

UP

One Man's Journey to Feminism

Peter W. Pruyn

he / him / his*

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Revision 2020-12-01

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Content warning:
Contains descriptions of physical and emotional violence

* Pronounced “prine”. He/him/his: This is the set of pronouns I ask others to use when referring to me. People who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming may use pronouns that do not conform to binary male/female gender categorizations, such as “they, them, theirs.”

10: Debrief

“That which we do not bring to consciousness appears in our lives as fate.”

— Carl Jung

Two fundamental CRM (Cockpit Resource Management) practices are setting aside time to pre-brief crew activities before a flight and then, equally importantly, setting aside time to debrief the flight afterwards for lessons-learned. I will now do that for my life and why I identify as a feminist. This is not simple to me. Too often I’ve seen feminist-related terms used without pausing to ensure that everyone is on the same page about what they mean, resulting in increased conflict. As a result, I first feel the need to define some of these concepts and how I have come to understand them as a man. For this chapter I will be putting a pause on storytelling (mostly) and offer my personal exploration of these terms, how I relate to them as a man, and how I believe they relate to our species as a whole.

But before I look at words, I need to start with a person.

Gloria Steinem

Recently I was speaking with an educated middle-aged White woman about writing this memoir. At some point I mentioned how much I admired Gloria Steinem. She responded with contempt, “Gloria Steinem?! She was a *Playboy Bunny*!” When I attempted to defend Steinem, I got the sense that I was swimming up-stream.

So allow me to start with this: no one individual has had a greater impact on my development as a feminist than Gloria Steinem. Her eloquence, wisdom, dignity, humor, and endurance have been essential to this man wanting to learn more about feminism. If I think about why she has had such an impact on me, I would say there are two reasons. First, whenever I listen to her, I learn something. Her language is always accessible. And, second, I’ve never heard her say anything that made me feel alienated as a man. The result is that, for me, Steinem feels more like a learning partner than an icon.

I will rely on her ideas throughout these reflections.

For those who, like my acquaintance above, choose to judge Steinem based on a single association, I offer the following. In 1963, Steinem was a Playboy Bunny as her cover as an investigative journalist. Her resulting article exposed multiple facets of systemic abuse and had multiple immediate and long-term positive effects.⁶²

Finally, Steinem is the only feminist organizer I know who consistently advocates that this

⁶² The article originally appeared in *Show* magazine in May, 1963 with the title “*A Bunny’s Tale*.” However, Steinem includes the two-part article as the chapter “*I Was a Playboy Bunny*” in her 1995 book, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. You can read the chapter here:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111027052018/http://www.gloriasteinem.com/storage/I%20Was%20a%20Playboy%20Bunny.pdf>

work should be fun. She often likes to say, “The end doesn’t justify the means, the means *are* the ends. If we want joy and music and friendship and laughter at the end of our revolution, we must have joy and music and friendship and laughter along the way.”⁶³

If you’re still not convinced that Steinem might have anything worthwhile to say, I invite you to read the transcript or watch the video of a conversation she had with gay rights lawyer Roberta Kaplan at the New York Public Library on October 26, 2015.⁶⁴

Whether you are a man or a woman, a feminist or an anti-feminist, to borrow a tag-line: if you don’t think Gloria Steinem is worth your time, you don’t know enough about Gloria Steinem.

Patriarchy

The word *patriarchy* comes from the Latin, *pater*, meaning “father”, combined with *arch*, meaning “first” or “rule” (as in “arch enemy”).⁶⁵ Therefore, *patri-archy* literally means “rule of the father”. Expanding this to a societal level, a better way to characterize the term might be: “A social system where men have power over all other genders.”⁶⁶ In addition, Steinem likes to emphasize that a key aspect of this power is controlling reproduction in order to ensure being able to pass property—and therefore power—down to male offspring. In order to do that, you need to be certain of who your offspring are.

If you have a society built on these terms, however, over time there are multiple other effects beyond just privileging male heirs. In researching patriarchy for this memoir, the following is the most comprehensive definition I’ve come across. It is from an article entitled “*A New Definition of Patriarchy: Control of Female Sexuality, Private Property, and War*” by Carol Christ.⁶⁷

As a starting point, Christ first offers a definition that summarizes the above: “patriarchy is a system of male domination in which men dominate women through the control of female sexuality with the intent of passing property to male heirs.” But she then continues:

Patriarchy is often defined as a system of male dominance. This definition does not illuminate, but rather obscures, the complex set of factors that function together in the patriarchal system. We need [a] more complex definition if we are to understand and challenge the patriarchal system in all of its aspects.

She then offers the following more comprehensive definition (fasten your seatbelt):

Patriarchy is a system of male dominance, rooted in the ethos of war which legitimates violence, sanctified by religious symbols, in which men dominate women through the control of female sexuality, with the intent of passing property to male heirs, and in which men who are heroes of war are told to kill men, and are permitted to rape women, to seize land and treasures, to exploit resources, and to own or otherwise dominate conquered people.

⁶³ Gloria Steinem, Commencement Address, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, May 20, 2007. Retrieved from: <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/smith-history/commencement-speakers/2007>

⁶⁴ Gloria Steinem and Roberta Kaplan, Celeste Bartos Forum, the New York Public Library, October 26, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.nypl.org/events/programs/2015/10/26/gloria-steinem-roberta-kaplan>

⁶⁵ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/patriarchy> and <https://www.etymonline.com/word/patriarch>

⁶⁶ Elizabeth J. Meyer. “*Patriarchy 101: What is it and how does it impact education?*”, December 11, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/gender-and-schooling/201612/patriarchy-101>

⁶⁷ Carol P. Christ. *Patriarchy as a System of Male Dominance Created at the Intersection of the Control of Women, Private Property, and War, Part 1*, feminismandreligion.com, February 18, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://feminismandreligion.com/2013/02/18/patriarchy-as-an-integral-system-of-male-dominance-created-at-the-intersection-of-the-control-of-women-private-property-and-war-part-1-by-carol-p-christ/>

Woah.

I will confess that when I first read this, I had a flashback to my early 20's when I first heard someone use the word *genocide* to describe what White European colonialists did to Native Americans. It felt like a kick in the gut. I'm a White European-American. I'm a male. But after I took a deep breath, I had to admit: Christ nailed it. *All* of her definition rings true to me. *All of that* outs patriarchy as the primary guiding force behind the last several thousand years of humanity's recent history. Patriarchy legitimizes holding power over nothing less than life and death. This is the source of the inter-generational addiction to building oneself up by putting others down.

How sad.

For modern-day evidence to support the above, Steinem frequently quotes from the 2014 book *Sex and World Peace*.⁶⁸ The book asks the provocative question, "Surely the security of the state impacts the security of women ... but might the security of women impact the security of states?"⁶⁹ Through an exhaustive inter-disciplinary analysis of a decade's worth of research, the authors identify that the best indicator of violence both within a country as well as a willingness to use violence against another country is not poverty, natural resources, religion, or degree of democracy; it's violence against women. The implication is that once men normalize dominating through violence in the home, they are more likely to do so outside the home. The book offers this mind-bending statistic: "More lives are lost from violence against women, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, suicide, egregious maternal mortality, and other sex-linked causes than were lost during all of the wars and civil strife of the 20th century."⁷⁰

What do I, as man, do with this? How do I connect it to my everyday life?

On the one hand, I agree with Christ's definition of patriarchy. On the other hand, most of us spend more time in organizations and communities than on literal battlefields. Would it be worth having a more practical working definition of patriarchy to apply to our day-to-day experience?

As I mulled over whether that would be helpful or would detract from Christ's thesis, Steinem did it for me. I began to hear her talk about healthy social structures as "circles rather than pyramids" and that we are all "linked rather than ranked." This was the practical perspective I had been looking for that represented my lived experience. By identifying "ranked pyramids" as the culprit, she is emphasizing a basic principal of systems thinking: structure determines behavior.⁷¹ This isn't just about the actors, i.e. men, but the structural incentives that influence everyone's behavior in the system. As Bell Hooks put it, "Patriarchy has no gender."⁷²

Trying to take all of that into account, here is my working definition of patriarchy: *patriarchy is a hierarchical social system that values domination, power and control through the perpetual competition for the pursuit of status.*

This definition is designed to omit explicit mention of gender to leave room for my lived experience as a man who has sometimes been abused by women. I would characterize these women as agents of patriarchy. Their behavior was influenced by the structure of the organizations in which they worked. This is in no way meant to invalidate the historical origins of these hierarchies in the

⁶⁸ Gloria Steinem and Emma Watson in Conversation, How to: Academy, London, February 24, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm6ESsMlvYE>. Also see a transcript here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/18213974-en-el-it-pt-nl-emma-watson-gloria-steinem-in-conversation>

⁶⁹ Valerie M. Hudson and Chad Emmett (April, 2012). *Sex and World Peace*. Woodrow Wilson Center. Retrieved from: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Hudson%20Presentation.pdf>

⁷⁰ Valerie M. Hudson and Chad Emmett (April, 2012). *Sex and World Peace*. p. 4.

⁷¹ This and other systems concepts I will refer to are from the related fields of Systems Thinking and System Dynamics. For more, see the work of Jay Forrester, John Sterman, Peter Senge, Donella Meadows, and Linda Booth Sweeney. I've included a couple of their books in the For Further Reading section in the Appendix. For a do-it-yourself introduction to systems thinking, see the "Introduction to Systems Thinking Group Activity" in the Resources section.

⁷² Bell Hooks (2013). *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. Taylor and Francis. p. 170.

more comprehensive definitions of patriarchy above, only to focus attention on the power structures that surround us, whether they are populated by men or women.

In my mind, patriarchies, power structures, and empires are all the same thing. And we know that all empires fail. Empires fail because each level of a hierarchy acts as a barrier to communication. Gradually, over time, decision-makers become further and further removed from reality, leading them to make bad decisions, ultimately confidently leading their people off a cliff.

