FROM THE EDITOR

Will White Working-Class Men Be the Voting Bloc That Helps to Defeat Trump?

It is not news that Trump won 62 percent of the white male vote, and 66 percent among white men without a college degree. If [Democrats] could speak to many of these men, they might be able to peel off a few million votes—what could be the margin of victory in November’s election.
— Andrew Yarrow, Washington Post op-ed, January 18, 2019

There’s an underappreciated voting bloc that could help to unseat Donald Trump in November: alienated white working-class men. What? Weren’t they one of the key groups that helped to (s)elect him in 2016?

A lot of men chose Trump because they believed him when he pledged to revive the coal industry and to jump-start US manufacturing. Once in office, of course, you-know-who broke his promises. If the past three years have shown nothing else, it is that these men are still on the outside looking in—their noses pressed against the bakery window of the American dream—watching as one-percenters gorge themselves on tax-break pastries. Are these men beginning to realize that they’ve been scammed?

When it comes to reaching out to these men—and there are millions of them—there’s a, well, elephant in the room. Progressive activists, quick to empathize with many groups of struggling voters, fail to include working-class white men, callously generalizing that “men don’t have problems; they are the problem.” As journalist and historian Andrew Yarrow wrote, “Helping all people in physical, socioeconomic, and psychological distress should be a defining characteristic of a humane, caring, and democratic society. However, in our bitterly divided times, these foundational goals have been politicized: Many on the right have drawn attention to men’s problems, some thoughtfully but more often to bash feminism and women, while many on the left are silent because they are implausibly unaware of such issues or, more likely, that highlighting them would be deemed politically incorrect. This failure of liberals is not only morally wrong, but it also hurts their own prospects of winning broader support among men.”

While the large minority of voters who condone—no matter how illegal or immoral—Trump’s behavior, includes a lot of men, is their support for him unshakable? It is possible that as more revelations of his malfeasance come to light—not to mention being painfully reminded how he has betrayed them—some may very well begin to abandon him.

The Chinese have no equivalent for the word “crisis.” Rather, they utilize two symbols, one above the other. The top symbol means “danger”; the bottom “opportunity.” In considering the plight of white working-class men, we have to recognize the danger inherent in leaving these men outside the big tent of change, and the opportunity if we invite them in.

Don’t get me wrong. Men who stubbornly refuse to give up their unearned privilege and entitlement must be challenged. Their insistence on patriarchy’s virtues must be confronted. At the same time, if we abandon these men, cede them to the men’s rights movement, then disempowered, alienated, and hurting men will continue to vote against their own self-interest. While it’s always been important to reach out to them, in 2020 it is imperative.

Nearly 25 years ago, I led groups for men acting abusively in their relationships. A cofacilitator coined the term “compassionate confrontation” to describe our approach: yes, we would hold you accountable for your behavior toward your partner, and yes, we would treat you humanely as a person. No shaming, no humiliating. Much the same can be said about alienated working-class men today. If we write them off as misogynists, or worse, we are missing an opportunity to see them, to connect with their humanity. We can simultaneously demand more of these men and empathize with their economic plight—including the emotional toll it’s taken on those no longer able to adequately provide for their families.

The #MeToo movement has shaken up a lot of men across the race and class spectrum. Its challenge is also an opportunity—a gift if men can move past our fear. We can and should expect more from ourselves: from how we behave in our relationships to how we show up as fathers, spouses, caregivers, householders. White working-class men must be invited into the tent of the disenfranchised, not uncritically or unconditionally, but honestly, compassionately. Once inside, they can become part of a grassroots movement supporting those who are struggling.

More than a year ago, in his prescient Washington Post column, journalist-historian Yarrow wrote: “Helping all people in physical, socioeconomic, and psychological distress should be a defining characteristic of a humane, caring, and democratic society. However, in our bitterly divided times, these foundational goals have been politicized: Many on the right have drawn attention to men’s problems, some thoughtfully but more often to bash feminism and women, while many on the left are silent because they are implausibly unaware of such issues or, more likely, that highlighting them would be deemed politically incorrect. This failure of liberals is not only morally wrong, but it also hurts their own prospects of winning broader support among men.”

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Photo: Jim Lego/Centre Photo Laval
Mail Bonding

Glad You’re Not a Monthly

A year or two ago [a friend] had you send a copy of Voice Male to me. I read it and liked it but did not subscribe at that time. Maybe I did not understand that it isn’t [a monthly and] therefore something I could keep up with. This year I again received another copy of Voice Male which I read, liked and decided I wanted more of. Now I have started reading the Voice Male book.

Katherine Youngmeister
Santa Fe, NM

Frogs, Snails and Puppy Dog Tails

I may not know much, but your magazine seems to do what most current past literature does: it promotes men/boys as the “problem” and woman/girls as “innocent victims” in all this—as if there is not a problem with female on male violence, that woman do not sexually abuse men. Tommie (sic) J. Curry in his book The Man Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood documents the prevailing myths around black men and patriarchy. You should read it because no one wants to admit that many relationships are and always have been dominated by women. No balance; same female propaganda as always. One would think that with all the labels females use to describe many in a negative light in their homes and in front of boys, and that is heard on the streets, TV, movies, that a magazine for men might address those things. Of course that would be to much to ask because it is not equality you seem to want but to change men with no equivalent change for women. When I was growing up the saying was girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice whereas boys are made of frogs and snails and puppy dog tails. Boys get abused from the time we come into this world. Your magazine seems to have a facade of helping boys/men but it typically carries out the feminist agenda especially as it relates to black males as one author states we are the black bogey men.

Herschel Chapman, Jr.
via email

Voice Male
Across the Pond

I had been meaning to subscribe to the magazine and get a copy of the Voice Male book for several years now. For some time I’ve been interested and involved in profeminist politics here in the UK, especially work to end men’s violence against women. I finished my PhD on this topic last year (which specifically looked at engaging men and boys in violence prevention in England), and seek to do whatever I can to contribute to feminist social change through research, teaching and activism, for which Voice Male looks to be a fantastic aid. I think it must have been relatively early on in my ongoing political education that I first heard about the magazine, possibly thanks to Michael Flood’s XY online website—people are clearly aware of Voice Male here in the UK and around the world! So it was high time I got a subscription. I think you all deserve a lot of plaudits for keeping the magazine going for so long.

Prof. Stephen Burrell
Department of Sociology
Durham University
Durham, UK

Letters may be sent via email to
www.voicemalemagazine.org or mailed to
Editors: Voice Male, PO Box 1246,
Amherst, MA 01004

Resources

Voice Male maintains an extensive list of resources related to boys, men and masculinities, gender equality, and sexual and domestic violence prevention, among other topics. It can be found on our website at https://voicemalemagazine.org/resources/. If you know of an organization to include, please email relevant information to info@voicemalemagazine.org.
Men and Loneliness

Loneliness kills. According to former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, isolation and weak social connections “are associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day and even greater than that associated with obesity.” Even when it’s not fatal, loneliness makes life a lot less pleasant. While loneliness cuts across all racial and socioeconomic lines, just about everyone feels lonely at some point, right?

One group in particular is disproportionately affected: men. As Henry David Thoreau wrote in his classic book, *Walden*, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” And a recent study by YouGov backs him up. In the study, 44 percent of males 18 plus said they feel lonely all the time (emphasis added)—far higher than the percentage of women who gave the same answer. And that doesn’t even take into account men's well-documented habit of underreporting anything that might make us feel or give someone else the impression that men might be weak or defective. In the same study, men were 50 percent more likely than women (18 percent vs. 12 percent) to say they don’t have any close friends, and 33 percent more likely (32 percent vs. 24 percent) to say they don’t have a best friend. In fact, many men feel emotionally closer to their dogs than to other humans. In a recent study by psychologist Christopher Blazina and researcher Lori Kogan, 62 percent of male dog owners said that their relationship with their dog is “almost always” secure, while only 10 percent said the same about the relationship with the closest human in their life.

Adolescent Boys Also Suffer from Unrealistic Beauty Standards

Naomi Wolf’s 1991 book *The Beauty Myth* reported that efforts to be thin and pretty undermine women. But one of the biggest fictions about the beauty myth is that it’s solely female. Boys suffer from unrealistic beauty standards, too, and the problem starts early. In the tween years, as puberty begins and testosterone starts to surge, boys generally don’t notice much of anything happening to their bodies,

(continued on page 6)
Men @ Work

the New York Times reported at the end of last year. At least nothing outwardly visible. Fair enough; it will take years for this hormone to transform them into men. What they do notice is the endless parade in front of them of perfect male bodies across screens and billboards and magazine pages, too: broad shoulders beneath chiseled jawlines; six-pack abs above bulging genitals hiding beneath tight shorts or underpants. And those who have viewed porn (that would be half of all boys finishing middle school, maybe more, depending upon the study you read) see extra-large examples of manliness. Compounding the issue is that scant attention is being paid to this pernicious assault on adolescent boys at a critical time in their development. Now health and wellness educators have a whole new area to turn their attention to this year and beyond.

Young Men on Sex, Masculinity, and #MeToo

What do boys think about sex, masculinity, and #MeToo? Peggy Orenstein, acclaimed for her 2016 book Girls & Sex, was initially resistant to write a companion book, about young males’ thoughts on consent, sexual violence, power, and intimacy, according to an interview she did recently with Fatherly. Then #MeToo happened, sparking urgent conversations about those topics and others. Orenstein soon changed her mind and the resulting book, Boys & Sex, is a deep dive into the complicated inner and outer worlds boys inhabit.

Interviewees, 16–22, responded to Orenstein’s questions about everything from “toxic” masculinity and the cultural shifts happening around them to consent and the complications that arise when young men want to interrupt “locker room talk.” It’s an upclose examination of what boys are thinking at a time when they are still being pushed to wear the mask of conventional masculinity. Along with the book’s nuanced look at the complexities of being a young man today, Orenstein also addresses what parents can do to help young men to become more emotionally present.

Much of what she uncovered is consistent with findings Voice Male has reported on over the years including boys’ answer to her question about the attributes of the “ideal guy.” Orenstein found that responses could be distilled down to “Sexual conquests, dominance, aggression, wealth, athleticism and emotional suppression, stoicism, never showing any feelings, don’t let people see you cry. That was still completely there—in the box that boys are put in.” To read the full interview, go to fatherly.com/love-money/relationships/teen-boys-sex-toxic-masculinity-me-too/.

Bullied Boys, Risky Sex

Adolescent boys who are victims of cyber bullying are more likely to exhibit adverse psychological problems, including depression and risky behaviors such as substance use, and unprotected intercourse with multiple partners. Researchers, including those from the Louisiana State University, found that all types of peer victimization are related to symptoms of depression for both females and males. Based on previous studies, the researchers said boys who are subject to cyber bullying pursue risky sexual behaviors more frequently than do girls, reflecting a culture of unhealthy masculinity. The study, “Peer Victimization, Depression and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Youth in the United States: a gender-based approach,” was conducted by Youn Kyoun Kim, Mansoo Yu, Courtney Cronley and Miyoun Yang and published in the International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health. The study highlights the need to pay special attention to male victims, who may be reluctant to self-identify, and are therefore at greater risk of negative health outcomes.

Hooked on Gambling as Teens, Men Still Gambling in Their Twenties

Research shows that one in 10 boys 17-years-old bet over the Internet, despite it’s being illegal for anyone under 18. By the time they reach 20, more than a third are gambling online and this reaches 47 percent among 24-year-olds, according to research by Bristol University and reported in the UK’s Daily Mail. One in eight 11 to 16-year-olds follow gambling businesses on social media. The alarming findings lay bare the scale of the gambling epidemic among young men in Britain, which is fueling soaring rates of addiction and mental health disorders. To obtain their findings, researchers quizzed more than 10,000 young people aged 17, 20, and 24 about their gambling habits.

Young Children See Males More Powerful Than Females

Researchers have found that children as young as four might see males as more powerful than females. In a study published in the journal Sex Roles, conducted by the French National Centre for Scientific Research, children associated power with masculinity. In some situations, the association between power and masculinity didn’t manifest in girls. The researchers wanted to know whether children aged three to six in France, Lebanon, and Norway attributed more power to masculine figures than feminine ones. One experiment featured showing the children a picture with two non-gendered individuals, with one of them in dominant physical posture and the other in subordinate posture. The children first had to guess which of the two was exerting power over the other. Then they had to assign a gender to each. The results revealed that from four years and up a large majority of children considered the dominant individual to be male. The power-masculinity association was observed in both boys and girls, and just as much in Lebanon as in France and Norway. Researchers noted there was no significant difference in three-year-old children but did not explain why.
Gender activists in Jamaica are hoping that the call for a more than a monthlong withdrawal of sexual privileges in romantic relationships will raise awareness about violence against women and enlist male muscle in the fight for respect.

Reacting to a wave of spousal violence on the Caribbean island, “the fire of fury” was ignited by Trinidad and Tobago writer and gender advocate Nazma Muller. She took to her social media page to urge women to organize a sex strike to put the cause of women’s rights on the front burner. She had proposed that the sex strike be imposed until International Women’s Day on March 8.

