

THE Round Table

Fall 2013

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin



Why This Issue?

I bet you're thinking something like this: "I'm not gonna read this one - sexism? Really? With wars, climate change and poverty breathing down our throats, they're writing about sexism? (And jeez, didn't we take care of all that in the 70s?)" Well, bear with us for a few pages, and you might just jump onto our bandwagon. Let's start by picturing a city, one that's completely enveloped in smog 365 days of the year. If you'd lived there all your life, the smog would be hard to describe. It's everywhere and permeates all of life. It hinders some people more than others, and some are more aware of it than others.

Sexism (and other oppressions like it) is kind of like smog; despite its pervasiveness, we have a hard time naming and challenging it. It often seems more useful to focus on specific issues (health care reform, the crisis in Syria, drones) than on the foundational systems that give rise to them. There's a problem with this approach though: unless we do intentional work to acknowledge and dismantle these very present systems of domination (like racism, sexism, heterosexism, and racism) that fuel injustice and war, they tend to be mirrored and even amplified in our opinions, in our interactions with each other, and in our organizations - no matter how radical or full of "good people" the organization is. (The Catholic Worker is a good example of this phenomenon when it comes to racism - we do lots of specific resistance work that has to do with race, but we mostly don't look inward at our own communities' patterns of racism. Therefore, as a mostly white movement, we tend to reproduce racist structures, and have a truckload of blind spots to address.)

Sexism is a smog that permeates our lives, whether we choose to admit its presence or not. What does this smog look like, you ask? Carolyn Griffeth, in her introductory article, observes that patriarchal society more highly values men and masculine-identified values. Where have you seen this manifest with friends, family, and national priorities? Braden Tobin describes the patriarchal gender roles that our society enforces: Joey gets the action figures with guns and is encouraged to be aloof, authoritative, and strong, while Susie gets the pink dolls, and is conditioned to take care of others. Jenn Lay names the powerful dynamics of sexism in the Catholic Church, discussing the consequences of being raised with a male-centered language, teachings, and images of God. Teka Childress describes her first-hand experience of sexism as she ages. In a poignant piece from a Karen House guest, Michelle Perry shares a story that calls out the many faces of male domination. My article "Say it Ain't So!" encourages CW communities to actively challenge the underlying ideologies - especially patriarchy - of the injustices we resist, noting that the CW is often a place where men have the strongest voices, where people of color do not find a home, and where LGBTQ people feel unsafe.

We can each sign up for smog-clearing duty. Mary Densmore helps unpack the phenomenon of denial: "A big way internalized sexism exists...is by failing to acknowledge that sexism is real. We are told that it's all in our minds, and that isn't it great there are so many female doctors these days..." Jamala Rogers suggests that "Our progressive movements must...dethrone white supremacy and sexism wherever they raise their ugly heads." James Meinert shares wisdom from his journey in becoming a better male ally to women.

In our regular columns, Annjie Schiefelbein shares about the Karen House community's journey in better balancing the values of self-care with care for the other. Mike Baldwin shares about the summer in the city from his vantage point at Little House, and Ellen Rehg, who is writing a book about Ann Manganaro's life, shares some highlights of this Karen House founders' story.

We can't stop war unless we dismantle the oppression that is at its core. And we can't dismantle oppression until we start looking at ourselves and our communities with humility, honesty, and courage. Here's to clearing the air of the smog; here's to dismantling sexism. ✝

- Jenny Truax



Cover: Dail Chambers
Centerfold: Crimethinc

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work. People working on this issue include: Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, Ashleigh Packard, James Meinert, Daniel Ryskiewich, Carolyn Griffeth, Mark Beker, and Ellen Rehg. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

Dismantling Sexism, Discovering Sisterhood

by Carolyn Griffeth

Years ago I attended a talk by the renowned peace activist, David Dillinger. 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. And it 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 women and men 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. To do this we must create safe, supportive contexts in which women and men 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



“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.”

Photo: Liora K. Photography



Carolyn Griffeth is loving thinking about her goals for herself, her community, her city, the world, and the entire universe.

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, became the excuse for women’s oppression. To this end, women have been systematically robbed of the right to control our sexuality and reproduction, or to exercise political and economic power.³

Though the ability of women to birth children marks a true biological difference between the sexes, sexism takes root 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 social 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, sup-



“Patriarchal masculinity teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others. To change this, males must critique and challenge male domination of the planet, of less powerful men, of women and children.” - bell hooks

portiveness, 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. 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, 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 that 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 woman (or sex with a woman) 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 reasons, 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 many 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.

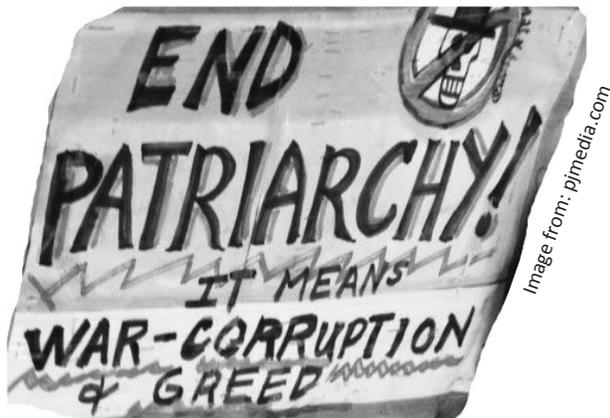
Once again, the time is ripe to forge a movement in which women come together to better understand how sexism affects us and to reclaim our power to create wonderful lives for ourselves and impact the world. In recent years I, along with other women in my community, have participated in women’s gatherings 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 Re-evaluation Counseling Movement, which publishes Sisters, and the Liberation of Men.

Say It Ain't So: Sexism in the Catholic Worker

by Jenny Truax

Catholic Workers do a great job of taking personal responsibility to address the structural injustices of war, over-consumption 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 like 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 leveling 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 of our communities’ 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



Jenny Truax is feverishly preparing to camp out for movie tickets for the 2015 release of Star Wars VII.

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.

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

How Sexism Hurts CW Communities

1. It crams us into **rigid gender-based roles** that inhibit creativity and self expression.
2. **It limits authentic community life** with the patriarchal underpinnings that the men are the real leaders, thinkers, and activists, and that women function to support them.
3. **It obstructs relationships**, support and love for people with expressions of gender that fall outside the societally accepted norms.
4. **It bamboozles our social analysis**, fooling us into comparing oppressions rather than exposing the inter-connectedness of all domination systems.
5. **It exposes our hypocrisy** when we ignore or allow male domination in our communities and churches.