Empires don't practice good CRM.

So far, this discussion is all theoretical. I'd like to now ground it in two examples from everyday life, in this case in my own backyard. These examples are relatively minor in and of themselves, but I'm choosing them as representative of how patriarchy manifests itself in everyday life.

Example #1: In April, 2018 the *Boston Globe* ran a story entitled "*In Seaport, it's State Police vs. Boston police in battle over turf.*"⁷³ Apparently, a dead body had been found at Boston's Logan airport, and three different law enforcement organizations responded: the Massachusetts State Police, the Boston Police, and the Transit Police. Representatives from each organization then proceeded to argue for *90 minutes* about whose organization had jurisdiction over this incident. I'm going to suggest that law enforcement organizations are classic patriarchies in that they are "hierarchical social systems that value domination, power and control through the perpetual competition for the pursuit of status." In my view, this biases them to be competitive towards each other rather than collaborative.

What is the cost to society of such behavior?

Example #2: I once had the opportunity to speak with a senior government official of a local city while standing outside their brand new public library. This town had recently completed this state-of-the-art building to the tune of \$90 million. I would describe the resulting facility, both inside and out, as opulent. As he stood there admiring it, he puffed out his chest and remarked how pleased he was that his city's library was nicer than another affluent community's library in the next town over.

In this remark, I felt he was outing his motivation for the project as being driven more by his own ego than the needs of the people in his community. I'm going to take a wild guess that if egos had been removed from the design process of this library, this city could have found a way to build it for something less than \$90 million, allowing the remaining funds to meet other needs of the community.

I'm going to suggest that politics is "a hierarchical social system that values domination, power and control through the perpetual competition for the pursuit of status." The result is that meeting the people's needs is not always the goal.

When virtually every social system, organization, and profession functions in this way, those in power benefit at the expense of the average person. And because these dynamics are pervasive, suggesting that things could be different results in push-back from those who benefit from the status quo. The person who speaks up is positioned as being the problem.

Patriarchy gaslights.⁷⁴

Consider the situation of a group of settler farmers who all share the same town common for grazing their livestock. As each farmer grows their herd, they each need more and more of the common for their animals to graze. Suddenly, without necessarily setting out to, they are all in competition with each other over a finite, shared resource. If everyone pursues their own self-interest, collectively they will use up the one resource they all need, causing everyone to suffer.

⁷³ Matt Rocheleau. "*In Seaport, it's State Police vs. Boston police in battle over turf.*" *Boston Globe*, April 4, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/04/04/seaport-state-police-boston-police-battle-over-turf/zdCQgMosjPzrC2UcUXl5pM/story.html>

⁷⁴ In Patrick Hamilton's 1938 stage play *Gas Light*, a husband attempts to make his wife believe she is going insane by dimming the gas lamps in their home while claiming that nothing is wrong. (Ingrid Bergman starred in the U.S. film version in 1944.) Gaslighting has come to mean a form of psychological abuse in which the victim is gradually manipulated into doubting their own sanity. For more see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaslighting>.

This dynamic is so common in the study of social systems that it has a name: The Tragedy of the Commons.⁷⁵ You might also recognize this dynamic by another name: capitalism. I see traditional capitalism as the economic implementation of patriarchy.

The implicit motto of all patriarchies is “More!” Those in charge are resistant to feedback that suggests that the right course of action is ever “Less!” because they see it as risking “losing” to someone else. The germ of patriarchy is posturing. Whether you have power or not, to live in patriarchy is to live in fear. In short, patriarchy is bad for your mental health. These dynamics are playing-out at the scale of our entire species with the commons being our planet’s atmosphere and natural resources.

Patriarchy is setting-up our entire species to lose.

The systems theorist and author Peter Senge once described humanity’s fundamental challenge in a globalized world simply as: “How can we live in each other’s backyards?”⁷⁶ How do you collaborate with strangers?

Patriarchy isn’t helpful in answering these questions.

Male Privilege⁷⁷

A fundamental cause of patriarchy’s persistence is the dynamic of male privilege.

The word *privilege* comes from the Latin *privus*, “private” combined with *legis*, meaning “law”.⁷⁸ Here is one practical definition: “a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group.”⁷⁹ Privilege functions as a form of immunity from accountability. As such, privilege is a form of power, and power does not take kindly to being questioned. As some have put it, when you’re used to privilege, equality feels like oppression.⁸⁰ When you’re used to power, accountability feels like injustice.

Over the years, I began to keep track of whenever I heard a woman talk about something she felt she had to do that had never occurred to me to do. It took me until my 40s to identify these disparities as a function of my male privilege. Why did it take me so long? Because one characteristic of privilege is that you can get away with not knowing you have it. It’s the people who don’t have it who are forced to notice it every day of their lives. In short, women, transgender individuals, and people of color grow up with acute knowledge of my privilege in a way that I, as a White male, did not.

For those who have it, privilege functions as an invisible tyranny, enabling denial of its existence.

⁷⁵ For one explanation of this classic systems archetype, see: Linda Booth Sweeney and Dennis Meadows (2010). *The Systems Thinking Playbook: Exercises to Stretch and Build Learning and Systems Thinking Capabilities*, pp. 196-197. Another way to explore Tragedy of the Commons is by examining the world view or internal mental picture that each participant has of the situation that guides their behavior. While in competition with each other, one can say that each is operating from a world view of scarcity. As Rebecca Solnit’s *Cinderella Liberator* (Haymarket Books, 2019, p. 18) puts it, people aren’t naturally wicked, they’re just taught that “there wasn’t enough for everybody and they needed to take things from other people to have enough for themselves.” One antidote is operating from a world view of abundance.

⁷⁶ Senge is the founding chair of The Society for Organizational Learning and author of numerous books on organizational learning and systems thinking including: *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, and *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World*.

⁷⁷ A version of this section appeared in *Fourth Wave*, medium.com, February 17, 2020.

⁷⁸ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/privilege>

⁷⁹ Sian Ferguson. *Privilege 101: A Quick and Dirty Guide*, September 29, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/what-is-privilege/>

⁸⁰ See Chris Boeskool, “When You’re Accustomed to Privilege, Equality Feels Like Oppression,” *The Huffington Post*, December 6, 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/when-youre-accustomed-to-privilege_b_9460662

The following is my current, incomplete list of male privileges I have lived with that I have become aware of to-date:

1. I've never worried that I wasn't going to get a job because the other applicants were women.
2. I've never had to worry in a job interview about whether saying that I wanted to have children someday would lower my chances of getting the job.
3. I've never had to worry if having children would negatively impact my career.
4. I've never felt aging has impacted the possibility of my being a father.
5. I've never wondered if I was being paid 20-30% less than my female colleagues.
6. I have felt valued for being a man in female-dominated professions.
7. When I look up the chain of command in most organizations, I see people who look like me.
8. I've never looked back at all the women who helped me over my career and realized that most of them were just trying to sleep with me.
9. I've never felt confused about the intentions of a compliment from a female supervisor.
10. I've never been sexually harassed on the street.
11. I never structure my social plans around avoiding walking home alone at night.
12. When I notice that a woman is walking behind me on the sidewalk, it's never occurred to me to move to the other side of the street.
13. It's never occurred to me to put a whistle on my keychain.
14. I've never walked around at night with a death grip on my car keys sticking-out from my fist in my pocket in case I have to use them as a weapon.
15. When I've approached my car in a parking garage, it's never occurred to me to look under it to see if there was someone lying underneath waiting to grab my ankles.
16. I've never been afraid that a woman might rape me.
17. The number of times I've felt concerned for my safety on the street living in Boston over the past 15 years: two.
18. I feel comfortable traveling alone most places.
19. I can initiate conversations with women at social events without being afraid that they will think I'm "easy".
20. I've never felt cornered by a woman who was making unwelcome advances and ignoring my cues that I wasn't interested.
21. I've never felt the need to wear a wedding ring to keep women away in order to feel safe.
22. I've never felt that women frequently interrupt me.
23. I've never felt a woman has ever 'fem-splained' anything to me.
24. I rarely feel intimidated by a woman due to her being physically larger than I am.
25. I've never feared for my physical safety when a woman gets angry at me.
26. It's never entered my head that one risk of agreeing to live with someone is domestic violence, including death.
27. I rarely feel the need to apologize for expressing my feelings.
28. I don't cry when I get angry, which would make other people think I'm sad rather than angry.
29. Whenever I've been sad or angry no one has anyone ever said to me, "You should smile more often!" Not once.
30. I typically feel admired for being direct rather than feel penalized.
31. I've never had the experience of offering an idea in a meeting, having no one acknowledge it, and a few minutes later having a woman mention the same idea and everybody loves it!
32. When I need to get a large group's attention, I've never had to ask a female colleague to yell "May I have your attention, please!" because no one paid attention to me when I said it.
33. With the possible exception of job interviews, I've never felt scrutinized for my appearance in any professional setting.
34. I've never felt pressure to dye my hair or alter my appearance in any way whatsoever to look younger in order to avoid age discrimination or simply to be noticed.
35. I've never thought I was having "a bad hair day."
36. Over my lifetime, I've received far more compliments for my actions, accomplishments and character than for my appearance.
37. I've spent little time and emotional energy over the course of my life concerned about my appearance or body-type.

38. There is nothing about having a male body that comes anywhere close to the shame, exclusion, and stigma of menstruation in every culture I know of.
39. In short, I haven't been taught by society to hate my body.
40. Whenever I have a minority experience—for example, being the only man in a Women Studies class—after the experience is over, I am always able to return to my majority status in the outside world.
41. I've never felt a doctor was discounting my report of symptoms because I was a man.
42. When I take a prescription drug, I can be sure that its clinical trials used research subjects of my gender.
43. I've never paid more than \$25 for a haircut or more than \$8 for an undergarment.
44. It's never occurred to me to exchange sex for money when I was struggling financially.
45. It's taken me until I was fifty-two years old to become aware of the items on this list and know that they only just scratch the surface.

