

ROAR LIKE A WOMAN

How Feminists Think Women Suck and Men Rock

INTRODUCTION

“And What Do You Do?”

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My inquisitor was a feminist marketing director for an eight-figure non-profit outfit working to improve the lives of Third World children. She and I were at an evening cocktail gathering of company directors and senior managers from the businesses which sponsored her charity, partners from the law firms which provided bona fide services to her organization, high-profile media, and politicians. Waiters moved through the crowd as we overlooked the city lights far below us from our uptown premises on the thirty-first floor. ‘Achievement’ and ‘power’ hung in the air.

“I am a mother,” I replied.

Her eyes widened. She frowned. Then she shook her head with swift little side-to-sides. She looked at me in disbelief, then alarm. Had she just heard me offer up motherhood as a real occupation, without any evidence of a man-identical career as a backstop to shore up my acceptability? On seeing I was serious, she turned to jelly, and nearly wobbled off her feet.

“A *mother*?” I could see her thinking. “Is she for real? Mothers give birth to and shape the lives of children; what a waste of time! A mother is a woman! Women are not legitimate human beings. Everyone knows that! Everyone knows that, to be legitimate, a woman must secure a paid job in the workplace alongside men. Only

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men, and women who do what men do, live in the truth. What kind of freak could be so out of touch as to not know what an *embarrassment* she is to herself?”

She leaned toward me. Her cold smile pretended to be amused, as if I had misunderstood her question, and couldn't possibly have meant to reply as I did. Speaking with condescension and disapproval, as if I were little more than a child myself, she said:

“Yes, but what do you *do*?”

Did this exchange take place? No. I made it up. But it might have happened, mightn't it? It reads like a real event because it takes place in many gatherings, in many sectors, in many cities and countries in the developed world. Chances are, if you have ever been a stay-at-home mother any time in the last 40 years, that some variant of this scene has happened to you. Probably more than once.

Every mother knows 'what I do' as a mother, because they do it too. Yet the denial of motherhood's workload and value in this scene above is embedded in our culture. Knowledge of what mothers do is hidden to all except other mothers. In those first 48 hours or so after her first child's birth, a mother enters a new and vastly changed reality that will last for the next 20 years. It will be a world of suffering and unremitting effort and sacrifice and hyper-responsibility. There'll be lots of good things, too, like joy, hilarity and horizonless love.

Feminism, and society at large, will almost entirely ignore her new circumstances. As if that weren't bad enough, her status will switch from valid (career-woman) to non-valid (stay-at-home mother). Almost from that very moment, feminism will hound her to go back to work.

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If and when she tries to do that, she will re-enter a working world utterly unmade for mothers. Workplace timetables are designed for the childless, and will not budge to suit her. The tax system will treat her as a man, though her financial life-path is dramatically different to his. She cannot leave the office three hours early to take her six-year-old to the dentist, because the workplace says that paid work is ‘serious’ and that safeguarding her children’s teeth is not. She cannot have her children come by the office after school, because an invisible sign outside the workplace door says “Only Women Without Kids and Mothers Who Act Like Women Without Kids May Work Here; No Mothers Who Actually Act Like Mothers by Having Kids in Their Presence Allowed.” Her employer may free up floor-space for shower cubicles so workers can cycle to work, but will refuse her request for a play-lounge where toddlers and teens can hang out after school in their mother’s company while she works. Not that she would dare make that request.

This is not how a feminist world was supposed to look.

You would think that, with the advent of the feminist era, motherhood would take pride of place as the world’s most respected job. You would assume that workplace spaces and timetables would transmogrify into mother-friendly shapes. You would think that women’s massive contribution as home-makers would step forward out of the shadows of living room recesses into the light of public acclaim. You could expect that our institutions, our workplaces, our financial products, our civic architecture, our social customs, our weekly schedules would transform into a marvelous new womanesque pattern that wrapped itself around her domestic reality as housewife and mother (and parceled out that immense domestic reality more equally to men). You might expect to celebrate the onset of an age in which women’s feminine strengths—not just our intellect which is equal to a man’s, but our connectedness, our undying engagement with emotional truth, our limitless capacity for hard work 24/7 x 365, our embodiment of peace and love—could glory in

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the same recognition our society awards to the qualities of men, who taken as a sex possess none of these strengths, at least not in the same quality and quantity.

But it was not to be. Instead of bringing women's supreme contribution as mothers and housewives out into the public gaze, feminism ridiculed and suppressed it. Instead of advocating for feminized working hours to accommodate home-makers and mothers, feminists resoundingly reinforced the existing masculine schedule. Instead of calling for a feminized social infrastructure, be it a woman-only taxi service, breastfeeding rooms at the mall, or customs like a 'go to the head of the queue' policy for mothers grappling with toddlers at the airport check-in desk, feminism focused almost solely on bulldozing women into careers alongside men. That gigantic issue, child care, was never a serious item on their agenda.

