


Dear men: Here are 5 things you can do to support your wife or girlfriend in a sexist world

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Dear men: Here are 5 things you can do to support your wife or girlfriend in a sexist world

Written by Jessica Eaton

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Content warning for discussion of sex, porn, violence and misogyny

This blog is for all of the men who love women, who are in relationships with women they respect and care about. You see, being a decent bloke to your wife or girlfriend is great and all, but the woman you love lives in a society that is inherently sexist and misogynistic.

She lives in the same world as you, but the world doesn't treat her the same way it treats you. That's why I've put together some things you can do to support her in a society that hates her for being a woman.

Actually, before I start with the things you can do to support her, take a few moments to think about this. Were you really aware that the woman you love lives in such a misogynistic world? Have you noticed the way she is spoken to? The way she is treated? Has she ever told you about the way other men have treated her? The way she is talked over and ignored? The way the builders wolf-whistled her at 12 years old? The way she picks different routes home from work to stay safe? The way she texts her best friends to check they 'get home safe'?

If you respect her and care for her, she is with you because she can feel that. However, her trust and love for you does not stop her from being oppressed, discriminated against and harassed out there in the world.

Here are some things you can do to support her in a sexist world:

1. Believe in and educate yourself about misogyny

If you love her, care about her and respect her – you need to make sure your eyes and ears are open to the misogyny and sexism she is battling every single day. Don't convince yourself that sexism is over, and that women are treated as equals in society. Learn about the global oppression of women. Look around you and consider the way women are objectified, hypersexualised, discriminated against and blamed. Watch the way other men treat women around them. Listen to the way your peers talk about women and girls. Consider how many notions of 'not being manly enough' are based on the stereotypes of women. Have you ever

been told not to cry like a girl? Been told to 'stop being a woman'? Been called a 'pussy' for being scared? Been told you run or throw 'like a girl'? Heard a man calling another man a 'little bitch'? Have you ever noticed how many slurs are female?

Notice these aggressions all around you. Imagine what it is like to be the woman you love in a world in which being a woman is the worst thing you can be, and that's why all the male slurs are about humiliating men for acting like a woman. The woman you love is being held up as an example of what men should never be. Think about that.

2. Don't 'not all men' her when she tells you about the way a guy has treated her

I know its tempting or can even make you feel offended or defensive, but when she is talking about men treating her like shit, or the time she was assaulted, or her friend being raped – she does NOT need to hear you say 'Yeah, but not all men are like that, babe.'

She already knows that. That's why she's with you.

So please, don't tell her what she already knows. She knows not all men are rapists or abusers or wife beaters or paedophiles. She knows. But that doesn't take away from what she is saying.

Lots of men feel personally attacked when women talk about male violence, but as long as you are not one of those men who are committing it, minimising it or encouraging it, then this isn't about you. Listen to her, care about her view and her experiences. Condemn what the other man did to hurt her or hurt someone she knew.

Remember that she is in a relationship with you because she cares about, respects and loves you. That means she can sit and rage about the way some footballer is getting away with raping women and the women are being blamed – and it's not about you. She doesn't think it's 'all men'.

3. Do not stand by and allow men to disrespect her

Now obviously, as a man who loves and cares for your wife and girlfriend; I already know you wouldn't let someone hurt or threaten her. But what about the microaggressions she faces every day?

What about the way the man at the car garage won't listen to her about there being something wrong with her car because she's just a woman? Or the way the estate agent talks to you as you walk around a house viewing, as if your partner isn't even there? Or the way your mates joke that you are a 'walking bank' and she's probably out right now rinsing your credit cards? Or the way your family tell the women to get back in the kitchen and make the food? Or the way the bank manager only makes eye contact with you whilst talking about your joint mortgage?

These examples might sound small and petty but imagine being on the receiving end of them.

Imagine being side-lined, ignored and mocked like this. Furthermore, imagine a man treating her like this or talking to her like this, whilst you stand by, completely oblivious to how she is being made to feel.

Imagine the mechanic only speaking to her, because you are too stupid to understand. Imagine being shown around your new house by an agent who only ever asks her about the house, the mortgage and the deposit – because it can't possibly be you with the money or the authority to rent or buy a house. Imagine her friends joking that you live off her money and you are some wasteman who uses up all her credit cards. Imagine going to the bank to discuss the mortgage and the bank manager literally ignoring your existence and only talking to your wife or girlfriend, because they assume she is the only one who understands and the only one making the money.

That's what it feels like to be on the receiving end of this constant disrespect.

When you live in a sexist world, even if you respect and care about a woman – it doesn't mean other men around you respect her. Lots of men around you will assume you have the same lack of respect for women as they do.

When these things happen to her, say something. You don't have to be aggressive or confrontational, but don't stand there and allow her to be disrespected by other men.

All it takes is a swift 'Well, this is a joint decision so my partner needs this information too' or 'Why don't you ask my wife what she thinks?' or 'Would you speak to her that way if she was a man?' or 'Actually, I agree with her, she's right' or 'My girlfriend does not sponge off me, she makes her own money.'

Deliberately bring her into the conversation and keep referring back to her, to reposition her in the conversation.