When I read this list, I think about the women who taught me each one. (Shannon taught me #44.) There have been times when I have read this list out-loud that I have teared-up. But if I'm honest with myself, I'm not tearing-up just for women's suffering. A prerequisite for change is owning the shame of having been wrong in the past. Part of the emotion comes from the shame of my own past ignorance. Privilege abounds in my life story: in my education, my mobility, my being able to resign from a job without another already lined-up, and in many, many other ways.

There will be no substantive change in gender equity in society until men deconstruct their own privilege. To do anything less merely perpetuates the status quo.

Meanwhile, my experience is that it is extremely difficult for the average man to do this. Why? Because examining one's privilege is an exercise in vulnerability, and vulnerability is patriarchy's kryptonite.

Having worked in substance abuse recovery, it's hard not to see parallels with how privilege functions. The majority of recovering alcoholics will tell you that the first time someone suggested to them that they might be an alcoholic or that they needed help, they were unable to hear it. The most common first symptom of addiction is denial. In one way, privilege recovery may be harder for some men than substance abuse recovery because privilege is something men are born with. As a result, they have no experience of having lived without it. Meanwhile the most common time period for people to experiment with drugs is as a teenager. At least up until that point they have had some life experience living sober. Memories of that sober life can be a powerful resource for recovery.

As Steinem once put it: "The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to un-learn."⁸¹

I wonder what a 12 Step program for recovering from male privilege would look like?

Equality vs. Equity

Definitions of feminism often use the word "equality" to define the goal of feminism. I've come to see that it's important, however, to make a distinction between equality and equity.

Imagine taking summer classes abroad in a country that speaks another language. Let's say the teacher gives all the students 30 minutes to complete the test. Sounds fair, right? Now suppose the test is written in the foreign language, and you're not fluent in it. Suddenly, that same 30 minutes isn't fair to you. In this case, the test wouldn't just be testing your knowledge of the subject matter; it would also be testing how well you know the local language. To make this class equitable for non-

⁸¹ *Living the Revolution*, Gloria Steinem's commencement address at Vassar College, May 31, 1970. Retrieved from: <https://vq.vassar.edu/issues/2002/02/online-additions/living-the-revolution.html>

native speakers, the school would also need to provide a translator for those who needed one.

Equality is treating everyone the same. *Equity* is giving everyone what they need to be successful.⁸²

While equality at first may seem fair, what it does, in fact, is to hide the advantages of privilege. In the above example, it would be the privilege of being a native speaker.

Another example that involves gender: how should we decide how many bathroom stalls to have for men and women in large public-use buildings such as sports arenas or airports? (In addition to some number of gender-neutral bathrooms for members of the transgender community.)

Equality would say that we should provide an equal number of stalls for men and women, so-called “potty parity.” And yet, any visit to an airport or sports arena at peak times shows the flaw in this thinking: the line at women’s rooms typically extends down the hall while there is often little or no line at men’s rooms. As a result, when it’s time to leave, the men are stuck waiting for their female family members who are still in line.⁸³

The reality is that women, on average, need more time in the bathroom than men. No one benefits from design choices that ignore this fact. Lack of equity eventually hurts everyone, not just the people most immediately impacted.

One more example: I am a year-round commuter cyclist. While I have appreciated the incremental additions to roadways over the years for cyclists such as bike lanes and other signage, the fact remains that the entire roadway system was designed for cars. As a result, automobile drivers operate with significant privilege while cyclists remain systemically vulnerable.⁸⁴ Therefore, it’s not enough to work towards having equal numbers of bicycles and cars on the road because it’s not a level playing field to begin with. Automobile privilege would still exist. In order to meet fully the diverse needs of both, the fundamental structure of the system needs to be changed.

In the same way, it isn’t enough to work towards simply having equal numbers of women “at the table” in professions, organizations, or government. While equal numbers are a good start, once there, women need to be equally heard, too. It’s not just about equal numbers. It’s about equal power.

Hence, the goal should not just be equality but equity.

Feminism

When Emma Watson spoke at the UN in 2014 as a Global Goodwill Ambassador for Women, she lamented that “feminism has become an unpopular word,” “synonymous with man-hating.” She wondered, “Why is the word such an uncomfortable one?”⁸⁵

My sense is that a contributing factor is that different people have different conceptions of what the word means. On one extreme is the perspective that only those who have the lived experience of being a woman can be a feminist. From this point of view, “male feminist” is an oxymoron. I wouldn’t say that’s wrong. It’s one perspective. No matter how much I may learn about feminism, this perspective fuels a persistent imposter syndrome in me that I suspect will never fully go away.

In trying to understand what feminism means to me, over the years I collected other

⁸² Amy Sun, “*Equality Is Not Enough: What the Classroom Has Taught Me About Justice*,” September 16, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/equality-is-not-enough/>

⁸³ This example comes from the Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center, Jamaica Plain, MA.

⁸⁴ Jeremy Dowsett, “*What riding my bike has taught me about white privilege*,” August 29, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://qz.com/257474/what-riding-my-bike-has-taught-me-about-white-privilege/>

⁸⁵ Emma Watson, speech as UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador, United Nations Headquarters, New York, September 20, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too>

perspectives and definitions that felt useful. Here is a random sample:

- “[believing] that a woman has the right to live her life the way she wants to regardless of what society has to say about it...” — Katherine Borland
- “feminism = gender + power” — Cynthia Enloe
- “the movement to liberate democracy from patriarchy” — Carol Gilligan
- “Feminism [is] about making life more fair for women everywhere. It’s not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It’s about baking a new pie.” — Gloria Steinem
- “Feminism is about removing gender from the question of what people can do in society.” — the editors of *Bitch* magazine
- “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” — Merriam-Webster
- “Feminism is about having choices.” — Emma Watson
- “A feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes, there’s a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it. We must do better.’” — Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In reviewing these and other perspectives on feminism, I had two reactions. The first was: there is room in the world for more than one definition of feminism. My second reaction was that while I appreciated what each perspective added to my understanding, it still felt like there was something missing. I just couldn’t put my finger on what it was.

Then one day I visited the Schlesinger Library for the History of Women in America at Radcliffe. Hanging up on the wall were two framed silk-screened banners from the early 1970s that Radcliffe graduates had made to carry at graduation.



Figure 59: Two feminist logos that were on display at Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute.⁸⁶

While neither of these symbols was new to me, it was the first time I had seen them side-by-side. What did they mean?

The equal sign on the left seemed straight-forward enough. To me it symbolized the equality of women. Meanwhile, the raised fist on the right could mean protesting, fighting, female empowerment, or speaking truth to power. I also noted the equal sign below the raised fist. I had an inkling that, together, these two symbols had something to teach me, but I wasn't sure what.

It would only be many months later that it hit me: the equal sign is the goal; the raised fist is the method for achieving the goal. This is what was missing for me in those other definitions: making the 'how' explicit.

I reflected over the course of my life. What was I doing when I advocated for conducting a pilot survey at Yute Air? Would that qualify as a "feminist" act? Did it matter that I was a man and that there were no female pilots at the time? If there were women pilots at Yute someday, would it help them? I think it would. What was my goal of doing employee surveys at Yute, the Med Fly Project, and my department at NASA? I would say the goal was to give a voice to those who were not being heard, to prime the pump of feedback to those in power. What would be the right name for that role? A feminist? An "organizational CRM instructor"? A "pyramid hacker"?

What would be a working definition of feminism that would characterize both the goal and the method, that would be broad enough to include actions by a man in male-dominated environments as well as when the abusers are women acting as agents of patriarchy?

⁸⁶ On the left: White Fabric Featuring Woman Symbol Printed in Red with Equals Sign Enclosed. Radcliffe College Archives Memorabilia Collection, Hollis #olvwork596564. On the right: Amy Brodkey Papers, 1970-1972. Hollis #olvwork601147. Both are from the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute.

Taking all of that into account, here is my working definition of feminism. First, I see feminism as a stance, a mindset, a way of being in the world. For me, it is the stance of *interrogating the dynamics of power in social systems for the purpose of empowering the disempowered*.

As with my working definition of patriarchy, I am deliberately removing the explicit mention of gender. When you do this, it could be taken as a definition of social justice. And perhaps it is. But it works for me as guidance for being a feminist because if half the species lives in a disempowered state, then living this stance will result in empowering women.

Applying this stance will also further the cause of all disempowered groups. As Steinem and many others have pointed out, you can't separate feminism from how it intersects with other social movements, such as civil rights and gay rights, for example. The intention is that when the tide of equity rises, all boats of the disempowered will rise.⁸⁷ Because women are half the population all over the world, I see feminism as a primary focus of global action.

For the disempowered, feminism is about cultivating empowerment. For the privileged, feminism is about learning to act out of relationship rather than out of power.

Feminist Ally

How does one be an effective male feminist ally? A cursory investigation of self-proclaimed male feminists indicates a problematic track record.⁸⁸

In the exquisitely crafted 2018 documentary *RBG*, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg quotes 19th century abolitionist and women's suffrage activist Sarah Grimké: "I ask for no favor for my sex. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks."

Taking a cue from RBG, I would say that Rule #1 of being a male feminist ally is: don't assume you know what it means to be an ally. It's not up to men to answer the above question; it's up to women and members of the transgender community. But what I can do as a man is bother to ask, "How can I support you?"

Asking is important because support is highly contextual. The role a senior male partner at a male-dominated law firm can play in mentoring a female associate over many years is very different from a man joining the crowd at a Women's March. But what each has in common is trying to do our best to maintain awareness of providing support versus trying to control or rescue. In short, a man must go about the role of ally relationally, progressively checking-in about what is appropriate for them to do. And if the answer we receive to the above question is: "Go away and deconstruct your privilege," well, we should do that.

This role does not require having all the answers. Allies don't have to have the perfect thing to say or do. To make an effort, as some activists put it, "Forget your perfect offering."⁸⁹ There is no perfect offering. There are few easy answers. Just try, and calibrate your actions based on on-going feedback.

