

10 Ways Men Can Combat Sexist Entitlement in Public

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After the tragic mass murder in Isla Vista, CA in May, violence driven by Elliot Rodger's [misogyny](#) and [racism](#), countless women used the hashtag [#YesAllWomen](#) to [voice the endless ways in which overt and microaggressive misogyny shows up in their everyday lives](#). It was an incredible response to a terrible tragedy, one with the power to raise awareness of the constant assault on their lives, bodies, personhood, and livelihoods that women-identified people face. I, along with a number of other pro-feminist men, called on men to read as many of the tweets and to reflect on what they cumulatively call on us to change.

Sadly, though, many men saw it as a chance to question and challenge women's experiences with misogyny rather than to listen.

One of the most common refrains, despite the thousands of voices cumulatively calling on men to realize the harsh realities of misogyny, was "PROVE IT!" Men, and not just your hardcore MRAs, were challenging women (without a hint of intended irony) to show evidence that misogyny exists while the evidence rained in tweets all around them.

One dude in particular tweeted at a number of women, asking for proof that men are socialized to feel entitled to women, women's bodies, women's accomplishments, women's space, and so on.

As one example, someone tweeted the "[Men Taking Up Too Much Space on the Train](#)" Tumblr, trying to help him understand that male entitlement extends beyond overt commodification of women's bodies, and that it extends into how we are socialized to be in society. Literally, we are socialized to take up more than our fair share of space!



Source: [Men Taking Up Too Much Space on the Train](#)

From there, someone linked to the "[Your Balls Are Not That Big](#)" Tumblr, and someone else posited that maybe the men on trains are just "[Saving Room for Cats](#)."

Source: [Saving Room for Cats](#)

The guy didn't really get the connection.

But there is an important connection to be made.

#YesAllMen are socialized to feel and act entitled in society, and we tend not to see and understand the ways we act with entitlement because, well, [privilege](#). And for many of us, this entitlement just plays out through microaggressions like [asking a woman to smile](#) or [touching a woman's hair without her permission](#).

But it doesn't just impact women. Last week I was on a plane, and I was exhausted. I had just spent the night in the airport after a series of annoying delays, and it was a long flight. The guy sitting behind me was pretty obnoxious during boarding, cracking stupid jokes and being overall way too loud for a 7 am board time. I was in the exit row, which meant there was a gap between my window seat and the actual window/door, and a few hours into the flight, I was woken up by a terrible smell. This is what I found:



Yeah, that is my arm rest, and those are his shoeless feet.

Now before you rush in with a #NotAllMen trope or a story of a woman being super entitled in public space, listen: no, not all men would have the gall to put their stank feet up on someone else's armrest, and yes, I have seen women get super entitled about how their drink was made at a coffee shop.

However, when we pair the entitlement that men too often feel and act upon with the everyday misogyny that women face, we have a dangerous combination.

No, not all men will be an Elliot Rodger, killing women who reject us, but if we are not actively working to dismantle the ways in which men learn the type of entitlement that Elliot Rodger felt, then we are surely contributing to the wider problem.



So here are 10 simple ways that men can combat sexist entitlement in public:

1. Don't Act Like the World is Your Living Room, and Call Out Men Who Do

This one's simple. Be aware of the physical space you take up in public: on trains, in coffee shops, at the library, on airplanes. I'm plenty guilty of waking up on a plane, only to realize my large legs have taken over some of the space afforded to my neighbor when they bought the ticket. I simply apologize and reposition myself so I'm not taking over! See a dude with his feet up and shoes off in a crowded Starbucks? Politely ask him to consider how much space he is using.

2. Using Your Voice: Step Up and Step Back

I'm a loudmouth, and it's easy for me to dominate conversation. But you know what I've noticed? Far more men are this way than women. Thus, when we're part of a conversation, whether it's on the latest Spiderman movie or on the best way to dismantle the patriarchy, we need to be aware of how much we're talking. You see, it's not just the physical space to which men tend to feel entitled. Thus, we should be aware of how much we're talking, and if we are talking a whole bunch, step back. If we notice that men are dominating the conversation, we should step up simply to point it out and to call men to reflect on that.

Here's a little secret: Most of the times I have had a BRILLIANT idea in a discussion, if I wait a little while, someone else will voice that idea or something similar. If they don't, then I still can. This doesn't mean that I'm not an active participant in the discussion. It simply means I put more energy into really listening than to having my voice heard.

3. Work to End Street Harassment

A simple way to do this is not to harass women on the street. And not all street harassment is a lewd comment about a sex act yelled at a woman. Street harassment can be [leering](#). Street harassment can be asking a woman to smile. Street harassment can be hitting on a woman with whom you have no context or relationship.

Aside from refusing to participate in street harassment, though, we have a responsibility as men to end street harassment. There are a lot of ways to do that, but [here are a few suggestions for starters](#).

