

TRANSFORMING A RAPE CULTURE

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REVISED EDITION
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MEN, MASCULINITY, AND THE RAPE CULTURE

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What is it about groups that seems to bring out the worst in men? I think it is because the animating condition for most American men is a deeply rooted fear of other men—a fear that other men will see us as weak, feminine, not manly.

NOT A WEEK GOES BY without another entry in the seemingly endless parade of men behaving badly, men who embody the seamier side of male sexuality—entitlement, predation, and violence: athletes, politicians, TV and movie stars, rappers, ordained clergy. When confronted by this parade, many men react defensively. “Men on Trial” could be the common headline linking all these disparate cases.

But it's not men on trial here; it's masculinity, or rather the traditional definition of masculinity, a definition that leads to certain behaviors that we now see as politically problematic and often physically threatening. Under prevailing definitions, men have and are the politically incorrect sex. Perhaps we should slap a warning label on penises across the land: Warning: Operating this instrument can be dangerous to your and others' health.

Why have these issues emerged now? Why are sexual harassment and date rape the particular issues we're facing? Most importantly, how can we change the meanings of masculinity so that sexual harassment and date rape will disappear from our workplaces and our relationships?

CONSTRUCTING MALE SEXUALITY

To speak of transforming masculinity is to begin with the way men are sexual in our culture. As social scientists see it, sexuality is less about biological urges and more about the meanings we attach to those urges, meanings that vary dramatically across cultures, over time, and among social groups within any particular culture. Sexual beings are made, not born. John Gagnon, a well-known theoretician of this approach, argues that people learn when they are quite young a few of the things that they are expected to be, and they continue slowly to accumulate a belief in who they are and ought to be through the rest of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Sexual conduct is learned in the same ways and through the same processes; it is acquired and assembled in human interaction, judged and performed in specific cultural and historical worlds.¹

The major item in that assemblage, chief building block in the social construction of sexuality, is gender. We experience our sexual selves through a gendered prism, and the rules of masculinity and femininity are strictly

enforced. Difference equals power. The difference between male and female sexuality reproduces men's power over women, and simultaneously the power of some men over other men, especially of the dominant, hegemonic form of manhood—white, straight, middle class—over marginal masculinities. Those who dare to cross over—women who are sexually adventurous and men who are sexually passive—risk being seen as gender (not sexual) nonconformists. And we all know how homophobia links gender nonconformity to homosexuality. The stakes are high if you don't play along.

Sexual behavior confirms manhood. It makes men feel manly. A quarter-century ago, psychologist Robert Brannon identified the four traditional rules of American manhood: (1) No sissy stuff. Men can never do anything that even remotely suggests femininity. Manhood is a relentless repudiation and devaluation of the feminine. (2) Be a big wheel. Manhood is measured by power, wealth, and success. Whoever has the most toys when he dies, wins. (3) Be a sturdy oak. Manhood depends on emotional reserve. Dependability in a crisis requires that men not reveal their feelings. And (4) Give 'em hell. Exude an aura of manly daring and aggression. Go for it. Take risks.²

These four rules lead to a sexuality built around accumulating partners (scoring), emotional distance, and risk-taking. The emotional distancing of the sturdy oak is considered necessary for adequate male sexual functioning, but it leads to some strange behaviors. For example, to keep from ejaculating too soon, men devise a fascinating array of distractions, such as counting, doing multiplication tables in their heads, or thinking about sports. Risk-taking is a centerpiece of male sexuality. Sex is about adventure, excitement, danger. Taking chances. *Responsibility* is a word that seldom turns up in male sexual discourse. And this, of course, has serious medical side effects: sexually transmitted diseases, the possibility of impregnation, and AIDS—currently the most gendered disease in American history. To reign in this constructed male appetite, women have been assigned the role of asexual gatekeepers; women decide, metaphorically and literally, who enters the desired garden of earthly delights and who doesn't. Women's sexual agency, women's sense of entitlement to desire, is drowned out by the incessant humming of male desire. A man's job is to wear down her resistance. Sometimes that hum can be so loud that it drowns out the actual voice of the real live woman that he's with. Men suffer from socialized deafness, a hearing impairment that strikes only when women say no.