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

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 publicly. 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 its 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 com-

munity 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." ✦

1. Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice



Re-defining Beauty: A Fight with Capitalism

by Jamala Rogers

Recently Sistahs Talkin' Back (the women's section of the Organization for Black Struggle) hosted the documentary, "The Souls of Black Girls." The response was overwhelming. As we struggled to find more chairs and the space to put them, our

Black women's self-image is rooted in a broader societal view both shaped and exploited by patriarchy and capitalism.

members looked at one another in disbelief and wondered what were the motivating factors that drove the women to exploring this "disorder".

From the time black women were ripped from the western coast of Africa, we have been trying to hold onto our culture which included what is beauty. We can no longer look to Mother Africa to restore or affirm our self-image as the white supremacy view of beauty has been exported worldwide. African women press their hair and use skin lightening products as they break from the African standards of beauty, now looked at as backwards and ethnic, to embrace to European look—as best they can given the impossibility of ever achieving such a feat.

Filmmaker Daphne Valerius takes a stark look at the relationship between media images and the self-esteem of African American women in her moving documentary "The Souls of Black Girls." Released in 2005, the film's focus is painfully still relevant and will haunt us for generations to come. Valerius takes a slice from W.E.B. Dubois' Souls of Black Folk and the concept of double-consciousness" – the conflict of being black and an American. She expands it to add being a woman plus being black and an American.

The filmmaker puts forward one formula to describe our dilemma. I prefer to use the feminist theory of triple oppression--race, gender and class. I believe it's a better analysis because you then put it squarely in the context of capitalism and its feeder, patriarchy. Patriarchy is the big Daddy of sexism; one is a system

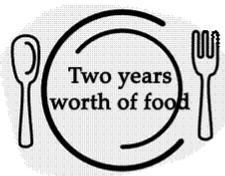
of male domination, the former is its manifestation.

Black women's self-image is rooted in a broader societal view both shaped and exploited by patriarchy and capitalism.

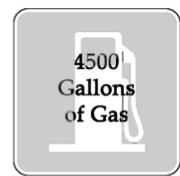
We've long heard the persistent statistic regarding pay comparisons between men and women. Women of color fare worse. African-American women earn 61 cents for every dollar a white, non-Hispanic man earns, and the number for Latina women is a mere 52 cents. This gap remains constant, regardless of education levels.

Debra L. Ness, president of the National Partnership for Women & Families, breaks it down by looking what the loss of dollars could buy. For a working African-American woman, that's more than two years' worth of food; almost 10 months' worth of mortgage and utilities payments; more than 16 months of rent; more than three years' worth of family health insurance premiums; or 4,549 additional gallons of gas, each year. The accumulative effect over years is devastating.

The report, "Lifting as We Climb: Women of Color, Wealth and America's Future", acknowledges the fallacy of looking at



or



What could be bought with the amount of lost income due to sexist, racist wage disparities; African-American women earn 61 cents for every dollar a white non-hispanic man earns.

gender and racial economic disparities separately. By doing so, it reads, we fail to recognize the "the daunting economic reality faced by women of color who experience the compounding negative effects of being both a woman and a person of color."

The report by the Center for Community Economic Development goes on to illustrate those disparities. It cites realities like black and brown women making one penny of wealth for



Jamala Rogers is a long-time organizer in St. Louis, a founding member of the Organization for Black Struggle, and is continually blogging at jamalarogers.com. She's always encouraging the rest of us to write more!

every dollar a white man makes. These pay and wealth gaps likely lead to poverty (if you weren't already born into it), greater debt, and disparities in retirement.

So, as black women are being pushed into low-wage jobs and face a daily grind to make ends meet for them and their families, can't they even look good while they suffer?

Yes and no.

Black women may concede that the economic system has its foot on their necks but at least they can control how they look. Most have yet to connect their incessant need to look good (white) with a sophisticated marketing strategy that has at its



“Telling a poor, black woman that she shouldn't be spending all her money on her clothes, hair and make-up won't change behavior. It won't even start a conversation...As part of our overall struggle to transform this society, we must raise the issue of racism as it relates to beauty and challenge those institutions that perpetuate a white standard of beauty.”

core the belief that black is ugly.

It's been estimated that black women spend about \$500 billion dollars on hair care and personal grooming products. That's billion with a 'b' which is mind-boggling to most outsiders. That's more than some countries' gross national product.

Black writers, filmmakers and artists have attempted to highlight the issues through popular media in hopes that it will put the issue in the public square for discussion.

When Spike Lee tackled the complex issue of light skin/dark skin in "School Days," white movie critics dubbed it a bunch of foolishness. They had—and have—no idea of the genesis of this phenomenon that has plagued descendants of slaves for generations. The issue has its roots in the double tier of house and field status. The lighter-skinned slaves, offsprings of the white slave owner, were kept in the house to do chores. Darker skinned slaves worked from sun up to sun down in the fields. Since the white folks treated house slaves a tad bit better, black folks either came to resent the status or learned to respect it. Those feelings and behavior are still prevalent today.

Chris Rock wrote and produced "Good Hair," a mainstream movie that took a look at the hair industry and the attitudes of

black folks who support the multi-billion dollar industry. I've also written about black hair, including an article in my book of collected commentaries, *The Best of 'The Way I See It'*.

As violence has increased in U.S. society, black women have felt the brunt. The increasing attacks on women have come in many different forms from image to physical violence. We've been the target of mockery and condemnation. Even First Lady Michelle Obama can't escape it.

But no source has been as hurtful to the image of black women as the music industry, especially hip hop. Hip-hop has been accused of glorifying violence, misogyny and homophobia. Gangster rap has spared no blows as black women have been lyrically reduced to sexual objects and punching bags. We were renamed bitches and hoes by the very men whom we gave birth to and with whom we have to interact on a daily basis.

Byron Hurt does an excellent job of exploring this multi-layered issue in his award-winning documentary "Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes." Hurt's focus is on how black men assert their masculinity at the expense of black women. Being socialized in a racist, sexist, homophobic society affects everyone but for those most oppressed, it's particularly psychologically destructive. It plays out in all of our relationships—as parents, our love lives, our jobs (if we have one), etc.

For radical men and women who understand the nuances of patriarchy and the boundless stranglehold of racism, we have to do more than criticize the attitudes and practices of those who are having the life beaten out of them spiritually, socially, culturally, psychologically, politically and economically. Telling a poor, black woman that she shouldn't be spending all her money on her clothes, hair and make-up won't change behavior. It won't even start a conversation.

As part of our overall struggle to transform this society, we must raise the issue of racism as it relates to beauty and challenge those institutions that perpetuate a white standard of beauty. This is not just a task for people of color; white people must be skillful and bold enough to challenge both individuals and institutions as well. We must be ready with an appropriate response when we hear a black youth refer to another kid's hair as good or when we hear someone being called a bitch or hoe. Being silent only helps to perpetuate the oppressive system that robs people of color of their identity, dignity and self-esteem.

