

Feminist Politics: Where We Stand

Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. This was a definition of feminism I offered in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* more than 10 years ago. It was my hope at the time that it would become a common definition everyone would use. I liked this definition because it did not imply that men were the enemy. By naming sexism as the problem it went directly to the heart of the matter. Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult. It is also broad enough to include an understanding of systemic institutionalized sexism. As a definition it is open-ended. To understand feminism it implies one has to necessarily understand sexism.

As all advocates of feminist politics know, most people do not understand sexism, or if they do, they think it is not a problem. Masses of people think that feminism is always and only about women seeking to be equal to men. And a huge majority of these folks think feminism is anti-male. Their misunderstanding of feminist politics reflects the reality that most folks learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media. The feminism they hear about the most is portrayed by women who are primarily committed to gender equality — equal pay for equal work, and sometimes women and

men sharing household chores and parenting. They see that these women are usually white and materially privileged. They know from mass media that women's liberation focuses on the freedom to have abortions, to be lesbians, to challenge rape and domestic violence. Among these issues, masses of people agree with the idea of gender equity in the workplace — equal pay for equal work.

Since our society continues to be primarily a "Christian" culture, masses of people continue to believe that god has ordained that women be subordinate to men in the domestic household. Even though masses of women have entered the workforce, even though many families are headed by women who are the sole breadwinners, the vision of domestic life which continues to dominate the nation's imagination is one in which the logic of male domination is intact, whether men are present in the home or not. The wrongminded notion of feminist movement which implied it was anti-male carried with it the wrongminded assumption that all female space would necessarily be an environment where patriarchy and sexist thinking would be absent. Many women, even those involved in feminist politics, chose to believe this as well.

There was indeed a great deal of anti-male sentiment among early feminist activists who were responding to male domination with anger. It was that anger at injustice that was the impetus for creating a women's liberation movement. Early on most feminist activists (a majority of whom were white) had their consciousness raised about the nature of male domination when they were working in anti-classist and anti-racist settings with men who were telling the world about the importance of freedom while subordinating the women in their ranks. Whether it was white women working on behalf of socialism, black women working on behalf of civil rights and black liberation, or Native American women working for indigenous rights, it was clear that men wanted to lead, and they wanted

women to follow. Participating in these radical freedom struggles awakened the spirit of rebellion and resistance in progressive females and led them towards contemporary women's liberation.

As contemporary feminism progressed, as women realized that males were not the only group in our society who supported sexist thinking and behavior — that females could be sexist as well — anti-male sentiment no longer shaped the movement's consciousness. The focus shifted to an all-out effort to create gender justice. But women could not band together to further feminism without confronting our sexist thinking. Sisterhood could not be powerful as long as women were competitively at war with one another. Utopian visions of sisterhood based solely on the awareness of the reality that all women were in some way victimized by male domination were disrupted by discussions of class and race. Discussions of class differences occurred early on in contemporary feminism, preceding discussions of race. Diana Press published revolutionary insights about class divisions between women as early as the mid-'70s in their collection of essays *Class and Feminism*. These discussions did not trivialize the feminist insistence that "sisterhood is powerful," they simply emphasized that we could only become sisters in struggle by confronting the ways women — through sex, class, and race — dominated and exploited other women, and created a political platform that would address these differences.

Even though individual black women were active in contemporary feminist movement from its inception, they were not the individuals who became the "stars" of the movement, who attracted the attention of mass media. Often individual black women active in feminist movement were revolutionary feminists (like many white lesbians). They were already at odds with reformist feminists who resolutely wanted to project a vision of the movement as being solely about women gaining equality with men in the existing sys-

tem. Even before race became a talked about issue in feminist circles it was clear to black women (and to their revolutionary allies in struggle) that they were never going to have equality within the existing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

From its earliest inception feminist movement was polarized. Reformist thinkers chose to emphasize gender equality. Revolutionary thinkers did not want simply to alter the existing system so that women would have more rights. We wanted to transform that system, to bring an end to patriarchy and sexism. Since patriarchal mass media was not interested in the more revolutionary vision, it never received attention in mainstream press. The vision of “women’s liberation” which captured and still holds the public imagination was the one representing women as wanting what men had. And this was the vision that was easier to realize. Changes in our nation’s economy, economic depression, the loss of jobs, etc., made the climate ripe for our nation’s citizens to accept the notion of gender equality in the workforce.

