

The *Boyfriend's* Introduction to **FEMINISM**



by Gideon W. Stone

2nd EDITION

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The *Boyfriend's* Introduction to **FEMINISM**

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1. This is bullshit.

Welcome to *The Boyfriend's Introduction to Feminism*. I expect someone else gave or recommended this book to you. That's a good sign! They want you to have a better life.

Don't get too hung up on the title. It does not mean that person wants you to be their boyfriend. You might already be their boyfriend, or want to be their boyfriend, or hope to be someone's boyfriend some day, but this book is for anyone who could feasibly be a boyfriend at some point in the not-too-distant future.

More generally, this is a book about feminism for young men. I know that sounds like a bad idea, but give me a few more pages. By the end of this chapter, if you are sure it's not for you... okay.

The way I see it, one of three things can happen if you finish this book:

- a) You might embrace feminism.
- b) You might decide feminism is not for you, but still come to understand that feminists are not your enemy.
- c) You might decide feminists are your enemy anyway, but now when you complain about it, you won't come off like a spaniel barking at his own shadow.

So this book is a win-win-win for you. You cannot lose.

Before I tell you more about this book, I want to tell you about a book that came out when I was a young man: *8 Simple Rules For Dating My Teenage Daughter*, by W. Bruce Cameron.¹

¹ Workman Publishing, (2002). I do not expect you to read every

8 Simple Rules is a book of essays. As you might guess, one essay spells out eight rules Cameron has for anyone dating his teenage daughter(s). Rule #2:

If you cannot keep your eyes or hands off my daughter's body, I will remove them.

The book was sold as 'humor', and it was so popular it became a sitcom on broadcast television. So probably Cameron is not 100% serious about gouging out your eyeballs. It's just a joke, right?

In Rule #3, he informs young men that if they show up to his house with their pants sagging and their underwear exposed, "I will take my electric staple gun and fasten your trousers securely in place around your waist."

So: girl meets boy. Boy makes girl happy. Girl brings boy home to meet dad. Dad threatens boy with bodily harm from a power tool because of his dislike for fashion trend. You might also catch that dad is being a bit racist.

Sure, these are jokes... but what do these jokes tell you about your place in the world? Does W. Bruce Cameron care about you? Is he safe?

W. Bruce Cameron is not a feminist. He is on the other side, whatever you want to call that. His idea of humor is threats to torture, maim, and kill young men who make his daughters happy. The sitcom aired at 8pm on Tuesdays: back then, this stuff was prime time fun.

A generation ago, to a dad like Cameron: you were the enemy. And for a lot of dads today, guys who were raised by those dads, and whose wives were raised by those dads: you are still the enemy. They see their job as protecting their girls from guys like you, with violence if necessary. In Rule #4, he threatens to kill you. But it's all a joke, right?

book in the footnotes. Some you probably should not read.

When I was in high school, a few years before *8 Simple Rules* was published, I dated a girl whose step-dad was a competitive pistol shooter. The first time I picked her up for a date, her step-dad made sure I saw his gun collection and the trophies he won for shooting accurately from long distances. And then he said, “So... you’ll have her home by 10, right?”

Yes, her step-dad was yanking my chain, and we had a nice chuckle, but the threat was there. For guys my age, it was also common to meet a girl’s dad and have him start making vague references to war crimes he did in ‘Nam. Bodies. Napalm. Nightmares. You can’t know, kid. You weren’t there.

That is how our society raised the current generation of dads. In fact, the idea that dads have to use violence to protect their daughters from guys like you is a long tradition through generations of dads for thousands of years. That tradition is part of something feminists call ‘patriarchy’. Feminists oppose patriarchy. Feminists do not want to maim or murder teen boys, even as a joke.

If a feminist re-wrote Cameron’s essay, it would be short. It would just be *One Simple Rule For Dating Anyone*.

Always respect their agency and autonomy.

‘Agency’ means a person’s ability to make choices.

‘Autonomy’ means their independence to make those choices. That is feminism in a nut shell: always respect women’s agency and autonomy, the same as everyone else’s.

Patriarchy is bad for women and girls because it limits their autonomy and agency. But it is also bad for lots of men, especially young men. Just a few years after *8 Simple Rules* was published, while the show was still on T.V., superstar feminist bell hooks wrote, “Patriarchy is the

single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation”.² That means you and me both. Feminists have been worried about the harm men and boys suffer in our society for at least twenty years, and in fact a lot longer.

I wrote this book to be the bare minimum for any guy who wants to date a feminist. Or better still, as a starting point for any guy who wants to be a feminist. I think everyone should be a feminist. If you want to get the most out of your relationships with women, you should be a feminist – not just for your girlfriend’s or your wife’s sake, but for every person you will care about in your lifetime.

Most of all, I think you should be a feminist for your own sake, to live a fuller, happier life. I think you should be a feminist to have better friends, better love, and better sex. You should be a feminist to live your best life. It might not be easier, but I promise it will be worthwhile. That is what I want you to get from this book.

Now let me tell you more about where it’s headed. The next chapter, “You can’t be a feminist”, talks about why I am a feminist, with a brief history of feminism. The third chapter, “I’m not the patriarchy”, explains what patriarchy is and why we all play a role. The fourth chapter, “It’s just science!” talks about why gender is not really a science.

Chapter 5, “Give your balls a tug” explores masculinity. Chapter 6, “Thanks for the tip” talks about bodily autonomy. Chapter 7, “She’s asking for it” talks about sex. Chapter 8, “You’re just another cuck” talks about love and why you don’t understand *Moby Dick*. Chapter 9, “What color is your Bugatti?” looks at some of the bullshit masculinity out there. Chapter 10, “I can’t even” gives some concrete advice and next steps, should

² bell hooks, *The Will To Change*. Washington Square Press (2004), p. 17. Own it, read it.

you want to continue your journey.

Let me now say a couple things about what this book is not. It is not meant to make you feel bad about being a boy or a man – although you should definitely feel *different*, by the end. Some of what you read will be unpleasant, for sure, but my goal is to give you better choices about the kind of man you will be. I can't blame you for having bad choices at this point.

This is also not a complete overview of feminism. For one thing, this book is heavily focused on men and boys, where feminism is... not. And this book is only 100 pages, so it should be a quick read for you (you can ignore the footnotes). Obviously, I can only cover a tiny fraction of the feminist universe in that space. There is a lot I have to leave out. So by the hundredth page, you should know enough to decide how to live your life, but you will not know enough to tell anybody else how to live their life.

So that's what this is. If it's not for you, no worries. You are free to go rage on the internet, bark at your shadow, or do whatever else you do with your time. But you might want to read the next chapter, just to be sure you and your asshole are on the same side.

2. You can't be a feminist.

I am a man and I am a feminist.

Based on those two data points, you can probably guess what I look like, what I am wearing, what music I listen to, maybe even what I smell like.

You are probably wrong. Let tell you more:

- I am an Eagle Scout.
- I was an NCAA Division I athlete in college.
- I was a consultant for the Department of Defense on nuclear weapons proliferation.
- I have been snake-bitten more times than I can remember. I let them all go.
- I have been arrested three times.
- I played bass in an alt-country band for ten years.
- You know that scene in *Eastern Promises* where the mob bosses look at Viggo Mortensen's tattoos, and one guy asks about the 'crosses'? He is referring to one of Russia's most notorious jails, 'Kresty'. I have been in that jail.

All of that stuff describes a feminist. I have always been a feminist. My feminist parents raised me to be a feminist. I will never claim to be a top-tier feminist, but I know where I stand.³

A lot of people say a man cannot be a feminist. Even some feminists say men can only be allies. But men have been feminists for generations. John Brown, the militant abolitionist, was also a feminist; he made his sons do

³ Plan A was to publish this under my real name, but that would likely kill my teaching career. I'll explain Kresty later.

housework the same as his daughters.⁴ Frederick Douglass described himself as a “radical woman suffrage man”.⁵ John Stuart Mill, the Scottish philosopher and politician, argued for women to have the vote in 1866. In fact, the word ‘feminist’ was coined by a guy named Charles Fourier, who argued for women’s equality over two hundred years ago. They were all feminists, and so am I.

A lot of people think feminists hate men. One of the weird things about feminism is that the whole pop-culture conversation about feminism is dominated by people who hate feminism enough to invent scarebros to argue against.⁶ Chief of these is ‘feminists hate men’. So pervasive is this idea in our culture that even some young women who want to be feminists believe it, and decide that they too must hate men in order to free themselves.

They are wrong, but I am not a feminist to prove them wrong. I am not a feminist because I give a rat’s ass what anyone thinks about me. I am a feminist because I want a better life for myself and the people I care about.

My feminism centers women, as any feminism should. That means taking women’s perspective and justice as my starting point, but it does not mean stopping there. Obviously, this book does not center women, nor is this book about centering men in feminism. It is about centering feminism in men. Even if I were single and not a father, even if I was alone or stuck in a prison full of dudes, I would still be a feminist. It makes my life better. I would have to be a fool not to see that. I would have to be

4 Adam Gopnik. “John Brown’s Body”. *The New Yorker* (April 25, 2005). <https://tinyurl.com/57v8abmv>

5 Frederick Douglass. “I Am A Radical Woman Suffrage Man: An Address Delivered in Boston, Massachusetts, on May 28, 1888”. *Frederick Douglass Papers Project*, <https://tinyurl.com/5cnsy4br>

6 ‘Antifeminist straw men’ was too wordy. We will meet some of the antifeminist dudes in Chapter 9.

suicidal to ignore it.

So what does it mean that I am a ‘feminist’? Usually, there are two answers to that question. The first is that a feminist believes in the equality of men and women, in political and social terms. A lot of people are more or less this kind of feminist, but even lots of people who do not identify as feminists will tell you they believe in the equality of men and women.

To way oversimplify our history, the ‘equal rights’ version of feminism is what we call ‘first-wave feminism’, which kicked off in the English-speaking world with Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792.⁷ She argued that women should have the same rights as men, and this encouraged many women in the U.K. and U.S. to focus on their political rights. The most important political right was the right to vote, which American women finally won in 1920. As we all know, that victory solved all women’s problems for the rest of human history.

The second answer is more complicated. Women who won the vote soon realized having rights in public does not solve the many problems women face in private (and did not even solve that many public problems). This led feminists to look deeper, in particular in Simone de Beauvoir’s book *The Second Sex* (1949)⁸ and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).⁹ These women and others looked at gender inequality as a much bigger social problem, prompting feminism’s second wave.

The name we use for social inequality against women and girls is “patriarchy”. Second-wave feminists (along with third- and fourth-wave feminists) want to smash patriarchy. I want to smash patriarchy. If things are bad for

7 I’ve read most of it.

8 Own it. Haven’t read it. Probably will.

9 Haven’t read it. Probably won’t.

men under patriarchy (and they are) then equality for women means the same amount of bad for everyone. That kind of equality is for chumps. I want better for everyone. We are all better off without patriarchy.

Feminism today covers a broad range of views. There are centrist feminists who think the movement should focus on passing the Equal Rights Amendment (which most Americans support), and there are Marxist feminists who think we should tear apart the U.S. economy and rebuild it along socialist lines (not me). There are TERFs¹⁰ (definitely not me) who argue that transwomen cannot be women or feminists. Many feminists (like me) identify as 'intersectional', which means we recognize that patriarchy is not the only injustice in society, and that many people are subject to overlapping injustices. Intersectional feminism tries to work in solidarity with other movements, like antiracism, the labor movement, and disability justice.

There is plenty of disagreement within feminism about what feminism should be. It is probably impossible to be a feminist without disagreeing with at least some feminists some of the time. There are definitely feminists who will disagree with things I write. That is okay. The important thing is that we all oppose patriarchy. We are all on the same side even if we disagree where the line is.

Of course, 'patriarchy' is a loaded term. The next chapter is all about patriarchy, but let's call W. Bruce Cameron's schtick in *8 Simple Rules* 'ironic patriarchy': his girls have no agency and he will staple-gun anyone who touches their boobies (wink wink but serious face). Now let's go beyond the joke, to see some dead serious patriarchy. Let's go down the yellow brick road of patriarchy so we can peek behind the curtain and meet the wizards who wield its power – who, as it happens, often

10 Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists.

wear robes and long beards.

The Emerald City of patriarchy is Afghanistan under Taliban rule, where women are mostly hidden in their homes. Everywhere else they are covered head, shoulders, knees, and toes – and still need a chaperone. ~~As I am writing this, the Taliban is implementing a legal ban on women laughing in public.~~ Soon after I wrote that sentence, the Taliban banned women's *voices* in public. Many Afghan people resist these rules, but it is difficult and terrible to be a woman in that society right now.

Can you imagine dating there? You can't. Not in public, anyway. In big cities, some people date in secret, but... it's very dangerous. In 2012, the Taliban beheaded 17 young people just for attending a mixed-gender party.¹¹ And not just for young lovers: getting caught can have consequences for families and friends, too. For most young couples, the parents work things out, and the first time they ever touch each other is at the wedding.

Granted, these traditions are shaped by a deep history of insecurity over decades of war (including the U.S. occupation). But strip away all the religion and moralizing, and it still boils down to dads 'protecting' their girls from boys – but with AK-47s, not staple guns.

So now you might be thinking: wow, Afghanistan sounds like a terminal case of blue balls! Right? It gets worse. With women effectively vanished from public life, many powerful men turn to abusing boys in a practice called *bacha bazi* – or 'dancing boys'. The boys are essentially sex slaves.¹²

11 Even W. Bruce Cameron thinks this was cruel – to the girls.

12 Opposition to *bacha bazi* was one of the reasons the Taliban gained power in the first place. It is once again technically illegal, but the Taliban seems to have little interest in investigating and prosecuting cases. See Jovana Andelkovic. "Bacha Bazi – severe child abuse disguised as an Afghani custom." Humanium.org (September 13,

It might feel like a hike from W. Bruce Cameron's staple gun to Afghan warlords abusing boys, but friend... it is not a leap. Jordan Peterson agrees, as you will learn.

The connection is right there in Cameron's jokes: control of girls' sexuality requires violence against teen boys, too. The core of patriarchy is control over women and girls' sexuality, but it cannot tolerate the healthy development of boys' sexuality any more than it can girls'. Anywhere women are locked out or locked down, the abuse of boys thrives – in Afghanistan, but also male-only spaces here in the U.S. like the Boy Scouts and Catholic clergy. The staple gun joke is less funny now, right?

So now you have a choice: a status-quo so determined to control women's and girls' sexuality that it will sacrifice boys' tender young buttocks to the lusts of older men, but which even in its weak form thinks torturing teenage boys is prime-time comedy.

Or you can join a movement of people who want to free every single human being on earth from that horror.

Whose side are you on? Were I in your shoes trying to weigh the pros and the cons... this would not be a tough choice. People say feminists hate men, but when have feminists threatened boys with torture and sexual abuse?

So I am a feminist, and you can be a feminist, too.

The first step is to buy a bra. Then burn it!

That's a joke. Would you have laughed if W. Bruce Cameron wrote it?

If you decide you are a feminist... you are a feminist. One of the weird but nice things about feminism is that once you're in, you're in. Nobody can kick you out. There are likely to be some feminists who find my version of feminism too idiosyncratic, and I welcome their criticism... but none of my errors will make me not a feminist.

2022) <https://tinyurl.com/4jpyvjkd>

Nobody can cancel my feminism except me.

That also means I can't kick anyone else out. For a lot of young men, their entire experience of feminism so far is women tweeting "Men are trash" or something like that. That is not my feminism and not my experience of feminism, but I also cannot promise you those accounts are not feminist. I do think social media is mostly trash, and the algorithms boost the 'feminists hate men' stereotype, making the movement look more hostile than it really is.

Some people think men need their own movement. They say a guy like me can only be an ally or pro-feminist, but I should focus on men's liberation. Men tried that in the 1970s, and it went badly off the rails to become the men's rights movement, which is now fiercely antifeminist.

I think that if we support the basic goal in feminism (smashing patriarchy), the idea that men can only be allies but not fully feminist ends up being exactly the kind of gender hierarchy we oppose. To say each gender should have its own movement is to concede ground we ought to be conquering. There is no his and hers freedom. Gender liberation cannot be gendered liberation.

For similar reasons, I do not describe myself as a 'male feminist'. The phrase gives weight to gender that it should not have in a feminist world. Granted, a lot of feminist guys do identify as 'male feminists', but many of them see this as a noble sacrifice, something they do to protect women and girls. These men seem to think they must give something up, so that women can have more.

This is important: if your feminism makes your life less full than it was before, you are doing it wrong. I am not asking you to sacrifice yourself for the freedom of women and girls. I am asking you to set yourself free in solidarity with women and girls.

3. I'm not the patriarchy.

You have been harmed by patriarchy. It starts early and does not stop. We are doing this now because you are in an in-between time – maybe not quite free of your parents, but not quite settled down. I wish I could have helped you sooner. Sorry.

You might notice I used 'patriarchy' instead of 'the patriarchy'. A lot of people read 'the patriarchy' as 'THE PATRIARCHY, LLC' – as if we have a chairman and bimonthly meetings and a social committee to plan our Secret Santa. Just plain 'patriarchy' makes it sound more abstract but also broader in scope, which it is.

Patriarchy is a social institution – that is, a durable set of ideas that shape our relationships with each other. Other institutions include religion, marriage, and Thanksgiving. We don't usually talk about 'the religion', 'the marriage', 'the Thanksgiving' – so it also makes more sense to talk about just 'patriarchy' and not 'the patriarchy'.

Another reason to avoid the 'the' is that the rules of patriarchy can change from society to society, from vicious and obvious (Afghanistan) to subtle and insidious (some European countries).¹³ They are all related, but they are not all the same. There are lots of different patriarchies, all of which are patriarchy.

Beneath it all, patriarchy rests on three bedrock ideas:

- 1) Humans have two genders, 'men' and 'women'.
- 2) We can reliably tell men from women by their biological, psychological, and social traits.
- 3) Men are superior to women.

¹³ You can assume I'm talking about American patriarchy in this book, unless I specify otherwise.

Some people want to narrow the definition to just #3 all by itself, but #3 would be meaningless if #1 and #2 weren't doing a ton of work already – and we'll look at that work in the next chapters.

