

WHAT I CAN DO TO RESIST

RAPE CULTURE

1. Educate others on the harms of pornography

- a. Promoting men's violence and sexual exploitation
 - i. Mainstream porn is violent and degrading (close to 9 out of 10 of the most popular pornographic films contain physical violence)
 - ii. Pornography eroticizes men's violence against women. Porn is sex trafficking & rape with the presence of a camera. Victims exploited in porn are often reenacting trauma from being abused as children.
 - iii. Sex buyers seek to imitate porn acts with a real person- this increases the demand for prostitution/sex trafficking.
 - iv. 1 in 5 pornographic images is of a child (child sexual abuse images)
 - v. Men who view porn are more likely to believe women want to be raped, show less empathy towards others, and show an increased interest in sexually coercing partners
- b. Addiction
 - i. In the U.S., 1 in 3 men ages 18-30 believe they are addicted to porn (visit www.yourbrainonporn.com to learn more)
 - ii. As a person continues pornography use, they become desensitized and build up a tolerance- progressively seeking out more hard-core, degrading, deviant and violent porn
- c. Marriage, family, and sexuality
 - i. Marital, relationship, and sexual satisfaction decreases over time after porn use- eventually users can become so desensitized by porn that they no longer desire sex with a real person and can only be aroused by porn
 - ii. 56% of divorces cite at least one person's pornography obsession as a major factor in their divorce
 - iii. Porn is a grooming tool and a child's first form of sex education (average age of first exposure is 8-11 years old)

2. Understand and act against harmful gender socialization

- a. Patriarchy (a system of male dominance & control) is a consequence of *sin*- not God's original intention for relationships and society (Gen 3:16).
- b. Look at the Gospel contextually and see how Jesus treated women- as radically equal and honoring amid an oppressive patriarchal society that viewed women as property.
- c. Bulldoze the "Box." Choose to live in freedom to be all God has called us to be- this means revisiting gender roles of "masculinity" and "femininity." Our human experience, strengths, personalities, and gifts cannot fit into one socially-constructed gender box. Gender expectations

constrain and limit our unique gifts we as individuals offer the world, while shaming those who don't conform/fit into these boxes. Gender roles create a hierarchy of male dominance and female subordination, resulting in a loss of our humanity, and building a foundation for abuse. Jesus demonstrated what it means to be fully human and rebelled against gender roles, cultural customs, and rejected most of what our culture defines as "masculinity."

- d. Embrace egalitarian church principles and practices rather than complementarian/patriarchal dogma that reinforces gender roles and creates an atmosphere where abuse festers
- e. Volunteer, financially support, and follow the blogs of Christians for Biblical Equality International (visit www.cbeinternational.org)
- f. Lead egalitarian Bible & book studies that focus on gender (such as Bilezikian's *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place 3rd Edition* or James' *Malestrom*, or Cunningham's *Why Not Women?*).
- g. Build women up in spiritual leadership: full inclusion and authority in decision-making, teaching, pastoring, elder roles, and ministry within the church. The Bible upholds equality (Gal 3:28) and reveres multiple female prophets, ministers, leaders, deacons, apostles and disciples! Are women representing half of church leadership?
- h. Encourage biblical equality within marriage: mutual (not one-sided) submission (Eph 5:21)
- i. Stop glorifying traits associated with masculinity and devaluing women and using women/girls/femininity as an insult (i.e. "you're throwing like a girl," "stop being a sissy," "you're so whipped," "man up/be a man," "real men...")
- j. Speak about healthy relationships and God-honoring sexuality in a grace-filled, joyful, and positive way that is not fear, identity, or shame-based in youth groups, marriage seminars, and at the pulpit
- k. Sexuality is an expression and *part* of us, but not an identity. Our identity is in Christ alone- as children of God. Resist the urge to imitate the world by making our sexuality define who we are and what we are worth.
- l. Make healthy relationships and sexuality an ongoing conversation in the family and in the church (not a one-time "talk" on biology). Keep in mind: the environment in which these topics are talked about must feel safe, or people will not share honestly

3. Interrupt and intervene against behaviors that contribute to sexism and abuse

- a. Encourage a guest expert to speak about domestic/dating abuse from the pulpit
- b. Refuse to laugh or remain silent when others make sexist remarks, rape jokes, gender-based comments/stereotypes, or perpetuate myths about rape/the sex industry
- c. Confront abusive attitudes, behaviors, church doctrine, or practices in the church
- d. Mentor youth to become "media critics." It is impossible (and unhelpful) to shelter youth from the toxic images and messages that bombard them. Instead, we can help youth critique destructive influences, advertisement, song lyrics, movies, etc. This will help youth not passively listen or internalize these messages but instead ask questions. I.e. *What message is being sent? How accurate is this message when weighing reality/truth?*
- e. Refuse to support or engage in sexually exploitative businesses (pornography, strip/exotic dance clubs, prostitution) or stay at hotels that offer pay-per-view pornography

- f. Refuse to participate and actively speak up when others are being spiritually abusive: twisting, distorting, bullying and manipulating others by using theology, doctrine, or scripture (i.e. using verses on “submission” to justify abuse and sexism) to gain power and control
- g. Educate congregation and youth on signs of abuse (including verbal, emotional/mental/psychological, economic, sexual, physical, and spiritual)
- h. Start or join a church network/coalition to address men’s violence
- i. Write letters, call, and lobby with public officials to support policies that promote justice for women and freedom from men’s violence and exploitation.

