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**Are Women the New Dominant Sex?: Investigating the Impact of Feminism on Masculine Roles and Identity**

**Lauren Boothby**

Women are becoming the new dominant sex. Pursuing feminist equality reform results in a trend toward extremes. The trajectory of women's rights needs to be examined in light of its causal effects on men. The decline of Western patriarchy ironically leads to the progression of matriarchy. This is being achieved through women's educational advancements, feminist ideological dominance in political and academic discourse, and defamation of men to the benefit of women. This essay is based around these ideas, and more specifically on the following assertions:

I will argue that the end goal of feminism is not equality: it is matriarchy. Women have stepped into the power vacuum created by removing men from positions of privilege, and are now in the process of achieving ideological dominance through victim status. Attempts at creating equality for women lead to inequalities for men who become the weaker sex. Domination is perpetuated by media portrayals of idiotic men which justifies masculine oppression. Oppression is socially approved by politically correct feminist agenda. As a result, men experience identity crises when old masculinities are destroyed, but no socially and politically acceptable alternatives are provided. Men and women should work *together*, not against each-other, to establish true *equality*. The contributions of both sexes need to be seen as valuable and beneficial to society.

### **From Oppressed to Oppressor**

The beginning of the end of the Western male-dominated era is perhaps most apparent in job losses in previously male-dominated sectors. Postmodern society has shifted away from manufacturing and factory jobs created during the modern and industrial periods. These sectors were hard-hit in the recession of the late 2000s, and a large majority of the six million cutbacks were men (Rosin, 2010). The recession revealed an economic pattern in creation for decades

(Rosin, 2010). Male trade jobs are being phased out (Rosin, 2010). On the other hand, careers that are projected to grow in the next ten years are sectors dominated primarily by women (Rosin, 2010). These jobs are not necessarily the most sought-after, but this trend suggests that men who previously earned a living in one sector, now do not possess the marketable skills necessary for available jobs.

Sociologist Kathryn Edin argues that matriarchies are replacing patriarchies (Rosin, 2010). In her interview for *The Atlantic*, she states that the power of the Western male was destroyed in the 1990s recession (Rosin, 2010). Men have no social power; it is now in the hands of women (Rosin, 2010). Additionally, the historical desire for sons is being replaced with desire for daughters in much of America, and even South Korea (Rosin, 2010).

Data from a Statistics Canada report (2012) showed that Canadian women earn more undergraduate and master's degrees than men, and the disparity has been increasing since 1992. While both men and women are earning more degrees than in the past, the growing number of educated women is symptomatic of a power transition in society. In both the lower and middle classes, women are dominant. At the present time, the majority of politicians and high-ranking business officials continue to be men, but the number of women is increasing. In the lower and middle classes, however, it is clear that the result of feminism is not equality. Where feminism has taken the greatest hold, women have replaced men as the dominant sex. First attempts at equality have overreaching effects where men become the ones that are socially disadvantaged.

### **The Idiot Man**

Popular media reflects these trends. Several sitcoms whether intentionally or satirically, reinforce cultural stereotypes that devalue masculinity. Intellectually inferior men plague television sitcoms. The *idiot man* generally holds all or most of the following characteristics. He

has a low I.Q., is a borderline alcoholic, and an avid sports lover. He is sexist, clumsy, physically useless, socially awkward, an uninvolved father, and a sincere idiot. Where the *idiot man* lacks intelligence and general domestic and social usefulness, his wife satisfies the deficit. The *intelligent woman* has specific characteristics in stark contrast to the *idiot man*. She has a high I.Q. and is educated. She is either a housewife, or she works part-time while simultaneously managing her home. Additionally, she has high social intelligence, engages with her children, and is brilliant when compared to her husband. While I acknowledge that the wives discussed below are far from ideal portrayals of women, these issues are beyond the scope of this paper. The present essay examines the neglected stereotype of intellectually inferior men in relation to their female counterparts, and I have chosen three recent, popular sitcoms that display this negative male stereotype.