In fact, feminism morphed into the very opposite of what it set out to be. Instead of rejecting the oppression of women, feminists rejected women themselves. They laid waste to womanhood's powers, and handed women nothing but men's powers in their place. Feminism became masculinism.

BORN IN 1966, I HAVE fully—all too fully—lived the feminist life. Until my children were born in 2003 and 2004, I worked full-time as a media relations consultant in the tourism industry, and jetted around the world as a freelance travel writer, always for free, much of the time in first class. Measured by the feminist yardstick, it was a glamorous and 'successful' life. Behind the 'empowered' facade, however, I was unhappy. I was over-worked. Like just about every woman, I already had a job as a home-maker, to which feminism turned a blind eye. I was charged with cooking meals for two nightly. Paid work displaced the time I needed to plan, shop for, and cook dinner. I was cooking too late in the evening, when I was over-hungry and past a comfortable eating time, and when I needed to attend to personal affairs like

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migrating data from my old laptop to the new one, or researching a new cell phone contract, or hand-washing the sweaters to put them away for summer. That pushed those tasks on to Saturdays, when I needed to do the errands and grocery shopping and laundry for two, which typically required several days in any case. That squashed more of the errands and grocery shopping and laundry on to Sundays, when I badly needed a rest-day. That pushed the rest-day into midweek, when I went without a rest-day because I was working five days. I lived in a state of permanent frustration at the great feminist denial that housework is just that—work.

At work, my frustration continued. In the office, feminism required me to make like a man. I was supposed to act as if I were as free of domestic constraints as a man is, as if it were as easy for me to leap behind a desk at 9 a.m. and stay there all day as it was for him. Work that women typically perform like cooking, shopping, cleaning, laundry, errands and personal administration was deemed to exist in another dimension that no one in the workplace needed to acknowledge.

Something I found more subtly disempowering was that I was expected to be as motivated and energized by my work as a man is, despite the fact that, as a woman, I already had a motivation to attend to my sizeable unpaid workload in the house. Feminism pretended I had no desire to see to my home-running and personal affairs at all, beyond whatever desire a man might have to do those things. His priorities and motivations were considered to be the only ones a woman could have and feel.

Yet not only did I have a motivation to run my home, I also had a woman's outward-reaching impulses to care for family and friends and community. Those caring impulses translate into work. Not paid work, and not work that is always strictly necessary, but work that is nonetheless enriching, both to me and to the people on the receiving end of that care. In these supposedly pro-woman days, however, that

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work counts for zilch. Only the kind of work men do, the paid kind, bestows legitimacy on women in feminists' eyes.

What Is a 'Feminist'?

What does this book mean by a 'feminist' and 'feminism'?

It does not set out to criticize the classically liberal political stance of Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, who set us women on our way to shaking off our circumscribed place in the world, or Germaine Greer, whose *The Female Eunuch* in 1970 flung open the doors to a world of action and intellect for women.

In this book, the word 'feminist' means that stereotypical career-woman with a lurking air of disapproval of anything that smacks of femininity. She wears a severe expression, and is super-conscious of appearing 'business-like'. She describes women as being 'in charge' of their lives and 'strong', and her definition of 'strong' is a woman who thinks, walks and talks indistinguishably from the way a man thinks, walks and talks. She uses the word 'advance' to describe every occasion on which a woman comes closer to being like a man. She wears a suit like he does, and keeps her mothering and domestic workload out of public view, like he does. She makes a show of finding men offensive, while flattering them with imitation at every turn.

I know what you're going to say. "That femo-Nazi is, like, from the '80s!" you might cry. "That was a previous geological age!" You will probably protest that my feminist caricature is hardly a complex picture of a feminist. You may say, "But I'm a feminist, and I'm no career-or-die tragic! Feminism moved on from that long ago. Feminism is way more subtle and sophisticated than that these days!"

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I don't believe that the portrait of a feminist above is nearly as out-of-date as it sounds. It is indeed an image from the neo-conservative 1980s, but that is when feminism shriveled from an outward-looking, celebratory movement to a juggernaut of self-actualization-as-women-by-emulation-of-men. It's been the same ever since. The shoulder-pads may be gone in body, but in spirit, they're still perched on the shoulders of feminists today. The mindset of that stereotypical career-woman is alive and well, and her generation is at the most senior level in the femocracy, politics, academia, law and corporations. Others of her ilk are already retired or have passed away, but their refusal to forge a woman-shaped world has left an impossible legacy for today's women.

Chances are you identify as a 'feminist'. Many of us do. It is not my intention to talk down all us women who call ourselves feminists, and who love our jobs, or who simply want to work for extra income, or who have to work, and who also run homes, and who very likely have kids, or have had kids, or are planning to have them. That's a lot of women.

This book's target is those feminists who sneer at housewifery and motherhood, who disavow their female sensibilities and priorities, who trumpet that their sensibilities and priorities are identical to those of men, who hold career dear over every other kind of human endeavor, and who insist that a career means exactly the same thing to a woman as it does to a man. And that's a lot of women, too. In fact, there is at least a little of that feminist woman in just about all of us. I did my fair share of sneering and jeering at motherhood and home-making, and made more than my fair share of burnt offerings to the Career-god, in my twenties and thirties, like most other women inculcated into the feminist cause.

