

coupled men “are happier, more sexually satisfied and less likely to end up in the emergency room” than their uncoupled counterparts, Dokoupil writes. The sexual rhetoric-reality gap is similar to the gap between locker room talk and real-guy talk. The reputation is that guys’ locker-room talk is full of bawdy bravado, but Michael Messner says most guy talk actually involves “quiet, dyadic discussions of relationships, fears, and doubts,” and hopes, dreams, and desires.

Our ideas about masculinity are propped up by all sorts of cultural sources such as religion, family, schools, fairytales, sports heroes, science, and everyday myths that are so common that they become invisible to us. Yet even though the politics of masculinity are so often invisible to us, gender politics are everywhere. When we make gender visible, then we can start talking about the possibilities of positive masculinity. The question is what would that version of masculinity look like? And how would we make it happen?

The good news is that there are infinite possibilities for creating positive masculinity. Being a real man doesn’t have to mean setting oneself up in binary opposition to femininity. Masculinity doesn’t have to hinge on power and control over others. Real masculinity can involve valuing a wide range of emotions, experiences, preferences, desires, and accomplishments in all people.

Chapter 4

Gender Advantage: Checking In on Masculine Privilege

MASCULINE PRIVILEGE IS THE IDEA THAT society confers certain unearned advantages on men simply because they are male. Masculine privilege operates in everyday events. Sometimes it’s really obvious, as in the fact that Congress remains overwhelmingly male. But masculine privilege also flies under the radar. Institutional practices and ideological beliefs about masculine superiority seem so normal or natural that we’ve learned not to notice when a man’s opinion is taken more seriously than a woman’s or that calling a boy a “grrl” is considered an insult.

Exposing invisible patterns and practices allows us to think critically about the links between gender privilege and sexism. One way masculine privilege operates is in how men (and women) are taught to see sexism as “individual acts of meanness,” says feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh. What’s really going on, though, is that sexism is supported by invisible systems that perpetuate and maintain dominance for men *as a group*.

This process is similar to how racism and white skin privilege work. McIntosh comments in her essay “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” As a white woman McIntosh can turn on the TV or look at the front page of the newspaper and assume she’ll see people of her race widely represented. Jewel Woods draws parallels with his status as a man; he writes in “The Black Male Privileges Checklist” that as a man he can assume that his financial success or popularity as an

athlete will not be associated with his looks. If he wants to "sow some wild oats," he won't be judged for it. Friends might even encourage him. Woods also notes that privilege looks different for men of color than it does for white men. "Examining black male privilege," Woods writes, "offers black men and boys an opportunity to go beyond old arguments of 'personal responsibility' or 'blaming the man' to gain a deeper level of insight into how issues of class and race are influenced by gender."

Masculine privilege and its benefits are real, but they're often hard to see. They go unrecognized because they're so common. The ideological, structural, and institutional factors of masculine privilege tend to remain invisible. And men tend to be unaware of their own privileges as men.

Masculine privilege includes individual actions, but it exists on a larger scale as well. So even if a man says, "Well, I'm not sexist. I'm not like *that*," masculine privilege isn't so easy to shrug off. In general, men more easily than women walk through the world with a sense of status and cultural legitimacy that isn't necessarily conscious or articulated. And it's not necessarily something that men *ask* for. Men are conferred status and legitimacy by a culture with a long history of doing so. Masculine privilege functions on a macro level through the ways our institutional and cultural systems are systemically structured.

For instance, antisexist author Hank Shaw reports in "It's Time for Guys to Put an End to This" that 85 percent of reported rapes in the United States end up with no conviction by the courts. Almost 90 percent of reported rapes result in no jail time. One question is why there are so many rapes in the first place—to the tune of 876,000 a year, by some estimates. (The American Medical Association counts seven hundred thousand and according to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, 60 percent of sexual assaults are still not reported to the police.) "No matter which figure you choose," says Shaw, "it's WAY TOO MUCH." Shaw connects the dots between masculine privilege, violence, and institutionalized patterns of power imbalances. One possible reason there are so many sexual assaults perpetrated by men,

Shaw writes, is that "these guys think they have the right to sex, even though it's not in the Constitution. They also think their right to sex is greater than the right of a woman to say 'NO!' Which is another way of saying this: 'Men are more important than women. So we get to make the rules,'" says Shaw.

These sorts of beliefs come from masculinist ideologies of privilege. These ideologies are models for exerting power over others—and then ignoring this process, or choosing to look the other way. Some people deflect attention from masculine privilege by arguing that men are just as affected by assault as women, or that women actually have more power because they can falsely accuse men of rape. Tragically, it's true that more than one hundred thousand boys and men are raped every year, according to Shaw. But 90 percent of all rape victims or survivors are women, and 60 percent are girls under the age of eighteen. The rapists are overwhelmingly grown men. Furthermore, the National Coalition Against Violent Athletes reports on its website that, according to the FBI, "More people falsely report their own death than file a false report alleging sexual assault."