Our progressive movements must be competent and creative in putting forward alternative forms of beauty in our analysis and our narratives. The goal is to dethrone white supremacy and sexism wherever they raise their ugly heads; the current standard of beauty is just one of those arenas.

Filmmaker Daphne Valerius has characterized black women's elusive struggle to reconcile the white standard of beauty with their own black reality as a "disorder". If we accept that term as real and true, then black and brown people must accelerate the deconstruction of beauty so that it reflects our own. The role of enlightened white people is to have our backs by challenging the status quo and (re)committing themselves to the broader struggle against capitalism and the sub-systems that keep it propped up. ✦

Taking a Look at Internalized Sexism

by Mary Densmore and Teka Childress

Ed. Note: Mary and Teka both wanted to write about internalized sexism so they put together a joint piece: Teka's follows Mary's and focuses particularly on aging.

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 lack of inhibition, 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 small 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 is 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



"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 and that isn't it great there are so many female doctors these days..." Graphic: identitytheory.com



Mary Densmore is pushing everyone in the Kabat House community to really go for what they want and to not settle for what has been handed to us. She also loves having kittens around.

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 it 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 every day 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. ✦



Original Artwork - Dail Chambers

Mary Densmore lent me a book by Richard Rohr titled Falling Upward. This book helped me to view my aging differently. In it, Richard Rohr suggests that in the second half of our life, whenever it begins for a given individual, we begin the work of letting go to something bigger than ourselves. According to the author, in the first half of our life we are building up our resumes, so to speak. We are conquering our areas of expertise. As we get older, we move from our great hopes of accomplishment to the simple truth that our life is not at the center of things, that one way or another we will die, we must let go and that this really is okay. This obviously does not mean that we no longer pursue worthy activities, or strive to live well. We may even do our best or most momentous work during this period, but it is not about our doing it anymore. We might learn we have an important part to play just like everyone else.

I bring up the book because it has helped me find a path for my later life. Before I found this book I was struggling to hold onto my self-esteem as an older woman. I was amazed

to discover just how much I had internalized of society's images of older women as off the mark, irrelevant and worthy of being side-lined. In addition to the struggles that older men have, older women have to deal with having been less valued throughout their lives than men; while at the same time too much valued for whether or not they were physically beautiful. It is no wonder one sees the lengths to which women go to keep their beauty. I cannot go on any internet site that has any idea of my age without being inundated with ads offering to provide me with 10 weird tips to get rid of my mid-section or outrageously expensive creams for my face to fight age lines and everything else.

Additionally, one of the chief values assigned to women by society is the bearing of children. Older women are out of luck here as well. But a remedy has been offered for this. It has become more common for older women to find ways to

continue bearing children through the use of fertility treatments. We are encouraged to avoid, even fight against, the reality of aging at all costs.

If I had to take a written test describing my values, I would never side-line older women. But somewhere, along the line, I have swallowed this oppressive view whole, albeit somewhat unconsciously. As I aged, I found myself apologizing for being older, making jokes about my age all the time. I felt silly and ashamed for all the crazy things that happen to an older woman's body and mind. I carried negative judgmental feelings about all of these things deep within me. I began to notice my reaction to other older women and was shocked at how I sometimes viewed them. Yet, now this older woman was me.

As I began to have trouble hearing and would miss key words at a meeting and would not know what people were saying for a moment, I felt embarrassed. I felt irrelevant to life, all the more because I have always found so much of my own sense of self-worth in my work and accomplishments. I wanted to say, "Hey, I haven't really

changed that much. I just can't hear as well as I used to. My mind is not completely gone, but then again if it were, please love and respect me anyway."

We've been taught to value ourselves for our connection to power, beauty and wealth which really all lead back to power. Until we can let this way of valuing ourselves go, we are trapped and not ready for the step of handing over all things to love. Let us make it easier to find our way in later life, letting go of the unimportant to embrace what really matters. I am working to let go of negative and oppressive images of older women, and want to encourage others to do this and to realize they are not valuable because of their beauty, their age, their gender or sex, their mental health or even for how cleverly they communicate; but simply because at any stage of their life they have something of value to offer that does indeed impact and change the world. ✦



Photo Accessed at: fssba.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Copy-2-of-Grandmothersmilecrop.jpg



Teka Childress is still struggling to bring people together to provide a place for the unsheltered downtown residents. Join her in the good fight!



**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.**



Adapted from a poem by Nancy R. Smith. CrimethInc. Gender Subversion Kit #69-B. Copies of this poster are available individually and in bulk quantities from CrimethInc. Genders Anonymous / PO Box 1963 / Olympia WA 98507 or if waiting ain't your thing, go to www.crimethinc.com.

Sexism in the Catholic Church

by Jenn Reyes-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 con-

trol 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 disguise 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



"...years of male language, images, and teachings... led 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."



Jenn Reyes-Lay is the Director of the Catholic Action Network and has organized and put on the first ever Catholic Monologues. It has been a lot of work!

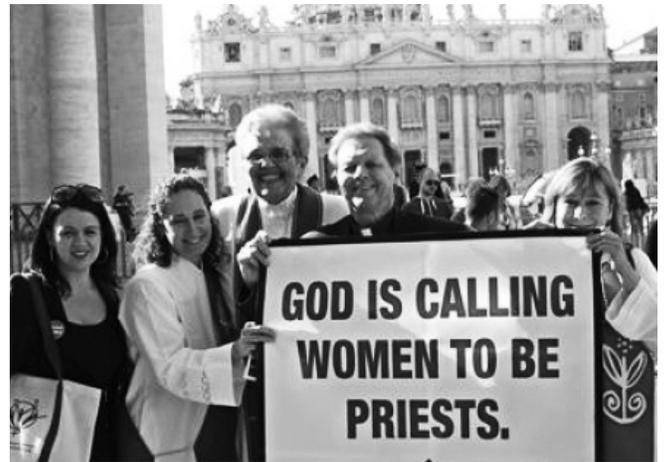
in the person of Christ because Christ was a man. God's maleness becomes contingent on Christ's penis, as if the most important part of Jesus' divinity are the sex organs he was born with. Drawing on Mary Daly's famous words, "If God is male, then male is God," I would suggest that the theology of the 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 latina 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



Members of the Women's Ordination Conference and Roman Catholic Women Priests in front of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome: Donna Rougeux (second from left in alb), Fr. Roy Bourgeois, Janice Sevre Duszynska, Ree Hudson and Erin Hanna

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 everyday 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>

Gender: The Woes of Boys and Girls

by Braden Tobin

“Find a scapegoat and patriarchal power is safe.” - Carol Riddell

The pervasiveness of sexism in our culture is alarming. In my experience and understanding of human interaction, gender and the way it is implemented and carried out in our society is one of the principle causes of sexism. The ways that we learn to interact with one another based on perceived positions in society perpetuate a lack of intimacy, promote isolation and disconnect, and favor "men" over others, which leads to inequality and the oppression of all people, regardless of gender identity. It is important to gain a grasp of gender and its oppressive nature in order to better understand sexism, as well as to gain a better grasp of how gender hurts everyone. I dream of a world where we relate through mutual understanding and we are able to express ourselves without the parameters of gender being forced upon us. This is an invitation.