Speaking to The Gleaner newspaper in Kingston at the end of January, Muller urged Caribbean women to protest the ideology that women were property. Men will “never miss the water till the well runs dry,” she noted in promoting the sex strike. “They will begin to value us and our capacity to produce life if we doh’ let off none. Lock shop and reflect on what this thing is doing to us and to the future,” Muller said. “I am saying to my sisters across the Caribbean, let us really consider and appreciate this thing we have and the case of how it is used. We really have to take back our p*****p***** and put value on it.”

Since the start of 2020, there have been at least four cases of fatal domestic violence against women in Trinidad; between November 2018 and December 2019, 20 women were murdered by their partners. As a result, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service recently launched a gender-based violence unit to address reports of domestic and intimate-partner violence, and sexual assault, among other gender-based crimes.

Professor Opal Palmer Adisa, university director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies said she would strongly advocate for Jamaican women to also “lock shop” in protest of gender-based violence there. Acknowledging that women have used sexual power for personal benefit and sway in their relationships for ages, Palmer Adisa said it was time for women to collectively challenge patriarchal values of entitlement.

“Jamaica definitely needs a [sex] strike. I think that women have more power than they exercise. If women were so organized and all women took this on as their issue and we say nothing, nobody getting anything—including those who are ‘behaving themselves’—then that would have some impact,” Palmer Adisa said.

The advocacy comes amid national outrage over a slew of murders of women. Palmer Adisa fears, however, that because many women will not feel sufficiently empowered to engage in a strike of this nature, which would require mass participation, the desired result might not be achieved.

Gender activist Nadeen Spence shared a similar sentiment of caution. Spence said that even though women have used a sex strike in seeking to end civil war, she did not believe the strategy would be successful in Jamaica because some women would cast blame on other women.

The advocacy to which she referred was the sex strike organized in the West African state of Liberia in 2003 by Leymah Gbowee, ending 14 years of civil war. Gbowee was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Palmer Adisa believes that one way of achieving a paradigm shift in Jamaican culture and relationships is to recruit men as loud voices in the fight against patriarchal violence. “Men have to be our allies and they have to speak to other men, their brothers, men on the street they see are disrespecting women, so that becomes their responsibility.”

Danae Hyman is a reporter for The Gleaner newspaper in Kingston, Jamaica, where a version of this article first appeared. She can be reached at danae.hyman@gleanerjm.com.
When I was ten I wanted to live inside my father’s dreams. My father worked nights and slept during the day. Our apartment on 938 Longwood Avenue in the fifties was what someone coming from the South, or maybe Texas, might call a shotgun shack. My family lived in unit number three. One walked up several stairs from the front stoop past the mailboxes, a long corridor, and then up a long flight of stairs. The first door on the right was where we lived. Inside, the rooms were next to each other like shoe boxes. Off the hallway was a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, then a living room, with two more bedrooms in the back. A fire escape outside the bedroom on the left. During the years I would grow up in this space, the rooms would change. Bedrooms would become living rooms. A kitchen would become a bathroom if there was no hot water. Richard’s room would become Marie’s room. I saw my father sleeping in many different rooms.

A man sleeps because he is tired. He also has a thirst for sleep if he wishes to escape. Maybe after drinking or making love, the wetness of sleep can wash away a man’s pain or guilt. A man can also crave sleep if he wishes to dream. Here a man can discover his wings. He can learn to fly again. He can leave this world for another. To dream is to be free. For my father to dream it was the chance to slip past the labels and gravity of opinions that people had of him. He could avoid being called dumb or stupid. He could fix anything you gave him. I remember a large picture of my father that was stored in the back of a closet. In the picture my father is handsome, cool, debonair, a lady’s man, Billy Dee Williams when Diana Ross was Lady Day. My father was in his twenties when this picture was made. He had the look of a gambler, or maybe Malcolm Little before he took an X for his name.

We lived on Longwood Avenue because some cousin or uncle helped my father find a place to live. Here was a man with three children, trying to make ends meet. He needed all the help he could get. On those late afternoons when he would leave the house for work he would ignore the sky and clouds. He would have no time to name the trees, plants, or flowers. My father walked down the street the way jazz musicians entered clubs carrying their instruments. He had a presence of coolness, detachment. A musician turning his back to his audience.

Egberto Miller walks to the subway carrying his lunch. My mother has taken the time to fix him a good meal. I will remember the exchange of small brown paper bags more than hugs and kisses between my parents. When we moved into the St. Mary's Housing Projects, we lived on the seventeenth floor; my mother would watch my father walk to work from the bedroom window. Behind her would be an unmade bed. The outline of my father's body was still trapped against the sheets and blankets. My father never overslept when it was time to go to work. He never dragged himself out of bed. He was up and in the bathroom washing his body before you could even talk to him. This is why I believe he
never dreamed. His eyes never had that soft, hazy, distant look. His eyes never looked tired. When you work hard every day you don't look tired; you are tired but you never mention it. There are no excuses.

I wonder what my mother thought about my father always sleeping. No time to really go anywhere. What was she thinking while bending over the stove? My father is sitting at the kitchen table. He props his head up with his hands. He is waiting for his meal. Years from now I will recognize the pose. It’s the picture we get from the losers’ locker room after the World Series, the Super Bowl or the NBA Finals. It’s defeat after making an error, the ball going in and out of the rim. A foot touching the line in the end zone. Or worst, the referee or umpire missing the call. Yet there is something heroic about my father. It took many years for me to realize the simple beauty behind how he ate his food. The care that he gave to even the most mundane task. Just before I went off to college, he printed my name on the inside of a new typewriter case, his block letters so beautifully even. I looked at my name each time I took the typewriter out. I was named by the women in the family. A great aunt gave me the middle name Ethelbert. My mother’s mother was named Eugen without the E at the end. I write my name on a white sheet of paper, Eugene E. Miller. I hand it to my father so he can spell it correctly.

Excerpted from Fathering Words: The Making of an African American Writer by E. Ethelbert Miller. A 20th anniversary edition of the book was just published by Black Classic Press. Author of several collections of poetry and two memoirs, he is the editor of Poet Lore magazine, and host of the weekly WPFW morning radio show On the Margin. He lives in Washington, DC.

100th Anniversary of Suffrage
Votes for Women
By W.E.B. DuBois

Three years before women won the right to vote, civil rights leader W.E.B. DuBois wrote the essay below in The Crisis, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Let us understand frankly, there is not the slightest reason for supposing that white American women under ordinary circumstances are going to be any more intelligent, liberal or humane toward the black, the poor and unfortunate than white men are. On the contrary, considering what the subjection of a race, a class or a sex must mean, there will undoubtedly manifest itself among women voters at first more prejudice and petty meanness toward Negroes than we have now.

It is the awful penalty of injustice and oppression to breed in the oppressed the desire to oppress others. The southern white women who form one of the most repressed and enslaved groups of modern civilized women will undoubtedly, at first, help willingly and zealously to disenfranchise Negroes, cripple their schools and publicly insult them.

Nevertheless, votes for women must and ought to come and the Negroes should help bring this to pass for these reasons:

1. Any extension of democracy involves a discussion of the fundamentals of democracy.

2. If it is acknowledged to be unjust to disenfranchise a sex it cannot be denied that it is absurd to disenfranchise a color.

3. If the North enfranchises women, the proportion of unselfish intelligent voters among Negroes will be increased, and the proportion of Negro voters whom white politicians have trained to venality will be decreased.

4. If when the North enfranchises women the South refuses to enfranchise only the whites, then the discrepancy between North and South in the votes cast will be even greater than now; at present the southern white voter has from five to seven times the power of the northern voter. How long would the nation endure an increase or even a doubling of this power? It would not take long before southern representatives in Congress would be cut down or colored women enfranchised.

5. Granting that first tendencies would make the women voter as unfair in race rights as the man, there would be in the long run a better chance to appeal to a group that knows the disadvantage and injustice of disenfranchisement by experience, than to one careless and arrogant with power. And in all cases the broader the basis of democracy the surer is the universal appeal for justice to win ultimate hearing and sympathy.

Therefore: Votes for Women.

Civil rights leader, Pan-Africanist, sociologist, educator, historian, writer, editor, poet, and scholar, W.E.B. DuBois was a founder of the NAACP. This essay appeared in The Crisis, the NAACP’s magazine, in 1917.
Every two weeks, a group of 50 or 60 men cram into a makeshift bingo hall in Vancouver’s poorest neighborhood, Downtown Eastside. They share a hot meal, play bingo, get free haircuts—then they get real about their health, talking about everything from prostate cancer to sexual abuse, in sessions led by doctors and nurses.

It’s called DUDES Club, an acronym for Downtown Urban Knights Defending Equality and Solidarity. “We have this phrase, Leave your armor at the door,” said longtime club member Robert Chippeyay, 54. “You just leave all your toxic masculinity at the door, feel free and everyone’s at the same level. And that’s where the magic happens.”

Chippeway was in rough shape when he first stumbled upon the group in 2010. After a decade of living in Downtown Eastside, he was an alcoholic with a cocaine addiction, living with HIV and Stage 2 cirrhosis of the liver. “My mental health was all over the place,” he recalled. “I was powerless and I felt hopelessness.”

He was encouraged by the club’s welcoming atmosphere, so he kept returning. He credits his fellow “dudes” for helping get him back on his feet again. “It’s very important, crucial, to my recovery,” he added.

The program is now fielding inquiries from community health providers worldwide who wonder if the key to improving men’s mental health is as simple as good, old-fashioned male bonding.

Overcoming Loneliness

The Vancouver Native Health Society started DUDES Club in 2010, after male patients at its HIV drop-in clinic repeatedly talked about being lonely (www.dudesclub.ca/).

“They all identified loneliness as their main mental health concern ... it manifests in substance use, depression, anxiety, and PTSD,” said Dr. Paul Gross, a family physician and cofounder of the men’s health group. “So, [we’re] just trying to be a sanctuary, a safe space where men can come and connect.”

In addition to the bi-weekly dinner and bingo, the men take outings to sports events and go camping. But the backbone of the program remains discussions about health. Once a year, the men also gather for a wellness fair, where medical tests are offered. Gross says DUDES Club’s social aspects are essential to coaxing men to open up about health.

“There’s an expectation, constructed over centuries, of what is expected of men: stoicism and courage in the face of any suffering. And don’t show emotion, don’t show weakness. Don’t ask for help if you absolutely don’t need it,” said Gross.

“That narrative has been responsible, we believe, for a lot of the trend over the past decades in terms of ‘toxic’ masculinity, gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace.”

Brotherhood of Solidarity

About two-thirds of DUDES Club members identify as Indigenous. Sandy Lambert, a member of Tallcree First Nation in Alberta and DUDES Club resident elder, says he’s met many Indigenous men who avoid hospitals and medical clinics, even if they require urgent care. “They just didn’t feel any trust with the healthcare system because of all the stigma and discrimination that happens. I thought, ‘Well, maybe, as a human being, I can help my brothers out there.’”

Persuading men to talk is no “overnight fix,” says Lambert, but he believes it helps to combine Western medical treatment with Indigenous healing traditions such as the medicine wheel. “I know my people used to sit in teepees, and the men and women would have their own talking circles. So, for generations and generations, we did that,” said Lambert.

Sandy Lambert, a member of Tallcree First Nation in Alberta and a DUDES Club elder.
The program is fielding inquiries from health providers worldwide wondering if the key to improving men’s mental health is as simple as good, old-fashioned male bonding.

Research suggests that the DUDES Club model shows benefits. A three-year study by the University of British Columbia found that participants’ mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health improves in the program’s safe, non-judgmental environment.

“Part of what we try to do is to encourage men to move along the spectrum from curious to serious about their health and wellness,” said Gross.

Elders and cooks receive honoraria, but the group relies primarily on volunteers, including Gross, which allows the club to operate on a budget of approximately $25,000 a year. The program’s cost-effectiveness has led to the launch of satellite clubs in seven communities across British Columbia, including Kamloops, Smithers, and Prince George, in addition to its 32 clubs in partnership with the First Nations Health Authority.

“It reconnected me to my spiritual being”—Robert Chippeway

Robert Chippeway still marvels at how the brotherhood helped him clean up his health, recalling a critical moment in his recovery that took place one evening at DUDES Club. “I stood up there and said, ‘Hey guys, this is really good for me. I’m actually one-year sober today.’ The whole group applauded … I was super proud.”

Chippeway has been sober for nearly four years, and he’s managing his HIV with medication. He also began exploring his Ojibway heritage, which he’d long felt alienated from. “I’m more involved in singing and making drums and going to sweats and stuff like that. It reconnected me to my spiritual being,” he said.

Chippeway also reconnected with his family, eventually moving to Coquitlam to live with his brother, sister, and father.

He was recently named a DUDES Club Champion, which means he helps organize dinners and plan outings for the men. Though he no longer calls the Downtown Eastside home, Chippeway still makes time for the dudes. “Just the bonding, being in a room full of men with men,” he said, “it’s just amazing.”

Duncan McCue is host of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s Radio One’s Cross Country Checkup and a correspondent for CBC’s The National. During a Knight Fellowship at Stanford University in 2011, he created a guide for journalists called Reporting in Indigenous Communities. Duncan is Anishinaabe, a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. A version of this story first appeared on the CBC’s website.
Pornography has become the default sex educator for large numbers of young people. Viewing pornography is routine, especially among boys and young men, as recent studies document, including two in Australia. Children and young people are encountering pornography in greater numbers, at younger ages, and with a wider variety of content.