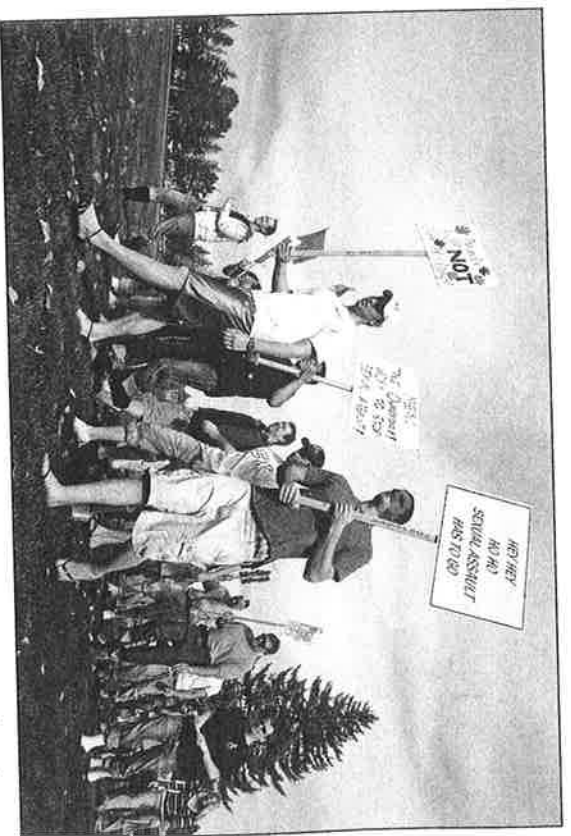
Understanding power and privilege means taking seriously not only gender dynamics but also issues of race, class, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, and nation of origin. This means knowing, for instance, that black people comprise 13 percent of the national population but 30 percent of those arrested, according to the nonprofit group Human Rights Watch. This disparity isn't necessarily caused entirely by racism among cops—but that doesn't mean racism doesn't exist. Like sexism, racism is more complicated than that, which is exactly what makes it so powerful. Researchers believe, for example, that racial disparities in the criminal justice system result from "indirect" forms of discrimination such as poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and increased police scrutiny in particular neighborhoods. These institutionalized disadvantages are "compounded throughout the criminal justice processing system," reports Human Rights Watch.

Being a member of any dominant group includes the ability to not

notice one's privilege. So white skin privilege can mean driving through a neighborhood without thinking about race and whether the police are going to pull you over. White privilege can mean the luxury of walking into a room without thinking about the color of your skin because white people don't usually think about their skin tone unless they're the only white person in the room. Similarly, paying attention to the sex/gender of your sexual partners isn't something people generally do if they're straight.

And the same thing is true for men. Men don't usually wake up in the morning and think about their privilege or even the fact of being male. The unexamined assumptions and the ongoing invisibilities of gender privilege make masculine privilege powerful because it goes underground. It enables men to be unself-conscious about privilege and status. And that's the privilege: *not* having to think about one's gendered identity. In other words, the concept of masculine privilege includes the luxury of not having to notice one's gender.

Women are often acutely aware of being gendered female as they make their way through everyday experiences in the world. Not paying attention to masculinity might mean walking to your car at night *without* thinking about personal safety or the possibility of sexual assault. Women often hold their keys at the ready, walk in pairs, or remain hypervigilant about their surroundings in ways that often simply don't occur to men. Because girls are raised knowing they will be judged on how they look, women are intensely aware of their image from head to toe. Men may not give a second thought to what they're wearing. Looking good can matter for everyone, but the social stakes for men are not as high if they look sloppy, unattractive, skinny, or fat. And what if a woman feels cranky one day? What if she's deep in thought, or she just doesn't feel like smiling? Women are used to being told by total strangers to smile (read: Be more friendly and less ornery). Men are rarely—if ever—told to smile. Men are not required to be socially accessible. Men don't generally get accused of PMS-ing (again, read: not being nice enough). Being acutely aware of one's gender in this way is something men rarely experience.



Walk a Mile in Her Shoes: The International Men's March to Stop Rape, Sexual Assault, and Gender Violence provides men an opportunity to put themselves in the shoes of women and imagine what it's like to routinely face the threat of violence. Here, participants wear high-heeled shoes during a 2008 march in Laramie, Wyoming.

Masculine privilege can be a touchy issue for a lot of us to read about or discuss. These conversations can feel threatening. Men might feel defensive; they might feel as if they're being accused of being sexist. Women might think men are being singled out for attack and want to stand up for them. But we can't adequately address sexism without discussing masculine privilege. Sidestepping the subject is like trying to eradicate racism without ever mentioning white privilege. This subject can provoke discomfort, but talking about masculine privilege is a crucial conversation. It is a subject that's important to investigate.

The point of conversations about power and privilege is not simply to declare that unearned privilege is always bad. Those of us who have privilege shouldn't just sit around feeling guilty about it (and then pat ourselves on the backs for knowing enough about sexism and racism to feel guilty in the first place). The impact of unearned privilege depends on what we *do* with it. Success and change lie in figuring out how

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privilege—whether based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, or any other aspect of identity—can be relinquished or used for positive change.

Hey, What's in That Guy's Knapsack?

Masculine privilege lends men access to power, which has a serious impact on gender equality. Some forms of injustice, such as sexual assault or pay inequity, are obvious and concrete. Other instances of bias are damaging precisely because they're so hard to pinpoint. Masculine privilege is buttressed by a sexism that runs so deep through our collective psyches that, as Shulamith Firestone suggests, biased sex and gender divisions are practically invisible. These invisible practices easily go unnoticed until somebody calls them out.

When little boys are encouraged to be more active or are allowed to get dirtier than girls when they play, there is subtle yet profound gender construction at hand in which boys learn to exercise a greater range of motion and physicality. Most pronouns used for God are masculine (His, Him, Father), and most visual images for God are male. The pronoun "guys" may, without question, refer to a group of both men and women, but referring to that same group as "girls" is an unacceptable alternative.

Men can walk relatively freely through the world without fear of sexual harassment and rape (unless they are young boys, are gay, are incarcerated, or visibly deviate from gender norms). Men can assume people will listen when they talk, and they don't generally struggle to make their voices heard (although this may not necessarily be true in a mixed-race group of men). Men don't usually have to worry that if they are aggressive or opinionated they will be condemned or called a "bitch."

If you can show up for class in jeans and a T-shirt and feel pretty sure you won't be criticized for not wearing makeup, chances are you are the recipient of masculine privilege. Same goes if you are expected to spend little money on beauty and hygiene products. (Just for kicks, ask your female and male friends how many products they used this morning before they left their houses. Then do the math and figure out

how much money men saved. These savings are the result of gendered beauty and consumer expectations.) Because we are surrounded by examples of gender privilege and bias every day, we become used to them. If we notice it at all, masculine privilege can seem normal or natural.

