

THE MYTH OF MALE POWER

The following is a short excerpt of the book, *The Myth of Male Power*, by Warren Farrell. Look for it (DEMAND IT!!!) in a bookstore near you.

There are many ways in which a woman experiences a greater sense of powerlessness than a man. She may fear pregnancy, aging, rape, date rape and criminal assault. She may feel greater pressure to marry and, without regard to her own wishes, interrupt her career for children. She may feel excluded from an old-boy network. She may resent having less freedom to walk into a bar without being bothered. Fortunately, most industrialized nations have acknowledged these experiences [as we have in these forums]. Unfortunately, they have acknowledged only female experiences -- and concluded that while women **have** the problem, men **are** the problem.

A man, of course, has a different experience. He can see marriage become divorce, and often finds that shared financial burdens become alimony payments, his home become his wife's home and his children become support payments who have been turned against him. A man who finds himself in these situations feels as if he is spending his life working for people who hate him. He feels desperate for someone to love, but fears that another marriage may ultimately leave him with another mortgage payment, another set of children turned against him and a deeper desperation. When such a man is called "commitment-phobic," he doesn't feel understood. When men try to keep up with payments by working overtime and are told they are insensitive, or try to handle the stress by drinking and are told they are drunkards, they don't feel powerful but powerless. When they fear a cry for help will be met with an instruction to stop whining, or that a plea to be heard will be met with "yes, buts," they skip attempting suicide as a cry for help and just commit suicide. Men have **remained** the silent sex and are increasingly becoming the suicide sex.

What feminism has contributed to women's options must be supported. But when feminists suggest that God might be a She without suggesting that the Devil might also be a female, they must be opposed. Feminism articulated the shadow side of men and the light side of women. It neglected the shadow side of women and the light side of men. And it didn't acknowledge that each sex has each side within itself. When the issue of sexual harassment surfaced, we were told, "Men don't get it." In fact, neither sex gets it. A man doesn't get a woman's fear of harassment, which stems from her passive role. A woman doesn't get a man's fear of sexual rejection, which stems from his initiating role. Both sexes are so preoccupied with their

vulnerability that neither understands the other's vulnerability. The difference? Feminism taught women to sue men for sexual harassment or date rape when men initiate with the wrong person or at the wrong time. No one has taught men to sue women for sexual trauma for saying yes, then no, then yes, then no during a sexual encounter. Feminism left women with three sexual options -- their old role, the male role and the victim role. Men were left with less than one option -- they were still expected to initiate in a relationship, but now, if they did it badly, they could go to jail for it. Feminism justified female "victim power" by convincing the world that we live in a sexist, male-dominated and patriarchal world. In fact, the world is both male- and female-dominated, both patriarchal and matriarchal, each in different ways. Among other things, that's why patriarchy and male dominance double as code words for male disposability. The male's role -- to provide and protect -- led to the disposal of men in war and work (in the "death professions" of construction, firefighting, lumberjacking, trucking). While we acknowledged the glass ceilings that kept women out of the top, we ignored the glass floors that kept men at the bottom. Thus the Jobs Rated Almanac reveals that the majority of the 25 worst jobs "happened to be" male dominated. By the Eighties, feminism's ability to articulate a women's light side and a man's shadow side led to women's magazines, talk shows, self-improvement books and TV specials that equated progressivism with women as victims and men as victimizers. Rarely did we see women as victimizers and men as victims (of false accusations, emotional abuse or deprivation of visiting rights with their children). It was soon considered progressive to criticize male legislators for making war, but not to credit male legislators for making democracy. In the United States, almost 1 million firefighters volunteer to risk their lives to save strangers. Of these, 99 percent are men. We see TV specials that ask the question, "Does the man next door molest girls?" but not "Does the man next door save girls?" In our everyday lives we might see six firefighters saving women, but no TV special points out that all six firefighters were men -- or that male police officers, rescue-team members, lifeguards and ambulance technicians who save women's lives are far more ubiquitous than men who jeopardize women's lives. During Mike Tyson's rape trial in Indianapolis, the hotel in which the jury was sequestered caught fire. Two firefighters died saving hotel occupants. Tyson's trial made us increasingly aware of men as rapists, but the firefighters' deaths did not make us increasingly aware of men as saviors. We were more aware of one man doing harm than of two men saving, of one man threatening one woman (who is still alive) than of dozens of men saving hundreds of people (and that two of those men died). Men's expectations are about as deeply ingrained in society as women's were in the Fifties. Women's studies have helped women question their expectations. And this is positive. What isn't positive is the tendency of feminists to argue against men's studies because "history is men's studies." History books, though, do not encourage men to question their expectations. In fact, history books sell to boys the traditional role of hero and performer.