And for #3, 'superior to' means both 'better than' and also 'positioned above'. Patriarchy is a gender hierarchy: men are better than women, men are above women, men are in charge of women.

Feminists think gender hierarchy is pointless, unfair, and harmful. We want to end patriarchy because it is bad for everyone, especially women. This does not mean we want to replace patriarchy with matriarchy, in which women are superior to men. That is still a gender hierarchy. We want no gender hierarchies at all.

The word 'patriarchy' literally means 'rule by fathers'. Dads used to have a lot more power back in the day. In classical patriarchy, young men and women were both more or less property of their fathers. In Roman times, an adult son was not fully a man and free of his father's authority until daddy's death. If your dad insists you take up his sport, or his hobbies, or that you follow his career path, then you are living in an echo of that.

Feminist writers adopted 'patriarchy' to refer to power dynamics in modern society more broadly. Whether men are fathers or old or not is not all that important to our use of the word. A lot of antifeminists assume 'patriarchy' means the key relationship is father-daughter, and argue that we are just angry women with daddy issues. Which might be true in specific cases, but misses the forest for the trees. If daddy was not all in on patriarchy, his daughters probably would not have issues. That said, bad husbands probably forge more feminists than bad dads.

Daughters and wives get the worst of it, but patriarchy also has no great love for its sons. It low-key hates boys:

“What are little boys made of? Snips and snails and puppy dog tails.”¹⁴ Snips are eel-like fish, snails are snails, and puppy dog tails are cut off to make the dogs more attractive. Under patriarchy, boys are a problem only solved by turning them into men.

It is a common misconception that only elite men are part of The Patriarchy. Almost everybody is part of patriarchy. It's not enough to say, 'I'm not in charge of anything!' It's not enough to say, 'Oh, I don't really believe men are better than women!' Unless we confront how these ideas color our entire worldview, we're also part of patriarchy. I'm not perfect here: many days, I am to some degree a part of patriarchy.

It is hard not to participate in patriarchy. We have a hard time imagining anything different, because every part of our society and culture is tainted by patriarchy, going back thousands of years. Patriarchy took over before humans invented writing, so we have to literally dig up and piece together evidence there was ever anything else.

For a long time we were told that patriarchy was established by God from the dawn of time; you can see this in the Bible or the Qur'an. After Darwin, 19th century anthropologists decided it was something humans created. They saw patriarchy as the peak of human civilization.¹⁵ They acknowledged humans had matrifocal societies before patriarchy, but considered those societies 'savage'.

In 1932, a zoologist named Solomon Zuckerman published a book arguing that male dominance is typical in

14 Probably from Robert Southey. Girls are made from 'Sugar and spice and everything nice'; that is, consumables.

15 Joan Marler. "The Beginnings of Patriarchy in Europe: Reflection on the Kurgan Theory of Marija Gimbutas". in *The Rule of Mars: The History and Impact of Patriarchy*, edited by Cristina Biaggi. KIT (2006). p. 65 This chapter is available on the Wayback Machine: <https://tinyurl.com/ycam9sn2>

primates. He based this on a London zoo exhibit of mostly male baboons that turned into a bloodbath, and the image of brutal monkey patriarchy has been stuck in pop culture ever since. However, primatologist Frans de Waal says that male control of females is "atypical among primates"; he calls patriarchy "the wrong metaphor".¹⁶ Turns out, it's not natural for most primates, including humans.

In fact, human societies have only been patriarchal for the last 7,000 years or so, which is only 3% of human history. An archaeologist named Marija Gimbutas did a lot of the work on the transition to patriarchy. She points out that before 5000 BCE or so, European cultures had no signs of war: no defensive structures, no weapons, no graves honoring warriors. They also had few figurines of male gods, but lots and lots of female goddess figurines. (These objects are believed to be sacred because they are common at sites that were altars or shrines.) Gimbutas argued this points to a civilization that was "peaceful, sedentary, matrifocal, matrilinear, and sex egalitarian".¹⁷

Then horse-riding nomads from Central Asia moved into Europe. Gimbutas called them 'Kurgans', but others call them 'Yamnayans': they were "warlike, patriarchal, and hierarchical".¹⁸ In addition to patriarchy, they brought a language we call Proto-Indo-European, which became the basis for languages as diverse as Sanskrit, Armenian, Latin, Greek, and even English. DNA evidence backs up this theory, but the types of DNA passed down by mothers

16 Frans de Waal. *Different: Gender Through The Eyes of A Primatologist*. W.W. Norton & Co. (2022), p. 84; ch. 4

de Waal identifies as a feminist and this is a great read, but I think it would be more effective with a firmer grasp of feminist work.

17 See Marija Gimbutas. *Civilization of the Goddess: the world of Old Europe*. HarperCollins (1991), p. 352. Own it, read it.

18 Same book, same page.

seem less affected.¹⁹ So it looks like waves of Kurgan men rode into Europe, killed people, and took over. Something similar happened to India, and possibly other places: the archaeology work is not as thorough as in Europe, so we know less. But eventually, Europeans and others spread patriarchy to the rest of the world through religion and colonization.

So not only is patriarchy not natural, we even have a pretty good idea as to when it started. Even if it was somehow natural, that does not mean it is best for us right now. We need to have a conversation, to make a choice about what sort of society we live in. I choose a society without patriarchy, where boys do not have to worry about having their eyes gouged out or their buttoholes gouged in.

Make no mistake: if you are a man, patriarchy benefits you in some way. The most important benefit every man enjoys under patriarchy is that we are not women. We can make choices women cannot – like shamelessly having lots of sex, eating whatever we want, ignoring our children, and buying clothes with pockets.²⁰ ‘Privilege’ is our name for the more and better choices men enjoy. It is not necessary for a man to be in a position of power over women. Under patriarchy, all men enjoy some degree of privilege in terms of the choices they are allowed.

If that was all there was to it, this would be more of a slog for me. But patriarchy also denies men choices – like sitting down to pee, or seeing a therapist, or being

19 Miriam Robbins Dexter. “The Beginnings of Patriarchy in Europe: Reflection on the Kurgan Theory of Marija Gimbutas”. in *The Rule of Mars: The History and Impact of Patriarchy*, edited by Cristina Biaggi. KIT (2006). p. 148-149
See also Roni Jacobson. “New Evidence Fuels Debate over the Origin of Modern Languages”. *ScientificAmerican.com* (March 1, 2018). <https://tinyurl.com/2tkabsth>

20 This is not an exhaustive list.

emotionally available for our children, or anything that might be considered ‘girly shit.’²¹ You might not want to make a ‘girly’ choice today, but you might want to make that choice some other day. Meanwhile, there are probably many men who would make that choice right now.

When men are denied choices, they sometimes assume that means male privilege is illusory. Yet patriarchy also tells us the choices we lose are worse choices, that we are not missing anything. For example, patriarchy does not protect young men, but tells us that needing protection is feminine. *Not* needing protection is a privilege under patriarchy, so the vast majority of men think being exposed to harm makes them more manly. One of the reasons patriarchy is so successful is that it casts its own faults and contradictions as strengths and benefits.

Some people argue that because men get harmed, society does not value men. Yes: welcome to patriarchy. Patriarchy harms men while claiming it helps them. For example, men are more likely than women to commit suicide. Of course, a key tenet of patriarchy is that a man who needs help is weak. ‘Real men’ know that therapy is basically the same as a Gestapo interrogation, and would rather take their secrets to the grave. Men kill themselves rather than get help, because patriarchy told them they were better off dead.

Getting rid of patriarchy begins with seeing through the lies and learning to think about our lives honestly. And that goes for women, too: most women end up supporting patriarchy because it’s easier to go along than fight back. It is easier to think and behave the way other people do, than to try to think and behave differently.

Most women are not feminists. In a 2019 Ipsos poll that asked American women whether they identify as

21 Nor is this is an exhaustive list.

feminists, only 29% said yes.²² A Pew poll in 2020 showed only 19% of American women say 'feminist' describes them very well.²³ 42% of women said it describes them 'somewhat well', which Pew says means 61% of American women could be feminists. I think Ipsos got it right; I think Pew's approach is too fuzzy. A person 'somewhat' opposed to patriarchy is also somewhat okay with it. If I ask whether 'anti-kicking puppies' describes you, and you say "somewhat well"....

Most women are not feminists, or are only 'somewhat' feminists, because it is easier to go along with patriarchy than fight. Patriarchy gives women fewer and worse choices than it allows men, but also punishes them harshly for 'wrong' choices. The penalties include physical and sexual violence, economic insecurity, and social stigma.

So the trade-off women face is not a) patriarchy or b) liberation, but a) patriarchy and b) the consequences of fighting patriarchy. A feminist woman knows she will still spend most of her life in patriarchy, nowhere near free of it, and possibly harmed even more than if she did nothing. But she also knows her fight will improve the life of every single person she cares about. If she can surround herself with people who oppose patriarchy, she might get a break.

Women cannot end patriarchy without men. Because patriarchy shapes our relationships, women need men to help remake those relationships. As individuals we cannot free ourselves from patriarchy, not entirely or even mostly. Yet refusing to impose patriarchy on other people is a massive kindness towards everyone around us.

We also cannot pass a law to ban patriarchy. It is not a

22 Catherine Morris. "Less than a third of U.S. women identify as feminists". Ipsos, 25 Nov. 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/4a26wfju>

23 Amanda Barroso. "61% of U.S. women say 'feminist' describes them well; many see feminism as empowering, polarizing". *Pew Research Center*, July 7, 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/2eetbpdv>

legal thing. The fact that women have rights does not mean patriarchy is over. In fact, winning political rights made it clear to women that the struggle was bigger than just voting or owning property. Women have made progress in that respect, but the U.S. government is still heavily patriarchal (and I wrote that *before* the 2024 election).

Even if we elect a woman as President (oops), patriarchy will still be a powerful social institution. A woman who wields patriarchal power is not smashing the patriarchy: if anything, she's helping it. Margaret Thatcher is not a feminist icon; she used her power to protect and strengthen patriarchy in Britain.

That goes for most women in positions of power. Some are feminist, but more often women in power get there by serving patriarchy. The fact that lots of men had female teachers or even bosses who abused their power does not mean patriarchy is over. My 4th- grade teacher was an asshole, but her being a woman didn't mean patriarchy was over, in roughly the same way her being Black did not end white supremacy.

That principle extends to moms, too. A lot of men think that because their moms raised them, they grew up under matriarchy. But the power moms have over children is rooted in patriarchy. So bell hooks wrote that "patriarchy breeds maternal sadism in women who embrace its logic", and "single mothers are often the most brutal" in putting that sadism to their sons.²⁴ She also wrote:

Mothers who ally themselves with patriarchy cannot love their sons rightly, for there will always come a moment when patriarchy will ask them to sacrifice their sons.²⁵

24 bell hooks, *The Will to Change* (Wash. Square Press, 2004), p. 61

25 bell hooks, *The Will to Change*, p. 64

If feminists are just women with daddy issues, then antifeminists are just men with mommy issues.²⁶ To be clear, feminism insists all parents reject the sort of violence that patriarchy uses to make boys into men.

Indeed, some of the most important work feminists do is in their personal relationships. Of course, there is a public face to feminism, which involves voting and marching and all that. But whether or not you do that public work, it is likely that the most consequential work you do will be among your family and friends.

How you build those relationships, whether they are full of care and justice or dominance and violence, will probably matter more than your voting record. Patriarchy will not end in an electoral landslide or a court verdict, but date by date, kiss by kiss, birth by birth, death by death. We will not live to see the end of patriarchy, but in the meantime we can do tremendous good for the people we care about by rejecting patriarchy in our personal lives.

There is no point worrying men will be wiped out when patriarchy ends. It will not happen in our lifetime, not in our grandkids'. And what it means to be a man is always changing, anyway. In the next chapter, we will see how researchers try to measure gender scientifically.

26 Neil Strauss, a recovering misogynist, says that he, many of his fans, and other antifeminist authors all have narcissistic mothers. See Laura Marsh & Esther Breger. "Can a Pickup Artist Unlearn His Tricks?" *The New Republic* (October 14, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/2tjna39s> and Kathy Gilsinan. "The Game at 10: Reflections from a Recovering Pickup Artist". *The Atlantic* (October 13, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/44r6bwpm>

4. It's just science!

The cornerstone of patriarchy is the idea that there are two genders: men and women. They are completely different, and men naturally dominate. Everyone knows that. It's science.

Feminists accept that human genitals tend to fall into two categories. But from our perspective, that grain of fact is not enough to support the sand castle that is gender. We reject the gender binary, which says what is masculine cannot be feminine and feminine cannot be masculine.

Other than their genitals, what does science actually say about men and women? The most obvious difference is that men are usually bigger: the average man has 1.12 times the body mass of the average woman.²⁷ But that is not much for primates. Male gorillas can be more than twice the size of female gorillas, and even chimpanzees have a bigger size difference. The size difference is because male gorillas compete physically for mates. The fight.

Primates that engage in sperm competition tend to be the same size for both sexes, but the male's genitals are larger. Gorilla penises are tiny. The size and shape of men's genitals suggest we evolved for sperm competition – that is, for women having multiple partners.²⁸ For example, the glans on the human penis has a large coronal ridge, which seems to work as a scoop to clear other men's semen out of the vagina.²⁹ Gross, right?

27 Richard J. Smith. "Scaling of Sexual Dimorphism in Body Mass: A Phylogenetic Analysis of Rensch's Rule in Primates". *International Journal of Primatology* 23:5 (October 2002), 1095-1135. <https://tinyurl.com/2s4x79v6>

28 Michael Pham and Todd Shackelford. "Human Sperm Competition: A Comparative Evolutionary Analysis". *Animal Behavior & Cognition* 1:3 (2014). <https://tinyurl.com/3vhm4yjd>

29 Gordon G. Gallup, Jr. et al. "The human penis as a semen

On the other hand, the average man is much stronger than the average woman. Perhaps men did fight for mates, like gorillas, though the strength difference is nowhere near that of gorillas. Another theory is that women evolved to carry more fat (instead of muscle) to help fetal brains develop, while men stayed about the same.³⁰

But if men evolved to fight, they evolved to fight each other – not to dominate women. We saw in the previous chapter Frans de Waal describe male control of females as ‘atypical’ in primates. If humans evolved for physical or really any kind of competition, then patriarchy is not natural. Patriarchy *limits* competition. Social institutions often foster cooperation to allocate resources, which in patriarchy means girls and women.

Many people believe the difference between men and women is more than physical, but neurological as well. Men and women do have different brains – the difference is about 1%, on average. But: “it is impossible to discern the degree to which group-level differences between human males and females are attributable to inborn sex factors versus social-environmental gender learning, acting through lifelong neuroplasticity”.³¹ That is, the difference in brains may well be due to the fact that social factors shape our brains even before we are born. Whatever the structural difference, the “sexes do not differ in general

displacement device.” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 24:4 (July 2003), pp. 277-289 <https://tinyurl.com/35zt5hs9>

- 30 William D. Lassek & Steven J.C. Gaulin, “Substantial but Misunderstood Human Sexual Dimorphism Results Mainly From Sexual Selection on Males and Natural Selection on Females”. *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022) <https://tinyurl.com/y8b5fn3b>
- 31 Lise Eliot, et al. “Dump the ‘dimorphism’: Comprehensive synthesis of human brain studies reveals few male-female differences beyond size”. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 125 (June 2021), pp. 667-697. <https://tinyurl.com/33ymz73s>

intelligence”.³² To the extent there are differences in specific intelligence, they probably reflect social factors as well as biological factors.³³

A lot of people put the differences between men and women down to biochemistry, not anatomy. Everyone knows testosterone makes men more aggressive, right? While that might be true for some animals, it is not so much for male humans. The authors of a chapter in a 2017 book on violence and aggression concluded the evidence was “weak or inconsistent” for a link with testosterone.³⁴ A 2020 review also found “no strong evidence for a causal role in testosterone promoting human aggression”.³⁵ The one big exception was for men who had low levels of cortisol. In humans, cortisol mediates aggression, and interpersonal conflict is good way to get cortisol flowing. Absence of cortisol is not normal – an anomaly.

There are other anomalies that make *specific* men more susceptible to violent impulses, but not most or even many men. We can call these differences “anomalies” because most men do not have them. For example, ‘low MAOA’ is often cited as a path to higher violence, but the majority of

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- 32 Matthew Reynolds, et al. “The sexes do not differ in general intelligence, but they do in some specifics”. *Intelligence* 92 (May-June 2022). <https://tinyurl.com/589ahbm7>
 - 33 Diane Halpern & Mary LaMay. “‘The Smarter Sex’ A Critical Review of Sex Differences in Intelligence”. *Educational Psychology Review* 12 (June 2000); abstract, p. 232. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1009027516424>
 - 34 Justin M. Carré et al. “Testosterone and Human Aggression”, in Peter Sturmey, *The Wiley Handbook of Violence and Aggression*, vol. 2: Biology. Wiley (2017), p. 10 at <https://tinyurl.com/48tb8jvs>
 - 35 S.N. Geniole, et al. “Is testosterone linked to human aggression? A meta-analytic examination of the relationship between baseline, dynamic, and manipulated testosterone on human aggression”. *Hormones and Behavior* v.123 (July 2020). <https://tinyurl.com/2s43395y>

people who are positive for low MAOA are not violent.³⁶

COMT is another anomaly that affects maybe 1 in 6 men, and might make men more prone to violence.³⁷ Yet scientists still cannot agree whether it has any role in aggression. And for any of these genetic issues, there are still social factors (a history of child abuse, drug abuse, etc.) necessary to turn the biological anomaly into behavior.

The vast majority of men do not have an innate tendency to aggression and violence. The idea that men are aggressive most likely reflects thousands of years of myths and traditions celebrating a few men's violent behavior, making exemplars of people who might well be freaks of nature. The rest of us, the vast majority of dudes who are not predisposed to violence are somehow expected to follow their terrible example.

Obviously, aggression is not the only difference between men and women – and again, feminists accept that some of those differences have at least biological roots. But if gender is a material fact, it should be fairly simple to measure. That has not been the case.