Pornography is a powerful sexual socializer. There is robust evidence of pornography’s impacts, across seven domains, among young people and adults. Some are relatively innocuous; others are deeply troubling.

First, especially for the youngest children, some are shocked, troubled, or disturbed by premature or inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit material, although others are not.

Second, unsurprisingly, pornography provides sexual information and liberalization. Young people who use porn develop greater sexual knowledge (including about bodies and practices) and more liberalized sexual attitudes than others, as longitudinal studies in the Netherlands and US have found.

Third, pornography can shift users’ sexual interests, behaviors, and relations. The most well-documented example is that young men who use pornography are more likely than others to be interested in, and to try to have, anal intercourse. Studies also find links between pornography use and unsafe sex, and other behaviors. Pornography shapes its users’ “sexual scripts,” modeling behavior and guiding their sexual expectations.

Fourth, pornography can lower relationship satisfaction. A 2017 study in Human Communication Research found that pornography use is associated with men’s lower sexual and relationship satisfaction in relationships. Some studies also find that for women, male partners’ pornography use reduces intimacy, feeds self-objectification and bodily shame, or is accompanied by coercion into sexual acts.

Fifth, some individuals come to use pornography in ways that are compulsive, with damaging consequences for themselves or others. Whether we understand this as an addiction or an impulse control disorder, there is no doubt that some users experience their use as harmful. There are debates over whether pornography is or isn’t a significant contributor to men’s problems with desire, erection, and orgasm, and it may be particularly so for men with self-reported problematic use.

The last two areas of impact are the ones that concern me most.

Sixth, pornography teaches sexist and sexually objectifying understandings of gender and sexuality. It shapes how boys and men see girls and women, and how girls and women see themselves.
The New -
appearance is more likely to practice or desire behaviors, as meta-analyses in both and violence-supportive attitudes, in both meta-analyses and further recent studies among adolescents and adults. They also find associations between pornography use and actual violent behaviors, as meta-analyses in both 2000 and 2015 showed. Other research finds that men who use pornography more often are more likely to practice or desire dominant and degrading practices such as gagging and choking. Women who use pornography are more likely to practice or desire submissive practices such as being choked, slapped, gagged, and so on, especially if their first pornography exposure was at a young age.

Correlational studies cannot show the direction of causality, but experimental and longitudinal studies can. Experimental studies find that people shown pornography show increases in sexually violent attitudes and behaviors. Finally, longitudinal studies find that pornography use predicts later sexually violent attitudes and behaviors. For example, in a study of U.S. youth conducted over three years, individuals who used violent pornography were more than six times as likely as others to engage in sexually aggressive behavior. In another study among adolescents, males’ use of sexually explicit media predicted more frequent sexual harassing behaviors two years later.

Can Pornography Be Ethical?

YES.

I’m a 36-year-old erotic performer who has done various types of sex work and sex work activism, including pornography. Part of my personal brand is that the work I do is socially conscious, ethical both in the performance and the production, based in genuine chemistry and consensual, negotiated sex. I care deeply about working with companies that reflect a diverse, trans-inclusive, body-positive cast, which I am able to manifest because I live in the San Francisco area. Even so, I am not dependent on porn for my living. I am white and cisgendered—so I have intersections of privilege there as well.

I fundamentally believe that ethical pornography is a possibility, simply because I do not believe the inherent act of filming a sex act is ethical or non-ethical. I believe that ethical porn is a spectrum of behavior that treats performers as workers and as humans, both on set and within the marketing. I’ve personally created work that I would point to as examples of ethical porn, and am lucky to have worked with companies that hold themselves to that standard. I think that we’re seeing the results of how queer porn often joins politics to their pornography in the mainstream, with safer sex being depicted more often, racism being challenged and various big companies focusing on “real chemistry” in their pairings—though we still have a long way to go before that’s the norm.

—Kitty Stryker

Queer porn performer and lecturer on sex work, consent culture, and intersectionality in sex-positive spaces, Kitty Stryker is editor of the anthology Ask: Building Consent Culture. She speaks at universities and conferences about feminism, sex work, body positivity, and queer politics.

NO.

I am a radical feminist. I believe that the root of women’s oppression lies in male violence, control and exploitation of female sexuality and reproduction. This is seen in the heteronormative practice of marriage that constructs women and children as possessions of men, and within a rape culture that privileges the practice of PIV [penis-in-vagina] sex and the male orgasm, and fetishizes the idea of consent while invalidating the actual practice therein.

In our current capitalist-patriarchy, the production of ethical pornography still helps to maintain male control of women’s sexuality and the privileging of the male orgasm. The current movement towards the production of ethical pornography is a positive attempt to deal with the consequences of the ubiquity and mainstreaming of violent “gonzo” porn and the production and distribution of images of abuse taken without consent, including that of children and the current rise in “revenge porn.”

In theory, the filming of a sex act is neither inherently ethical nor non-ethical; however, it is not possible to have ethical pornography in our capitalist-patriarchal culture, where women are still constructed as a sex class while the vast majority of the pornography industry, including the supposed free online porn, is owned by a very small group of companies. Ethical porn is not a separate economic entity distinct from the power of mainstream violent, racist, homophobic and misogynist pornography. In a post-patriarchal, post-white supremacist world where poverty does not dictate the “choices” of individuals, it may be possible to make ethical pornography. We simply are not in that position yet.

—Louise Pennington

Louise Pennington is a feminist writer and editor of A Room of Our Own, a collection of essays, poetry, and short stories written by women. She also edited Everyday Victim Blaming: Challenging the Portrayal of Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in the Media. Excerpted from a debate six years ago between Stryker and Pennington which originally appeared in The New Internationalist.
The effects of pornography are neither inevitable nor all-powerful. The impacts of pornography are mediated by four factors: the characteristics of the viewer, their engagement with the material, its content, and the character and context of use.

Pornography is an important risk factor for sexual violence. But its risks are greater for some users than others. If a 16-year-old boy already has hostile and sexist attitudes toward girls, he is more likely to be drawn to violent pornography, and this pornography will have a greater influence on the likelihood that he will pressure or coerce girls into sex. Sexual violence is shaped by multiple social and cultural factors, of which pornography use is only one.

We need to know much more about how young people use, and engage with pornography. But in recognizing their active use of sexual media, we should not pretend that pornography has no effects. As a recent review of 43 studies among adolescents and emerging adults documents, sexually explicit and sexually violent media have clear effects on domestic and sexual violence perpetration and victimization.

How Can We Limit Pornography’s Harms Among Children and Youth?

Leaving aside legal strategies, I focus on three areas to limit pornography’s harms:

First, comprehensive sexuality education in schools is vital for providing alternative, age-appropriate content on sexuality.

Second, curricula on pornography can teach young people to respond more critically to pornography. “Pornography education” seeks to support young people to critically evaluate and respond to pornography’s influence in order to minimize its harms and equip them for healthy relationships. Australia has already produced good curricula.

Such efforts do work. In a Dutch longitudinal study, the more a young person had learned about the use of pornography from their school-based sex education, the less likely they were to develop a view of women as sex objects. In a US evaluation of a five-session curriculum, students showed positive changes in their pornography-related knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

Parents may worry that teaching about pornography in schools will encourage students to seek it, but there is no sign that school curricula prompt young people to seek out pornography for the first time, or that researchers asking adolescents about pornography encourages its use.

“Better” and “Ethical” Pornography?

Third, we need better pornography, what some call “ethical pornography”—ethical in its production, use and distribution, and content.

Participants should have consented to their involvement and not be harmed. The unethical production of porn is common: among Australians aged 16–49, 12 percent of males and 6.2 percent of females have taken a nude or sexual image of another person without their consent. Ethical pornography also involves ethical use and distribution. People consent to its viewing, and it is not distributed without participants’ consent.

However, discussions of “ethical” pornography have largely ignored the issue of consent. Yet physical and verbal aggression is routine in pornography. An analysis of top-selling and top-renting titles found that 88 percent of scenes showed aggression, largely by males and overwhelmingly against females.

So we must also hold the pornography industries to account. They must produce better pornography, which eroticizes consent, respect, and intimacy rather than sexist hostility.

Parents also have asked me: “My son is looking at porn. What kind of porn should he be looking at?” Maybe we need “free range” pornography, even a ratings system, the “Healthy Sex Seal of Approval”?

Even depictions of consensual sex may perpetuate the sexual objectification of women and reinforce other sexist social norms. And in a sexist culture, even the most ethical images of sex may be understood in ways that affirm that wider culture. Still, it seems pragmatic to give attention to what might comprise “better” or at least “less worse” pornography.

Regardless of our individual moral or political leanings, it is our collective responsibility not just to prevent and reduce the harms pornography causes, but also to foster children’s and young people’s healthy sexualities.

**Fight the New Drug**

Fight the New Drug is a non-religious and non-legislative organization whose mission is to provide individuals the opportunity to make informed decisions “regarding pornography by raising awareness on its harmful effects using only science, facts, and personal accounts.” According to its website, it “carefully review[s], summarize[s], and present[s] peer-reviewed research about pornography in a clear and concise way that’s engaging and easy... to understand.” Fight the New Drug says it does “not associate with any faith or belief system, nor do we discuss porn and sexual exploitation from a religious or moral perspective.”

www.fightthenewdrug.org/

When my phone rang last May, I saw the call was originating from the Canadian Arctic. Who would be calling me from there? I wondered. The voice on the other end of the line said, “I have been looking hard to find you. I need you to edit my book.” So began my adventure working with Francisca Mandeya, author of the memoir Mother Behold Thy Son. Over the ensuing months, I was privileged to learn about Francisca’s life—and her life’s work. What follows is an excerpt from her book; its subtitle expresses her mission: One Woman’s Journey to Dismantle Patriarchy and Live a Life of Equality, Love and Freedom.

—Rob Okun

I was born at Mt. St. Mary’s Hospital in Wedza, a rural area in the province of Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe. My parents’ home was in a village named Goto, Zimbudzana Kraal, about 25 kilometers from the hospital. Wedza is known for having provided iron to the ancient people of this Zimbabwe land. The Mbire people of the Soko clan owned the land. It was known as Mbire before colonial powers called it Wedza. It is in this village that my umbilical cord is buried and from where I was educated from age seven to 13 save for one term in Marondera in 1979.

In 1984, when I was almost 14, I left home for four years to attend boarding school at St. David’s Bonda in Nyanga, followed by two years at St. Ignatius high school in Chishawasha, a Jesuit mission not far from Harare. For my siblings and me boarding school became more of our home than our village home because we stayed there nine months of the year.

I am a mother. I am a mother of two girls and a boy. I once was married. I am a single mother of two daughters and a son, raised in my home as equals, not a common practice in a patriarchal culture like mine. Each of my children is pursuing their passion: in clinical psychology, telecommunications, and aviation.

I have studied accounting, development education, and systemic family counseling. I am a scholar of development studies. I am a mother who has dared to be vulnerable, visible and authentic. While in this book I focus on my son—and by extension on all boys’ journey to manhood—my daughters (and girls and young women) are also always close to my heart! Mother Behold My Son is for them, too.

I long to see my son become a man of conviction, confidence and integrity, a loving brother, husband or partner; a father, citizen, leader, co-worker—all that he can become. I long for him to be a “Proverbs 31 man” who will find his Proverbs 31 soul mate (a virtuous, ideal partner). I long to behold my son reaching his full potential and becoming the best version of himself. If he treats his fellow human beings as equals, I am convinced that ideal will be attained. I have a dream.

Mother Behold Thy Son

I long to free myself from the clutches of patriarchy as I bare my soul and stand tall to tell my story. Through storytelling, I hope to teach my son to extricate himself from the jaws of rigid, traditional masculinity that threatens to undermine his happiness. I teach my son and daughters to stand in this world as equals, to question anyone who boasts of possessing knowledge and authority. I encourage and challenge them to learn, to unlearn and relearn as they journey toward their purpose.

I am an optimist with abundant energy and an unbreakable spirit. I am the voice that has refused to give in to the culture of silence. I am a voice from the universe proclaiming that we must employ the power of love, not the love of power, if we are to turn wounds into wins. I am a healer committed to the healing of the feminine and the masculine.

This book represents a sliver of my life. In it, I expose not just the toxicity of gender inequality but also recount my journey to free myself, my family and everyone I can, from its poisonous legacy. I know that my family and I are not alone. I am bringing out into the open issues that many families would rather ignore. As Oscar Wilde said, “This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners.”

I am writing this story from my home in the Arctic Archipelago, in Nunavut, a Canadian territory nearly 13,000 miles from my native Zimbabwe. How did I end up here? Let me explain.

While in Zimbabwe, my quest for freedom and belief in justice and peace often got me into risky, sometimes life-threatening situations. One such incident occurred in 2012 after I sent a government minister’s wife a Mother’s Day message. “If as mothers we all told our sons not to participate in election
Francisca Mandeya wrote *Mother Behold My Son* with her 22-year-old son, Paul Ntandoyenkosi Danisa, a pilot, uppermost in her mind.

violence,” I wrote, “no mother would be mourning the death of her child. Happy Mothers Day.”

