

Gay, Roxanne.
"Bad Feminist"
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Introduction

Feminism (n.): Plural

The world changes faster than we can fathom in ways that are complicated. These bewildering changes often leave us raw. The cultural climate is shifting, particularly for women as we contend with the retrenchment of reproductive freedom, the persistence of rape culture, and the flawed if not damaging representations of women we're consuming in music, movies, and literature.

We have a comedian asking his fans to touch women lightly on their stomachs because ignoring personal boundaries is oh so funny. We have all manner of music glorifying the degradation of women, and damnit, that music is catchy so I often find myself singing along as my very being is diminished. Singers like Robin Thicke know "we want it." Rappers like Jay-Z use the word "bitch" like punctuation. Movies, more often than not, tell the stories of men as if men's stories are the only stories that matter. When women are involved, they are sidekicks, the romantic interests, the afterthoughts. Rarely do women get to be the center of attention. Rarely do our stories get to matter.

How do we bring attention to these issues? How do we do so

in ways that will actually be heard? How do we find the necessary language for talking about the inequalities and injustices women face, both great and small? As I've gotten older, feminism has answered these questions, at least in part.

Feminism is flawed, but it offers, at its best, a way to navigate this shifting cultural climate. Feminism has certainly helped me find my voice. Feminism has helped me believe my voice matters, even in this world where there are so many voices demanding to be heard.

How do we reconcile the imperfections of feminism with all the good it can do? In truth, feminism is flawed because it is a movement powered by people and people are inherently flawed. For whatever reason, we hold feminism to an unreasonable standard where the movement must be everything we want and must always make the best choices. When feminism falls short of our expectations, we decide the problem is with feminism rather than with the flawed people who act in the name of the movement.

The problem with movements is that, all too often, they are associated only with the most visible figures, the people with the biggest platforms and the loudest, most provocative voices. But feminism is not whatever philosophy is being spouted by the popular media feminist flavor of the week, at least not entirely.

Feminism, as of late, has suffered from a certain guilt by association because we conflate feminism with women who advocate feminism as part of their personal brand. When these figureheads say what we want to hear, we put them up on the Feminist Pedestal, and when they do something we don't like, we knock them right off and then say there's something wrong with feminism because our feminist leaders have failed us. We forget the difference between feminism and Professional Feminists.

I openly embrace the label of bad feminist. I do so because I am flawed and human. I am not terribly well versed in feminist history. I am not as well read in key feminist texts as I would

like to be. I have certain . . . interests and personality traits and opinions that may not fall in line with mainstream feminism, but I am still a feminist. I cannot tell you how freeing it has been to accept this about myself.

I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I'm not trying to be an example. I am not trying to be perfect. I am not trying to say I have all the answers. I am not trying to say I'm right. I am just trying—trying to support what I believe in, trying to do some good in this world, trying to make some noise with my writing while also being myself: a woman who loves pink and likes to get freaky and sometimes dances her ass off to music she knows, she *knows*, is terrible for women and who sometimes plays dumb with repairmen because it's just easier to let them feel macho than it is to stand on the moral high ground.

I am a bad feminist because I never want to be placed on a Feminist Pedestal. People who are placed on pedestals are expected to pose, perfectly. Then they get knocked off when they fuck it up. I regularly fuck it up. Consider me already knocked off.

When I was younger, I disavowed feminism with alarming frequency. I understand why women still fall over themselves to disavow feminism, to distance themselves. I disavowed feminism because when I was called a feminist, the label felt like an insult. In fact, it was generally intended as such. When I was called a feminist, during those days, my first thought was, *But I willingly give blow jobs*. I had it in my head that I could not both be a feminist and be sexually open. I had lots of strange things in my head during my teens and twenties.

I disavowed feminism because I had no rational understanding of the movement. I was called a feminist, and what I heard was, "You are an angry, sex-hating, man-hating victim lady person."

This caricature is how feminists have been warped by the people who fear feminism most, the same people who have the most to lose when feminism succeeds. Anytime I remember how I once disavowed feminism, I am ashamed of my ignorance. I am ashamed of my fear because mostly the disavowal was grounded in the fear that I would be ostracized, that I would be seen as a troublemaker, that I would never be accepted by the mainstream.

