

Confessions of a misogynist

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The first person to confront me on my misogyny was my fiancée in college. Deborah and I had a heated argument. She started to walk away and I grabbed her arm, spinning her around.

She yanked free and said, "This is how domestic violence starts!"

I didn't believe her at the time but she was right. For the next three years, my controlling and violent tendencies escalated. It wasn't until she left that I realized I had become an abuser.

I slapped her once while we were in bed. Another time, I held her head against the

passenger window while driving down Highway 26. Sometimes, she would lightly jab my chest during an argument and I would grab her arm and squeeze until she fell to her knees, begging me to let go. I punched holes in walls and tore the closet door off its hinges. I blocked exits or locked her out of our apartment when she left while I was lecturing her.

Deborah was introverted. When she chose to be friends with someone, it was a rare and precious relationship. I felt insecure and threatened by the one or two women she befriended, so I criticized them in

private and used silence to show my disfavor when around them. Deborah eventually gave up their company.

I belittled and berated her. I blamed her for my rage. I cannot remember everything I said but I will never forget the effect. After verbally assaulting her, she would slump to the floor and sob until she fell asleep.

I was sexually selfish and pouted when she wouldn't meet my demands. I never concerned myself with her pleasure. I just wanted to get off. In fact, I treated everything about our relationship as an extension of my fragile, bitter ego.

Toward the end of our marriage, I stayed up all night and slept all day while she was at work. I'd steal her tip money for booze and porn after she went to sleep. On nights I did share her bed, I kept a machete under the mattress and a string of white Christmas lights on all night. I wouldn't talk to her when we crossed paths during the day. As a result of my conduct, we have not had contact of any kind since 2004. We never will and that's for the best.

I wasn't born hating women. No one is. I developed a sense of entitlement and looked down on females after years of privilege. Misogyny became as invisible and pervasive



ARTWORK BY KAT DAVIS

as the air I breathed. All of my behavior stemmed from an underlying belief that everyone would hurt me and women were supposed to serve men.

Fear of people stemmed from my violent childhood. My step-dad beat my mom and my mom beat me. Violence at home, bullies at school and ultra-violent action "heroes" taught me the world and its people were a threat and I had better be ready to defend myself.

Consequently, I separated from the relational/emotional aspects of myself. Everything around me – comic books, movies, video games, even church – stressed logic and action to the neglect of feeling. I was encouraged to stand up for myself in a fight and threatened with rejection if I espoused anything labelled "feminine." So, female came to mean less than masculine. All I had left after that was cold fear hidden by sarcasm and threats.

I was also immersed in a religious culture that seated me at the head of the table and the household. I never saw a woman preach a sermon or lead a discussion about spirituality. When I was 11, I was laughed at by a church elder when I pointed out this discrepancy. Deborah and I attended a conservative, evangelical Christian college that literally taught that women and men held "separate but equal" household roles. I

believed God had ordered things for my privilege.

Today, I think and live a different way. I have been non-violent for 15 years. I started the journey to peace and respect for all living things at the Men's Resource Center. There I learned about the cycle of abuse and how to let go of my desire for power and control. I spoke to and about my feelings rather than acting on them. I came to accept that under my addiction and interpersonal violence was a deep depression and under my depression was unacknowledged trauma.

In addition to my personal work in counseling, I learned about the larger issue of misogyny and rape culture from a dear but brief allegiance with a radical feminist group. They taught me to recognize the privileges I take for granted at the expense of women everywhere. For example, I have never feared sexual assault crossing an empty parking lot at night. I've never worried about being accepted or rejected for a job based on my gender. I rarely have to think of myself as a representative of my entire sexual orientation group. Most of all, I have the privilege of not being required to acknowledge or let go of my privileges.

The list of my unearned advantages is too long to enumerate here and there are women who have done a better job of

explaining it than I ever could.

I continued my journey of unlearning through the counsel and training of a pastor committed to eliminating male privilege and domestic violence from churches. In sermons, small groups and workshops I unlearned the irrational and inconsistent aspects of my belief system that distorted a religion of love into a religion of hate.

As a result, I was available and equipped on three occasions to help friends escape their abusers. I do not celebrate my involvement, however. Their courage and initiative are what got them out. I just answered the phone when they called, arranged a vehicle and moved some possessions.

And that's the primary point I want to make. I should not be applauded for basic human decency. Treating people who identify as female with respect is not heroic or noble or enlightened. It is (or should be) a requirement – an essential aspect of the social contract we adhere to as members of the human species. The United States Declaration of Independence should read, "All people are created equal." And no one should be congratulated for not beating someone up.

As for me, I continue to study non-violence and to uncover my gender biases. I am, by no means, "fixed." I am just beginning to heal the underlying trauma that drives my fear and anger. And until I have addressed these risk factors, I do not engage in romantic entanglements. The stakes are too high and there is so much work to do.

Still, like most people, I have a vibrant and passionate emotional palate. Now, I have a rich vocabulary for my limbic system to paint on the outside what is going on inside. Love has so many more meanings for me than simply affection or sexual desire. Empathy, joy and community are analogs for "love" in my mind. I want to be held and hugged and can say so to male- or female-identifying friends alike. I am no longer a "real man." I am a real person.

In spite of my upbringing and traumatic experiences, I take full responsibility for my violence. I was mentally competent every time I hurt Deborah. I knew it was terribly wrong. I write this confession as the only means I can think of to atone for my crimes. To reach out to her directly would be self-serving at the expense of re-traumatizing her.

So, I am reaching out to my community instead. I am not asking for your forgiveness. I am simply asking you to consider what I have written. Have you hurt someone close to you in a similar manner? What beliefs or attitudes do you harbor that may be misogynistic? What needs to change? How can you help?

If you think you might be hurting a loved one or just want to help, please get in touch with Men's Resource Center:

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