*Home Improvement* was the first television show I considered. Tim Allen's character is amusing, although quite stupid. If the reader performs but a quick video search of virtually any episode of this show, she should not be surprised to find an instance of Tim playing a fool. His character is inept at correctly performing virtually any task without failing miserably. He is clumsy, arrogant, and sexist. Tim's wife Jill works in addition to performing most of the housework. She often speaks to Tim in a condescending manner and displays her superior intelligence when she corrects his foolish mistakes. In one of the later seasons, Jill leaves her job to pursue a Master's degree in psychology. Tim is the primary breadwinner, but he exemplifies all the characteristics of the *idiot man*. Jill juggles home and work responsibilities, has good social skills, and is tolerant of Tim's idiocy and blatant sexism. While I acknowledge she is not devoid of female stereotypes, she exemplifies the *intelligent woman* character, and overall she

displays superior intelligence in both practical and academic matters. Any sexism on Tim's behalf is understood by the audience to be unjustified.

*Family Guy* and *The Simpsons* are two animated television programs presently airing. The husbands in both series – Peter Griffin and Homer Simpson, respectively – exemplify the *idiot man* character. Homer Simpson and Peter Griffin share the following endearing qualities; they are: middle-aged, fat, borderline alcoholics, blue-collar workers, stupid, violent, often sexist, clumsy, childish, naïve, generally terrible fathers, and absolutely hilarious idiots. Marge Simpson is a housewife, and although not always a moral compass, she is generally the voice of reason among chaos. Homer's daughter Lisa Simpson is by far the most intelligent member of the family. She demonstrates competence in the areas Marge neglects. In this series, Homer is the *idiot man*, and together Marge and Lisa play the character of the *intelligent woman*. Lois Griffin has less moral integrity than the Simpsons women. Her character is far from the image of an 'ideal' wife and mother, as she cheats on her husband, is often emotionally unavailable, but is importantly far more intelligent than her husband Peter. This interestingly defies normative stereotypes of women and housewives, but establishes Lois' intelligence as one of her consistent qualities. Therefore, although neither portrayal is wholly flattering to women, Lois Griffin is consistently portrayed as the *intelligent woman* with Peter, her incompetent husband, playing the *idiot man*.

This section included three examples of popular television programs that demonstrate negative male stereotypes. While I do not deny the presence of irony and sexist undertones toward women, the prevalence of idiotic male characters demands attention. As women have begun to attain positions of power, many sitcoms contrast the high intelligence of women with

the idiocy of men. In each of these programs, women are justified believing men to be sexist pigs and fools that are hopeless without their brilliant wives.

### **New Masculinity**

Feminist movements have created new work and social opportunities for women. When women joined the workforce and increased their education, normative social roles were destroyed, and new acceptable roles created. Western women are no longer confined to the home, and it is now acceptable to be a highly educated career woman with or without children, married or unmarried. Many men are supportive of women's achievements, including those of their girlfriends, wives, daughters, sisters and friends. This change in women's roles constitutes an enormous social shift that which is not without an effect on men. Feminism clearly defined new roles available to women, but fails to address roles for men. The subversion of 'traditional' gender rolls altered the nuclear family structure. The men who previously benefited from this arrangement now ask themselves, "What is my role?" No comprehensive answer is given. The changing nature of masculine roles is in need of further sociological examination.

### **Dramatic Actors, Deep Acting, and Recipes**

Social roles are created and legitimated through acting. George Herbert Mead's conception of the self provides a useful understanding for the creation and destruction of masculine roles as they are played out *in response to* feminine roles. The self is essentially connected to the mind (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Behavioural processes involve an internal dialogue of actions and words involving symbols and meanings shared by social groups (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). The masculine self, then, must be understood as being created *in response to* the views of others. Social control is internalized in the self where he determines his behaviours according to social norms. Both sexes intentionally play roles as actors. Irving



Goffman suggests that humans are impression managers who act to present specific images of ourselves to others (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). As actors, we present and conceal information in order to display a socially desirable self, taking the attitude of the other (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). It is essential to understand that, as feminism increases in strength, so too does its power to define social roles for both women and men. In patriarchal societies, women's behaviour was controlled by preconceived male assumptions. Presently, the opposite is true. Feminism has replaced male-dominated ideology, so the self-identity and consequent behaviour of men is now constructed and controlled by socially approved forms dictated by women. Television's *idiot man*, then, should be viewed as being created *in response to* the role of the *intelligent woman*, as masculine roles are being created *in response to* feminine roles.