Feminist and antiviolence activist Ben Atherton-Zeman comments, "Heterosexual men listen to songs all about how our gender is the victim of female manipulation and heartbreak. But in reality, my gender exists with a privilege that's invisible. We're safer on the streets, safer at work, safer in our homes. We make more money than women do, see our faces more on television, and are represented by leaders that look like us."

Men can take for granted that they're the norm, the standard bearers. Guys—especially straight, white, able-bodied guys—can be pretty sure that when they see the front page of the newspaper, flip through the sports section, or meet their tenured physics professor, the faces they see will look a lot like their own. And when those faces don't—as when the doctor, dentist, or plumber turns out to be a woman—it might be a big surprise. The fact that people still specify "female" doctor but don't spell out "male" doctor is evidence that a male norm is still in play. Books, magazines, college campuses, and television shows still tend to make universal assumptions that words such as "mankind," "chairman," "policeman," or "freshman" refer to everyone.

What we think of as regular or neutral is often based on the assumption of a male standard. For most professional sports teams, the men's league is the presumed norm and the women's is the exception. The NBA is men's basketball, but women's pro-ball is singled out as the WNBA. Colors that are thought of as gender neutral, such as blue and green, are associated with boys. Clothing that is thought of as gender neutral is associated with men (pants, slacks, suits, etc.) not women (skirts, stockings, dresses, etc.).

Masculine privilege means guys can turn on the radio or watch music videos knowing it's unlikely they will encounter lyrics or visual images that refer to them in sexually degrading or objectifying ways.

The Unearned Benefits of Being Male

In Peggy McIntosh's 1988 essay on privilege, she wrote, "I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks."

McIntosh's important insight provided the groundwork for men such as Paul Kivel, Jewel Woods, and Barry Deutsch, who have borrowed her concept and created similar lists about male privilege.

Do you benefit from unearned privileges because you are male? How many of the following can you check off? Some examples will be mediated by experiences of class, race, nation of origin, religion, and sexual orientation. These aspects of privilege are important issues to consider and discuss.

1. I can be pretty sure that when I walk down the street, nobody will yell at me about my body or tell me what they want to do to me sexually.
2. My forefathers, including my father, had more opportunities to advance themselves economically than my foremothers.
3. When I learn about the civil rights and Black Power movements, most of the leaders that I learn about are men.
4. If I choose not to have children, nobody will question my masculinity.
5. No one will think I'm selfish if I have children and a career.
6. In school, boys' sports were given more attention than girls' sports. There were cheerleaders for boys' teams, but none for the girls.
7. At work, I can be fairly sure that I won't be sexually harassed.
8. If I have sex with a lot of women, it's unlikely that I'll be called a chickenhead, slut, or a ho.
9. I will not be expected to attend a "purity ball" to celebrate virginity until marriage.
10. I can be pretty sure that when I talk in groups or in public, people

will listen to what I'm saying and they will believe I know what I'm talking about.

11. I've gotten work, a job interview, job training, or an internship through personal connections with men.
12. I can be reasonably assured that in my intimate relationships and everyday life I am unlikely to be the victim of domestic violence or sexual assault.
13. I generally feel safe when walking to my car by myself at night, hiking alone in the woods or the mountains, or walking on the beach.
14. I can turn on the TV or open the newspaper and expect to see people of my sex represented, including political and business leaders, top athletes, movie stars, and experts. My elected representatives are mostly people of my own sex.
15. When I have medical procedures, take prescribed medicines, or receive other health treatments, I can assume they were tested and proven safe on people of my own sex.
16. I have heard men belittle women's abilities, women's writing or music, women's intelligence, or physical strength, or make other comments about women being inferior to men—especially if there are no women are in the room when they say it.
17. I know that if I want to, I can pay money to have sex with women or to watch them dance with their clothes off.
18. I have easy access to sexually revealing images of women on the Internet and in books and movies.
19. I can assume that I'll do less of the housecleaning, cooking, childcare, washing, or other caregiving than the women in my family do.
20. I can dress how I want, without people assuming I want to have sex with them.
21. When I have sex, I don't have to worry about pregnancy if I don't feel like it.
22. I don't need to think about sexism every day. I have the privilege of not having to think about my privilege.

This sidebar draws on and was adapted from the works of Peggy McIntosh, Paul Kivel, Jewel Woods, and Barry Deutsch.

The film *Dreamworlds 3*, a groundbreaking movie about music videos and the stories they tell about women and girls, convincingly describes how pop culture media send powerful messages about men's sexual access to women's bodies. Music videos are a central part of our pop culture, and they routinely portray women's bodies in hypersexualized, objectified ways. Yet if we are not taught media literacy tools, we tend to see these images as "just entertainment" instead of understanding that music videos also reveal significant messages about sexuality and relations between women and men.

When it comes to home and family life, many men report wanting to spend more time with their children. But in actual practice, it is frequently assumed that women, not men, will interrupt their careers to raise families. As feminist blogger Barry Deutsch puts it in "Unpacking Men's Invisible Knapsack," "If I have children with a wife or girlfriend, and it turns out that one of us needs to make career sacrifices to raise the kids, chances are we'll both assume the career sacrificed should be hers." Often this decision seems rational because the male partner is already earning more money. Yet this is actually an example of how privilege begets more privilege. That's not to say that career or money automatically equals privilege, but that *options, choices, and earnings potential* are all hallmarks of privilege.

When it comes to marriage practices, the vast majority of men don't change their last names after getting married. It simply might not cross men's minds, or they might laugh at the mere suggestion. While taking a woman's surname after marriage might seem weird, U.S. institutional structures reinforce and maintain the assumption that men will keep their own names. Steve Fries, writing for *USA Today*, reports that ingrained patriarchal traditions have been slowly challenged by a few men who have taken their wives' last names. Yet as of 2007 more than forty states actually prevented a man who wants "to alter his name after his wedding to do so without going through the laborious, frequently expensive legal process set out by the courts for any name change." In these states, there wasn't even an option on the marriage license application for the groom to choose the bride's name.

