

reporter who trashed Toni Morrison in an editorial about the Nobel Prize), unites with conservative thinkers (many of whom are white and male) who hold similar views, who also have the power in many instances to prevent those works from being published, reviewed, read, or studied.

All too often in *The Morning After*, Roiphe evokes a vision of feminist movement that simplistically mirrors patriarchal stereotypes. No doubt it is this mirroring that allows *her* voice, and not the voices of visionary critiques of feminist dogma, to receive such widespread attention and acclaim. Roiphe ends *her* book warning readers about the dangers of "excessive zeal" in relation to advancing political concerns, cautioning that it can lead to blind spots, a will to exaggeration, distortions in perspective. Regrettably, Roiphe did not allow her work to be guided by this insight.

While it is useful for everyone to critique excesses in feminist movement, as well as mistakes and bad strategies, it is important for the future of feminism that those critiques reflect a genuine will to advance feminist politics. Like Roiphe, I wrote a very provocative feminist book when I was young. And I know firsthand how important it is for young feminist thinkers to be courageous in their thinking and action, to claim the right and power to speak their minds. At the same time, it is equally important that those who advocate feminism, young and old, female and male, continually search our hearts and minds to be clear that our interests are not motivated by opportunistic concerns or articulated in shallow ways that mirror and perpetuate antifeminist sentiment. Although my books rigorously critique and interrogate aspects of feminist thoughts, they also insist on the primacy of a fierce feminist commitment to ending sexism and sexist oppression. A progressive, revolutionary feminist movement must welcome and create a context for constructive conflict, confrontation, and dissent. Through that dialectical exchange of ideas, thoughts, and visions, we affirm the transformative power of feminist politics.

SEDUCED BY VIOLENCE NO MORE

WE live in a culture that condones and celebrates rape. Within a phallogocentric patriarchal state, the rape of women by men is a ritual that daily perpetuates and maintains sexist oppression and exploitation. We cannot hope to transform "rape culture" without committing ourselves fully to resisting and eradicating patriarchy. In his recent essay "Black America: Multicultural Democracy in the Age of Clarence Thomas and David Duke," Manning Marable writes:

Rape, spouse abuse, sexual harassment on the job, are all essential to the perpetuation of a sexist society. For the sexist, violence is the necessary and logical part of the unequal, exploitative relationship. To dominate and control, sexism requires violence. Rape and sexual harassment are therefore not accidental to the structure of gender relations within a sexist order.

This is no new revelation. In all our work as thinkers and activists, committed feminist women have consistently made this same point. However, it is important to acknowledge that our movement to transform rape culture can only progress as men come to feminist thinking and

actively challenge sexism and male violence against women. And it is even more significant that Marable speaks against a sexist order from his position as an African American social critic.

Black males, utterly disenfranchised in almost every arena of life in the United States, often find that the assertion of sexist domination is their only expressive access to the patriarchal power they are told all men should possess as their gendered birthright. Hence, it should not surprise or shock that many black men support and celebrate "rape culture." That celebration has found its most powerful contemporary voice in misogynist rap music. Significantly, there are powerful alternative voices. Mass media pays little attention to those black men who are opposing phallocentrism, misogyny, and sexism. The "it's-a-dick-thing" version of masculinity that black male pop icons such as Spike Lee and Eddie Murphy promote is a call for "real" black men to be sexist and proud of it, to rape and assault black women and brag about it. Alternative, progressive, black male voices in rap or cinema receive little attention, but they exist. There are even black males who do "rap against rape" (their slogan), but their voices are not celebrated in patriarchal culture.

Overall, cultural celebration of black male phallocentrism takes the form of commodifying these expressions of "cool" in ways that glamorize and seduce. Hence, those heterosexual black males that the culture deems most desirable as mates or erotic partners tend to be pushing a "dick-thing" masculinity. They can talk tough and get rough. They can brag about disciplin' their women, about making sure the "bitches" respect them. Many black men have a profound investment in the perpetuation and maintenance of rape culture. So much of their sense of value and self-esteem is hooked into the patriarchal macho image; these brothers are not about to surrender their "dick-thing" masculinity. This was most apparent during the Mike Tyson trial. Brothers all over were arguing that the black female plaintiff should not have gone to Tyson's hotel room in the wee hours of the morning if she had no intention of doing the wild thing. As one young brother told me last week, "I mean, if a sister came to my room that late, I would think she got one thing on her mind." When I suggested to him and his partners that maybe a woman could visit the room of a man she likes in the wee hours of the night because she might like to talk, they shook their heads saying, "No way." There is a deeply ingrained sexism, a profoundly serious commitment to rape culture.

