

Me Too and Beyond

By Marcia Wolff, M.A.

Early in my career, I worked in human resources as a nurse at Chrysler Corporation. The president asked me to write some suggestions to upgrade and streamline the human resources department. I handed him three pages of ideas and he sent it on to Detroit. After a couple of months, with no response from him, I asked what happened? He said they responded that 'no woman could have written that.' This was 1978. It was such a global comment, it stunned me. So, when I read the poem "Advice to Young Ladies," as I returned to college in my forties, I was shocked that this diminishment of women had been going on since before the year one. Now I was angry!

During my graduate school internship in Counseling Psychology, I was hired to work in the District Attorney's Domestic Violence Program. I asked myself this question: What happened to us, us men and women?

In time, I began to see that part of the human experience is how we are conditioned between zero to seven, how our egoic construct is formed, layer upon layer. We absorb the dynamics between our parents, how they interact with their children, how religious beliefs or lack thereof filter down into our neurons. The same is true for gender expectations of boys and girls as well as cultural beliefs from history books, political leanings of family, and media influences. Additionally, we draw conclusions at a very young age about ourselves based on a tone of voice, a look, a hit, a shame and often determine that we are not okay or that we can do no wrong. We mimic what we see in our homes, often seeking ways to be accepted and loved.

One example was of a young man, 18 years old, who was in the state hospital for hitting a young girl over the head with a brick and raping her. I asked him if at any time, he wanted to get to know the girl first. "No", he said, "I just wanted her." The walls in his room were covered with Playboy centerfolds. I asked if he could have staved off this action by attending to his body's sexual tension. His eyes bulged. He said intensely, "no, that would be a sin." So, if we walk this backwards, the young man was raised in a patriarchal milieu, where the father or mother could be dominant, and he had internalized a fear of the feminine, and

objectified women. He's emotionally shutdown, doesn't want to engage with her except through force. And most likely, he was not skilled in communications.

I'd never thought much about Patriarchal values that are part of the air we breathe, until I attended a yearlong training to become a facilitator in Gender Equity and Reconciliation. We were 30 men and women from around the world, gay, straight, and bisexual. All of us had been boiled in the oil of patriarchal values but in different degrees. These values include war, force and aggression, control and domination, materialism, greed, image consciousness and suppression of feminine values, all swimming in the matrix of fear, what bell hooks would call The Dominator Culture. To level the playing field, the facilitators asked a series of 60 questions regarding all kinds of abuse, sexual, emotional, physical, spiritual, financial, rape, assault, pornography, and war. One by one we stood up silently if the question pertained to our experience. We saw in silence that we'd all, men and women, experienced abuse.

In the workshop we watched a documentary on young males, 18 to 20 years of age, and their conditioning. They were asked: what does it mean to be a man, what does it look like, feel like. Each young man said similar things: you need to be strong, you need to be on top, you need to exercise your power, you don't let anyone overtake you. And if you're not like this, then what are you? The answer was: you're a wuss, a wimp, a queer, or you're a girl. In our homophobic culture, this is one place where the matrix of fear lies for young boys and men. And sadly, many were pushed off their father's lap at 2 and 3 years old and told not to be a sissy. So, it starts young, the building of shame, fear and the loss of their inner little boy and many of his feelings and needs.

For girls growing up with patriarchal beliefs, in public schools, during pre-teen and teenage years they often shut themselves down, don't want to appear too smart, they want to be liked by the boys and don't want to seem threatening to them. In private girls' schools, what was found in a crucial study, is how girls lose their voice and with it, their sense of self. Additionally, it revealed that if you let a girl in conflict with another girl argue and express all feelings in public until all is said, the girls ultimately gather clarity, self-trust, and confidence in their ability to express authentically. And this can be very threatening in a patriarchal culture.

One of the more heartbreaking issues was of a Viet Nam war veteran who could not get any peace within himself after a violent incident. The men were to walk through a mine field. But first, the sergeant had confiscated two Vietnamese women. They were sent into the field to test the ground; the women were blown to pieces by the landmines. They were expendable; their lives meant nothing, just objects. This young man, 18 years old, had such guilt that he could do nothing to stop this situation. His feelings of self-hatred were overwhelming. It took an Asian woman in our group to help lift some guilt off his heart. But, he still needed to work with his own wounded little boy and retrieve it from patriarchal demands on men to shut their emotions down.

These patriarchal beliefs trickle down into every aspect of our lives. It was shown distinctly that an educated professional woman had to tone down her anger and present her side of her trauma in a pleasant manner. The educated professional male could rage, cry, tantrum and be adolescently sarcastic to the senator questioning him and still become a supreme court justice. Toxic Masculine energy denigrates the woman as a liar and tries to PUSH through with force their own agenda.

Where do we go from here? How do we bring about reconciliation? D. H. Lawrence said: The future of humanity will be decided not by relations between nations, but by relations between men and women.

Albert Einstein said you can't solve a problem from the same consciousness in which that problem was created. Therefore, we need to create a new consciousness. Let's call it The Culture of Love, which is based in genuine power, not based in force or fear.

With couples and groups that I've worked with, I see most men and women have trouble communicating in ways that are not attacking, judging and critical. We all must develop a skill set in non-violent and emotionally intimate communications as we begin to divorce ourselves from the dominator culture. This is an ongoing learning.

The #MeToo movement has reawakened the rage that has seemed dormant in the public eye, but in every town and every home there are painful stories and struggles with the issues of violence, domination and control in all socio-economic

groups. Both men and women have work to do in this new consciousness. It's already begun.

Men who were shut down by mothers or fathers need to process their inner anger at the parent who betrayed them by cutting off their access to many of their feelings or where a parent is not able to protect them from the aggressor in the family. They also need to acknowledge and take responsibility for their own harmful behaviors. They need to find the lost inner source, inner child within themselves and reclaim it. They need to find a community of men who have already done substantial inner work and find a male therapist aligned to this focus.

For women, we need to say NO to the abuse in our lives, be they friends, colleagues, husbands, partners, or brothers. We must withdraw the way we have over-functioned or overly mothered men. We must stop staying quiet. We must speak out about male/female abuse of power. We need to not take on the projection's men put on us from their disowned pain. We must stop minimizing our pain. We must stop accepting crumbs of respect instead of what we really deserve. The truth is women are limited in how they can help men in their healing. Men need other men.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "love is never for the mean, it requireth courage stout." We need to carve out time for quiet and stillness to listen within. We can tap into our heart for the quieter voice, that is our inherent inner guidance system. The body lets us know when we are angry, sad, fearful or joyful. It's important to feel these feelings. Feel your anger and see where someone stepped on your toes. Don't spew on the person but express to them what you are feeling and ask for what you need instead. This is conscious work in communicating more authentically and less abusively.

While there is a lot of rage now, which is important for healing, it is ultimately necessary for men and women to feel compassion for the fact that we were conditioned in a patriarchal paradigm. Together, with joined effort, we can create a culture of love. We can be grateful, generous, warm, kind, peaceful, patient, curious, creative, forgiving, and loving. These actions will evolve us forward in many aspects of our lives and in our society. Please join the evolution!