A hundred years ago, psychologists Lewis Terman and Catherine Cox Miles created a test to measure masculinity and femininity, called the M-F test.³⁸ Terman was a pioneer

in IQ testing, and figured he could measure gender more or less the same way. Working from the gender binary, he and Miles assumed it was a single spectrum from masculine to feminine. So they had test takers answer questions about things like what jobs they preferred to do – librarian, auto racer, architect, etc. And the results were about what you might expect.

Soon other researchers made their own M-F tests, but results from the various tests were weakly correlated, which “hinted that various M-F scales were not always measuring the same thing”. Terman and Miles also found that “college students’ M-F scores did not correlate much with their self-ratings”. A guy could think he was manly but his M-F score would tilt feminine. Which could be good for him: based on M-F testing data, “feminine boys and masculine girls tend to show higher levels of creativity, scholastic achievement, and giftedness than more sex-typed children”. To be clear: the gender binary was not valid science.

In 1974, a psychologist named Sandra Bem took a different angle. She did not assume masculinity and femininity were on the same scale, but created two separate scales. In her approach, masculinity corresponded with “instrumental traits” – focused on tasks, getting the job done – and femininity corresponded with “expressive traits” – more to do with relationships with people. A person could be both strongly masculine and strongly feminine, strongly one or the other, or weakly both. And her measurements worked a bit better than Terman and Miles’ M-F tests, but still not great.

Richard Lippa, author of the book I am summarizing, tried yet another route in the 1990s, which he called “gender diagnosticity”. So far it is the most reliable way to measure masculinity and femininity (according to Lippa). But it depends on context: what counts as masculine or

36 Tabitha Powledge. “Do the MAOA and CDH13 ‘human warrior genes’ make violent criminals—and what should society do?” Genetic Literacy Project (April 5, 2024). <https://tinyurl.com/2uv3m542>

37 Arqam Qayyum et al. “The Role of the Catechol-o-methyltransferase (COMT) Gene Val158Met in Aggressive Behavior, A Review of Genetic Studies”. *Current Neuropsychopharmacology* 13:6 (December 2015). p. 802-814. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4759319/>

38 Richard A. Lippa. *Gender, Nature, and Nurture* 2nd Ed. Taylor & Francis Group (2005). The discussion of gender measurement draws heavily on pp. 46-80 of this book. Subsequent quotes are from pp. 51, 53, 64, 57, 73.

feminine changes across times and cultures. The GD method develops questions based on what people in a specific time and place think is masculine or feminine. It is still the main tool used to measure gender.³⁹

Psychologists have spent a hundred years trying to nail down something fundamental about gender, and according to Lippa the most we can say is that men tend to be more interested in things while women tend to be more interested in people.⁴⁰ And Lippa says that nature and nurture are “inseparable” in gender development.⁴¹

Lippa may not be a feminist, but his conclusion is not controversial to feminists. We agree nature helps shape gender, but we add more nuance. First, while there are differences between men and women, it is not biology or psychology that creates gender *roles*. Instead, our ideas about biology and psychology matter more than the facts.

Second, and more importantly, those differences cannot justify a gender hierarchy – that is, a patriarchy. A society where biological facts mattered more than our ideas would be a lot closer to gender equality than we are now. Think about Lippa’s finding that masculinity relates to interest in things, and femininity to interest in people. If that is true, why do we let men run our governments?

One of the most misunderstood things feminists say is that “gender is a social construct” – by which we mean, gender is a concept created by society. A lot of people think this means that we think that gender is complete make-believe, like a fairy tale. But no: gender is very real.

We know gender is real because it has consequences in the world. You can see those consequences everywhere. It is

39 Marco Del Giudice. “Statistical indices of masculinity-femininity: A theoretical and practical framework”. *Behavior Research Methods* (56), pp. 6538-6556. <https://tinyurl.com/4jrw9ac>

40 Lippa, *Gender, Nature, and Nurture*. p. 78

41 Lippa, *Gender, Nature, and Nurture*. p. xix

real, but it is a social fact, not a material fact. The United States of America is also a social fact, not a material fact. People live and die because the U.S.A. exists, but if we all stopped believing in the U.S.A. it would cease to exist. Same for Thanksgiving, marriage, and religion.

When we call something a ‘construct’, we should ask who constructed it, and from what? For the first question – “who?” – the answer is pretty much everybody in society. The folks doing the heavy lifting tend to be lawmakers, religious leaders, marketeers, artists, and so on.

Some of the best evidence for the social construction of gender is the fact that different societies have different social constructs. In fact, plenty of cultures have recognized more than 2 genders, anywhere from 3 to 7.⁴² These societies were stable for long periods of time, which suggests that any number we assign to genders is arbitrary. Genders are not traits that humans discover; they are categories humans create.

For the second question – “from what” – the answer is biology, culture, politics, religion, and so on. Again, most feminists do not deny that biology is part of gender. We do doubt it is the most important ingredient. Consider a cake recipe: it might call for flour, sugar, eggs, butter, baking powder, etc. Which is most important? It is hard to say.

Think about this: the recipe calls for 2 teaspoons of baking powder. It makes enough cake for eight slices. How much baking powder is in each slice?

It’s a trick question: baking powder transforms in the oven to create a salt and carbon dioxide. If the reaction is complete, there should be no baking powder left in the cake – just the products of that reaction. But even though

42 See, for example, Oliver Taylor. “10 Societies That Recognize More Than 2 Genders”. *Listverse* (October 3, 2018). <https://tinyurl.com/ye26nch4>

it is no longer present, the baking powder leaves bubbles in the cake that make it fluffier than it would be.

Social constructs can be similar: when we get to the final product, it might well be the case that one or more ingredients has changed so much that it is no longer detectable. I don't think that is the case for gender, but the biological facts are probably a lot more like baking powder than flour in this recipe.

With respect to biology, something like 1% of people have ambiguous gender, but even people who have unambiguous biology can still feel like they are quite different genders. But most of us aren't inspecting DNA or checking genitals: we take our cues from decisions people make about their appearance, which can be extremely ambiguous. We can even change biology, e.g. giving AMAB people estrogen. Even if there are biological facts, our minds are so bent around gender that it is hard for us to think about those facts except in terms of gender.

Then there are the psychological aspects: patriarchy assigns men traits like brave, tough, stoic, and strong (and if you aren't these things, you are less of a man) and says women are timid, fragile, emotional, and weak. But there are endless exceptions: men who are timid and women who are brave and so on. Even if the average man is significantly braver than the average woman, that difference does not support the expectation that all men should be brave and all women should be timid.

Patriarchy becomes especially hard to believe in the social traits it assigns to genders. It says that men have roles like hunters and leaders and soldiers and explorers and athletes, and yet in every era of human history we can find women who have done these things successfully, and in no time more so than now. So the rules about which gender is which under patriarchy do not work anymore, if they ever

did. Again, they are not rules we discovered about how men and women exist. They are rules we made up to tell men and women how to exist.

Once we are assigned a gender – boy or girl – we are then expected to learn and follow the rules. As young people, we experience gender as expectations. For those of us who grew up as boys, we were expected to be physical, rambunctious, loud, brave, tough, and so on. We had to do things we did not want to do and sometimes did things we hated, simply to fulfill other people's expectations of what boys and men should be.

Feminism says those expectations are crap. Whatever the biological differences in humans with different genitals, they do not support the weight of gender expectations. Feminism says you do not have to conform to someone else's idea of what a person with your genitals thinks, feels, does, and is in our society. Feminists (except TERFs) encourage free gender expression. You can be as manly as you want, and you can be as feminine as you want. You can be non-binary, masc, femme, trans, whatever – and you can change that day to day if you want to.

Some feminists are gender abolitionists. I am not, but the basic problem with gender is that no matter the science, in practice we define masculinity as better than femininity to justify putting men above women. We have to get rid of the hierarchy. The question is, can we still retain any meaningful sense of gender? Gender abolitionists say "no", and I suspect they might be right. It will not happen any time soon, of course. In the meantime, we should look at what masculinity demands of boys and men.

5. Give your balls a tug.

Masculinity is in crisis! You know that already. You read the headlines. Maybe you tried tanning your ballsack because you watched Tucker Carlson's "The End of Men".

The thing is, masculinity has been in crisis for more than a hundred years. Plenty of men have tried to solve that crisis, like when Sir Robert Baden-Powell created the Boy Scouts in 1907.⁴³ There have been lots of books, too: Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man* in 1974, Jack Nichols *Men's Liberation* in 1975. A generation later came Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly* and Robert Bly's *Iron John*, both in 1992.⁴⁴ Did feminism spark this crisis? I doubt it.

Part of the problem is that nobody can agree on what masculinity is and isn't, as we saw in the last chapter. In *Iron John*, Bly noted how masculinity changes decade by decade: "The Fifties man was supposed to like football, be aggressive, stick up for the United States, never cry, and always provide".⁴⁵

So what does masculinity look like now? When I started on this chapter, I realized my own views might be outdated. I decided to read the #1 book in 'men's gender studies' on Amazon, which at that moment was John Lovell's *The Warrior Poet Way*.⁴⁶ Lovell is a former Army Ranger, current gun influencer, and *Braveheart* mega-stan.

43 Matthew Wills. "Boy Scouts and the Phenomenon of 'Boyification'." *JSTOR Daily* (August 9, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/mu9te8m2>

44 Farrell: did not read. Nichols, Bly: own and read. Keen: read.

45 Robert Bly. *Iron John*. Vintage (1992) p. 2

46 John Lovell, *The Warrior Poet Way: a guide to living free and dying well*. Sentinel (2023) By the time I checked the book out, read it, and wrote this chapter, *The Warrior Poet Way* had dropped to #9, replaced at the top by Kyle Prue's *How To Piss Off Men: 109 Things to Say to Shatter the Male Ego*. Progress?

Incidentally, iconic feminist Audre Lorde described herself as a "Black woman warrior poet".⁴⁷ I don't know if she saw *Braveheart*, but she would hate Lovell's book. I apologize if this chapter reads like a book report, but I had little idea when I picked up *The Warrior Poet Way* that it would be so batshit perfect.

How does Lovell define masculinity? "Warrior" is a big hint, and Keen and Bly also use 'warrior' in their books. One problem here is that societies with a warrior caste also have castes for men who are not warriors – including slaves. Usually, you don't get to choose.

Lovell says we "need men to be strong and aggressive"⁴⁸ – but as we saw in the last chapter, aggression is not a biological trait for most men. Lovell may be one of the men with freakish genetics: he wants men to be dangerous, "constantly war-gaming a thousand different ways to destroy their enemies".⁴⁹

He also has a very white view of masculinity: when he sees "big guys tatted up wearing MultiCam with a Glock T-shirt and gun stickers all over their cars" he thinks "good guy".⁵⁰ But for a Black or brown man, being dangerous is an easy way to get shot by white guys in Glock shirts.

With words like 'big' and 'strong' Lovell tells us we ought to look aggressive, too. Feminists have written tons about how beauty standards harm women, but in 2001 a study reported "nearly as many men as women are unhappy with how they look"; the authors noted the problem had been growing the last 25 years.⁵¹

47 Audre Lorde. "The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action". *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press: 2007), pp. 41-42.

48 Lovell, *The Warrior Poet Way*, p. 39

49 Lovell, *The Warrior Poet Way*, p. 19.

50 Lovell, *The Warrior Poet Way*, p. 30

51 Katharine Phillips & David Castle. "Body dysmorphic disorder in men". *BMJ* 3:323 (November 2001), p. 1015-1016.

A lot of this is on Hollywood. In 1972, *Cosmopolitan* featured nude Burt Reynolds as their centerfold.⁵² His not especially muscular build was typical of leading men of that era. A decade later, Arnold Schwarzenegger starred in *Conan the Barbarian*, and began a trend towards absurdly ripped heroes. Schwarzenegger did not disclose his use of steroids until much later.⁵³

When Hugh Jackman first starred as Wolverine in 2000's *X-men*, his 'mutant' physique looked like a beefier Burt Reynolds. In *The Wolverine* in 2014 he looked like a veiny boner with lambchops. Indeed, for the last 20 years or so, nearly every dude who takes off his shirt on screen has to have unrealistic muscles, even if the character is not a mutant, god, or genetically-enhanced super soldier.

Kumail Nanjiani has been candid about the toil and toll it took to achieve a god bod: his workout mantra was "leave your body".⁵⁴ Which, obviously, is not healthy. Alan Ritchson also described the damage from his regimen to play jacked Reacher: "I fucking wrecked my body, dude. It was too much. I didn't have time to heal".⁵⁵ In fact, Ritchson's physician put him on testosterone *after* filming, because his workouts snuffed out his body's ability to produce the stuff. A lot of guys hold themselves to this standard, which for most is completely out of reach

⁵² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1121529/>

⁵² "A Look Back at Burt Reynolds' Iconic Nude Photoshoot in *Cosmopolitan*". *Cosmopolitan.com* (September 7, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/w8jafm8>

⁵³ Ebenezer Samuel. "Arnold Schwarzenegger Explains His Olympia-Era PED Use". *Menshealth.com* (May 24, 2023) <https://tinyurl.com/44amfsjh>

⁵⁴ Brian Raftery. "Kumail Nanjiani Can Do Anything". *Menshealth.com* (March 10, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/bddep24>

⁵⁵ Sam Diss. "Alan Ritchson on becoming Jack Reacher: 'I f**king wrecked my body'". *GQ UK* (January 19, 2024) <https://tinyurl.com/3bu5r798>

without chemical assistance.

This is something I have struggled with, too. Many years ago, as I was recovering from cancer surgery, I decided to hit the gym again. I needed specific exercises, but I couldn't find a workout book with pictures of dudes I could believe were natural. I also did not want cosmetic beef, just functional strength. So I bought the *Women's Health Big Book of Exercises*.⁵⁶ It had the same basic exercises as men's books (and more), but the models look like normal people. 10/10 highly recommend.

So why does patriarchy need men to be and look aggressive? Guys like Lovell argue that men are 'protectors' – that this is a natural role for men, which demands aggression. But there is a huge difference between protecting people because human dignity deserves protection, versus protecting people because you see them as possessions.

Car crashes are one of the leading causes of death of Americans, especially children. About 1 in 5 child deaths is from a car crash.⁵⁷ If men are protectors, then extremely safe cars – like the 2024 Honda Accord⁵⁸ – should be extremely masculine. They protect people extremely well. But no: men show off their masculinity in desperately loud track cars and trucks with kid-killer lifts.

In fact, Lovell's buddies with their Glocks are at least twice as dangerous to their own families as guys without guns, and probably a lot more.⁵⁹ A guy who wants to

⁵⁶ Adam Campbell. *The Women's Health Big Book of Exercises*. Rodale (2016).

⁵⁷ Rebecca Cunningham, et al. "The Major Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States". *New England Journal of Medicine* 379:25 (December 19, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/3aepk2zp>

⁵⁸ "2025 Top Safety Picks". Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. <https://www.iihs.org/ratings/top-safety-picks/2025>

⁵⁹ David Studdert. "Owning Guns Puts People in Your Home at

protect his family is much safer with zero guns, but patriarchy has to control people before it will protect them.

A better explanation is that men protect *other men* – specifically, that young men protect old men. After all, nobody really expects old men or even middle-aged men to be warriors. The deal patriarchy offers young guys is that at some point, you can have the money and the women and the house and the herds of horses and the slaves – whatever passes for wealth in your society – if you earn it by protecting and increasing the wealth of older men. It's not biology. It's business.

What do guys lose in this deal? For starters, a bunch of us die pointless deaths – not just in war, but in our own neighborhoods. Men are far more likely to be murdered outside the home than women, and one very common way that happens is getting into arguments with people we know.⁶⁰ Lovell wants us to be dangerous, and we are: dangerous to anyone we know.

Consider how that threat of violence affects our relationships with other men. Men know men are dangerous, so we have to be careful. We saw how W. Bruce Cameron framed one relationship: 'I will kill you' – that, to a potential son-in-law. Who would want to be friends with that?

People write and talk all the time about how lonely men are. For example, a recent CNN essay talked about "The male loneliness epidemic and how it affects fathers".⁶¹

Greater Risk of Being Killed [...]" . *Time.com* June 3, 2023.

<https://time.com/6183881/gun-ownership-risks-at-home/>

60 "Expanded Homicide Data Table 10" and "Expanded Homicide Data Table 11". FBI: UCR, *2019 Crime in the United States*. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-10.xls>
<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-11.xls>

61 Shannon Carpenter. "The male loneliness epidemic and how it

But these people never talk about how violence makes our relationships more difficult. In his book, Lovell never describes a close friendship with another man (or woman, for that matter). He talks a lot about his wife and his kids, and some about admiring another soldier, but almost nothing about guys he likes to hang out with just to hang out. And Lovell not only thinks men should be aggressive, he surrounds himself with men with guns. Guns definitely do not protect men from loneliness.

This same aggression translates easily to domestic violence in family life. By far the weirdest part of *The Warrior Poet Way* comes in the chapter, "Battle The Inner Coward" – subsection, "Staving Off Softness". Lovell tells how his son had a bloody knee and would not stop crying, which made Lovell uncomfortable. So Lovell pulled out his knife and cut himself. I shit you not:

As blood dripped down my arm, I looked my son in the eye and said, "This hurts me the same as yours hurts you. But I'm choosing to take the pain. I'm choosing to be tough. And I'm asking you to do the same."

At that moment, he officially finished crying. [...] After that day, he was tougher, braver. I could see it in his eyes.⁶²

If I discovered my dad was a psycho, I would also be tougher and braver in his presence. But if I did that to my kid, my wife would lock me up in a mental hospital before the bleeding stopped. And she would be right.

affects fathers". *CNN Health* (9/18/2023)
<https://tinyurl.com/4xfdy35>

62 Lovell, *The Warrior Poet Way*, p. 67.

What Lovell describes is domestic violence – self-inflicted, but still not okay. Nothing in the book better demonstrates some of the key principles of masculinity:

- 1) We have to harm ourselves to be men.
- 2) There is no comfort for men, only the same hurt other men feel.
- 3) Emotions are weakness, which we must do everything to avoid.
- 4) Emotional terrorism is okay, because that is power.
- 5) Not controlling our kids makes us failures as men.
- 6) Dad is the most dangerous person in our childhood.