I get angry when women disavow feminism and shun the feminist label but say they support all the advances born of feminism because I see a disconnect that does not need to be there. I get angry but I understand and hope someday we will live in a culture where we don't need to distance ourselves from the feminist label, where the label doesn't make us afraid of being alone, of being too different, of wanting too much.

I try to keep my feminism simple. I know feminism is complex and evolving and flawed. I know feminism will not and cannot fix everything. I believe in equal opportunities for women and men. I believe in women having reproductive freedom and affordable and unfettered access to the health care they need. I believe women should be paid as much as men for doing the same work. Feminism is a choice, and if a woman does not want to be a feminist, that is her right, but it is still my responsibility to fight for her rights. I believe feminism is grounded in supporting the choices of women even if we wouldn't make certain choices for ourselves. I believe women not just in the United States but throughout the world deserve equality and freedom but know I am in no position to tell women of other cultures what that equality and freedom should look like.

I resisted feminism in my late teens and my twenties because I worried that feminism wouldn't allow me to be the mess of a woman I knew myself to be. But then I began to learn more about feminism. I learned to separate feminism from Feminism or Feminists or the idea of an Essential Feminism—one true

feminism to dominate all of womankind. It was easy to embrace feminism when I realized it was advocating for gender equality in all realms, while also making the effort to be intersectional, to consider all the other factors that influence who we are and how we move through the world. Feminism has given me peace. Feminism has given me guiding principles for how I write, how I read, how I live. I do stray from these principles, but I also know it's okay when I do not live up to my best feminist self.

Women of color, queer women, and transgender women need to be better included in the feminist project. Women from these groups have been shamefully abandoned by Capital-F Feminism, time and again. This is a hard, painful truth. This is where a lot of people run into resisting feminism, trying to create distance between the movement and where they stand. Believe me, I understand. For years, I decided feminism wasn't for me as a black woman, as a woman who has been queer identified at varying points in her life, because feminism has, historically, been far more invested in improving the lives of heterosexual white women to the detriment of all others.

But two wrongs do not make a right. Feminism's failings do not mean we should eschew feminism entirely. People do terrible things all the time, but we don't regularly disown our humanity. We disavow the terrible things. We should disavow the failures of feminism without disavowing its many successes and how far we have come.

We don't all have to believe in the same feminism. Feminism can be pluralistic so long as we respect the different feminisms we carry with us, so long as we give enough of a damn to try to minimize the fractures among us.

Feminism will better succeed with collective effort, but feminist success can also rise out of personal conduct. I hear many young women say they can't find well-known feminists with whom they identify. That can be disheartening, but I say, let

us (try to) become the feminists we would like to see moving through the world.

When you can't find someone to follow, you have to find a way to lead by example. In this collection of essays, I'm trying to lead, in a small, imperfect way. I am raising my voice as a bad feminist. I am taking a stand as a bad feminist. I offer insights on our culture and how we consume it. The essays in this collection also examine race in contemporary film, the limits of "diversity," and how innovation is rarely satisfying; it is rarely enough. I call for creating new, more inclusive measures for literary excellence and take a closer look at HBO's *Girls* and the phenomenon of the Fifty Shades trilogy. These essays are political and they are personal. They are, like feminism, flawed, but they come from a genuine place. I am just one woman trying to make sense of this world we live in. I'm raising my voice to show all the ways we have room to want more, to do better.

[ME]

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Faludi, Susan.

"Backlash: The Undeclared
War Against American Women."
1994

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Backlash

Introduction: Blame it on Feminism

To be a woman in America at the close of the 20th century—what good fortune. That's what we keep hearing, anyway. The barricades have fallen, politicians assure us. Women have "made it," Madison Avenue cheers. Women's fight for equality has "largely been won," Time magazine announces. Enroll at any university, join any law firm, apply for credit at any bank. Women have so many opportunities now, corporate leaders say, that we don't really need equal opportunity policies. Women are so equal now, lawmakers say, that we no longer need an Equal Rights Amendment. Women have "so much," former President Ronald Reagan says, that the White House no longer needs to appoint them to higher office. Even American Express ads are saluting a woman's freedom to charge it. At last, women have received their full citizenship papers.

And yet . . .

