



Anti-man to Anti-patriarchy

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It is the fourth month of my junior year in college and I feel like my mind has suddenly been opened. It is an awakening to be able to take a step back and look at the macro level forces that have permeated my way of thinking and recognize the effect they've had on my life. When I first began to explore the feminist inside of me, I focused on micro level situations such as my parents, relationships, and daily activities. After further inquiry I realized that behind all of these things were bigger issues and stronger forces that have affected every part of me and of my life.

The first step I took towards self discovery was examining the person I am today. I looked at my attitudes, beliefs, values, and where I fit into the society around me. Next I looked back on the past twenty years of my life to see what social forces contributed to these aspects of my personality. Finally, I was able to really explore the global forces that shaped me and my way of life. Originally I chose to refer to my feminist attitudes as "anti-man," but eventually as I realized the power of ideologies I changed the label to "anti-patriarchy." My original paper involving the micro-level feminist issues in my life involved much detail. For the purpose of leaving more room for an analysis of global forces I will try to summarize those seven pages.

To begin with I am twenty years old, a female, and a college student. The strongest priorities in my life involve being educationally and professionally successful. I am determined to be self sufficient in my life. One of the best parts of my college career thus far has been my involvement with my sorority. Within this group I often take on a supportive role and am called upon for strength. This strength shows through in my relationships with the opposite sex as well. I have a strong determination to always put my goals and happiness ahead of anything else. One of these goals is to be a lawyer. My primary interest in the law is within the realm of the family such as divorce and custody cases. Finally, I have found myself feeling dissatisfied and detached from our current political system. I disagree with many American policies but don't recognize my ability to make a difference.

All of these aspects of my personality seem to imply feminist values. My need for self sufficiency relates to the fact that I never want to be the kind of woman who relies on a man to fulfill her. The importance of the sorority in my life is due to my need for female camaraderie. When I do need support I would rather turn to my girlfriends than seek the help of a male. In my romantic relationships I am not extremely open. I chose to keep that part of my life as a place of enjoyment, not necessity. In the past three years I have not had my heart broken or cried over a boy. There have been too many times in my life when I have seen the dissolution of a relationship lead to much anguish in a girl's life. This has really affected my goals for the future. When I picture myself in a courtroom I see myself defending a woman. In my mind's eye, women are the victims of injustice. The reason for my feeling detached from politics is that I am a woman. Most of the decisions that I don't agree with are made by men and for men, and in turn I cannot see my place in the system.

My current attitudes on life reflect my upbringing and also the patriarchal society we live in. In America in the past women relied on men to work and bring home money for the family. Because of this women put up with unfair domestic duties, violence, and oppression. These are things I do not want for myself. I have chosen to call upon females for emotional support in my life because as a sex we are socialized to fulfill this need. Men are desired to be tough and independent while women are expected to be open and rely on each other. There are many arenas of society that women are completely left out of. Although there have been more women in politics in the past few decades, there have not been enough so as to break down the barriers and end male domination in this arena. I will discuss macro issues such as these and the underlying patriarchy of society in more detail later. For now it is also vital to look at micro-level social forces that have had an affect on the values I presently hold.

There are many factors that have contributed to the feminist part of me. Obviously the first social institution that affects one's life is the family. My immediate family is very liberal. Neither of my parents ever placed me and my brother in traditional gender roles. We were always given the same opportunities whether they involved sports or music lessons and we usually did everything together. My mother is a feminist. She has always taught me that I can be and do whatever I want and that my sex should never hold me back. I have watched her as she attended pro-choice rallies, entered the voting booth with her as she chose political candidates, and volunteered alongside her in a home for battered women. She is a strong independent woman and has been one of the greatest influences in my life.

Besides my immediate family my extended family has greatly shaped me into a semi-feminist. My father's family is Jewish and I will be the first to admit that my

grandfather is a chauvinist. I am the only girl cousin on that side of the family and I have always been on the bottom of the ladder. I have resented this position for as long as I can remember. As far as religion was concerned my Poppy cared only that the boys knew the prayers and attended Hebrew school. At this point in my life I am very close to my grandparents; more so than any of my male cousins. The fact still remains that in my family I had to work to prove myself simply because I was a girl. Writing this paper has helped me see that this part of my life has affected me more than I ever realized.