The response was fast and furious. “Who are you?” she responded angrily. “I will have you followed by the Central Intelligence Office!” A chill spread through my body. I shivered as if the coldness of the text had jumped off the page and invaded my body. I never answered; I never heard from her again.

The Central Intelligence Office is notorious for being hostile to dissidents. True to the minister’s wife’s menacing warning, one day I was followed and threatened with being “disappeared”—right in front of my family. I told the young man—an agent of the Central Intelligence Office—“You don’t carry Zimbabwe on top of your head like I carry a bucket of water or a bag of mealie meal!” I stood firm. He was surprised that I challenged him and asked for his ID. My brother-in-law (who witnessed what was unfolding) noticed the white Mercedes-Benz the young man was driving had government license plates. After the ordeal, I went to Highlands Police Station to report the matter, in part to make sure there was a record of what had happened. This was neither my first nor my last brush with the system.

I never meant to leave home but I was weary from my dangerous adventures (and being so distraught I contemplated suicide). I felt compelled to leave such a toxic environment. It was more than “urging” from my sisters—they demanded I leave. I moved to Nunavut to live with one of my sisters, Tina, on Christmas Eve 2014. Canada is now—to me—the land of the free. It is where I have come full circle, where I can use my voice and my power without worrying about who might be breathing down my neck.

**Preoccupied Father, Entitled Attacker**

You know the phrase “boys will be boys”? While both women and men have uttered those words, until recently neither thought much about their impact. As the mother of a son and two daughters, hearing that old adage makes me cringe. It irks and unsettles me still. On its own, I suppose the expression “boys will be boys,” could be seen as harmless. However, in the context of how it is usually expressed I can only feel a righteous anger: this damaging expression must be uprooted; not just from our culture but from all cultures!

I remember a day back in 1988, when I was 18. I was blossoming into adulthood and getting comfortable with my changing body—a developing chest and emerging hips. I was conscious of my darker complexion and how I resembled my father—which I was often reminded of by many who compared me to my lighter and prettier siblings. Since I cared about getting compliments, I took extra care to do my hair and look and smell good. Still, I wanted to excel in my academic life, and I was not as excited by boys.

It was Parents’ Day, and I was lost in thought. All the lower sixth or form five students would be showing their parents their work and having a day of celebration. As the ceremony began, I stood on my tiptoes looking around for my father. Where is he? Is he all right? Surely, he would not want to miss this occasion. Today, he would want to witness my academic progress and meet all my teachers. I had done well so I knew my dad would be proud of me.

With a heavy heart, I realized my father was not coming. My friends’ parents tried to console me, but the heavy load I was carrying did not get any lighter. I felt betrayed by my father. Other dads had shown up, why not my dad? My best friend Felly tried to console me, and others offered a hug or a pat to acknowledge my accomplishments, but all I could do was sob. I couldn’t seem to catch my breath. With each pat or hug my friends offered for my accomplishments I kept heaving ragged breaths of distress accompanied by a full chorus line of tears. Nothing would ease my pain except seeing my dad. Have you ever experienced a similar type of disappointment? How is an 18-year-old supposed to be consoled? It was a struggle to come to terms with my absent father. I was his little girl; I was his angel.

While deeply immersed in my disappointment, I was surprised to see a figure in the school garden. No one should be in the garden, I thought to myself. It wasn’t allowed. Even through my blurred, teary vision I could see the figure approaching. My eyes fully opened and I met the gaze of a young man my age. His eyes were sparkling, red like hellfire. When he grinned, he revealed teeth resembling those of a vampire ready to eat. A sense of unease gripped me. He was getting closer.

With a self-possessed expression on his face, he soon was standing directly in front of me, assessing me, sensing what I might do. For my part, I could do nothing. I could think nothing. I could say nothing. He knew he had the advantage. His eyes traveled up and down my body. Then, with a lecherous smile, his hands started to go to uninvited places.

I was frozen. I could not speak, scream, or put up any kind of a fight. I was paralyzed, unable to resist his unwanted advances. Beads of sweat formed on my brow. I could feel the heat in my body rising, not out of desire but fear. A banging noise in my chest was getting louder as my heart slammed into my chest. My ears were on fire. The hair stood up on the back of my neck and my heart continued to race and throb. I desperately wanted to escape but didn’t know how or even if I could get away, where to go. I felt helpless. My thoughts immediately went to my father. Where are you? Then to my brother; where was he? That is who I was looking for—for we could cry together!

My mind was racing like a wild animal instinctively knowing it must escape this danger. But while in my mind I was screaming, “Help!” I remained frozen. He was tall, hovering over me. What should I do? What could I do? Who can help me? His hands were exploring every part of my body. By my silence had I granted him permission to touch me? No—I had not! Silence, yes, but inside I continued screaming. I was calling out—in silence—for my father, my brother as the attacker’s hands dug into my flesh.

That day I was a young, innocent girl. I had never known a man in this way. He was exploring my body with such a sense of entitlement. I knew this was wrong. His manhood was rising, and all I could do was scream inside, “*My God! Where are you, Lord?* I need You now. “*Where are you Dad?*” I needed him, too. And my
brother—“Where are you?” No one answered. No one came. No one was in sight, not even God, or so I thought.

As his behemoth hands continued gripping me by my hips, finally, finally, finally I found my voice. I screamed so loudly that I could swear the ground shook beneath my feet. “Stoppppp!” I screamed. “Get your hands off my body! No! No! Don’t touch me.”

Once they started, the words began tumbling out: I had found my voice! From a place deep within, a surge of energy coursed through my body, accompanied by the strength of King David. I shoved him hard and he fell. I did not recognize it at the time, but God was there with me. God was the speed in my feet. God was speaking to me, reminding me that even though neither my father nor my brothers were present, I was not alone.

The assault was my first experience of unwanted attention. Are girls really supposed to be exposed to such unwanted sexual attention? Are we supposed to put up with being assaulted for the enjoyment of boys? Really?! As long as the attention pleases the boy, it’s just “playing,” right?! Absolutely not! My head was throbbing. Where is my father? Doesn’t he feel I need him now? What happened to our connection?

As I caught my breath and gathered my wits, I started down the hill toward the gate where vehicles entered school grounds. Despite feeling so hurt that he hadn’t been there, my connection with my father was extraordinarily strong. At that moment, it was as if my cry of despair had somehow summoned him. I looked up and there in the distance was his car heading toward me. Instinctively, my feet began a happy dance, and I ran to meet him.

“Where were you, Baba? It is almost time for parents to go.”

“I had some business to finish Fraa. You know how hectic it can get. We were at Portland Cement. I am here now. Don’t cry.”

“Yes, Baba!”

“How is school?”

“It is perfect. I came in first in Physical Geography.”

I said nothing about what happened. My lie by omission nagged at me, but I ignored it. It crept into my thoughts with each sentence to my father. “I no longer want to be in this school, Baba. I want to go home.” Those were the words I wanted to say, but they were stuck, unspoken on the tip of my tongue. I couldn’t access them even though my father and I have a remarkably strong spiritual connection. My father also carried a gun. He had a fiery temper that I inherited. He was aptly named, Ignatius—fiery one. If I told him what had happened, I imagined he would want to use his gun on the man who violated me. So, even if I had wanted to tell, I couldn’t.

Change Is Possible

It is 1986 and I am 16. I remember as if it were yesterday. I am sitting—dazed, bewildered and confused. I see my father surrounded by 16 nurses. Was there something magical about that number? Was this merely a vision or reality? The coincidence was so surreal. At that moment, it was only a vision, a dream. Later it would become reality.

Because of the vision I never spoke with my father about the horror I experienced that day in the school garden. My lips remained sealed for all these years. Until now; I am telling you. While I always trusted my father and his intentions, I feel I know exactly how he would have reacted to the humiliation I felt. Things would have ended well, for him or the perpetrator. Back in those days schools usually dismissed pleas girls made to be protected from abuse. Shamefully, all they would say is that useless phrase, “Boys will be boys!” Dad would have seen what happened for what it was; a clear violation of his darling angel, Fraaa.

Most boys grow to manhood socialized to believe they are entitled to privilege. Too often, when boys and men abuse girls and women, we survivors keep quiet. As a result, the abuser gets away with it, goes unpunished. As girls and women, we feel afraid we’ll be blamed for what happened. And it is this sense of blame that creates the conditions in which shame can grow and in which boys can shrug, hiding behind the “boys will be boys” façade. It is the basis for so many injustices perpetrated against girls and women. They take it lightly; we take it hard.

Unbelievably, years after he sexually assaulted me, the perpetrator actually sent me a friend request on Facebook! “Do you remember what you did to me in the school garden?” I messaged him back, wondering why he wanted to be my friend. “No, I do not remember,” he lied. And here is the worst of it. I do not know why but I accepted his friend request. Later, he unfriended me.

In 2018, 30 years after that terrible time, one of the boys I went to high school with made an astonishing statement to me after exchanging a few messages on social media. “I can’t even believe we are chatting with all the stupidity and immaturity I had during our time together in school. I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me.” He was not involved in bullying me, or body shaming, or groping me. He was just a passive bystander yet he felt guilty for all that had happened to me. He felt the need to apologize on behalf of the boys who were unkind to me. His apology gave me a sense of hope that mothers can behold their sons becoming the best versions of themselves. It also demonstrates to boys that they can be active bystanders (and avoid carrying guilt over the years, kicking themselves saying, “I should have protected that girl”). Change is possible; we need more men who are honest and transparent enough to speak up, to break through the male code of silence.


To order a copy of the book go to amazon.com/Mother-Behold-Thy-Son-Patriarchy/ dp/1999278305. To reach her write: franmandeya@gmail.com.
The stark scene described above is part of a monologue in *The Penis Monologues*, a play examining aspects of the “dominant male temperament.” That’s the phrase the play’s author, Fang Gang, a renowned Chinese sexologist, uses, acknowledging certain similarities with the English phrase “toxic masculinity.”

Based on case studies collected during Fang’s research on gender while at Beijing Forestry University, the play’s 12 episodes are performed by 10 amateur male actors. Before coming to Hangzhou province last spring, performances took place in Beijing and Shenzhen. The play has faced many obstacles in a country where frank conversations about sex and gender are still taboo. Performances in the southern city of Guangzhou were abruptly cancelled without explanation and the show’s name in Chinese deliberately avoids using the word *penis*.

Despite these challenges, *The Penis Monologues* is a remarkably candid examination of sex and relationships in a deeply patriarchal country. In 2017, a wide-ranging online survey of college students found that it was not uncommon for respondents aged between 18 and 22—most of whom were female—to report they had experienced sexual harassment on campus; less than 4 percent reported what had happened to school authorities or police. And although dozens of women spoke up about sexual harassment issues in the country last year, the impact has not been as strong as in Western societies, where soul-searching is taking place among certain groups of men.

Fang hopes *The Penis Monologues* will prompt more heterosexual Chinese men to reexamine the ways they approach and treat women. “I want to reflect on and criticize the violence of men against women, and promote gender equality from a male perspective,” Fang told Sixth Tone, an online publication covering the uncommon stories of common Chinese people. “Unilateral efforts from women are far from enough; men must act, too.”

That perspective resonates with Tao Xiaotao, a social worker specializing in sex education who also produced the production in Hangzhou. The mother of two young boys hopes that news of the performances will spread on social media and get more straight men thinking about their interactions with women. “Drama is a more acceptable form of expression (than directly calling for change), as it’s easier for people to relate to characters in a play, which then prompts them to reflect,” she says.

Still, the play’s subject matter hasn’t made it easy for Tao to find willing actors. Most men she approached declined after reading monologue titles like “Penis Size,” “Domestic Abuser,” and “Erectile Dysfunction.” “They are afraid of being mocked...
or judged by the public," she said.

When 42-year-old business owner Yu Lei read the play for the first time, he was shocked that it so boldly addressed taboo subjects. But after attending one of Fang’s sex-ed public lectures and seeing members of the audience calmly taking notes, he decided to join the troupe, despite never having acted before.

Tao assigned Yu the play’s first monologue, “Date Rape,” which tells the story of a male college student forcing his girlfriend to have sex with him in a hotel room. Yu was so nervous about performing that he told his wife he was taking part in a charity event organized by a Chinese chapter of White Ribbon, the international advocacy organization working to end men’s violence against women. Fang organized the Chinese group in 2013.

He needn’t have worried: His performance received thunderous applause from the nearly 100 people in the audience, though Yu later confessed he had misgivings. “I’m afraid people might think it was my own story,” he says.

Unlike Yu, Wang Hongqi didn’t hesitate to tell his wife about the play. On the night of the performance, she sat in the audience alongside their six-year-old son. Despite the play’s occasionally explicit content, Wang doesn’t worry that sex-related topics might adversely affect his child. “Kids think all this stuff is perfectly normal and natural,” Wang says. “It’s the parents who don’t know how to give them a proper sex education.”

Wang, who used to work for a company that builds subway systems, once accepted the combination of extreme work hours and after-work social gatherings organized by his male bosses. But that culture kept him from spending time with his family, and after-work social gatherings organized by his male bosses. He needn’t have worried:

While a law to protect domestic violence survivors took effect in 2016, women reporting abuse seldom receive help from authorities, which sometimes list DV cases as “family conflicts.”