The American Civil Liberties Union takes this issue seriously. In 2006, Michael Buday elected to use the last name of his new wife, Diana Bijon. After months of frustration and discovering that it would take a \$350 fee, court appearances, a public announcement, and mounds of paperwork to change his driver's license (hoops that women don't jump through), Buday took his case to the ACLU of Southern California. Jill Serjeant reports for Reuters that California state law now guarantees "the rights of both married couples and registered domestic partners to choose whichever last name they prefer on their marriage and driving licenses." Mark Rosenbaum, legal director of the Southern California chapter of the ACLU, comments that this new law "disposes of the rule in California that the male surname is the marital name to the same trash bin where dowries were once tossed out."

The decision to hyphenate last names might appear to be an egalitarian practice, but it's usually the woman who does this—and it's still considered somewhat unusual when a man joins her. Fries notes that Sam Van Hallgren, the cohost of a movie-review podcast, *Filmspotting*, had to placate his listeners who were caught off guard the first time Van Hallgren introduced himself with his new name. (Van Hallgren was formerly Sam Hallgren until he married Carrie Van Deest and they combined names.) The social risk proved high for Van Hallgren: According to Fries, he "received a scathing note from a longtime listener with a subject line that read, 'Sam, turn in your man card.' The listener asked what 'sissy juice' the host was drinking."

Linguistic Shape-Shifting

Language is one of the key ways that our culture, consciously or not, conceals masculine privilege. Sometimes it's as simple as straining "female" before "doctor," as mentioned above, or using "mankind" to describe humankind. But other times the manipulation of language is more complicated.

Linguistic shape-shifting is what Jackson Katz calls the nearly imperceptible practice of making men, boys, and masculinity disappear through how we use language. Katz explains that this "disappearing

act" involves using gender-neutral language to obscure gender-specific events such as men's responsibility for violence. "We cannot achieve dramatic reductions in men's violence against women," Katz says, "until we can at least *name* the problem correctly." Tragedies such as the 1998 Jonesboro Massacre, Columbine in 1999, the 1999 gang rapes in Woodstock, the sexual assaults in Central Park during Puerto Rican Day festivities in 2000, the shooting of ten Amish girls in 2006, and the thirty-two murders during the 2007 Virginia Tech rampage were reported as violent attacks, or as "kids killing kids," rather than what they really were—*men's* (and boys') violent assaults.

Katz explains that the way we structure language allows men to slip out of view. For instance, the sentence "Mary is a battered woman" emphasizes a woman's condition and diverts attention away from male violence. This lets men and our society collectively off the hook from taking a cold hard look at gendered violence. In his book *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*, Katz cites linguist Julia Penelope's work in tracing the transition from male accountability to passive invisibility: 1) John beat Mary, 2) Mary was beaten by John, 3) Mary was beaten, 4) Mary was battered, 5) Mary is a battered woman. By the end not only has "John" disappeared from the equation, but "Mary's" identity is sealed by the status of her victimization.

This linguistic shape-shifting matters because the media frequently use passive descriptions when they report on male violence against women. This passive style reinforces ideas that domestic violence and sexual assault are "women's issues," and men are left out of the picture. "John left the conversation long ago, while Mary evolves into the active victim," Katz explains. "Victim-blaming is very pervasive in our society, because this is how our whole power structure is set up. We start asking why Mary put herself into a position to be beaten by John. If we really want to work on preventing sexual assault and male violence against women, we need to start asking questions about John, not Mary," Katz says. In other words, we need to shift the paradigm at the cultural level and start treating domestic violence and assault as men's issues.

In "The Grammar of Male Violence," Jennie Ruby also describes how language focuses on women as victims but not on the role of men as perpetrators. Crime reports are written in the passive voice. "The result is that the gender of the victim is clearly stated," Ruby writes, "but the gender of the perpetrator is completely hidden: 'A woman was raped' rather than 'A man raped a woman' or 'A man raped someone,' or even 'An unknown male assailant raped a person.'" These passive oversights of language are at the core of masculine privilege: the privilege not to have to notice privilege, and the privilege of disappearing from accountability. What results is that men can collectively stay in the same place and the cultural systems of masculine privilege remain unexamined. This limits society's ability to effectively address important issues of power and privilege, safety and liberty. The focus remains on helping women escape violence rather than on reducing violent behavior in men.

A similar process is at work in the way the news media report on reproductive politics. Recent headlines in major newspapers, on websites, and in magazines announced an "epidemic" of teen pregnancy and a rising concern about the rate of sexually transmitted infection among teen girls. So what's the problem with this picture? Don't we care about reproductive issues and the sexual well-being of girls and young women?

We do, of course. But, as Mike Males points out in the *Los Angeles Times*, not only are the sensationalist reports about rising teen pregnancy rates fact-challenged, they also revive a host of pre-1950s-esque sexist misnomers. What's more, this kind of reporting diverts attention away from the complexity of the situation. A large majority of male partners involved in teenage pregnancy are men age twenty and older, Males writes. Instead of criticizing the "high rate of teenage pregnancy" in the United States, it would make sense to say something about the high rate of adult men who are impregnating teen girls.

The same goes for teenage girls who contract conditions such as HPV, chlamydia, or HIV/AIDS. The partners responsible for sexually transmitting these infections—partners who are usually

male—are removed from the focus of public debate. When it comes to public discussion about teen pregnancy and STIs, men are often erased from the equation. Removing men from public scrutiny once again lets men off the hook and leaves social problems only partially addressed.

Pornography and Privilege

Some people argue that pornography is another way masculine privilege is constructed and reinforced. It's true that pornography certainly highlights women's sexual bodies. But porn doesn't focus *only* on women. Not all pornography is straight or heteronormative, but a lot of it is. And men aren't the only ones looking: Women watch porn, too. So how can we know that pornography reinforces male privilege?

