

beaten or killed for violations of these orders. Some widows, who no longer have husbands to give them permission to leave the house, are starving.

36. The issues of exclusion addressed here have been mostly ones of epistemology and conceptual coherence. However, there is another argument for excluding even admittedly feminist men from feminist activities. It is a pragmatic sociological argument which says: Women have been trained to respond in detrimental ways around men—overtrusting, deferential, nurturing, and self-sacrificing. As such, men should not be allowed in some female groups—such as women's studies classes or support groups, because their mere presence by itself will be disruptive. While this argument is an important one, it deserves a lengthy treatment I do not have room for here. So let me just make five preliminary points:

a) If the strong version of these empirical claim are true, then it would no doubt count as a reason for excluding men from certain contexts. If men unavoidably prevent women from learning or some other beneficial activity, they should be excluded.

b) However, this argument would not only apply to women's studies classes or women's support groups. If accurate, it might apply to all settings. If women are damaged by men's sheer presence in a class, for example, they are damaged whether the class is Intro. to Women's Studies, Calculus, or the History of Jazz. This is in fact, an argument now being used for separate girls' math and science classes in public high schools.

c) It is not clear, even if such empirical claims are true (and they may very well be overgeneralizations) that the best course of action is to accede to statistical tendencies. Perhaps having men in classes or other groups who were sensitive to such issues would be more beneficial, because they could help train women out of such deleterious behavioral patterns.

d) Sometimes part of this argument says that women and girls tend to accept claims from men much more readily than from women, having been trained to defer to men. If that is true (though it seems overgeneralized) then it might be a reason for having *more men than women teaching feminist classes* because it would imply that students would take feminist claims from men's mouths more seriously.

e) Arguments about sociological and psychological facts must be taken seriously. However, it should not be assumed that these arguments for exclusion are only those of morally sensitive progressives. The very same arguments used to exclude male feminists from teaching Women's Studies, or white antiracists from teaching African American Studies, or Christians from teaching Jewish Studies, are used to exclude gays and lesbian from the military and women from military colleges—among other cases. In both of these latter cases, the argument is not that gays, lesbians, and women cannot be good soldiers, but only that straight and male soldiers will not function well around them because of negative attitudes. Since the only question is one of efficiency, gays, lesbians, and women must be excluded from military contexts—even though the fault lies entirely with some heterosexual men's dispositions. Now, this comparison proves nothing about the former cases (they all may be good arguments), but it does illustrate that issues of just treatment are often in conflict with issues of efficacy whether decorated lesbian officers are being kicked out of the army or good male feminists are being excluded from teaching.

37. May, Strikwerda and Hopkins, *Rethinking Masculinity*, back cover.

## from Men Doing Feminism

### Chapter 3

## Who's Afraid of Men Doing Feminism?

Michael S. Kimmel

Can men *do* feminism? Ought men to do it? What happens when they do? These are questions with which I am constantly confronted, in my pedagogy, and in both my public and private lives.

Each year, I'm invited to give about twenty or more lectures at colleges and universities all over the country. Usually, the invitation comes from a coalition of women's studies faculty, sociologists, and the occasional student organization that has actually heard of NOMAS (The National Organization for Men Against Sexism, of which I am National Spokesperson) or my work. (On rare occasions, the funding comes from both the Women's Studies and the Intrafraternity Council—often the first time those organizations have collaborated on anything!) The motives for the invitation are similar. In each case, the Women's Studies faculty tell me that they feel frustrated by the fact that their courses have roughly the same gender composition today as they had twenty years ago. Today, they tell me, they typically have only one or two men in a class, and they spend much of their time cringing defensively in the corner, feeling blamed for the collective sins of two millennia of patriarchal oppression. Colleagues who teach more general courses on gender issues like Sociology of Gender or Psychology of Gender report only slightly less skewed gender composition of their classes. These colleagues believe, as I do, that it is imperative to find ways to bring men into the conversation about gender issues that women have been having for more than two decades.