Behind this celebration of the American woman's victory, behind the news, cheerfully and endlessly repeated, that the struggle for women's rights is won, another message flashes. You may be free and equal now, it says to women, but you have never been more miserable.

This bulletin of despair is posted everywhere—at the newsstand, on the TV set, at the movies, in advertisements and doctors' offices and academic journals. Professional women are suffering "burnout" and



succumbing to an "infertility epidemic." Single women are grieving from a "man shortage." The New York Times reports: Childless women are "depressed and confused" and their ranks are swelling. Newsweek says: Unwed women are "hysterical" and crumbling under a "profound crisis of confidence." The health advice manuals inform: High-powered career women are stricken with unprecedented outbreaks of "stress-induced disorders," hair loss, bad nerves, alcoholism, and even heart attacks. The psychology books advise: Independent women's loneliness represents "a major mental health problem today." Even founding feminist Betty Friedan has been spreading the word: she warns that women now suffer from a new identity crisis and "new 'problems that have no name.'"

How can American women be in so much trouble at the same time that they are supposed to be so blessed? If the status of women has never been higher, why is their emotional state so low? If women got what they asked for, what could possibly be the matter now?

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The prevailing wisdom of the past decade has supported one, and only one, answer to this riddle: it must be all that equality that's causing all that pain. Women are unhappy precisely because they are free. Women are enslaved by their own liberation. They have grabbed at the gold ring of independence, only to miss the one ring that really matters. They have gained control of their fertility, only to destroy it. They have pursued their own professional dreams—and lost out on the greatest female adventure. The women's movement, as we are told time and again, has proved women's own worst enemy.

"In dispensing its spoils, women's liberation has given my generation high incomes, our own cigarette, the option of single parenthood, rape crisis centers, personal lines of credit, free love, and female gynecologists," Mona Charen, a young law student, writes in the National Review, in an article titled "The Feminist Mistake." "In return it has effectively robbed us of one thing upon which the happiness of most women rests—men." The National

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Review is a conservative publication, but such charges against the women's movement are not confined to its pages. "Our generation was the human sacrifice" to the women's movement, Los Angeles Times feature writer Elizabeth Mehren contends in a Time cover story. Baby-boom women like her, she says, have been duped by feminism: "We believed the rhetoric." In Newsweek, writer Kay Ebeling dubs feminism "The Great Experiment That Failed" and asserts "women in my generation, its perpetrators, are the casualties." Even the beauty magazines are saying it: Harper's Bazaar accuses the women's movement of having "lost us [women] ground instead of gaining it."

In the last decade, publications from the New York Times to Vanity Fair to the Nation have issued a steady stream of indictments against the women's movement, with such headlines as when feminism failed or the awful truth about women's lib. They hold the campaign for women's equality responsible for nearly every woe besetting women, from mental depression to meager savings accounts, from teenage suicides to eating disorders to bad complexions. The "Today" show says women's liberation is to blame for bag ladies. A guest columnist in the Baltimore Sun even proposes that feminists produced the rise in slasher movies. By making the "violence" of abortion more acceptable, the author reasons, women's rights activists made it all right to show graphic murders on screen.

At the same time, other outlets of popular culture have been forging the same connection: in Hollywood films, of which Fatal Attraction is only the most famous, emancipated women with condominiums of their own slink wild-eyed between bare walls, paying for their liberty with an empty bed, a barren womb. "My biological clock is ticking so loud it keeps me awake at night," Sally Field cries in the film Surrender, as, in an all too common transformation in the cinema of the '80s, an actress who once played scrappy working heroines is now showcased groveling for a groom. In prime-time television shows, from "thirtysomething" to "Family Man," single, professional, and feminist women are

humiliated, turned into harpies, or hit by nervous breakdowns; the wise ones recant their independent ways by the closing sequence. In popular novels, from Gail Parent's *A Sign of the Eighties* to Stephen King's *Misery*, unwed women shrink to sniveling spinsters or inflate to fire-breathing she-devils; renouncing all aspirations but marriage, they beg for wedding bands from strangers or swing sledgehammers at reluctant bachelors. We "blew it by waiting," a typically remorseful careerist sobs in Freda Bright's *Singular Women*; she and her sister professionals are "condemned to be childless forever." Even Erica Jong's high-flying independent heroine literally crashes by the end of the decade, as the author supplants *Fear of Flying's* saucy Isadora Wing, a symbol of female sexual emancipation in the '70s, with an embittered careerist-turned-recovering-"co-dependent" in *Any Woman's Blues*—a book that is intended, as the narrator bluntly states, "to demonstrate what a dead end the so-called sexual revolution had become, and how desperate so-called free women were in the last few years of our decadent epoch."