Given the reality of racism, it made sense that white men were more willing to consider women’s rights when the granting of those rights could serve the interests of maintaining white supremacy. We can never forget that white women began to assert their need for freedom after civil rights, just at the point when racial discrimination was ending and black people, especially black males, might have attained equality in the workforce with white men. Reformist feminist thinking focusing primarily on equality with men in the workforce overshadowed the original radical foundations of contemporary feminism which called for reform as well as overall restructuring of society so that our nation would be fundamentally anti-sexist.

Most women, especially privileged white women, ceased even to consider revolutionary feminist visions, once they began to gain economic power within the existing social structure. Ironically, rev-

olutionary feminist thinking was most accepted and embraced in academic circles. In those circles the production of revolutionary feminist theory progressed, but more often than not that theory was not made available to the public. It became and remains a privileged discourse available to those among us who are highly literate, well-educated, and usually materially privileged. Works like *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* that offer a liberatory vision of feminist transformation never receive mainstream attention. Masses of people have not heard of this book. They have not rejected its message; they do not know what the message is.

While it was in the interest of mainstream white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to suppress visionary feminist thinking which was not anti-male or concerned with getting women the right to be like men, reformist feminists were also eager to silence these forces. Reformist feminism became their route to class mobility. They could break free of male domination in the workforce and be more self-determining in their lifestyles. While sexism did not end, they could maximize their freedom within the existing system. And they could count on there being a lower class of exploited subordinated women to do the dirty work they were refusing to do. By accepting and indeed colluding with the subordination of working-class and poor women, they not only ally themselves with the existing patriarchy and its concomitant sexism, they give themselves the right to lead a double life, one where they are the equals of men in the workforce and at home when they want to be. If they choose lesbianism they have the privilege of being equals with men in the workforce while using class power to create domestic lifestyles where they can choose to have little or no contact with men.

Lifestyle feminism ushered in the notion that there could be as many versions of feminism as there were women. Suddenly the politics was being slowly removed from feminism. And the assumption pre-

vailed that no matter what a woman's politics, be she conservative or liberal, she too could fit feminism into her existing lifestyle. Obviously this way of thinking has made feminism more acceptable because its underlying assumption is that women can be feminists without fundamentally challenging and changing themselves or the culture. For example, let's take the issue of abortion. If feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression, and depriving females of reproductive rights is a form of sexist oppression, then one cannot be anti-choice and be feminist. A woman can insist she would never choose to have an abortion while affirming her support of the right of women to choose and still be an advocate of feminist politics. She cannot be anti-abortion and an advocate of feminism. Concurrently there can be no such thing as "power feminism" if the vision of power evoked is power gained through the exploitation and oppression of others.

Feminist politics is losing momentum because feminist movement has lost clear definitions. We have those definitions. Let's reclaim them. Let's share them. Let's start over. Let's have T-shirts and bumper stickers and postcards and hip-hop music, television and radio commercials, ads everywhere and billboards, and all manner of printed material that tells the world about feminism. We can share the simple yet powerful message that feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression. Let's start there. Let the movement begin again.

Consciousness- Raising: A Constant Change of Heart

Feminists are made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by having the privilege of having been born female. Like all political positions one becomes a believer in feminist politics through choice and action. When women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and male domination, they were clear that females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males, the difference being simply that males benefited from sexism more than females and were as a consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege. Before women could change patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness.

Revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained. Understanding the way male domination and sexism was expressed in everyday life created awareness in women of the ways we were victimized, exploited, and, in worse case scenarios, oppressed. Early on in contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent-up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation. On a basic level

many hurt and exploited women used the consciousness-raising group therapeutically. It was the site where they uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds. This confessional aspect served as a healing ritual. Through consciousness-raising women gained the strength to challenge patriarchal forces at work and at home.