The truth about gender is that there is no universal definition. Despite the majority of us being taught that gender means specific things for the course of our lives, never was there a point in our lives where we actively consented to the social construction that is gender, yet it is omnipresent and dictates our place in relation to the world which surrounds us. At a very young age, we begin to learn gender. The first question asked when a person gives birth is whether the child is a girl or a boy. When asking this question, people are not interested in the anatomy of the child, but rather the ways the child will interact in the world. If you are born with male anatomy then you are expected to be masculine, with female anatomy you are expected to interact with the world as feminine. Anatomy is nothing more than anatomy; it does not dictate personality or character. To go further, sex itself is much less a dichotomy than we are taught and this dichotomy is a social construct. This is problematic because it automatically forces one of only

two options onto each of us, when in reality there are myriad ways of being and interacting with the world around us.

Nobody really is a gender from the start. Gender is not determined by biology, rather, it is simply a set of expressions learned, then performed, by a person to establish their identity. These expressions include mannerisms, an inclination to take up space in a room, style of dress, grooming, tone of voice, and body movement. All of these things are adaptable and interchangeable. And most of them are learned in our families of origin, from our parents who are trained experts in implementing patriarchy. Gender expects for Susie to play with pink dolls and Joey to play with action figures with guns, and if either wants to play with the toy assigned to the opposite gender, then it is something to be talked about or even worried about. Gender imposes that boys have a predisposition to violence, apathy, aloofness, as well as to think, strategize, and plan, while girls are predisposed to take care of other's emotional needs, while being free from the burden of thinking. These, along with the rest of the stereotypes enforced on us, are implicitly agreed upon ways of acting out our genders and they are supposedly natural and diametrically opposed.

These pre-determined expectations surely cause disconnect within all of us. This disconnect is extremely useful and a neatly packaged predicate for the concept of capitalism. Not only does it create a dichotomy which dictates who works where, it also allows for inequality and a pervasive white male supremacy (patriarchy). Gender in this context is inherently coercive; seeing beyond this pervasive set of oppressive rules will require creating new tools for relating with one another.

The social construction of gender coerces us into believing that men and women are inherently different and therefore exist harmoniously in nature. This is the status quo. We are led to believe at an early age that gender is essential, meaning that we are born to behave in certain ways based upon our biological sex. Things don't occur so neatly in nature; most things



Braden Tobin is looking toward the future and anticipates a fall and winter full of cozy sweatpants and gold nail polish.

that fit neatly in boxes have been reified by a people who favor power being in the hands of one group at the expense of the other. When examining gender, it is important to look at a historical context of gender oppression. In order to do this, I will give a few examples of people who have challenged the status quo of gender and the response of them doing so by the hegemonic ruling class.

Around 4000 B.C.E. an extraordinary change took place, beginning first in the near east and spreading gradually from there into Europe. The previous values of communal societies were completely overturned by male invaders. With the development of the state, came the falling of women's status and the devaluation of the mother goddess. This is when the rise of private property first began; property which was passed along from father to son.¹ With the invasion of a new hegemonic ideology where the mother goddess was replaced by more patriarchal godheads, gender inequality came about. Also came the necessity to define stagnant sex roles, social classes, and to crusade against previous religions as "heresy," thus systematically erasing the existence of transgender people, as "heretics," from the visible societies.

With the transformation of Christianity from a peasant-class communal religion to an effective tool of control by the ruling elite came the destruction of the polytheistic religions which revered transgender people as their leaders. By the 11th century, the Catholic church - by then the largest landlord in Western Europe - gained the organizational and military strength to wage war against the followers of the old beliefs.² This stamping out was further perpetuated by the fear that Christians had toward the worship of the Great Mother, whose chief priests were Gay transvestites.³

One of the most popular examples of a person who was persecuted for challenging the European hegemony of gender is Joan of Arc, someone who is memorialized by the Catholic Church as a heroine saint. She was executed for her refusal to dress in traditionally women's clothing because she was a warrior. The issues of her transvestism were prevalent during her trial. According to Pennethorne Hughes, the wearing of clothes appropriate to the opposite sex was always one of the rites of witchcraft, as it has been and is of primitive peoples, during their fertility festivals throughout the history of



the world.⁴ Such a belief permeated the culture during witch hunts which targeted transvestism. The cross-dressing link led to the execution of Joan of Arc, who is known for her achievements as a peasant warrior who helped to drive the British out of French villages, but seldom for her heroism in the context of transvestism.

Blatant patriarchal oppression continues through the Industrial Revolution when some women relied on dressing and performing as men to work in factories for a decent wage, but were persecuted by the bourgeoisie for gaining access granted only to men. The truth is that the examples of how capitalism and patriarchy reinforce each other go on and on (and I would encourage you to read more about them in order to get a full grasp of the devastation that inflicting gender has created before us). Even more problematic is that our society has become so accustomed to the violence of patriarchy and its gender dichotomy that it is nearly unquestionable in mainstream spaces. Not only is this gender dichotomy irrefutable, it is perpetuated by our religious leaders and curriculum, political parties, and education-industrial complex - with its invisibility of positive examples for those in marginalized groups and acceptance of sexism, hetero-sexism, and homophobia as appropriate

ways for children to establish social roles. The purpose of establishing a historical discourse is to remind us of the fact that these examples have been inherited by our children. Similar interactions are constantly being re-created in a process of expressing gender through bullying and othering; using the same expressions of sexism and homophobia as have been used by the dominant class for centuries.

Gender is not..