That pain is familiar to Ye Chuyang, a queer actor portraying personal experiences in the monologue “Gender Queer.”

“I don’t agree with binary gender divisions, because it limits people’s possibilities,” Ye said. “Most people think men are supposed to be macho, decisive, and strong. They don’t appreciate feminine or delicate men. Though my parents appreciate the sensitive and gentle side of me, they prefer me to be strong and tough just like other boys.”

Ye thinks the play is a chance to both educate people about sexual diversity and help more men understand the experiences of women. “If men could break the rules and speak out, women would feel encouraged and less lonely in this battle,” he says.

Gu Wei’s story, meanwhile, is probably the most personal. A recovering domestic abuser, his monologue reflects on how he had treated his now ex-wife as a possession and didn’t tolerate any challenges to his authority in their marriage. “It was typical dominant masculinity.”

Gu, who has since reformed his behavior and become an activist and volunteer with White Ribbon, hopes to raise awareness of an issue that too many Chinese women suffer in silence. Though a national law to protect victims of domestic violence took effect in 2016, in reality women who report abuse seldom receive adequate help from the authorities, which sometimes list domestic violence cases as “family conflicts.”

Born in 1999, Luo Bin is the youngest member of the cast. Growing up, Luo witnessed his grandfather’s dominating the family and how they snapped at his submissive grandmothers. The young Luo concluded that such behavior was normal. After he got to college, he said he would side with his male friends when they complained that their girlfriends wouldn’t have sex with them. Working on the play has convinced Luo that his long-held behavior and become an activist and volunteer with White Ribbon, hopes to raise awareness of an issue that too many Chinese women suffer in silence. Though a national law to protect victims of domestic violence took effect in 2016, in reality women who report abuse seldom receive adequate help from the authorities, which sometimes list domestic violence cases as “family conflicts.”

The sophomore college student acts as the play’s host, going up to other actors and asking questions like, “What’s a real man?” and “What’s your favorite sex position?” The questions sometimes make audiences uncomfortable, but Luo thinks they’re necessary to open conversations about gender equality. “Now I know if we don’t give people the right to choose what they really want, then it’s not equal at all,” he said.

Fan Yijing is a features reporter at Sixth Tone covering relationships, gender, and aging. Sixth Tone, where this article first appeared, covers issues from the perspectives of those most intimately involved in the nuances and complexities of today’s China.
I was watching the dates a little over a year ago, morbidly perhaps, to determine when I would pass the exact age at which my father died. I have always been finely attuned to time—how long I've known someone, how old I was when Richard Nixon resigned, the years from my son being in preschool to college that overlapped with our last cat's life. I am a historian after all. Many would call me sentimental. I've long felt, like Proust, a visceral quality to time and its passage.

My father died nearly 38 years ago, when he was two months shy of turning 61. I was 25 and had barely known him as an adult. I feel forever grateful that teenage tensions had turned into a good relationship during his last years. On what was to be our last weekend together—the Fourth of July 1982—we had gone to see ET and he was so proud of one of my first bylined articles in the New York Times. But his death during a routine hospital visit a few weeks later not only should not have happened, but also it froze one very important time vector in my life.

My father—like my mother a research psychologist at the National Institutes of Health—was a thoughtful, kind man who grew up in Pennsylvania's coal country and moved upward to reach the upper rungs of his profession.

As I recently told a friend whose father had just died, the idea that death is “being absent” may be the most memorable notion I took away from reading Jean-Paul Sartre decades ago. Dying, being absent, my father wasn't there for what could have been a long adult friendship and a relationship with my son who, in many ways, is so much like him.

When I turned 60 and 10 months in April 2018, I didn't so much think about the prospect of my own death—although that crossed my mind—as I did about what a life that length would mean for me, my loved ones, my friends, posterity. My father and mother were both very accomplished professionals, but in part because my mother lived a quarter century longer, she may be better remembered in their profession and got the longer obituary. (Not many not-famous people care about the length of obituaries unless one has written them, as I have.) That quarter century also enabled her to know not only my son and the ups and downs of my life until age 50, but also that communism had collapsed and the Internet was revolutionizing how people lived and worked.

For me, there was a huge additional trove of memories with and of my mother, captured not only on the Kodachrome slides that my father loved but also on digital cameras that were starting to appear. When I lived in New York, she would regularly visit at my apartment and meet my friends, and I would get off Amtrak at Washington's Union Station late Friday nights to visit her, go to museums, and watch old British comedies on PBS. Later, before she got quite ill, she would play Legos and go berry picking with my son and me.

My father missed all of that because he had died at the age I had just turned. So, I thought: What would I miss and what would my son and others miss if I died at the same time (or a few or more years later)?

I first thought of my son: He would not have had me at his college graduation this spring, much less when he starts his career, or may marry, have children, achieve great things, have setbacks, and have stories to tell. Our discussions of politics and the Economist and cats would have ended early in the Trump administration and, of all the Indian dinners we'd had together, he would never have the possibility of eating Indian food with me in India.

I thought of my partner and how we would only have known each other a few years, not had countless new joys and occasional sorrows, and not “grown old together.” Colleagues and others...
would never see me publish another article or book—maybe the one that would hit the big time. Among my friends from childhood and college, long friendships would have ended in middle age, with no new experiences together and no more times to remember the “good old days” over a bottle of wine. Newer friendships would have been shallower and be cut short. I wouldn’t learn anything more about myself if, as the French philosopher Jacques Derrida suggested, friendship is founded on seeing oneself in the eyes of others.

That’s roughly what happened for my father. For him, I would never be more than the son who had just left graduate school and started at the Times. His marriage to my mother would end at 33 years, far short of those I’ve known who have celebrated 60th or even 70th anniversaries. That next paper or experiment or speech he may have been thinking about writing, doing, or giving would never happen. He never could have thought that when he walked into that hospital that hot July day in 1982, and—unless one believes in some form of eternal consciousness—the very contemplation of these possibilities died with him.

For his friends and colleagues, he has receded far deeper into memory than my mother has. My son tries to “know” him by reading his papers and exploring on Ancestry.com. I try to learn something new about him by talking to distant relatives I barely know and renting a car in Lithuania to drive to the town where his ancestors once lived. Neither my son nor I nor anyone else will ever be able to ask him any more questions, have any more serious or trivial conversations that would make me know him better, love him more, confer new respect, or even annoy me. (I can’t think of him annoying me, but since we all annoy one another at some point, there are all sorts of hypothetical annoyances that could have been if he had lived.)

A post-1982 future could only be hypothetical or conjectural. Which brings me back to the thought: What if I had died at my father’s age, or in that ballpark that I’m still in? As a father, what would that mean for my son? And what about when he hits the age at which I die?

I would like to live a long life, but I also need to—

Andrew L. Yarrow is a 63-year-old former New York Times reporter, historian, and author, most recently of Man Out: Men on the Sidelines of American Life, excerpted in the Fall 2018 issue of Voice Male.

INTERRUPTED BY WAR
When I was old enough, my mother showed me a picture of her father she had shredded—tucking the tiny pieces into her bra to keep them hidden during The War. Her life would have been over, she told me, if anyone had discovered the bits of Jew on her. She—disguised by her red hair, a silver cross, and impeccable Polish—needed to stay alive to keep the promise made to her mother to save herself.

After The War, my mother found a Jewish photographer in Berlin who did his best to make the picture whole. He apologized for the eyes. A straight tear through the center of my grandfather’s gaze made it impossible to restore his eyes—which were softer, my mother said, much softer than they appeared.

My grandfather’s burning gaze, interrupted by a war, stares back at me across time.

My mother never stopped regretting the eyes not being right, as if she had done something wrong, as if she might have preserved him better than she did.

Ani Tuzman is an award-winning poet and the author of The Tremble of Love: A Novel of the Baal Shem Tov. To visit her website and read her blog Harvesting Love, go to antituzman.com.
B eing a transgender male from childhood I always desired to be a man. However, I was born in a female body. I used to observe cisgender male bodies and would compare my body to theirs. Such comparisons are mostly inevitable, I suppose. I have constantly compared my body to cisgender men’s—their beards, their muscles, height, hands, everything. These comparisons often increased my vulnerability and made me more insecure about my body.

When I started my transition in 2017, the comparison took a different turn. I began to look like a cis man and I also seemed younger than my actual age. People didn’t believe I was older. I wanted to look like my age and have the body of a cis man of my age.

Last winter I had a bilateral mastectomy—top surgery—which entailed removing my breasts and shaping a male-contoured chest. I opted for this surgery without any proper counseling and was expecting miracles. There were many things that I’ve realized since my surgery. When trans people start our medical transition, we are crossing a gender binary in many cases without properly understanding how things are going to be—that we can never go back to fitting into the binaries again.

Society’s Pressure on Trans People to Conform to the Binary

As I did not have any proper counseling, I was not prepared for what was to come. Society generally approves of only two forms of bodies—cis female and cis male. Only these binary bodies are considered acceptable. That puts tremendous pressure on trans people to conform. Because of this pressure trans people often feel stuck; we may forget to examine our dysphoria, essential to helping know what sort of transition—social, medical, or legal—we desire, including if we desire any sort of transition at all.

I have seen many trans people so pressured that they may opt for bottom surgery just for society, even when they feel dysphoric. I also had the same impression regarding our bodies. I had a cis female body before I opted for the top surgery. Now I don’t have breasts. Still, since I don’t have the body of a cis male, what is my body? It doesn’t conform to any sort of societal expectation of a so-called “normal” body. So what is it? My breasts had been a part of my body for nearly three decades. It is not that I miss them; still, it did take time for me to adjust to the fact that they were no longer part of my body. There were even moments of self-doubt when I used to wonder if I had made the right choice to opt for surgery.

Aftershocks of Surgery

Few talk about post-surgical depression and issues like sudden hair loss. Trans people need to be more aware of post-surgical depression and its manifestations, which can include trouble sleeping or excessive sleeping, anxiety and stress, feelings of despair and hopelessness, and poor appetite among others. If a trans person experiences these kinds of symptoms even two weeks after surgery, they shouldn’t hesitate to contact a mental health professional immediately. It is perfectly okay to feel this way. In my case, I was extremely anxious about my nipples and about recovery. At times I was so anxious I could not concentrate on anything and was unable to sleep for days. Also, I started having hair fall out from various parts of my body. Fortunately, those symptoms stopped after a month. This is why counseling about surgery is so important.

I’m Comfortable with My Body

Three months after my surgery I was able to say unequivocally that it was one of the best decisions I have made. I no longer feel that conscious of my body. Though I am still on the road to recovery, wearing vests and T-shirts became a liberating experience. My dysphoria levels have diminished significantly and I am more confident about my body. Now every time I look in a mirror, I see the guy I always felt I was on the inside.

Just like gender, our bodies are also on a spectrum. I used to believe in the societal construct that a man can only be a man if he has a cis male body. However, I am a man with a vagina who used to menstruate and has a beard and who can easily pass as cis male. I don’t wish to be like a cis man anymore; I am comfortable with my body. My body is trans and I am in love with it. This is my way of being a man.

Jamal Siddiqui is a Muslim who believes in queer feminism and maintains a blog about his transition. He recorded his transition on his YouTube channel. A version of this article appeared in Feminism in India (feminismindia.com).
As a longtime advocate of healthy masculinity, not to mention a passionate rugby fan for decades, gender equality researcher-advocate Garth Barker says he was intrigued when he learned that rugby’s national governing body, New Zealand Rugby (NZR), was launching a video series called Being Men. With rugby considered the country’s “national sport”—and half-jokingly also considered its national religion—Barker says he was curious about what they would include in the videos. The national rugby association governs not just local clubs and regional teams, but also professional franchise teams and national men’s and women’s teams. So what they recommended would have countrywide significance (www.NZRgby.co.nz). What follows is his report on Being Men.

Imagine 17 current and former rough-and-tumble rugby players speaking on camera with intense emotional honesty about their lives and behaviors—the camera always in closeup on their faces. No cutaway shots; just men, exposed and vulnerable, speaking to the camera. Being Men is a conduit for direct, honest communication, a key behavior the videos want to promote. The men share how reaching out to others, listening, being honest and self-aware, and managing emotions have been key to their getting through tough times, being healthier, and having better relationships. These are the same characteristics being championed by men wanting to move beyond the constraints of traditional masculinity and be more equitable, healthier, caring, or happier (including in toolboxes I developed for the White Ribbon Campaign; see Resources at the end of this article).

Being Men turned out to actually be four videos. They cover a range of topics including:

- Tough times: Exploring challenges men face with their mental well-being
- Asking for help: Examining challenges facing men when they do reach out
- “He said, she said”: What’s it like to fall in and out of love
- “We need to talk”: Carefully considering how men can talk openly and more often with each other about relationships.

What was a big surprise for me was that the videos were produced by and for the sport of rugby, a symbol—indeed a key foundation of—New Zealand’s expression of traditional masculinity. Half-jokingly referred to as our national religion, rugby has been so pivotal to New Zealand’s masculine identity that in the seminal 1996 book on kiwi men, A Man’s Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male by Jock Phillips, he devotes an entire chapter to it, aptly titled “The Hard Man: Rugby and the Formation of Character.”