Popular psychology manuals peddle the same diagnosis for contemporary female distress. "Feminism, having promised her a stronger sense of her own identity, has given her little more than an identity crisis," the best-selling advice manual *Being a Woman* asserts. The authors of the era's self-help classic *Smart Women/Foolish Choices* proclaim that women's distress was "an unfortunate consequence of feminism," because "it created a myth among women that the apex of self-realization could be achieved only through autonomy, independence, and career."

In the Reagan and Bush years, government officials have needed no prompting to endorse this thesis. Reagan spokeswoman Faith Whittlesey declared feminism a "straitjacket" for women, in the White House's only policy speech on the status of the American female population—entitled "Radical Feminism in Retreat." Law enforcement officers and judges, too, have pointed a damning finger at feminism, claiming that they can chart a path from rising female independence to rising female pathology. As a California

sheriff explained it to the press, "Women are enjoying a lot more freedom now, and as a result, they are committing more crimes." The U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography even proposed that women's professional advancement might be responsible for rising rape rates. With more women in college and at work now, the commission members reasoned in their report, women just have more opportunities to be raped.

Some academics have signed on to the consensus, too—and they are the "experts" who have enjoyed the highest profiles on the media circuit. On network news and talk shows, they have advised millions of women that feminism has condemned them to "a lesser life." Legal scholars have railed against "the equality trap." Sociologists have claimed that "feminist-inspired" legislative reforms have stripped women of special "protections." Economists have argued that well-paid working women have created "a less stable American family." And demographers, with greatest fanfare, have legitimated the prevailing wisdom with so-called neutral data on sex ratios and fertility trends; they say they actually have the numbers to prove that equality doesn't mix with marriage and motherhood.

Finally, some "liberated" women themselves have joined the lamentations. In confessional accounts, works that invariably receive a hearty greeting from the publishing industry, "recovering Superwomen" tell all. In *The Cost of Loving: Women and the New Fear of Intimacy*, Megan Marshall, a Harvard-pedigreed writer, asserts that the feminist "Myth of Independence" has turned her generation into unloved and unhappy fast-trackers, "dehumanized" by careers and "uncertain of their gender identity." Other diaries of mad Superwomen charge that "the hard-core feminist viewpoint," as one of them puts it, has relegated educated executive achievers to solitary nights of frozen dinners and closet drinking. The triumph of equality, they report, has merely given women hives, stomach cramps, eye-twitching disorders, even comas.

But what "equality" are all these authorities talking about?

If American women are so equal, why do they represent two-thirds of all poor adults? Why are nearly 75 percent of full-time working women making less than \$20,000 a year, nearly double the male rate? Why are they still far more likely than men to live in poor housing and receive no health insurance, and twice as likely to draw no pension? Why does the average working woman's salary still lag as far behind the average man's as it did twenty years ago? Why does the average female college graduate today earn less than a man with no more than a high school diploma just as she did in the '50s—and why does the average female high school graduate today earn less than a male high school dropout? Why do American women, in fact, face one of the worst gender-based pay gap in the developed world?

If women have "made it," then why are nearly 80 percent of working women still stuck in traditional "female" jobs—as secretaries, administrative "support" workers and salesclerks? And, conversely, why are they less than 8 percent of all federal and state judges, less than 6 percent of all law partners, and less than one half of 1 percent of top corporate managers? Why are there only three female state governors, two female U.S. senators, and two Fortune 500 chief executives? Why are only nineteen of the four thousand corporate officers and directors women—and why do more than half the boards of Fortune companies still lack even one female member?

