeting, you want to bring up their anti-LGBT stance in relation to your values as a house. Here's what you say:
2. A soup line guest is heckling your community member, who happens to be a lesbian: "Baby, where's your boyfriend? You need a man in your life! Why don't you have a husband?" What do you say?
3. During a meeting, the men have done most of the talking. A new topic is introduced; what do you say?
4. Some volunteers are discussing the Catholic Church: "The stuff about women being priests is a waste of time. We should be working to end war, which is the ultimate oppression." What do you say?
5. Your community, which does hospitality for women, gets a call from a potential guest who is transgender (She was born a biological male and identifies as female). Someone says, "The guests and volunteers are going to be uncomfortable. I don't think she should stay here." How do you respond?
6. A guest in your house of hospitality won't pick up her baby when he starts crying. She says that if she spoils him too much, he'll turn into a fag. What do you say?
7. You're at your community sponsored liturgy, which has a practice of using non-sexist language. An invited priest is saying mass, and uses the 'traditional' he's, Lords, and hims when referring to God. What do you do?
8. A female community member is on house, and weary from listening at length to a guest. She's joined by a few male community members, when another guest happens to come in, very upset and wanting to talk. The men wander out, while the woman again does the listening. How do you talk to the men about this?
9. Some high school volunteers are playing with some of the kids in the house. They are asking the boys if they have girlfriends and the girls if they have boyfriends. How might you respond to them?
10. A new community member is giving a tour to some adults. As she passes her bisexual community member, she introduces the group, and "outs" Paul: "And this is Paul, he works on lots of pro-gay issues, like marriage equality." What do you say to your new community member?

Communal Strategies for Action

- **Encourage Inner Work as a Community**
 - Without the difficult work of examining our own prejudices, attitudes and behaviors, communal strategies will fall short. As a community, encourage and create structures for members to educate themselves, to journal, and to discuss oppression and privilege.
- **Examine your Communal Structures through an Anti-Sexism, Anti-Heterosexim Lens:**
 - Liturgy
 - How your house is funded, staffed, etc.
 - What your public face is
 - Community Culture (What is celebrated? What are the expectations of behavior? How do we interact?)
 - Leadership & Decision Making (How are decisions made, in and out of meetings? What voices are most strongly heard, and do roles fall into sexist gender roles?)
 - What coalitions do we build – what kinds of groups do we seek out?
- **Host Fishbowls and Listening Sessions**
 - A small group openly discusses an issue, surrounded by the larger group. The fishbowl helps promote understanding and is useful when some people have a lot of information, experience or interpersonal dynamics that others might not share. People within the fishbowl can alternate between people in dominant or targeted groups. Women can talk about sexism they experience in community, and then men can share how patriarchy has hurt them.
- **Do Community Check Ins**
 - Within meetings, have regular time to discuss a particular oppression. Where did you notice racism this week - within yourself, in the world? Where did you succeed and fail in combatting heterosexism this week?
- **Take a Retreat**
 - Take time away to address a specific oppression in a community-building format. Develop a common language, understanding, and expectations about the oppressions and power dynamics that influence your community interactions.
- **Host Support Groups**
 - Outside of the community meeting, host a regular gathering, as a safe space to discuss internalized sexism, homophobia, etc.
- **Communal Agreements: Being Allies for Each Other**
 - Discuss and create shared expectations for each other in regards to your anti-oppression work. Some possible examples of communal expectations:
 - Men will commit to being allies for women when discussions of sexism and patriarchy arise
 - Straight people will handle anti-LGBTQ comments made by volunteers

More Specific Ideas for Communal Action

Be public in your support of LGBTQ individuals and their relationships:

- Hanging Rainbow Flags etc.
- Post a statement: This is an open and affirming place.....
- Include this statement in your newsletter, website, etc.
- Celebrate International Womens Day and National Coming Out Day

Resistance

- Host discussions on issues that affect the LGBTQ community
- Show up for actions around queer issues.
- Build coalitions with feminist groups, LGBTQ advocacy groups
- In resistance campaigns, ensure equal representation between genders in leadership

Spirituality

- Delve into the feminist theology and gay-liberation theology
- Worship in a way that celebrates the spiritual insights and leadership of all people
- Challenge sexism and homophobia in religious institutions

Communal Relationships

- Ask LGBTQs and women for feedback on how their identity shapes their experience of life in community.
- Create support groups for women and LGBTQ individuals to talk about their experience of sexism and heterosexism within the Catholic Worker
- Develop a communal understanding and agreement about how you will respond to homophobic, sexist, or transphobic language, from guests or volunteers, as individuals and as a community?
- Host book groups and events to educate community about sexism and heterosexism

Consider your participation with groups that discriminate against women or LGBTQs:

- Humbly ask them to change their policies
- Consider not participating with them
- Build relationships with them and share your insights
- If you do choose to participate in such a group, commit to do so as an agent for change (“critical acquiescence”)

Seize the Dream Now

Resources and Further Reading

- “Being an Ally versus Being a Nice Person” - Nadirah Adeye
- “Dear male allies: your sexism looks a bit like my racism” – geekfeminism.org
- Nola Feminist Allies
- [Readings for Diversity and Social Justice](#) – amazing thorough treatment of all the “isms”
- *Dismantling Racism: A Resource Book for Social Change Groups* – available for download at westernstatescenter.org
- [Voices from the Catholic Worker- by Rosalie G. Riegler](#)
- [The Catholic Worker After Dorothy: Practicing the Works of Mercy in a New Generation – Dan McKanan](#)
- culturalbridgestojustice.org
- understandingprejudice.org
- The American Psychological Association has great beginners resources on LGBT issues of all kinds

THE CATHOLIC WORKER IS A PLACE OF LOVE, ACCEPTANCE, AND CELEBRATION!

LET'S CELEBRATE...

WOMEN

WHO ARE STILL PAID LESS THAN MEN,
OFTEN TREATED AS SEXUAL OBJECTS,
AND TAUGHT TO DEFER TO MEN

ELDERS AND YOUTH

WHO ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED,
IGNORED AND PATRONIZED

PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

WHILE THEY CONTRIBUTE MUCH TO OUR
SOCIETY, MANY BELIEVE THEY DO NOT
DESERVE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

PEOPLE WHO ARE LESBIAN, GAY & BISEXUAL

WHOSE RELATIONSHIPS ARE CONSIDERED
SECOND-CLASS BY SOCIETY

PEOPLE OF COLOR

WHO ARE SURVIVORS OF
GENOCIDE, SLAVERY,
LYNCHINGS, HUNDREDS OF
YEARS OF TERRORISM BY
THE WHITE POWER
STRUCTURE

TRANSGENDERED PEOPLE

WHO FACE DISCRIMINATION, HATE
CRIMES, WHO ARE TAUNTED AND
TREATED LESS THAN HUMAN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

WHO ARE AMONG THE POOREST
PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY; CONSIDERED
INFERIOR, A BURDEN TO SOCIETY

LOW INCOME PEOPLE

WHO ARE OFTEN BLAMED FOR
THEIR POVERTY

...ALL PEOPLE CREATED BY GOD!

LET'S CREATE A HOME WHERE...

WE TREAT EACH OTHER WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

WE CAN ALL GIVE AND
RECEIVE LOVE

WE SAY NO TO DISCRIMINATION,
HATEFUL LANGUAGE, AND SYSTEMS
THAT OPPRESS OTHERS

WE CAN ALL LIVE WITHOUT FEAR

...WE BUILD A NEW SOCIETY WITHIN
THE SHELL OF THE OLD