

# Los Angeles

MAGAZINE

## *The Future is Human, Though. A Tantrika's Take from the Trenches of the Masculinity Mess*

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*[NOTE: This article was assigned to me as a feature story by a Los Angeles Magazine editor. Once it was finished, they rejected the article they had tapped me to write, in saying: "It comes off as critical of the Me Too movement"; which was the whole point, and why I took the assignment in the first place. After LA Mag killed the piece, I pitched it to all of my editorial contacts, and at least a dozen other publications, but no one would touch it because it didn't align with the dominant cultural narrative that seeks to demonize men, and victimize women, while dividing and disempowering us all.]*

Enrique sat on the couch, cheeks flushed, still getting his bearings, while I stripped the sheets from the massage table.

"There's no feminine energy in my life," he sighed, reaching for his socks.

Enrique is twenty-seven. He works in tech, and shares a house with three other dudes.

"It's basically all porn, all the time there," he said. "I don't think it's healthy."

Did I mention that Enrique barely got hard, and took forever to come?

Now's probably as good a time as any to explain that I am a Tantrika, which, technically, means I'm a sex worker. It's an unlikely vocation for a Jappy Valley girl with monastic inclinations, a big mouth and a master's degree. Alas, a handful of authority issues, attitude problems and antisocial tendencies renders me relatively unhireable in the real world. And so it is that I find myself proffering high-vibe hand jobs for cash - a career path that gives me a unique, front-line perspective on the unfurling crisis of masculinity men in this culture are most definitely navigating.

As a Tantrika, I act as a kind of gatekeeper or guardian for the sacred sexual energies I channel. Decades of spiritual study, practice, purification, ritual and ceremony have rendered me open to/adept at working with the higher mystical frequencies that move through me in service to healing the masculine. Plus, multiple astrologers have told me I'm a Vestal Virgin, which totally lines up with me being a prude until my late 30s, when I received the Tantric nudge - a higher calling that happened to coincide with a plant medicine initiation wherein a shaman pummeled my naked body with wooden needles while a vision of Ayahuasca asked if I was ready to devote my life to Spirit, and I asked if I could think about it, even though we both knew the choice had already been made, if for no other reason than I was having a conversation with an invisible plant deity in my head while a man wearing a dress chanted in esoteric tongues and stabbed my body black and blue.

The bulk of my clients are average dudes who comprise every possible demographic. Most of them aren't looking for a kundalini awakening or a self-actualizing experience, rather they just want a pretty girl to rub their shoulders and their penis. They also want to feel safe, and nurtured, and accepted. They want to bask in the feminine, which - by nature - is receptive, tolerant, compassionate and cooperative, as opposed to its active, aggressive, competitive, protective and combative masculine polarity.

“It’s so nice to be in a woman’s energy, and not be made to feel like I’m the enemy,” a sound editor named David told me, fastening his watch, and running a hand through his salt-and-pepper hair after our session.

David went on to explain that his wife has been angry ever since the Me Too thing erupted and still refuses to have sex with him, because he is a person with a penis, and thus a patriarchal perpetrator who needs to check his privilege and button his lip.

“A lot of men are having more conflict with their spouses at this time,” Noah Rothschild, a Santa Monica-based LMFT who specializes in men’s issues told me. “With the Me Too movement, they’re dealing with having so much stuff projected onto them.”

We’re not supposed to talk about anything that challenges the allegedly empowered, script-flipping wonderfulness that is the Me Too movement. If you dare mention the slander, the misandry, the bullying or the divisiveness, you’re called out as a traitor, or a misogynist, or an alt right Nazi, despite the fact that you’re a Jewish chick devoted to unity consciousness. But, power dynamics between men and women are nuanced and complex, rife with offshoots and intricacies that can’t honestly be whittled down to a hashtag, or a false dialectic.