If women "have it all," then why don't they have the most basic requirements to achieve equality in the work force? Unlike virtually all other industrialized nations, the U.S. government still has no family-leave and child care programs—and more than 99 percent of American private employers don't offer child care either. Though business leaders say they are aware of and deplore sex discrimination, corporate America has yet to make an honest effort toward eradicating it. In a 1990 national poll of chief executives at Fortune 1000 companies, more than 80 percent acknowledged that discrimination impedes female employees' progress—yet, less than

1 percent of these same companies regarded remedying sex discrimination as a goal that their personnel departments should pursue. In fact, when the companies' human resource officers were asked to rate their department's priorities, women's advancement ranked last.

If women are so "free," why are their reproductive freedoms in greater jeopardy today than a decade earlier? Why do women who want to postpone childbearing now have fewer options than ten years ago? The availability of different forms of contraception has declined, research for new birth control has virtually halted, new laws restricting abortion—or even information about abortion—for young and poor women have been passed, and the U.S. Supreme Court has shown little ardor in defending the right it granted in 1973.

Nor is women's struggle for equal education over; as a 1989 study found, three-fourths of all high schools still violate the federal law banning sex discrimination in education. In colleges, undergraduate women receive only 70 percent of the aid undergraduate men get in grants and work-study jobs—and women's sports programs receive a pittance compared with men's. A review of state equal-education laws in the late '80s found that only thirteen states had adopted the minimum provisions required by the federal Title IX law—and only seven states had anti-discrimination regulations that covered all education levels.

Nor do women enjoy equality in their own homes, where they still shoulder 70 percent of the household duties—and the only major change in the last fifteen years is that now middle-class men think they do more around the house. (In fact, a national poll finds the ranks of women saying their husbands share equally in child care shrunk to 31 percent in 1987 from 40 percent three years earlier.) Furthermore, in thirty states, it is still generally legal for husbands to rape their wives; and only ten states have laws mandating arrest for domestic violence—even though battering was the leading cause of injury of women in the late '80s. Women who have no

other option but to flee find that isn't much of an alternative either. Federal funding for battered women's shelters has been withheld and one third of the 1 million battered women who seek emergency shelter each year can find none. Blows from men contributed far more to rising numbers of "bag ladies" than the ill effects of feminism. In the '80s, almost half of all homeless women (the fastest growing segment of the homeless) were refugees of domestic violence.

The word may be that women have been "liberated," but women themselves seem to feel otherwise. Repeatedly in national surveys, majorities of women say they are still far from equality. Nearly 70 percent of women polled by the New York Times in 1989 said the movement for women's rights had only just begun. Most women in the 1990 Virginia Slims opinion poll agreed with the statement that conditions for their sex in American society had improved "a little, not a lot." In poll after poll in the decade, overwhelming majorities of women said they needed equal pay and equal job opportunities, they needed an Equal Rights Amendment, they needed the right to an abortion without government interference, they needed a federal law guaranteeing maternity leave, they needed decent child care services. They have none of these. So how exactly have we "won" the war for women's rights?

Seen against this background, the much ballyhooed claim that feminism is responsible for making women miserable becomes absurd—and irrelevant. As we shall see in the chapters to follow, the afflictions ascribed to feminism are all myths. From "the man shortage" to "theinfertility epidemic" to "female burnout" to "toxic day care," these so-called female crises have had their origins not in the actual conditions of women's lives but rather in a closed system that starts and ends in the media, popular culture, an advertising—and endless feedback loop that perpetuates and exaggerates its own false images of womanhood.

Women themselves don't single out the women's movement as the source of their misery. To the contrary, in national surveys 75 to 95

percent of women credit the feminist campaign with improving their lives, and a similar proportion say that the women's movement should keep pushing for change. Less than 8 percent think the women's movement might have actually made their lot worse.