Some campus fraternities have adapted the business text *Getting to Yes* and applied it to scoring. Some campus men's groups offer seminars to other men about how to spike women's drinks with roofies—basically using the drug Rohypnol to render women unconscious, and consequently more compliant. I'm sure I'm not the first person to point out that having sex with someone who is unconscious is closer to necrophilia than it is to sex. I wouldn't imagine you could count it on your scorecard.

WHO ARE THE REAL SEXUAL REVOLUTIONARIES?

Of course, a lot has changed along the frontiers of the sexual landscape since the 1960s. We've had a sexual revolution, after all. But as the dust settles, what emerges in fine detail is that it's been women, not men, who are our era's real sexual pioneers. We men like to think that the sexual revolution, with its promises of more access to more partners with less emotional commitment, was tailor-made for male sexuality's fullest flowering. But, in fact, it's been women's sexuality that's changed, not men's. Women now feel capable of and entitled to sexual pleasure. They have learned to say yes to their own desires, claiming, in the process, sexual agency.

And men? We're still dancing the same tired dance of the sexual conquistadors. Look, for a minute, at those late-night and cable TV shows like *The Man Show* or those men's magazines like *Maxim* or *Stuff*. Men seem to need to feel reassured that although women are working right alongside men in every conceivable field of endeavor, women are still, at heart, jiggly sexpots who fetishize consumer goods and jump on trampolines in bikinis, with oversized mammary glands not quite completely stuffed into too-tight tops. Or what about those so-called reality shows like *The Bachelor* in which women literally and symbolically prostrate themselves on the altar of masculinity to get some media-defined version of Mr. Right—handsome, rich, and vacuous—to marry them. (Even *The Bachelorette*, which pretends to reverse roles, makes women into the object of men's attraction, for which men are supposed to compete—which is hardly a role reversal. What it shows is that women are equally capable of objectifying men—not quite the revolution one might have hoped for.)

Some might argue that this simply confirms that women can have male

women - the real sexual pioneers

sex, that male sexuality was victorious because we've convinced women to be more like us. But then why are so many men wilting in the face of women's desire? Why are sex therapists' offices crammed with men who complain not of premature ejaculation (the most common sexual problem in the 1970s) but of what therapists euphemistically call inhibited desire—that is, men who don't want to have sex now that all these women are able to claim their sexual rights.

And how about the legions of men now clamoring for Viagra, choosing to medicate a problem whose origins lie in their other sexual organ, their brains? (At least two-thirds of all men with erectile dysfunction experience morning erections, indicating that the problem is not with the physiological apparatus but in the message they send to that apparatus in the presence of a corporeal, desiring being.) But men look to Viagra not to help pump their erections but to revive their libidos. Many men believe that Viagra is a foolproof aphrodisiac, guaranteed to enable them to achieve functioning erections even in the absence of sexual desire. (And it is among the most successful new drugs ever to hit the global market.) It does no such thing; it enables an erection to be achieved and sustained only in the presence of desire. This dubious pharmaceutical solution may make desire actionable but it does not replace it. That would require some rethinking about what sex is and could be. Only in the most hydraulic model of male sexuality—ten inches, hard as steel, goes all night—could Viagra be seen as priming the pump.

DATE RAPE AND SEXUAL PREDATION, AGGRESSION, AND ENTITLEMENT

As women have claimed the right to say yes, they've also begun to assert their right to say no. Women are now demanding that men be more sexually responsible and they are holding men accountable for their sexual behaviors. And, yes, it is women who have changed the rules of sexual conduct. What used to be (and in many places still is) called male sexual etiquette—forcing a woman to have sex when she says no; conniving, coercing, pushing, ignoring her efforts to get him to stop; getting her so drunk that she loses the ability (or consciousness) that one needs for consent—is now defined as date rape. Charges of date rape are brought every year on campuses all over the

United States against all sorts of men, but most frequently against fraternity men (some with an enlarged sense of entitlement, like that of JFK's nephew William Kennedy Smith) and athletes. In American life, it sometimes seems as though we expect sexual aggression from athletes [see Messner, p. 23]. Barely a week goes by in which the sports pages do not tell of yet another professional athlete like Christian Peters, the former Nebraska lineman, or Randy Moss, the star receiver for the Minnesota Vikings (who was tossed off the Notre Dame team before he ever played for them because he had been accused of sexual assault in high school; he then went on to star at Marshall, where he was also accused of rape). The Center for the Study of Sport and Society at Northeastern University posts the names of all athletes accused of sexual assault, and they have to update the list weekly. And what about Latrell Sprewell, who when upset that his coach worked the team too hard in practice decided to try and strangle him? In high schools, in colleges, and on professional teams, we're getting the message that our young male athletes, trained for fearless aggression on the field, are translating that into predatory sexual aggression in relationships with women. Our task is to make it clear that what we want from our athletes when they are on the playing field is not the same as what we want from them when they are playing the field.