That is what he taught his son. And let me be clear that describing this as domestic violence is not at all a joke, nor does it diminish the reality of domestic violence that men experience. Yet a lot of men's rights advocates never complain about domestic violence from their dads or older brothers, only their partners and mothers. As if the violence is not the problem... just the gender is doing it.

I expect most men have survived domestic violence – when they were boys. Whether or not you think it's okay to spank a child, it is still violence. In many homes, it is dad's prerogative: 'Just you wait till your father gets home!' As a gender role, 'dad' embodies patriarchal violence quite literally. Lovell wants us to be dangerous, and we are: to our families.

So you don't assume that I think Lovell is completely wrong about everything, I will note he does not directly criticize mental health care. He allows, "Trauma is a real thing", and suggests "professional help" for dealing with it,

"depending on its level of severity".⁶³ But he also says "what we call trauma" is "often a man's lack of creativity and resolve to find the next battle".⁶⁴ Which... wtf?

Given his background, he needs to say more. Veterans are at least 50% more likely to commit suicide than civilians, according to the VA.⁶⁵ And men, of course, are already more likely than women to commit suicide – which you probably know. In the U.S., 80% of suicides are men.⁶⁶ What you may not know is that women are much more likely to attempt suicide than men.⁶⁷ Men are not more suicidal than women. We're just better at it. We are dangerous men, indeed: dangerous to ourselves.

A lot of these suicides are older men, too. Even if masculinity feels easy now, it will not always be. Guys your age assume they can keep it up forever, but then one day find the walls they thought protected them have instead become a prison. They are crushed by the pressure to keep being the man, to keep being aggressive and dominant, to protect without protection, to provide but never receive. They find themselves with nobody to turn to, and no way out. The friends and family who piled on the pressure will say kind words about how he was strong and tough and brave and 'a good man', with no clue he could have been anything else and yet lived.

To sum up Lovell's book, the most manly thing about good men is aggression, and we should lean into that. Yet

⁶³ Lovell, *Warrior Poet*, p. 201

⁶⁴ Same book, same page.

⁶⁵ "Ways Veterans Differ From the General Population". Veterans Affairs Administration (Jan. 2022). <https://tinyurl.com/3y6vuadx>

⁶⁶ "Suicide Data and Statistics". CDC.gov (March 26, 2025) <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/data.html>

⁶⁷ Rachel Carretta et al. "Gender Differences in Risks of Suicide and Suicidal Behaviors in the USA: A Narrative Review". *Curr Psychiatry Rep* 25:12 (November 6, 2023), p. 809-824 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11225381/>

we can also see that most of the bad stuff that happens to men – war, violent crime, isolation, suicide – stems from aggression. Men, especially young men, frequently get killed trying to be the men patriarchy says they should be. That can be fighting in wars or fighting in bars, or doing dangerous sports or just driving like an asshole. Men, especially young men, endure tremendous harm trying to prove their masculinity. Does that seem okay?

Lovell blames the crisis in masculinity on a society that praises “weakness and lack of discipline while villainizing aggression and strength”.⁶⁸ Yet the men he praises in *The Warrior Poet Way* are mostly movie characters, from films like *Top Gun*, *Gladiator*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Rambo*, *Fight Club*, and of course *Braveheart* over and over. All more or less fiction. Lovell seems to think feminism is more influential on young men than the massive multi-billion dollar industry pumping out films, shows, and video games that celebrate violence. I wish! I’d be getting paid for this book, if that were the case.

You have probably seen a lot of those films, or similar. You probably didn’t know you were being indoctrinated. It might be okay if it were just for fun, except you get this same bullshit from dads and uncles and older brothers and pastors and Scoutmasters and coaches.

Coaches in particular: one of the main ways men are socialized into aggression is through competitive sports. In high school I joining the rowing team and loved the sport, but in college I had a pair of coaches who were relentlessly aggressive towards their own athletes. All their yelling and cursing and breaking shit soon killed my enthusiasm. I already had a competitive streak, but they made me dysfunctional. Almost thirty years later I still have to be very careful about anything competitive, to keep from

68 John Lovell, *The Warrior Poet Way*, p. xv.

becoming a raging asshole again.

Sports or no, for any young man the odds are about 100% that you have been told at some point in your life: don’t be a pussy. Don’t be a little bitch. Give your balls a tug.⁶⁹ Man up. It is usually – not always – men saying these things, policing your masculinity. You are a male, therefore you must be masculine, and so those expectations form boundaries on what you can be.

You can think of those expectations as a box. Masculinity has walls; outside the box are all the things men are not supposed to do or be. Some men fit inside the box just fine. Like Lovell, they find it easy to be that kind of man. But many of us do not.

For many men, the box is too small. We think too much, feel too much, we simply are too much. We are too big for the box. So what do we do? Traditional masculinity demands we lose what doesn’t fit in the box. As we mature, we are expected to leave behind the parts of us that are kind or vulnerable or beautiful, because it is all girly. Because that’s not what men are. Patriarchy cannot allow it. bell hooks calls this ‘psychic self-mutilation’⁷⁰: we become men by cutting away anything feminine.

We see this mutilation clearly in schools, where more and more boys are falling behind girls. When boys were ahead of girls, most people thought it meant boys were smarter than girls. Now that boys are falling behind, it is part of the ‘boy crisis’, a problem studied by the World Bank⁷¹ and United Nations.⁷²

An obvious explanations for the problem comes from

69 Yes, this is a reference to the show *Letterkenny*. Also *Shoresy*.

70 bell hooks, *The Will To Change*. Wash. Square Press (2004), p. 66.

71 UNESCO. “Boys’ Disengagement in Education”. <https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education/boys>

72 World Bank. “Education Underachievement Among Boys and Men”. <https://tinyurl.com/3svdur2s>

sociologist Anne Lincoln, who studied why veterinary medicine has become a female-dominated field over the last generation. According to her research, “what’s really driving feminization of the field is what I call ‘preemptive flight’—men not applying because of women’s increasing enrollment”.⁷³ Dr. Lincoln should have called it “male bail” instead, but either way it is documented in a range of other fields and professions. When too many women do something, a lot of men refuse to do it. And this is a straight man problem, because gay men are more likely than women to succeed in school and attend college.

Another explanation comes from Finnish researchers, who used Lippa’s gender diagnosticity approach to look at why boys were doing worse in school.⁷⁴ The Finnish team measured students on three aspects: their personality traits, their personal values, and their cognitive skills. The male-typical personal values included ‘Power’ and ‘Tradition’ – so basically, patriarchy. Both boys and girls could score as ‘male-typical’ in this study, and what the team found was that ‘male-typical’ personality *traits* made no difference, but personal values and cognitive skills did. Boys who were male-typical and girls who were male-typical in these values and skills did worse, and ‘personal values’ was the most significant factor.

I have been teacher for several years, and I have read a lot of articles about the struggles of boys in school. These

73 Malinda Larkin, “Study seeks to explain feminization of veterinary profession.” American Veterinary Medicine Association, avma.org (December 15, 2010). <https://tinyurl.com/uj5ezamn>
See also: Celeste Davis, “Why aren’t we talking about the real reason male college enrollment is dropping?” *Matriarchal Blessing*, October 6, 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/4n34nmxd>

74 Sointu Leikas, et al. “Male-typicality Disadvantages’ in Educational Outcomes Is Reflected in Personal Values, but Not in Personality Traits”. *Collabra: Psychology* 10:1 (June 14, 2024). <https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.118840>

two theories – they are pretty close to each other – describe what I see in classes. Boys are more likely to ignore the content and not do the work. It’s not because teachers are not trying to reach them; we are!

To be clear, I do not blame the boys. I blame patriarchy, and maybe racism. To the extent American education has changed in ways that disadvantage boys, it’s probably due to changes meant to disadvantage Black schools and students, especially Black boys. But since this is a bigger issue than just the U.S., I mostly blame patriarchy: it is causing these boys something like brain damage. I am not saying ‘masculinity is brain damage’, but when boys don’t develop their minds, they become men who are less capable and less conscious than they should be. Feminists do not want to leave these boys behind. Women get no benefit whatsoever from ignorant men.

Feminism wants you to be your best, smartest, most fully developed self. Patriarchy can’t let you do that; instead, it demands you sacrifice and suffer. When we talk about ‘toxic masculinity’, we mean the aspects of masculinity that cause harm to other people, but also the harm it causes men themselves. From our perspective, masculinity isn’t in crisis; for too many men, it is crisis.

Yet feminism does not demand you abandon masculinity entirely. We do not want you to be less than men. We want you to be more than men. We want you to give up trying to squeeze into the masculinity box. There are parts of you that fit in the box, and that’s fine. But the parts that don’t fit are still you, and we want you to be whole. Liberation does not mean a different box. It means no walls at all.

In Chapter 2, I gave you my masculinity resumé so you wouldn’t think I was some long-haired herbal-tea-drinking watery-colory BabyBjörn-wearing weirdo. Everything on

that list is true – it's what fits in the box, but it's not all of who I am. I am an Eagle Scout but I got my award with hair down to my shoulders. I told you I was an athlete, but I did not mention my physical disability or my mental health struggles. I get snake bit every now and then – nothing venomous – but I can't drink caffeine. When my kid was born, I had a work-from-home job as a defense consultant; I quit to be a stay-at-home parent because my boss (a man) insisted I could work sixteen hour days with an infant in the house. I even dabble in water colors. Feminism helped me understand that I am not coming up short in my masculinity. I am exceeding it. I am overflowing the box. It is too small.

Feminism does not demand we give up masculinity, but it does ask us to recognize masculinity comes with some heavy baggage. We have to be sensitive and responsive to the harm men have caused even if we did not cause it ourselves. We have to acknowledge the hurt and fear masculinity has caused women and others, even if we did nothing to cause or provoke it. That will often be uncomfortable, but it's a lot more comfortable if you wear your masculinity lightly. Don't let masculinity confine you. It should not be a straitjacket, but a raincoat – something you can take off when you don't need it. You can decide what it means to be a man, and when. That is the liberation feminism offers you. And that goes for trans-bros, too: your masculinity is valid. The most manly thing you can do now is to refuse other people's bullshit.

This helps women, too, and I don't mean in terms of us men not being assholes, but also that. Patriarchy says what is manly cannot be girly and what is girly cannot be manly, which means relaxing your masculinity also opens up space for women to transform femininity. The less you enforce masculinity on yourself, the less you enforce femininity on

women. Everybody gets a little more room to be.

If you are young, you are under the most pressure you will ever be to fit into the masculinity box. By the time you're 30, that pressure will drop off sharply (unless you find yourself in a toxic environment). So be tough and brave and strong and assertive for now, if you want to, but also make room in your life to be vulnerable and beautiful and kind. Be your fullest self.

The Warrior Poet Way is one of the worst books I have ever read about masculinity, so let me end with one of the best: Robert Webb's *How Not To Be A Boy*. He writes:

if you want a vision of masculinity, imagine Dr. Frankenstein being constantly bum-raped by his own monster while shouting, 'I'm fine, everyone! I'm absolutely fine!'⁷⁵

That is the crisis in masculinity. Masculinity tries to convince us the harm it does is is fine, absolutely fine. If you're not fine, it's okay to say so. Don't let it fuck you in the ass.⁷⁶ Which brings us to why patriarchy is okay fucking anyone in the ass.

⁷⁵ Robert Webb. *How Not To Be A Boy*. Canongate (2019), p. 238. Own it, read it, love it.

⁷⁶ If butt stuff is your thing, that's a different conversation.

6. Thanks for the tip.

Last chapter, we saw bell hooks call the demands of masculinity 'psychic self-mutilation', but sometimes that mutilation is not 'psychic' and not even 'self'. If you are missing part of your penis, you know what I mean.

Bodily autonomy is central to feminism. It is one of the main things we fight for. For thousands of years, women have not been able to make independent decisions about their bodies. They have been subject to the whims of their fathers and husbands or other men as to who will have sex with them, how often, how many children they will bear, what sort of physical labor they do, and so on. There is no feminism that ignores bodily autonomy.

But bodily autonomy is not just for women. It is for everyone. For men, for children – even babies.

Many baby boys in the United States are circumcised soon after birth. They are never given the choice. Whatever your thoughts on the value of circumcision, the feminist view is that it must be a choice boys make for themselves. It cannot be made for them.

Some of the earliest leaders of the movement against circumcision were (women) feminists, like Marilyn Milos. A history of that movement notes how Milos and other "women's rights" activists (i.e. feminists) took up the cause; even early male leaders of the movement were "peace and women's rights activists".⁷⁷

Today, few feminists pay attention to anti-circumcision activists – 'intactivists', which is clever – because the intactivists turned a blind eye to anti-semitism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry. This alienated lots of people who

77 Charli Carpenter. *'Lost' Causes: Agenda Vetting in Global Issue Networks and the Shaping of Human Security*. Cornell (2014) pp. 125-7. <https://fbbaum.unc.edu/teaching/articles/Carpenter-Ch6.pdf>

would be sympathetic to their cause.

Here's Eli Ungar-Sargon, director of a documentary on circumcision, explaining the change:

I don't think a good person of conscience who cares about things like homophobia, racism, sexism, can look at a movement like this and take it seriously, when there's absolutely no type of sensitivity to those issues and those sorts of prejudices are just allowed to run rampant [...]⁷⁸

One part of the problem is that intactivists framed the issue as one of 'men's rights', which by definition does not reflect solidarity with feminists. Circumcision is more accurately a violation of children's bodies, not men's.⁷⁹

For many young men, circumcision was the worst thing a doctor ever did to them – and they can't even remember it. But many, maybe even most women have much worse experiences of our medical system. Many women have awful experiences with physicians over and over as teens and adults because of their sex and their gender. Google 'speculum'. From a feminist perspective, bodily autonomy in medicine means much more than just foreskins. For women, it includes appropriate gynecological care, birth control, abortion, etc. Too many men ignore that and focus instead on their missing dick lip.

The most important justification for infant circumcision (at least among gentiles) was to prevent masturbation. This is a bodily autonomy issue, but it is also not a strict consequence of patriarchy. There were patriarchal societies in which masturbating was okay.

78 Daisy Schofield. "How intactivist's anti-circumcision movement was co-opted by the alt-right". *DazedDigital.com* (April 9, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/3cj32c55>

79 Charli Carpenter. *'Lost' Causes*, pp. 144-147

For people in European and colonized countries, the stigma has roots in ancient Greek culture, where sexual activity was either active or passive. Active was manly, passive was womanly.⁸⁰ We still see this today in insults and epithets: “Suck my dick”; “This blows”; “Fuck me!”; “You’re a pussy” – all rooted in passive sexual roles. Back then, masturbation was also considered passive and thus feminine – “Go fuck yourself!” Now you might think, ‘Yeah, but I get *really* active.’ Sorry: still passive. Note that anally penetrating teen boys was active and ‘manly’.

So masturbation shame is based on a gendered view of sexual activity, which makes it a consequence of patriarchy. That stigma became a religious taboo in Christianity for a long time, and still is for many believers. After the Enlightenment the taboo was justified in medical terms, and here we return to circumcision. It was not just the taboo, but the refusal of bodily autonomy that allowed physicians and other clinicians to do incredible harm to young people who might masturbate. This included circumcision and clitoridectomy, but also chastity belts and the ‘Bowen Device’ and ‘jugum penis’.⁸¹ Some people were locked into mental institutions to prevent masturbation.

All of which feminists oppose. One of the perks about being a feminist is that you can jerk off without shame. Bodily autonomy means it is nobody else’s business. It is your body to do with as you please.

You might think, ‘great, but feminists don’t like porn, so...?’ But why do you need porn? Lots of animals jerk off. All male primates, as far as I know. Most mammals,

80 Terry Madenholm. “The Rules of Masturbation in Ancient Greece”. *Haaretz.com* (April 10, 2023). <https://tinyurl.com/yeysbud2>

81 LJ Charleston. “The brutal anti-masturbation devices of the Victorian Era”. *News.com.au* (July 20, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/4wk34vut>

including sheep, ferrets, bats, dolphins, goats, dogs, lions. The male sea otter at the Georgia Aquarium, for sure. Do they need porn? No. They just grab and go when the need arises. Humans were once the same kind of animal. The big difference is that you have been taught shame.

My feminist parents did not teach shame, and my generation did a lot to escape it. I think the 1992 *Seinfeld* episode “The Contest” was the tipping point.⁸² A few years later, the book *Black Hawk Down* could talk candidly about how Army Rangers like John Lovell serviced their units.⁸³ For a while it was better, but today lots of people want to bring that shame back – things like ‘No Nut November’ or the Proud Boys ban on masturbation.⁸⁴

And along with that, we have seen an incredible surge in the industry that preys on and stokes that shame: pornography. A great many guys only need porn to get past their shame. If they did not have the shame, they would not need the porn.

I really mean this: if you need to see people having sex to get aroused enough to complete the mission... there might be something wrong with you. But I don’t think the problem is that you are a pervert. I think you’re just ashamed, because patriarchy says you should be.

You can see the shame in porn, too. In most porn the actors (men and women) look unhappy and angry. There is so much tension – not sexual tension, but sexualized tension. These are not healthy people in happy, loving relationships. The actors must act as if they are doing wrong, because that is how their audience feels. The actors cannot be joyful, because the viewer is not joyful.

82 November 18, 1992.

83 Mark Bowden. *Black Hawk Down*. Signet (1999)

84 Nikki McCann Ramirez. “The Proud Boys Have Really Strict Rules About Jerking Off”. *Rolling Stone* (January 23, 2023) <https://tinyurl.com/3arm44hp>

Feminists oppose porn for two reasons: the most important is bodily autonomy. We do not believe that actors (men or women) in porn are making free choices. Some, maybe. Many are not. The porn industry depends on coercion, and the weirder it gets the less likely the actors have any autonomy or agency in their roles.

The second reason is that porn tells men – especially young men – that women are subordinate, that women are less than, that women are things to be used. In fact, feminists define pornography as “sexually explicit material that depicts women being coerced, abused, dominated or degraded in such a way as to endorse their subordination”.⁸⁵ We do not object to sexually explicit material. If anything, we are more open-minded about it than conservative people. We object to subordination.

Another way of describing this is that feminists object to objectification. You might think we mean physical objects, like forks, doorstops, or Fleshlights®. An easier way to think about it is in grammatical terms. In English, sentences usually have a subject and a verb: for example, “I write.” In that sentence, the subject is ‘I’ and the verb is ‘write’. If the sentence is “I write books” – then ‘books’ is the object of the verb.

And so with sex, ‘objectification’ means sentences like “I fucked her.” ‘Her’ is the object. Nothing in “I fucked her” suggests she had any agency. “I fucked her” could mean she sought me out for sex, but it could also describe sexual abuse. Either way, “I got fucked” is not how people describe a pleasant experience. Under patriarchy, men are the subjects in sex and women are the objects: men fuck women. The idea is a big problem for women,

85 West, Caroline, “Pornography and Censorship”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.) <https://tinyurl.com/2fdsd5fb>

but also for everyone else.

“We fucked” is better. This sentence makes both people subjects. But that is past tense. How we think about sex in future and present tenses is more important. That includes how we fantasize about sex. If you fantasize about sex with objects, you are likely to treat partners as objects.

Porn is an object. A photo is an object. There is no way around that. A video is just a bunch of objects, moving quickly on a screen. Still, when feminists talk about objectification, we’re usually not focused on the mere fact the photo or video exists (although that may be an issue, too) but how it portrays the people involved.

Porn often depicts women in ways that encourage men to see those women as objects. Porn often encourages men to think of women as having no autonomy or agency over their desire. Even if the woman is shown wanting sex, it is only because the man initiated sex. The man’s desire ‘turns on’ the woman; her agency is secondary to his.

Porn encourages men to see women as subordinate to men’s desires, which is how patriarchy says things are supposed to be. Ironically, this same expectation is behind many men’s complaints about ‘starfish’ sex, where the woman just lies there limbs akimbo. These women are just doing what patriarchy tells them to do: not show any agency in sex. And that sex is kinda terrible – for her especially, but also for him.

There are two things you can do right now. First, make your partner’s agency and autonomy an explicit part of your fantasies. Instead of imagining yourself ramrodding someone hypnotized by the sight of your massive dong, imagine you and her engaging in mutually desirable sex. Don’t just fantasize about the partner you want. Fantasize about the partner who wants you.

Second, avoid media that seems to subordinate anyone

or deny their agency and autonomy. I have little idea how hard it is to avoid porn that subordinates and objectifies women. Last time I checked, it was a real challenge. But the better you get at avoiding gross fake sex, the better you will be prepared for great real sex.

There is 'ethical porn' out there, although I think anything ethical is probably not pornography by the feminist definition. If it's sexy and ethical, 'erotica' is a better word. Point being, most feminists are not opposed to titty pics. We are not even opposed to movies about people banging. But porn exploits women's bodies as it exploits men's shame. We are opposed to exploitation.

We are just as opposed to the exploitation of men's bodies. Bodily autonomy especially opposes slavery: that is, when people are denied bodily autonomy for economic and political reasons. I've already mentioned John Brown and Frederick Douglass were feminists: before the (U.S.) Civil War, abolitionists and feminists were a rock-solid alliance. All the feminists you can name in that era – the Grimke sisters, Lucy Stone, Sojourner Truth – were also abolitionists. Many saw a clear parallel between the enslaving of Black people and the subjugation of women. Just as they opposed the idea that Black people could be forced to work, we oppose the idea that young people should be forced to fight.

Conscription – we call it the 'draft' in the U.S. – forces young men to fight wars. This is very deeply an issue of bodily autonomy. Feminists oppose the draft for men, women, and everyone. This is one of those situations where equality is for chumps: women and men both getting drafted is the same bad for everybody. We want better for everybody. We want no draft.

Guess who gives not a backseat fuck about the draft? John Lovell. In *The Warrior Poet Way* he tells of his

sympathy for Vietnam veterans "who went to fight in the name of freedom", and came home "to crowds literally spitting in their faces".⁸⁶ That would be super sad if it were not an urban legend; there is plenty of research debunking that story.⁸⁷ Lovell accuses hippies of "breaking the hearts and spirits of our warriors", without realizing many 'warriors' were draftees.⁸⁸ In fact, 3/4ths of the men who fought in the war came home no longer supporting it – and many of them became protestors themselves.

Any time a feminist talks about the draft, somebody says, "what about World War 2?!?!?" Yes, we are a long way from an ideal feminist world in which war is unthinkable. In the meantime, a quasi-feminist society might well use force to defend itself. That could look like this: national service would be compulsory for every able-bodied person at 18, to include military training but also plenty non-combat options. Military conscription could only begin in case the country was attacked. (The Confederates attacked us; the Axis powers attacked us.) Conscription would take only those 22 and older who had *already* completed their national service. Service would be limited to the country's existing territory. Young people still in national service could not be forced to the front lines as conscripts, but they could volunteer.

The key difference here is that protection would be a duty older people owed to younger people. Not just men's duty, and not just young men's. The expectation would be that everyone would fight – gender would not be a factor.

Still, the government should not have to force people to fight. People don't run away from wars because they're scared. Plenty of people enlist in wartime even though

⁸⁶ Lovell, *Warrior Poet*, p. 35

⁸⁷ The Wikipedia page "Myth of the Spat-On Vietnam Veteran" gives an overview of that research: <https://tinyurl.com/4matfx68>

⁸⁸ Lovell, *Warrior Poet*, p. 35.

they're scared (as both my grandfathers did). People run away because they feel there is nothing worth fighting for. In a feminist society, everybody's life would be meaningful and worth protecting, and the urgency of protection would outweigh the risk. But again, we are so far from that sort of society that it is almost unthinkable.

In feminism, bodily autonomy is an ethical commitment we owe to each other no matter what the government says. When we talk about a 'right' to bodily autonomy, we are talking about government. 'Rights' are rules about what government should and should not do. Feminists fight for the right to bodily autonomy against conscription, slavery, transphobia, circumcision, mass incarceration, and more. Right now, the U.S. government does not acknowledge a right to bodily autonomy.

The most obvious battleground for the right to bodily autonomy is abortion. Feminists think people should be allowed to take care of their bodies as they see fit, and the government should not make those decisions for us. When it comes to pregnancy, feminists believe only mothers and their physicians are in any position to make choices.⁸⁹

Whether you think abortion is right or wrong, the feminist view is that the government has no say. No doubt some mothers get abortions for bad reasons. No doubt some get abortions for good reasons. The point is that government cannot decide good or bad, much less declare that no good reason exists. To argue otherwise is to grant the government incredible power over our bodies.

People who say abortion violates a 'right to life' are telling us they believe the government knows best how we can take care of our bodies. Most of these same people also

89 This is a bit of semantics, but I think 'mother' can refer to anyone who is pregnant regardless of their gender identity. This seems to me a more radical statement than 'men can give birth.'

argue modest taxes and minimal gun control are tyranny. The homicide rate in the U.S. is 7.5 per 100,000.⁹⁰ The maternal mortality rate is 18.6 per 100,000.⁹¹ Pregnant people in America face more than twice the risk of death the average gun owner faces.

Some men concede a right to abortion but argue they have an equal right to not pay money to support a child they fathered. Obviously, this is silly. Bodily autonomy is not implicated in the payment of child support. But bodily autonomy is implicated in the fact that some 1.5 million parents are jailed each year for not paying child support.⁹²

To most feminists, this is outrageous. Jailing those people – most are men – serves no feminist goal. Paternal child support is not a feminist idea. The main reason child support exists is to prevent kids from getting money from the government. The idea that fathers bear primary responsibility for providing for their kids is deeply patriarchal. It is based on the legal doctrine of 'coverture', in which a man and his wife were a single legal person, by which the man was responsible for earning money and all important decisions.⁹³

90 "Assault or Homicide". National Center for Health Statistics (July 23, 2024) <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/homicide.htm>

91 Donna Hoyert. "Health E-Stat 100: Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2023". National Center for Health Statistics (2025) <https://tinyurl.com/y57pfydc>

92 Elizabeth Cozzolina. "Who Goes to Jail for Child Support Debt?" Council on Contemporary Families (June 19, 2018). <https://tinyurl.com/3mu8d8nw> Because sentences are usually less than a year, most deadbeat parents are in and out of jail in a short time frame. It is not the case that the majority of our prison population of 2.2 million people are delinquent dads.

93 Elizabeth D. Katz "Criminal Law in a Civil Guise: The Evolution of Family Courts and Support Laws". *University of Chicago Law Review* 86:5 (September 2019). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3168243; much of this page is paraphrase from the article.

Child support laws were on the books in the early 1800s, but enforcement was limited. As desertion and divorce became more common later that century, more and more mothers and children turned to charity for support. By the end of the century, charity leaders (mostly men) began to push to make non-payment of child support a crime, because they did not want to help women whose husbands had left them with children. When state programs took over from charities, the states saw child support as a way to limit their spending as well.

By the end of World War II, 'family courts' were common in the U.S. These were civil courts, so deadbeat dads could be held in 'civil contempt' – which meant they could be jailed, but without the usual due process. In particular, people charged with civil contempt have no right to an attorney, like they would in a criminal court.

From a feminist perspective, this is wrong. Jailing parents (most of them are men) for non-support does nothing to help their children. It probably does worse than nothing. This is one of those times where equality is not enough. We do not want moms going to jail the same as dads.⁹⁴ We want better for everybody.

In particular, we want better for the kids. A child support system that goes after absent parents only helps kids whose absent parent is not dead, poor, unknown, incarcerated, or somewhere out of the country. Even with the most robust child support enforcement, there will still be too many kids who get nothing.

In a feminist world, no parent would go to jail for failure to support their child financially. But more importantly, no child would lack support. Here is a feminist writing about abortion, men, and child support:

⁹⁴ In fact, many of us want to abolish the prison system in the U.S.

the state has a duty to meet children's basic needs and [...] this should be done at a generous level. The payment should be non-means tested and should be made on the basis that children are individual citizens with the entitlement of citizens to social support at times of incapacity (here by reason of immaturity) to support themselves.⁹⁵

Making sure all kids' needs are met is a social obligation under feminism, not just a parental obligation.

Point being: the principle of bodily autonomy means kids should not have bits of flesh cut off, mothers should not be forced to give birth for kids they do not want, and fathers should not be forced into jail for kids they do not support. A government that can deny women abortions and tolerate cutting up baby bits is definitely a government that can lock men in jail for not paying child support. That government is patriarchal, not feminist.

⁹⁵ Sally Sheldon. "Unwilling Fathers and Abortion: Terminating Men's Child Support Obligations?" *Modern Law Review* 66:2 (March 2003), pp. 192-193.
<https://sci-hub.se/https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2230.6602001>

7. She's asking for it.

One of the main ideas in this book is that patriarchy cannot tolerate the healthy sexual development of young men any more than it can for young women. Most girls experience this as a clear message: 'Don't have sex.' For boys, it's more like 'Don't make your dick our problem.' You can ask questions when you are a little kid, sure. But as soon as you are capable of sexual reproduction, you are to never ever talk about it to any adult. Even that two weeks of sex ed in 9th grade PE class, you better not say a single damn word. So says patriarchy.

Of course, feminism sees things differently.⁹⁶ Your sexuality is valid – boy or girl, cis or not, straight or queer. It is not something to ignore or deny. In a feminist world, you would get more than two weeks' help sorting it out.

Once a boy hits puberty, he is confronted with a dilemma: he probably has a biological need to ejaculate, but – as we saw in Chapter 6 – patriarchy says the only okay male ejaculation is into, onto, or due to a woman. Or a catamite, but that is definitely not okay these days.

However, the biological need to ejaculate does not imply a biological need for sex with other people. A lot of people have no sex drive. They live just fine. Some people choose to ignore their sex drive, and they live just fine.

Bodily autonomy means we are not entitled to use anyone else's body to meet our needs. The easiest way to think about it is like this: we need to eat, but we have no reason to expect someone else to spoon feed us. If you are hungry and nobody will put food in your mouth, do you blame them as you starve?⁹⁷

⁹⁶ I will note that even some feminists have not gotten over this stigma, and treat teenage boys' sexuality as icky.

⁹⁷ An obvious exception is people who are impaired in ways that

The most important thing about your body is that it is yours. That means you can do things with it that you want to (like masturbate and not fight wars), but it also means you are responsible for it. You are responsible for cleaning your body. You are responsible for putting food into it. You are responsible for tending to its needs.

Sex is no mere biological need. It is also a psychological need. Sexual relationship is a social need. As we have seen, in patriarchy social facts are more important than material facts. Our need for sexual partnerships – not sex itself, but relationships defined primarily by sex – is yet another social construct.

Patriarchy that says we need a sexual 'partner', and that women exist to meet that need. In Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, this is a big reason Eve was created for Adam. In more secular thinking, men evolved to dominate women into meeting that need. Patriarchy even says a man who has no partner (that is, no woman) is incomplete. You can see this all over the place – coverture, jokes about "my better half", Tom Cruise saying "you complete me" to Renee Zellweger in *Jerry Maguire*.

Many men see their partners as proof of their manhood, not as human beings with their own agency and autonomy. The married guys who low-key hate their wives but stay with them? That ain't love. And when those women leave instead, it tears these guys in half – they cannot bear the thought, they swear they will die, and sometimes they kill her. The dependency on women built into masculinity should be embarrassing.

For young men, the dependency is particularly acute. Other than hurting people, one of the main ways boys

make it difficult or impossible for them to feed themselves. Issues around disability and sexuality are important and I have lots of thoughts, but too many for the scope of this book.

become men in our society is by having a sexual partner. C.J. Pascoe wrote a good book about how this plays out in an American high school.⁹⁸ I think she probably neglected how the school setting channeled physical aggression, but it is definitely worth a read. Point being: a young man's masculinity is constantly challenged and belittled. If you're not going to fight it out, your best option is to get laid.

At the same time, patriarchy tells girls your age: 'Don't have sex.' Patriarchy creates the demand, but restricts the supply. Dads like W. Bruce Cameron are not just protecting their daughters, but also gatekeeping masculinity. Under patriarchy, you have to prove yourself to older men to be accepted into manhood.

In his discussion of evolutionary theories of sexual selection, Richard Lippa writes:

Think of the swagger and risk-taking of young males, who often put on a show of prowess for admiring young women: on the football field, in sportscars, or on the battlefield. Literally, young men are dying to impress attractive women.⁹⁹

All these things impress men, not women. Young men are dying to impress other men, especially older guys. Incidentally, one of the reasons sports like football are a big part of American high school is because vigorous exercise was thought to dissipate teens' sexual energy.

After the gatekeeping, patriarchy promises that when you finally get into a sexual partnership, your satisfaction is guaranteed. This is false. You might be a consistent horndog now, but you will probably get sick or injured at

98 C.J. Pascoe. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* 2nd Ed. University of California Press (2011).

99 Lippa, *Gender, Nature, and Nurture*, p. 92.

some point, you might have to travel apart from your partner, you might be exhausted, you might be depressed, you might be stuck in a bedroom right above your in-laws for a week every winter. And these things will happen to your partner, too.

Even in the happiest and sexiest of relationships, there will be times when one or both spouses cannot or simply do not want to have sex. That is normal, but a lot of guys – a lot of boyfriends and husbands – see not having sex as a hit to their masculinity. It is not. Not having sex is okay. Not having sex is surprisingly normal.

When someone does not want to have sex, not having sex is the only choice that is okay. Unfortunately, we have normalized the idea that sex is okay so long as there is 'consent'. The problem is that 'consent' is a word we use when people agree to things they did not want. Harvard law professor Catharine MacKinnon explains:

In social reality, the crucible of meaning, sex that is actually desired or wanted or welcomed is never termed consensual. It does not need to be; its mutuality is written all over it in enthusiasm. Consenting is not what women do when they want to be having sex. Sex women want is never described by them or anyone else as consensual. No one says, "We had a great hot night, she (or I or we) consented."¹⁰⁰

Consider a list of sexual encounters a woman might have:

100 Catharine A. MacKinnon. "Rape Redefined." *Harvard Law & Policy Review* 10 (2016), p. 450 <https://tinyurl.com/yhfn9nmn>

- 1) Sex she definitely wanted to have.
- 2) Did not want to have, but her partner took her on a really nice date and he'll be done in 3 minutes anyway.
- 3) Did not want to have, but her partner refused to do any chores until she did, so... whatever.
- 4) Did not want to have, but her partner refused to take her home, leaving her stranded in a scary place.
- 5) Did not want to have, but she is financially dependent on her partner, who will refuse to pay for her prescription medicine.
- 6) Did not want to have, but her partner threatened to break up with her and kick her out, leaving her homeless.
- 7) Did not want to have, but her partner threatened her with physical violence.

The way the law works now, the fact that this woman consented makes all except #7 legal. That's where we get drawing the line at 'consent', even though #4 through #6 are also really awful and deserve to be treated as violence.

MacKinnon proposes drawing the line at 'coercion' – if there is evidence of coercion, physical or otherwise, then the sex was unlawful. By that standard, we can say that everything past #3 should be illegal. And it helps makes clear that #3 is shitty behavior, but not illegal.

The word we use for illegal sex is 'rape', and maybe you noticed I got pretty far without using that word – which is something for a book about feminism.¹⁰¹

The thing is, I think rape should not exist. I don't mean

101 The Frankenstein bit in Chapter 5 was Robert Webb, not me.

that men should stop raping women, which I also believe (very strenuously), but that I think that rape as a concept should not exist.

'Rape' describes a social fact, not a physical fact. Rape is a social construct – which, again, does not mean it is all in our heads. It is very real for its victims.

In its traditional sense, the word 'rape' described a property crime. It once meant 'taking by force'. The social fact of rape is more like robbery than other bodily crimes, in that a rapist steals something from his victim.

Traditionally, the victim of rape was the man whose property lost value. You can see this plainly in Deuteronomy 22:28-29, in which a man who rapes an 'unpledged' virgin must pay the father 50 shekels and marry the young woman. And here they meant a child, because the normal age for marriage was early teens. Rape a child, pay 50 shekels, get a wife, and the only thing that mattered was the men were satisfied. 50 shekels back then is about \$1000 today, according to the Internet.

That is ancient history, right? Maybe you saw the meme about Franca Viola, the Italian woman who in 1966 fought against a so-called 'reparative marriage' – which would have forced her to marry her rapist. Italy did not repeal that law until 1981. That is within my lifetime. There are Italian women still married to the men who raped them as girls. They had no choice. And right now, there are still countries that have marry-your-rapist laws. He can even divorce her soon after, in some places.

Just in 2016, my state raised the minimum age for marriage to 16. That is within your lifetime. Before that, girls as young as 13 could be forced to marry a man if they were pregnant with his child. Most of the girls under 15 were married to men over 21, some to men much older.

We hid thousands and thousands of cases of sexual

abuse against young girls by marrying them to their rapists. Many of those girls are now women, still married to their rapists. And these laws were not unusual. When feminists talk about 'rape culture', this is the sort of thing we mean.

The reason rape is traditionally a property crime is because women are consumer goods under patriarchy, something men can use and use up. You can see this in the focus on girl's virginity, men's anxiety about their girlfriend's body count, old men leaving their wives for a 'newer model', and the 'wizard sleeve' myth about vaginas.

This also colors our concept of rape: a woman who was raped is used, and less worthy. 'Rape' does not describe the woman's experience of bodily violation; instead, it describes her loss of value to men. In some countries, fathers and brothers kill rape victims because those girls are no longer valuable enough to keep alive.

The second-most misunderstood thing feminists say is 'rape is about power'. This comes from the book *Against Our Will*, by Susan Brownmiller; the more exact quote is "all rape is an exercise in power".¹⁰² Her point is not that a specific rapist rapes from a desire for power – which might well be the case. Rather, she is talking about men's power used and enforced through rape as a social institution.

Under patriarchy, rape is a threat to women who disobey. The threat is that if they dress the wrong way, behave the wrong way, hang out with the wrong people, they will be raped. They will be degraded, and – the implication is – they deserve it. Patriarchy condemns rape not because it wants to get rid of rape – it has had *every* chance – but because it needs women to be scared enough to accept men's dominance over them. The threat of rape is used to control women's autonomy and agency.

102 Susan Brownmiller. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Simon & Schuster (1975). p. 256

In a similar way but less frequently, rape is used to police men's masculinity. Men who rape other men target men they see as weak, often young and queer men, as punishment for not being masculine enough. The threat is that if you are anything like a woman, you deserve to be raped just like a woman. A man who allows himself to be used like a woman is less worthy, is less valuable as a man.

Some men want to call 'made-to-penetrate' sexual violence a form of rape. In MTP, a man is forced to penetrate another person, usually a woman, with his penis. I have no doubt it can be a traumatic experience, and it deserves to be treated as a serious crime. The reason men have little traction calling MTP 'rape' is because society does not see those men as diminished, in the same way it sees women and men who are penetrated. Patriarchy cannot allow 'rape' to describe the social facts of MTP.

When I say 'rape' should not exist, I mean that the word should not be used to describe any person's experience – not men's MTP, not women's non-consensual penetration, not my own experience of sexual violence. In a feminist world, it would be impossible to rape anyone, because *nobody* would be diminished by their sexual activity, consensual or not. Nothing could be taken from them. The social fact that 'rape' describes would be unthinkable, and that is a world I want to live in.

We are slowly moving away from talking about sexual violence in those terms, but even the phrase 'sexual assault' minimizes the problem. As compared to simple assault, 'sexual assault' would be more accurately threats of sexual violence. "Your body, my choice." "I'm about to tear that ass up." That sort of thing. Unwanted sexual contact should be called 'sexual battery', or 'sexual abuse' if ongoing. I am okay describing a person who commits sexual violence as a 'rapist', until we have a better word.

But one crucial step towards a rape-free world is abandoning the model of sexual agency that says men ask (or insist) and women consent (or not). Sexual consent is not a feminist concept; it has been in the law books for more than 500 years.¹⁰³

The concept is so pervasive in America today because of the Clery Act, passed in 1990 and named after a college student who was raped and murdered in her dorm. That year, only 31 members of Congress were women – less than 6% of the total. This law was passed by anxious dads afraid their daughters would get raped at college.

The Clery Act requires colleges to report crimes on campus and a “statement of policy that addresses the institution’s programs to prevent dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking”.¹⁰⁴ These programs mostly did not exist pre-1990, so schools had to get them up and running quickly. Which they did! But they built these programs on the bare-ass minimum to avoid reporting sex crimes: ‘consent’.

I started college in the mid-1990s, when sexual violence programs were goofy. By the end of the decade they had become more polished and not as awkward. But all that talk about ‘consent’ was driven by the interests of college administrators and lawyers. The process was never led by women, much less feminists.

We’ve been drilling consent into college students for more than 30 years (at least in the US). That’s a generation or two, and it is progress. At some point sex educators realized ‘consent’ was an abysmally low bar, so they began pushing ‘enthusiastic consent’ instead. But even if I consent ‘enthusiastically’ to something, the word ‘consent’

103 Susan Brownmiller. *Against Our Will*, p. 29

104 34 CFR 668.46(j). <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-668/subpart-D/section-668.46>

means I did not want to do it in the first place. No adjective can make ‘consent’ describe something people want to do. And again, courts have ruled that extremely unenthusiastic consent is still not rape.

That model of consent was clearly at work in the poster put out by Coastal Carolina University in 2008:

Jake was drunk. Josie was drunk. Jake and Josie hooked up. Josie could not consent. The next morning, Jake was charged with rape.¹⁰⁵

The poster assumes Jake wanted sex, and assumes that Josie could not want sex. What if they both wanted sex?

Sex where both partners want it is the only okay sex. It is the only ethical way to have sex. I do not want to have sex that is merely legal, not by the consent standard and not by MacKinnon’s ‘coercion’ standard. I want to have sex with a partner who wants to have sex with me. What that means in practice is no longer asking, “Do I have your consent?” but instead, “Do you want to have sex with me?”

Asking in terms of *intent*, in terms of what each partner desires, avoids the weirdness of asking permission to please yourself with another person’s body. Asking for our partner’s ‘intent’ focuses more on what we can do to give each other pleasure. Intentional sex is better than consensual sex by any measure.

One of the many problems this approach solves is Jake and Josie’s tryst: plenty of drunk people want to have sex with each other. If both partners intend to have sex, being drunk cannot erase that fact, for the same reason we do not excuse drunk drivers because they were too drunk to

105 The poster went viral several years later. See, for example, Samantha Rogers. “How this school’s old anti-rape poster sparked new controversy”. *Daily Dot* (May 28, 2021). <https://tinyurl.com/3rwbfbpbx>

consent to driving.

So a feminist approach would teach college kids mutual intent, instead of ‘enthusiastic consent’, which for all intents and purposes is a lawyer’s way to describe intent and purpose. You should only have sex with people who want to have sex with you. For men and women to have this kind of sex means we have to accept women’s intent – their desire for sex, and their agency and autonomy with respect to sex. This is something patriarchy cannot accept, because it threatens the logic of sexual control.

When a woman is raped, patriarchy does not attack her by saying, ‘She consented.’ Instead, patriarchy says she was *asking* for it: she went to that bar; she wore that dress; she went to his apartment. These are non-sexual choices. It is bonkers to assign sexual intent to these choices, but that is not the real point of these claims.

Instead, the point is to discredit every woman’s agency, to use rape to threaten and disparage all women’s choices and so take away those choices. When patriarchy denies women’s agency to choose sex, it also takes away their choice to not have sex. ‘No means no’ is not meaningful unless ‘yes’ is a valid choice for women.¹⁰⁶

Many women have been told their entire lives that ‘yes’ is not a valid choice. Remember, our whole culture tells us giving men sexual pleasure is bad: e.g. “you’re fucked!” If you date women, you will probably encounter women who say they want to have sex but show zero interest during the act. Some men – not enough – eventually figure out the work they need to do to help their partner reclaim her sexual agency. It takes physical work but also emotional work, work inside and outside the bedroom. Often, part of that work involves closing the orgasm gap: men are about

¹⁰⁶ I learned this in college from someone whose job as a sex educator was created by the Clery Act.

30% more likely than women to orgasm from sexual intercourse.¹⁰⁷ Women want sex more when they can enjoy it, according to Professor Obvious.

For some men, intent might mean less sex, but it means better sex. Much better, I expect. When men do the work to create space for women’s intent, sex is no longer a one-sided exploit but a source of mutual pleasure. The sex you get from mutual intent is at least twice as much fun as the sex you get from consent, simply by pure math. And let me be clear that while feminism says guys should help do that work, the work is only necessary because of patriarchy. In a feminist world, every person has a valid ‘yes’ and a valid ‘no’ with respect to their body.

If you are a teen, that even includes you. If consent is problematic, so are laws on age of consent. I know this is a deeply icky topic, but it has to be addressed in a book aimed at young men. To jump ahead a bit, I will strongly affirm that adults should not have sex with minors. In fact, I will go even farther, but it will take a minute to get there.

The key difference between regular rape laws and statutory rape laws is that the latter objectify minors *completely*. The laws abolish any agency for people below the age of consent. In fact, ‘age of consent’ is misleading; for a long time, it was simply the youngest a girl could be given (or sold) to a man in marriage by her dad. In some U.S. states, that was as young as 10 years old. It was not her consent that mattered. It was his.

In the late 19th century, reformers fought to raise the age of consent in the U.S. for reasons that included classism, racism, and ableism, but also protecting girls. In

¹⁰⁷ Amanda Gesselman et al. “The lifelong orgasm gap: exploring age’s impact on orgasm rates”. *Sexual Medicine* 12:3 (July 2024) doi: 10.1093/sexmed/qfae042.

her book *Delinquent Daughters*, Mary E. Odem explains how the reformers saw their goal as ‘moral purity’ – preventing girls from being ‘ruined’.¹⁰⁸ The problem they wanted to solve was that older men could seduce young girls and render them worthless in society’s eyes, but those men caught no consequences. Raising the age of consent was a step towards rough equality: the girls would still bear the stigma of premarital sex, but now men would bear the stigma of being convicts.

Once again, equality was worse for everybody. The reformers did not fight the moral stigma (really, the social stigma) of premarital sex for girls. In her book, Odem shows that many times men arrested for statutory rape were given probation, while the “female delinquent” – the victim – was put into a custodial facility.¹⁰⁹ In around 75% of the cases Odem documents, the charges were brought by parents, despite the girl saying she consented to the relationship. Consent over girls’ bodies belonged to their parents, especially their fathers.

Since then, things have gotten better. Girls are no longer locked up for having sex and the laws are more evenly applied, though still often used to by girl dads to punish young men. Romeo & Juliet laws, which allow a certain age gap, have made that less of a problem, although not all states have them. Still, the basic paradox remains: it is bananas to say that kids under 16 cannot consent to sex, when many kids that age clearly intend to have sex.

Age of consent laws only apply to criminal cases, not civil cases, and we saw that child support is a civil matter in the U.S. A few boys who were victims of the crime of

108 Mary E. Odem. *Delinquent Daughters; protecting and policing adolescent female sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920*.

University of North Carolina Press (1995). The rest of this discussion draws heavily from this book.

109 Odem. *Delinquent Daughters*. p. 65, 115, 146.

statutory rape have been sued in civil court for child support of the children born from those crimes. In one case, in California, a 34-year-old woman had sex with a 15-year-old boy. The boy told police it was “mutually agreeable”.¹¹⁰ In fact, the police did not get involved until the woman applied for state benefits for their baby, and then discovered the father was a minor. The state charged the woman with rape; note that nobody described it that way except the government. The state then brought a civil case against the victim for child support. The civil court found that the boy acted with intent; that he sought out the relationship. He was found liable for child support.

Do you think the 15-year-old suffered any of the social facts ‘rape’ describes? Was he worth less in society’s eyes? What the woman did was deeply wrong, but it is hard to see why ‘rape’ is the right word to describe sex he fully intended to have. If we still call it rape, remember that a government that can force girls to give birth to their rapists’ child is very much a government that can jail a boy for not supporting his rapist’s child.

One thing that should be clear to you by now is that age is often a form of power. A lot of the harm you face is not because of your gender, but because of your age. Under patriarchy, boys are a problem solved only by making them into men. So it should make sense that age in a sexual relationship can also be a form of power, and that it can be a form of coercive power. The younger a person is, the bigger difference it makes.

Feminism gives us a way out of this mess. We can adapt the idea of ‘coercion’ by making explicit that a large age gap implies a coercive relationship. Romeo & Juliet laws

110 Much of the details are drawn from Erin McCormick, “‘Bizarre’ ruling on teenage father”. *SFGATE* (December 1, 1996). <https://tinyurl.com/2ek7t34u>

sort of do this, but instead of setting a flat gap – 3 years, 4 years, whatever – I think we should use the half-plus-seven rule. If you divide the older person's age by two and add seven, that number is the youngest person they can have sex with; any younger, and the relationship should be presumed coercive. By this rule, the gap is very narrow when teens are young, but widens as they get older. It also eliminates the cliff at 18, so that high school romances do not turn into sex crimes overnight.

Where the younger person is under 18, and below the older person's half-plus-seven, there should be a default presumption of coercion. As in age of consent laws, the child, their parents, or the state could press charges.

But – and this is where I go farther – I think the law should allow the possibility (but not presumption) of coercion up to 22 or so. It is now entirely legal in nineteen states for a 25-year-old adult to start grooming a kid at 14, have sex with them at 16 under promise of marriage, then dump them at 18 for the next target. This is an experience too many young women have, and even some young men.

Age is coercive power in these relationships, and the law should allow young people to fight back. I think that victims older than 17 up to 22 whose partners break the half-plus-seven rule should be able to press charges. The penalties should focus on restitution for the younger partner, not prison time for the creep.

If you are already an adult, you might balk at this proposal, but men have always balked when the age of consent has been raised. But in this approach, laws based on a presumption of coercion should also allow the victim's intent as a true defense. Right now the intent of a minor does not matter at all, even if they committed fraud.

So, for example, say a 19-year-old man goes on a dating site and meets a woman whose profile says she is 17. She

invites him to have sex, but afterwards it turns out she is only 14 and he is charged with statutory rape. True story.¹¹¹ The girl and her mother begged the court to let the guy go. The judge ignored them on grounds 'you kids need to get off your computers' (paraphrase), and gave the man 90 days in jail, five years of probation, and registration as a sex offender forever. The age of consent in Indiana is 16, and note that under Indiana's statutory rape law, "It is a defense that the child is or has ever been married".¹¹² Barf.

From a feminist perspective, no justice is served by treating the above case as a sex crime. More appropriate would be 'contributing to the delinquency of a minor' (which is still a felony). Cases like this are very rare, but show how patriarchy's need to control women's sexuality can harm young men, as well.

Feminism wants to liberate you from that harm. If you want to have sex, feminists want you to have better sex – in an ethical sense, but also in a pleasurable sense. If you do not want to have sex, feminists want you to have no sex at all. But whether or not you have sex, feminism wants you to have love – which is the next chapter.

111 Julie Bosman. "Teenager's Jailing Brings a Call to Fix Sex Offender registries". *New York Times* (July 4, 2015).

<https://tinyurl.com/2mwsyn9d> His sentence was later vacated and revised, taking him off the sex offender registry but subjecting him to stringent probation. See Mary Beth Spalding. "Probation is denied in controversial sex case". *South Bend Tribune* (December 9, 2017) <https://tinyurl.com/4eb9kcc4>

112 IN Code § 35-42-4-9(d) (2024). <https://law.justia.com/codes/indiana/title-35/article-42/chapter-4/section-35-42-4-9/>

8. You're just another cuck.

If you read the classics you were assigned in English class, you saw male relationships that were deeply loving – for example, Ishmael and Queequeg in *Moby Dick*:

Captain Ahab interrupted us in one indelicate moment with a rousing, “Thar he blows!” I avowed myself that Ahab must receive his comeuppance, but not before I delivered myself from Queequeg’s ministrations to the mast.

I made all that up. You probably had no idea because you did not read *Moby Dick*. You should. It really is great.

In the book, Ishmael and Queequeg have a close relationship that Herman Melville (the author) describes as more or less a marriage. Melville based this on customs of some Pacific Islanders, sort of similar to the Eurasian concept of ‘blood brothers’ (not a Native American thing).

To modern readers, Ishmael and Queequeg seem gay. But if readers in 1851 saw them that way, the book would have never been published. To readers back then, they were simply men who loved each other platonically – which was fine. The scandal was not that they were the same gender, but different races.

When Melville wrote *Moby Dick*, women were still more or less property of their husbands – not in a strictly legal sense, like slavery, but... in still kind of a legal sense? At the beginning of the 19th century, divorce was difficult to obtain. In many states, adultery and abandonment were the only grounds for divorce. In most states cruelty was not; a man could beat his wife senseless every day knowing she could not divorce him.

Divorce was a big issue for 19th-century feminists. They made a lot of progress, but that was overshadowed by

abolition of slavery. For feminists who were also abolitionists, divorce had clear parallels to abolition for slaves. By World War II, most states allowed divorce for a number of reasons. The first no-fault divorce law in the U.S. passed in 1969.

Again: patriarchy is about control of women. For most of human history, the power to control women has been baked into norms, traditions, and laws around marriage. But as women began to free themselves from those laws, patriarchy did not just give up and go extinct. Instead, patriarchy evolved.

And so control of women became not a question of law, but a question of love. Patriarchy reframed what women owe men as ‘love’ – meaning sexual fidelity above all, because the goal is always sexual control. You might have heard the expression, “True love waits”? Yeah, that.

Today, saying ‘I love you’ in a young relationship is so fraught because it both offers and demands sexual exclusivity (from women, more than men). In fact, guys are more likely to say it first.¹¹³ That’s because it is usually not a gift, but a demand.

In academic feminist terms, we are exploring “the role of love as an ideological mechanism whereby women’s work is controlled and [...] sex is constrained or unfree because women’s material options are unequal to men’s”.¹¹⁴ But you do not need to read feminist books to see this.

You can stream it. ‘Romantic comedy’ – rom-com – is the film genre most heavily marketed to women; it earned a billion dollars a year at the box office until ‘Netflix and

113 Christopher D. Watkins et al. “Men say ‘I love you’ before women do: Robust across several countries”. *Sage Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 39:7 (Jan. 27, 2002).

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/02654075221075264>

114 Catherine Mackinnon. *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*. Harvard U. Press (1989), p. 67 <https://tinyurl.com/4hmk7ys3>

chill' became a thing.¹¹⁵

Of the 50 top-grossing rom-coms (according to IMDB¹¹⁶), 30 scripts were written entirely by men. 41 films were directed by men. Even *Sex and the City*, an iconically feminine movie, was written by two men and a woman and directed by a man. Rom-coms are mostly stories men tell women about love.

Consider what that story looks like: women are wooed until they accept the inevitable, then surrender bodily to the male lead. They have no choice, no reason, no decision: they must follow their hearts. They are flotsam in a roiling sea of emotion. They cannot help but fall in love.

What women get from these stories is the promise that they will someday find comfort and security with a good man. Seems nice, but these are not feminist themes. That is not what agency and autonomy look like. These movies are just patriarchy selling patriarchy.

Rom-coms also set an unrealistic standard for most young men. What young men learn from these movies is that if you are the best guy you can possibly be, the girl will fall in love with you like flipping a light switch. But a woman who wants what rom-coms promise will not get it from the typical 16- to 25-year-old guy. And those stories meanwhile help drive the idea that a man who does not have sex is a man who is unloved: unsexed is unloved, and unloved is worthless. This makes men's romantic lives incredibly high stakes: literally everything or nothing.

It is bad for men's non-romantic lives, too. The link between love and sex makes it deeply uncomfortable for (hetero) men to say 'I love you' to each other, and

¹¹⁵ Rom-coms dipped under \$1 billion in 2011:

<https://tinyurl.com/3szc8ex5> – the same year “Netflix and chill” appears on Google Ngram: <https://tinyurl.com/3ksprdpn>

¹¹⁶ cthejtheizzo. “50 Highest Grossing Romantic Comedy Films of All Time”. IMDB.com <https://www.imdb.com/list/ls004066533/>

unthinkable in non-sexual relationships with women. It somehow became gay to say 'I love you' to your dad or your son or your best friend, and even Jesus Christ seems fruity to modern readers. You probably will have relationships in your lifetime that are sexual, but the vast majority – with your family and friends – will not be. You should be able to tell these people you love them.

I am angry about this. I am angry they – patriarchy, rom-com writers, whoever – took this away from us. I have a few guy friends for whom I would not hesitate to take a bullet, but the rules say if I tell them, “I love you”, it must mean I want them to come inside me.

The rules are bullshit. The stories are bullshit – and not just rom-coms, but music and sitcoms and chick-lit and reality television. This bullshit is a product of patriarchy. And it is *dangerous* bullshit. People die for this bullshit.

Several years ago a man killed several people in California because of this bullshit. I probably need to be more specific, but I will not use his name. I only bring him up to talk about the watery logorrhea he called his ‘life story’. To save you reading it, I will let him summarize:

All I ever wanted to was to love women, and to be loved by them back. Their behavior towards me has only earned my hatred and rightfully so! I am the true victim in all of this.¹¹⁷

The true victim in all of this then killed six people – four men and two women – to punish all women everywhere for not once riding his dick. Once again, patriarchy needs to harm men to control women's sexuality. Yet a surprising number of guys called him a hero.

The true victim fully believed the key to his self-worth

¹¹⁷ <https://archive.org/details/MyTwistedWorld>, p. 136. But don't.

was 'love'. He wrote at length about the pleasure other people enjoy in romance. He saw having a girlfriend as the sign of a healthy, having-his-shit-together guy. He saw the highest expression of love as sex. And he did not invent those ideas out of thin air.

The thing about his 'life story' is that if you fed every one of the top 50 romantic comedies into a human garbage can full of teenage angst, narcissism, and depression, then let it ferment for a while, you would get pretty close to his worldview. And because it's America, throw in a handgun.

All this garbage can ever wanted was for love to solve his problems, and he never understood that it could not. I say this as a happily married man with a sizeable share of problems: love didn't solve all of them. Love wasn't a switch, or some irresistible destiny, or an ocean my wife and I drowned in. Love was a decision we made together, a decision we make every day.

Nobody ever taught the garbage can a single true thing about love. He lived a dark and miserable life and when he was unable to flip the switch, he blamed the bulbs – not the wiring. He killed people because he never saw the light. And as much as I despise him, I do recognize he was lied to. All he knew about love was lies.

What made Ishmael and Queequeg's story special wasn't that they were boning, but that they loved each other *as equals*. Patriarchy does not and cannot allow this for men and women. The point of romantic love under patriarchy is still domination and sexual control.

But to truly love another person, you must do it as equals. You cannot dominate your equal. You cannot control your equal. The difference that belief has made in my life and my marriage is massive.

To name one tiny benefit, it makes our relationship safer for me. Under patriarchy, if she were to cheat on me

with another man, that would reflect badly on me: I would be just another cuck. You can spend days online reading sob stories (some are even real) from guys who get completely wrecked by a cheating partner. They blow up their lives, tear apart their families, and try to punish their partner in court and out. This is about control, not love.

Equality means my wife is free to make her own decisions, as I am free to make mine. If she were to cheat, she would own that decision. I would be sad, I would walk away, but it would not reflect on me at all. Not a single photon. My identity as a man in no way depends on her staying faithful. And that is liberating for me. I do not have to worry about her destroying me by cheating.

I am not saying monogamy is a bad thing: it is a choice loving people can make. It is a choice my wife and I make, quite happily. But it is also a choice people make in completely loveless relationships, and a choice many people are forced to make (i.e. not a choice). When monogamy is about control and not equality, that is a problem.

If you already have a partner, and you feel like your love for her is higher/stronger/different than your love for your friends, there's probably some patriarchy lurking in the gap. If your love is conditional on her sexual fidelity, that is control – not love.

That's doubly true for the guys who discover their kids are not 'theirs'; if your dad's love is conditional on a DNA match, what he really loves is dominating your mom's vagina. (So do I, but don't tell your dad!)

Does that last joke make you angry? Take a moment to ponder why I am the bad guy here.

Humans need love. Humans do not need sexual partners. Patriarchy tells you the most you can ever be loved is by a loyal sexual partner. That is false! You might be spending lots of energy right now searching for that

kind of love. I noped out of the dating scene before Tinder, but I pay attention enough to know it is brutal out there. If you are still dating, you have my sympathy.

I know, for example, that you face a lot of headwind from women. Like I said, most women still support patriarchy, at least somewhat, but that's even more likely for women looking for a relationship with a man. It is difficult, if not dangerous for women to date men and oppose patriarchy at the same time. Many women who self-identify as feminists will still go along with some of the patriarchal aspects of dating, for as long as they are in the dating pool. When they find the right guy, they will then try to make him a proper ally, though it is often too late.

For a lot of guys your age, dating is the first time they hear patriarchy say "no". For example, that thing where women on apps specify men "6' or taller"? Bigger men are more dominant under patriarchy, like John Lovell says. Women do stuff like this because patriarchy puts them in such an insecure position that they look for dominant partners as a source of security. They seek security through patriarchy from the very insecurity created by patriarchy: that is how patriarchy keeps the wheels spinning.

When confronted by these dating norms, many men blame women – then get red-pilled or inceled or turn into lobsters or whatever anti-feminist cesspit they stumble into. But these women are only following the rules of patriarchy. There's literally a massive bestseller called *The Rules* that is just a how-to guide for dating under patriarchy. In fact, it's a whole series of books – written by women.¹¹⁸ They did not make the rules. They just wrote

118 Elle Fein & Sherrie Schneider. *The Rules: Time-tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right*. Grand Central Publishing (2001). Also *The Rules II*, *The Rules for Online Dating*, *The Rules for Marriage*, and *Not Your Mother's Rules*. Available in a boxed set. Remember, feminism has one rule.

them down for each other.

One of those rules is that men are expected to be 'providers'. Traditionally, guys show this by paying for everything on dates. The basic deal patriarchy offers women is (some) security in exchange for sexual control, and so women are supposed to look for guys who can pay. As a broke-ass grad student dating my future wife, I too felt pressure (not from her) to pay for everything on dates. We quickly figured out that did not work for us.

The problem you face right now is that the economy is pretty shit for young men. Income inequality is a serious problem – the last time it was this high was 1929.¹¹⁹ It is more than five times as high as when I was born, and more than three times what it was when my parents were born. And so lots of young men aren't able to find decent jobs, the kind that allow them to start and support a family. The billionaires that are fucking us (figuratively) do not care whether you fuck (literally), while a flock of masculinity grifters feed and feed on your anxiety.

As wealth inequality grows, as the economy has less and less to offer young people, it is less and less realistic for women to expect men to pay for everything, because the money isn't there. The 'provider' expectation put on young men has become untenable and unfair, if it was ever okay.

Feminists do not support that expectation at all. But also, feminists hate this economy. Many of us want to tear it apart and start over from scratch. I am not at all a Marxist, but clearly the economy is a mess. I think even Adam Smith would be appalled at how bad it has become.

One consequence is that most families have to send both parents to work. Of course, women have always

119 "U.S. Inequality Has Returned to Gilded Age Levels". *Inequality.org* (Updated January 11, 2023) <https://tinyurl.com/5bwsabdz>

worked, but before World War 2 only about a quarter of American women worked outside of the home. After WW2, that proportion climbed steadily for decades as more women strove for economic independence.¹²⁰

Feminists wanted more room in the workforce for women's autonomy. They said 'women can work.' Capitalism replied, 'women *must* work', and now even families with two middle class jobs lead working class lives. Feminists never thought women should be forced to work to survive, and we also do not think men should be forced to work to survive. Again, we want better for everybody.

While many women have to work outside the home, many men still expect women to do most of the work inside the home. They want wives to take care of them, to clean the house and buy and prepare their food and mind the children, so that all men have to do is get dressed and go to work. Again, the extent to which masculinity insists on dependence on women should be embarrassing.

Feminists call domestic labor the 'second shift': first at work, second at home. While we do not support the 'provider' expectation at home, let me point out that the likelihood men will not help at home drives many women to prefer wealthier men. Women might not be looking for a man to support them, but instead for a man who can support a nanny or at least a cleaning service.

Point being: a lot of young guys cannot afford patriarchy, and that is not feminism's fault. The way the economy is going, it is a lot more realistic to expect rough equality all around in a marriage or long-term relationship. But the feminist view is that equality begins with partners loving each other as equals, and rejecting the hierarchy that

makes men the breadwinners and keeps women in the kitchen. You love her enough to put a ring on it, but do you love her enough to scrub off the ring in the bathtub?

And if you want children, you need to be prepared to take on at least an equal share of the child care. Not just because you love your spouse, but because you love your kids. You should be involved in their care and in the lives.

Pop-culture likes to frame feminist ideas about equality in terms of how many politicians and CEOs are women. But feminism is far more concerned with personal equality, with equality in our relationships. Equality, at a fundamental level, requires us to love each other as equals. For a man, loving your partner as an equal might be the most radical thing you can do to smash patriarchy. And learning how to love women as equals is one of the most powerful things you can do to improve your own life, because it also means learning to love the parts of yourself that are feminine, the parts patriarchy wants you to hate.

120 "Overview of women's participation in the the labor force". U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (June 25, 2024)
<https://www.bls.gov/cps/demographics/women-labor-force.htm>

9. What color is your Bugatti?

If you have read this far, feminism probably resonates for you at some level. I hope you see more clearly the choice between patriarchy and freedom. Of course, there are people who will deny that choice exists, who will say this is dogma or propaganda. Let's meet a few of them, and see if their bullshit makes any sense at all.

As I mentioned, the pop-culture conversation about feminism is dominated by antifeminists. That has long been the case, but today many antifeminists are not content to block progress. Instead, they want to return to an era without feminism, with ironclad gender roles. Like the Taliban, they want to roll back everything women have achieved. They are in that respect fundamentalists, preaching fundamentalist masculinity. And just like their comrades in Kabul, they are bad for women and men alike.

From where I sit, the three most visible masculine fundamentalists are Andrew Tate, Jordan Peterson and Ben Shapiro. Each represents an area in which men claim superiority over women. Tate brags about his physical strength. Peterson claims rational intellect. Shapiro wants political leadership. I cannot engage deeply with their work here, because their work is not deep anywhere, so I will focus on their discussions of gender.

Andrew Tate

A few years ago an eighth grade boy asked me, "What color is your Bugatti?" I made him explain that it was an Andrew Tate thing, and then I googled the name. I was not at all surprised to find yet another bulgy dipshit upselling masculinity to teenage boys. But I was surprised at how transparent the con is. He regularly makes claims that are

easy to prove wrong.

In a 2021 interview on YouTube, Tate said, "I am absolutely sexist and I'm absolutely a misogynist" and "there's no way you can be rooted in reality and not be sexist".¹²¹ He then tried to prove his point by explaining that if boarding an airplane about to fly through a hurricane, most people would want the pilot to be a man. Call me a chicken, but I would want to know *why* the plane was flying through a hurricane. Most planes do not.

The only planes I know of that do fly through hurricanes belong to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) 'Hurricane Hunters' program. In 2018, they announced that two women, Capt. Kristie Twining and Lt. Cmdr. Rebecca Waddington, piloted a Gulfstream IV into Hurricane Hector near Hawaii. In 2019, Capt. Twining and Lt. Cmdr. Waddington along with Lt. Lindsey Norman flew a mission into Hurricane Dorian. In 2020, Lt. Danielle Varwig flew her first hurricane mission. When Tate gave his interview in 2021, three of the six pilots flying NOAA Gulfstream hurricane missions were women. I doubt they'd even let Tate board their plane, but they might give him a set of plastic junior pilot wings if he was nicer.

Tate likes to ask people the color of their Bugatti as a flex – because it shows he has more money, which makes him more dominant... I guess? But Tate seems to have earned most of his money running warehouses of webcam models to help lonely and ashamed guys jerk off. Tate's abuse of those women caught him human trafficking charges in Romania, where he lived because the laws were already lax compared to the U.K.

121 *Anything Goes with James English*, "My Life as a Pimp - Andrew Tate Tells His Life Story". June 20, 2021 starting at 1:26:38. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhUi1htVeJc>

His side hustle is selling masculinity in videos and books, despite his claim that, “Reading books is for losers who are afraid to learn from life”.¹²² One of the books he sells is titled *Tales of Wudan*, about a kung-fu master and his student. It is pretty short, and you can find a free PDF online. At one point the master and student have a cry:

“Why are you crying?” I asked.

He didn’t reply. I turned my head to look at the moon and cried with him.

And there’s nothing wrong with that. Right, Andrew? He said this in a video:

The only kind of men who advocate crying are the kind of men who don’t have the self-control to prevent themselves from crying.¹²³

Youtuber Zoe Bee has a video on *Tales of Wudan*, in which she explains these men are Tate and his dad.¹²⁴ Jamie Tahsin and Matt Shea say the same in their book on Tate, *Clown World*.¹²⁵ The cartoons make it pretty obvious.

Tales from Wudan is about Tate’s relationship with his father, and it is not healthy. The story starts with the dad character, Master Po, beating children and denying them blankets. In another story, Tate’s character gets slashed and

122 @Cobratate, December 13, 2022, 11:28 AM.

123 Tate Archives, Aug 3, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4Men316S2w>

124 Zoe Bee. “I Read Andrew Tate’s Book so You Don’t Have To”. YouTube (May 20, 2022) <https://youtu.be/iOkSP-KlfhI?si=6M6pDfsqHBNdF1Xk>

125 Jamie Tahsin and Matt Shea. *Clown World: Four Years Inside Andrew Tate’s Manosphere*. (2024: Mobius).

scarred for being curious. Po even tells Tate to stay away from beautiful women. Throughout the book, Tate’s character fails over and over to prove himself to his Master, often catching a beating. The subtext seems to be his dad cannot love him unless he earns it, which he never will.

The point of all this psychoanalysis: Tate promises young men this exact same mindset and methodology will bring them success... by mining bitcum. But why should anyone pay money to learn an ideal of masculinity that Tate himself never lived up to? Especially when it is so incredibly bleak: for all his Bugattis, Tate never points to any love or joy in his life. In person, in public, he still comes off like an angry and unloved child.

In an interview with Piers Morgan, Tate said,

I think young boys in their teens lack life experience, they lack nuance, and they need to be very very careful about what they digest online, whether it’s my content or anyone else’s.¹²⁶

That is good advice, for once.

Jordan Peterson

Tate mocks men who seek mental health care, so it is ironic that a psychologist, Jordan Peterson, is his high-brow counterpart. Peterson was a professor at University of Toronto when his opposition to a law that protects gender expression made him famous.

Peterson claimed the law would *force* him to use a person’s preferred pronouns, which might not be a lie but is still whatever it is when a statement is not at all true. I

126 *Piers Morgan Uncensored*, October 7, 2022, 22:40. <https://youtu.be/VGWGcESPltM?si=I0vIkLTIWAigJlso>

teach trans kids every now and then, and this is such a weird hill to die on. It is very easy to respect a person's pronouns, assuming you do not identify as an asshole.

Peterson's fussiness about gender made him popular on the right, and soon he had a book deal: *12 Simple Rules: An Antidote To Chaos*. 'Simple' really is a lie. Each chapter follows a formula of tons and tons of tangential material to prop up some petty peeve of Peterson's.

In the first chapter, "Stand Up Straight With Your Shoulders Back", Peterson talks on and on about lobsters then finally explains that standing up straight with your shoulders back triggers serotonin, the same chemical that make lobsters feel dominant.¹²⁷ But it turns out he does not understand lobster neurochemistry: serotonin makes lobsters and other invertebrates more aggressive, but in vertebrates (like most humans) it has the opposite effect.¹²⁸

Rule 11 is, "Do Not Bother Children When They Are Skateboarding". Can you guess what the actual point of that chapter is? Gender fundamentalism. Peterson argues the science of gender is settled: "This isn't a debate. The data are in".¹²⁹ Peterson here cites only four papers, which do not all support his claims. In fact, I bought *Gender, Nature and Nurture* because Peterson cited one of Richard Lippa's papers among the four.

In the same chapter, Peterson writes, "Don't, in the immortal words of Arnold Schwarzenegger, be a girlie man".¹³⁰ He does not know that Schwarzenegger borrowed

127 Jordan Peterson. *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. Random House (2018); see p. 7 especially.

128 There are many articles debunking Peterson on this point, e.g.: Leonor Gonçalves, "Psychologist Jordan Peterson says lobsters help to explain why human hierarchies exist – do they?" *New Statesman*, 22 May 2018. <https://tinyurl.com/8d4vn258>

129 Jordan Peterson. *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. Random House (2018), p. 298.

130 Jordan Peterson. *12 Rules for Life*, p. 328

the phrase from the characters Hans and Franz on *Saturday Night Live*. The 'immortal words' more accurately belong to Kevin Nealon and Dana Carvey, from a sketch mocking Schwarzenegger's masculinity.

Schwarzenegger himself only ever used the phrase in public to attack political opponents. When people disagreed with him, he called them names. The first time was in 1988 to describe the Democratic presidential ticket, Michael Dukakis and Lloyd Bentsen. Dukakis was in the Army and never saw combat, but Bentsen won a Distinguished Flying Cross flying B-24s over Europe during World War 2. He was shot down twice. One of the places Bentsen bombed was Austria, Schwarzenegger's homeland. Does Peterson think Bentsen was a 'girlie man'? He also does not know that Schwarzenegger expressed regret about using the joke.¹³¹

In 2017, Peterson sat down for a conversation with law professor Camille Paglia. Paglia describes herself as a transgender feminist who uses cis pronouns and has – in her own words – "repeatedly protested the lynch-mob hysteria that dogs the issue of man-boy love".¹³² Read that quote a couple more times to make sure you get it. I have a hard time seeing anything feminist in her work, but she at least proves that nobody gets kicked out of the club.

The video is mostly them complaining. Peterson's big gripe is the bitter (to him) criticism he gets from women. He points out how he might confront a man: "when men are talking to each other in any serious manner, that underlying threat of physicality is always there, especially if

131 Lou Schuler, "How Arnold Became Arnold: The Men's Health Legends Interview with Arnold Schwarzenegger". *Menshealth.com* (October 10, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/mr2ttdp3>

132 Camille Paglia. "Ask Camille: The Purity of Allen Ginsberg's Boy Love". *Salon.com* (April 15, 1997) <https://tinyurl.com/22w6myxs>

it's a real conversation".¹³³ Masculine aggression? Peterson thinks it is a feature, not a bug. He is so very sad he cannot punch women who criticize him.

The most bizarre part in the conversation is that Paglia then says, "I don't think people realize that masculinity still exists in the world as a code among jihadists." Then Peterson exclaims, "Yes!"

You probably thought I was over the top when I compared the Taliban and W. Bruce Cameron in Chapter 2. But Peterson, Paglia, and I all agree that the Taliban and *8 Simple Rules* are just different phases of the same matter. I am the only one of the three who sees a problem.

Ben Shapiro

Ben Shapiro is a right-wing political commentator with a law degree from Harvard. For all his work across various media, Shapiro is probably most famous for his prudish revulsion at the Cardi B song, 'W.A.P.'; "this", he declared "is what feminists fought for".¹³⁴ He meant that as a critique of feminism, but... how is dry better?

I checked out Shapiro's book *How To Destroy America in Three Easy Steps*, in which he constructs a fantasy of the United States. He then blames the left for wrecking his fantasy. He calls his own side "Unionists" and the left "Disintegrationists" with not even a glance at the people who literally tore the country apart, who fought against literal integration, and who are still at it today. Hint: they aren't feminists and sure as hell aren't abolitionists.

Of course, Shapiro opposes feminism but has the

133 "Modern Times: Camille Paglia & Jordan B. Peterson". October 2, 2017 00:37:00 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIVnmUdXM>

134 Ashley Reece. "Ben Shapiro Stumped by Wet Pussy". Jezebel.com (August 10, 2020). <https://tinyurl.com/44ym4u3r>

smarts to avoid gunning for women's rights. Instead, he lays the blame on "intersectionality", which he allows was at first "perfectly plausible".¹³⁵ But now, says Shapiro, it "has become a rallying cry for Disintegrationists who aver that America is subject to unbending, rigid hierarchies that can be torn down only by uprooting the American system".¹³⁶ This is a common ploy on the right: 'this liberal thing was okay *then*, but now it's gone too far.'

As one example of the threat to America, Shapiro points to the Boy Scouts. He says the organization was "forced to denounce its own principles" because "those principles comply with traditional attitudes towards Judeo-Christian morality".¹³⁷ Later, he scoffs at the fact that "the Boy Scouts can be forced to include girls".¹³⁸

I do not see that he was ever a Boy Scout, but I am an Eagle Scout. I was also active in the movement that pushed Scouts to allow gay members and ultimately girls. Our point was that the BSA should keep to Scouting's founding principles, which respect the moral and ethical traditions of chartering organizations (like churches and schools). 'The idea Scouts were 'forced' by outside agitators to let girls in is bullshit. In fact, it had a lot more to do with the need for more revenue to cover losses from sex abuse lawsuits. And far from 'uprooting the entire American system', the change has been painless by all accounts. On this subject and many, Ben Shapiro is bullshitting us.

Throughout the book, Shapiro makes inclusion out to be a terrible threat to America. He thinks it is wrong because in his view human nature exists and is immutable. No surprise, he argues attacks on America find "their

135 Ben Shapiro. *How to Destroy America in Three Easy Steps*. Broadside Books (2021), p. xxiii.

136 Shapiro again, p. xxiii.

137 Shapiro yet again, xxvii.

138 Shapiro, but Arabic numerals: p. 88.

apotheosis in the Distintegrationist obliteration of biological sex”.¹³⁹ If we had done any such thing, we probably would brag about it a lot more.

Shapiro complains “this madness has even reached into the medical establishment”; to prove his point, he quotes Dr. Deanna Adkins of Duke University School of Medicine, “that gender identity ‘is the only medically supported determinant of sex’” – to make it look like Dr. Adkins has lost her lady doctor mind.¹⁴⁰

Shapiro does not cite the quote, but it was easy enough to find: in expert testimony Dr. Adkins gave in a lawsuit challenging North Carolina’s ‘bathroom bill’, which would have forced transgender people to use bathrooms according to their as-if-cis identity. And what Dr. Adkins wrote was, “For individuals with gender dysphoria and individuals with differences of sex development, gender identity is the only medically supported determinant of sex when sex assignment as male or female is necessary”.¹⁴¹

Adkins was talking *only* about clinical treatment for a small fraction of the population. For the other 98% or so of us, biological sex is still medically useful. In her testimony, Dr. Adkins outlines a very concrete and medical rationale for her views, based on decades of research and clinical practice with transgender people. Dr. Adkins’ position is solidly grounded in reality, which is tragically incompatible with Shapiro’s fantasy.

What happened next will shock any red-blooded American: the GOP governor who pushed for the bathroom bill was voted out of office. His Democratic successor revised the bill with the North Carolina legislature. That was eight years ago. Has Dr. Adkins’

¹³⁹ Back to Shapiro, *How to Destroy America...* p. 34.

¹⁴⁰ Same Shapiro book, same Shapiro page.

¹⁴¹ Here is the document: <https://tinyurl.com/dakzk3rn>
Emphasis added.

madness torn the state apart? I drive through North Carolina a few times a year. The bathrooms are fine.

Shapiro did something similar in an episode of his YouTube show later in 2020, warning us of “The Attack on Masculinity”. The army leading this attack? Harry Styles wearing dresses in *Vogue* magazine.¹⁴²

Shapiro argues, “Some behavior is more masculine like punching people in the face, some behavior is more feminine like wearing floofy dresses”. Franz de Waal reports that female chimpanzees are more likely to “self-adorn” using decorations like grass, vines, dead snakes, and monkey intestines.¹⁴³ But both men and women ‘self-adorn’, and men’s fashion can be just as fancy as women’s.

Shapiro digs deeper:

It is endemic for men and males of all mammalian species to be more aggressive, right? These are just biological realities. To pretend they are social constructs entirely is completely idiotic and anti-scientific and anti-evidentiary.

He then says, “boys are taught to be more masculine in virtually every human culture”. If boys are innately masculine, why do they need to be taught to be more masculine? And what about cultures where they are not taught?

Shapiro goes on to say the left is “undermining the civilizational compact between men and women that exists based on biology”. If that civilization was at all threatened by Harry Styles in a floofy dress, it was too fragile to

¹⁴² The Ben Shapiro Show, “The Attack on Masculinity”. November 17, 2020 starting at 38:10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pUIUey50Gg>

¹⁴³ Franz de Waal. *Different: Gender Through the Lens of a Primatologist*. pp. 141-143

survive. But also, Shapiro uses the word 'compact' as if we all talked it out and decided how men and women should be based on our biology and then signed our names at the bottom. That never happened.

What Shapiro does not grasp is that we are having that conversation right now. For the last two centuries, we have been openly negotiating gender. And Shapiro has nothing to bring to the table, nothing to offer anyone except the same old same old. Why would you let him sign you up for that? I sure as hell will not.

A lot of feminists find the popularity of guys like Tate, Peterson, and Shapiro to be alarming. I get that, but I also find them weirdly reassuring. They would not have the energy they have if the world were not changing quickly, if women were not making progress. They clearly have nothing new or substantial to add to the conversation. At a deep level, feminism is changing our society in ways these guys will never understand, much less touch. So the question I have for you is: do you want to move forward with us, or stay behind with these douchebags?

10. I can't even.

Congrats, you made it! That was nowhere near everything, but it should be enough.

If you still don't want to be a feminist, or you hate feminists, you can stop here. I failed you, and I am sorry for that. I hope you don't get hurt out there. You can always change your mind later.

If you want to be a feminist, now you might be thinking, 'Oh no, I need to completely change everything and it's going to be soooooooo much work.'

Slow your roll, friend. You do not have to go from 0 to 100% feminist overnight. Don't even try. It will be completely fake and people will distrust you for it. Feminism is a life-long project. Pace yourself.

In fact, you are probably never going to be 100% feminist. I am not, and I just wrote a whole book about how feminist I am. I can't fully avoid patriarchy. I doubt even rockstar feminists like bell hooks and Audre Lorde were 100% except on their best days. Think of it like baseball: anything above .300 (=30%) is solid, but even some pros have trouble getting that many hits.

So, to recap, patriarchy stands on three basic ideas, each of which is problematic for all sorts of reasons:

- 1) Humans have two genders, 'men' and 'women'.
- 2) We can reliably tell men from women by their biological, psychological, and social traits.
- 3) Men are superior to women.

To fight back, we'll attack those ideas in reverse order, thus establishing rough principles for our liberation:

3) Men and women should be equal.

The most obvious step you can make as a feminist is to recognize women and men are equals. In 2025, a lot of this should be pretty straightforward, but we will go through it just to be thorough.

Always respect women's agency and autonomy, along with everyone else's. At home, in school, at work, in bars and clubs, in sports, in public – everywhere and anywhere, every time and any time. Avoid people, spaces, and media that treat women else as less than, which includes porn.¹⁴⁴

Learn to listen to women. Start listening to the women in your life, at home, school, work, everywhere. Learn to acknowledge them and not talk over them or ignore them. But also, learn to listen to stories and ideas by women. Listen to music by women. Read books by women. Watch films made by women. Watch comedy by women.

Start learning from women feminists. Obviously, this book is full of literally priceless advice and probably deserves a different Nobel Prize for each chapter. But women feminist writers deserve your attention more. Everyone will tell you to read bell hooks's *The Will to Change*, but I got more from *Feminism is for Everybody*. Either one is a good next step. If you need more convincing, Catherine Crialdo Perez's *Invisible Women* and Laura Bates's *Everyday Sexism* are both popular. Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* is very good, if a bit dated, but it is more horror than you will ever want from a book.

Read *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.¹⁴⁵ This book was first published in the 1970s, when reliable information on

¹⁴⁴ This does not apply to kink communities where subordination is intentional play with clear guardrails.

¹⁴⁵ Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Atri (2011)

women's health and sexuality was hard to find. It was the first feminist book I ever read. If you intend to have a sexual relationship with a woman, this is information you need to know. Don't be that guy who can't buy tampons or freaks out when his wife's menses stains the sheets. Know what you are signing up for.

Once you have learned to listen to women, learn to talk to women. That means, for example, stop hitting on women. Flirting is still okay, with an important distinction: hitting on someone is a means to an end. You are the rat trying to push the button that triggers the reward. Flirting is something we do because it is intrinsically enjoyable. It is the reward. If you can't see the difference, do not try either one. Just talk to women. You will get the hang of it.

Learn to be friends with women, without it being sexual. That thing about Kresty, the Russian prison in my manliness resumé? It happened because I was friends with a woman. I spent the summer of 1999 in St. Petersburg, Russia, where I met a young American woman who lived there. She was fun and pretty, but I never picked up any vibe. We were just friends.

The Russians had just suffered a currency crisis, so the whole government was strapped for cash. When they opened Kresty to paid tours, my friend decided we had to go. We joined one of the first tours. Our group was guarded by a fat guy in a balaclava and blue camo. His uniform said 'OMOH' – "oh-mon" – the name of the Ministry of the Interior police. Right to left it read 'HOMO', so that was funny.

The prison was a nightmare. The tour guide let us peek into a filthy cell with ten guys and six beds. At the end of the tour, the prison had a gift shop that sold sculptures the prisoners made from chewed bread and paint. I think there

was a Mickey Mouse. The OMOH cop told us not to buy any, because the roaches eat them up in a few days. We were lucky not to take home tuberculosis for a souvenir.

Point is, this woman trusted me enough to invite me to one of the most notorious prisons on earth. I had an extraordinary experience that I will remember for the rest of my life, which I probably would have missed if I had not been her friend. Believe me that sex is nowhere near the most interesting thing you could do with a woman.

I said in Chapter 8 that you should love your partner as an equal. If you intend to partner with a woman, you should learn to love the women you care about – especially in non-sexual relationships. That means family, but also friends. It probably won't do to start with a partner, and then try it with the other women in your life.

- 2) We cannot reliably hold men and women to different expectations.

Again, women and men can be different, but we should drop the expectation that they should be different. We should not punish people who do not meet those expectations. While this affects how we treat other people, it also means you cannot reliably hold yourself to the expectations of masculinity.

Stop letting masculinity define you. Stop hacking off the parts that don't fit in the box. Keep working to be the best, fullest version of yourself. Embrace the parts that do not fit in the box. Live with integrity: "Integrity means being whole, unbroken, undivided. It describes a person united with the different parts of his or her personality, so that there is no longer a split in the soul".¹⁴⁶ Be all of you, as much as is possible.

If there are parts of you that you do not like, ask

¹⁴⁶ Harold Kushner, in bell hooks. *The Will to Change*. pp. 155-156.

yourself whether they are in fact bad, or just not masculine enough. Work on the bad, but learn to accept and embrace anything that is not bad. Don't punish yourself for not being manly enough, which might be still more challenging than treating women as equals.

Try to find or create a refuge for yourself, a space where you are not expected to perform masculinity – but a space where you can take it off when you need to. Find people who do not need you to be in the box, who do not hold you to those expectations. That refuge might well be therapy, at least for a time: lean into it.

Respecting and loving yourself means developing your agency and autonomy. We have seen how masculinity encourages men to be deeply dependent on women to take care of them. Learn to take care of yourself. Learn to manage a household – to cook and clean and shop. Learn to do everything you might need to do if your partner is in the hospital for a week or a month or just up and leaves.

And once again: learn to love. A big part of loving other people is taking care of them. Learn to take care of the people you love. Start with the people closest to you, especially the women. Start with your family, if you can. Patriarchy has its roots in families, so we have the most power to fight patriarchy in family and other close relationships. We can do a lot of good by focusing on care and justice in our day-to-day interactions with the people closest to us. Start there. Learn to cook for people, learn to help them when they are sick or injured, learn to keep them company when they are lonely.

Learn to take care of children. If you have trauma around parentification or something similar – if you've already done the work – you can take a pass on this one. Otherwise, you need to learn to take care of kids even if you intend to remain childless. Things happen; be ready.

I used to think I did not like kids. Once I started taking care of kids, I got over my dislike. If you never get over it, that's fine. My litmus test for any male feminist is: do I trust him to take care of a small child? And yes, there are definitely women I would not trust with a kid.

The more you take care of other people, the more you will learn to take care of yourself. The more you will learn that you sometimes need care for your spirit. That is a normal human need. Only patriarchy that says men must go it alone, that every man's soul ought to be a fortress. Feminism says you will live your best life in connection and community with the people you care about. That has certainly been my experience.

1) Human genders are myriad and always changing.

I assume if you're reading this that you identify as a dude. As I have said, I am not telling you to abandon that aspect of your identity. But be careful with your masculinity, that it serves you and not patriarchy. Be a man but defy expectations. Be more than a man. Feminist masculinity will always be subversive, one way or another. Wear your masculinity like a raincoat, not a straitjacket.

With respect to other people and their genders, accept that gender is unnecessary and in flux. That means being trans-affirming, but also affirming non-binary and Two-Spirit and gender-fluid and agender folks. A lot of people invested in traditional gender roles see non-traditional identities as threats. They are not, and it is silly to be scared of them. Policing the boundaries of gender does nothing to help men – or anyone else, for that matter. Accept and affirm people for who they want to be, not for how well they satisfy someone's else expectations.

Of course, there is a lot more I want to say, a lot more to be done, but this is page 100 (in the PDF) and I promised we would end here. I think you are off to a good start, and there are lots of people who want to help you.

Feminism – fighting patriarchy – is a life-long project. Unlearning all the bullshit that patriarchy has put into your head is going to be slow and awkward for a while, and you will make mistakes. Accept that you are going to screw up a fair bit, and be comfortable with that discomfort. Just because you make the occasional misstep does not mean you are walking in the wrong direction. Own your mistakes. A genuine apology is surprisingly powerful. Many women are startled to hear a man say, "I'm sorry" and mean it. Use that power wisely.

As a reminder, at this point you probably know enough to decide how you want to live your life. Fundamentalist terror and violence, or feminist care and justice? The boxed-up cut-up version of yourself, or the biggest and best you you can be? But you do not know enough to tell anybody else how to live their life. Okay, so you might be in a position to drop hints, but don't get sanctimonious.

Be patient with yourself, and be patient with others. Neither you nor I can do this alone, but only in solidarity can we find our freedom.