In the later part of my life it was forces outside of my family that influenced me and strengthened my bond to women. I have watched the way my friend's lives and my own have been negatively affected by male dominance. On a small scale, the position that girls and guys hold in society is very unfair during the high school and college years. Very different things are expected of boys and girls especially when it comes to their relations with one another. Guys can easily detach themselves from situations that girls can not escape from and their emotional consequences are not as great. Not to mention the double-standards that have become common practice. When boys sleep with many girls they are revered while girls who sleep with many guys are looked down upon.

In discussing my experiences with college-age boys and how they have influenced my anti-male attitudes it is impossible for me not to account for the fact that I live in the midst of a plethora of drunken fraternity boys. On the way out at night they shout disrespectful things at us. When we come home we have to try to fall asleep to the sounds of their fighting. Neither one of these actions can I understand or accept. During my freshman year someone I really cared about was severely hurt in one of these fights. It is not often that you hear of girls using tire irons to beat each

other's heads with and leave one another dead. Whether looking at the issue on a micro-level like that situation or on a macro level of male political leaders dropping bombs on one another, I see my life being negatively affected by these decisions that neither I nor other women helped to make.

Another aspect of society in which I have seen injustice towards women is in cultural standards of beauty. The media has convinced the female population that in order to be attractive to men they have to look like a certain 2% of airbrushed women. These images have projected unfair expectations on women as a whole and I see the negative effects in my life everyday. Two of my best friends suffer from eating disorders, and the rest of us are so consumed with image that we kill ourselves over body types, clothing and make up. It takes my roommates and I about an hour longer to get ready than it does the boys next door.

Living in America in the 20th and 21st centuries has also provided me with a social location in which I developed feminist ideals. The real feminist movement may have been started a while ago but it is still prevalent today. I'm sure it will continue as long as patriarchal ideals overwhelm our culture. My next step in self-research was to examine these large-scale ideologies in relation to patriarchy and feminism.

Gender subordination is not a new idea. It has been around forever and is ingrained in our lifestyles and societal practices. The underlying reasons for male dominance and the emergence of patriarchal values are unclear. Some theorists suggest a biological motive. They assert that women are naturally the weaker sex and through "will to power," the idea that all people strive to exert dominance over each other, men came to dominate society. Along with the idea of biological implications of male dominance is the theory of women's reproductive role leading to their subordination. Women are responsible for care of children in the womb and also for their

food consumption at their earliest stages of life. Throughout the life course women sustain these familial responsibilities of child care. Men are then free to work outside the home and gain capital. In surplus societies those who control the surplus have power and these traditional gender roles made it impossible for women to have equal access to any outside capital. In turn dominance lay in the hands of men. It seems that a mixture of biology and society originally placed women below men in order of societal importance. Whatever the case it cannot be contested that gender differences and inequalities are and have been a very relevant part of most cultures throughout history.

One way to understand the depth of gender inequalities is to study some of the most prevalent ideologies of the past and present. An ideology is any combination of ideas that come together to support a certain attitude or interest. Many ideologies have been developed since the industrial revolution and most of them illustrate the need for feminism. Rationalism is one such ideology and is very popular in western society especially since the introduction of the cybernetic age of computerization and dehumanization. Rationalism is the idea that human problems can be solved by using simple reason. This has been one of the most prevalent ideologies of the post-industrial time period and is the main theory on which capitalism was built. However it is difficult to understand how a society based on reason does not award each of its citizens equal rights. What is reasonable about believing one sex is subservient to the other? If society were truly functioning rationally, not just rationalizing and justifying its beliefs and actions, gender inequality would not exist.

Another place in which to explore ideologies and how they relate to feminism is within the realm of politics. America's political system is a representative democracy. In this country the people elect officials to

make laws as opposed to a direct democracy where the people make the laws and a pluralist democracy where power over the laws is held by interest groups. Depending on their satisfaction with the status quo or current state of affairs, people vote for different representatives who correspond to their place on the political spectrum. The political spectrum represents the range of satisfaction people have with the current conditions within society. Those who are very nationalistic, who are satisfied with the status quo and believe that the only changes society needs would be going back to the old ways, would fall towards the right of the spectrum and be considered conservative. Feminists are more likely to find themselves on the left side of the spectrum and may be considered liberal. Most feminists recognize the weaknesses in the system and see the need to change current situations due to their dissatisfaction.

The fact that most women vote to the left of the spectrum reinforces the idea that they do not hold a good place in the current society. Realizing that unequal treatment exists is extremely disenchanting. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau shared the idea that people joined together in a societal contract that should create a government designed to protect them from tyranny. They called this idea the Social Contract. Under that contract a utilitarian government should evolve that does whatever it can to produce the greatest happiness for its citizens. Even the American constitution provides for people to have basic human rights such as those listed on the bill of rights, the first ten amendments to the constitution. No ideology calls for a society in which its citizens are judged on the basis of their sex and yet these conditions still exist. Perhaps this is due to the fact that these ideologies were created by men with their rights in mind. Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and the founding fathers of America were all men. Even the constitution of the United States reads all men are created equal. In all of these

ideas the focus was on men and this has had a profound effect on our government and political climate today.

Previously I stated that I have always felt detached from politics. I have never believed that I had the power to make any real difference. I referred to the fact that rich white men seem to be making all of the important decisions in my life and recently I discovered that I am not the only one who feels this way. Our government seems to be based on an elitist mentality. This includes the assumption that some people are more deserving and qualified than those that they govern. There are two theories that correspond to this idea. One is elite theory and the other is conspiratorial theory. Both suggest that a small group of powerful citizens control all of the power of the country and make decisions based on their common interests. For a young woman from the middle class these theories are easy to relate to. In the presidency I see WASP men with Ivy League educations, from George Washington until now. These are the kind of people who have always been in power in America. Although every citizen has the power to vote for president, the choices of candidates are usually also rich white men. As pointed out by Michael Moore in the movie *The Big One*, people end up voting for one of two evils. The president then fills the rest of the government with his supporters who hold the same interests as he does. If this does not seem like an elite group of people ruling society I don't know what is.

My earlier draft also referred to the fact that one of the reasons I feel more and more like a feminist is that I often times resent the choices made by the male-dominated government. Decisions are made for me and Americans as a whole that we have no say in, especially women who hardly have representation in government. When governmental decisions affect me in a negative way I hold the president and his cabinet collectively responsible because they share

the responsibility of the government's successes and failures. This causes me to lose faith in our system.

There are many people throughout the globe and throughout history that share the same disenchanted political views as I and have tried to change the system. Michael Moore is one of these people. I have already mentioned his ideas about political candidates but his ideologies extend much further. Moore is a supporter of elite and conspiratorial theories. He sees big corporations and the government working together to exploit American citizens. If he is correct women are in an even worse position because the only place they have less representation than in government is in the executive branches of big corporations. Either way Michael Moore tried to reach his ideas to the masses in order for others to recognize the injustices that face American citizens. This is his way of trying to bring about change.

In the past, political unrest has led some groups to call for anarchy. These groups are opposed to all or much of institutionalized government. Some anarchists are individualists who believe in the power of personal achievements. Another type of anarchist is social, believing that each individual contributes to society as a whole. However neither group have had a chance to test their ideologies in real life situations. It is much more common for discontent with the government to fall in the track of a socialist revolution.

Socialism is the application of communist principles. Communism is an old term that means local communal relationships among people. There are two different types of socialism, humanitarian and scientific. Humanitarian socialism says that people should work and share because of certain moral imperatives. Scientific socialism believes that basic dynamics of human conduct make socialism inevitable. Both theories lead to the formation of a welfare state, a society that provides vast social pro-

grams for its citizens.

Many people attribute socialist principles to Marx, a conflict theorist. Following him, Lenin believed that a small group of party elites should exercise control over the masses. Marxism-Leninism was the first application of these principles on a large scale. It occurred in Russia. Because one of the main ideas of socialism is equality it is an ideology that attracted many women. Females were often powerful forces behind communist revolutions.

An intriguing example of one such revolution occurred in Cuba. Neocolonialism refers to wealthy nations gaining control of developing societies by making vast economic investments. In some Latin American countries neocolonialism led to a strong sense of unrest among the people as their cultures became westernized. Fidel Castro was a man who took advantage of Cuban nationalism and used patriotic acts to overthrow the Batista and free Cuba from neocolonialism. In his rise to power Castro preached freedom and equality for all and yet these ideologies were not put into practice on a micro level in his life. When Fidel came home at night he expected his wife to have stayed home with their baby all day and have dinner on the table. He even committed adultery. Also Fidel's coup would not have been successful had it not been for two key women and yet once in control he paid no attention to women's issues. This is usually the case in such revolutions. Male leaders use women to help them gain power but never truly change their patriarchal ideas. However this was not the case under the rule of Mao Tse Tsung of China. Mao supported the idea that "Women hold up half of the sky." As Chinese culture rejected feudalism and accepted Maoism (a Marxist ideology that included populism and traditional Chinese values) women's conditions greatly improved.

The fact that there is a need for an ideology like feminism, that Baradat (2003)

also includes it as a full chapter in his book, only reinforces for me how deep-seated the web of patriarchy is in all of our lives. First of all Baradat acts as if it is a miracle or a phenomenon for women to be in politics. He actually lists the names of women political leaders. A passage in a book would never say "Men are becoming much more active in politics; consider Vladimir Putin or George Bush." In class on December 5th one of my classmates made the comment, "How many women leaders do we need before we don't live in a sexist society?" The day that a question like that wouldn't come up; the day that feminism isn't an issue; that is the day women will have equality.

In all actuality, when compared to the distant past, women's societal conditions have greatly improved around the globe and especially in America. Feminism, an ideology which emerged in the 18th century, has contributed greatly to the rights and power of women. It focuses on ending gender inequalities and on the economic, social, and political plight of women. Feminist activists like Mary Wollsenkraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhill and Betty Friedan helped to gain rights for women in areas like voting, sexuality, birth control, and the workforce as well as trying to put an end to sexism, that is, prejudice based on gender. These women helped bring to light the true injustices toward females in society and they were successful in bringing about change. However, it seems to me that feminist ideals were fostered only when they best facilitated men, as during WWII when female labor was needed. From this event the moral relativism in our society is easily recognized. The truth at any given time is subject to the needs of society. In my life I greatly appreciate the contributions feminist women have made to improving the current female condition. Because of them I am able to attend college, to vote, and to make decisions about my sexuality and reproduction. At the same

time I cannot help but see how ironic it is that I should be appreciative of having rights and responsibilities that should be inherent to all people.

As long as male domination continues so will feminism. Traditionally there are three forms of feminism in existence. Reform feminists realize that men and women have differences but that they are equal despite this. They pay attention to feminine uniqueness and believe the system must reform in accordance with it. Revolutionary feminists cannot cooperate with men in leadership. They believe women alone must lead the restructuring of society. Separatist feminists ignore men entirely. Their idea is to create their own culture parallel to men. I myself am a reform feminist. I cannot blame men for the patriarchal society we live in, nor can I expect society to change without the help of both sexes. Patriarchal ideologies have permeated all of our minds and we are all responsible for the implications they have on our daily lives.

Patriarchy and feminism and the effects they have on each other are illustrated in the movie *Thelma and Louise*. To me the most interesting part of the movie was examining the male and female relationships. The first example is Thelma's relationship with her husband Darryl. Darryl is in complete control of his wife. He does not listen to a word she has to say, she takes care of everything in the household, she thinks that he cheats on her and she has never been out of town without him. At first it is easy to hate Darryl, to see him as the villain who is keeping Thelma down. The truth is that Thelma enables him to treat her that way. They both believe in their places in the relationship and their gender roles because that is how they've been socialized. Next the two ladies meet Harlin in a nightclub. He immediately becomes the aggressor and approaches them with confidence as if he is automatically in the dominant position. He asserts this same belief and aggression when he attempts to rape Thelma. Some-

thing made him believe that as a man he could control a woman—that she was there to fulfill his needs and had none of her own. Brad Pitt's character manipulates Thelma not by exerting dominance over her but by making her believe he cares about her. As the cop says "Women love that shit." Finally the truck driver that Thelma and Louise meet in their travels embodies male chauvinism. That man harasses them with vulgar and degrading comments. He even admits to calling them beavers over his radio. (Beaver is a slang word for female genitals.) He refers to them by this name as if that is all they are. Non-fictional women face men like these in their day to day lives.

This summer I lived in Brooklyn and worked in Manhattan. To get to work in the morning I had to walk four blocks, take a half hour subway ride, and walk another six blocks. I then bought coffee from a vendor on the street who was male and was greeted at the front door of my workplace by two male security guards. One morning I counted twenty-one different men who made disparaging remarks towards me or made me feel uncomfortable in some way. I even began to wear unflattering clothing so as not to draw attention to myself. In our country a man may say things to a woman, to any strange woman walking down the street, and that is O.K. In the workplace the problem of sexual harassment has been recognized, but in public sexual harassment is a common practice. Women have commonly been looked at as objects of sexual pleasure not as people with wants and needs equal to men and this has been the cause of much unjust treatment.

In his book *Ways of Seeing* John Berger deals with the idea of men and women having a different social presence. He states that the way the two sexes see each other and themselves depends upon perspective. A man's presence depends upon what the viewer thinks he can do, a woman's on what the viewer thinks can be done to her.

Men act and women appear. The concept in the chapter that led me to do the most self inquiry was the topic about the surveyor and the surveyed. A woman's self is split into two because as she is carrying out her life she must also be watching all of her own actions to make sure she is projecting the right image. Thus she is constantly surveying herself and being surveyed. Whatever she is doing she can picture in her head how it may be seen by others. Her need to survey herself comes from the fact that throughout the life course females are taught that their sense of being can only be supplanted by a sense of others appreciating them. In the past few weeks I have tried to make both my roommates and myself aware of these two parts of our selves. We have all noted that the surveyor and the surveyed are natural parts of all of our thoughts. Whether taking a seat in class or getting ready to go out on a Friday night we are all constantly aware of how we may appear to those around us.

American consumer culture has thrived on women's needs to be perceived a certain way by the opposite sex. The video *Affluenza* deals with the overwhelming sense of consumerism that has taken over America. In this context affluenza is referred to as a disease which makes people feel the need for large amounts of material goods without gratification or satisfaction. The media has helped people to take materialism to another level. *Affluenza* told us that the average American will see over a year of commercial programming in his or her lifetime. Many advertisements project the same type of ideas and influence cultural norms. Successful publications teach people to seek self-esteem through material objects. Companies are able to make us believe that a new stereo or pocket book will bring about love and respect. Psychology is used as a means to sell products. Women in particular are bombarded with certain images of culturally ideal females. They are told that in order to have happiness this is

the way they must look, dress, and act; then they are told that in order to look, dress, and act that way they must buy certain products. Throughout my life I have been immersed in these images. I have a shelf full of face creams and work out videos to prove it. The truth is that affluenza is beginning to overwhelm all of our lives. We buy things to fill an emptiness that cannot be filled by material things. As stated earlier sometimes the results can be devastating, especially on young women with low body image. Videos like *Affluenza* help people to realize the brainwashing effects consumer culture has had on our lives.

Throughout the semester I have actually seen the brainwashing effects all ideologies have had on my life. Karl Mannheim (1936) says that ideologies express those ideals of the upper class and uses the term utopia to refer to the ideals of the oppressed. This concept made me realize that most of the ideologies that I follow in my life have come from men's ideals and have contributed to patriarchy in society. Although I have started on a path that helps me to recognize the ideologies present within me, I am unable to separate myself from these ways of thinking. Mannheim believes that all ideologies are distortions of knowledge. He also believes that there are a select few detached individuals who can step away from themselves and see how ideologies have affected their thoughts in order to find real truths. In reality I think that all of the norms and values of society, every sense of our beings, stem from ideologies. In my opinion ideologies are too strong a force in our lives to truly be free from.

In my search to explore the ideologies present inside of me I followed many steps. First I looked at micro-level forces within my life. At that point I was able to get a sense of who I was and what ideologies dominated my ways of thinking. I analyzed my desire for strength in my own personality, my relationships with others, and my

general attitudes about life. Next I looked at what forces and events in my life had affected the person I've become. My family, religion and social experiences led me to place a label on this chapter of my life which I called "anti-man."

After looking at the world in a broader view in areas like politics, cultural norms, and the underlying male domination in society I made a new realization. There are macro-level forces at work in the world that have an effect on every aspect of our lives. It is no one's fault that women face inequalities in America. I cannot blame men, or women for that matter, if I am unsatisfied with my gender role. Patriarchal ideologies are present in all of our consciousnesses. All I can do is try to open people's eyes to the things that affect their lives. The first step in combating negative ideologies is to realize that they are simply ideas, theories, and concepts. They have no factual basis except in our minds. I would now like to change my label to "anti-patriarchy" and to dispel remnants of patriarchal ideologies in my life.

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