MEN IN GROUPS AND MASCULINE FRAGILITY

Focusing on athletes only illustrates the problem of male entitlement, which seems to flow unquestioningly to men in groups. Most athletes, after all, play on teams; much of their social life and much of their public personas are constructed through association with their teammates. At scores of campus and corporate workshops over the past fifteen years, women have shared the complaint that, while individual men may appear sympathetic when they are alone with women, they suddenly turn out to be macho louts, capable of the vilest misogynist statements, when they are in groups of other men.

What is it about groups that seem to bring out the worst in men? I think it is because the animating condition for most American men is a deeply rooted fear of other men—a fear that other men will see us as weak, feminine, not manly. The fear of humiliation, of losing in the competitive ranking among

men, of being dominated by other men—these are the fears that keep men in line and that reinforce traditional notions of masculinity as a false sense of safety.

Homophobia—which appears to be the fear of homosexual men but is really the fear of other men—keeps men acting-like men, keeps us exaggerating our adherence to traditional norms so that no other men will get the wrong idea that we might really be that most dreaded person of all: a sissy. Don't believe me, though. Listen to the words of my favorite contemporary gender theorist, Eminem. When asked in an interview why he uses homophobic epithets in his raps, Eminem poignantly illustrated the role of gay baiting in peer interactions. In his view, calling someone a faggot is not a slur on his sexuality but on his gender. "The lowest degrading thing that you can say to a man when you're battling him is to call him a faggot and try to take away his manhood," said America's premier rap artist. "Call him a sissy, call him a punk. 'Faggot' to me doesn't necessarily mean gay people. 'Faggot' to me just means taking away your manhood."³

That fear of being seen as a sissy, of being gay-baited, taunted, and bullied because one is not a real man is certainly what lies behind so much adolescent masculine risk-taking and violence. A recent survey asked high school students what they were most afraid of. The girls answered that they were most afraid of being assaulted, raped, killed. The boys? They said they were most afraid of "being laughed at." Boys laugh at each other, tease each other, make fun of each other, bully each other constantly. When we consider the myriad school shootings that have occurred between 1992 and 2002 (there have been twenty-eight cases), several constants stand out. All twenty-eight cases were committed by boys. All but one was committed by a white boy in a suburban or rural school. We speak of teen violence, youth violence, violence in the schools, but no one in the media ever seems to call it suburban white boy violence, although that is exactly what it is. Try a little thought experiment: Imagine that all the killers in the more famous school shootings in the 1990s—Littleton, Colorado; Pearl, Mississippi; Paducah, Kentucky; Springfield, Oregon; and Jonesboro, Arkansas—were black girls from poor families who lived instead in New Haven, Boston, Chicago, or Newark. Wouldn't we now be having a national debate about inner-city poor black girls? Would not the media focus entirely on race, class, and gender?

Of course it would: We'd hear about the culture of poverty; about how life in the city breeds crime and violence; about some putative natural tendency among blacks towards violence. Someone would probably even blame feminism for causing girls to become violent in vain imitation of boys. Yet the obvious fact that these school killers were all middle-class white boys seems to have escaped the media's notice, in part because race, class, or gender are only visible when speaking of those who are not privileged by race, class, and gender but invisible when speaking of those who are privileged by them—which might account for some of that media myopia. But it's not just middle-class white boys. It's something else—it's the interactions among middle-class white boys. All the boys who committed these terrible acts had stories of being bullied, beaten up, and, most significantly for this analysis, gay-baited. All seem to have stories of being mercilessly and constantly teased, picked on, and threatened. And, most strikingly, it was not because they were gay (none of them was, as far as I can tell), but because they were different from the other boys—shy, bookish, honor students, geeks, or nerds.

The prevalence of this homophobic bullying, teasing, and violence is staggering. Probably the most common put-down in America's high schools and middle schools today is "that's so gay." And as we've seen, it has less to do with sexual orientation than it does with gender. Boys act as the gender police, making sure that other boys stay in line.