The vast majority of pornography depicts sex acts being done to women, women being on display for the pleasure of others, women depicted as deriving pleasure primarily by pleasing others. This is not a moral issue; it's a political one. Sex and pleasure are great. Some political theorists such as Herbert Marcuse even argue that sexual pleasure is a form of political liberation. And what consenting adults enjoy *sexually* or *what they do* with their bodies is their personal choice. But in *mainstream* porn, the viewer is usually assumed to be male, *cruelty* or *degradation* of women plays a central role, and women's bodies exist mostly for men's pleasure. To be blunt, given that face shots, gang bangs, gonzo, and airtight scenes are stock material, we need to start asking some real questions about gender politics and mainstream pornography. The point is not to ban porn or to demonize people who make it or who like to watch it but to understand how porn functions in propping up masculine privilege and influencing our cultural narratives about sexuality.

We live in a culture that is infused with pornographic imagery. Porn and sex work have become models emulated by so much of mainstream life—for example, pole-dancing fitness classes, easy Internet access to porn, porn-peddling banner ads and email spam, porn-infused music videos, and G-strings with cherries and the words “eye candy”

marketed to tween girls. With the mainstreaming of pornography melded onto a culture with preexisting gender disparities, we tend to end up with a narrow version of sexual pleasure. Because pornography has a wider reach than it used to, it is fast becoming the primary way that people learn about sexuality and pleasure. Yet in porn we see the same sexual tropes repeated over and over. This gives the misguided impression that pornography provides visions of sexual diversity when it actually offers lots of opportunities to see the same thing. It's like fast food: Coast-to-coast drive-throughs offer lots of chances to get the same hamburger and fries. They don't offer a lot of options in choosing what to eat.

Some might say to all this: Lighten up! Porn is just about getting off. It's just fantasy. Robert Jensen calls this a “definitional dodge”—a bunch of smoke and mirrors. To Jensen, the real issue is how hegemonic masculinity and masculine privilege remain invisible in pornography. Avoiding any frank discussion about pornography by calling it fantasy effectively staves off critique, even preemptively.

The definitional dodge enables us to avoid confronting issues of masculine privilege by claiming that porn is just free expression, says Jensen. The “dodge” usually involves some combination of arguing that porn is all a matter of taste; that what's porn to some is erotica to others; that what's degrading to some is liberating to others; that arguments about pornography are entirely subjective; that we can't precisely define pornography so therefore we can't really say much about it; or, what's the big deal? It's just fantasy.

Arguing that porn is just fantasy is like saying advertising has no effect on our buying habits. Or that news media have no impact on how we understand current events. How could it be true that every other form of mass media has an impact on our habits and collective consciousness, but that porn is “just fantasy”? And even if porn is “just fantasy,” then what do these fantasies reveal about the ways in which gender and masculinity are constructed and about how privilege is reinforced and maintained? And what are the consequences of these common cultural tropes?

© Peace Over Violence



Peace over Violence (formerly the Los Angeles Commission Against Assault on Women) ran a poster campaign called "This Is Not an Invitation to Rape." The images in the campaign, including this one, attempt to convey that all sexual activity requires the enthusiastic consent of all parties involved.

victim and victimizer alike often do not recognize the violence in acts that the society has deemed violent enough to be illegal." According to Jensen, the inability to recognize sexual assault—for either perpetrator or survivor—is at the core of what's called a rape culture, and it is propped up by mainstream pornography.

But It Was Just a Joke

Jokes about women's bodies and brains can mask sexism and perpetuate masculine privilege. The problem is that there's a real difference between sexually explicit or erotic humor and jokes that mix sexuality

One study of campus-based sexual assault found that men were sexual aggressors toward more than half of college women interviewed; 47 percent of men who had committed an act that met the legal definition of rape said they expected to engage in a similar assault in the future; 88 percent of men who reported having committed an assault that met the legal definition of rape were adamant that they had not committed rape.

Meanwhile, only 27 percent of women who experienced assaults that met the legal definition of rape labeled themselves as rape victims or survivors. Jensen points out that rape and sexual assault are common fodder for entertainment and supply key plot lines in movies, music video, and television. "We live in a culture in which the sex-

domination nexus is so tight that

Gray Rape

"Gray rape" describes fuzzy sexual situations in which it's unclear whether an assault occurred—maybe there was regrettable sex, or people were so wasted that the line between consent and assault seemed unclear. In her popular *Cosmopolitan* magazine article, author Laura Sessions Stepp refers to gray rape as "sex that falls somewhere between consent and denial." Stepp says gray rape is even more confusing than acquaintance rape, or date rape, "because often both parties are unsure of who wanted what."

The action-oriented group Men Can Stop Rape strongly disagrees that there's such a thing as gray rape. The group argues that the term lessens men's accountability and distracts from the real issue, which is whether all parties agreed to have sex with each other. In a poll on its website, the group asks, "Is 'gray rape' society's traditional way of holding men less accountable OR is it a viable result of today's casual hookups, mixed signals, and alcohol (use)?" Discussing these issues and increasing awareness about different forms of sexual assault and what constitutes consent is a form of taking feminist action.

Men Can Stop Rape wants to know which of the following describes what you believe about "gray rape":

- It's just society's traditional way of holding men less accountable (and in turn pointing the finger back at women).
- It's a result of the current equal-opportunity hookup culture.
- It's a result of increased drug and alcohol use that accompanies today's wild partying.
- It's a combination of all the above.

Or maybe you're thinking, "Wait up! There's a heck of a lot more to the issue than this."

with aggression. The former might be funny; the latter create feelings of discomfort and even threat. Often we aren't taught the tools to distinguish between the two.

Jokes that individual men tell women tend to be erotic and clever (such as punch lines that hinge on double entendres). These kinds of jokes are intended to be seductive, professor Peter Lyman explains in "The Fraternal Bond as a Joking Relationship." These sorts of jokes are used by men particularly when they're trying to attract women. But jokes that men tell other men *about* women tend to be sexual and aggressive rather than erotic. They tend to be hostile rather than clever. They tend to be sexist rather than sexual. The purpose seems to be to create homosocial bonding. This is done, however, through reinforcing women as hypersexualized females who can be dominated or denigrated.