In short, 150 years ago, when rugby was first introduced to this young, colonial country, which had a predominantly male population, it came freighted with high-minded Victorian views of masculinity: Tough, stoic men were useful for breaking in the land, but their rowdiness needed to be channeled into socially sanctioned outlets. Rugby built “muscular Christians,” squashing effeminacy and proving “virility.” It also demanded that individual emotions be suppressed for the team to function. It was played exclusively by men and its playing fields dominated public recreational spaces. As a schoolboy player a hundred years later, I found rugby still heavy with all these unspoken assumptions, though even then I was beginning to question their relevance.

Fast forward fifty years to 2020, and New Zealand Rugby’s governing body is now promoting an entirely different way of being men. What happened? Like some of the men in the videos, the sport had a crisis so demanding it compelled a new reaction.

In 2016 one of their professional teams hired a female stripper for a “Mad Monday” end-of-season, boozy blowout. Their lewd behavior, possibly involving nonconsensual touching, was reported in the media and a loud public outcry followed. Rugby had managed to escape scrutiny for previous incidents of players’ violence toward women, but this time the outpouring of anger—along with sharp, informed criticism about their lack of an effective systemic response—shocked NZR.

Rugby was caught up short, apparently clueless about the significant shifts in social norms well under way across the wider community. By 2016 men engaging in domestic and sexual violence against women was “not OK,” to repeat the well-used slogan of...
a 10-year-old government-led campaign. Alongside such social marketing, there had been also a decade of community engagement and a range of primary prevention projects—including a few that focused on promoting healthier, nonviolent male behavior.

Some individual rugby clubs and unions participated in the violence prevention movement, but too little had happened at the national level. By the time of the 2016 incident, there were activists who had been clearly articulating how antiquated and inexcusable watching a stripper was; how it was part of a culture of violence against women; that rugby had avoided taking responsibility; that it had abdicated using its privileged position to be a force for good among New Zealand men; and that rugby’s culture and systems had to change. Now.

To their credit, the NZR quickly and publicly accepted the reality that their institution had to change. Recognizing that they didn’t have the answers, they established an independent review panel comprised mainly of women. Called “Respect and Responsibility Review,” it made 91 recommendations “to ensure everyone involved in the game has the right information and understanding...[about] respect and responsibility to enable them to make the right decisions. This includes ensuring that our attitudes towards women in rugby, diversity, respect, responsibility and inclusiveness are in keeping with a world leading sports organization” (www.NZRugby.co.nz/what-we-do/rugby-responsibility/respect-and-responsibility-review).

NZR has since adopted “Respect and Inclusion” as a measure for their own corporate performance to hold themselves “accountable for our culture and how we behave.” They also established a new complaints management service and finally appointed a woman to their board.

Nicki Nicol, the NZR’s chief operating officer who has seen many of these developments, explains that they now focus on “culture, so everyone feels included, as well as promoting diversity of ethnic and gender identities. We’re putting our people’s well-being at the center of what we do.” She notes that the NZR now has been accredited with the Rainbow Tick, a seal of approval for being at the center of what we do. “People are at the center of everything we do. We’re enhancing people’s experience of rugby, which we hope will flow out into their communities.”

Meanwhile, the NZR has a range of development programs for the rugby players they employ, or who show promise. These help participants to better manage the demands of professional sport, as well as the normal life challenges facing a young person. They include developing their mental and emotional resilience through workshops and resources, such as self-tests and videos of experienced players describing how they have managed. All the programs are under the banner Headfirst: Fit Minds for Tough Times.

The NZR’s approach to supporting players reflects an increasing public discussion of men’s mental health in New Zealand, including the high rate of male suicides, and an accompanying rollout of community initiatives that promote better mental well-being, especially for men. As with the contemporaneous development of violence prevention, a public health approach is being taken. For example, at the launch of the Being Men videos I sat next to the manager of Farmstrong, an organization promoting well-being and resiliency for farmers. They use a high-profile rugby player as their ambassador. And a legend of the game, Sir John Kirwan, has openly discussed his own anxiety and depression; his personal revelations led the way in shifting attitudes and promoting well-being. (In 2012 he was knighted for his services to mental health and rugby.)

Both NZR projects, Te Hurihanga/Be the Change and Headfirst, were keenly aware of how traditional male socialization directly contributes to men’s violence and destructive behavior and undermines men’s well-being. They have been dealing with the bitter harvest of male socialization every day. So when they were approached by Sarah Grohnert, an independent documentary filmmaker interested in doing a project about New Zealand men, they immediately saw the potential (http://sarahgrohnert.com/en).

They worked together on the topics and questions and on finding suitable participants. Then Sarah interviewed a mix of men, including some current and ex-players. (A woman camera operator shot all the interview footage.) Over 50 hours of rich material was skillfully edited down to the four 15-to-16-minute-long videos that make up the film.

What I found so heartening about Being Men was that while individual participants had typically developed their own strategies, they were the same actions men could take if they wanted to move beyond traditional male socialization. While several mentioned the mask men typically wear, the participants didn’t talk explicitly about challenging gender expectations, even though that was precisely what they were doing. They come across as ordinary guys who are perceptive, self-aware, and willing to change. That truth completely subverts the stereotypes of what a rugby player is and in so doing exemplifies new ways for all New Zealand men to be. And maybe, just maybe, men everywhere.

Resources

The Being Men videos: http://www.nzrugby.co.nz/being-men
The Headfirst: Fit Minds for Tough Times program and resources: https://www.headfirst.co.nz/
The Farmstrong website with wellbeing and resiliency resources for farmers: https://farmstrong.co.nz/
Information on Sir John Kirwan’s work and resources for mental wellbeing: https://jkfoundation.org.nz/
White Ribbon New Zealand’s toolboxes for men: https://whiteribbon.org.nz/toolbox/

Garth Baker has worked on a range of gender transformative projects for New Zealand men. He also has a long, abiding interest in rugby and has written about the game. His comprehensive report prepared for White Ribbon New Zealand, “What #MeToo Asks of Men,” appeared in the Fall 2018 issue. He can be reached at garthbaker@xtra.co.nz.
Why Feminist Philanthropy Helps Everyone

By Peter Schattner

One in three women globally experience violence in their lifetime. If gender-based violence were a disease, it would be the largest epidemic in history; 650 million women worldwide have suffered the consequences of child, early, and forced marriage worldwide. That’s the entire population of the US twice over! (https://girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/)

The scale of human rights violations against women is unspeakably vast. Yet it’s something we must speak about, especially as men, and especially now. With an occupant in the White House who has openly bragged about sexual assault, alongside a worldwide increase in femicide, the gender power imbalance is at a breaking point.

Gender inequality touches each of our lives. Addressing the societal, political, and economic structures that disadvantage half our population is a moral imperative. The solution—upholding women’s rights—has enormous benefits for everyone. I see feminist philanthropy as perhaps the most effective strategy for addressing some of the most challenging political and economic problems that confront both men and women today.

Randomized studies of programs that improve women’s access to economic opportunities suggest that such programs can lead to investment returns of $7 for every $1 invested. As the World Bank has put it, “Gender equality is smart economics.” The compounded returns from investing in women manifest in politics as well. When women are included in peace processes, a peace agreement is 35 per cent more likely to last at least 15 years, according to the International Peace Institute. Higher levels of women in parliament reduce the risks of civil war.

Here’s an example. The Global Fund for Women gave a $10,000 grant to Leymah Gbowee and her organization Women in Peace Network in Liberia in 2001. At the time Liberia was in the middle of a bloody civil war that raged for 14 years.

Women in Peace used the grant money—and risked their lives—to bus hundreds of women into Accra, Ghana, where they staged a sit-in for peace at a hotel where political talks were under way. They established an interreligious movement of Christians and Muslims bringing women’s political power to the door—literally—of the high-level negotiations. The women linked arms and blocked the meeting doors where peace talks had stalled, refusing to leave until the peace accord was signed and finalized and the civil war was over.

“For her efforts in the non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peacebuilding work,” Leymah Gbowee was one of three women awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. She said that it would have been “impossible for us to achieve what we achieved in Liberia had it not been for the fact that we had support both financially and morally” by a small grant from the Global Fund for Women. That seed investment yielded incredible returns in brokering peace for a whole country.

Let’s take another pressing issue: the climate crisis. Women farmers account for up to 70 per cent of all food production in developing countries and are at the forefront of climate resilience efforts. According to the United Nations, women are leading efforts to conserve and care for forests, helping to mitigate the carbon dioxide emissions caused by deforestation. The fight against climate disruption and for the survival of all on our planet, like so many other battles for progress—healthy societies and robust economies—intersects with the rights of women.

It is because women are so perversely underfunded that the investment in their full participation in society has enormous yields. Despite some recent headline-commanding investments in gender equality funding from Canada, the EU, and others, women’s rights are woefully underfunded comparative to the need. (https://matchinternational.org/equality-fund/)

Further and problematically, only one percent of gender-focused aid goes to women’s organizations. In this case, it’s not just what we fund, but how we fund it.

Giving money to large institutions (in which men dominate in leadership positions) to decide how to best benefit women is not a model for true change. Conversely, funding women directly to lead the change they seek—not targeting them as beneficiaries—begins to unwind the power dynamics that disadvantage women in the first place.

To end poverty, reduce conflict, promote global health, and decrease climate disruption—invest in women throughout the world now, and invest in them directly. It is the best way to get the world we want—a world where we all have more equal access to opportunities benefits everyone. We should all start working toward that goal today. We don’t have any more time to spare.

Peter Schattner has worked in a range of scientific fields from molecular biology to theoretical physics. Author of Sex, Love and DNA: What Molecular Biology Teaches Us About Being Human, he encourages men to join him in supporting women's rights through the Men’s Challenge, which matches donations to the Global Fund for Women (https://globalfundforwomen.org/challenge). This commentary first appeared in Alliance Magazine.
Ronald Levant and Shana Pryor have synthesized decades of research on men and masculinities in their new book, The Tough Standard: The Hard Truths About Masculinity and Violence. Levant is one of the fathers of the psychology of men and masculinities discipline who for more than four decades has addressed the full range of the male lived experience, from examining men’s sexual and domestic violence and addressing manhood in the #MeToo era to considering men’s health (including depression and trauma). Pryor is a doctoral student noted for her research on men and masculinities. The Tough Standard explores the strain facing both men of color and white working-class men. Acknowledging both the joys and challenges of fatherhood and boys on the journey to manhood, the book aims to provide a context to examine the patriarchal yoke stifling males (as it continues to oppress women and girls). Drawing on foundational research that marked the early days of the study of men and masculinities (Levant coedited A New Psychology of Men 25 years ago)—and integrating insights from both academic and activist efforts of more recent times—The Tough Standard, excerpted below, may come to be seen as an essential guide for men navigating their way through the treacherous waters of traditional masculinity en route to a new expression of manhood.

The present masculinity crisis concerns not only sexual and physical violence but also the economic stagnation of white working-class men resulting from the confluence of large-scale economic, political, and social changes. These changes include the Great Recession a dozen years ago (dubbed at one time the “Mancession” because of its disproportionate effect on men), technological and productivity advances, globalization of the economy and the rise of China and India, weakening of labor unions and the resulting loss of high-paying union jobs, and growing income disparity.

Earlier stages of these changes were described by Hanna Rosin in her provocatively titled 2012 book, The End of Man and the Rise of Women, and even earlier by Susan Faludi in her 1999 book Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man. Blue-collar jobs now take more skill than they used to. In addition, the problem is not just due to changes in the labor market; it is also due to the poorer performance of boys in school compared to girls.

Economists David Autor, David Dorn, and Gordon Hanson argued in a 2018 paper, “When Work Disappears: Manufacturing Decline and the Falling Marriage Market Value of Young Men,” that adverse trade shocks, like a surge of imports from China, “differentially reduce employment and earnings of young adult males” and “heighten male idleness and premature mortality.” These changes have resulted in unemployment or underemployment of white working-class men. In an article in The Economist in 2015, “The Weaker Sex,” the magazine reported, “In America pay for men with only a high-school certificate fell by 21 percent in real terms between 1979 and 2013; for women with similar qualifications it rose by three percent. Around a fifth of working-age American men with only a high-school diploma have no job.” This has resulted in huge sense of grievance, which plays a prominent role in our country’s current political turbulence. Claire McCaskill, the former Democratic senator from Missouri who was defeated in her 2018 reelection campaign, was interviewed on the New York Times podcast “The Daily.” She had an interesting insight into why so many white working-class and rural people have abandoned the Democratic Party. According to McCaskill, they see the Democrats helping women, gay men and lesbians, African Americans, and immigrants from Mexico and Central America and ask, “What about me?”