That, then, is the starting point for my lecture. I try to explain why virtually every month there is a new name added to that growing list of men who have come to symbolize the gender issues currently in play. I began to work on that lecture the day after Clarence Thomas had been confirmed to his appointment to the Supreme Court. I sat down to write a



short op-ed piece for a local newspaper about the ways in which Anita Hill's testimony opened up an opportunity for men to rethink the ways we had been taught to treat women in our workplaces. I called the piece "Clarence . . . and Us" to suggest the ways in which what I believe Clarence Thomas did to Anita Hill is not as atypical as it might at first have sounded. In fact, what most middle-aged men probably were taught was "typical office behavior"—explicit requests for dates, implicit sexual innuendos, assumptions that seniority has its privileges of access to women, pornographic pinups or calendars on the walls—might now be called sexual harassment. I argued that it was about time men took on the issue of sexual harassment.

A few months later, I was invited to expand upon that op-ed piece in a lecture. Wave after wave of women had been coming forward in the aftermath of Anita Hill's compelling testimony, describing their experiences in the workplace. Suddenly men seemed so confused, so defensive and resistant to what they were saying. William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson were standing trial for date rape. It seemed another opportunity for us addled, middle-aged men to rethink what we had been taught as adolescents, for what I grew up calling "dating etiquette" or even just plain "dating"—to keep trying to get sex, to see sexual conquest as an entitled right, to wear down her resistance, to keep going despite that resistance—is now called date rape. Mike Tyson and William Kennedy Smith were not, it seemed to me, monsters, but men, assuming and doing what regular guys had been doing and assuming for a very long time. Here, again was an opportunity to rethink what we had been taught, and I was determined to raise these issues so that we could rethink our own behaviors and assumptions.

Then Magic Johnson announced that he was HIV positive, and that he had contracted the virus through unprotected heterosexual contact with any one of the more than two thousand five hundred women whom he had "accommodated" sexually—that was his term for it—during his career as a sexual athlete.

Suddenly, it seemed that America was taking a crash course on masculinity, on masculine sexual entitlement, aggression and abuse, and our instructors were Anita Hill, Patricia Bowman, Desiree Washington, and any one of those anonymous two thousand five hundred women whom Magic Johnson had "obliged." Just as suddenly, American corporations, state and local governments, universities and law firms were scrambling to implement procedures to handle sexual harassment. Many seemed motivated more by fear of lawsuits than a general concern for women's welfare, more interested in adjudicating harassment after the fact than in developing mechanisms to prevent it.

Many men reacted defensively. "Men on Trial" was a common head-

line in newspapers and magazines. And other men seemed interested in more of a defensive retreat, running off to the woods to chant, drum, and *bond* with other men. It hardly seems coincidental that 1991 was the same year that the American media discovered the "men's movement," and in which Robert Bly's *Iron John* and Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly* soared to the top of the best-seller lists. Just when women had found a voice through which they could finally speak about their experiences, men declared themselves tired of listening, and then trooped off to the woods to be by themselves.

I tried to address these themes in that lecture, paying attention to what I saw as the possibilities for change that these cases presented to us, as men, possibilities to think about our selves, and our relations with women in new ways. I titled that first lecture "Clarence, William, Iron Mike, Magic . . . and Us: Issues for Men in the 1990s."

Since then, I've given that lecture at over one-hundred colleges and universities. And virtually each month I have to revise the title to reflect the steady stream of men's names that capture the issues with which I think we are struggling. Today, I might give it the title "Clarence, William, Iron Mike, Magic, Senator Packwood, Woody, Tailhook, the U.S. Military, Spur Posse, John Wayne Bobbitt, The Citadel, Tupac, O.J. . . . and Us." The students usually get the point.

In the course of the lecture, I point to the ways in which women's lives have changed in the past thirty years, and how these changes have forever transformed the landscape upon which gender relations are carried out. I try and cover a lot of ground: sexuality, date and acquaintance rape, AIDS, the workplace, the balance of work and family life, sexual harassment. In every case, I suggest that men should want to support feminist reforms: not only because of an ethical imperative—of course, it is right and just—but also because men will live happier and healthier lives, with better relations with the women, men, and children in their lives if they do. I take as an epigraph a line from a 1917 essay by the Greenwich Village writer Floyd Dell. "Feminism," he wrote, "will make it possible for the first time for men to be free."