Some might find the following jokes funny, innocent, offensive, or rude:

Q: How do you change a woman's mind?

A: Buy her another beer.

Q: What is the difference between your job and your wife?

A: After twenty years your job still sucks.

Are these jokes erotic or misogynist? (And how can we tell the difference?) Are they funny *because* they call out the sexism of everyday life? When we hear them, do we laugh or cringe, feel shocked or angry? Or do we pride ourselves on being unshockable and "ironic"? Do we find ourselves laughing even if we don't really think a joke is funny?

Whether women (or men) experience a joke as funny or as intimidating can be a matter of context. If jokes about women are made in an atmosphere of physical intimidation, that becomes a power issue, Lyman writes. And if you're the one on the scene without the power, this can be frightening. It increases men's power and tends to

silence women. Sexist jokes themselves are a power issue, whether they are made in an atmosphere of physical intimidation or at the workplace or in an intimate relationship; the jokes themselves, in reinforcing masculine privilege, point out men's power over women.

Jokes can be used to covertly reinforce women's subjugation because jokes ask us to let go of our objections. And if we refuse to let the objections go, we might be called humorless, or we might be accused of being a killjoy. Labels such as these are a quick route to minimizing or dismissing people's concerns. To seal the deal, the seemingly innocent phrase, "Boys will be boys," might be deployed. This again lets men and boys off the hook and clears them of responsibility. As this pattern of dismissing objection and concern is repeated the stakes get higher. Our culture asks us to overlook misogyny whether the issue is jokes that cut down women, sexist DJs on drive-time talk radio, hiring strippers for frat or bachelor parties, sports-related violence, sexual assault at military academics, or expecting access to women's—and even children's—bodies through global sex tourism.

Unequal Privilege

While there is an unearned privilege that's awarded to men simply for being born male, it's a privilege complicated by other aspects of identity. The way activist Atherton-Zeman puts it, "Many of us guys want to deny we have privilege, since we don't especially *feel* privileged. We feel victimized—as working class or poor men, GBTQ men, as men of color, or just as men trying to navigate relationships and the world."

Black, Latino, and Arab men, as well as other men of color, are more closely scrutinized by the criminal justice system. These men experience endemic racism. This means that black men, for instance, have certain status as *men* yet often lack status and privilege as *black* men. The disproportionate numbers of black men imprisoned relative to the total population of black men is one example of discrimination and unequal access to basic rights such as fair and just treatment by the criminal justice system.

Transgender and transsexual individuals also have a complicated relationship to masculine privilege. Author-activist Matt Kailey comments that female-to-male transsexuals are often criticized for transitioning into male privilege. "Sometimes we are accused of transitioning specifically to gain this privilege," Kailey says. "And although many transmen will admit to experiencing newfound privilege, at least superficially, after transition, the bottom line is that we are still transsexuals, one of the least privileged groups in society today. Some transmen, depending on ethnicity, economic level, and several other factors, can enjoy a measure of post-transition male privilege. But when our transsexuality is revealed or discovered, all bets are off."

Younger boys can also experience the effects of relative powerlessness. Systemic abuse of power exists, for instance, when boys are sexually assaulted by grown men. Data provided by Darkness to Light, an organization dedicated to confronting child sexual abuse, indicate that one out of six boys survives sexual abuse by the time he is eighteen years old. More than 60 percent of the time, the perpetrators are men. (Only 10 percent of these pedophiles are strangers, and when girls are assaulted the perpetrator is almost always male.) The expectation that boys don't cry or express hurt contributes to the fact that male childhood abuse continues to be underreported. When society looks the other way or fails to acknowledge male patterns of abuse, it reinforces tacitly sanctioned practices of domination that so deeply affect how we understand our world, our emotions, and our relations with others.

The presence of complex, multilayered patterns of subjugation is why some people have started using the term "kyriarchy" instead of "patriarchy" to describe sociopolitical structures of domination and the abuse of power. As explained by Lisa Factora-Borchers on her blog, *My Ecstasy*, and repeated by Lauren Smith on *Jadedhippy*, patriarchy refers literally to "rule of the father." But all men do not have the same access to power and privilege. *All* men do not dominate *all* women equally, in the same way. Theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza coined the term "kyriarchy," which comes from *kyrios*, the Greek word

for "lord" or "master," and *archein*, meaning "to rule or dominate." Schüssler Fiorenza explains that kyriarchy points to how the structures of domination are intersecting and "multiplicative." This structure looks like a pyramid of people where a few people are in charge and a lot of people are at the bottom. It's a system "of ruling and oppression," explains Schüssler Fiorenza.

When people talk about the "shifting circles of privilege, power, and domination—they're [actually] talking about kyriarchy," writes Factora-Borchers. When you talk about the power a white woman asserts over a brown man, that's kyriarchy. "When you talk about a Black man dominating a Brown woman, that's kyriarchy. It's about . . . everyone trying to take the role of lord/master within a pyramid."

Clearly, we benefit from creating more precise terms to explain the complex patterns of privilege and the abuse of power. bell hooks uses the phrase "white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy" to describe these complicated structures of domination. hooks explains that white supremacist capitalist patriarchy creates and maintains the center and the margins in society. What she means is that people with power and access to resources "live" at the center of society. These are the movers and shakers, the people who get to decide and define what's important in society. Those at the margins are quite literally *marginalized*. For instance, a homeowner would be at the center; his or her immigrant housekeeper would be at the margins.

Yet it's not the case that men *always* have privilege even if they are at the "center" in certain instances. It's possible for men to simultaneously inhabit many worlds with different degrees of privilege and powerlessness. Some men experience masculine privilege within a family setting or on the job, yet they may also experience disadvantage as, say, a black man in white-dominated settings or as a Muslim man in white, Christian communities. Author and transman Jacob Anderson-Minshall writes, "Becoming a man has opened my eyes to the privileges men still have over women in this country; it's not just getting paid more for the same work, it's a level of respect I was instantly granted

Reflections on Masculine Privilege

When I was in school, the boys took geometry and the girls took home ec. I remember thinking this was really unfair that we had to do math and the girls learned how to make a pot roast and feed a family. I thought geometry was a burden. But looking back I realize that we got an education in ways the girls didn't and there was a certain amount of privilege in that. Though in actuality, I never did use geometry in real life and it took me years to learn how to cook and wash my clothes!

