

The Role of Psychotherapists in Changing the “Culture of Misogyny”

by Bruce M. Small, B.Sc. (Psychology), M.Ed., Therapist

In March 2015 Ontario premier Kathleen Wynne announced initiatives to change the “culture of misogyny” in Ontario and to end sexual violence and harassment of women in our society. While Premier Wynne's announcement heralds a “road map” for achieving these goals, there is a great deal of work that must be done to accomplish them.

Not the least of this work requires *direct therapy of men*. There are few men in our society who have grown up unscathed by the sexist culture that trained and still trains men to feel and act superior to and more entitled than women. Most of the training is chronic, in that many men who carry outdated notions about women and gender are virtually unaware of any flaws in their approach and in their concepts about men and women and their roles and stations in society.

It is my experience that deep-seated social patterns often require intensive direct therapeutic work or well-designed peer counselling over considerable lengths of time to even begin to un-seat old viewpoints, prejudices, and practices. While media campaigns and public discussions are surely valuable, raising awareness without doing substantial internal work on each of us can often lead to pushing the attitudes underground without actually reversing them.

I am therefore encouraging all psychologists and psychotherapists to become more aware of the effects of sexism and misogyny in their client populations, and of the necessity to recommend in-depth counselling for the specific men who appear to be responsible for perpetuating or aggravating those effects. I am also encouraging everyone who understands this sexist system to be forthright in recommending this kind of work to men in general as well as to the specific men in their lives who they feel need it the most. I would also recommend that men who are in therapy for other reasons take the opportunity to review their internal attitudes about women while they are at it.

It is still essential and of the highest priority to help women who have been adversely affected by prejudicial attitudes and actions. They need the opportunity and support to recover from the associated traumas, to undo internalized effects of oppression by others, to use their power individually or by joining with other women and to resist unacceptable treatment, when it is safe to do so. But without simultaneously treating the men who perpetrate harassment, prejudice and violence against women, we would be missing a major component of the solution to the problem highlighted by Premier Wynne.

For those in the psychology and psychotherapy professions who are willing to work directly with men to help them uncover, understand and undo internalized sexist and misogynist notions, I would like to encourage us all to keep in touch with others doing similar work, to exchange notes, to educate each other about successes and failures, and to speak publicly about the importance of this work.

It is important for men to know that cleaning house in our own heads is honourable work, and leads to improvements in our relationships to women as well as many unanticipated benefits for all other aspects of our lives. Becoming clear about the inherent value of all human beings can also affect how we relate to other men and to children, how we relate to people who manifest the full diversity of gender and sexuality in our society, how we work and conduct business, how we relate to and express our own feelings, how we relate to and use our own bodies, how we care for our planet and what we feel is important in our lives. *No one loses from doing this kind of work.*

For further information, contact bruce@envirodesic.com or visit <http://www.brucesmall.com>.