Each history book is advertisement for the performer role. Each lesson tells him, "If you perform, you will get love and respect. If you fail, you will be nothing." To a boy, history is pressure to perform, not relief from that pressure. Feminism is relief from the pressure to be confined in the traditional female role. To a boy, then, history is not the equivalent of women's studies, it is the opposite of women's studies. It tells him that the only acceptable role is the traditional one. Women's studies do more than question the female role -- they tell women they have a right to what was once the traditional male role. Nothing tells men they have a right to the traditional female role -- an equal right to stay home full-time or part-time with the children, for example, while his wife supports him.

To acknowledge the full truth about sex roles -- that both men and women are burdened by and benefit from them -- was considered regressive. Worse, it didn't sell. Women bought the books and magazines, and publishers pandered to them, just as politicians pander to interest groups. Women became Women Who Love, and men became Men Who Hate. The pandering transformed a female strength -- understanding relationships -- into a female weakness: misunderstanding men. In the past quarter century, feminism has been to the daily news what bacteria is to water. We consumed it without knowing it -- both the good and the bad. Men were not perfect listeners. But many did absorb new concepts: sex object, glass ceiling, palimony, the battered-women syndrome, deadbeat dads, the feminization of poverty. Slogans focused on female concerns: "A woman's right to choose," "Equal pay for equal work," "Our bodies, our business." Men found their sexuality blamed for almost everything -- sexual harassment, sexual molestation, pornography, incest, rape, date rape. Men accepted as truth many assumptions of discrimination against women -- women are the victims of most violence, women's health is neglected more than men's, women are paid less for the same work, husbands batter wives more, men have more power, ours' is a patriarchal, sexist, male-dominated world. Many men condemned these so-called discriminations against women even as they accepted the necessity for discriminating against men -- affirmative action for women, government-subsidized women's commissions, women's studies, government programs for women, infants and children. For men, feminism turned the battle of the sexes into a war in which only one side showed up.

Have we been misled by feminists? Yes. It is feminists' fault? No, because men have not spoken up. Simply, women cannot hear what men do not say. Now men must take responsibility to stand up for what they want. Men can be thought of as searching for their inner perestroika. Just as Soviet citizens watched the world around them become freer, men watched the women around them become freer. In the same way Soviet citizens began to question of their perception of themselves as a powerful nation distracted them from facing powerlessness, men are on the verge of questioning if their perception of themselves as the powerful sex simply distracts them from facing their powerlessness. Men are appropriately beginning to see themselves for what they've become -- a Third World sex. -- (Aaron L. Hoffmeyer TR@CBNEA.ATT.COM), "The male form of a female liberationist is a male liberationist -- a man who realizes the unfairness of having to work all his life to support a wife and children so that someday his widow may live in comfort, a man who points out that commuting to a job he doesn't like is just as oppressive as his wife's imprisonment in a suburb, a man who rejects his exclusion by society and most women from participation in childbirth and the engrossing, delightful care of young children -- a man, in fact, who wants to relate to people and the world around him as a person."

- Margaret Mead, 1975 "The only trouble with sexually liberating women is that there aren't enough sexually liberated men to go around."

- Gloria Steinem, 1972 Average Life Spans by race and gender (in years):
White Women 79, Black Women 74, White Men 72, Black Men 65,
[White women outlive black men 14 years. A 49-year-old black man is closer to death than a 62-year-old white woman.]

- National Center for Health Statistics "It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them."

- Mark Twain, "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar," Following the Equator, 1987

"When a man says it hain't the money but the principle o' the thing.... it's th' money."

- Kin Hubbard, Hoss Sense and Nonsense, 1923 "The pitfall of the feminist is the belief that the interests of men and women can ever be severed; that which brings sufferings to the one can leave the other unscathed."

- Agnes Repplier, Point of Friction, 1920 "When you educate a man you educate an individual; when you educate a women you educate a whole family."

- Charles D. McIver, in a speech at the North Carolina College for Women "Democracy gives every man the right to be his own oppressor."

- James Russell Lowell "If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace."

- Thomas Paine

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