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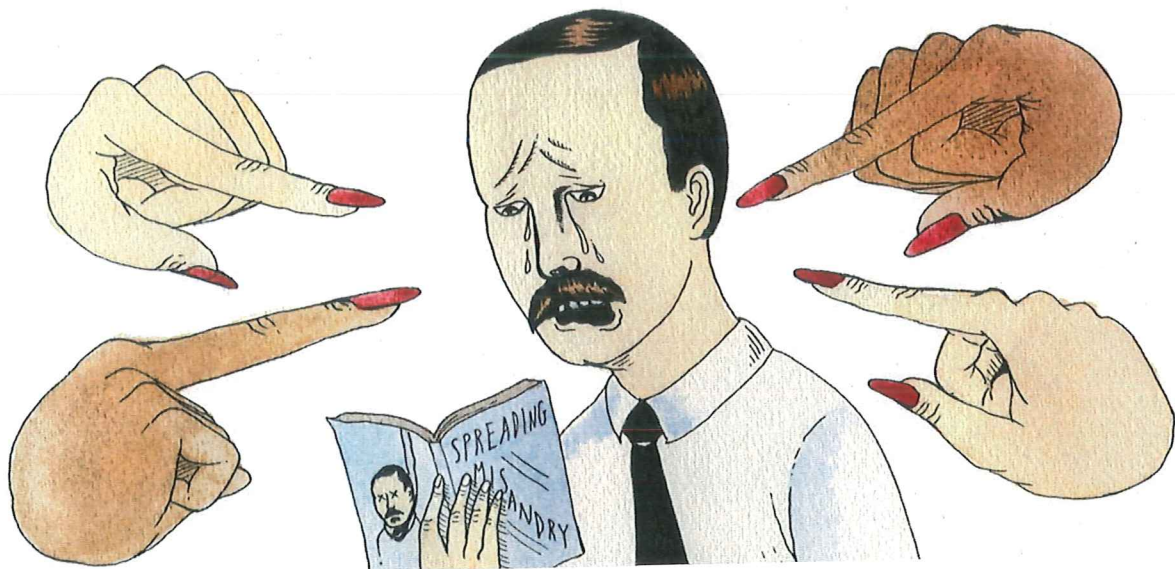
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The stories we're told
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Illustrations by Dave van Patten

I Was a Men's Rights Activist

One man's journey from misogyny to feminism

I discovered the men's rights movement when I was 22, working at a bookstore in downtown Kelowna, British Columbia. I was trying to earn some money before starting my second year at university.

I was in the self-help section "facing" our most popular books—arranging them so their covers, and not their spines, faced outward—when I noticed the title *Spreading Misandry: The Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture*.

I had never even seen the word "misandry" before, but I was able to deduce its meaning immediately: If misogyny is hatred of women, then misandry

must be hatred of men.

Well, that's kind of edgy and countercultural, I thought. I had never seen anything that said I—a white, heterosexual male—was actually the one being discriminated against. It was so provocative. The cover art was a white guy in a business suit being strangled by his necktie.

I was in that strange, formative period when you're trying to find your adult identity, flirting with contrarian worldviews, so I thought, *What the hell? I'll read this.*

I bought it hook, line and sinker. I was studying political science at the time, so I had never thought about social processes like misogyny and sexism. It was revelatory. The book talked about how pop culture demonized straight, white men because they're the only demographic left that it's acceptable to make fun of.

The chapter that stood out the most was about how men are portrayed as these bumbling oafs on television, especially sitcoms. Their wives, meanwhile, are these enlightened women who have to endure their idiot husbands. Pop culture conveyed men as court jesters, the fools. The women were the empowered ones, the voices of reason. *Home Improvement*, with Tim Allen speaking in grunts, was the primary example.

Looking back, I realize *Home Improvement* was actually reproducing 1950s gender dynamics. It was about a ridiculously successful man who had his own TV show, was his own boss and took over the entire garage so he could spend all his free time fixing up old cars. His wife, however, was relegated to the domestic sphere, and even though she had a job, it was always incidental to her role as a mother and wife.

But it took me a long time to realize that.



I'm not sure which came first—my sense men were losing their place in society or my reading *Spreading Misandry*—but I do know the book crystallized that feeling.

The bookstore had this policy that allowed employees to essentially “check out” a book and report back to their colleagues about it. The idea was this would increase the literacy of the staff so we could all sell books more effectively, so I came back a week later and told them about *Spreading Misandry*.

Usually the book reports elicited conversation, but mine was met with stern silence. “You know, this guy has some valid points, although some parts are a little extreme,” I said. All the staff members present were women—most of them university students, some older women—and they started warily eyeing each other as I talked. I thought it was going to be my Sermon on the Mount, that I was revealing something everyone needed to know. Instead, a woman in her 50s looked at me for about 40 seconds of awkward silence before the manager said, “Okay. Thanks for that.” It was one of the most cringeworthy moments from that period of my life.

