

What About the Men...?

Less than 100 years ago, women in North America were not considered people under the law – they were in the same category with criminals, crazy people and animals. Some people may say things have changed - women have equality now. The "Women's Movement" is passé. A global "snapshot" of current conditions for women gives us a clear picture of how far we've come: In current times, women are burned in India, (the leading cause of death for women in India is "kitchen fires") mass raped in Bosnia, infibulated in Africa, robbed of their human rights in Afghanistan. In China so many girl babies are killed at birth there is now a shortage of marriageable aged women and young girls are being kidnapped and sold as brides. In Nigeria, young women are stoned to death for becoming pregnant outside marriage. In Pakistan 90% of women are abused by their husbands and are considered to have the same value as a shoe. "Honor killings" are common in many Middle Eastern countries where a woman can be killed by her male family members if she is perceived as having shamed them. In Japan women who report domestic violence are likely to be told to "go home and be better wives" and robbery is considered a worse crime than rape. In the Congo – 2000 women a day are being raped (sexually terrorized) and 50% of them are little girls.

Steven Lewis, former Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations and current Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa states: "Women are an endangered species."

In Canada, one out of every four women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime. Eighty five percent of these assaults will happen by someone known to the woman. In Canada, two women are killed every week by their husbands or boyfriends (or ex-husbands or boyfriends.) This is the leading cause of injury for women in this country – including car accidents, stranger rapes and muggings combined. [Why don't we know this?] According to a 1999 Statistics Canada report –based on the largest Canadian survey ever done on violence against women – over 50% of Canadian women are being abused within their relationships.

The degradation, mutilation, abuse and even murder of women is so common – such an everyday experience, that it begins to be experienced by men, and by women themselves, as normal. Our legal, moral and personal values are defined by the male- dominated system that exists world-wide. The Patriarchy is the only experience we, as humans have, within the context of our memories and our parents' memories, and our grandparents' memories. The books we read, from infant nursery rhymes to childhood fairytales - from adolescent fiction to adult literature - have been written primarily by men, about men and from a man's point of view. The vast majority of TV programs – from cartoons to soaps – reflect this same viewpoint. The films, videos, magazines, newspapers, comic books...the bible, history books...all primarily *his* -story.

We live in a world where the language makes females invisible. We are told that gender neutral language is awkward and unnecessary - that “mankind” really means women too. We live in a world where males commit the vast majority of violence of any kind. Suddenly when male

violence is the issue, the language magically becomes gender neutral. The newspapers report: “Domestic Violence”, “Family Violence” and “Youth Violence”. Or perhaps, “Asian Gang Violence”...but we never hear, “White Male Violence”. But if a woman is involved in violence it makes the front page of TIME magazine.

We live in a world where our very reality is defined by male thinking. What is normal/abnormal, good/evil, funny/not funny, beautiful/not beautiful, valuable/not valuable, true/untrue...all defined within the context of the Patriarchy. The Patriarchy even defines the female body. Until recently female children were told by their parents they “didn't have a penis”. What they did have “down there” went un-named altogether. Now a female child is told that she has a vagina. This is as bizarre (and anatomically incorrect) as describing the mouth as a “throat” without naming the lips, teeth and tongue. The parts of a little girl’s body that she can see and touch – that are important solely for her pleasure – her vulva her labia and her clitoris - remain unspoken.

We live in a world where anti-female messages, images, jokes, beliefs, and behaviours are so common, we are desensitized to them. However, when something is said, written – even thought – that is not “pro-male” it stands out like a flashing red light. Sirens go off, alarms sound and the “man-hater” police are on patrol.

When we speak up about women’s issues – especially Violence against Women – (why is Violence against Women considered a “women’s issue”?) – we are accused of being “anti-male”. Throughout history, women have been shut out of the educational, political, religious and corporate worlds but when we dare to have women only meetings or marches or intimate relationships we are perceived as, *leaving men out*. The consistent, persistent, insistent message is: “*What about the men?*”

When I wake up one morning and discover that Santa Clause is a woman, that the vast majority of world leaders are women, that the lawmakers and the law enforcers are women. That global, educational and economic power are in the hands of women. That Baby Jesus was a little girl, the Pope, Buddha, Allah and God are all female. I will sit up and take notice when someone says, “*What about the men?*”

Until then, every time I hear those words, I see all the girls and women who are emotionally, spiritually and physically battered all over the world. I see the women who are dying or have died at the hands of men. I see all the girls and women who are being underpaid, undervalued and underestimated. I see the women who are not being seen at all.

I am seeing the world through a woman's eyes, experiencing the world through a woman's body, feeling the world with a woman's heart and speaking the world with a woman's voice. As long as I speak my truth as a woman, I know I will continue to be accused of leaving men out. As long as I voice my love for women, I know I will be accused of hating men.

One has to ask: Why is it that one woman speaking her truth and encouraging other women to tell the truth about their lives is so threatening? One voice in the din of male voices shouting her...is there a note I am hitting...like the tone that only dogs can hear...and women all over the world are pausing, tilting their heads and listening? And the men somehow sense this is going on and they are afraid?

What about the men? Why are they afraid? Do they think we want to reverse the world, seize all the power, and have them suffer the injustices we have suffered? We could reassure them that we don't hate them. But what would it be like, if just this one time, I could tell my story and be believed? What would it be like, if just this one time I could speak my truth and not be accused of hatred.

What would it be like, if just this one time, *it wasn't about the men?*

- Anita Roberts