Importantly though, the foundation of this work began with women examining sexist thinking and creating strategies where we would change our attitudes and belief via a conversion to feminist thinking and a commitment to feminist politics. Fundamentally, the consciousness-raising (CR) group was a site for conversion. To build a mass-based feminist movement women needed to organize. The consciousness-raising session, which usually took place in someone's home (rather than public space that had to be rented or donated), was the meeting place. It was the place where seasoned feminist thinkers and activists could recruit new converts.

Importantly, communication and dialogue was a central agenda at the consciousness-raising sessions. In many groups a policy was in place which honored everyone's voice. Women took turns speaking to make sure everyone would be heard. This attempt to create a non-hierarchical model for discussion positively gave every woman a chance to speak but often did not create a context for engaged dialogue. However, in most instances discussion and debate occurred, usually after everyone had spoken at least once. Argumentative discussion was common in CR groups as it was the way we sought to clarify our collective understanding of the nature of male domination. Only through discussion and disagreement could we begin to find a realistic standpoint on gender exploitation and oppression.

As feminist thinking, which emerged first in the context of small groups where individuals often knew each other (they may have worked together and/or were friends), began to be theorized

in printed matter so as to reach a wider audience, groups dismantled. The creation of women's studies as an academic discipline provided another setting where women could be informed about feminist thinking and feminist theory. Many of the women who spearheaded the introduction of women's studies classes into colleges and universities had been radical activists in civil rights struggles, gay rights, and early feminist movement. Many of them did not have doctorates, which meant that they entered academic institutions receiving lower pay and working longer hours than their colleagues in other disciplines. By the time younger graduate students joined the effort to legitimize feminist scholarship in the academy we knew that it was important to gain higher degrees. Most of us saw our commitment to women's studies as political action; we were prepared to sacrifice in order to create an academic base for feminist movement.

By the late '70s women's studies was on its way to becoming an accepted academic discipline. This triumph overshadowed the fact that many of the women who had paved the way for the institutionalization of women's studies were fired because they had master's degrees and not doctorates. While some of us returned to graduate school to get PhDs, some of the best and brightest among us did not because they were utterly disillusioned with the university and burnt out from overwork as well as disappointed and enraged that the radical politics undergirding women's studies was being replaced by liberal reformism. Before too long the women's studies classroom had replaced the free-for-all consciousness-raising group. Whereas women from various backgrounds, those who worked solely as housewives or in service jobs, and big-time professional women, could be found in diverse consciousness-raising groups, the academy was and remains a site of class privilege. Privileged white middle-class women who were a numeric majority though not necessarily the radical leaders of contemporary feminist movement of-

ten gained prominence because they were the group mass media focused on as representatives of the struggle. Women with revolutionary feminist consciousness, many of them lesbian and from working-class backgrounds, often lost visibility as the movement received mainstream attention. Their displacement became complete once women's studies became entrenched in colleges and universities which are conservative corporate structures. Once the women's studies classroom replaced the consciousness-raising group as the primary site for the transmission of feminist thinking and strategies for social change the movement lost its mass-based potential.

Suddenly more and more women began to either call themselves "feminists" or use the rhetoric of gender discrimination to change their economic status. The institutionalization of feminist studies created a body of jobs both in the world of the academy and in the world of publishing. These career-based changes led to forms of career opportunism wherein women who had never been politically committed to mass-based feminist struggle adopted the stance and jargon of feminism when it enhanced their class mobility. The dismantling of consciousness-raising groups all but erased the notion that one had to learn about feminism and make an informed choice about embracing feminist politics to become a feminist advocate.

Without the consciousness-raising group as a site where women confronted their own sexism towards other women, the direction of feminist movement could shift to a focus on equality in the workforce and confronting male domination. With heightened focus on the construction of woman as a "victim" of gender equality deserving of reparations (whether through changes in discriminatory laws or affirmative action policies) the idea that women needed to first confront their internalized sexism as part of becoming feminist lost currency. Females of all ages acted as though concern for or rage at male domination or gender equality was all that was needed to make

one a "feminist." Without confronting internalized sexism women who picked up the feminist banner often betrayed the cause in their interactions with other women.