One way to provide support without needing to know what to say is to amplify the voices of those you're trying to support. While every context is different, one recent example has been

⁸⁷ For one example of the effect of more women being elected to political office see "*What Happens When Women Legislate*" by Brittany Bronson, *New York Times*, April 18, 2017, retrieved from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/opinion/what-happens-when-women-legislate.html>. For another example, listen to Johnetta Cole's comments on the unique role of Black women in U.S. politics, The Black Women's Agenda 43rd Symposium, September 18, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wygAG4k4gE>

⁸⁸ For example, see "*Is It Possible to Be a Male Feminist?*" by Jake Flanagan, *New York Times*, June 8, 2014. Retrieved from <https://op-talk.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/08/is-it-possible-to-be-a-male-feminist/>.

⁸⁹ Emma Watson Interviews Reni Eddo Lodge, Our Shared Shelf, Oct 15, 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwWCZL_OU5Y

celebrities allowing Black Lives Matter activists to use the celebrity’s social media accounts to address the celebrity’s fans directly.

The over-arching goal of an ally should be to work yourself out of job so that one day the women you are supporting no longer need your support.

Finally, the greatest frontier for male allies isn’t working with women at all. It’s working with other men to explore how feminism benefits them, too. In my experience, that’s where society is most stuck.⁹⁰

Gender and Ego

Ego is a loaded word. It can mean so many different things. It can be used in a put-down, such as “So-and-so has such a fragile ego!” “They’ve got such an ego!” has become a synonym for arrogant or self-absorbed. It can also have the psychoanalytic meaning from Freud. In short, the term can mean different things in different contexts.

In the previous diagram I made entitled “One Way of Thinking about the Development of ‘The Self’: The Self/Other Ratio” (Figure 57, p. 235), I defined ‘Self’ as simply how much a person is able to focus on their own needs versus the needs of others. I represented such growth as a spectrum from accommodating, to relating, to dominating.

When you looked at that diagram, did anything about gender come to mind?

It does for me.

The next diagram shows my intuition. Let me be clear that the shape and position of the bell curves in this diagram are non-scientific. However, there is data that hints at the gender ratios specifically at the end-points of the curves, and most clinicians I have shared this with feel it represents their lived experience.

Specifically, women have higher documented rates of post-traumatic stress.⁹¹ This supports the larger numbers of women on the extreme left side of the graph. On the other extreme, there are also gendered dynamics around narcissism and psychopathy. Fifty to 75% of those who meet the official diagnostic criteria of narcissism are male.⁹² For psychopathy, the anti-social behaviors typically displayed by psychopaths are much more common in men than in women.⁹³ The Hare Psychopathy Checklist is a standard psychopathy measure. Scoring 30 or above suggests that someone is a psychopath. The average score of men who are *not* psychopaths is 6 while the average score for women who are not psychopaths is only 3.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ For more on allyship, see “*Developing a Liberatory Consciousness*” by Barbara J. Love in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Maurianne Adams, Ed., et al. (2000), p. 470.

⁹¹ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, 5th ed. (2013), p. 278.

⁹² DSM 5, p. 671.

⁹³ DSM 5, p. 662. Robert D. Hare, PhD, “*Psychopathy and Antisocial Personality Disorder: A Case of Diagnostic Confusion*,” *Psychiatric Times*, February 1, 1996. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychiatrytimes.com/view/psychopathy-and-antisocial-personality-disorder-case-diagnostic-confusion>.

⁹⁴ *Understanding the Psychology of Offenders and Victim-Perpetrator Dynamics: The Importance to Clinicians and Clinical Work with Victims*, Anna Salter, PhD, New England Society for the Treatment of Trauma and Dissociation (NESTTD), Lexington, MA, September 23, 2017.

My Lived Experience of Gender and Ego

Here ego is defined simply as "sense of self", how much a person spends thinking about their own needs versus the needs of others.

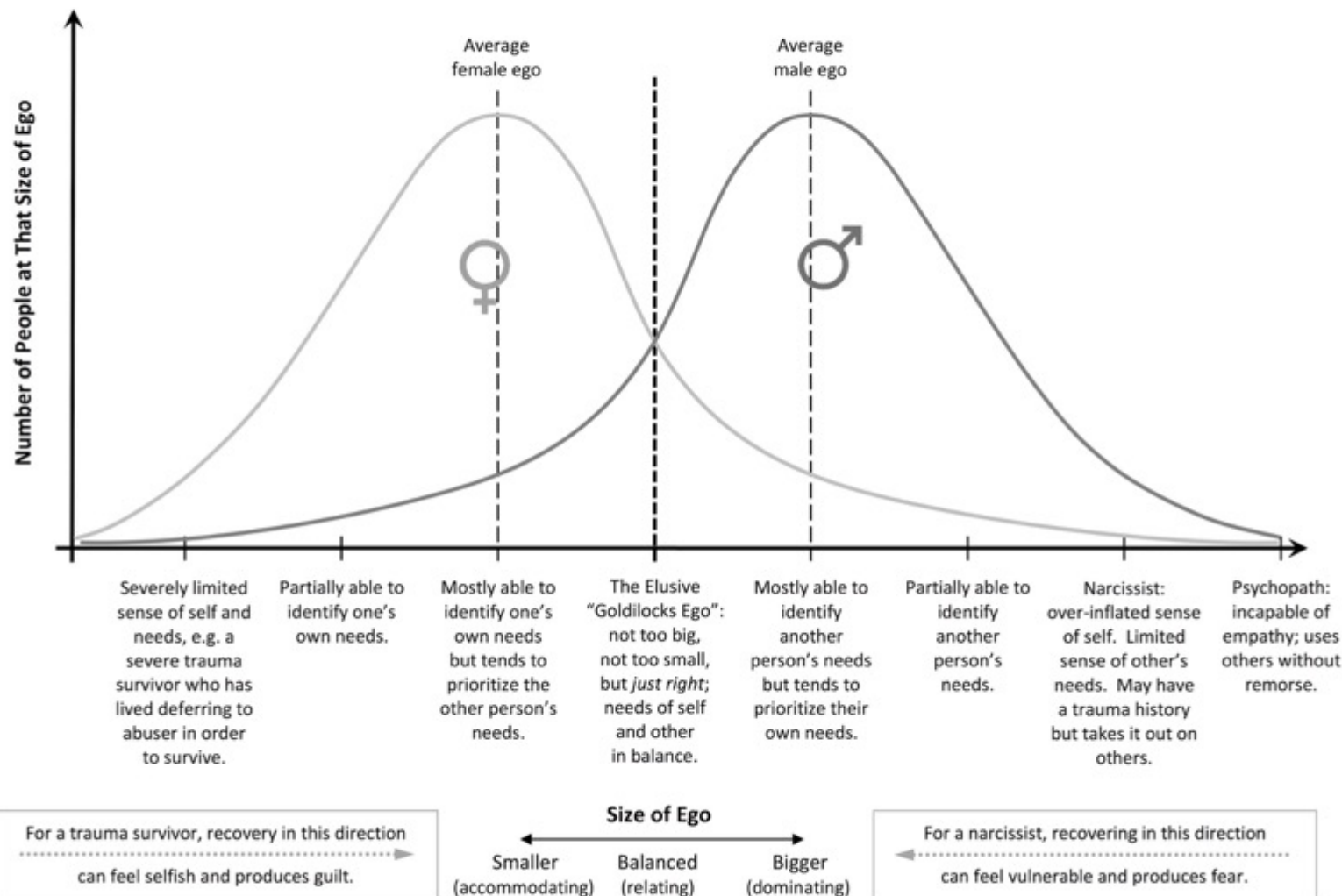


Figure 60: My experience of the relationship between gender and ego. The curve on the left represents the distribution of ego size among women with their average at just to the left of center. The curve on the right represents the distribution of ego size among men with the average at just to the right of center.

It is my experience that men, on average, as a group, have bigger egos than women. I see this as a contributing factor to why society meets men's needs at the expense of women's needs. Meanwhile, I do not believe these dynamics are in any way innate to either gender.

Another source of data that comes to mind when looking at this graph are the well-documented dynamics of boys and girls in math classrooms. As girls reach puberty, they become more self-conscious of their behavior in front of boys. Typically, they reduce their interactions in class, which hurts their academic performance. As a result, girls do better in single-sex math classes, while boys do better in co-ed classes. Needless to say, this presents a paradox for designing the ideal educational experience for all. Now scale-up these dynamics from a classroom to an entire country. I see comparable dynamics at-play.

This graph also brings to mind linguist Deborah Tannen's observations of gender differences in speaking styles. Tannen characterizes women as having a preference for what she calls private speaking or "rapport-talk" while men have a preference for public speaking or "report-talk":

For most women, the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships. Emphasis is placed on displaying similarities and matching experiences. From childhood, girls criticize peers who try to stand out or appear better than others. People feel their closest connections at home, or in settings where they feel at home—with one or a few people they feel close to and comfortable with—in other words, during private speaking. But even the most public situations can be approached like private speaking.

For most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance such as storytelling, joking, or imparting information. From childhood, men learn to use talking as a way to get and keep attention. So they are more comfortable speaking in larger groups made up of people they know less well—in the broadest sense, "public speaking." But even the most private situations can be approached like public speaking, more like giving a report than establishing rapport.⁹⁵

Tannen then offers the following anecdote about a straight couple she calls Stuart and Rebecca:

...at a meeting of the neighborhood council or the parents' association at their children's school, it is Stuart who stands up and speaks. In that situation, it is Rebecca who is silent, her tongue tied by an acute awareness of all the negative reactions people could have to what she might say, all the mistakes she might make in trying to express her ideas. If she musters her courage and prepares to say something, she needs time to formulate it and then waits to be recognized by the chair. She cannot just jump up and start talking the way Stuart and some other men can.