4. For the love of women everywhere, please stop expecting her to act out things you saw in porn

It's a slap in the face for a lot of people to realise that porn is misogynistic and sexist. It represents the true derogation, humiliation and objectification of women. If you're a guy who watches porn and has maybe been watching it for 5, 10, 15 or maybe more than 20 years – you will notice how much more violent and degrading it has gotten.

The days of 'the plumber who came to fix the pipe under the sink and then ended up having sex with the woman over the dining table' have gone, my friends. Long gone. Now we have women being violently penetrated by groups of men. Women being beaten, strangled, hit, kicked, slapped, spat on, shouted at and called names. Women being forced to commit disgusting acts that no woman you love will ever want to copy. Women being fed drugs before, during and after

porn shoots so they are so high they can't feel the hours of pain that is required for these shoots. Women suffering internal injuries and irreparable anal prolapse because, guess what, the ass is not for sex.

The reality is, men in power are making porn that frames women in this way – and then men and boys think that is normal sex. Those of you who have had sex with women will know that real life sex is absolutely nothing like porn sex. And you need to remember that.

Two stories that might make you rethink this issue:

1. My friend is a GP who reckons she now sees about 4-5 women with 'fisting injuries' per month from men who have tried to copy fisting from porn and have caused extremely serious tears in women's vaginas. This is NOT okay. This is NOT healthy experimentation. Stop trying to copy porn. Porn is not real sex.
2. My other friend is a therapist who sees men and boys who have watched so much unrealistic porn, that they can no longer get an erection or have sex with women they fancy. Some of those men say that the only way they can ejaculate is if they are having sex with their partner and watching porn on the laptop at the same time, next to them. She recently saw a guy who has a girlfriend that he really loves, but he just cannot get aroused by her healthy, natural body – because her body looks nothing like the women in porn. This is also NOT okay. This is the way men and boys are being manipulated by porn. These effects are seen in boys from the age of 14 years old. Think about that.

Porn, unfortunately, is not the harmless bit of fun it is made out to be. In fact, just take a few minutes to think about the things you thought women liked because you saw it in porn, only to be told by a woman in real life to stop it, that it hurt, that she didn't want to do that or that she physically could not copy that from porn.

5. Challenge your peers when they are abusing, disrespecting or harming women

Women and girls have been trying to challenge men and boys for decades, but they are not the sex that holds the most authority and power in society. When women and girls stand up and challenge men and boys, they are often laughed at, ignored or shouted down.

However, when men start challenging each other and holding each other to account, shit will change.

You might be the good guy who has never hurt a woman, but do you laugh along with your mates whilst they tell rape jokes or call a woman they know a 'fat slag'? Do you quietly shake your head when your mate chats up a woman who keeps telling him she is not interested? Do you intervene when you think your brother is abusing his girlfriend? Do you stop in the street to ask if a woman needs help when her drunk husband is yelling at her and the kids? Do you report your boss for treating your female colleagues like tea-maids?

Please, SAY SOMETHING.

Women who stand up and defend or protect themselves often fear repercussions or actual threats of violence. Women you know will tell you how dangerous it can be to tell a bloke you're not interested in him, especially considering how many of them will turn on you at that point. Women who speak up at work against a sexist boss will probably find themselves fired or bullied to the point of resignation.

Showing support and challenging the misogynistic world we all live in doesn't end with your own girlfriend or wife. What about the way your sisters, friends, mum, daughters, cousins, aunts, nieces and grandmothers are treated in the world? What about the way your female colleagues are treated at work?

Again, you don't have to aggressively stop a man, but you can challenge him, talk to him, report him or find a way to protect the woman you are worried about. And if a woman discloses to you, listen to her and believe her.

If you see a man you know abusing his partner, threatening her, coercing her, manipulating her, bullying her, assaulting her or gaslighting her – please consider saying something or doing something. Don't leave her to struggle on her own. Don't stand by in silence. Don't watch it happen whilst thinking, 'It's none of my business'.

If you have a mate who laughs as he says he has never done a single nappy for his baby because it's 'woman's work' – laugh at him and tell him he's a father and he needs to sort his shit out.

If your brother can't take no for an answer and is pestering the woman at the bar for the second time this evening, move him away from her and tell him she's not interested.

If you have a boss at work who listens to the ideas of the men but seems to think women are naïve or stupid, keep highlighting the good work of your female colleagues and ALWAYS say when a good idea was from one of the women in the team. If you can sense a female colleague is being overlooked, simply say, 'Have you thought about asking Maya? She's really good at that, you know.'

Never allow men in your team to take the work or ideas from a woman and claim them as their own. And when a guy repeats the exact same thing a woman just said, literally say 'Isn't that what Amy just said? Didn't she just say the exact same thing?'

Finally, one thing to everyone reading this. Please don't use the comments under this blog to bring women down further – or to ridicule the men who care about women, sexism or misogyny. If anything, if you want to leave a comment, why don't you suggest more ways that men can stand up for the women in their lives and challenge the misogyny we live in every single day?

If my ten-year-old son can recognise sexism and say to the guy at Volkswagen, 'You wouldn't talk to my Dad like that...'; then I firmly believe that men and boys can be encouraged to step in and challenge male violence and misogyny when they see it.

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