At the time, though, it was just confirmation of misandry. *Why would they be so angry if they weren't threatened by what I was saying?* My co-workers were a lot less friendly to me after that.

About three weeks later, I was fired. I have absolutely no evidence that it was connected to my book summary. It might've been that I was kind of an asshole back then—I was rude and had a tendency to snap at people I

considered less intelligent.

I was so confused at that time in my life, so unsure of myself, that I was especially susceptible to something like men's rights. My politics were all over the map: I thought I was a libertarian at the same time that I was more deeply exploring my Catholicism—which is about as confused as you get. (Being a libertarian doesn't really jibe with the dictates of an authoritarian, hierarchical church.) Growing up, I loved guns and hunting and wanted to be in law enforcement. Then, in university, I realized I hated hunting and was suspicious of law enforcement.

Later, I discovered I suffer from clinical depression. There's a lot of literature on how socially extremist groups—such as men's rights or white supremacy—exploit young men whose lives are in turmoil, their beliefs in conflict. *Spreading Misandry* was a recruitment piece and I was an easy target.

My girlfriend and I broke up at the end of that summer and I was devastated. The majority of my friends were women, but I started withdrawing from them and hanging out with guys more. My relationship with women became less about friendship and more about who I could hook up with.

I sought out other men who felt like me. This was in the Web 1.0, pre-social media days, so it was mostly chat rooms or poorly written proto-blogs on Angelfire, AOL and Geocities (all of them fueled by rage and fear). I read a little bit of *The Myth of Male Power* by Warren Farrell, and I adopted this rhetorical trick many men's rights activists employ: "I'm not a feminist and I'm not a men's rights activist," I would say. "I'm an egalitarian."

I didn't encounter the term "men's rights" until 2005, right before social media really took off. I'd Google "men's oppression" or "anti-feminist" and find anything I was looking for on people's Blogspot sites or in the comments on pre-Reddit sites like Fark. And, of course, 4chan.

Every once in a while I'd stumble across MRAs advocating killing feminists, and I'd think to myself, *That's insane*. But then I'd do what a lot of MRAs do: I'd say, "Those voices are on the fringe," and argue they didn't speak for the movement as a whole.

My real life was entirely devoted to school, so my men's rights activism occurred exclusively in the classroom. We'd talk about the Equal Rights

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Amendment in a political science class and I'd say, "Well, what about men?" We'd talk about feminist epistemology in philosophy class and I'd say, "Doesn't anyone care about the way men see the world?" I saw myself as more than just a provocateur.

I stayed away from sociology my first few years because those classes were predominantly women, and I shared a belief common among science, engineering and tech people that sociology wasn't "real" science—it was just about feelings and how men are the root of all evil. But I took an introductory sociology course as an upperclassman. We had these discussions about feminism and patriarchal institutions, and I kept thinking to myself, *I don't oppress women. Why am I being attacked? Why am I the victim in this new feminist order?* I despised sociology.

I graduated in 2006 with a political science degree and spent a couple years doing odd jobs—bartender, tuxedo salesman. Soon I realized I wanted to do academic work, specifically studying men and masculinity, so I re-enrolled in some sociology courses. I was like, *I'll use my academic qualifications to talk about men's rights issues. I'll grit my teeth and listen to the feminists and read their stupid books, but then I'll go my own way.* Things didn't go as planned.

The first semester I took Intro to Gender Theory and the teacher asked, "What does gender mean to you?" Everyone talked about their lived experiences as women or gay men. When it was my turn, I said, "I'm here to offer a man's point of view on gender."

My instructor smiled and said, "Well, you must love our textbooks, then." I looked at the syllabus and saw *Masculinities* and *The Men and the Boys* by Raewyn Connell, both about gender from the perspective of men's lived experiences. I just thought, *Well, shit.*

I read them and it didn't take long for my men's rights beliefs to start falling away. They didn't stand up to all the empirical evidence I was finally reading—research that was informed by feminist theory and offered actual solutions.