What's not in this anecdote is exploring *why* Rebecca behaves this way. My sense is that she learned to take a step back from public speaking as a result of the ways that patriarchal culture made her feel punished when she did assert herself. As a result, I don't see these gender differences as inherent; they're learned.

⁹⁵ Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, (Ballantine Books, 1990), pp. 77, 87.

Retrieved from: <https://the-eye.eu/public/WorldTracker.org/College%20Books/Seeing%20Ourselves/Chapter24.pdf>

Most of democracy happens in public speaking. As long as male voices dominate, women's needs will be marginalized.

Perhaps 'ego' isn't the right word for this discussion. I am open to suggestions. But regardless of what word we use, I feel the dynamics of imbalance are real.

Narcissism

As long as narcissism appears on the chart above and is a word that often shows-up in these conversations, it feels useful to pause and examine it.

In the original Greek myth, Narcissus fell in love with his reflection in the water and was so taken by it that he could never leave it.⁹⁶ A subtle point is that Narcissus didn't fall in love with himself; he fell in love with the *image* of himself.⁹⁷ The central compulsion of a narcissist is not cultivating an ideal self. It is cultivating an idealized *image* of themselves, not just for others but for themselves.

The following are the official diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder from the American Psychiatric Association:

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

1. Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).
2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
3. Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions).
4. Requires excessive admiration.
5. Has a sense of entitlement (i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations).
6. Is interpersonally exploitative (i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends).
7. Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.
8. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.
9. Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.⁹⁸

These criteria make clear why having a narcissist in power is extremely dangerous. If you cultivate the belief that you are superior to others, you are also cultivating the belief that others are inferior to you. The result is justification for abusing them. And while certainly predisposed to abuse, the longer-lasting damage of a narcissistic leader comes from making poor decisions, decisions not based on reality but on what promotes a more idealized self-image.

A central skill of complex decision-making is perspective-taking: continuously cultivating learning about multiple facets of any given situation on an on-going basis. Narcissists are biased towards blocking out any perspective that would make them look anything less than ideal.

In this way, narcissism is a learning disability.

⁹⁶ Edith Hamilton (1942). *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, pp. 114-115.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Kilpatrick. "A psychoanalytic understanding of suicide." *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 8:13-23, 1948. For more geeking-out on narcissism see: Nancy McWilliams (2011). *Psychoanalytic diagnosis: Understanding Personality Structure in the Clinical Process, 2nd Edition*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 176-192; and Arnold H. Modell (1975). *A Narcissistic Defense Against Affects and the Illusion of Self-Sufficiency*. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 56:275-282.

⁹⁸ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed.* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), pp. 669-670.

Why I'm a Feminist

As I see it, there are three major components of society: 1) men, 2) not men (women and transgender individuals), and 3) social systems, including organizational and societal structures, laws, and culture. The primary structure of society is patriarchy. In a patriarchy, individual behavior is biased towards increasing social status. A common strategy for doing so is being a sycophant to those above you in the hierarchy. Unfortunately, this has the effect of stifling honest feedback to decision-makers. Meanwhile, power-hoarding behaviors nudge decision-makers to be more authoritarian than consultative, further increasing the probability of poor decisions. In this way, patriarchy stifles the formation of a “loyal opposition”, encouraging group-think.

Meanwhile, patriarchy is also traumatizing to those without power. As I've learned, male trauma survivors tend to act-out, taking their pain out on others, while female trauma survivors tend to act-in, taking their pain out on themselves. Hurt people ... hurt people. This is why so many perpetrators feel like victims. To a large degree, we treat other people the way we treat ourselves. The result is to set-up the very same dynamic in the next generation, there-by perpetuating a gendered power imbalance.

The overall affect is that society makes bad choices, and abuse perpetuates the system.

One purpose of this memoir is to unmask trauma as a significant contributing factor in the perpetuation of patriarchy. And just how prevalent is trauma in contemporary American society?

In the late 1990s, over 17,000 mostly middle-class adults in Southern California were asked if they had experienced a wide range of “adverse events” before the age of 18.⁹⁹ In this study adverse events included: physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; losing a parent to divorce; living with a parent who abused alcohol or drugs; or having a family member in prison, among others. The researchers were stunned to discover that an astounding 64% had experienced at least one adverse event during their childhoods. Even more disturbingly, they found a direct relationship between the number of adverse events experienced and risk of disease and early death. For example, if an individual had four adverse events, they had twice the risk of cancer and heart disease. If they had six adverse events, they had a startling 20 years lower life expectancy.

These statistics are even more disturbing when you consider that the people in this study were generally well-off. Marginalized and economically disadvantaged people all over the world are likely to have far worse trauma histories. The implication is that most people in the world are trauma survivors—yet we act like they are an aberration. The reality is that trauma is pervasive, and its impact is substantial. Meanwhile, shame keeps the truth of this prevalence hidden. *This needs to change.* A first step in reducing how much trauma there is in the world is telling the truth about much there is.

Seeing the world through a trauma lens changes how you are in the world. You begin to see the schoolyard bully as wounded. That doesn't mean you become a doormat. You can still set healthy boundaries with the bully. But you do so from a place of deeper insight into his behavior that fosters compassion—in more than just playgrounds. Patriarchs can be among the most wounded of all.

The healing of patriarchy requires individual healing. The up side is that with the right support in trauma recovery, suffering can be a gateway to compassion, creating a cycle of healing rather than harm.

When pain heals, it becomes a resource.

⁹⁹ More widely known at the ACE (Adverse Childhood Events) Study, an excellent five-minute video summary of the study is here: <https://vimeo.com/139998006>. Another summary is here: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/about.html>. An extensive website about the study, its impact, subsequent research and additional resources is here: <https://acestoohigh.com>. The initial paper is: Filetti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., et al. (1998). “*Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults.*” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258. Available at [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8/abstract](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(98)00017-8/abstract).

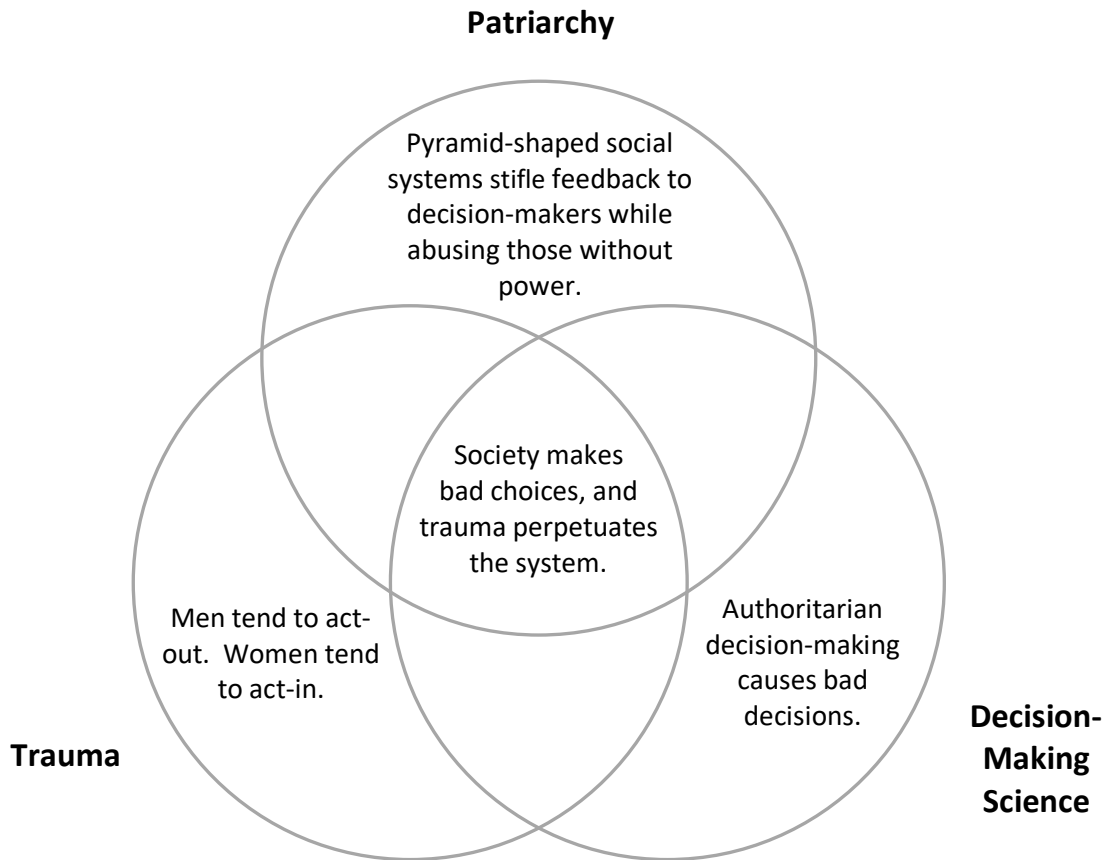


Figure 61: Why I'm a feminist.

It's worth taking a moment to reflect on the sequence of life experiences I have had that led me to these conclusions. They are far from linear:

1. Growing-up with an abusive patriarch.
2. Attending an abusive all-boys school for twelve years.
3. Taking a Women's Studies class in college.
4. Living in other countries and seeing that culture is arbitrary; gender is a construction.
5. Learning about Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) as an antidote to unhealthy power dynamics in the cockpit.
6. As a result of seeing the world from the air as a pilot, being encouraged to take a systemic view of social systems and witnessing the footprint of man.
7. Experiencing unhealthy power dynamics in multiple organizations across multiple professions.
8. Learning about trauma treatment and recovery.
9. As a trauma therapist witnessing the systemic abuse of women in society.
10. Coming to understand the systemic nature of gender and power dynamics in society, a.k.a. patriarchy.
11. Seeing feminism as the antidote to unhealthy power dynamics in society.