just male or female



defined by body parts



sexual orientation



determined by chromosomes

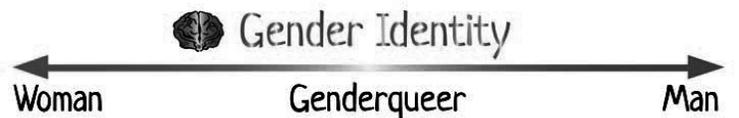
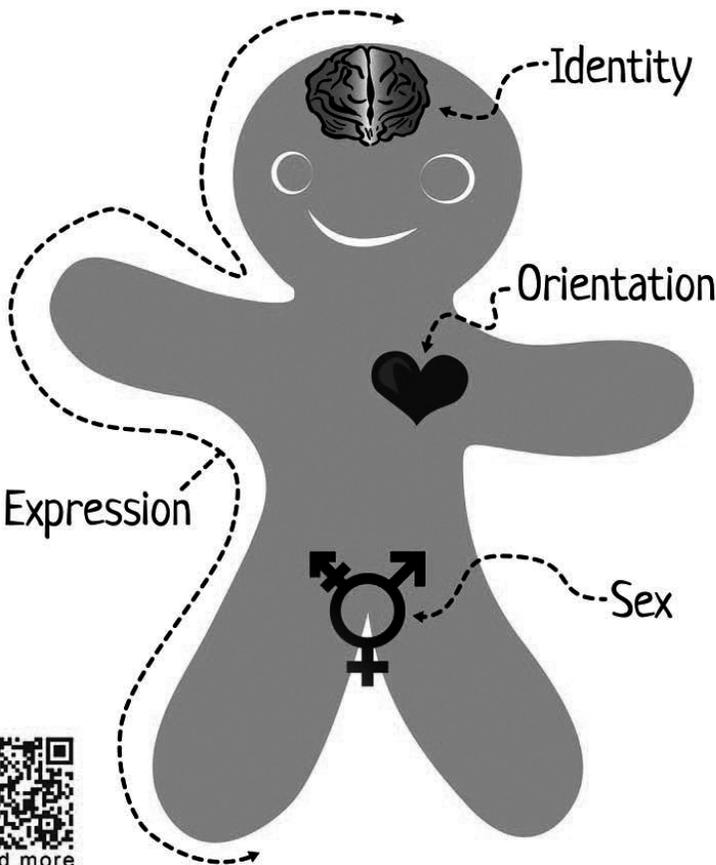
If we are serious about creating a new society in the shell of the old, patriarchal gender cannot be a part of that society. Since gender dictates how we relate to one another, it seems as though it is one with the shell itself, but closer to reality is that we could go on without it in ways that we never knew possible. This society necessitates as well as facilitates the perpetuation of gender as we know it. We must learn a new framework for our liberation. "Identity politics often frames oppression as singularly and uniquely experienced by one particular identity to

which others, at most, can act as allies. This masks the shared interests some within an identity category may share with others designated beyond its boundaries.”⁵ It is possible that men can be more than just allies to the oppressed women. Our liberation is not contained within the gender binary. Therefore we cannot use it as a tool to diffuse and redistribute power. Operating in a way in which we favor one sex over the other, regardless of which one it is, creates a power dynamic which is necessarily oppressive. I don't mean to delegitimize the importance to some for safe spaces and I believe that those can be useful. If our goal is to feel more connected and less isolated from one another, then we need to understand the universal struggle and the importance of connecting through both our unique and collective experiences. I dream of a world in which gender isn't polarized and seen as an essential part of our daily lives; a world where we may all express ourselves accessing 100% of our tools for intimacy. †

1. Evans, Arthur. *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*. Boston, MA: Fag Rag Books, 1978.
2. Feinberg, Leslie. "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come." *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. New York: CRC Press, 2006. Pp. 205-220.
3. Evans, Arthur. *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*. Boston, MA: Fag Rag Books, 1978.
4. Ibid.
5. Anonymous. *Dangerous Foundations: An Argument Against the "Identity" in Identity Politics*.

The Genderbread Person

by www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com



Gender identity is how you, in your head, think about yourself. It's the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormonal levels) and how you interpret what that means.



Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact.



Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Female = vagina, ovaries, XX chromosomes; male = penis, testes, XY chromosomes; intersex = a combination of the two.



Sexual orientation is who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.

Sometimes Leaving is Hard *and* A Poem

both by Michelle Perry

I left my husband today. It hurt me bad, but it had to be done. And I cried like a baby. My eyes still watery and itchy. My heart thumping every time I go back in my mind and hear the door close behind me. It hurt him too. Crushed him like a ton of bricks. He didn't break too much in front of me but he did break. The tears fell as he begged me to stay. But I just couldn't. We have been down this road before. I always stay and he never changed. He would do good for about a week, then he would go back to his old self. The self that does not care about anything or anyone but himself.

So, here I am at this shelter now. Yeah, he was the bread winner in this marriage or shall I say he was the bread. Yeah, I have no job. I solely depended upon him to take care of me. I know he is my husband so he was expected to do so, wasn't he? And, besides he wanted it that way. He loved taking care of me. Or maybe he just loved having someone who needed him. I wish I had gotten a job because I would have moved straight into an apartment. I would have more things for myself. My friends used to tell me all of the time to at least always keep money saved for emergencies. But it's okay I'm starting over anew. I feel free now and the shelter is clean and the people are nice. It is a domestic violence shelter, though. But it was the only one who could take me in right away. And, although he never hit me he did threaten to kill me if I ever left. Well, I left and I take that threat very seriously. No, I do not think he is going to hunt me down and attack. But you never know. Right? So, anyway, I'm here and I am free. Free to be myself and free to enjoy life.

I am very comfortable with my room which I share with a young lady named Abigail. She is very nice. Her boyfriend was very abusive to her and used drugs. She was with him for two years. The final straw was when he broke her arm and nearly choked her to death. Her cast has a bunch of obscenities toward her boyfriend written all over it right along with names of friends and get-well-soon messages. Every woman here has her own story. Makes you want to cry. Listening to a few of them makes my little problems seem like mosquito bites com-

pared to the dog bites these women have suffered.

I miss him, I do. But I can't go back. I just can't no matter how bad the hurt, no matter how many tears and no matter how lonely I get... I have to keep moving forward. It's what's best for me. He is a liar, a manipulator, a cheat, a heartbreaker, a user. Yes, he used me. I may not have had money and material things but I had time. I was always available to him. Always there to listen, always there to pick on when he's mad at the world, always there for him to vent, always there to open myself up to him literally and let him have me any way he pleased. I'm crying now, but I will be alright. Despite the hard, sad time I had at the top of the morning.

I arrived here at 9am and breakfast was still being served. I enjoyed myself a nice stack of fresh banana pancakes with sausage links, scrambled eggs, oatmeal and coffee. For lunch there was grilled cheese, tomato soup and iced tea. For dinner, we ate vegetable lasagna, garlic bread, salad, grape juice, and apple cobbler for dessert. My day turned out okay in the end.

I'm laying here in my bed toying around with my cell phone contemplating a phone call to my now estranged husband. I know I shouldn't but I want to. I can just call and check on him at least. Right? Right—just an excuse. I hear Abigail on her phone talking with her mother who is obviously warning her about going back because Abigail is saying a lot of "Okay, Mom" and "Mom, I know". Then she says, "Oh, Mommy, please don't cry. I will make it next time because there won't be a next time. I'm not ever going back to him. I didn't come home to you and Daddy right away cuz I wanted to take a couple of weeks or more to clear my head, that's all."