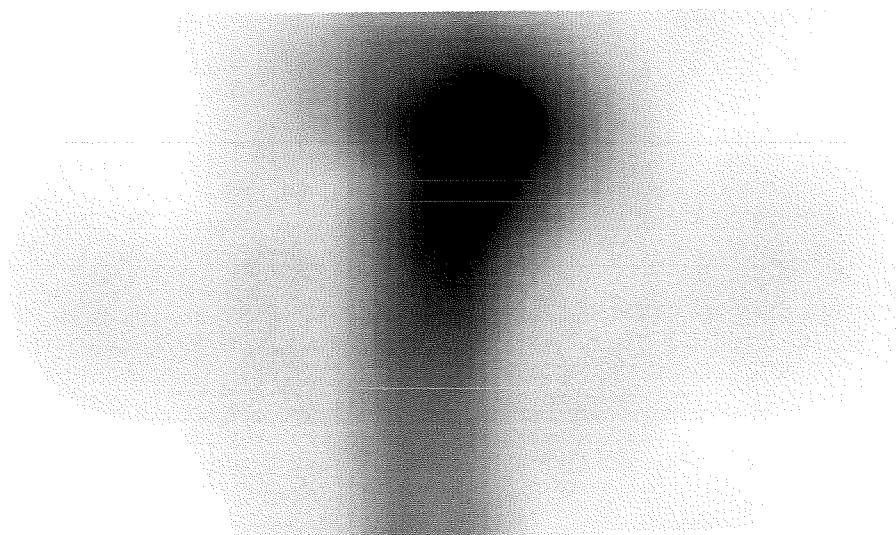
Men are socialized to be stoic, rational beings. The only emotions we're allowed are anger and joy, and in a precious few instances, we're allowed to cry—like if our sports team loses. As an MRA, I always believed it was women and feminism putting men in this box. But these feminist texts not only validated the crisis of masculinity, they pointed out men are the biggest

policers of masculinity. Men beat each other down for being “girly,” for liking sewing or baking, for crying. For being “faggots.” “You gotta man up.” “You can’t be a pussy, right?”

MRAs and feminists were acknowledging the same problems, but the MRAs weren’t locating the right cause. The feminists pointed out, “No, actually this is rooted in the same patriarchal institutions that are harming women.” It was subtle but profound.

And feminism showed that men of color and queer men experience the world differently than the straight white men who dominate MRA groups and assume all men are fundamentally the same and like them.

I realized all the arguments about male oppression I had bought into were weak. And all the evidence I needed was in feminism.



I discovered Reddit, which is a hotbed of men’s rights activism, around 2009, but luckily by then I was already moving away from the movement. A lot of the stuff there was elementary, anyway.

My transformation didn’t happen overnight, though. There wasn’t really an “Aha!” moment, but more of a progression. I had to deconstruct all the MRA beliefs I had internalized. My classmates shuddered every time I opened my mouth. I would write these pro-men’s rights arguments that I thought made sense, but my instructors would say, “This is a tautology.”

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At one point, I made the argument that metrosexualism was oppressive to men, that it was an attempt to feminize us because we were too hairy; because we weren't good enough as we were. One of my female peers turned to me, lifted up her skirt and said, "I shave my legs every day. Don't talk to me about the cosmetics industry oppressing men."

I ended up enrolling in a master's program for sociology. And by the end of my first semester, I realized I knew nothing. From there, it was a slow process of building.

I finished my master's in 2011, and in 2012 I started publicly identifying as a feminist. Now I'm a sociology Ph.D. candidate at the University of Victoria.

My focus is still on men (that much hasn't changed since my MRA days), but my work recognizes that the single most powerful set of tools for understanding the issues men face can be found in feminist analysis.

Despite my best efforts, I'm an idealist, and I honestly, truly believe sociology can be an activist discipline. It can teach young people how our society constructs inequality, and once we start down that road we can do something about it.

There are some MRAs who claim men's rights is akin to feminism, but that's incorrect. The men's rights movement has always been anti-feminist first, men's issues second.

Every time I look back at the men's rights movement, all I see is negativity, rage, hate, bitterness and fear. But I don't feel ashamed of my time in it. I don't even know that I regret it, because without it, I might not have ended up where I am now. It turned me on to the study of men, and eventually to feminism.

I've been dating the same woman since 2004, and, oh god, I must've gotten on her nerves back then.

— Edwin Hodge, as told to John McDermott

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