I confess that in my 20's when I first heard Margaret Mead's famous quotation, "Every time we liberate a woman, we liberate a man", I found it a stretch. But I don't anymore. Emma Watson put it simply: "If men don't have to be aggressive in order to be accepted, women won't feel compelled to be submissive."¹⁰⁰ More broadly, Steinem has observed that the largest threat to climate change is the birth of new humans. Achieving gender equity would therefore not only reduce domestic violence thereby reducing global violence. It would also allow women to control reproduction, thereby reducing over-population, thereby reducing climate change.¹⁰¹ I now understand that feminism isn't just about helping women; it's about recalibrating our species to be sustainable. The reduction of war, domestic violence, overpopulation, and climate change are all by-products of one goal: gender equity.¹⁰²

To make this conclusion unequivocal, the 2020 book, *The First Political Order*, is an exhaustive empirical analysis of 176 countries, representing every continent, region, religion, and race, as well as a wide variety of ethnic identities. The authors conclude:

This research tells us something very important—the subordination of women is not an idiosyncratic cultural or religious or regional phenomenon. Rather, it is a universal political order—a first sexual political order—that exists prior to and molds what we perceive to be cultural and religious differences between countries and regions

The true clash of civilizations is not West versus East, or North versus South: the true clash is subordination of women versus nonsubordination of women as the first political order upon which a civilization is built. That clash is occurring within nations just as much as it is between nations. In a sense, it is a great test given to each and every people—to choose security, stability, prosperity, health, and resilience or to choose the sequelae of male dominance that offer the opposite.¹⁰³

The decades of empirical evidence is there. The policy research is there. All that's missing is the public consciousness of gender equity's central nature and the political will to make it a reality.

Imagine your organization, community, country, or even all of humanity as an airliner. Regardless of who is in the cockpit, how do we want them to be making decisions? When airline captains don't listen to copilots; when mission managers don't listen to engineers; when corporate managers don't listen to employees; when husbands don't listen to wives; when politicians don't listen to citizens—airliners, space shuttles, organizations, families, and societies crash.

Feminism does for our species what CRM has done for aviation.

¹⁰⁰ Emma Watson, speech as UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador, United Nations Headquarters, New York, September 20, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too>

¹⁰¹ Gloria Steinem and Emma Watson in Conversation, How to: Academy, London, February 24, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm6ESsMlvYE>. Also see a transcript here: <https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/18213974-en-el-it-pt-nl-emma-watson-gloria-steinem-in-conversation>

¹⁰² For my elaboration on this, see "Women's Empowerment → Humanity's Well-Being", *Fourth Wave*, medium.com, November 6, 2019.

¹⁰³ Hudson, Valerie M., Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen. *The First Political Order. How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide*, (Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 347.

In May of 1970, Gloria Steinem testified before the U.S. Senate on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. This is how she concluded her testimony:

Women are not more moral than men. We are only uncorrupted by power. But we do not want to imitate men, to join this country as it is, and I think our very participation will change it. Perhaps women elected leaders—and there will be many more of them—will not be so likely to dominate black people or yellow people or men; anybody who looks different from us.

After all, we won't have our masculinity to prove.¹⁰⁴

The Earth

If narcissism is a learning disability for an individual, then patriarchy is a learning disability for society. The result is social systems that react to dissenting opinions with control rather than curiosity. I see this as the central cause of why humanity has been so slow to react to climate change. Patriarchy is the Earth's abusive spouse, and she's been screaming in pain for decades. She just doesn't speak in words; she speaks in rising carbon levels, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, diminishing biodiversity, and increasingly volatile weather patterns.

It's common to fold civil rights and gay rights into conversations about intersectional feminism. I don't always hear the environment being put on equal footing.

Every time we turn the key in the ignition of our cars, we are exercising carbon privilege. Every time we fly on an airliner, we are exercising carbon privilege. In my own life, in order to see that privilege and fully understand the scale of impact our species is having on our delicate interconnected planet I had to personally witness: bioluminescent plankton; the northern lights; musk ox huddling for survival; melt ponds dotting the surface of massive glaciers like holes in Swiss cheese; the recession of those same glaciers over the last several decades; the impact of manufacturing the 250 square miles of Lake Meade from building the Boulder Dam; practicing seeing the planet through astronauts' eyes; and engaging in climate change education for two-and-a-half years. More than any other experience in my life, my work with Al Gore's Climate Project¹⁰⁵ instilled in me a "species mentality," that is, approaching problem-solving from the perspective of our species as a whole. In short, it didn't happen overnight.

If we want our planetary partner to have equal rights, we need far-reaching interventions to make up for our recent history, interventions on the scale of what it took to mobilize our nation for World War II. What would real progress look like? When elected officials are willing to make public transportation free by increasing taxes on gasoline and carbon emissions, we will be making real progress. When we are willing to phase out internal combustion engines by instituting a government buy-back program to replace them with alternative forms of propulsion, we will be making real progress. When corporations and retail stores commit to selling only carbon-neutral products and services, we will be making real progress. When building exteriors are made of photovoltaics so that structures are not only off the grid but become their own grid, we will be making real progress.

I don't believe you can be a feminist without being some kind of environmentalist, and I don't see how you could be an environmentalist without being some kind of feminist. They are inextricably linked.

The Earth is a trauma survivor, too.

¹⁰⁴ Gloria Steinem, Testimony Before Senate Hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment, May 6, 1970. Retrieved from: <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/steinem-testimony-speech-text/>

¹⁰⁵ Mentioned on page 181.

Shame and Change

When I began to understand my White, male, class, economic and carbon privileges, I experienced shame and guilt for realizing I was a member of a group that has hurt others. I have a growing sense that working through these issues cannot be shameless.

There are multiple perspectives on how to define shame and whether it can ever be a productive emotion or whether it is inherently unhealthy. I define shame, and its close cousin, guilt, in the following way. I see guilt as the emotion we feel when *we* know we've done something wrong. I see shame as the emotion we feel when *other people* know we've done something wrong. It includes the fear of being found out and cast out by others. It is the opposite of a sense of belonging, acceptance, and dignity.

Guilt is when we feel we've let-down ourselves. Shame is when we feel we've let-down our tribe.

One can make the case that shame has an adaptive function. When we lived in hunter-gatherer clans out on the savanna, being alone could be fatal. I have come to see shame as the border collie of emotions, constantly trying to shepherd us back to the herd.¹⁰⁶

Shame plays a central role in trauma and trauma recovery. Trauma pioneer Judith Herman advocates that trauma should actually be viewed as a shame disorder rather than as a stress disorder.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, shame is such a powerful emotion that most people are even ashamed ... to talk about shame! After all, one of the most potent ways parents and society teach us what to be ashamed of is by what they *don't* talk about. Since trauma is typically avoided as a topic of conversation, when someone experiences trauma, they think they're the only one. Feeling you're the only one is a one-way express ticket to shame—completely independent of who is at fault.

Silence is the Grand Wizard of shame.¹⁰⁸

I have come to see human beings as “shame-avoidance machines”. My sense is that most of us make hundreds of decisions a day to avoid experiencing shame. “Should I say such-and-such?” “Should I wear such-and-such?” As we weigh the options, we typically reject the choices that risk shame.

When you challenge an alcoholic for the first time about their drinking, their likely denial is shame-avoidance. If and when they do achieve sobriety, working through the shame of having hurt others during their addiction is a critical part of sustaining recovery. When my father “psycho-analytically forgot” that he had ever hit me, I see that as shame-avoidance. When I mention to friends who eat red meat that I no longer do because cows contribute disproportionately to climate change, their desire to change the subject is shame-avoidance. In the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore explains the denial of petroleum executives to own their contributions to climate change by quoting Upton Sinclair: “It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.” I see the central force behind such deep-seated denial as shame-avoidance.

When I look back on my life, there were multiple moments when I felt like a failure. At the time, those moments appeared to be caused by not meeting a professional goal I had set for myself. But when I re-examine those moments today, I can see that universally they also included the experience of abruptly losing my adopted family of the moment. Feeling cast-out produces shame. If I had had enough emotional literacy to see the role that shame was playing in those situations, I

¹⁰⁶ For more on my perspective on guilt and shame in trauma recovery, see *Peter's Psycho-Ed Handouts Client Handouts and Therapist Resources for Trauma, EMDR, and General Psychotherapy*, 2020, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Judith Lewis Herman, M.D. “*Shattered Shame States and their Repair*,” The John Bowlby Memorial Lecture, Saturday March 10, 2007. Retrieved from: <http://www.challiance.org/Resource.ashx?sn=VOVShattered20ShameJHerman>

¹⁰⁸ For one extraordinarily eloquent examination of the relationship between silence and shame, see Lacy Crawford's *Notes on a Silencing: A Memoir* (2020).

would have better understood why I felt the way I did as a step towards healing.

A large part of psychotherapy is simply making the implicit, explicit. Once you have a name for something, it can be recognized, talked about, and managed. If I could have said in those moments, “Gee, I just lost my sense of family. This is going to cause feelings of shame,” then I would have been able to see the shame as a temporary feeling that would eventually pass just like any other. Being able to name shame allows for the experience to be seen merely as a temporary state, rather than a permanent trait. Instead, unable to discern the shame, I just felt defective.

I see social movements as trauma recovery for society. They occur when a social group is being traumatized. Before the movement forms, people in the group suffer in silence and shame, feeling hopeless and that they are the only ones. The forming of the movement is a process of people realizing they are not the only ones. Normalizing their experience is the first step of being able to move past their shame. Meanwhile, for those of privilege who have a conscience, if they ever reach a point of recovery themselves, they must also work through the shame of their role as contributors to the system.

Shame is everywhere.

There’s another way in which I think social movements inevitably cause shame. If society is changing, it is inevitable that there will come a moment when you are doing something differently than most people. Whether you are a so-called “early adopter” of the change, or someone who moved with the majority of the herd, or a late adopter, at some point you will likely look around you and see people you know doing something differently than you. And those people will see you behaving, differently, too.