4. Refuse to Use Sexist Language, and Call Out Men Who Do

Sexist language really is pervasive. From the common usage of [b*tch](#) to calling someone (but particularly a woman) [hysterical](#) to referring to a woman as [crazy](#), there are endless ways that sexist language makes its way into our vernacular. Worse, when men are only around other men, the hyper-sexualizing language often gets pulled out, objectifying women through language and gesture. A simple thing that we as men can do to push back against male entitlement is to refuse to use this language and to talk to other men about why we find it hurtful or offensive when they talk this way.

5. Keep Your Clothes On

Man, I used to love to streak. Any chance I got, I was running around naked in public. But it wasn't until some people called me in to consider the roots of [sexist male entitlement present in my streaking](#) that I realized that it wasn't just good fun. But it doesn't have to be as overt as streaking for male bodies to dominate space. Have you ever been in a crowded area on a hot summer day when a guy takes off his shirt? First off, he ensures that his sweaty body rubs up against other people, but he also exerts his privilege, as cis women and Trans* people do not often have that same privilege of going topless in public. A simple thing we can do to push back on sexist entitlement in public is to keep our damn clothes on (yes even if we're hot).

6. Be Publicly Trans*-Inclusive

I hadn't actually considered how cissexist it was for me to simply take my shirt off in public every time I could until a Trans* friend pointed out how he can't actually wear traditionally "masculine" swim attire because it would be considered indecent, just as it would be for a cisgendered woman to go topless in public. That got me thinking: How else do I need to change my behavior to be more Trans* inclusive? Here are a few ideas: Don't assume people's gender pronouns until they tell you, opting to use gender-neutral ones instead; make sure to call people by their preferred gender pronouns and preferred name, even if it's hard for you to remember; highlight Trans* issues (like [the cissexism of assuming only women need abortions](#) or the hyper-prevalent threat of violence Trans* people face) whenever it makes sense to do so as a way to lessen the marginalization of Trans* people in society. Aside from helping to make our communities safer places for Trans* people, doing so is a subtle way to check male entitlement because it challenges our traditional gender norms that undergird male entitlement.

7. Demonstrate Clear Consent

Whenever possible, demonstrate consent. Need to slide past a woman in a public place? Don't just put your hand on her back. Ask to slide by. Ask before you hug someone. Ask before you pick up that little kid or tickle them. Ask before you kiss your partner. Simply finding mundane as well as creative ways to demonstrate consent is a simple way to push back on the assumption that men are entitled to the bodies and spaces around them.

8. Strive to Be an Ally to Women in Social Spaces

Party spaces tend to be some of the most overt areas where men exert entitlement. Ask any woman whether they've been groped by a dude on a dance floor and you'll understand what I mean. Thus, men have a responsibility to strive to be allies in social spaces. Not sure how to do that? [I wrote a whole piece on that!](#)

9. Talk About Male Entitlement with Other Men

Because of that old adage that privilege conceals itself from those who have it, a lot of men are clueless to the ways that we express entitlement to space, bodies, affection, emotional energy, and so on. Talking with other men, particularly doing so publicly, is an important tool for challenging entitlement simply because it sheds light on the problem. Whether it's a call out or call in or a public conversation with your bros about the ways that men express entitlement, naming the problem can help you identify allies you never thought you had and help men consider a problem that far too often is invisible to us.

10. Talk to Boys and Young Men About Male Entitlement in Age-Appropriate Ways

What's the best way to end male sexist entitlement? Keep it from spreading to the next generation! Obviously telling a 5 year old that he is expressing "sexist entitlement to girls' bodies" when he pushes over that little girl to take the tricycle she is riding isn't going to help anything. But talking to him about why it is important to respect all people's bodies is vital. Pointing out to boys and young men the ways in which they are exhibiting entitlement and helping them understand why it is wrong is key to ending the entitlement that far too often leads to violence later in life.

Are you a coach of a boys soccer team? Talk to them about why the sexist ways they are talking about the girls soccer team's bodies isn't cool (and for goodness sake, don't participate). Are you a father or an uncle? Think of fun and creative ways to teach the little boys in your life about asking for consent.

When I think of what it looks like to talk to young boys about entitlement, I think of a story my friend likes to tell about his professor. While over at the professor's house for dinner, his 4 year old son hit his older sister. The professor pulled his son aside and asked the boy, "What's the most important thing about being a man?" The little boy, embarrassed, said, "Being gentle." Brilliant.

No, not all men will act upon the ways we've been socialized to feel entitled by committing murder, intimate partner violence, child abuse, or sexual violence, but yes all women and all children have to deal with the consequences of male entitlement and its close connection to violence. In turn, we cannot expect women to be the only one's leading men to change. We have to step up and be the change while calling more men into the work.

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