

# Dismantling the Patriarchy

Fifth Estate Collective

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Everyday sexual predation on women by men of power and prestige in the entertainment world, politics, business, and the university has been an open secret that has suddenly gained massive public attention. Women's words have been listened to and prominent men have experienced almost immediate banishment from their fields after exposure of their abusive actions.

There probably is a non-clichéd phrase to replace “the tip of the iceberg,” but what we see unfolding in Hollywood and Washington DC, is just that. Sexual harassment, abuse, and assault are commonplace in every workplace, venue, and setting.

In this issue, we have a selection from *Learning Good Consent: Building Ethical Relationships in a Complicated World*, a collection of essays which examine the culture of sexual consent, relationships of power, and boundaries.

It starts with the assumption that its readers are committed to creating an egalitarian and pleasurable context for sex and relationships. Unfortunately, the overwhelming number of assaults and indignities suffered by women are perpetrated by men who never conceive of the idea of consent, having incorporated the tenet of patriarchy that every woman's body should always be available to them.

Although not every woman experiences abusive power relationships, almost every one has experienced male domination in the form of harassment, comments, groping, or worse, sexual assault and rape. Whether it is someone on a bus or at a demonstration, between coworkers, a boss and workers, a landlord and a tenant, teacher and student, the guy across the street, an uncle or a fellow student, with a pinch, a rub, a quick feel, a thrust, a leering glance, or a sexist joke, it's the power of the patriarchy over women that is being exercised. The pervasiveness and magnitude of offenses against women is daunting.

All too many women experience domination and violence from partners in their lives. In New York City alone, almost 300,000 cases of domestic abuse were reported in 2017 including beatings, non-fatal shootings, and stabbings. Not reported are the single slap or punch, the pushing, emotional abuse, and bullying that never come to official attention.

Whatever percentage of men act in an aggressive or abusive manner, the patriarchal culture has hurt staggering numbers of people. The yearly average number of victims of rape and sexual assault in the U.S. is 321,500 according to government statistics, and a 2013 study found that rape is grossly underreported (such as forced sex when the perpetrator has been considered a friend). Statistics for incest and sexual abuse of children, primarily girls, are overwhelming.

A feminist group once put forth a single cardinal rule for human interaction that not only addresses social-sexual situations, but includes human aggression in general, all mostly perpetrated by men.

No one touches another person without permission.

We would add, no one dominates another person. Sexual bullying, making purposely embarrassing sexual remarks and jokes, comments on body shape and apparel, are among the other patriarchal privileges afforded to men.

The question remains of how to give social force to resistance since so many situations involve equations of power. Tell your boss you don't appreciate his remarks and you lose your job. Refuse the director and you don't get the part. Don't give the landlord a kiss, you're on the street. These are relationships deeply imbedded in capitalist society and enforced by disproportionate power expressed as the privileged status of men. It is omnipresent even when there's no direct power relationship, and it reinforces patriarchy.

Within our communities and projects, we need to strive for a microcosm of the world we desire. Hopefully, we are correct in saying that those who desire radical social change adhere to and promote these standards more so than society at large. However, it's not enough for men to declare that they're pro-feminist; they must reflect on their socialization. Women must do so as well. Patterns of domination must be broken.

How to do so is difficult. An intellectual and ethical commitment to behaving in a non-sexist, non-dominating manner is necessary. This sets a standard by which actions can be evaluated.

Although hypocrisy reigns high among many who give lip-service to sexual equality, it is the power of women expressed through feminism that have brought down so many of the powerful and allowed ordinary women to protest abuse at home and in the workplace.

There must be zero tolerance for sexist and assaultive behavior. Social space has opened where women needn't tolerate an unwanted touch or sexual remark. Men should not accept sexism in any situation, from people they know or from strangers, or in themselves.

Male bad behavior has a history stretching back thousands of years. We have an opening at this point to begin a significant challenge to patriarchy.

It begins with all of us.



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