Feeling “othered” produces shame.

As a result, I see shame as unavoidable in both individual trauma recovery as well as social movements. But if we can name these dynamics in advance, it makes the inevitable experiences of shame manageable, both for whatever shame we may experience ourselves, as well as generating compassion for others who are experiencing shame for the first time.¹⁰⁹

As powerful as it is, shame is no match for a sense of belonging, acceptance, and dignity.

Hope

In spite of there being so much pain in the world, signs of hope are everywhere. As Steinem has wryly observed, one of the benefits of getting older is that “you remember when things were worse.”¹¹⁰

Let’s start with a model patriarchy: aviation.

On January 15, 2009, just after take-off from New York’s LaGuardia Airport, U.S. Airways Flight 1549 flew through a flock of geese, causing an unprecedented dual-engine failure. Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger took the controls over one of the most densely populated areas in the world and guided the aircraft toward the only space within gliding distance large enough to accommodate a forced landing of an airliner: the Hudson River. There were no fatalities and astoundingly few serious injuries among the 155 souls on board.

While his flying skills and cool head were the focus of his well-deserved adoration, Captain Sullenberger did something else, that to me, is even more heroic: with only *twenty seconds* before impact,

¹⁰⁹ For the only humorous exploration of shame and personal change I know of, see actress and writer Aidy Bryant’s brilliant critique of unequal pay in Hollywood, January 13, 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdemUBW59BI>. The world would be a better place if there were more Aidy Bryants in it.

¹¹⁰ Gloria Steinem, Women’s March Speech, Washington D.C., January 21, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/news/a20118/gloria-steinem-womens-march-speech/>

he asked his copilot a truly miraculous question: “Got any ideas?”¹¹¹

Setting aside how many of us would have the presence of mind to ask a subordinate what they thought during possibly the highest-stakes moment of our lives, this simple question is in stark contrast to the hurry-up-and-go behavior of the Chief Pilot of KLM who caused the worst accident in history in 1977, mentioned previously.¹¹² In the thirty-two years between these two accidents there has been an extraordinary cultural shift among flight crews towards asking for input as Captain Sullenberger deftly modeled.

If the historically male bastion of aviation is capable of such a sea-change, what else is possible?

Continuing in aviation, Quantas, the national airline of Australia, has famously never had a jetliner fatality. Some attribute this remarkable safety record to the anti-authoritarian Australian cultural value that would encourage Captains to try to be “just one of the boys” with their copilots, while simultaneously encouraging copilots to be less afraid to speak their minds. Social scientists describe this as low “power distance” between crew members, encouraging more open communication. The result is that “Australians argue with their superiors while at the same time respecting them.”¹¹³

In other operational environments¹¹⁴: Harvard Business School Professor Robin Ely has spent a remarkable career researching gender dynamics in organizations. Her extraordinary paper, *Unmasking Manly Men: The Organizational Reconstruction of Men’s Identity*, describes the experiences of men living and working in an environment of archetypal masculinity: oil rigs. Yet, these rigs successfully implemented their own version of CRM (Cockpit Resource Management), creating a culture in which:

... workers engage in mutual expressions of vulnerability: they acknowledged their physical limitations, learned from their mistakes, and attended to their own and others’ emotions. As a result, these men expressed a broader repertoire of personal qualities, including qualities that run counter to conventionally masculine scripts. Our findings point to the mutability of masculine identity as a social status achievement and to how organizations can disrupt such tendencies and stand to gain in the process.¹¹⁵

But the most compelling detail for me in Ely’s research was reading that the female graduate student who did the fieldwork for this article, who actually lived and worked on these oil rigs for four weeks, reported being consistently treated by the men with nothing but respect.

It really is possible.

In the world of business: Recently two of the local drug store chains in my neighborhood stopped selling cigarettes. One reported that they made this change because they saw themselves as a healthcare company and that selling cigarettes was therefore contrary to their values. This choice strikes me as shockingly “un-patriarchal”. Surely, these organizations lost money in the short-run for this decision. Surely, there were “bean-counters” within the organization who objected.

How did that happen?

In raising boys: The Maine school system collaborates with a non-profit called Maine Boys to

¹¹¹ He didn’t. Read the full cockpit transcript at <https://www.tailstrike.com/150109.htm>

¹¹² See p. 122.

¹¹³ David Beaty (1995). *Naked Pilot: The Human Factor in Aircraft Accidents*. p. 244.

¹¹⁴ An operational environment, such as firefighting or an operating room, I define as: an environment where the laws of physics are in-play, decisions must be made in real-time with incomplete information, and where the cost for a wrong decision is severe injury or death. By this definition, solo rock climbing is an operational environment while the trading floor of a stock exchange—however stressful—is not.

¹¹⁵ From the abstract of: Ely, Robin J., Debra E. Meyerson (August, 2006). “*Unmasking Manly Men: The Organizational Reconstruction of Men’s Identity*,” *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 2006(1). Their final paper: Ely, Robin J., Meyerson, Debra E. (2010). “*An Organizational Approach to Undoing Gender: The Unlikely Case of Offshore Oil Platforms*.” *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30:3–34.

Men to implement programs such as Reducing Sexism and Violence. The Maine Boys to Men website states:

The Mission of Maine Boys to Men is to reduce interpersonal violence, specifically male violence against women and girls, and support the development of emotionally fluent, civically-engaged boys.

Boys to Men addresses the development of boys in the context of their relationships, socialization process, and cultural environments. Boys are bombarded by narrow, confusing, and often destructive messages about masculinity beginning at very early ages. We believe it is not the boys, but rather the culture in which they live and grow, that is in need of repair. While holding boys and men to a higher degree of individual accountability, we also put an appropriate level of focus on the environment—families, schools, community organizations, and peer culture—as the key agents of change in the lives of boys.¹¹⁶

In raising girls: When Alice Paul Tapper was nine years old, she noticed that she and other girls in her school were raising their hands in class less than the boys. When she mentioned this to her mother, she encouraged Alice to bring this up with her Girl Scout troop. The other Girl Scouts had noticed the same thing in their schools and said they didn't raise their hands because they were afraid of being wrong. To change this dynamic, in collaboration with the Girl Scouts Alice helped create a Raise Your Hand merit badge. She was later invited to write a *New York Times* editorial and a book by the same name as the merit badge.¹¹⁷

But it's the story *behind* this story that I think needs to be told even more. What were the pre-conditions that led Alice to do all that?

When Alice's mother first met Alice's father and found out that his middle name was Paul, she promised herself that if she married him and they had a daughter, she would name her daughter after Alice Stokes Paul (1885-1977).¹¹⁸ Raised in the Quaker tradition that each person has a duty to make the world a better place, Paul was a suffragist and life-long women's rights activist. She was instrumental in: fighting for women's right to vote; co-authoring the Equal Rights Amendment; and successfully advocating for women's rights to be a part of both the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Alice Paul Tapper was raised to know who her namesake was and what she stood for. The point is, young Alice didn't just show-up in class one day and have an idea out of the blue. Alice was raised to believe that women deserve equality, to question why things are the way they are, and that with the right collaboration and support, change is possible.

In the media: In 2017 *The New York Times* saw fit to create the position of a full-time gender editor, Jessica Bennett, whose purpose is "working to expand global coverage of women, gender and society across platforms."¹¹⁹

Internationally: Since 1993, the non-profit Women for Women International (WfWI) has helped more than 478,000 marginalized women affected by war and conflict. They currently work in

¹¹⁶ Retrieved from: <http://www.maineboystomen.org/about.php>. For more on why this might be important, see Peggy Orenstein's "*The Miseducation of the American Boy*", *The Atlantic*, January/February 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/01/the-miseducation-of-the-american-boy/603046/>

¹¹⁷ See: Alice Paul Tapper, "*I'm 10. And I Want Girls to Raise Their Hands*", *New York Times*, October, 31, 2017 and <http://www.gscnc.org/raiseyourhand>.

¹¹⁸ I confess I had never heard of Paul until I read Alice Paul Tapper's story. For more on Paul see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Paul, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/alice-paul> and <https://www.alicepaul.org/who-was-alice-paul/>. The 2004 film *Iron Jawed Angels* is also about Paul.

¹¹⁹ See some of Bennett's articles here: <https://www.nytimes.com/by/jessica-bennett>

nine countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Sudan.¹²⁰ Using local staff combined with a long-term approach, their programs empower women to: earn and save money with business skills; improve their health and well-being; influence decisions in their home and community; and connect with local networks of other women for on-going support.

But Women for Women International doesn't just work with women.

In direct response to requests from their women participants, in 2002 WfWI piloted a Men's Engagement Program in Nigeria. Since then, their local train-the-trainer approach has reached nearly 26,000 men in six countries focusing on the following topics: women's rights under national and international law; violence against women and how to prevent it; the value of women's work and girls' education; and reproductive health and family planning. The program also provides a space for men to discuss other community issues related to these topics. As one program director put it, "Originally, the men never wanted to see the women more empowered than they were. They would disrupt what the women would be doing. They used to convince the women not to go [to the program]. Now they are working together."

To bring lasting change in gender norms and inequality, it wasn't enough to work only with women. They also had to support men in engaging as allies and advocates for gender equality. WfWI's experience is that the more men they engage, the more women receive the support to become—and remain—empowered while also creating an environment that supports gender equality.¹²¹

In considering the role hope plays in our collective future, it feels fitting to quote here from British journalist and feminist author Caitlyn Moran:

... the future is a propaganda war. ... we are choosing whether we're going to be pessimistic or optimistic about the future. And the way that the news media is set up at the moment and the tone that social media has—these two incredibly powerful places where we have all our conversations and where we go, "What's the world like today? I'll look at the news, and I'll go on social media." That's what the world is now. And the tone of both those places is incredibly pessimistic. It's only showing us problems. It's only showing us things when they've tipped over, and it seems like they can't be solved anymore. And people's reaction to that is necessarily one of being completely overwhelmed ... but that's where you realize that ... on a day-to-day basis one of the greatest things that you can do to the continuation of our species and making the world a better place is to be optimistic, is to not believe in that. Because ... if we all thought that everything was going to get better, then things would get better If at the point where you just become, "Oh no, it's just too exhausting. I can't do anything about it," *that* is where we lose the war.