When I'm finished, the reaction is almost always the same: a substantial contingent of feminist women students visibly and vocally appreciate my lecture. A smaller—much smaller—contingent of male students come up afterwards and thank me, usually asking what they can do on their particular campus. The Women's Studies faculty and sociologists are also usually pleased. I feel good, as though I've contributed to an opening of dialogue between women and men on the campus.

Then the criticism comes, and always from two sources. First, there are what I've come to call the angry-white-men-in-training. These young men are defensive, angry, and fully resistant to anything that remotely hints of



feminism. Armed with the latest platitudes from Rush Limbaugh, the proceed to offer the false stereotypes of feminist women that we've come to know and detest. They whoop and holler as if the lecture has become a daytime television talk show bashing feminism. (It is significant that a discussion of men is so easily transformed into another opportunity to trash feminist women.) In about one in five lectures, I experience something like the following, which happened recently.

A burly white male student, sitting in the back row, arms folded across his chest, the brim of his baseball hat turned around, raised his hand as the moderator for the evening's lecture announced there was time for one more question. "What makes you such an expert on men?" he began with a challenge masquerading as a question. "The way you talk about listening to women, and supporting feminism, you must be a faggot or something. You sure aren't a real man."

I shifted to a kind of mental remote control, and tossed his question back to him. I asked what was it about my support for feminism that made him think I might be gay. He declined to pick up the question and disengaged, mumbling inaudibly. The lecture ended.

No matter how many times I've been gay-baited, been rhetorically or literally called out, my manhood questioned, I'm still somewhat startled by it. Why would some people believe that supporting feminism is somehow a revelation of sexual orientation? I offer no clues to my sexuality in my lectures or in my writing, no references to the gender of a "friend," "partner," or "lover." All I do is agree with women that inequality based on gender is wrong, and that women and men should be equal in both the public and the private spheres.

Does this make me less of a real man? The reviewer of one of my books, a collection of men's writings examining the feminist debate about pornography, called me a "traitor." Another wrote that anyone who supports equality for women or for gays must be a wimp.

The second critical reaction is more complex, and somewhat more troubling. One or two feminist women express their displeasure at my lecture by poking holes in my argument, revealing what they see as inconsistencies and contradictions. Their followup questions and the ensuing discussion unravel quickly to what one might call "patriarchy-baiting," trying to elicit some reaction, some slip-up, some element of defensiveness, some point of weakness that will reveal my own patriarchal biases. These are inevitably revealed, to which their response is a loudly triumphant "Aha, we knew it!" and a quieter, but no less pronounced sigh of relief. All men *are* the same, and that *same* is patriarchal.

What are these two groups so afraid of? Why can't men *do* feminism, or at least be seen to support feminism? After all, feminism provides both women *and* men with an extraordinarily powerful analytic prism

through which to understand their lives, and a political and moral imperative to transform the unequal conditions of those relationships. Why should men be afraid of feminism? And why should some feminist women be afraid of profeminist men?

To address these question, two caveats are in order. First, to address the former question, we must make a distinction between feminism as that analytic prism and feminism as a set of policy initiatives designed to remove obstacles to public sphere participation for women. After all, although most American men remain, at best, indifferent, and, at worst openly hostile, to the term feminism, and especially dismissive of the term feminist, it is also the case that most men support every single element in what we might call a feminist political and social policy agenda when its elements are disaggregated and presented as simple policy options. And second, in addressing the latter question, I want to be clear that I do not intend to be a ventriloquist, explaining women's experiences for them. Instead, I speak from my experience as a man whose work is devoted to making feminism, as I understand it, apprehensible and even acceptable to men.

While I will want to address each of these fears of feminism separately, I want to pause to point out one significant similarity. In both cosmologies, profeminist men cannot exist. To the angry white men, profeminist men cannot exist, and so their effort is to unmask me as a fraud of a man. Hence the gay baiting and wimp baiting, which often amount to the same thing. To that small group of feminist women, *profeminist* men cannot exist, because such men are potential allies, not enemies. So often these women, like the angry white males, discredit the motives or intentions of the men who support them. To move feminism forward, both as a cluster of theories and as a political project, I believe that we will need to honestly confront both of these fears of feminism.

I begin by speculating about the fear that some feminist women have of profeminist men, based upon my conversations with several of these women who have challenged and pushed these issues. Each of their perspectives is doubtless true, but even taken together, they are not the whole truth.

To some women, fear of profeminist men comes from a fear of men in general. All men are men, monolithically constructed essences, incapable of change. In this model, some things are eternal verities, always *signifying* the same thing. Erections signify domination and nothing else. Men embody unmediated patriarchal oppression. To be a man means to be an oppressor.

Thus *we*—men who could support feminism—cannot be said to exist if the polar dichotomy by which they see the world is to remain in place. In some cases, of course, this is more complicated than a simple "women



good, men bad" world view. Rather, I understand these women to say that since all men benefit from patriarchy in a myriad of ways, seen and unseen, it is not possible for men to renounce patriarchy and come over to the other side. Since privilege is indelibly inscribed onto men, and men embody it whether they choose to or not, then the only possibility for men to be redeemed is for them to renounce masculinity itself. One simply cannot be a man and support feminism. (This position is also echoed by some men, like political activist John Stoltenberg, who encourages men to "refuse to be a man" in his first book, and celebrates the "end" of manhood in his second.) We can always retreat if the going gets tough or dangerous. This would be especially true for heterosexual white men, who can slide seemingly without effort, into the arenas of privilege, which often remain invisible to those who have it.

To others, it's simply too easy for men to declare themselves profeminist. They fear a syndrome among men that a friend of mine has labeled "premature self-congratulation," in which men declare themselves liberated by masculine fat. Or they observe that cinematic trope in which profeminist men, like the cavalry, come to the rescue of the damsel in distress. "Thanks for bringing this patriarchy stuff to our attention, ladies," they can almost hear us say. "We'll take it from here." What have they given up, what risks do they take, by declaring their support of feminism?

To still others, the expression of a fear of profeminist men is triggered more by what I actually argue in my lecture than by anything I might be seen to embody. Although I suggest that the ethical imperative—that feminist reforms are right and just—should be the basis for men's support for feminism, I also argue that it is in men's interests to support feminism, that men will actually *benefit* from their support of feminism. I argue that men's efforts to end sexual harassment, date and acquaintance rape, to share housework and child care will actually enable men to have more fulfilling lives, more satisfying relationships with women, with children and with other men. "Just what we need," one woman sneered derisively, "a feminism that will benefit men. Count me out."

One expression of this fear of feminism is a particular hostility to men who have embraced feminism in the academy and are using a feminist perspective to understand gender relations. No sooner do women get a foothold on a legitimate domain in the academy than men rush in to a new growth area, displacing women and setting up shop, much the way obstetricians and gynecologists displaced midwives at the turn of the century, or that men are entering nursing as other fields dry up.

There is, perhaps, some truth in this. But for every male academic who uses feminist analysis as the framework for their work, there are hundreds, even thousands, who remain resolutely and defiantly hostile to the

new academic practice called "Men's Studies," which sounds so defensively reactive, as if it were the academic wing of the men's rights movement. I simply *do* the sociology of gender. I do it from a feminist perspective, which takes as its starting point that gender relations are constructed in a field of power. And the gender that I study is men.

I believe that each of these positions seems partly true. Privilege is invisibly but indelibly conferred upon men, whether we renounce it or not. But there are also costs to men for renouncing it, costs that the antifeminist men recognize more readily, if less enthusiastically, than these few feminist women. The reaction of men to feminism does, I believe contain an angle of vision that needs to be addressed.

That issue concerns power. Feminism requires an analysis of power; indeed, one of feminism's central tenets is that gender relations are constructed in a field of power. At the political level, feminism addressed a symmetry in women's lives. At the aggregate level, women were not *in power*. Just look at those corporate boardrooms, those collegiate boards of trustees, those legislatures and executive mansions, feminist women said. It's evident that women are not in power. And, at the individual level, women did not *feel powerful*. Feminism, then, was a political movement to challenge women's social powerlessness and their individual feelings of powerlessness.

But that tidy symmetry breaks down when applied to men. Sure, men are *in power* at the aggregate level. Again, the gender composition of those legislatures, board rooms and trustees don't lie. But ask individual men to *give up* power and you are more likely to get a blank, defensive stare, as if you were from another planet. "What are you talking about?" the men will respond. "I have no power. My wife bosses me around, my children boss me around, my boss bosses me around. I'm completely powerless!"

Several groups on the political front privilege men's experience of powerlessness and ignore the continued social aggregate power of men over women as groups. Antifeminist purveyors of men's rights, like Warren Farrell, claim that male power is a "myth." "Feel powerless?" he seems to say. "Of course, you do. Women have all the power. Currently, we men are the real victims of reverse discrimination, affirmative action, custody and alimony laws. Let's get some of that power back from those feminists!"

Some of the followers of Robert Bly and other leaders in the mythopoetic men's movement also seem to privilege the personal feeling over the social and political analysis. If you don't feel powerful, then you're not powerful. "Come with us into the woods," they seem to say. "We'll go get some power. Here's the power chant, the power ritual, the power drumming." I remember a few years ago when mainstream American men, who were supposed to feel such renewed power under Reaganism,



resorted to wearing power ties and eating power lunches to demonstrate their power—as if power were a fashion accessory. What better expression of political and economic impotence than to be eating and wearing the signs of one's power!

Farrell frequently uses the analogy of the chauffeur to illustrate the illusion of men's power. Think about a chauffeur. He's in the driver's seat. He knows where he's going. He's wearing the uniform. So, you might say, he has the power. But from *his* perspective, someone else is giving the orders. He's not powerful at all. His power is a *myth*.

This analogy has some limited value: individual men are not powerful, at least all but a small handful of individual men. And most American men do not feel powerful. But the analogy is right for the wrong reasons. What if we ask one question of our chauffeur, and try to shift the frame just a little, to reveal what is hidden by the analogy. What is the gender of the person who is giving the orders? Who is sitting in the back seat?

When we shift from the analysis of the individual's experience of his position to a different, relational context, the interactions between and among men become clear as relations of power. Of course, men as a group do have power, and that power is organized against women. But some men also have power over other men. Profeminism, a position that acknowledges men's experience without privileging it, possesses the tools to bring those levels together, to both adequately analyze men's aggregate power, and also describe the ways in which individual men are both privileged by that social level of power and feel powerless in the face of it.

It seems to me that men's defensiveness reaches its zenith around the question of power, as if to identify and challenge men's power was to ignore men's pain. Such a trade-off is unacceptable politically, and, frankly a non sequitur. Men's pain is caused by men's power. What else could it be? Would we say that the unhappiness of white people was caused by black people's power? The pains and sexual problems of heterosexuals was caused by gays and lesbians? Profeminism requires that both men's social power and individual powerlessness be understood as mutually reinforcing, linked experiences, both of which derive from men's aggregate social power.

For men to support feminism, it seems to me, means acknowledging men's experience of powerlessness, which often makes feminist women uneasy, while placing it within a context of men's aggregate power—the power of men as a group over women as a group, and the power of some men over other men. Disaggregating the term *masculinity* into its plural masculinities is one way to address that second dimension of power. Some men are disempowered by virtue of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, able-bodiedness. But all men are privileged vis-a-vis women.

There is another dimension that must be addressed with men, and upon

it pivots our political work as men who seek to support feminism and challenge other men. It requires adding another dimension to the discussion of power and powerlessness—the issue of entitlement. I recently appeared on a television talk show opposite three “angry white males” who felt that they had been the victims of workplace discrimination. The show's title, no doubt to entice a large potential audience, was “A Black Woman Took My Job.” In my comments to these angry men, I invited them to consider what the word “my” meant in that title, that they felt that the jobs were originally “theirs,” that they were entitled to them, and that when some “other” person—black, female—got the job, that person was really taking “their” job. But by what right is that his job? By convention, by a historical legacy of such profound levels of discrimination that we have needed decades of affirmative action to even begin to make slightly more level a playing field that has tilted so decidedly in one direction.

Men's sense of entitlement is the source of much of men's experience of powerlessness. Consider the work of Robert Bly. The reaction to Bly's *Iron John* was curious in at least one respect. Readers of the book, as well as virtually all the men I've observed at mythopoetic retreats—men who are, themselves, fathers, and, indeed, often even grandfathers—identify with the young boy in the fairy tale. There are three other men in the story with whom one could identify: the boy's father (the king), the father of the woman that the boy eventually marries (another king), and Iron John himself (who turns out to also have been a king). Three kings and one little boy. And all these fifty year old men, fathers themselves, identify as the boy, not as any of the kings. What are we to make of this?

Let us ask who exactly is the little boy. He is a prince—that is, he is a man who is entitled to be in power but who is not yet in power. He will be; he is entitled to it. But not yet. In short, he is entitled to power, but feels powerless.

It is from this place—shall we call it the “Inner Prince”?—that I believe men speak, a place of gnawing, yawning anxiety, a place of entitlement unfulfilled. No wonder men are defensive when we present feminism to them. It feels like they will be forced to give up their sense of entitlement. Feminism, to men, feels like loss—a loss of the possibility to claim their birthright of power.

And when men feel their entitlement being snatched from them, they are likely to lash out. Thus, for example, the media-created mischaracterizations of feminist women as man-hating harpies seeking to dethrone academic standards and demolish democracy and individual freedom. Feminists are, in fact, “reasonable creatures,” as feminist essayist Katha Pollitt titles her book, capable of sound judgement, informed opinions, and justifiable outrage at continued injustice. They're feminists because they know that feminism will enlarge the arena of individual freedom for



women and ensure their equality and safety under the law. Those ideals seem as American as apple pie and fatherhood. And feminist women do not hate men. Most of the feminist women I've met love us enough to believe in men's ability to change, despite the pain they have endured both institutionally and individually from a world dominated by men.

Much of this vilification of feminists as man haters coincides with men's fear of feminism. The media assassination attempt, after all, describes men as the centerpiece of the feminist project. Feminism is not about empowering or protecting women (or, obviously, both); rather, feminism is about hating men. Men are, after all, still the center of the universe—as they are entitled to be. To characterize feminism as an ideology that is about men is to return the framework of political ideas to the position to which men are entitled. The world revolves around men, either positively or negatively charged. And, according to Harry Brod, much of men's fear of feminism is not that it is about men's loss of power, but that it is not *about* men at all. If men are redundant, irrelevant, or even insignificant to the feminist project, then the world as we men have come to expect it is no longer a familiar one.

Profeminist men become targets for such anger as well as do feminist women. When hegemonic manhood is threatened, it almost always lashes out sexually. Thus do all the *others* become sexualized—black men, Latinos, and Italians become rapacious beasts, and profeminist men become feminism's court eunuchs, emasculated pussy-whipped wimps. Our masculinity is questioned, usually by questioning our heterosexuality. Any man who supports feminism cannot be a real man, hence he must be gay. Thus does internalized homophobia often keep men from supporting feminism.

Contemporary men did not invent this equation. We are in good company. I spent five years researching the history of men who have supported women's equality in the United States. Since 1776, these profeminist men have included a pantheon of respected Americans who supported women's rights to equality in the workplace, the classroom, and the polling place, who believed that women had the right to control their own bodies, their own names, and their own property. Men like Thomas Paine, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Walt Whitman, Wendell Phillips, Robert Dale Owen, W.E.B. DuBois, John Dewey, Matthew Vassar, and Rabbi Stephen Wise. (The results of this research were published in *Against the Tide: Profeminist Men in the United States, 1776–1990*, a documentary history, published in 1992.)

And ever since the origins of the American women's movement, profeminist men have had their manhood questioned. Profeminist men were consistently vilified by other men, jeered as they marched in demonstrations, mocked in the media, and occasionally, even physically attacked. The day after he gave the rousing speech at the First Woman's Rights

Convention that turned the tide toward the suffrage plank, Frederick Douglass was vilified in the Syracuse newspapers as an "Aunt Nancy Man," an antebellum term for wimp. Another recalled that when he marched in suffrage parades with the Men's League for Woman Suffrage, onlookers shouted "Look at the skirts!"

When he marched in the great parades for Woman Suffrage in the first decades of the century, playwright George Middleton recalled being heckled with such cries as "Take that handkerchief out of your cuff" and "You forgot to shave this morning." And the anonymous author of a profeminist pamphlet called *How it Feels to be the Husband of a Suffragette* noted that he did not wash the dishes in his home (neither did his wife) despite the fact that "something over 11,863 of you requested me to go home and wash them on the occasion of that first suffrage parade." Even the *New York Times* anticipated that male marchers would "be called endearing names by small boys on the sidewalk," but extended to the male suffragists their "sympathy and admiration."