4. Support victims/survivors of men’s violence

- a. Volunteer and donate to local centers working with survivors (sexual assault programs, trafficking programs, domestic violence programs, violence prevention programs, men against sexism groups etc.)
- b. Listen and believe people when they disclose they have been a victim of abuse. Validate their feelings. It is normal for survivors to be angry, depressed, sad, numb, calm, or even humorous. People cope in different ways.
- c. Do not pressure survivors to heal, forgive, or move on/get over it. This may *obstruct* their healing. Recognize healing is often a long, sometimes up-and-down journey and every survivor’s journey is different.
- d. Let victims know you support them no matter what. A woman who has been battered will leave her abuser an average of 5-8 times before leaving for good. Do not shame others for returning to an abuser.
- e. Recognize victims feel powerless. Respond by giving the power back to the individual- let her/him make her/his own choices and don’t imitate her/his abuser by telling her/him what to do or trying to take control of the situation.
- f. Recognize ANYONE is capable of abuse or exploitation. Abusers are your family members, neighbors, co-workers, friends, public officials, children, celebrities, and pastors. Abusers may appear respectful, moral, charming, or well-liked. Abusers often do not abuse their victims in public and are the people you may least suspect.
- g. Involve yourself (and other men) to be part of the solution with The MENDING Project and offer free/discounted goods and services to survivors www.menaspeacemakers.org/mendingproject
- h. Welcome those who have been exploited in the sex industry into your church
- i. Recognize abuse or sexual assault is always the fault of the abuser alone
- j. Refuse to victim-blame (i.e. *What did you do to make him so mad? You must’ve provoked him. Why did you wear that/walk alone/drink/flirt?*)
- k. Do not scrutinize a victim’s story and pick apart what you would have done in that situation or try and “find evidence” that they brought it upon themselves. Hindsight is always 20-20.
- l. Ask women how rape culture, sexism, men’s violence, and the constant threat of rape has affected them and those they love. Asking women about their experiences can be eye-opening (especially for men). Listen regardless of their reaction, don’t cut her off or “tone police” women when they get angry. Women are justified in their anger about the violence, sexism, and abuse men have perpetrated against them. Do not get defensive and rush to say “not all men...” etc. Validate their experiences.

- m. Do not hold double standards for men and women in the church- oftentimes men's sexual sin is considered a "mistake/struggle" that others empathize with, while women's sexual sin deems her unworthy, dirty, and destroys her relationships and reputation in the church.
- n. Recognize youth group talks on "modesty" and "purity" often turn shaming, blaming, and focus on girls/women as the primary enforcers of men's purity. Teach men to full take responsibility for their objectification, lust, and sexual sin- do not blame women for men's sin.

5. Foster an atmosphere of accountability

- a. Recognize men's violence against women is a men's issue and respond accordingly. Men commit most acts of violence, so it is up to men to stop it, in conjunction with, and under the leadership and accountability of women.
- b. Hold abusers both criminally accountable in the community and spiritually accountable in your church
- c. Install Covenant Eyes internet filtering and accountability software in your home, mobile devices, and work place (visit www.covenanteyes.com)
- d. Start a porn accountability group with peers
- e. Recognize the role religious legalism and merely "following the rules" plays in nurturing the cycle of shame
- f. Be a role model and set an example of accountability by owning up to your own mistakes, sins, temptations, and failures.
- g. Hold pastors accountable if they use jokes about women or sexism to get a laugh at the pulpit
- h. Recognize the complexities of abusive attitudes and that abusers reap many benefits from controlling their partners- therefore many abusers do not change. Abuse stems from a sexist, patriarchal legacy that fosters deeply-ingrained attitudes of entitlement and male control (especially over women and children) that are difficult to undo in a short period of time.
- i. Ensure the safety of the victim is the primary concern- not maintaining the relationship/marriage. Many victims eventually need to leave an abuser when they feel it is most safe. God hates abuse and would never condone abuse taking place outside or within the most sacred human covenant- marriage.
- j. Marriage/a relationship is not a license to unlimited access to your spouse/partner's body. Never manipulate, guilt, pressure, punish, or make your partner feel like they "owe" you sex. This is sexual abuse and marital rape is a crime. If you want to have sex and your partner does not, respond with a respectful "okay," accept it, and do not make them feel bad for asserting their boundaries.
- k. Reflect on how YOU personally treat women. Have you been emotionally, psychologically, financially, verbally, sexually, or physically abusive and controlling? Have women told you that you have "anger" or "control" issues? This is a sign you should seek professional help through a batterer's intervention program for guidance on interacting with women in healthy ways.

Other things I can do to resist rape culture: