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Clearing the way: a man's journey towards feminism

'Feminists offered an important critique about a male-dominated society that routinely, and globally, treated women like second-class citizens. They spoke the truth, and even though I was a man, their truth spoke to me,' said Byron Hurt, African-American documentary film-maker and anti-sexist activist.

Through feminism, I developed a language that helped me better articulate things that I had experienced growing up as a male. Feminist writings about patriarchy, racism, capitalism and structural sexism resonated with me because I had witnessed firsthand the kind of male dominance they challenged. I saw it as a child in my home and perpetuated it as an adult. Their analysis of male culture and male behavior helped me put my father's patriarchy into a much larger social context, and also helped me understand myself better.

I decided that I loved feminists and embraced feminism. Not only does feminism give woman a voice, but it also clears the way for men to free themselves from the stranglehold of traditional masculinity. When we hurt the women in our lives, we hurt ourselves, and we hurt our community, too.¹

Hurt is able to articulate very clearly what he felt feminism had to offer him. But many others, both men and women, are much more conflicted. This chapter deals directly with some of the still-emerging themes of contemporary feminist debates

about men and feminism. It looks at what feminism means to both men and women, and examines the men's rights movement, which is often implicitly or explicitly anti-women. It shows how men's relationship with feminism is directly bound up with men and women's relationship with LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) issues. It examines twenty-first-century feminism's uneasy relationship with transgender rights. And it hears from a number of men who call themselves feminists about why they think this is so important.

What kind of feminist are you?

For its November 2013 issue, *Elle* magazine commissioned three advertising agencies to undertake what they called a 're-branding' of feminism. One agency produced a flow chart called 'Are You a Feminist?' Another created an ad about equal pay. The third came up with an ad about stereotypes of women.² *Elle's* rationale for the venture was that only one in seven women in the UK call themselves feminists. And only the first of the three agencies' 're-branding' offered the possibility that men could also be involved.

In fact, the one-in-seven figure came from a survey by Netmums, an online network for new mothers, so it is not representative of the wider population. For this constituency, it was perhaps not surprising that the top concern (69 per cent) was to 'reinstate the value of motherhood'. On the other hand, 41 per cent felt UK society was 'still a man's world' and 36 per cent said 'their daughters could not imagine a time when men and women were not regarded as equal'.³

In locating my own feminism, while I consider myself broadly socially progressive, internationalist, critical of capitalism and particularly neoliberalism, I don't find labels particularly helpful.

I have always liked the simple definition given by Rebecca West, writer and activist, in 1913: 'I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is; I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat.'

The other insight that holds true for me is 'the personal is political'. It dates back to the 1970s, and remains with me as I write this book. Partly because it continues to be important that we try to practise in our own lives what we 'preach' to others. But also because the two are so intertwined, and yet we often strive to separate them. This perspective was lost some time in the 1990s, when the overall analysis was that we were in a 'post-feminist' era, where many of the rights that earlier feminists were claiming had been achieved.

The main movements of feminists include radical feminists, who prioritize women-only spaces, liberal feminists, and Marxist or socialist feminists, who link their feminism clearly to a critique of capitalism and an analysis of exploitation. Feminists have also formed alliances based on their unique perspectives and experiences of religion, class or race, so there are black feminists, Muslim feminists and lesbian feminist groups and organizations.

Feminism has to be rooted in social, political and cultural realities. Feminist publisher Urvashi Butalia, from India, points out: 'I believe that feminist movements everywhere in the world are born of the particular political and economic realities of the places where they exist. In that sense, each movement has different issues and concerns.' However, she continues: 'Despite cultural and economic differences, there are issues that women share worldwide that have been the concern of feminists.'⁴

Feminism has its own divisions, between young and older, black and white heterosexuals and LGBTI and between countries

in the North and those in the South, sometimes called the 'Majority World'. For example, some Southern activists see feminism as a Northern cultural concept, while white middle-class feminists have often failed to understand the racism and oppression faced by black and minority ethnic women.

Bell hooks, long-time feminist activist, academic and writer, and now Distinguished Professor in Residence in Appalachian Studies at Berea College in the USA, offered a broad definition of feminism which does not pit women against men: 'Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.'⁵ She sees this struggle as clearly allied to changing patriarchal structures:

No matter their standpoint, anyone who advocates feminist politics needs to understand the work does not end with the fight for equality of opportunity within the existing patriarchal structure. We must understand that challenging and dismantling patriarchy is at the core of contemporary feminist struggle – this is essential and necessary if women and men are to be truly liberated from outmoded sexist thinking and actions.⁶

American feminist blogger Jessica Hoffman wrote in her 'Letter to white feminists' that: 'Privilege is a kind of poison – insidious, it obscures, misleads, confuses – and this is part of how power is maintained, as well-meaning privileged people miss the mark, can't clearly see what's going on and how we're implicated, are able to comfortably see ourselves as not responsible.'⁷

Most women are not affected by sexism alone. As one blog on black feminism noted, if it fails to recognize these different oppressions, feminism fails 'to capture and reflect the extreme differences in how women live their lives', which inhibit 'the

difficult work of turning feminism into feminisms – something more representative of our wonderful variety'.⁸

In the twenty-first century, there has been a revival of feminism, led by young feminists around the world who are organizing online and offline. I was interested to see on my Twitter feed that in January 2014 the Feminist Wire was creating a new section called 'Personal Is Political'.⁹ Perhaps it is on its way back – if it ever really disappeared.

But American critical theorist Nancy Fraser¹⁰ argues that feminism today has gone down the road of the personal rather than the political, co-opted by an individualism that is intrinsically connected to capitalism. She believes that

feminist ideas that once formed part of a radical worldview are increasingly expressed in individualist terms. Where feminists once criticised a society that promoted careerism, they now advise women to 'lean in'. A movement that once prioritised social solidarity now celebrates female entrepreneurs. A perspective that once valorised 'care' and interdependence now encourages individual advancement and meritocracy.¹¹

Her analysis, explored further in the chapter on employment, shows clearly why it is so important for feminists to bring the link between the personal and the social back into an analysis that includes both as an integrated whole.

Feminism: a four-letter word?

But first we need to reclaim the word 'feminism'. To many people, it provokes strongly negative feelings, in a way that the term 'gender equality' does not. 'Patriarchy' has the same effect. They often provoke bewilderment and misunderstanding and even rage. And this is true for women as well as men.

British student Rose Kelly talks about her experience of the word 'feminism':¹²

You'd think feminism was a four-letter word if you came to my campus. In a seminar a few weeks ago (about culture and diversity, by the way) the lecturer asked any feminists in the room to raise their hands. I'm ashamed to say that I didn't – in fact, only one girl in a class of 20 people did.

I'm not embarrassed about what I stand for, far from it, but I'm reluctant to label myself a feminist because of the assumptions people jump to. Siobhan Garrigan, another British student, said: 'Young people don't want to identify as feminists because there is this man-hating, frumpy, lesbian image forced on us.'

Or Holly, from the Vagenda blog, writes: 'We asked girls why they thought feminism had become such a dirty word. The words that girls responded with were: "not sexy, unfeminine, angry, confusing, academic, intimidating, guilt-inducing, radical, scary, man-hating, exclusive, and not relatable".'¹³

Sri Danti Anwar, Secretary of the Ministry for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection in Indonesia, told me that: 'In Indonesia we don't want to label ourselves feminist – there is resistance to the word because it is seen as Western. Even the word gender we don't use all the time, we just paraphrase it. We have to relate the idea of gender equality to people's lives. That is the real challenge, not the language itself.'¹⁴

Some responses to the online survey for this book suggested changes to the word, but many young women are instead reclaiming it. For example: 'I think the feminist movement would attract more men if a more gender neutral term was used to describe it.'

After an era that many defined as 'post-feminist', it is hearten-

ing to see this new 'wave' of young women – and some young men – who are happy to call themselves feminists. Respondents in the online survey also said: 'I am inspired by the resurgence of feminism and feel immensely hopeful that it will effect real and lasting change.'

The younger generation may have different understandings of what that means from the older generation of feminists, but we would all subscribe to Rebecca West's definition that we do not want to be treated like doormats.

And although there has been much controversy around Caitlin Moran's book *How to Be a Woman*, its mixture of humour and challenge seems to have made many young women think about what it means to be female and feminist.¹⁵ She says:

here is the quick way of working out if you're a feminist. Put your hand in your pants.

- a) Do you have a vagina? and
- b) Do you want to be in charge of it?

If you said 'yes' to both, then congratulations! You're a feminist.

Young Australian entrepreneur Holly Ransom agrees that her generation would rather not use the word 'feminist' but argues that this is 'because the evolution of the word has seen its mainstream connotation shift from "equal rights" to "hating men"'. If she uses the term 'equal rights', however, she says: 'I'm yet to meet a young woman who's not on board.' For Ransom, 'this is further proof of the need to raise the broader consciousness of the connotations of our language use and the framing of the current debate, as well as lifting the cloak of invisibility from the latent attitudinal and cultural phenomena that are currently serving as roadblocks to progress in gender equality'.¹⁶

Why do I need feminism?¹⁷

Young women at Duke University in the USA are among a number of groups who decided to set up what they called a 'PR campaign for feminism'. This is what they said: 'Our class was disturbed by what we perceive to be an overwhelmingly widespread belief that today's society no longer needs feminism ... We feel that until the denigration surrounding feminism and women's issues is alleviated, it will be hard to achieve total gender equality, both statistically and socially.'

Their account has now received more than four thousand photos from all over the world with statements about why feminism is needed. Most are from young women, a few from young men. This is a sample:

- 'I need feminism because in 1913 my great great grandmother gave her life in a Suffragette protest so that women could have the right to vote, and 100 years

Including men in feminism: the devil is in the detail

The involvement of men in campaigning for gender equality is not new, although it has always been a minority of men. In 1848, men attended the first women's rights convention in the Western world. In 1978, when men's groups proliferated in many countries, a statement issued in Los Angeles at the 5th National Conference on Men and Masculinities noted: 'the women's movement is the best thing that has ever happened for men'.

But there does seem to have been a change in recent years in the way that younger feminists view the involvement of men.

later, we *STILL* don't have equality between sexes.'

- 'I need Feminism because a 15 year old girl shouldn't have to come home so uncomfortable they're on the verge of tears, because a man has catcalled them in the street.'
- 'I need feminism because "men's jobs" (like engineering and physician) pay more than "women's" jobs. And that is **NOT** okay!'
- 'I need feminism because when I was a kid I told my family that girls couldn't be pretty and smart at the same time.'
- 'I need feminism because my nephew was called a "homo" (by his own father) for playing with the kitten I bought him. He's two years old.'
- 'I need **FEMINISM** because when talking about women's rights, someone came up to me and said, "Women are only good for keeping our stomachs full and our testicles empty."'

For example, UK Feminista¹⁸ calls itself: 'A movement of ordinary women and men campaigning for gender equality', and though the 1,000-strong audience at its 2012 national conference were mainly women, it included a substantial minority of men. In addition, in the online research carried out for this book, 90 per cent of younger respondents said that men could be feminists, and 73 per cent of respondents over fifty.

Gary Barker, one of the pioneers of work with men from a gender equality perspective and a founder of Instituto Promundo in Brazil,¹⁹ spoke to me of a 'generational shift':

There is a generation of young men who grew up with women's rights as daily reality, and a group of young women who expect nothing less than respect from men. I think that reality is driving our work in many parts of the world. There are more and more women who are women's rights advocates who say: 'Of course you (as men) should be here. You don't have to come and do your introductory remarks on why men should be part of gender. We get that.'²⁰

Marisa Viana da Silva, a young feminist from Brazil, said:

In my experience, we as young feminists are more open to working with men than older feminists might be. We believe that men can also be feminists, and we are more flexible towards having these discussions. We recognize we need a wider movement and as much support as possible. Younger feminists have had a hard time accessing the more elite spaces older feminists have gained so we have to ask ourselves: how do we garner support and who do we work with? And that includes men. We need to work across different movements - in Latin America we are young feminists within the indigenous and environmental movements. You carry that identity with you wherever you go.²¹

I spoke to Andreas, a young man in Indonesia, who told me that because of education and changes in the law:

Women are now more willing to express their opinions and men are starting to hear them. Young educated men see that the women's movement should be supported. This is a change between generations. My father would raise his eyebrows and say 'What is feminism anyway?' and refer to the Bible, but in cities at least, younger men will support women.

In the villages it is still much more difficult – the head of the village and the family is the man, and the voice of women and girls in family decisions is not taken seriously.

On the website Feminism.com, American activist and feminist Amy Richards says in response to the question about whether feminism fights for the equality of both sexes:

I personally do fight for men's equality as much as I fight for women's – or rather fight to free men and women from inequalities. And those inequalities are based mostly on long-term stereotypes – i.e., that men are conditioned one way and women another. Feminism is about breaking down those assumptions and more and more scientific evidence backs that up – we are programmed in our genders. Men are often more punished for not conforming; women have been able to access male worlds more easily than men have accessed female worlds.²²

Another reason why many young women are more welcoming to male feminists, however, may link back to American critical theorist Nancy Fraser's argument in Chapter 2 about individualization – because younger women tend to take a more individualistic approach that values choice above collectivism, there tends to be less opposition on political grounds to the choices that women make than there was for previous generations of feminists. A higher value is placed on individual choice than on political action.

Whatever the reasons that lie behind it, the fact that young feminists are more welcoming of men in their ranks is a big change.

In the past (and sometimes today), feminist or pro-feminist men were often attacked as representatives of the oppressors, of the patriarchy, as though everything that men have done to

women is their personal fault, and as though men do not suffer from patriarchy as well. As writer and sociologist Allan Johnson notes, many people equate the word 'patriarchy' with 'men', but this is a misinterpretation of the word: 'Patriarchy is ... a kind of society in which men and women participate ... A society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being *male dominated*, *male identified* and *male centred*. It is also organised around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women.'²³

Respondents in the online survey for this book noted: 'There do need to be women only spaces but there also needs to be spaces where men and women work together on these issues that affect both of them,' and 'In my experience some feminists are strongly against men becoming involved in feminist issues.'

Many feminists are suspicious of men wanting to get involved in something that has often rightly been a woman-only domain. They fear their motives, they are concerned that struggling women's groups will lose out once again to men in terms of both resources and attention. And they know that many groups calling themselves 'men's rights' are often misogynistic and woman-hating.

UK political anthropologist Andrea Cornwall and policy analyst Emily Esplen write in their paper on women's empowerment and men: 'As interest in men and masculinities has proliferated, so too has ambivalence amongst feminists about what this "men agenda" is all about. For some, it's a diversion from the real task of working with women to enable them to gain greater voice, agency and resources. For others, it's a nuisance and a threat, draining away vital funding and attention from women's rights. For others still, it's a fashion without political substance.'²⁴

Putting it even more strongly in her response to Cornwall

and Esplen's article, Zimbabwean gender specialist Everjoice Win writes:

All the things you suggest men should do; mobilizing other men, challenging one another, voting for women, working in trade unions, I agree they MUST do. Not as a favour to women. But because they want to, and they must do it if they are so called democrats, human rights activists/believers that they claim to be. The biggest thing men must do however is to change their personal behaviours, attitudes, and relationships with women. They must be consistent in demonstrating this change. We of course need EVIDENCE (yes that ever so wonderful word that they love throwing at us), that what they are doing is contributing to gender equality and women's enjoyment of rights. For now, please don't expect feminists to be jumping for joy because men have done what they should have always done. Be good people. Simple enough?

In fact, it is not that simple; we need to look at deeper cultural reasons. Young British writer Laurie Penny's take on this is interesting because she is able to pinpoint so clearly why even men who are not sexist and patriarchal benefit from patriarchy. Penny says:

Of course not all men hate women. But culture hates women, so men who grow up in a sexist culture have a tendency to do and say sexist things, often without meaning to. We aren't judging you for who you are but that doesn't mean we're not asking you to change your behaviour. What you feel about women in your heart is of less immediate importance than how you treat them on a daily basis.

You can be the gentlest, sweetest man in the world yet still benefit from sexism. That's how oppression works.

Thousands of otherwise decent people are persuaded to go along with an unfair system because it's less hassle that way. The appropriate response when somebody demands a change in that unfair system is to listen, rather than turning away or yelling, as a child might, that it's not your fault. And it isn't your fault. I'm sure you're lovely. That doesn't mean you don't have a responsibility to do something about it.²⁵

Men also need to recognize not only that they benefit – sometimes even when they don't want to – from what is known as the 'patriarchal dividend', but also that there is a real danger that even the most pro-feminist men take up women's space – in meetings, for funding, in generally getting their voices heard. Melanie Judge, South African social commentator, told me: 'The way in which men engage must be under scrutiny because men who are activists claim a political space and have to be held to account in the ways in which they are engaging with masculinities and challenge or reproduce existing systems. They need to work with women on what is prevention – the devil is in the detail.'²⁶

One respondent to the online survey for this book said:

To fully recognise women's oppression, to acknowledge that they benefit from it, even if not voluntarily and at last to not think they are the center of attention all the time. They mustn't steal our voices in our spaces. Their support is important I'm always glad when a guy identifies sexism on its own. However I'd like them to be more involved in their own deconstruction: like petitioning for paternity leave, try not to act like your typical male, etc. For once, I'd like the male gaze to be pointed at other guys and themselves.

And she has a point – in recent years, men working for gender equality have pushed for an end to violence against women,

they have campaigned for better paternity leave and access to their children. But they have paid less attention to some of the issues around power and structural inequality that are central to the achievement of real equality between men and women.

Marc Peters, from the MenEngage Network, recognizes the alliances that are needed between those with privilege – white, Western, educated men like himself – and those without: ‘When I step before a room of people to talk about equality, assumptions of my worldview abound based on my privilege. When I confound those expectations, I have no problem finding common ground and shared humanity with those who are systematically oppressed. Finding common ground with people like me, members of the oppressive group, is the challenge.’²⁷

There are many young men like Marc who are doing just this – linking the personal and the political. They often face distrust and sometimes downright hostility when they attend meetings on gender or feminism, where they are the only man among thirty women. They cannot help but feel, on occasion, if not all the time, the representative of the enemy, the perpetrator, the one with the power, rather than the father, brother, uncle, grandfather, lover, partner, colleague or friend. The fact that they turn up despite this shows that they have as much interest in changing the status quo as many of the women in the room.

This takes courage. It is the kind of courage that women needed for so many years – and still need – when they are the only woman in the room. As feminists, this should be something that we can recognize.

Feminism, men and sexuality

In recent years, the LGBTI movement has made both feminists and men working on masculinities think again about how

they define gender. MenEngage coordinator Oswaldo Montoya Telleria told me:

There is a very profound link between the movement for men and gender equality and the LBGT movement. They are both challenging the status quo relating to homophobia. One of the main obstacles for men and masculinity is that we fear we might be under suspicion of not being heterosexual. The LBGT movement is challenging that norm – for them, diversity is the norm. I remember at the beginning of the 1990s in Nicaragua we created a movement of men against violence. Half the men were gay, half probably straight, some probably in between. We felt the patriarchal system harmed us and we wanted to support women's struggle. We were there together and we started confronting our fears and biases together. This was a very profound moment for me.

Masculinities expert and sociologist Michael Kimmel says that when he gives a lecture, there are always questions from what he calls 'angry-white-men-in-training'. In 'Who's afraid of men doing feminism?'²⁸ he gives one example: 'A burly white male student. Sitting in the back row, arms folded across his chest ... raised his hand: "What makes you such an expert on men?" he began. "The way you talk about listening to women, and supporting feminism, you must be a faggot or something. You sure aren't a real man."'

Kimmel goes on to say: 'No matter how many times I've been gay-baited, been rhetorically and literally called out, my manhood questioned, I'm still somewhat startled by it. Why would some people believe that supporting feminism is somehow a revelation of sexual orientation?' He goes on to answer his question: 'To the angry white men, profeminist men cannot exist, and so their

effort is to unmask me as a fraud of a man.' A man questioning traditional masculinities is somehow less of a man rather than more of one. Which is why 'gay' is still an insult in many school playgrounds, but one usually reserved more for boys than for girls.

This is why it is so important for feminists – both male and female – to incorporate an understanding of LGBTI issues into their analysis, because LGBTI people are at the forefront of challenging traditional notions of gender: of what it 'should' mean to be a man or a woman.

In some countries, including India, there is now a box labelled 'other' to tick as well as 'male' and 'female'. Those who do not identify themselves as either sex are still 'other', but at least they are a recognized category.

LGBTI people pay a high price for this challenge. In some countries, tolerance of homosexuality is growing, while in others LGBTI people are murdered, raped, imprisoned and even executed just for being who they are. Being gay is still illegal in seventy-eight countries and being a lesbian is illegal in forty-nine. In some countries in Africa, anti-gay legislation is being hotly contested.²⁹

Even in Europe, a 2013 poll found that 26 per cent of gay people and 35 per cent of transgender people said they had been attacked or threatened with violence during the past five years. Almost half of the 93,000 surveyed said they had faced discrimination or harassment on the grounds of their sexual orientation, and half of these said they had not reported the incident because 'nothing would change or happen anyway'.³⁰

While in many countries in Latin America equal marriage bills have been passed with little fuss, in France thousands of pro and anti protesters took to the streets in 2013, and historian

Dominique Venner shot himself at the altar of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris because he objected so strongly to the idea.³¹

The links to right-wing movements are not coincidental; Marine Le Pen, leader of the right-wing National Front in France, tweeted about Venner's 'political gesture' in trying 'to wake France up'.³² And many of those opposing gay marriage are also against feminism, and want a return to 'traditional' notions of what it is to be a man or a woman.

It is not only right-wing homophobic people and organizations who struggle with transgender issues. Feminists too, particularly radical feminists and those who focus on the unequal power relationships between men and women, have not always been welcoming to transgender women, because they are, or were formerly, male. Such groups have themselves been attacked by men's rights activists for excluding men.

In a statement in August 2013,³³ thirty-seven radical feminists from five countries acknowledged the oppression faced by members of the trans community, but noted that they believed changing gender identity was not a political solution, and is not a feminist strategy, and that potentially 'it undermines a solution for all, even for the transitioning person, by embracing and reinforcing the cultural, economic and political tracking of "gender" rather than challenging it ... Transitioning, by itself, does not aid in the fight for equal power between the sexes.'

Transgender people have been bitter about what they see as a betrayal. Another statement by feminist/'womanists'³⁴ in twenty-six countries affirmed their support for trans people and said that they were 'essential to feminism's mission to advocate for women and other people oppressed, exploited, and otherwise marginalized by patriarchal and misogynistic systems and people'. Supporters of transgender people within feminism have

coined the term 'transfeminism', as one *Ms.* magazine blogger put it:

Trans feminism ... is simply one of numerous third-wave feminisms that take an intersectional approach to challenging sexism and oppression. The only thing different about trans feminism is that it extends this feminist analysis to transgender issues, which have been largely overlooked or misinterpreted by feminists in the past ... When trans feminism is reduced to a debate about whether trans women 'count' as women or as feminists, it's a disservice not only to us but to feminism as a whole.³⁵

I couldn't agree more.

Men's rights: feminists as 'agents of hate and corruption'

This next section looks at the men who are at the other end of the spectrum from most men in this book in that they support men's rights – often in opposition to women's rights. Their biggest guns seem to be reserved for feminists. One young female blogger writes about her friend Dan, who told her:

I feel like 'feminism' is often used as a cloak for thinly veiled attacks on men. Many – not all – people who identify themselves as feminists seem to be self-serving and employ double standards. Feminism doesn't seem to be about equal rights any more. Women, legally speaking, have equal rights. Discrimination still exists but the feminist movement has moved to a point where the aim isn't equality, it's empowerment. They want to gain power and 'punish' men.³⁶

There are also many men (and their female allies) who see feminism and women's rights as out to get the whole male

sex. It doesn't seem to take much to bring out the fury, as the following examples show.

Take the rage directed against Caroline Criado-Perez in the UK. Her crime? A campaign in 2013 to have Jane Austen, a woman author, on British banknotes. She succeeded, but in the meantime she was hounded on social media with hundreds of rape and death threats. She has since deleted her Twitter account, claiming that she and other victims were let down by the police response 'not to feed the "trolls"'. 'Not feeding the trolls doesn't magically scrub out the image in your head of being told you'll be gang-raped till you die,' she said. 'What are victims meant to do with that image, the rage and the horror that it conjures up? We're meant to internalise it until it consumes us? Well, I'm sorry, but I'm not having that.'³⁷ The two people convicted were a man and a woman, showing once again that it is not just men who can be sexist.

Merely raising the issue of sexism can come at a high price. Anita Sarkeesian, a cultural critic working on an online video series titled *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, found when she started an online campaign in 2012 to raise money for her series that she faced a barrage of online harassment, including misogynistic messages and death threats. Some of her online critics even created a game where you could physically abuse an image of Sarkeesian. 'They weren't attacking my arguments,' she says. 'They were coming after me for merely proposing the idea that there's sexism in games.'³⁸

In another example, when a group of sixteen-, seventeen- and eighteen-year-old young women at a school in the UK set up a Feminist Society and took photos of themselves with messages about why they needed feminism, the young men in their school subjected them to sexual objectification, vilification and harass-

ment. The school's response? Not to track down and punish the men, but to ask the women to remove the photos 'because of concerns for their safety'. The young women said: 'The school's actions were a disservice to not only girls and women but to society at large. When we fail in supporting the voices of girls we also turn our backs on boys who need a helping hand in becoming more informed young men. Please join us in sending a message loud and clear to schools around the country that feminism belongs in education!' Many young women – and young men – responded. You can see their messages on the website.³⁹

Those who attacked Caroline Criado-Perez and the boys who harassed the girls from the Feminist Society may not identify themselves as such, but they are part of a backlash against feminism that has been coming and going for at least fifteen years. It was explored in 1999 in writer Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man*.⁴⁰ And in Hanna Roisin's *The End of Men and the Rise of Women* thirteen years later.⁴¹

Faludi interviewed American men from all walks of life. She notes that:

A man controlling his environment is today the prevailing American image of masculinity. A man is expected to prove himself not by being part of society, but by being untouched by it, soaring above it ... And it is this very paradigm of modern masculinity – that it is all about being the master of your universe – prevents men from thinking their way out of their dilemma, from taking active political steps to resolve their crisis.⁴²

In *The End of Men* Hanna Roisin announces that 'The tides have turned. The "age of testosterone" is decisively over. At almost every level of society women are proving themselves far

more adaptable and suited to a job market that rewards people skills and intelligence, and a world that has a dramatically diminishing need for traditional male muscle.'

But others differ in fairly major ways as to how this change manifests itself. Warren Farrell, in his book *The Myth of Male Power*,⁴³ states that in fact it is women who are the 'winning' sex. It sets men against women – for example, he says: 'I look at how we have taken women's traditional area of sacrifice – raising children – and called it "sacrifice" while we have taken men's area of sacrifice – raising money – and called it "power".'

The website 'A Voice for Men' (AvfM)⁴⁴ goes even further. It states not only that it is: 'Pro Male – That means men and boys as a monolithic group, without consideration to race, creed, color, religion, lack of religion or sexual orientation. Racists, religious elitists or the anti-homosexual obsessed need not apply.' But that it is also 'Anti-feminist – AVfM regards feminism as a corrupt, hateful and disingenuous ideology based in female elitism and misogyny. And AVfM regards all self-proclaimed feminists as agents, unwitting or otherwise, of that hate and corruption.' It also has a description of the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) as

a grass roots, unfunded and loosely associated collection of human rights advocates focused on opposing the marginalization and vilification of men and boys in Western society. The MRM is a non-violent, non-political movement comprised of men and women who believe, based on a growing body of evidence that the human rights of males are being systematically removed by activists, lobbyists, politicians and academicians who cling to a misguided and wrongheaded belief that masculinity is fundamentally violent or harmful. This persistent myth is often referred to as cultural misogyny.⁴⁵