Men are not simply impression managers, as Goffman's theory suggests. Social norms infiltrate the psyche and impact how we experience emotion. In Arlie Russell Hochschild's theory of emotion management, acting reaches beyond outward behaviour and extends inward. Individuals engage in "deep acting" according to societal expectations (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Emotion work involves shaping feelings, characterized by statements such as: "I *psyched* myself up...I *squashed* my anger down...I *made* myself have a good time" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). "Working on feeling" suggests a conscious effort to change what one feels (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). The desire to alter feelings is determined by feeling rules, or social guidelines that are often latent (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). In *Working on Feeling* (2003), Hochschild acknowledges that feeling rules have been altered by feminism:

The feminist movement brings with it a new set of rules for framing the work and family life of men and women: the same balance of priorities in women and family now ideally applies to men as to women. A woman can now as legitimately as a man become angry...over abuses at work...Or a man has the right to feel angry at the loss of custody if he has shown himself the fitter parent (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011).

Perhaps one of the benefits of feminism for men may be the greater freedom for expressing emotional sensitivity, as Hochschild suggests in this excerpt. She allows for male feeling rules to be altered as women's have, but does not provide explanation, nor does she offer further information regarding the male response to feminism. Further exploration of masculine feeling rules and emotion management by men is needed because the lasting impact of feminism on men is not well documented or understood.

In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild argues that women's superior social skills were necessary as they held smaller "status shields" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Social norms have often dictated that women maintain composure and demonstrate kindness in aggravating circumstances (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). This was beneficial for women as they could "make a resource out of feeling" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). As this previously served to protect women in vulnerable positions, high social intelligence and deference are now marketable skills. This in turn presently places women in a privileged position. Women's oppression has prepared them for success as the economy becomes geared toward service jobs. Many men now do not have these skills as they have not yet learned to adapt to societal changes.

New masculinity is based on *a response to* feminism. Men now live in fear of reproach of being labeled 'sexist,' which is not only socially unacceptable, but also has legal repercussions in many Western countries. Masculine identity becomes based on negatives. Feminist men may be found reciting their religious mantras: "Thou shalt *not* be a hero. Thou shalt *not* assert leadership over thine wife, daughter, child, or any woman. Thou shalt *not* take the job of a woman. Thou shalt *not* be a macho man." Besides these negative laws, there exist relatively few positives: "Thou shalt be emotionally sensitive. Thou shalt be quiet and sit still. Thou shalt smile when thine wife brings home the bacon." Is the stay-at-home father the essence of new masculinity?

While I am not wholly opposed to these ideas, they are problematic in that *they do not provide positive socially approved alternatives for men.*

In addition to various levels of acting, individuals engage their worlds based on understandings of meaning. Alfred Schutz's stocks of knowledge "provide actors with rules for interpreting interactions, social relationships, organizations, institutions, and the physical world" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Understandings of meaning are thus based on previous knowledge. As men have not lived in a feminist, postmodern, Western society for long, they necessarily will find it difficult to determine meaning for their lives. The convenience of social norms is that they provide "recipes" for action, meaning, direction, and purpose for everyday living (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). The majority of previous recipes for men have been delegitimized, if not wholly destroyed. I argue that this leads to Durkheimian anomie.

### **Consequences of New Masculinity: Normlessness and Anomie**

The *Dictionary of Social Sciences* defines Durkheim's concept of anomie as referring to "the absence of governing rules, norms, values, and identities in a society, leading to feelings of isolation and uncertainty... [it is] a *social* state of disrupted meanings and values" (Calhoun, 2012). The previous section referred to changing roles for Western women and men. Because anomie is characterized by the *absence* of rules, norms and identity, feminism is therefore largely responsible for the anomie contemporary Western men experience. I mourn the crisis the feminist movement has forced upon men. Returning to the sitcom *idiot man* stereotype, this trend is a symptomatic *response to* normlessness. Emotionally empty, one-dimensional men are the result of a maladaptive understanding of self in the normless male culture. Men ask "What does it mean to be a man?" Feminism is loath to answer.

I have demonstrated that this power shift *exists* and discussed the *consequences* of this change. What follows is an examination of where this domination originated.

### **Ideological Domination**

As a Canadian citizen I have observed the social approval of feminism in my culture, but the pervasiveness of this ideology is difficult to quantify. Socially and politically correct speech and behaviour demands preferential treatment of women and other minorities. The importance of equitable treatment is clearly apparent in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). Section 15 (1) of the Charter guarantees equality before the law without discrimination, particularly regarding “race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” In addition, section 15 (2) clearly states that subsection (1) “does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups...” including all those mentioned previously. Canada has then, within its most important body of law, the approved preferential treatment of women. Women were indubitably minorities in recent Canadian history, however, as demonstrated in this essay, women are no longer victimized to the same extent they were previously. I have proposed that women are becoming the new dominant sex. Should affirmative action laws then, be used to expedite an ideologically privileged group? The *Employment Equity Act* was passed on December 12th, 1995. Section 2 states:

The purpose of this Act is to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfillment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women... [and other minority groups] giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than

treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and accommodation of differences.

Again, I do not deny that this legislation is largely responsible for the current beneficial position of women, nor do I want benefits, such as maternity leave and anti-discrimination policies, to disappear. What I do wish to underscore is that women *hold an ideological position of privilege*.

### **Political Correctness**

The flourishing of women's study departments at prestigious universities, and the legitimacy of feminist theory exemplifies women's privileged minority status. It is ideologically reputable to advocate for women's issues, women's rights, and women's opinions. Once more, I hold to the conviction that feminist theory is largely beneficial. I would not be able to critique feminism had I not been allowed to receive a higher education. I also accede that women's issues are separate from men's, and subsequently I value these practices and theories. However, I find it necessary to expose the ideological prominence and acceptance of feminism. It is unacceptable for men to speak of "men's issues" or pursue "men's studies." If men challenge the prevailing dogma and insist on male-specific material and programs, women retort that the whole of *history* is written by men, and other disciplines are products of patriarchy. I do not dispute this fact; however, I do believe that contemporary men are in a *markedly different* position than those preceding them. Western men are now ideologically disadvantaged, and ergo men's issues should be respected, as they are also valuable human beings whose life experiences are different than that of women.

An example of feminist dominance is Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalysis. She was at first influenced by Sigmund Freud's misogynistic theories where women suffer from "penis envy" and identity is connected to the relationship with the father. Chodorow provides an alternative

analysis, suggesting that it is, in fact, the relationship with the mother that is essential to identity formation (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Men define identity by detaching from the mother, but as a result they lose their ability to connect emotionally (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). This is another example of men being defined by what they *are not*, and *in relation to* women. According to her theory, men are unable to provide the emotional intimacy needed by women because of learned detachment from their mothers (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Women consequently turn to mothering to satisfy their desires for intimacy (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Again, men are herein defined by *negatives*, or by *lack*. Had this theory been reversed, Chodorow would today be labeled misogynistic and sexist. Her theory is, however, academically legitimate, although blatantly sexist. This is the result of ideological authority of feminism, and suggests a progression toward matriarchy. Both Freud's and Chodorow's theories are useful to a degree, but both are limited and sexist.

It is also necessary to discuss the disadvantaged position of men in light of the ideas of the Marxist feminist theorist Dorothy Smith. *Standpoint theory* argues one's standpoint and reality differs according to one's life experiences and gender (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Her theory is invaluable for understanding the different experiences of women. At this point I wish to rework her theories in order to examine the position of Western men. Smith's theory suggests that "in modern, Western societies, social domination operates through *texts*...that facilitate social control" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Her *relations of ruling* adds that that media, organizations and bureaucracies are connected to cultural, technical, and scientific discourses that coordinate them (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). She argues that sociological knowledge lacks the inclusion of lived experiences, and issues important to women have been overlooked (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). In a sense, I agree with her theory, but only insofar as to ironically point out how relations

of ruling surrounding dominant feminist ideology legitimate the domination of men. Are women's lived experiences more real than those of men? Smith's theory indicates a feminine bias. Lived experiences certainly contribute to practical applications of sociology, but both men and women have "lived experiences." I argue Smith's theory is useful inasmuch as it is applied equally to both men and women. Her theory appears to suggest that relations of ruling are connected to patriarchy. This theory becomes problematic unless the perpetrators of domination continue to be investigated, whether they are male or, as it now it often stands, female.

### **The Silent Man**

It is politically, socially, and academically acceptable to criticize men, and so men are now engaging in self-sanctioning behaviour. Michel Foucault's understanding of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, suggests that the threat of surveillance provokes internal controls (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). As the dominant ideology, feminism silences men who oppose it. Men are members of Foucault's *disciplinary society* and self-regulate their behaviour to that which is politically correct. Feminists are not known for inflicting penal punishment on male deviants. For Foucault, the stage of punishment from the nineteenth century forward is concerned less with physical punishment than with surveillance and punishment through social systems (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). The threat of surveillance by decentralized power coerces behaviour and creates "self-induced complicity with the rules" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). This type of coercion is far more insidious than physical punishment (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Feminist ideology asserts its domination through this decentralized power system. Examples of the multiple arenas of domination can be found in Canadian law. Affirmative action policies act as party whips, ensuring that men do not deviate from their subservient position to women.

The prevalence of stupid men in television legitimates the negative sanctions by the *intelligent woman*, and justifies the radical feminist belief in the *idiot man* stereotype. Men that engage in sexism or antifeminist behaviour receive punishment for deviating from norms. Ergo, men that do not self-sanction are seen as buffoons, sexist pigs, and are not respected.

### **The Irrationality of Rationality**

My final point regarding dominant feminist ideology is that – especially as it is connected to postmodernism, and based on rationality and ideals of fairness and equality – these ideologies have built immunity to criticism. As these ideologies are connected to ‘reason,’ they become dogmatic. It is not the state of economics, as Marxists would believe, or patriarchy, as feminists argue, but the corrupted rationality of reason that is responsible for social evils.

Theorists of the Frankfurt school, as influenced by Hegelian idealism, challenged what they referred to as “the totalitarianism of reason and rationality” (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Georg W. F. Hegel argued that reality was produced by individual understanding of ideas, how information is categorized, and that utopia can only be found when understanding of reason approaches reality as decreed by God (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). I argue that both Marxist feminism and postmodern or poststructural theorists such as those of Jean Baudrillard result in the inability of men to *negate* or critique what becomes established as absolute truth. It should be noted that the disillusion of “absolute truth” – although feminism in fact relies on a specific understanding of a “True” morality – defies criticism and creates an inability to negate its assertions. The existential crisis now characteristic of contemporary men is directly related to this. Postmodern theory declares “there is no truth;” while feminism declares “there is only *my* truth.” The destruction of previous gender norms must be seen as directly connected to postmodernism and the rejection of the idea of “Truth.” The combination seems illogical,



nevertheless *both ideologies ironically demand totality of belief* as there is no view but their own. This leads me to suggest that the rationality inherent in radical feminist ideology is in fact, *irrational*, and the built resistance to criticism, as influenced by postmodernism and poststructuralism, leads to *dangerous totalitarianism*. This is related to Herbert Marcuse's concept of *technological rationality* which demands unquestioned conformity to the "correct way" of understanding the world (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011).

### Conclusion

The domination of men by women is facilitated by ideology. The most clever and efficient way to win a battle is to conquer the enemy's mind. From a subservient mind follows a subordinate body, and so men have been brainwashed by drinking too much sexy pink Kool-Aid. But who is to blame for this toppling of power? Unfortunately, men have no one to blame but themselves. Karl Marx, a man, may be seen as an early contributor. Marx's theory of the oppressed masses is appealing; it not surprising that feminism recycles his theory for their purposes. Simply replace "men" with "bourgeois" and, voila!; you have successfully legitimated women in supplanting men. Additionally, male-created ideologies of postmodernism such as those of Baudrillard, legitimate the destruction of normative gender roles which previously benefitted male power. Women, although previously *the oppressed* under patriarchy, have become *the oppressors* as a matriarchal society evolves in Western countries like Canada. As a woman, I am quick to acknowledge that I have received numerous benefits from feminism and progressive, liberal political advances. Conversely, I propose that men have not only been *removed* from positions of privilege, but have been *replaced by women* to the extent that they are rendered useless. Women no longer need husbands, and so heterosexual masculinity has been challenged in a manner that has not provided alternatives to the social roles removed. Feminism

ought to be used to promote *equality of the sexes*, and as women are now dominating men in several arenas, it is time to re-evaluate positions of advantage and disadvantage, and make necessary changes to both laws and common understandings of average lower and middle class men who are most painfully impacted.

### **The Usable Past**

In his 2009 article *Revision Number Four: Orphans for Art In America*, art critic David Hickey rebukes contemporary artists and art students for their ignorance of history. Postmodernist understanding of art favors the rejection of previous art forms and knowledge. Jean-François Lyotard defines the hallmark of the postmodern condition as skepticism of all metanarratives (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Due to this skepticism, artists – as well as sociologists – have become generally reluctant to embrace worldviews, and so they have disengaged from their past. In *Orphans*, Hickey explains it this way:

Contemporary art, having lost its utopian future, now seems to be losing its usable past...The art world has lowered its entrance requirements and raised its cover charge so radically that a couple of million bucks and casual acquaintance with Spiderman now gain one entree into the most refined salon. As a result, the contemporary artist's field of play, once defined by the collective knowledge and experience of cognoscenti, has gone to seed. The groundskeepers have all gone home (Hickey 2009).

As inspired by Hickey, I see sociology as also in danger of losing its “usable past.” In critiquing patriarchy, feminism ought to not make the mistake of throwing away hundreds of years of the *good* and *beneficial* contributions to society made by men. Focusing solely on the failures of men will lead to their continued depreciation, and we will lose a wealth of knowledge from valuable human beings who have and will continue to contribute positively to Western society.

In her 2005 essay *Change Among the Gatekeepers*, Raewyn Connell discusses the import role men play in equality reform. Men continue to hold the majority of power in the upper

echelons of society, but before women achieved their current privileged position, men and boys controlled the majority of resources (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Men thus should be seen as responsible for any and all progress in equality up to today. Because men previously held all the power, women only have been given the opportunity to succeed as it was granted to them by men. Men and boys, then, should be viewed as *gatekeepers* to equality (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). If men continue to be defamed by women, I imagine they will be reluctant to further women's future goals. Sexist women may create backfire, and men may see their sexist views as justified.

In conclusion, I recommend not a return to patriarchy or furthering matriarchy, but instead a pursuit of true *equality*. As I have mentioned above, I do not deny the necessity of feminist theory for current understanding of equality. However, any ideology that asserts dominance ought to be subject to checks and balances to prevent overcompensation. In short, I recommend not one specific theorist's beliefs of utopia, but instead three ideas and virtues: *freedom of conscience*, *respect* and *selflessness*. *Freedom of conscience* would ensure individual ability to *negate* and prevent totalitarian ideology from asserting dominance. Finally, *selflessness*, coupled with *respect* would result in pursuing equality for all, not focusing upon the advancement of one group. If society pursued these three ideals, I believe many social evils would disappear.

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