Maybe that was my cue to call my mom and not my husband. My mom's upset that I didn't come home to her and Daddy, but it's the same scenario. I wanted to clear my mind as well and not keep depending on other people. In a sense, I feel like if you take care of me, you own me. Maybe that was his crazy thinking. He never said it but he showed it. Okay... so, enough about him for a minute. Notice I said a minute, cause in reality I can't clear him from my mind. But, I know I made



Michelle Perry is looking forward to adding more yarn to her dreadlocks and thinking about getting her lip pierced.

the right choice. So, anyway, I'm laying back on my bed and I'm very comfy cozy. The room smells of peaches—a lovely fragrance to me. Reminds me of when I was a child going to the farmers' market with my mother. She loves peaches and the car would smell of them for days. She bought cases of them—four or five cases. She would make peach cobbler, peach preserves, peach cake. She would slice fresh peaches and serve them with whipped cream. She would make a pot of warm peaches.

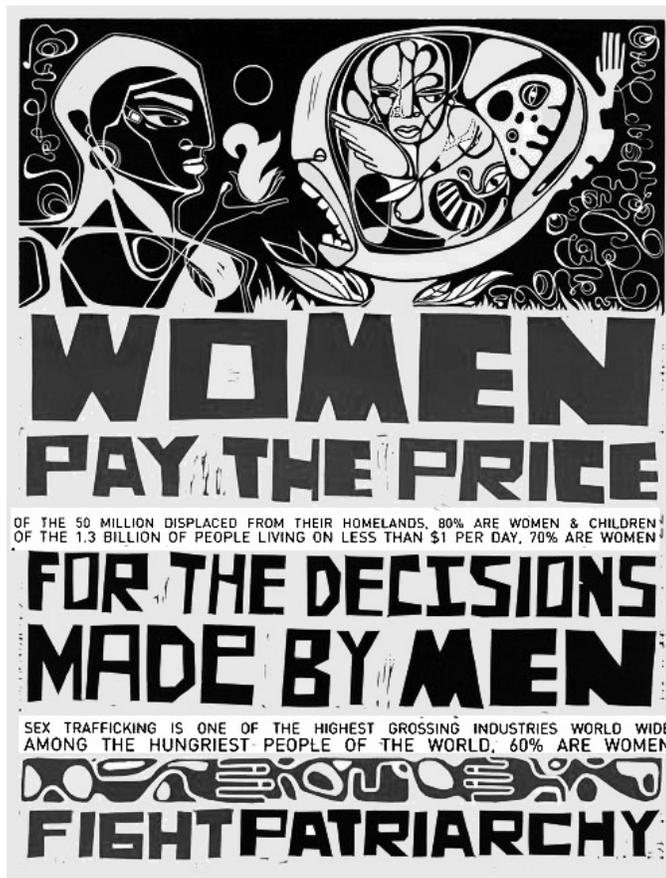
The smell of peaches may save me. They remind me of a better life than I've been living. I can't go back to that place I've

recently known as home. I just can't—all of the verbal abuse, all the comments and sarcasm, the throwing money in my face, the jealousy and insecurities... All of his chauvinistic ways are more than enough reason to never, ever step foot in that house again. I am a woman and not a door-mat or a fun-bag for him; or a convenience. I am a woman and I will be treated and respected as one by any and by everyone. ✦

man: I work my fingers to the BONE and all you do is sit at HOME...I take out the TRASH keep our cars filled with GAS sometimes im so tired but I still cut the GRASS...I give you money for SHOPPING... and when I do there is no STOPPING... but explain to me my DEAR why it is I can not enjoy a BEER...you buy curtains, TABLECLOTHS dishes and BARBIE DOLLS..., G.I. Joe and whatever your friends say is best by word of MOUTH...you will spend and spend and SPENDI mean you tell me how many other MEN... will do the things I DO and still put up with YOU...yes you and your whining you and your NAGGING.. you and your crying the scene is so SADDENING...the dishes aren't always DONE so our friends can't always come for FUN...and in the middle of the night when the baby CRIES... you lay still and think that I...yes I meaning ME... is going to change the pampers, feed and rock back to SLEEP...your brain cells must be BLOCKING... or maybe its those itchy STOCKINGS.. to make YOU....think im bout to DO what YOU should DO....why don't you just STOP IT ...hey sweep the floor and then MOP IT... and after that fix me a PLATE... I'll watch the kids and OH...yes hurry up THOUGH ...the game is starting for goodness SAKE... and I want all the FIXINS with some fresh fried CHICKEN... you belong in the KITCHEN for that is your PLACE.....

woman: yes you work and so do I and all you ever do is CRY... yes you cry complain fuss and NAG... and sometimes when i come home from the store you wont even help with the BAGS...you should cut the GRASS and take out the TRASH... and while your at it try working that dish RAG... you should care more for yourself didn't you HEAR... you're not in the best of health so you my DEAR need no BEER and how dare you give me extra spendings you SEE... then sit and dictate what i should buy for ME...while working your fingers to the BONE... i beautify and take care of our HOME... and don't ever mention to me AGAIN... about how many other MEN... because believe me i can show and PROVE... just how many of these RICHIES... would love to come and GET ME... and take me and the kids away from YOU... as for our friends this is not an all time night CLUB... for everyone to kiss and HUG... drink all of our beverages and eat all of our FOOD... cussing and SMOKING... laughing and JOKING... while our children are asleep how RUDE... and the kitchen is not just my SPACE it is yours and my PLACE so why don't you be a gentleman this time and fix me a PLATE....and let me tell you something FELLA... i am not your CINDERELLA so stop

treating me like your MAID... i work harder at home than you do on your job so I should be the one getting PAID... oh, and one more thing - I'm your wife so I suggest you treat me as SO... or I will pack all of my things and take the kids and in the wind we will GO. ✦



Source: favianna.com

Being an Ally

by James Meinert

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 it's 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 and 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.

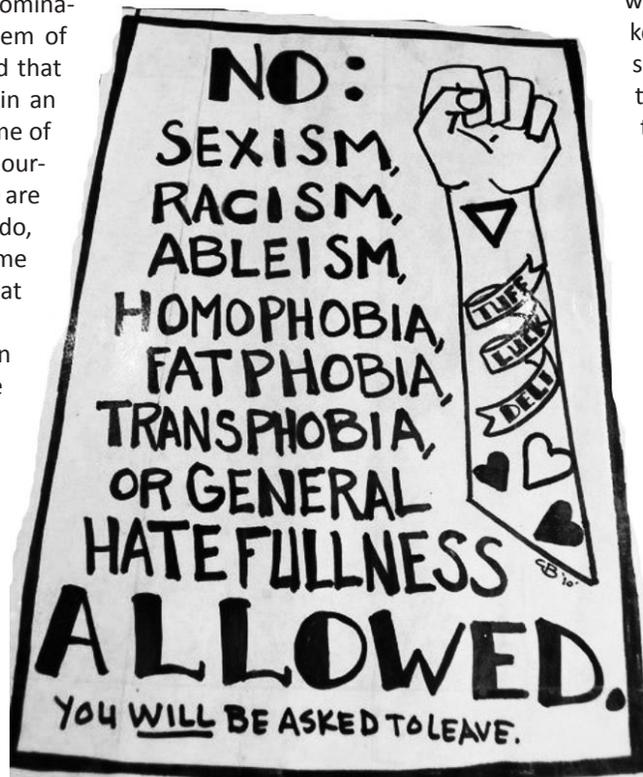
Over my four years in college, five more of my female friends confided in me about being raped. All of them asked me not to do anything or say anything. They just wanted support and to have it known by some people that it happened.