—Micky Hohl, forty-four-year-old filmmaker(D)

My ex-girlfriend is an interior designer. She used to come home and tell me about having to deal with contractors who would treat her like she's "just a girl." They'd try to get her in bed or act condescending toward her, like she didn't know what she was doing. I'm an electrician and I work with contractors, too. But they don't try to pull that shit with me.

—Donovan Davidson, thirty-eight-year-old electrician

A couple of weeks ago I was riding with a white male shuttle driver. He screamed "Bitch!" to a white woman on a bike that crossed in front of his car and surprised him as he was turning. I am a black man. Would he have screamed "Nigger!" if it had been a black woman on the bike? I don't think so. I think he was taking advantage of a privilege of perceived male sameness. I processed this. I thought about it. I had the opportunity to say something to him later but I didn't. I used a variety of excuses: My child was with me, so I waited. My partner said to let it go and I value her opinion. The driver was older and set in his ways. No sense wasting my energy on that one. This certainly was not a fireable offense.

And there lies my privilege. I can let misogyny go and not feel the direct impact of it. I've been doing antisexist work for years and I let it

go. I don't have to be "on" or feel the weight of it 24/7. Sexism is still not about me; it is about "them." Until that reality changes, I have so much more work to do.

—Michael Shaw, forty-five-year-old social worker

I am a privileged, straight, white male. I don't wake up in the morning worried about where I park my car or whether I will be sexually harassed or assaulted. I don't wake up in the morning worried about being confronted because of my skin color. And I don't wake up in the morning worried about being gay bashed.

—Stephen McArthur, sixty-year-old hotline crisis worker and violence prevention educator

One thing I've noticed is that men who consider themselves feminist often take a kind of bloodless, it's-all-theory attitude toward feminist topics. I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with male friends who are feminists in which they parse arguments and make statements as if there are no actual real-world implications of what they're saying. They don't take it personally, which to me is a dead giveaway that they don't truly get the ways that sexism and gender roles damage them, too. And that's their privilege talking—because of the benefits they do get from the status quo, and also because they're taught (directly and indirectly, by both mainstream culture and by some parts of feminist culture) that sexism has to do with women only. It's a blindness and depersonalization that women and people whose genders don't fit the standard binary can't afford to have, because sexism and misogyny hit us in the face (sometimes literally) at least almost every day. But men can choose to ignore it if they want, the same way white people can avoid dealing with race by taking shelter in their white privilege.

—Lisa Jervis, thirty-six-year-old cofounder, *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*

as a white man. But it's tenuous: when others see the cane I walk with, or realize I was once a woman, in their eyes I suddenly become half a man, or not a 'real' man and some of those privileges evaporate, doors of opportunity close."

Some might assume the margin is an undesirable place to be, but hooks points out that there is a form of power in the margins. Those at the margins—the gardeners and service workers, gay men, or non-English speakers—have insight into their own worlds as well as into the world of those at the center. By contrast, those at the center *think* they know it all. They think their own worldview is everyone's worldview and they don't realize that people at the margins have a deep understanding of both worlds. The immigrant gardener knows his own neighborhood and he understands the patterns of the rich because he travels there to work. The rich don't travel to the gardener's immigrant neighborhood and, if they do, are unlikely to understand what's going on.

This understanding of two worlds doesn't offer material power (and relative disadvantage still exists in many regards), but hooks explains that it confers a certain sort of cultural currency. Living at the margins gives people insight, a window into understanding the center in ways that rarely work in reverse.

But before we "start making a checklist of who is at the top and bottom" (or at the center or the margins), Factora-Borchers has some advice: "Don't bother," she warns. "The pyramid shifts with context." The point is not to rank or to compare. The point is to learn and to make a change.

Confronting Masculine Privilege

"Pointing out that men are privileged in no way denies that bad things happen to men," writes Barry Deutsch. Privilege doesn't mean guys get an easy pass in life. Deutsch continues, "Being privileged does not mean that men do not work hard, do not suffer. In many cases—from a boy being bullied in school, to a soldier dying in war—the sexist

society that maintains male privilege also does great harm to boys and men."

Some argue that men are oppressed because they aren't allowed to express a full range of emotions, they're constrained in what they can wear, and they are limited in how they are allowed to care for others. Robert Jensen argues that this is not oppression, but what he calls "toxic masculinity." "Toxic masculinity hurts men," he writes, but "there's a big difference between women dealing with the constant threat of being raped, beaten, and killed by the men in their lives, and men not being able to cry."

Yet some men have organized around the idea of their own oppression. Men's rights and fathers' rights groups argue that they face discrimination in divorce and custody decisions and that men are routinely and falsely accused of harassment or abuse. By avoiding real information about sexism, unearned privilege, and the institutionalized imbalance of power and authority, men's rights movements mask masculine privilege. There are legitimate social issues that need to be hashed out. However, the data tell us that, in the aggregate, men are not the primary victims of sexism. Masculinities expert Michael Flood clarifies that men who experience abuse, fathers who want greater involvement as parents, or male partners going through separation or divorce certainly deserve services and support. But the dangerous accusations against women by men's and fathers' rights movements create a backlash that, according to Flood, exacerbates "systematic silencing and blaming of the [actual victims] of violence" and hampers progress toward gender equality or even pushes it backward.