This sense of grievance may also be related to the increases in opioid addiction, overdoses, and suicide. Although a 2018 study in Florida argued that the supply of these drugs is a more significant cause than despair itself, just on the face of it, one would think that despair is probably a factor, although evidence supporting this has yet to emerge. On this point, a recent study linked chronic opioid use with a preference for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. Trump’s campaign most assuredly fanned the flames of working-class resentment. James Goodwin, Yong Fang Kuo, David Brown, David Juurlink, and Mukaila Raji concluded as much in their 2018 article, “More than a Rural Revolt: Landscapes of Despair and the 2016 Presidential Election.”
The Role of Masculinity

Our research has shown that working-class men have endorsed traditional masculinity ideology more strongly than men in higher social classes. Adherence to traditional masculinity exacerbates their difficult situations in two major ways. The first is the role it plays in their unwillingness to consider jobs in fast-growing service fields that are thought of as “feminine”—so-called pink-collar jobs, such as in health care, child care, elder care, education, bookkeeping, sales, and food preparation—endeavors some of which are performed as the unpaid work of housewives. In The End of Men, Hanna Rosin noted that of the 30 occupations expected to grow fastest in America in the coming years, women dominate 20: “The list of working-class jobs predicted to grow is heavy on nurturing professions, in which women, ironically, seem to benefit from old stereotypes.”

These old stereotypes are deeply ingrained in the minds of the men they marginalize; they do not see jobs centered on serving or caring as something for them. This might put men of low socioeconomic status at a disadvantage by limiting their employment options. Twenty years ago, researcher Ben Lupton noted that men who do decide to enter into the female-dominated workplace experience threats to their masculinity in three ways: an inability to “regenerate” their masculinity in a homosocial place of employment; the fear of feminization; and fear of being called gay.

Benjamin W. Domingue and colleagues used data from a National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, which enrolled a cohort of nationally representative school students aged 11–19 years from across the US and followed them up for 14 years. Among their conclusions:

- More masculine male respondents were downwardly mobile.
- They were enrolled in school for fewer years and were more likely to have lower-status jobs than their less masculine same-sex school peers.
- They were also more likely to have jobs in occupational categories with larger proportions of males than their same-sex school peers.
- Gendered behavior was not predictive of future educational and occupational attainment for female respondents.

In a 2009 article in Gender Work and Organization, researcher Darren Nixon interviewed 35 unemployed low-skilled men in the United Kingdom on their attitudes toward entry-level service work. Manual labor and interacting with other men in an all-male environment where they could swear, shout, and engage in masculine horseplay were sources of pride for many working-class men. Further, Nixon found that entry-level service work that required skills and attitudes antithetical to working-class men’s adherence to masculinity—specifically, the need for men to act more docilely and courteously to customers and their female co-workers (which they were unwilling to do)—led them to reject many forms of low-skilled service work as a future source of employment. Here are a couple of these men’s statements: “I’ve got no patience with people basically. I can’t put a smiley face on, that’s not my sort of thing.” (Colin, aged 24, unskilled manual worker)

“Sales assistant, no, rule that out completely. . . . I suppose I’d be frightened by it, never done anything like that before . . . services, it’s not my cup of tea really. . . . I think I wouldn’t be good at it. Wouldn’t have confidence in it.” (Jim, aged 45, former sewing machine mechanic)

We need to help working-class men understand and accept that traditional well-paying factory jobs are not coming back and that they can be nurses or sales clerks and still be men. The second way that masculinity exacerbates these men’s difficulties is the role it plays in their unwillingness to play a greater role in family chores, including child care and housework, which might enable their employed wives to earn more, again because child care and housework are thought of as feminine activities. According to a March 2015 article in The Economist headlined “The Weaker Sex,” “American men without jobs spend only half as much time on housework and caring for others as do women in the same situation, and much more time watching television.” Interestingly, racial minority men are more likely than white men to occupy female-dominated jobs at all levels of education—except highly educated Asian/Pacific Islander men—and these patterns are more pronounced at lower levels of education, according to a 2016 article by Jill Yavorsky, Philip Cohen, and Yue Qian in Sociological Quarterly.

A ray of hope for white working-class men comes from a study done in the United Kingdom. In a 2012 article for the British Sociological Association, “Boys Will Be Boys….Won’t They,” Steven Roberts interviewed 24 young men employed in the retail sector, finding (surprisingly) that young white working-class men were able to resist traditional masculinity ideology. Participants demonstrated a more positive attitude toward the “emotional labor” required in the service sector than has been previously documented, while also rejecting notions of traditional gendered domestic responsibilities as potential partners and parents. Roberts concluded: “Congruent with other emerging research in this area, the reference point for an ‘acceptable’ masculine identity appears to have shifted, with some young working-class men’s lives, at least, illustrating an attenuated or softened version of masculinity.”

In sum, working-class men’s allegiance to traditional masculine ideals is holding them back at least as much, if not more, than the large-scale economic changes that disrupted their lives in the first place.


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How to Raise a Boy
By Michael Reichert

“The Stresses of Boyhood,” “The Uncertain Future of Boys.” “Can Our Boys Be Saved?” The headlines raise alarming questions about boys. A new book provides some answers. Michael Reichert, one of the world’s leading researchers on masculinity, has written a guide that can help boys grow into strong and compassionate men. Drawing on decades of research (including as a clinical psychologist), Reichert’s new book How to Raise a Boy: The Power of Connection to Build Good Men does more than deconstruct conventional boyhood (and manhood), exposing how it damages young men. He offers detailed examples of a new expression of boyhood, and invites parents and educators to be partners, cultivating emotional and social terrain in which boys can grow and thrive.

Over the past quarter century, study after study of boys on the journey to manhood has convincingly demonstrated that boyhood—like manhood—is in transition. More recently the #MeToo movement has exposed the epidemic of sexual harassment and assault of women and accelerated the drive to devise strategies for raising respectful, empathic boys. How to Raise a Boy is an urgently needed voice in what is rapidly becoming a worldwide conversation. It very well may come to be seen as the essential book not only interpreting the monumental transition boyhood is undergoing but also offering practical tips for navigating the gender equality challenges ahead. The book dismantles the old paradigms of manhood—including their negative impact on boys—and also offers inspired advice for parents, educators, and mentors on how they can help boys to flourish both socially and emotionally. Filled with insights from psychology and neuroscience, it’s a book from the heart, offering a loving prescription for a new boyhood populated by more self-aware, more caring, and more compassionate boys on the road to becoming healthy, whole men. What follows is an excerpt.

Though the late nineties brought growing concern that all was not right in boys’ lives, problems of boyhood persist to this day. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, parents of boys 4–17 seek help from health care or school staff at rates nearly twice those of girls. In addition to impulsive risk taking, inattention, and conduct problems, boys lag behind girls in the social and behavioral skills that facilitate success in school; they are more often fidgety, disengaged, defiant and unregulated. Being disruptive, unable or unwilling to heed adult limits, boys evoke corrective action from teachers. They are the primary recipients of disciplinary sanctions and medication prescriptions, even though, as University of Minnesota child development researcher L. Alan Sroufe argues, “to date, no study has found any long-term benefit of attention-deficit medication on academic performance, peer relationships or behavior problems.”

Boys are also far more likely than girls to act in ways that increase the risk of disease, injury and death, to themselves and others: they carry weapons more often, engage in physical fights more often, wear their seat belts less often, drive drunk more frequently, have more unprotected sex, and use alcohol or drugs more often before sex. The correlation between these masculine norms and uncivil behavior is troubling. In another cross-cultural study, Stony Brook University anthropologist David Gilmore found that various practices of misogyny, which he terms a “male malady,” are best understood as a manifestation of the struggle to suppress within whatever they perceive about themselves as feminine. As he wrote in Misogyny: The Male Malady, “Men who hate women hate themselves even more.”

Life within the box or behind the mask is not merely confining but erodes boys’ goodness and virtue. Shielded by a mask, presenting an inauthentic front, boys become isolated and unmoored, losing the “true north” of connections to others for their moral compasses. Pretense trumps authenticity, a “cool pose” beats sincerity, and academic disengagement replaces commitment. Whatever parents teach their sons about fairness, integrity, and sincerity is undermined in a culture of peer policing and Animal House celebration. Compelled to conform, boys are vulnerable to forces specifically designed to co-opt their minds and hearts. Cut off from their families, for example, boys are more susceptible to the marketing pitches of a pornography industry that distorts human sexuality and love. The list goes on.

The Good News

Fortunately, there is a solution to the problems of boyhood. If we muster the courage, we can open ourselves to boys’ actual experience and work to build a boyhood that permits them to be who they are. The spate of books about boys in the late 1990s offered important insights. But the books tended toward one or the other of two polarized views: (1) that boys are biologically driven toward rambunctious play, gratuitous aggression and incessant risk taking or (2) they are naïve innocents, victims of social oppression, suffering in silent pain. In both cases boys are victims, either of their genetics or of their social ecologies. What was missing is the lovely and inspiring part played by a boy’s own imagination for his life.

I am optimistic that a historic breakthrough is currently in the making. Though boys continue to be subjected to myths and prejudices rooted in the past, and new, healthier ways for being male have not yet replaced old paradigms, contradictions between economic realities, family dynamics, and traditional norms make boyhood’s reinvention inevitable. As new social demands reveal the stark limitations of the old boyhood, fresh ideas will gain currency.

Here are three examples on a small scale hinting at what’s possible:

When a historic boys boarding school went coeducational after 150 years, it developed an attrition problem it had never faced before. Just a few years after girls entered, ninth- and 10th-grade boys began dropping out. I was called in to meet with male students,
their families and their teachers to find an explanation for boys’ new unhappiness. It wasn’t hard: under everyone’s noses—so taken for granted that it was practically invisible—was a hazing system that encouraged older boys to mistreat younger ones with no parallel among girls. Boys entered a school steeped in harsh man-making rituals, underwent considerable abuse, and received a promise that they could take advantage of the new boys coming after them. It was a proud tradition, defended as character building and tacitly endorsed by parents, teachers, coaches and school leaders. Only, with girls having such a different experience, it was harder and harder for younger boys to tolerate. The way the school had always done things, its model for the development of boys, was disrupted.

I offered my evidence for a link between hazing and the attrition problem and school leaders took strong action. They restructured their program for younger boys, emphasizing safety and mentoring, and made steady progress eliminating the “rat” system. Though stubbornly resistant to change, hazing gradually receded from boys’ relationships and the school’s attrition rate fell. Today the school is on strong footing as a modern institution.

A second example arose in the question-and-answer period following a talk I gave to parents. It was clear from their questions that what had brought them out on a wintry weeknight was hope for help with boys they worried about. Both mothers and fathers shared quite personal stories of anxiety, loss, frustration. One mother raised her hand. She explained that she was a single mother, separated from the boy’s father, and that her son had become harder and harder to deal with. He was withdrawn, surly, and rejected her authority to place limits on him.

She asked, “Is this normal, and should I just let his father take care of him now that he is a teenager?”

There were nods of understanding and even agreement across the audience. I have heard this question in some form or other from the start of my work and have come to expect it. I have even been on panels with experts who have confidently asserted that, of course, it takes another man to initiate a boy into the fraternity of manhood. One expert, in fact, has advised that it is the mother’s role to “build a bridge to the father” for her son.

There are problems with this view on several levels. First, there is no evidence that only another man can support a boy to become a man himself. In fact, such mentoring most often ensures the perpetuation of traditional ideas. That’s not to say that boys cannot learn important things from rubbing shoulders with an older man: how he gets up, shaves, relates to his partner, conducts his affairs. Boys love to see what other males have figured out. In the absence of real contact, in fact, boys are more vulnerable to exaggerated views. But an emphasis on learning masculinity can obscure the more vital development of the boy’s humanity and acquiring skills necessary for success in modern society.

This is what I said to that mother: “As much as I value strong relationships between boys and their fathers, the idea that mothers should back away from their own relationships out of fear that they might spoil their sons’ masculinity—turn them into mama’s boys—violates everything developmental scientists understand about the child’s need for a secure, dependable attachment. Boys, just like girls, have basic human needs that are ignored only at peril. The child who does not have the unconditional acceptance and love of a parent—or someone, somewhere—will be less bold, less confident, more vulnerable to a host of negative influences.”

There were nods from the fathers and looks of surprise, gratitude, and renewed confidence on the faces of the mothers. What struck me was how captive this mother was to bad ideas that violated nearly all of her parenting instincts—and how ready she was for permission to trust those instincts.

The third example came in a violence prevention program developed for early-adolescent boys in neighborhoods in and around Philadelphia. Because the link between becoming violent and witnessing or experiencing violence is strong, my research team began by assessing boys’ exposure to violence: fights, witnessing shootings or hearing gunshots, directly experiencing crime and personal threats. The goal was to build a program grounded in real data about the frequency and severity of experiences that evoked the fight-or-flight response characteristic of acute stress reactions.

We found chilling levels of violence. Despite the evidence of abnormal environmental stressors, we encountered skepticism from our funders and advisory board about whether these boys could benefit from an intervention that would aim both to protect them and help them recover from toxic stress. Some argued that the stresses were too severe, the boys too far gone, their resources too thin, community norms promoting violence too strong. Old racial, class and gender prejudices were offered; ideas that would have kept things just as they were.

But pressures to prevent at-risk boys from becoming twice-victimized were persuasive. We organized after-school groups and quickly found that many boys were all too happy to meet with other boys and an adult leader to talk through how they felt about this and other aspects of their lives. Many boys showed up for years, in fact, to talk, play games and generally work through tensions they were confronting at home, in school and around the neighborhood. The open discussions allowed them to be honest about what they felt and, evaluation research confirmed, made them less vulnerable to blindly reenacting violent scenarios.