As Katie Roiphe wrote in her controversial 2018 *Harper’s* essay, “The Other Whisper Network”: *One thing that makes it hard to engage with the feminist moment is the sense of great, unmanageable anger. Given what men have gotten away with for centuries, this anger is understandable. Yet it can also lead to an alarming lack of proportion.*

Women are pissed off. I get it. I’m a woman. I’ve been pissed off about gender inequality my whole life. But, the problem isn’t individual men – at least, not most of them. The problem is patriarchy, and all the ways that both men and women allow it to inform our thinking and engaging.

“Women are angry at the structure,” said Jay Levin, a life coach who teaches a course called *What Men Need to Know About Women*, “and they are projecting that rage onto men.”

The hypocrisy is that the tactics women are using to project this fury —shame, blame, bully, silence, slander— along with our cries to *fight sexism!* and *smash the patriarchy!* are the same destructive, divisive, *patriarchal* methods of engagement that got us into this mess in the first place.

The Me Too thing has given way to, or at least blurred lines with, a very loud and very insistent cultural narrative that pathologizes masculinity and consistently portrays men as aggressive, oppressive sexual predators hellbent on power and domination who are devoid of emotional feeling, depth or tenderness and are drunk with privilege, entitlement and every possible leg up.

“It’s as if masculinity – as if being a boy or a man – is now defined as a disorder in need of a cure,” *Factual Feminist* rabble-rouser and American Enterprise Scholar, Christina Hoff Sommers, told me when we spoke recently by phone. In fact, just last year, the American Psychological Association published its first-ever *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men*, ostensibly to support mental health professionals in dealing with the psychic atrocities associated with the dreaded Y chromosome.

The standard depiction of men as brutish and overbearing, though, doesn’t line up with my experience of having worked so closely with at least a thousand of them. From my vantage point, they’ve been shrinking —becoming more silent, more confused, less empowered and less expressed ever since this Me Too stuff started.

Take Ben. Ben is a shy, handsome filmmaker in his late 30s. It took him three months and ~~as~~ many emails to work up the courage to book a session. He showed up nervous and frazzled. When I invited him to have a seat and tell me what was on his mind, he picked at an imaginary piece of lint on his jeans, while relaying a conversation he’d had with his father, during which he said he got triggered.

“I’m sorry,” Ben blurted, interrupting his own story. “I shouldn’t use that word. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“What word?” I asked, genuinely confused.

“*Triggered*,” Ben clarified. “I mean, I know I can’t know what it’s like to really be triggered because I’m not a woman.”

I can’t tell you how often I suddenly find myself on the receiving of these gratuitous, left-field apologies. They’re like verbal armor dudes wield to stave off the oceans of feminine rage threatening to come crashing down upon them at any moment. Sexy though it isn’t, I don’t blame men for the pre-emptive groveling, given how fried I’m experiencing their nervous systems when they’re on my table.

“It’s made a lot of men really afraid to be themselves in the world,” Rothschild said of the Me Too ruckus. “I work with a lot of men in the entertainment business; and, even if they have not been inappropriate, they are still walking around on eggshells.”

As for the idea that Ben’s masculinity renders certain words and emotions off-limits, it’s part of this reductive, illogical premise that alleges that because women have felt frightened, or oppressed, or disempowered, that men are not allowed to feel these things, too. As though women have a monopoly on negative emotions and experiences, because men’s patriarchal privilege exempts them from the human condition.

This ridiculous proposition denies men’s fundamental feeling nature, which is the core issue informing this whole mess. It validates the archaic cultural program that equates vulnerability with weakness and teaches boys that feelings are for sissies and real men don’t cry. Dismissing men’s pain only feeds the monster that Me Too is attempting to slay, because, by and large, emotionally repressed/disconnected men are the ones who perpetrate so many of the awful, terrible, very bad things women are rightfully fed up with.

Rothschild, the marriage and family therapist, sees this vulnerability deficit as the core wound informing many of men’s issues. “Most men were conditioned this way in school and at home,” he said. “Our masculinity is questioned the moment we show any kind of emotions; so, we shut them down. That wound that men carry around creates a feeling of aloneness and isolation that affects them on a daily basis.”