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:

"It's 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 it has 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



Source: Anonymous Art of Revolution



James Meinert is struggling setting goals for his life, but feels good to be a part of a group reading Witnessing Whiteness together. He is also a really fantastic friend to Mark Becker!

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 quite 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. It's 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 it's 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, it's 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



"When I have had the courage to interrupt sexism it has felt quite almost life threatening, so I know why men don't do it all that often... Too bad. It's 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." Artwork: Candace Brekke

to start having conversations with each other.

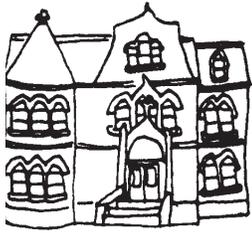
Finally, and maybe I shouldn't even ask this question, but why be an ally? Sometimes this question is implied by other men. What's in it for me? If men have it so good then why should we rock the boat? Well, I don't think we have it that good really. Sexism has set us up to be agents of oppression. There 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. ✦

Reference:

<http://tinyurl.com/being-an-ally>

<http://tinyurl.com/seeing-sexism>

<http://tinyurl.com/how-to-be-an-ally>



From Karen House

by Annjie Schiefelbein

At a Catholic Worker gathering a few months back, Carolyn asked folks to come up with quotes or ideas from the writings of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin that reflected the theme of “self-sacrificial love”. The participants did not find themselves lacking for material; Worker writings are replete with the Biblical theme of giving up your own life for the sake of the other and putting your own needs aside for the sake of the poor. Carolyn then asked the group to come up with quotes from those same writings that had to do with self love and caring for ourselves. When I heard about this later, I could come up with only one. From what I hear, the group did not fare too much better.

It makes me uncomfortable to consider self-care as an integral part of community life in the Catholic Worker. I (along with countless others) was brought up in the Worker fed on the notion that caring for the other trumps thinking of or caring for myself. Over the years, the Worker has demonstrated a great capacity to free folks who grew up white and middle class from their competitive, consumeristic, upbringings. Inherent in that freedom is the understanding that I am connected to, and responsible for other people - especially the poor. And if that is true, how can ‘finding myself’ or prioritizing my health and well being do anything but lead me back to that self-centered life which perpetuates oppression and division? Our isolationist culture can lead us into a perversion of self-care, where I do not contrast my needs with the needs of the rest of the world. Our consumer culture engenders a dependence on self-care in the form of distracting and numbing ourselves. We Catholic Workers often think of the two as mutually exclusive: either I am taking care of myself (selfish and unjust) or I am caring for others (saintly and virtuous).

Like most things, the truth lies somewhere in the middle, and at Karen House, we are in the exciting time of exploring where that might be. Probably for too long we have erred on the side of ignoring our own needs, and the needs of our community members, toward the value of meeting the needs of our neighbors, guests, volunteers, and friends. Over the past few years, we’ve started to focus more on the fact that everyone deserves to live in a way that they find fulfilling and life-giving. We are beginning to believe it might be possible to seek that fulfillment for and with our guests

and ourselves.

Towards that goal, we are trying to improve our balance of self care with our strong value of care for others. We are doing several things:

- We recently participated in a training for Restorative Circles, a process of redefining conflict as an exciting chance for growth and discovery (as opposed to a thing to fear and avoid at all costs). We followed that weekend by a community retreat focused on making this process a part of our everyday lives at Karen House. We are very excited about the effect this might have on our communal life and our lives with our guests.

• We are talking more about our own health (physical, mental, and spiritual). We are evaluating the food that comes into our home, both donations and the food we buy. It is difficult to make healthy decisions when surrounded by less-than healthy food every day. Leaving the house to take a break or exercise can be challenging; the needs of guests and visitors can make it very hard to extricate oneself. We hope to support each other as we try to discover and act on what healthy

living means for us.

- We have revised the way we do longer, philosophical meetings and retreats toward the goal of spending more time with ourselves reflecting on bigger issues and questions.
- We, along with Kabat House, have begun discussions about our shared spiritual life and how the communities might grow together in inclusivity, faith, and justice. We are praying together every Monday morning, and have recently begun discussing our Tuesday night liturgies and how they can be spiritually fulfilling and inclusive to everyone.
- Also with Kabat House we have established a twice monthly gathering for deeper sharing. These gatherings focus on our lives, joys, and struggles, and provide a forum for topics we would like to know more about or discern more fully together. We’ve dubbed it the Catholic Worker support group.

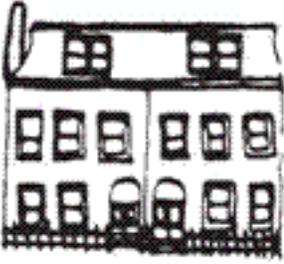
It is an exciting time for us, and we will keep you posted on our journey! ✚



Graphic: Silvia Rivera Law Project



Annjie Schiefelbein has recently been spotted creating beautiful flower arrangements, feeding stray dogs in our neighborhood, and planning the perfect prayer for Karen House meetings.



From Little House

by Mike Baldwin

*Hot town, summer in the city
Back of my neck getting dirty and gritty
Been down, isn't it a pity
Doesn't seem to be a shadow in the city*

*All around, people looking half dead
Walking on the sidewalk, hotter than a match head*

Summer in the City By Loving Spoonful,
Songwriters: Sebastian, Mark / Boone, Steve / Sebastian, John

When I think of summer, many images, poems and song lyrics come to mind: Carefree summers of my youth, Gershwin's melody, "Summertime," where the living is easy, for example (albeit from the racially controversial, Porgy and Bess opera.) Various impressionist paintings of summers in the French or



Photo: Jerry Miller

Italian countryside and images of sunflowers and English gardens. The lyrics above, however, better describes this summer for me. It tells the truth about the reality experienced by many who come into our lives through Little House, The Downtown Teens, and the Northside.

Summer 2013 in St. Louis started for me with notice that a well-known homeless shelter was under siege, a very hard

departure of a family from Little House, and a world-shattering phone call informing me one of my former Downtown Teens was in jail waiting trial on serious charges—a State away. Another Teen is due to be a father, with no job and no prospects. And it started with too many shootings and other forms of violence on the Northside. One (shooting) happened just moments ago, as I write this, at the school bus stop on my block. While the early summer weather with its cool temperatures and bountiful rain promised a bumper crop for our little orchard, the storms with high winds and too much moisture damaged several trees with blight and broken limbs.

We did manage to put aside some of these concerns to spend some time with the grandson and actually go fishing though no "fish were jumpin'" for us.

*One of these mornings
You're going to rise up singing
Then you'll spread your wings
And you'll take to the sky.*

Summertime by Gershwin

For sure, I believe this for all who face adversity. But the promise of rising up singing and spreading wings is tenuous, at best, for a young man trying to be a responsible dad while in his teen years he should be able to enjoy a worry free summer. Or, for the young person wrenched from his college dorm, who stayed one hundred days in jail awaiting a trial still in the future that could forever alter his life. Or for the families who left Little House abruptly and unprepared for the challenges in the "real world." Or for families torn apart by gun violence. Or homeless people facing another and crueler eviction.

Without wanting to sound paternalistic, the Downtown Teens, the families with whom we share our lives at Little House, and on the Northside, are family to us. And, by virtue of your relationship with us (as well as directly with some of them), they are your family and sons and daughters as well. Lets continue to build a better world so that the Summertime (for all) is less gritty and easier livin'. †



Mike Baldwin is bummed out that by the time the Round Table was published, his piece was out of season.



Catholic Worker Thought & Action

The Way of Love

by Ellen Rehg

The first thing that struck me about Ann was the room she and Virginia shared in the attic at Karen House. It was nearly bare—as spare and elegant as a piece of Shaker furniture. Stripped to the essentials, yet adorned with touches of beauty: a kite hanging from the corner of the ceiling; Renaissance paintings, cut out from the covers of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, arranged artfully on the walls; two bed rolls tucked away in the dormer window space.

“Even though this room is small,” she told me, “It’s still more space than many families have all over the world.” It was her way of sharing in their poverty.

Ann wanted to share in the world’s poverty. She had become a Sister of Loretto in 1964 right out of high school, because, as she wrote on her entrance application, she believed in “Love.” Yet, just a few years later, after college, she felt lost—not sure if she had taken the right path.

“I went to Forest Park and sat down under a tree and read the gospel of Matthew,” she said. She read through the entire gospel and then thought, “I can live with this. This is true.” Especially the words of Jesus in the 25th chapter of Matthew, which are foundational for Christians—that following Jesus meant feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned. Every step she took in her life after that brought her to a closer connection with the poor.

She decided to stop teaching, and go into health care. She decided to become a part of the Catholic Worker, just being formed in St. Louis. The two decisions coincided—she moved into Karen House in 1977, and started medical school at the same time. For the next ten years she was a Catholic Worker and (eventually) a physician.

I met Ann when I joined the community at Karen House in my mid-twenties. I was (as Teka likes to joke) a kind of wanderer, on a journey with no known destination. Ann was one of many loving people in the community who showed me the way. Or, not THE way. Because Ann loved me so well, I learned that love was the way, and that it takes many forms. Here is a small memory:

When I first came to Karen House, I was not a practicing Catholic, for all the good reasons that people still have today. But one day I somewhat begrudgingly decided to accompany Ann and the other regular Mass go-ers to Sunday Mass.

“Just because I’m going doesn’t make me a Catholic!” I exclaimed. Ann regarded me for a moment.

“That’s ok,” she said, smiling and linking her arm with mine. “You can be a Catholic Worker.”

Ann loved not just the poor, but also the poverty that we all carry within ourselves. She was careful to notice that poverty, and tenderly reach out if she saw you were struggling.

She opened herself to all forms of love, even romantic love. John Kavanaugh, the Jesuit priest, was the great love of her life; although they were both careful to love each other within the boundaries of their vows.

Eventually her love took her to El Salvador, in 1988 during the civil war. Ann pitted her life and work against the destruction caused by millions of dollars the U.S. provided to the Salvadoran military. “She suffered what we suffered, hunger, and other things. She wanted to be a part of us,” they said.

With the shy, teen-agers, most of them young women, she trained to be health promoters in the conflicted zone of Guarjila, Ann helped to build a regional health care system. After five years she came back home. The cancer she had fought some years before had returned. She died on June 6, 1993.

The clinic in Guarjila, where Ann worked was renamed the “Clinica Ana Manganaro.” It has prospered and expanded and serves the community to this day. The young women grew older, some married; some had children. One is in charge of the clinic; one is head of the clinic staff. One remembered the day that Ann helped her to deliver a breech birth. Ann would not take over for her, “you can do it!” she had told her, staying by her side.

In Ann’s memory, we can do it! Like Ann, we can help each other to grow in love and strength. ✚



Photo by Mev Puleo



Ellen Rehg is studying microbiology toward a nursing degree and is enjoying learning something so different.

The Round Table

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www.KarenHouseCW.org

Round Table Discussion at Karen House

What do you think of this issue? Join us Friday, November 8th, 7pm at Karen House, and let's talk about Dismantling Sexism!

New Liturgy at Karen House!

The Karen and Kabat House Communities are seeking to grow spiritually while challenging sexism, racism, homophobia, and other oppressions within ourselves and our community structures. To that end, together we are re-imagining a community-led Liturgy that will better fit our values, be welcoming, inclusive, and inspiring. For more details and the new Tuesday night time. Call us or sign up for our email announcements: karen-housecw@gmail.com

The Karen House Bike Shop

...could use donations of bikes, helmets, locks, and other bicycle accessories!

Karen House Needs

Coffee (Fair Trade preferred), large heavy blankets, hygiene items, toilet paper, sugar

Little House Needs

Gas dryer and garden helpers for fall clean-up

Christmas at Karen House - Here's the Scoop!

For the kids:

We are asking solely for monetary donations to our Christmas fund, or gift cards to: Circle of Knowledge (821-5150 circleofknowledge.com)

We won't be taking any donations of toys or gifts. The money and gift cards will go directly to the women, so that they can buy gifts for their children from this local, independent toy store. Everyone wins!

For the women:

- Books of bus passes
- Donations of money, so that we can buy each woman something from her wish list.

For the women and kids all year round:

- Gift certificates to Walgreens and Target
- Movie and City Museum passes
- Ameren UE and Laclede Gas gift cards

Folks can drop donations of money or gift cards off any time between 8am and 10pm, or donate via the "Support Karen House" page on our website, karenhousecw.org



We welcome your donations and participation. As Catholic Workers our hospitality to the homeless is part of an integrated lifestyle of simplicity, service, and resistance to oppression, all of which is inherently political. For this reason, we are not a tax exempt organization. Furthermore, we seek to create an alternative culture where giving is celebrated and human needs are met directly through close, personal human relationships. Thus, all of our funding comes from individuals like you who share yourself and your funds so that this work can go on.