By the early '80s the evocation of a politicized sisterhood, so crucial at the onset of the feminist movement, lost meaning as the terrain of radical feminist politics was overshadowed by a lifestyle-based feminism which suggested any woman could be a feminist no matter what her political beliefs. Needless to say such thinking has undermined feminist theory and practice, feminist politics. When feminist movement renews itself, reinforcing again and again the strategies that will enable a mass movement to end sexism and sexist exploitation and oppression for everyone, consciousness-raising will once again attain its original importance. Effectively imitating the model of AA meetings, feminist consciousness-raising groups will take place in communities, offering the message of feminist thinking to everyone irrespective of class, race, or gender. While specific groups based on shared identities might emerge, at the end of every month individuals would be in mixed groups.

Feminist consciousness-raising for males is as essential to revolutionary movement as female groups. Had there been an emphasis on groups for males that taught boys and men about what sexism is and how it can be transformed, it would have been impossible for mass media to portray the movement as anti-male. It would also have preempted the formation of an anti-feminist men's movement. Often men's groups were formed in the wake of contemporary feminism that in no way addressed the issues of sexism and male domination. Like the lifestyle-based feminism aimed at women these groups often became therapeutic settings for men to confront their wounds without a critique of patriarchy or a platform of resistance to male domination. Future feminist movement will not make this mistake. Males of all ages need settings where their resistance to sex-

ism is affirmed and valued. Without males as allies in struggle feminist movement will not progress. As it is we have to do so much work to correct the assumption deeply embedded in the cultural psyche that feminism is anti-male. Feminism is anti-sexism. A male who has divested of male privilege, who has embraced feminist politics, is a worthy comrade in struggle, in no way a threat to feminism, whereas a female who remains wedded to sexist thinking and behavior infiltrating feminist movement is a dangerous threat. Significantly, the most powerful intervention made by consciousness-raising groups was the demand that all females confront their internalized sexism, their allegiance to patriarchal thinking and action, and their commitment to feminist conversion. That intervention is still needed. It remains the necessary step for anyone choosing feminist politics. The enemy within must be transformed before we can confront the enemy outside. The threat, the enemy, is sexist thought and behavior. As long as females take up the banner of feminist politics without addressing and transforming their own sexism, ultimately the movement will be undermined.

Feminist Masculinity

When contemporary feminist movement first began there was a fierce anti-male faction. Individual heterosexual women came to the movement from relationships where men were cruel, unkind, violent, unfaithful. Many of these men were radical thinkers who participated in movements for social justice, speaking out on behalf of the workers, the poor, speaking out on racial justice. But when it came to the issue of gender they were as sexist as their conservative cohorts. Individual women came from these relationships angry. And they used that anger as a catalyst for women's liberation. As the movement progressed, as feminist thinking advanced, enlightened feminist activists saw that men were not the problem, that the problem was patriarchy, sexism, and male domination. It was difficult to face the reality that the problem did not just lie with men. Facing that reality required more complex theorizing; it required acknowledging the role women play in maintaining and perpetuating sexism. As more women moved away from destructive relationships with men it was easier to see the whole picture. It became evident that even if individual men divested of patriarchal privilege the system of patriarchy, sexism, and male domination would still remain intact, and women would still be exploited and/or oppressed.

Conservative mass media constantly represented feminist women

as man-haters. And when there was an anti-male faction or sentiment in the movement, they highlighted it as a way of discrediting feminism. Embedded in the portrayal of feminists as man-hating was the assumption that all feminists were lesbians. Appealing to homophobia, mass media intensified anti-feminist sentiment among men. Before contemporary feminist movement was less than 10 years old, feminist thinkers began to talk about the way in which patriarchy was harmful to men. Without changing our fierce critique of male domination feminist politics expanded to include the recognition that patriarchy stripped men of certain rights, imposing on them a sexist masculine identity.