When asked, many boys shared the sentiment voiced by Terrence, that though he sometimes had to defend himself with force, he “don’t love no fight.” A younger boy, Juan, elaborated on his view:

“Usually, I’m a person that doesn’t like to fight. Like, I’m like a ladies’ man. I don’t fight. Usually, well, I’m a lover not a fighter, right? I write poems, I do different stuff.”

In each of these examples, a truer read of boys overcame historic prejudice. With a commitment to boys’ human development as the starting point, very different outcomes in families, schools and communities come into focus.

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The first time I remember saying the word “abortion” was on a rugby field in 1991. I was late to practice; guys were already halfway through warm-ups. “Sorry,” I joked, “I was taking my girlfriend to get an abortion.” Several teammates burst out laughing.

Red-faced and angry, my coach bellowed: “That’s not funny!” And then to underscore how upset he was, he repeated it: “That’s not funny!”

I felt shock and embarrassment to be called out by my coach. Jaamy Zarnegar was a man I respected; I was deeply ashamed at what I’d said although at the time I couldn’t articulate why. Paradoxically, I also felt a thrill at demonstrating to other men how I could be uncaring and cruel. I knew I had just passed another self-administered test of my masculinity, sadly just as important to me at the progressive college I was attending, Guilford, as it was anywhere else.

I couldn’t (wouldn’t) find the time and space to talk about the jumble of feelings my degrading comment stirred in me. Among my male friends on and off the rugby pitch, we had never had serious conversations about our behavior and attitudes; we certainly had never talked about women’s reproductive choices—it just wasn’t something we did. It wasn’t something we had to do. (We also never talked about our responsibilities when it came to birth control beyond an occasional, “Better use a condom!”)

So we shook off Jaamy’s anger and dove into the ruck and maul of practice. But the fact that my coach had challenged me publicly mattered; I have revisited that moment many times over the past three decades.

Men Stopping Violence Helped Me to Look in the Mirror

Nine years later, in 2000, I began an internship with Men Stopping Violence, founded in 1982 in Atlanta as a social change organization dedicated to engaging men to end violence against women. My work at Men Stopping Violence (MSV) required me to look in the mirror, to get real with myself and other men about consent, coercion, and our choices around sex—and the effects of those choices on women. As an intern I went through MSV’s 24-week men’s education program where, like other men, I had to examine uncomfortable truths: my sense of entitlement to women’s bodies and the specific controlling behaviors I had used—jealousy, sulking, pressure tactics—to get sex. I had to ask myself difficult questions like, “What unexamined beliefs did I hold about women? Where did I learn those beliefs? How did they inform my actions, and how were women affected? For example, how had my recklessness around birth control impacted my partners and their reproductive decisions?”

Once I fully acknowledged that I had pressured women and had abdicated my responsibilities around birth control, I could no longer sit on the sidelines and pretend abortion had nothing to do with me. Despite these stirrings of awareness, I still wasn’t ready to leave the sidelines.

Almost Ready to Act

In 2012, around the time that the Georgia legislature reduced the amount of time for women to obtain an abortion, I was sitting with a colleague at Men Stopping Violence (MSV), Dick Bathrick, one of MSV’s cofounders. (He had been captain of the rugby team at Dartmouth College decades earlier.) I’d known Dick for more than 10 years and often turned to him for honest reaction. I knew there was a connection between efforts to limit access to abortion and violence against women, and I asked Dick to help me connect the dots.

Dick reminded me that at MSV we were often working with men who used coercive control to influence women’s reproductive decisions, including pressuring and often forcing a woman to have sex, to not use a condom, and, if a pregnancy occurred,
to force the woman to remain pregnant or intimidate them into terminating the pregnancy. He helped me to see that criminalizing or banning abortion is another iteration of coercion, another expression of men controlling women's bodies and lives, regardless of state law.

While it may be difficult for many women to hear, I needed a conversation with a man to finally, earnestly engage in women's struggle for reproductive justice. Dick wasn't saying anything that thousands of women across Georgia hadn't been saying emphatically for years. Still, I needed our conversation to realize that my inaction was, considering what's at stake, unacceptable to me.

**Listening to Women**

After that conversation, I began making conscious choices to put myself in positions where I could listen directly to women and female-identified leaders. I went to Feminist Women's Health Center trainings where I learned about the insulting, medically inaccurate (and unnecessary) steps a woman must go through before she can have an abortion.

I attended the screening of Melissa Alexander's documentary film *Confessional*, featuring victims of sexual violence telling their stories, part of a group exhibition in Atlanta, "If I Told You..." where female-identified artists addressed harassment, assault, violence, and the treatment of the female body. I sat rapt listening to testimony from a woman who was raped and had an abortion. She described how her rapist—a man in her community—was reportedly happy when he found out she was pregnant. Her agency and free will were as insignificant then as the day he raped her.

At a training conducted by SisterSong, the Atlanta-based national activist organization dedicated to reproductive justice for women of color, I was moved by the clarity of their definition of reproductive justice: “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”

I sometimes felt uneasy going into these spaces. But I had to confront the truth: staying in my comfort zone meant remaining willfully inactive around a human rights issue that I now knew I had an obligation to address.

As I learned more, I stepped more fully into this aspect of the work of advancing gender equality. I began by making monetary donations to organizations fighting for reproductive justice. Then I joined other men at rallies. Today I am part of an emerging men's coalition for abortion access. These are of course modest contributions compared to what the women who fight for reproductive justice every day do on behalf of women's autonomy and those whose bodies are in jeopardy.

**Coming Full Circle**

Recently I had dinner with my college rugby coach from three decades ago. When I told him that I was writing an article that included him, he seemed unperturbed. But when I told him that the topic was abortion, I saw his face cloud and he looked down at his plate. I reminded him of that afternoon on the pitch: my callous "joke," my teammates' laughter, and his swift, unambiguous condemnation.

What he said next echoed what my colleague and mentor Dick had said years earlier: Shortly before my "joke," Jaamy told me, he had accompanied a friend to get an abortion after the man who had gotten her pregnant refused to. He described the experience as hell for her. It was through women's experiences that he'd arrived at his own position: women deserve the right to make their own choices about reproduction. Full stop.

Here it was nearly 30 years later and this was the first deeply honest conversation I had with Jaamy. I felt closer to him than ever. I also felt a touch of regret. I might have been able to learn from him all those years ago about listening to women, but I didn't believe then there was space for us to talk. Having had that conversation, I felt a deep sense of relief wash over me. I was finally off the sidelines. Soon afterward I emailed this article to three of my college teammates, along with a note. It simply said, "Let's connect."

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More than 400 doctors and health professionals gathered at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in January for the seventh international conference on sexual violence. While the conversation surrounding violence against women has gained traction in the wake of the #MeToo movement—and recent government consultations on the topic—activists point out that too many people continue to be the targets of physical and sexual assault. In the edited interview below, Christina Okello speaks with Dr. Wissam El Hage, a psychiatrist at François Rabelais University in western France, and Isabelle Daigneault, a Canadian psychology professor at the University of Montréal, sharing insights about what's working and what's not in tackling sexual violence and why France and Canada differ in their approach. Among the differences? In Canada doctors and the police work in tandem.

Christina Okello: Two years after #MeToo, what has changed?
Wissam El Hage: A lot because of the hashtag #MeToo, and different hashtags. There’s been a lot of discussion in French society and this is good because the victims do not feel so alone. They may open up more easily to talk about their problems and what they experienced.

CO: Victims of sexual assault often don’t report it. New measures by the French government to tackle domestic abuse would ease doctor-patient confidentiality restrictions if a patient is at risk. Is this a good idea?
WEH: It is a controversial measure because it goes against medical secrecy, which is a form of protection for both doctors and victims. Victims feel safe coming to their doctor to speak about their problems and to find help. I don’t think that would be the case if they knew their doctor was no longer bound by secrecy. Also, we don’t know how this will work. Is it a medical problem or is it up to the justice or the police to take control? This is something that has to be ironed out.

CO: How difficult is it for victims of sexual assault to open up?
WEH: It’s like when you experience a horror film. When you go through experiences of violence it is very painful, very distressing for the patients, but the job that we do is to help them to cope with it, to transform the horror into something more normal and integrate it into their lives.

CO: What case has struck you the most?
WEH: Each case is unique; sometimes you feel helpless, you feel like your job is not really improving the situation and then you discover a few months or a few years later the evolution of the patient, of his social and family situation, and this is very helpful to us to continue to do our job.

CO: What are the different stages of the healing process?
WEH: When victims have experienced violence during their childhood, they go through feelings of shame, guilt, emotional distress, and this can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress, addictions and personality disorder. In other cases, they will have some kind of resilience and will seek help. The only way they can come out of their horror movie is by talking. When they accept [the need] to talk about it, to face up to it and accept their emotions. When they stop avoiding their past, improvement can start.
CO: So, talking is the key to treating sexual violence?
WEH: It’s not just talking about it, it’s how you do it. It has to be in a secure place and with a person of trust. We help the person to cope and to confront their emotions in a safe way where they don’t feel overwhelmed.
CO: Do you have the funds to do your job?
WEH: Last year, the French government created 10–12 trauma centers dedicated to treating victims. It’s a first step. Ten centers are quite little for France but it’s a good start. What’s needed is at least 30–50 trauma centers, outpatient care units across the country where victims can reach out to trauma professionals.
CO: One obstacle hampering efforts to tackle sexual violence has been the issue of time limits—some cases are too old to prosecute. What’s your view on time limits?
WEH: This is only a judicial point of view. For a doctor there are no limits. In some cases, people who suffer sexual violence, 30 percent only discover their symptoms 20 years later, triggered perhaps by another traumatic event. From a doctor’s point of view there is no time limit.

The Canadian Perspective

Christina Okello: How does Canada tackle sexual violence?

Isabelle Daigneault: We have a multi-tiered agreement between all the people involved in domestic violence or sexual abuse. For example doctors, police, judges, lawyers; they are all obliged to work together. Everyone needs to have a way of working with domestic violence and sexual abuse survivors. They have to report if there’s a case of abuse that comes to their attention—especially doctors.

CO: France is considering easing medical-secrecy restrictions if a patient is at risk. Is this a good idea?

ID: It’s a good start that doctors are allowed to speak but it’s not enough. One of the reasons I think that Québec is seen as more advanced is because we have a multi-sectorial agreement which has been in place since 2001. Everybody knows what they’re expected to do.

CO: Canada is often cited as an example in the fight against sexual violence. How well is it doing?

ID: Every year there are new budget announcements dedicated to sexual violence prevention in Québec. What is a bit disappointing at times is that the money is always announced when the government has an incentive to do so—like when there’s an issue or case that becomes public. Or, when there’s an election coming up, then there’s a lot of money that’s available. Yes, there’s funding but it’s never stable.

CO: It’s been two years since the #MeToo movement began, triggered by sexual allegations against Harvey Weinstein. Has a lot changed?

ID: The #MeToo movement has been liberating for a lot of women as it has helped them break their isolation. However, there has also been a backlash; people have started blaming women more than before and are defending the perpetrators.

CO: There have been a lot of awareness campaigns to eliminate sexual violence, but how do we achieve real action?

ID: We need to start with sexual education for children, and this will include gender equality so that men respect women—and that women have a voice. We need to start younger so that when these little boys grow up they will not perpetrate sexual assault, and women will not need to defend themselves; hopefully because it’s going to be eradicated.

CO: In France, nearly 150 women died at the hands of their partners or ex-partners last year. Experts reckon early child abuse is to blame for domestic violence. Violaine Guérin, a gynecologist and endocrinologist specializing in sexual violence, says early physical abuse may be driving the femicide figures. She said, “Violence breeds violence. If we succeed in eradicating violence against girls and boys in childhood, we will have an impact in preventing violence at an adult age.” So what’s needed to treat child abuse?

ID: First, we have to know that it happened. And it’s difficult because if we’re thinking about the #MeToo movement it’s relatively feasible for an adult to disclose and get help but for a child it’s much more difficult. Somebody has to be the child’s voice. Who will be responsible for that? Perhaps midwives, doctors and social workers, people who work closely with children could be one way. There needs to be intervention but maybe beforehand there should be an assessment of the child’s needs...done on a case-by-case basis.

CO: Out of the victims that you’ve treated, which one case has struck you the most?

ID: What a difficult question. The children or adolescents that I remember most, who have marked me most, are those who are resilient. It’s one of the subjects of my research: the consequences of child sexual abuse—what helps some children to overcome the abuse and be resilient? Some that impressed me the most are those as young as 12 and 13 and go around high schools and give testimony to what happened to them and help others to disclose and get help. That is I think the thing that touches me the most.

Christina Okello is a Paris-based investigative journalist for Radio France Internationale (RFI). She describes herself as “passionate about the Middle East, Africa and everything in between.” A version of this interview appeared on RFI’s website.

Wissam El Hage, a psychiatrist at François Rabelais University in Tours, western France, specializes in trauma and post-traumatic stress.

Isabelle Daigneault is a psychologist and professor at the University of Montréal who treats survivors of childhood abuse.
VOICE MALE

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