Many guys might reasonably say, "But I'm not like that. I'm not sexist. I don't exert masculine privilege. I'm just a regular guy." And there are plenty of great guys out there. Yet because of the institutional components of masculine privilege, it becomes difficult to simply opt out. Of course it's true that plenty of men and boys don't routinely exhibit sexist behavior and don't fling about masculine advantage like monkeys in a tree. But distancing oneself from gender politics without

Giving Up Unearned Privilege

Masculine privilege is social advantage that is derived from the happenstance of one's birth or conferred by society on certain groups. It's one thing to talk about privilege, but what would it take to give it up? Why would we want to and what might be some of the risks? Consider the following questions about giving up unearned privilege:

1. If I speak out and take action about unearned privilege, will my friends or family make fun of me or cut me out of the scene?
2. If it's a privilege not to have to think about my privilege, except when I feel like it, then what would it be like to think about masculine privilege critically and more often? And is thinking about privilege enough?
3. If I give up some of my privilege, will I put myself at a disadvantage in this competitive world?
4. Is it enough that I don't beat, cheat, or lie? If I want to refuse to be a bystander to sexism and all forms of social privilege, what do I need to do?
5. If I start taking masculine privilege seriously, won't this make me bitter? Or too serious? What if people don't want to be around me anymore? Will I feel like a traitor to other men?

actively engaging in the process to make things better tacitly enables the problems to continue. We all need to consider how we might take an active role in making a change. Otherwise we risk being part of the problem through passive denial or inaction.

In her book *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence*, author Myriam Miedzian explains that what we know best, the stuff that "forms part of our everyday landscape, is also that which we most take for granted, and question the least. And some of the strongest jolts to our awareness, the deepest reorientations in our thought, often come from being confronted with the obvious." Miedzian also writes that there's the chance that challenging "assumptions, values, and patterns of behavior that have been taken for granted for so long can be threatening

to people's sense of identity and self-worth; it can create feelings of guilt." Guilt, however, is a paralyzing, unproductive emotion. We need better ways to address social, political, moral, and ethical responsibilities when it comes to sexism and masculine privilege.

Relinquishing privilege involves, in part, each of us doing the work ourselves to examine our privilege. Peggy McIntosh has noticed that well-intentioned men may grant that women are disadvantaged yet be unwilling to admit to the ways that men are overprivileged. The interplay between sexism and masculine privilege penalizes women and, even by default, benefits men. Men may say they will work to improve "women's status," McIntosh says, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's status. Denying masculine advantage, she continues, creates taboos around "the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended."

What would compel men to confront and relinquish the unearned perks of gender? Why should men change? Michael Flood argues that men have an ethical obligation to eliminate that privilege. There is a simple moral imperative that men give up their unearned share of power. "The struggle to be ethically and morally consistent with our belief systems and our behaviors leads to complex questions and constant negotiations with self. The most important thing is that we have a responsibility to be introspective," Flood says.

Change doesn't have to mean becoming ultrasensitive, emo, passive, or constantly serious. Introspection, insight, awareness, and action can be serious. It can be done through humor. It can be private. It can mean talking with people or marching in the streets. It means educating ourselves. The challenge, according to Jackson Katz, is that in most cultures introspection is antithetical to constructed, hegemonic, dominant masculinity.

Unmasking male privilege makes each of us newly accountable. It means we have to be willing to face hard questions about how sexism is personal and political. It means being willing to take a stand about what each of us will do to make a difference.

Making Privilege Visible

The most effective male allies in our efforts to eradicate sexism are those men who understand that male privilege is not something you can remove like a coat. It operates at all times and in most instances serves to afford us unspeaken and often unrecognized pleasures. It is the threat of losing the benefits of sexism that motivates most men to be silent in the face of men's violence and privilege and why male "bystanders" are not readily intervening on men's sexist aggression and/or gendered injustices. It is the threat to male privilege that also produces the vitriolic response of many men to feminism.

—Chuck Derry, fifty-two-year-old founder, Gender Violence Institute

When men involve ourselves in antisexist and antiviolence efforts, this too is shaped by patriarchal privilege. Men's groups receive greater media attention and interest than similar groups of women, partly because of their novelty, but also because of the status and cultural legitimacy granted to men's voices in general. We receive praise and credit (especially from women), which is often out of proportion to our efforts, although this is understandable. And we are able to draw on men's institutional privilege to attract levels of support and funding rarely granted to women.

Men can rightly claim to be antisexist, but it is a mistake to claim to be nonsexist. In patriarchal societies such as ours, all men learn sexist thoughts and behaviors, all of us receive patriarchal privileges whether we want to or not, and all of us are complicit to some degree in sexism. Our task is not to be nonsexist, as this is impossible, but to be anti-sexist. Yes, we can rid ourselves of particular sexist assumptions and stop practicing particular sexist behaviors, but in a sexist culture we can never be entirely free of sexism.

—Michael Flood, forty-one-year-old researcher

I'm a pre-op FTM [female-to-male], second-generation Indian American, born and raised in Missouri. I'm female and I walk as male, so I'm constantly grappling with masculine privilege. The desire to be seen pressurizes me to collude with that system, but my girl upbringing makes such indifference impossible. Women's safety is a daily top priority for me, so I try and walk in ways that help women feel safe. I mean that literally. I walk a mile to and from the bus stop every day, and each night, I'm very intentional with how I walk—pace, space, and gaze—I attempt to eradicate danger from my steps in a way that supports women's occupation of space.

—S. Aakash Kishore, twenty-three-year-old lab assistant

I work at a rape crisis center doing advocacy, counseling, and prevention education. I benefit from masculine privilege every time I walk into a high school class to teach about rape. The young men, who because of sexism or defensiveness would tune out my female coworkers, listen because they've been taught to respect men, and only men. Masculine privilege allows the vast majority of men to sail through life oblivious to the day-in/day-out rape, abuse, and harassment that the women they love suffer at the hands of men.

—Patrick Donovan, thirty-year-old prevention services coordinator, rape crisis center

I am constantly aware of the privileges our culture bestowed upon me at birth, and while I'm aware that I cannot reject these privileges, I can work against the system that gave them to me.

—Steve McAllister, thirty-year-old health educator