Anti-feminist men have always had a strong public voice. The men who feared and hated feminist thinking and feminist activists were quick to marshal their collective forces and attack the movement. But from the onset of the movement there was a small group of men who recognized that feminist movement was as valid a movement for social justice as all the other radical movements in our nation's history that men had supported. These men became our comrades in our struggle and our allies. Individual heterosexual women active in the movement were often in intimate relationships with the men who were struggling to come to terms with feminism. Their conversion to feminist thinking was often a matter of rising to meet the challenge or risking the termination of intimate bonds.

Anti-male factions within the feminist movement resented the presence of anti-sexist men because their presence served to counter any insistence that all men are oppressors, or that all men hate women. It promoted the interests of feminist women who were seeking greater class mobility and access to forms of patriarchal power to polarize men and women by putting us in neat categories of oppressor/oppressed. They portrayed all men as the enemy in order to represent all women as victims. This focus on men deflected

attention from the class privilege of individual feminist activists as well as their desire to increase their class power. Those individual activists who called on all women to reject men refused to look at either the caring bonds women shared with men or the economic and emotional ties (however positive or negative) that bind women to men who are sexist.

Feminists who called for a recognition of men as comrades in struggle never received mass media attention. Our theoretical work critiquing the demonization of men as the enemy did not change the perspectives of women who were anti-male. And it was reaction to negative representations of manhood that led to the development of a men's movement that was anti-female. Writing about the "men's liberation movement" I called attention to the opportunism undergirding this movement:

These men identified themselves as victims of sexism, working to liberate men. They identified rigid sex roles as the primary source of their victimization, and, though they wanted to change the notion of masculinity, they were not particularly concerned with their sexist exploitation and oppression of women.

In many ways the men's movement mirrored the most negative aspects of the women's movement.

Even though anti-male factions within feminist movement were small in number it has been difficult to change the image of feminist women as man-hating in the public imagination. Of course by characterizing feminism as being man-hating males could deflect attention away from the accountability for male domination. If feminist theory had offered more liberatory visions of masculinity it would have been impossible for anyone to dismiss the movement as anti-male. To a grave extent feminist movement failed to attract a large body of females and males because our theory did not effec-

tively address the issue of not just what males might do to be anti-sexist but also what an alternative masculinity might look like. Often the only alternative to patriarchal masculinity presented by feminist movement or the men's movement was a vision of men becoming more "feminine." The idea of the feminine that was evoked emerged from sexist thinking and did not represent an alternative to it.

What is and was needed is a vision of masculinity where self-esteem and self-love of one's unique being forms the basis of identity. Cultures of domination attack self-esteem, replacing it with a notion that we derive our sense of being from dominion over another. Patriarchal masculinity teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others. To change this males must critique and challenge male domination of the planet, of less powerful men, of women and children. But they must also have a clear vision of what feminist masculinity looks like. How can you become what you cannot imagine? And that vision has yet to be made fully clear by feminist thinkers male or female.

As is often the case in revolutionary movements for social justice we are better at naming the problem than we are at envisioning the solution. We do know that patriarchal masculinity encourages men to be pathologically narcissistic, infantile, and psychologically dependent on the privileges (however relative) that they receive simply for having been born male. Many men feel that their lives are being threatened if these privileges are taken away, as they have structured no meaningful core identity. That is why the men's movement positively attempted to teach men how to reconnect with their feelings, to reclaim the lost boy within and nurture his soul, his spiritual growth.

No significant body of feminist literature has appeared that addresses boys, that lets them know how they can construct an identity that is not rooted in sexism. Anti-sexist men have done little education for critical consciousness which includes a focus on boyhood,

especially the development of adolescent males. As a consequence of this gap, now that discussions about the raising of boys are receiving national attention, feminist perspectives are rarely if ever part of the discussion. Tragically, we are witnessing a resurgence of harmful misogynist assumptions that mothers cannot raise healthy sons, that boys "benefit" from patriarchal militaristic notions of masculinity which emphasize discipline and obedience to authority. Boys need healthy self-esteem. They need love. And a wise and loving feminist politics can provide the only foundation to save the lives of male children. Patriarchy will not heal them. If that were so they would all be well.

Most men in this nation feel troubled about the nature of their identity. Even though they cling to patriarchy they are beginning to intuit that it is part of the problem. Lack of jobs, the unrewarding nature of paid labor, and the increased class power of women, has made it difficult for men who are not rich and powerful to know where they stand. White supremacist capitalist patriarchy is not able to provide all it has promised. Many men are anguished because they do not engage the liberating critiques that could enable them to face that these promises were rooted in injustice and domination and even when fulfilled have never led men to glory. Bashing liberation while reinscribing the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal ways of thinking that have murdered their souls in the first place, they are just as lost as many boys.

A feminist vision which embraces feminist masculinity, which loves boys and men and demands on their behalf every right that we desire for girls and women, can renew the American male. Feminist thinking teaches us all, especially, how to love justice and freedom in ways that foster and affirm life. Clearly we need new strategies, new theories, guides that will show us how to create a world where feminist masculinity thrives.

Ending Violence

By far one of the most widespread positive interventions of contemporary feminist movement remains the effort to create and sustain greater cultural awareness of domestic violence as well as the changes that must happen in our thinking and action if we are to see its end. Nowadays the problem of domestic violence is talked about in so many circles, from mass media to grade schools, that it is often forgotten that contemporary feminist movement was the force that dramatically uncovered and exposed the ongoing reality of domestic violence. Initially feminist focus on domestic violence highlighted male violence against women, but as the movement progressed evidence showed that there was also domestic violence present in same-sex relations, that women in relationships with women were and are oftentimes the victims of abuse, that children were also victims of adult patriarchal violence enacted by women and men.

Patriarchal violence in the home is based on the belief that it is acceptable for a more powerful individual to control others through various forms of coercive force. This expanded definition of domestic violence includes male violence against women, same-sex violence, and adult violence against children. The term "patriarchal violence" is useful because unlike the more accepted phrase "domestic violence" it continually reminds the listener that violence in

the home is connected to sexism and sexist thinking, to male domination. For too long the term domestic violence has been used as a "soft" term which suggests it emerges in an intimate context that is private and somehow less threatening, less brutal, than the violence that takes place outside the home. This is not so, since more women are beaten and murdered in the home than on the outside. Also most people tend to see domestic violence between adults as separate and distinct from violence against children when it is not. Often children suffer abuse as they attempt to protect a mother who is being attacked by a male companion or husband, or they are emotionally damaged by witnessing violence and abuse.

Just as a vast majority of citizens in this nation believe in equal pay for equal work most folks believe that men should not beat women and children. Yet when they are told that domestic violence is the direct outcome of sexism, that it will not end until sexism ends, they are unable to make this logical leap because it requires challenging and changing fundamental ways of thinking about gender. Significantly, I am among those rare feminist theorists who believe that it is crucial for feminist movement to have as an overriding agenda ending all forms of violence. Feminist focus on patriarchal violence against women should remain a primary concern. However emphasizing male violence against women in a manner which implies that it is more horrendous than all other forms of patriarchal violence does not serve to further the interests of feminist movement. It obscures the reality that much patriarchal violence is directed at children by sexist women and men.

In a zealous effort to call attention to male violence against women reformist feminist thinkers still choose often to portray females as always and only victims. The fact that many violent attacks on children are perpetrated by women is not equally highlighted and seen as another expression of patriarchal violence. We know now

that children are violated not only when they are the direct targets of patriarchal violence but as well when they are forced to witness violent acts. Had all feminist thinkers expressed outrage at patriarchal violence perpetrated by women, placing it on an equal footing with male violence against women, it would have been and will be harder for the public to dismiss attention given patriarchal violence by seeing it as an anti-male agenda.

Adults who have been the victims of patriarchal violence perpetrated by females know that women are not nonviolent no matter the number of surveys that tell us women often are more inclined to use nonviolence. The truth is that children have no organized collective voice to speak the reality of how often they are the objects of female violence. Were it not for the huge numbers of children seeking medical attention because of violence done by women and men, there might be no evidence documenting female violence.

I first raised these concerns in the chapter "Feminist Movement to End Violence" in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, stating:

It is essential for continued feminist struggle to end violence against women that this struggle be viewed as a component of an overall movement to end violence. So far feminist movement has primarily focused on male violence, and as a consequence lends credibility to sexist stereotypes that suggest men are violent, women are not; men are abusers, women are victims. This type of thinking allows us to ignore the extent to which women (with men) in this society accept and perpetuate the idea that it is acceptable for a dominant party or group to maintain power over the dominated by using coercive force. It allows us to overlook or ignore the extent to which women exert coercive authority over others or act violently. The fact that women may not commit violent acts as often as men does not negate the reality of female violence. We must see both men and women in this society as groups who support the use of violence if we are to eliminate it.

A mother who might never be violent but who teaches her children, especially her sons, that violence is an acceptable means of exerting social control, is still in collusion with patriarchal violence. Her thinking must be changed.

Clearly most women do not use violence to dominate men (even though small numbers of women batter the men in their lives) but lots of women believe that a person in authority has the right to use force to maintain authority. A huge majority of parents use some form of physical or verbal aggression against children. Since women remain the primary caretakers of children, the facts confirm the reality that given a hierarchal system in a culture of domination which empowers females (like the parent-child relationship) all too often they use coercive force to maintain dominance. In a culture of domination everyone is socialized to see violence as an acceptable means of social control. Dominant parties maintain power by the threat (acted upon or not) that abusive punishment, physical or psychological, will be used whenever the hierarchal structures in place are threatened, whether that be in male-female relationships, or parent and child bonds.

Male violence against women has received much ongoing media attention (highlighted by real-life court cases like the trial against O.J. Simpson) but awareness has not led the American public to challenge the underlying causes of this violence, to challenge patriarchy. Sexist thinking continues to support male domination and the violence that is a consequence. Since masses of unemployed and working-class men do not feel powerful on their jobs within white supremacist patriarchy they are encouraged to feel that the one place where they will have absolute authority and respect is in the home. Men are socialized by ruling-class groups of men to accept domination in the public world of work and to believe that the private world of home and intimate relationships will restore to them the sense of

power they equate with masculinity. As more men have entered the ranks of the unemployed or receive low wages and more women have entered the world of work, some men feel that the use of violence is the only way they can establish and maintain power and dominance within the sexist sex role hierarchy. Until they unlearn the sexist thinking that tells them they have a right to rule over women by any means, male violence against women will continue to be a norm.

Early on in feminist thinking activists often failed to liken male violence against women to imperialist militarism. This linkage was often not made because those who were against male violence were often accepting and even supportive of militarism. As long as sexist thinking socializes boys to be "killers," whether in imaginary good guy, bad guy fights or as soldiers in imperialism to maintain coercive power over nations, patriarchal violence against women and children will continue. In recent years as young males from diverse class backgrounds have committed horrendous acts of violence there has been national condemnation of these acts but few attempts to link this violence to sexist thinking.

I conclude the chapter on violence in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* emphasizing that men are not the only people who accept, condone, and perpetuate violence, who create a culture of violence. I urge women to take responsibility for the role women play in condoning violence:

By only calling attention to male violence against women, or making militarism just another expression of male violence, we fail to adequately address the problem of violence and make it difficult to develop viable resistance strategies and solutions.... While we need not diminish the severity of the problem of male violence against women or male violence against nations or the planet, we must acknowledge that men and women have together made the United States a culture of violence and must work together to

transform and recreate that culture. Women and men must oppose the use of violence as a means of social control in all its manifestations: war, male violence against women, adult violence against children, teenage violence, racial violence, etc. Feminist efforts to end male violence against women must be expanded into a movement to end all forms of violence.

And it is especially vital that parents learn to parent in nonviolent ways. For our children will not turn away from violence if it is the only way they know to handle difficult situations.

In our nation masses of people are concerned about violence but resolutely refuse to link that violence to patriarchal thinking or male domination. Feminist thinking offers a solution. And it is up to us to make that solution available to everyone.