Like many black men, they are enraged by any feminist call to rethink masculinity and oppose patriarchy. And the courageous brothers who do, who rethink masculinity, who reject patriarchy and rape culture, often find that they cannot get any play—that the very same women who may critique macho male nonsense contradict themselves by making it clear that they find the "unconscious brothers" more appealing.

On college campuses all over the United States, I talk with these black males and hear their frustrations. They are trying to oppose patriarchy and yet are rejected by black females for not being masculine enough. This makes them feel like losers, that their lives are not enhanced when they make progressive changes, when they affirm feminist movement. Their black female peers confirm that they do indeed hold contradictory desires. They desire men not to be sexist, even as they say, "But I want him to be masculine." When pushed to define "masculine," they fall back on sexist representations. I was surprised by the number of young black women who repudiated the notion of male domination, but who would then go on to insist that they could not desire a brother who could not take charge, take care of business, be in control.

Their responses suggest that one major obstacle preventing us from transforming rape culture is that heterosexual women have not unlearned a heterosexist-based "eroticism" that constructs desire in such a way that many of us can only respond erotically to male behavior that has already been coded as masculine within the sexist framework. Let me give an example of what I mean. For most of my heterosexual erotic life I have been involved with black males who are into a "dick-thing" masculinity. For more than ten years I was in a nonmonogamous relationship with a black man committed to nonsexist behavior in almost every aspect of daily life—the major exception being the bedroom. I accepted my partner's insistence that his sexual desires be met in any circumstance where I had made sexual overtures (kissing, caressing, and so on). Hence ours was not a relationship in which I felt free to initiate sexual play without going forward and engaging in coitus. Often I felt compelled to engage in sexual intercourse when I did not want to.

In my fantasies, I dreamed of being with a male who would fully respect my body rights, my right to say "no," my freedom not to proceed in any sexual activity that I did not desire even if I initially felt that I wanted to be sexual. When I left this relationship, I was determined to

choose male partners who would respect my body rights. For me this meant males who did not think that the most important expression of female love was satisfying male sexual desire. It meant males who could respect a woman's right to say "no," irrespective of the circumstance.

Years passed before I found a partner who respected those rights in a feminist manner, with whom I made a mutual covenant that neither of us would ever engage in any sexual act that we did not desire to participate in. I was elated. With this partner I felt free and safe. I felt that I could choose not to have sex without worrying that this choice would alienate or anger my partner. Though most women were impressed that I had found such a partner, they doubted that this could be a chosen commitment to female freedom on any man's part; they raised suspicious questions. Braggin' about him to girlfriends and acquaintances, I was often told, "Girl, you betta be careful. Dude might be gay." I also began to feel doubts. Nothing about the way this dude behaved was familiar. His was not the usual "dick-thing" masculinity that had aroused feelings of pleasure and danger in me for most of my erotic life. While I liked his alternative behavior, I felt a loss of control—the kind that we experience when we are no longer acting within the socialized framework of both acceptable and familiar heterosexual behavior. I worried that he did not find me really desirable. Then I asked myself whether aggressive emphasis on his desire, on his need for "the pussy" would have reassured me. It seemed to me, then, that I needed to rethink the nature of female heterosexual eroticism, particularly in relation to black culture.

Critically interrogating my responses, I confronted the reality that despite all my years of opposing patriarchy, I had not fully questioned or transformed the structure of my desire. By allowing my erotic desire to still be determined to any extent by conventional sexist constructions, I was acting in complicity with patriarchal thinking. Resisting patriarchy ultimately meant that I had to reconstruct myself as a heterosexual, desiring subject in a manner that would make it possible for me to be fully aroused by male behavior that was not phallogentric. In basic terms, I had to learn how to be sexual with a man in a context where his pleasure and his hard-on is decentered and mutual pleasure is centered instead. That meant learning how to enjoy being with a male partner who could be sexual without viewing coitus as the ultimate expression of desire.

Talking with women of varying ages and ethnicities about this issue, I am more convinced than ever that women who engage in sexual acts with male partners must not only interrogate the nature of the masculinity we desire, we must also actively construct radically new ways to think and feel as desiring subjects. By shaping our eroticism in ways that repudiate phallogentrism, we oppose rape culture. Whether this alters sexist male behavior is not the point. A woman who wants to engage in erotic acts with a man without reinscribing sexism will be much more likely to avoid or reject situations in which she might be victimized. By refusing to function within the heterosexist framework that condones male erotic domination of women, females would be actively disempowering patriarchy.

Without a doubt, our collective, conscious refusal to act in any way that would make us complicit in the perpetuation of rape culture within the sphere of sexual relations would undermine the structure. Concurrently, when heterosexual women are no longer attracted to macho men, the message sent to men would at least be consistent and clear. That would be a major intervention in the overall effort to transform rape culture.