The crisis of masculinity isn’t just taking an emotional toll on men. It’s affecting how they relate (i.e. they’re not), and how they function (i.e. they don’t). The number of twenty and thirty-something men I see with erectile dysfunction has skyrocketed over the past five years (thank you, web porn and Big Pharma), while an alarming percentage of my clients have thrown in the towel on dating and relationships altogether (thank you, Tinder and more web porn).

“I don’t know what to say to girls,” a thirty-one year old, chronically depressed client told me after admitting he hadn’t had sex in over a year. “Plus, I can never tell if they’re interested in me.”

From what I can see, app culture is atrophying dudes’ already under-developed rejection muscles by hardwiring them to wait until they’ve been pre-approved by a match notification before making any moves (i.e. texting an emoji), rendering them clueless as to how human connection actually works in the analog world.

“It’s so much easier to just focus on my career, hang out with my friends and come see you,” Paul, a twenty-something comedian told me. “No drama. No freak-outs. No restraining orders.”

He was joking, of course. Still, I hear this a lot – how men are tabling the urge to approach women, or compliment women, or engage women on any intimate level whatsoever out of fear of being misconstrued as a stalker or a predator, or of having a night of frolic come back to haunt them in the form of a sexual assault charge, or a social-media smear campaign.

“The risk of rejection has scaled up to the risk of persecution,” said Shane, a 42-year old chef who’s all but given up on casual romance.

People are quick to scoff at the idea of men being falsely accused of sexual misconduct and even quicker to cite statistics on how rarely it happens compared to how often sexual assaults go unreported. The two ideas are pretty much inseparable at this point. But, even before Me Too kicked off a flood of rape accusations, the [National Violence Resource Center reported that as many as 10 percent of all sexual assault reports were fraudulent, while more than 44 percent were ultimately dropped due to mislabeling or insufficient evidence](#). If what I'm witnessing amongst my clients, friends and colleagues is any indication, those numbers are skyrocketing – no doubt, in part, to the social caché surrounding the #metoo hashtag, and the feelings of camaraderie that come along with being part of a marginalized underclass of victims.

I'm not denying victims' pain or the gross pervasiveness of sexual assault, but we have to get real about all aspects of this situation if we're going to heal it. We can't do that by replacing due process with a guilty-until-proven-innocent mob mentality, or by rebranding unwanted flirtation as assault and drunken pawing as rape. And no, this is not to say that it's okay for a guy who's had too many beers to lay his hands on someone else's body, but to recklessly mislabel the action, and then dub the dude a sexual predator isn't honest, isn't cool, and isn't helping.

"I'm so glad for the Me Too movement, and I'm so glad that there is a shift, and that there is a cultural awakening towards the fact that there needs to be a shift," Elisabeth, a naturopath who specializes in emotional trauma told me, having been raped, and also falsely accused of various ersatz misdeeds during a nasty custody battle. "But, now we have these instincts to not trust men because we have been traumatized. And, I don't think that it's okay to perpetuate that cycle of trauma by lumping all men together. It's become a complete witch hunt."

Look, it's not that I don't get that the game has been rigged in men's favor for far too long, and that pretty much every woman on the planet has incurred some form of trauma at the hands of the masculine shadow. I'm a sex worker, for Chrissakes. But, in my experience, most men are good, and most men are kind, and most men are respectful.

"It's a small percentage of men who lead with that objectifying energy," Rothschild concurred, "a much smaller percentage than what people would think."

Creeps are rare, but they do exist. They're not the ones who ask to come on my tits, or who leer at my ass like it's not attached to a person with eyes and feelings. Those are trifles that, like it or not, come with the Tantric territory. It's gross and annoying, but it's not dangerous. The creeps are the few that I've encountered who elevate their desire over my humanity - the ones who inspire real-deal safety fear.

Walt was one of them—a retired military guy who told me his proctologist said he had the prostate of a 35-year old, and who spent the bulk of our session bragging about his crunch reps, his hot-shit security clearance, and his Black Ops consulting gig. He must have said "Black Ops" a half dozen times, pausing to see if I was going to have a spontaneous orgasm and gush about what a big, strong, brave man he was.