Opponents of feminism always questioned the virility of any man who supported women's rights. In 1913, Senator Heflin of Alabama (grandfather of Senator Howard Heflin) made this charge explicit. "I do not believe that there is a red blooded man in the world who in his heart really believes in woman suffrage. I think every man who favors it ought to be made to wear a dress."

Such sentiments contain two false equations. There's the implicit equation of manhood with oppression and inequality—as if real men support injustice. And there's the equation of supporting gender equality with effeminacy—as if only "failed men" could learn how to listen to women's pain and anger. But feminist women can also take a lesson here. Men do stand to lose something by supporting feminism—our standing in the world of men. There are some costs to our public position as profeminists.

What can we do to challenge these fears of feminism? One thing that seems necessary is to clearly and carefully demarcate men's relationship to feminism, particularly what ways men can support feminism. What is the best way for men to support feminism, and for feminist women to welcome men to the struggle? I believe that we might begin by considering ourselves the Gentleman's Auxiliary of Feminism. This is, to my mind, an honorable position, one that acknowledges that this is a revolution of which we are a part, but not the central part, not its most significant part.

It will be the task of this Gentleman's Auxiliary to make feminism comprehensible to men, not as a loss of power, which has thus far failed to trickle down to most individual men anyway, but as a challenge to that false sense of entitlement to that power in the first place. Like all auxiliary organizations, I think we need to remain accountable to headquarters.



In the conclusion to a recent article in *The New Republic*, sociologist Orlando Patterson outlined an ineluctable feature of all social change movements. Speaking of the movement for racial justice, he wrote that

... the burden of racial and ethnic change always rests on a minority group. Although both whites and blacks have strong mutual interests in solving their racial problem, though the solution must eventually come from both, blacks must play the major role in achieving this objective—not only because they have more to gain from it but also because whites have far less to lose from doing nothing. It is blacks who must take the initiative, suffer the greater pain, define and offer the more creative solutions, persevere in the face of obstacles and paradoxical outcomes, insist that improvements are possible and maintain a climate of optimism concerning the eventual outcome.

So too, I would propose, with feminism. Profeminist men are, as we social scientists like to say, necessary but not sufficient elements in feminism's eventual success. We can be its cheerleaders, its allies, its footsoldiers, and we must be so in front of other men, risking our own fears of rejection, our own membership in the club of masculinity, confronting our own fears of other men. But what choice do we have—we, women and men, who embrace a vision of sexual equality and gender justice?

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## Chapter 4

### On Your Knees: Carnal Knowledge, Masculine Dissolution, Doing Feminism

Brian Pronger

When the question arises whether men can do feminism or can even actually *be* feminists, the answer is often constructed as a matter of deciding what it takes, personally, politically, philosophically, or biologically, to fit the category "feminist." I would like to refrain from deciding who can be what and speak instead of states of desire that prevent men from embodying feminist insights, and alternatively, I want to explore forms of desire that could help men become feminist. What sort of desire would make it easier for men to appreciate feminist insights? I am speaking here not of an achievement that once recognized by authorities might qualify one to be a feminist, as passing a set of examinations qualify one to be a doctor, priest, psychotherapist, accountant, or professional hockey coach. I am thinking instead of reflective practices that could help men experience feminist desire.

I am focusing on desire because it seems to me that implicit in the question of men doing feminism is the energy of desire: men desiring not only the status of "feminist" but, more so, the desire to actualize life in more feminist than masculinist forms. This paper, consequently, will be about the nature of masculinity, a socio-cultural discourse that is (re)produced in bodies, actualized by desire. I will begin by briefly outlining what I mean by the body and desire, by sketching a theory of the relationship between desire and discourse and by specifying what I mean by the discourse of masculinity. I will then describe the tension between masculine and feminist forms of desire, and conclude by suggesting some practical bodily moves that men who experience masculine desire can make in order to open their bodies to the possibilities of feminism.