... there's a brilliant lyric by the band *The Divine Comedy*: "Fate doesn't hang on a wrong or right choice / Fate just depends on the tone of your voice." And that is so key, because you know, if you make mistakes in your life, ... decisions that you make won't ruin your life. But if your *tone* all the way through is one of unhappiness or anger or if you're an unpleasant person, that will dictate your life. And it's the same with our species. We can make all these mistakes, but if our general tone is one of "We're together in this; we're going to make things better," then that is what will happen.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Outreach*, Women for Women International, Spring, 2019 and <https://www.womenforwomen.org>. A short video about WfWI is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz2VY56wt70>

¹²¹ For more on this see the section "*Involve Men in Your Initiative*" in *Sex and World Peace* by Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad Emmett (2014), pp. 177-180.

¹²² Emma Watson & Caitlin Moran - In Conversation for Our Shared Shelf, May 6, 2016. Retrieved from:

The Feedback Loop Perspective

This book is not trying to provide all the answers. It's a conversation-starter. But as I reflect on my life, one major principle seems to be important to emphasize to fan these embers of hope: the feedback loop perspective.

It is a Law of Nature that all systems are governed by feedback. All systems are governed, regulated, calibrated, optimized by feedback. For example, the human body is the most elegant system I know. As you read this, your body is giving you feedback on a myriad of needs: whether you've had enough sleep, enough to eat, enough socializing, enough alone-time. You can try to ignore such feedback for some period of time, but, eventually, it will catch-up with you. Meanwhile, simultaneously, thousands more bio-chemical feedback loops are continuously regulating the body's multiple sub-systems and processes, such as heart rate and digestion, completely outside of our conscious awareness.

Social systems work under the same principle. A retail store gets feedback on how it is doing from how many items it sells. A company gets feedback on how good a place to work it is from employee turnover. A politician gets feedback from how many votes they receive. A social movement gets feedback, at least in part, from how many people attend its events. No amount of power can change this basic law. The most power can do is to delay feedback until it gets too loud to ignore.

This brings up a second principle of feedback: the more frequent the feedback, the more efficient the system. For example, imagine sailing a sailboat towards an island on the horizon. If you keep your eye on the island all the time, you will make many small steering corrections, resulting in a fairly straight path through the water to the island. But if you spend most of your time looking at your phone, looking up at the island only occasionally, you will end up making much larger, more infrequent corrections, resulting in a zig-zag path that will be far more inefficient.¹²³

This is true of human systems, too. Consider a marriage where the couple only talks about their relationship when things have reached a crisis. They may end up in couple's therapy or divorce. Compare this with a relationship where the couple has a scheduled "date night" once a month or the couple who has a brief check-in every evening at the end of the day. On-going feedback helps to both detect problems early so they can be addressed before they become unmanageable, as well as identify what's working so that it can be strengthened.

Health is free-flowing, continuous feedback. The less frequent the feedback—whether in a relationship, an organization, or an entire society—the larger and more painful the corrections. The more frequent the feedback, the smaller and less painful the corrections.

One way to prime the pump of feedback in any social system is to ask the question, "What are the dynamics of power in this moment?" This single question is short-hand for four follow-up questions:

1. Who has power?
2. Who doesn't?
3. Why?
4. How can this be changed?¹²⁴

The generic nature of these questions allow for exploring how different kinds of power may intersect, such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, social status, wealth, or ability. Whether asked out-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CynzW9Kz7Ds>. Transcript retrieved from:

<https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/18191682-en-es-it-nl-af-pt-caitlin-moran-emma-watson-transcriptions-clips-1>
¹²³ For this example as well as many of the concepts in this section I am indebted to the generosity of Richard Karash and his Systems Thinking Development Program, hosted at the Society for Organizational Learning in 2006.

¹²⁴ Marissa Conway, *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy*, The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, May 11, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqYCCMMJtUJI>

loud or silently to one-self, the answers can serve as a starting point for generating systemic feedback. As a result, I see asking such questions on a regular basis as fanning the embers of progress in the pursuit of gender equity.

And in progress there is hope.

Both/And

Human beings are complicated. Gender is complicated. The more I think about what needs to happen in society, the more I run into paradoxes that seem best answered with “both/and”.

Recently I was in a social situation where I mentioned to a group of women that I identified as a feminist. As the conversation continued, the woman on my left summarized her reaction to feminism by saying, “Women need to step-up!”

Hearing this, the woman on my right bristled, her spine stiffened, and she said with exasperation, “Some women have been abused!”

As a man who cares about these issues, what should my role be in such a moment? What, if anything, should I say?

I elected to say nothing and listen. Before it could escalate, our host called us to lunch.

I confess I experience a special kind of sadness when I see women activate each other in such a way. I wonder: does it have to be that way?

In the above example, I would be inclined to respond to each woman with something like, “I’m curious, what makes you think that?” But it’s hard to be curious when you’re in pain.

I think about the contrasting reactions I have to a close friend saying something I strongly disagree with, versus someone I’ve just met. When the friend says something surprising, I have the context of many years to compare their comment to. In contrast, if I’ve just met you, what you’ve just said tends to define all of who you are to me, hence it’s much easier to be dismissive of the entire person.

The word *respect* comes from the prefix *re-*, meaning *again* (as in re-do, re-write, re-wind) combined with the Latin, *spectare*, meaning to look, the same root as *spectator*. To *re-spect* someone, therefore, literally, is *to look again*, the implication being that they are worth looking at again.

As I see it, sustainable progress will require all three components of society—men, not men, and social systems—to change. There may be some situations in which women can “step-up”, such as the school board meeting that Deborah Tannen wrote about (supported by Linda Babcock’s research on women’s reluctance to ask), but such actions won’t produce any lasting effect unless the other two components change, as well. Perhaps a more complete answer would be: men need to take a step back, women need to step-up, and patriarchy needs to step aside.

In other words, my full reaction to my female colleagues’ conflicting opinions above would be “both/and”.

Other examples: “It’s not my fault that I was born with privilege *and* knowing that I have it, it is my responsibility to deconstruct it.” Both/and. “Gender is a social construction *and* it is our present reality.” Both/and. “I have the right to express my anger, *and* if this social movement is nothing but anger, we will alienate potential allies.” Both/and. “Gender is a continuous spectrum *and* polarities on that spectrum do exist.” Both/and.

While I think society would make better decisions if social structures were circles instead of pyramids, even pyramids have their place. In operational environments, such as firefighting, an operating room, or a cockpit, you do need to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities so that in a crisis it is clear who is ultimately responsible. In short, we still need pyramids when they are called for, but even then, they should be implemented with circles in-mind, that is, with good CRM. Pyramids or circles? Both/and.

Meanwhile, patriarchies work against a both/and perspective because both/and gives permission for ambiguity, and ambiguity is the enemy of control. There are two litmus tests in patriarchal culture. First, are you in my pyramid or a competing pyramid, the in-group or the out-group? And second, if you're in my pyramid, which one of us has more power? Who out-ranks whom? Patriarchies are allergic to ambiguity and nuance because they create the possibility that those two questions might not have definitive answers, thereby risking a power vacuum. Patriarchy pigeon-holes.

Black and white thinking is an enemy of working with complexity. Both/and is an antidote to black and white thinking.¹²⁵

There's always more to learn.

Intimacy and Legacy

If the goal of patriarchy is about maximizing power, dominance, and control, what should be the goal of a healthier society? And what should we call that healthier society?

My experience is that most feminists assume the goal should be called a matriarchy. While I don't think that's wrong, I'm concerned the term will alienate men just as the term patriarchy alienates women. Any suggestions? A civil society? How about "collaborarchy?"¹²⁶

What would be the thing each of us would be trying to maximize in a 'collaborarchy'? My answer is: intimacy and legacy. In patriarchy, the concept of intimacy has been distorted to mean sexual intimacy. More broadly, I see intimacy as meaning "to know deeply." Intimacy requires vulnerability; vulnerability requires trust; and trust requires safety—none of which are typically available in a patriarchy.

Intimacy and legacy feel linked. If you cultivate authentic intimacy, you will no doubt leave behind something worthwhile. And if you cultivate a legacy worth leaving, surely the process will generate intimacy along the way. It is only now in writing this that I can see that they are the aspirations of this memoir.

Life is for sowing. The harvest is for those who come after.¹²⁷

When I read that out-loud, it sounds a lot like love.



¹²⁵ Another antidote to black and white thinking is using spectrums of thinking. The variety of spectrums in the diagrams in this memoir are an attempt to do this. For example, "Are you a feminist or not?" is a black and white, yes or no question. A better question would be "What do you think about feminism?" (See Figure 2).

¹²⁶ Trademarked by David O. Smith, 2016. Used with permission.

¹²⁷ Not an original idea. One historical example: The Great Law of the Iroquois Constitution offers the guiding principle of considering the impact of all decisions seven generations into the future. A contemporary example: David Brooks, "The Moral Bucket List," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2015. Actor Willem Dafoe's Vincent van Gogh in the 2018 film *At Eternity's Gate* says something similar. (For The Great Law of the Iroquois see: Spencer Tucker, Ed. *The Encyclopedia of North American Indian Wars, 1607–1890: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011. p. 931.)

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Silkscreen Protesting Unequal Access of Women to Harvard, Red woman symbol with fist and equal sign worn at Harvard commencement, Amy Brodkey Papers, 1970-1972, Hollis #olvwork601147; and White Fabric Featuring Woman Symbol Printed in Red with Equals Sign Enclosed, Radcliffe College Archives Memorabilia Collection, Hollis #olvwork596564. Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute.

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