It was annoying because conversation is distracting when it comes to sacred sexual channeling, and because I don't play the coy, weaker sex game, like, ever. But, I swallowed the urge to tell Walt to shut up and get receptive because it wasn't a BDSM situation, and because fighting the masculine shadow with another masculine shadow doesn't lend itself to Tantric bliss, or actually work. Besides, the situation was clear. Here was a man who had no solid sense of self and whose shrunken self-esteem was dependent upon all these archaic masculine scripts he relied on for external approval, and who—in the telltale absence of strong, healthy, nurturing feminine energy in his life – was seeking that approval from me. He wasn't going to get it, but I wasn't going to shame him for trying.

It was while I was stroking Walt's semi stiffy, that he reached a hand out for my breast, even though my ad clearly states that mutual touch is prohibited. I sidestepped his outstretched digits, and said, "Hands to yourself, please," in a firm, but compassionate tone, while silently suppressing a volcanic surge of rage.

Two minutes later, Walt reached for my ass.

"NO!" I growled, jerking away, livid. "Do NOT touch me again, or this session is over."

If there's anything I've learned from my years in the Tantric trenches, it's to maintain clear boundaries while rooting myself in my heart, which – in this case – was no easy feat, as I had the distinct urge to claw Walt's eyes out. When shit like this happens, it's not just the guy who's doing the grabbing I'm mad at, it's every guy on every continent who's grabbed a woman who didn't want to be grabbed since the beginning of time. Feminine rage runs deep like that.

Walt got the message, and surprised me by offering his heartfelt appreciation for having eased his chronic pain. Apparently, the hundred-plus parachute jumps he'd made during active duty had wrecked his spine. Walt's retirement package didn't cover physical therapy, and he feared he was becoming addicted to the opiates his doctor kept prescribing.

And as quickly as I had judged him a sociopath was as quickly as all that feminine compassion came rushing back in. Because even though Walt was grabby and creepy, he'd devoted his life to protecting his country, and now that he was old and broken and skin-tagged, that country didn't have his back. He wasn't a sociopath. He was a human being with issues and challenges, like all of us. And though there's no way in hell I would ever work with Walt again, I gave him some Arnica, and a chiropractic referral, because I knew the care and homeopathic offerings of the feminine would go a long way in easing his suffering.

It's not a black and white situation we're navigating. We humans are complex creatures. We have shadows and we have gifts; and our shadows don't render us "toxic" any more than our victim narratives make us better, or more righteous, or the singular heirs to humanity's every tomorrow, despite those trendy *Future is Female* shirts attempting to claim otherwise. The problem with the imaginary gender divide jacking up our culture is that it oversimplifies a complex situation, while fostering a dangerous ~~false~~ narrative that would have us believing that there is an *us* and that there is a *them* and that one has to be put down for the other to raise itself up.

"The future isn't male or female. It's human," said Hoff Sommers. "We need solidarity between men and women, not a war."

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Carlos, 20s, lives alone in a tract house with no furniture, and – if his kitchen counter is any indication – no food, except for protein powder and tequila. His body is dappled with tattoos and bullet scars. He is kind and polite and completely silent when he comes.

"Be careful out there," Carlos always says after carrying my table to my car. It melts me every time - that tiny dash of protective masculine care that means just about everything these days.

There is no *them*. There is but one motley human *us*; and we are all flawed, and we are all fallible, and we are all just figuring it out as we go. The only way we're going to evolve our culture and our world for the better is by doing it together, by bringing our strengths and our gifts to the table in service to the healing and rebalancing of both the masculine and feminine polarities on the planet. That means that if women are claiming that what this culture needs is more feminine energy, then it's on us to embody that feminine energy, and to seed the world with it, instead of acting out the bad behavior of the patriarchy that got us here, and claiming it's progress because it's the women who are doing the raging and the smashing and the silencing and the suppressing, and the men who are getting the raw end of the deal.

Personally, I don't care whether the future is female. I just care that it's unified and peaceful and sustainable and inclusive. and from my freaky-deaky front lines Tantrika perspective, the only way we're going to get there is by invoking the grace of the feminine, now.

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