Men's fears of being judged failures as men in the eyes of other men leads often to a certain homosocial element within any heterosexual encounter: Men often will use their sexual conquests as a form of currency to gain status among other men. Such homosocial competition contributes to the strange hearing impairment that leads us to hear "no" as "yes," to escalate an encounter, to always go for it, to score. And this is occurring just as women are learning to say yes to their own desires, to hear their own voices. Instead of our socialized deafness, we need to become what Langston Hughes called "articulate listeners": we need to trust women to tell us what they want, when they want it, and what they don't want as well. And we need to listen to our own inner voices, our own real desires and needs. Not the voices that are about constantly proving something that cannot be proved, but the voices that are about connection with another and the desires and passions that can happen between two equals.

SAVING THE MALES

If men are afraid of what other men will think of them, they're also afraid of what women will do to them—just by their presence. Supporters of the male-only admissions policy at the Citadel distributed buttons that said "Save the Males!"—as if the very presence of women on campus would dilute the mystical bonding that takes place among the male cadets. Imagine a masculinity so fragile, so threatened, so besieged that the mere presence of a woman would make proving manhood impossible!

That also seems to be the fear that William (Hootie) Johnson expressed in his intransigent refusal to allow women to become members of Augusta National Golf Club. When their male-only policy was exposed by Martha Burk, the chair of the National Council of Women's Organizations, Hootie's growling resistance reminded me of those southern military schools: baffled by why women would want to join in the first place and gruffly resistant to allowing them to do so. Here was the head of the nation's premier country club, the site of its most prestigious golf tournament, acting like the Little Rascals defending their all-boy clubhouse with a hand-painted wooden sign that said, "No Gurls Allowed."

What could possibly be so scary about women's presence? I'll give you a hint: It isn't their presence. There are plenty of women at the Citadel (and at the Virginia Military Institute, another military academy that fought court orders to admit women); they cook the food and serve it, they clean the barracks and teach the classes, and they are graduate students and counselors. And there are plenty of women at Augusta National. Just who do you think serves all those cocktails at the nineteenth hole? Who serves the meals, prepares the food, makes the beds in the guest rooms? Women are all over the place—they are just not allowed to wear the fabled cadet uniform or the heralded green blazer. It's not women's presence that is threatening to men; it's their equality.

FROM THE BEDROOM TO THE BOARDROOM

Men's fear of and opposition to women's equality is found frequently in the workplace. Male doctors rarely are upset by female nurses or administrators,

just by female doctors; male corporate executives don't mind female secretaries, just female colleagues. But they'd better get used to it, because women have utterly transformed the public arena, the workplace. As is true of sexuality, the real economic transformation of the late twentieth century was women's dramatic entry into the labor force in unprecedented numbers. While many working-class white women and women of color have always worked, middle-class white women have entered the workforce in such numbers that men had better get used to having them around.

That means that the cozy boys' club—a.k.a. the workplace—has been penetrated by women, and just when that arena is more suffused with doubt and anxiety than ever before. In a downwardly spiraling economy, the current generation of college students are themselves downwardly mobile. The fastest growing job category in the U.S. economy is not dot-com millionaire; of all the jobs created in the decade from 2000 to 2010, more than four-fifths will be in entry-level service and sales jobs. Most Americans are less successful than their parents were at the same age, and this will continue for their entire working lives. It takes two incomes to earn what one income earned in the early seventies (the actual income of a family of four in the United States in 2003, in constant dollars, was about eight hundred dollars less than what it was in 1973). Most middle-class Americans cannot afford to buy the house in which they grew up.

We are a nation of fewer and fewer big wheels and more and more men who feel they have to prove themselves, who feel damaged, injured, powerless. And now here come women into that arena in unprecedented numbers. It is virtually impossible for a man to go through his entire working life without a woman colleague, coworker, or supervisor. Just when our breadwinner status is most threatened, women appear on the scene as easy targets for men's anger. This may help explain men's defensiveness and resistance to women's equality in the workplace: It feels like a loss to us. This potent combination of women's increased entry into the workplace, men's declining fortunes, and men's sense of entitlement is what I often think of as the political economy of sexual harassment. I'm not referring to the less common form of quid pro quo harassment, by which sex is exchanged or demanded in return for promotions, hiring, or other job perks, but the far more pervasive hostile environment, in which women are reminded that although they may be in the workplace, they still don't belong there, it's really a man's world. The

that is threatening, it's their equality

placing of sexual harassment on the national agenda affords men a rare opportunity to do some serious soul searching. What is sexual harassment about? And why is it in men's interests to help end it?

Sexual harassment cases are difficult and confusing precisely because one often finds a multiplicity of truths. His truth might be that he gave an innocent indication of sexual interest or made a harmless joke with the boys in the office (even if those "boys" happen to include women workers). Her truth is that his remarks cause stress, anxiety about promotion and firing, and sexual pressure.

Women and men often experience the same event differently. Men experience their behavior from the perspective of those who have power, women from the perspective of those upon whom that power is exercised.

If an employer asks an employee for a date and she declines, he may forget about it by the time he gets to the parking lot. "No big deal," he says to himself. "You ask someone out and she says no. You forget about it." In fact, repairing a wounded male ego often requires that we forget about it. But the female employee? She's now frozen, partly with fear. "What if I said yes?" she asks herself. "Would I have gotten promoted? Would he have expected more than a date? Will I now get fired? Will someone else get promoted over me? What should I do?" And so she does what millions of women do in that situation: She calls her friends, who counsel her to let the matter rest and get on with her work. And she remembers, for a long time. Who, therefore, is likely to have a better memory: those in power or those against whom that power is deployed?

Using one's position to hit on women (arguably what President Clinton did, both in the White House and when he was governor of Arkansas) is the kernel of what is objectionable about sexual harassment. It's particularly volatile because it fuses two levels of power: the power of employers over employees and the power of men over women. Thus what may be said or intended as a man to a woman is also experienced in the context of superior and subordinate. Sexual harassment in the workplace results from men using their public position to demand or extract social relationships. It is the confusion of public and private, bringing together two arenas of men's power over women. Not only are men in positions of power in the workplace, but we are socialized to be the sexual initiators and to see sexual prowess as a confirmation of masculinity.

Sexual harassment is also a way to remind women that they are not yet equals in the workplace, that they really don't belong there. Harassment is most frequent in occupations (such as surgeon, firefighter, and investment banker) or in workplaces where women are new and in the minority. "Men see women as invading a masculine environment," says Louise Fitzgerald, a University of Illinois psychologist. "These are guys whose sexual harassment has nothing whatever to do with sex. They're trying to scare women off a male preserve."

When the power of men is augmented by the power of employer over employee, it is easy to understand how humiliating and debilitating sexual harassment can be, and how individual women would be frightened about seeking redress. The workplace is not a level playing field. Subordinates rarely have the resources to complain against managers, whatever the problem.

Although men surely do benefit from sexual harassment, I believe that we also have a stake in ending it. First, our ability to form positive and productive relationships with women colleagues in the workplace is undermined. So long as sexual harassment is a daily occurrence and women are afraid of their superiors in the workplace, innocent men's behaviors may be misinterpreted. Second, men's ability to develop social and sexual relationships that are both ethical and exciting is also compromised. If a male boss dates a subordinate, can he really trust that the reason she is with him is because she wants to be? Or will there always be a lingering doubt that she is there because she is afraid not to be, or that she seeks to please him because of his position? As men, we should work to end sexual harassment. It is more important than ever to desexualize the workplace, and to begin to listen to women—to listen with a compassion that understands that women's and men's experiences are different, and understands that men, too, can benefit from the elimination of sexual harassment.

AIDS AS A MEN'S DISEASE

Clearly, men will benefit from the eradication of AIDS. Although we rarely think about HIV in this way, we need to hold this disease up to the gender lens, to see it through the prism of masculinity. AIDS is one of America's men's chief health problems, among the primary causes of death for men

aged thirty-five to forty-four, and AIDS is also perhaps the most gendered disease in American history. No other disease has ever attacked one gender so disproportionately except those diseases, like hemophilia, that are sex linked (to which only males or females are susceptible). AIDS could affect both men and women equally, and throughout the rest of the world (except the United States, western Europe, and Canada) the rates of infection reach gender parity; that is, of the 80 percent of HIV infections worldwide, half affect women and half men. And remember, in unprotected heterosexual intercourse, women are more at risk for HIV transmission than men. But in the United States, more than 85 percent of people with AIDS are men.

Let me be clear that in no way am I saying that one should not have compassion for women AIDS patients. Of course one must recognize that women are as likely to get AIDS from engaging in the same high-risk behaviors as men. But that's precisely my point. Women don't engage in those behaviors at rates anything like men.

One is put at risk for AIDS by engaging in specific high-risk behaviors—activities that ignore potential health risks for more immediate pleasures. For example, sharing needles is both a defiant flaunting of health risks and an expression of community among I.V. drug users. And the capacity for high-risk behavior—unprotected anal intercourse with large numbers of partners, the ability to take it, despite any potential pain—is also a confirmation of masculinity.

The victims of men's adherence to these norms of masculinity—AIDS patients, rape victims, victims of sexual harassment—did not become victims intentionally. They did not ask for it, and they certainly do not deserve blame. That some women today are also sexual predators, going to swank bars or waiting outside athletes' locker rooms or trying to score with male subordinates at work, doesn't make William Kennedy Smith, Mike Tyson, Magic Johnson, Randy Moss, or Bill Clinton any less predatory.

And the men—the date rapists, the sexual harassers, the AIDS patients—are not perverts or deviants who have strayed from the norms of masculinity. They are, if anything, overconformists to destructive norms of male sexual behavior. Until we change the meaning of manhood, sexual risk-taking and conquest will remain part of the rhetoric of masculinity. And we will scatter the victims, both women and men, along the wayside.

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF SAFETY

What links all these struggles—against sexual harassment, date and acquaintance rape, and HIV—is that all of them require a sexual politics of safety. The politics of safety may be the missing link in the transformation of men's lives, in their capacity for change. Safety is more than the absence of danger, although that isn't such a bad thing either. Safety is proactive, the creation of a space in which all people, women and men, gay and straight, and of all colors, can experience the fullness of their beings, can work to their potential, and can express themselves fully.

Think for a moment about how the politics of safety affects the three areas I have discussed in this essay. What is the best way to prevent AIDS? To use sterile needles for intravenous drug injections and to practice safer sex. Sterile needles and safer sex share one basic characteristic: They both require that men act responsibly. This is not one of the cardinal rules of manhood. Safer sex programs encourage men to have fewer partners, to avoid certain particularly dangerous practices, and to use condoms when having any sex involving the exchange of bodily fluids. In short, safer sex programs encourage men to stop having sex like men. To men, safer sex is an oxymoron, one of those juxtapositions of terms that produce a nonsensical outcome. That which is sexy is not safe; that which is safe is not sexy. Sex is about danger, risk, excitement; safety is about comfort, softness, security.

Seen this way, it is not surprising to find, as some researchers have, that one-fourth of urban gay men report that they have not changed their unsafe sexual behaviors. What is, in fact, astonishing is that slightly more than three-fourths have changed and are now practicing safer sex.

What heterosexual men could learn from the gay community's response to AIDS is how to eroticize that responsibility—something women have been trying to teach men for decades. Making safer sex into sexy sex has been one of the great transformations of male sexuality accomplished by the gay community. And straight men could also learn a thing or two about caring for one another through illness, supporting one another in grief, and maintaining a resilience in the face of a devastating disease and the callous indifference of the larger society.

Safety is also the animating condition for women's expression of sexuality.

While safety may be a turnoff for men (*comfort, softness, and security* are the terms of postorgasmic detumescence, not sexual arousal), safety is a precondition for sexual agency for women. **Only when women feel safe can they give their sexuality full expression.**

This helps explain that curious finding in the sex research literature about the divergence of women's and men's sexualities as they age. Men are believed to reach their sexual peak at around eighteen and then go into steady, and later more precipitous, decline for the rest of their lives; women hit their sexual stride closer to thirty, with the years between twenty-seven and thirty-eight as their peak years. Typically, we understand these changes as having to do with differences in biology—that hormonal changes find men feeling soft and cuddly just as women are getting all steamed up. But aging does not produce such changes in every culture; that is, biology doesn't seem to work the same way everywhere.

What biological explanations leave out is the way men's and women's sexualities are related to each other, and the way both are shaped by the institution of marriage. Marriage makes one's sexuality more predictable—the partner, the timing, the experience—and it places sex always in the context of the marital relationship. Marriage makes sex safer. No wonder women find their sexuality heightening—they finally feel safe enough to allow their sexual desires to be expressed. And no wonder men's sexuality deflates—there's no danger, risk, or excitement left.

Safety is a precondition for women's sexual expression. Only when a woman is certain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that her no means no can she ever say yes to her own sexual desires. So if we men are going to have the sexual relationships with exciting, desiring women that we say we want, then we have to make the environment safe enough for women to express their desires. We have to make it absolutely certain to a woman that her no means no—no matter how urgently we feel the burning of our own desires.

To do this we will need to transform the definition of what it means to be a real man. But we have to work fast. AIDS is spreading rapidly, and date rape and sexual harassment are epidemic in the nation's colleges and workplaces. As AIDS spreads, and as women speak up about these issues, more and more people need our compassion and support. Yet compassion is in relatively short supply among American men, since it involves the capacity to take the role of the other, to put ourselves in someone else's shoes,

a capacity that contradicts the manly independence we have so carefully cultivated.

Sexual democracy, like political democracy, relies on a balance between rights and responsibilities, between the claims of the individual and the claims of the community. When one discusses sexual rights—the idea that each person, every woman and man, has an equal right to pleasure—men understand immediately what you mean. Women often look delighted and a bit surprised. Add to the Bill of Sexual Rights a notion of responsibility, in which we all treat sexual partners as if they had an integrity equal to our own, and it's the men who look puzzled. "Responsibility? What's that got to do with sex? I thought sex was about having fun."

Sure it is, but it's also political in the most intimate sense. Sexual democracy doesn't have to mean no sex. It means treating your partner as someone whose lust is equal to yours and also as someone whose life is equally valuable. It's about enacting in daily life our principles, claiming our rights to pleasure, and making sure that our partners also feel safe enough to fully claim theirs. This is what we demand for those who have come to America seeking refuge—safety—from political tyranny. Could we ask any less for those who are now asking for protection and refuge from millennia of sexual tyranny?

CODA

It's been ten years since I wrote the first draft of this essay—ten years in which dramatic progress has been matched by equally dramatic setbacks. Even though there has been a noticeable increase in the number of men who are active in these campaigns—men who organized campus groups against sexual assault, rape, harassment; men who organized programming for other men to engage them in these efforts—the majority of men continue to believe that transforming a rape culture is women's work.

And why shouldn't they believe it? After all, most of the programming we do around sexual assault and date rape on campus focuses entirely on the women. To be sure, we tell the men, "Don't do it, or else." But that's often the end of the conversation with men. The women are much better prepared. We tell them what to wear and what not to wear, what parties they can safely go to and which to avoid, what to drink and what not to drink, how late to

Sexual
democracy

Marriage
makes sex
safer... hahaha...

stay out and how to get themselves home. We tell them always to go to parties with a trusted friend, never to lose eye contact, even to follow each other into the bathroom, and be sure to taste each other's drinks.

Now let me be completely clear here: Women must do all these things to reduce their risk of sexual assault. But what such programs imply about men is that unless women do all these things, unless women utterly compromise their liberties, remain eternally vigilant, and modify their activities, we men will act like out-of-control animals who will be all over them in an instant. By pitching our programs entirely to women, we assume an utterly unsavory—and unfair—view of men as no better than testosterone-crazed sexual predators.

I think we men can do better than this. Part of transforming a rape culture means transforming masculinity, encouraging and enabling men to make other choices about what we do with our bodies, insisting that men utilize their own agency to make different sorts of choices. To ignore men, to believe that women alone will transform a rape culture, freezes men in a posture of defensiveness, defiance, and immobility.

Nowhere is this better expressed than on a splash guard that a colleague devised for Rape Awareness Week at his university and that I have been bringing with me to campuses around the country. For those who don't know, a splash guard is the plastic grate placed in public urinals to prevent splatter. These simple devices are placed in urinals all over campus. This one comes with a helpful little slogan: "You hold the power to stop rape in your hand."

NOTES

1. John Gagnon, *Human Sexualities* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1977).
2. Robert Brannon, in the introduction to *The Forty-nine Percent Majority*, edited by Robert Brannon and Deborah S. David (Reading, Mass.: Addison, Wesley, 1976).
3. Richard Kim, quoting an interview between MTV's Kurt Loder and Eminem, in *The Nation* (March 5, 2001): 4.
4. Carol Iacofano, in a book review of *The Two-Income Trap: Why Middle-Class Mothers and Fathers Are Going Broke* by Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi, *Boston Globe* (November 19, 2003).

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