When it uses the word 'feminist', this book means the feminist leadership, not those of us who follow. It aims to hold to account those women who exhort women to seek

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their womanhood through living out men's experience. In taking a stand against feminism, this book is not out to insult, demean or criticize the much greater numbers of women who get pulled along in feminism's wake. There is really no alternative to the feminist life for most women today, in any case, so we are just about all 'feminists' in practice, even though a lot of us reject the label, and many of us are crushed, or at least frustrated, by feminism's failure to handle women's reality.

Nor do these pages deal with the many strands and sects of academic feminism. They're theory. It is mainstream feminism that's up for discussion here, because that is the kind that leaves an imprint on real women's flesh.

Let's not engage in a turf war about the definition of the word 'feminist'. It is anti-woman attitudes and actions that are under the spotlight in this book, irrespective of the word we use to describe those responsible for them. Because the women who engage in those anti-woman attitudes and actions call themselves 'feminists', that's what this book calls them, too.

Men Are Not the Benchmark

The feminist world-view says motherhood and housework and caring for the wider community (work largely performed by women) does not count, paid work (traditionally men's work) does, that 'successful' women must have a job and, more ambiguously, that 'successful' women are those who do the job like a man. Almost every woman today probably knows that this is starkly at odds with reality, especially if she is a mother, but even most mothers are seduced by that overriding feminist ideology to some degree. Most of us are trying to piece career into our lives after a fashion of our choosing (without much success, in the case of the majority of

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my friends and fellow moms). What this grappling for ‘work-life balance’ fails to recognize, however, is that in our decision to work at all, most of us are still in thrall to the same crude kernel of an idea that drives the most fanatical feminist: the belief that without a job like a man, we are failures as women.

To plant a seed of unworthiness in a woman who did not work, and then inform her that she could reinstate her worth if she took a paid job, and to present this re-legitimization as a terrific gift of empowerment and opportunity, was an act of great hostility to women on the part of feminism. Our need to re-secure our self-worth through a career is a blight on many women’s lives, and an insult to every woman.

It’s an insult even if she loves working. Most working women I know today are crippled by over-work, either because no woman-friendly jobs present themselves, or because they buy the feminist spiel that says women who fit a man-shaped world are superior to women who can’t or won’t.

Other women I know are at-home mothers who feel like failures thanks to feminist derision, or who remain staunchly proud mothers, but must get by without the pompom-shaking that feminism lavishes on career-women. Feminism’s savage sneering at stay-at-homes has abated somewhat since the ’80s and ’90s, but the full-time mother is still accorded scant tolerance.

Of course, a woman who has never had a job, and never plans to, is not just low-status in feminism’s hierarchy. She is virtually *sub-human*.

After more than 50 years of feminism if we start counting from 1963, both work and motherhood should be realms of opportunity, power and legitimacy for mothers. It is entirely thanks to feminism that they are not.

Female Presidents? Equal pay? Broken glass ceilings? These things all sound so good, don’t they? And they *are* good, in themselves. If you set out to make women

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more like men, you can't fail but do a lot of good, because men had it so good. No one could argue that feminism hasn't done good things for women. The feminism of the 1960s and '70s is arguably the greatest single social achievement in human history, outside of democracy itself.

Bewitched by our equal pay packets and glass shards, however, what we don't see is that from the 1980s onwards, these good things have been almost all results of a concerted process of masculinization, not feminization. Those feminists who applaud as you toil alongside men in the workplace are those same women who scorn your toil as a mother outside it. Those feminists who won you your glitzy LinkedIn profile are those same women who turned your parallel job description of 'housewife' (for we are almost all housewives) into an insult. Those feminists who crow over how they fought for your right to earn an income are those same women who permit your husband to legally abandon you as a mother of a newborn, leaving you with no income at all. Those feminists who campaigned for equal pay also campaigned for equal hours, demanding you work a man's full-time day despite your pre-existing job as a mother and/or home-maker.

Obviously, none of this is to say that women shouldn't have smashed-up glass ceilings. It is to say that women should be able to work below and above the ceiling on women's terms. It is also to say that many women do not care for the power they can wield from the corner office, or not only about that, and some women do not care about a career at all. Feminists care about the corner office because men care about the corner office. If men jumped off cliffs, feminists would jump too.

I WROTE THIS BOOK AT the kitchen table. It is a homespun book by an ordinary mother. To write a scholarly book would require a full-time career as an historian. This is not that book. I have a post-grad degree in history, but not in the history of feminism,

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and I don't need a degree in feminism to write about being a woman. We none of us need a college degree in womanhood. My only qualifications for writing this book are that I am a woman, and a woman who grew up in the 1970s, a time when women stood tall, with or without a career.

You won't find many statistics in these pages. Feminism too often deploys them in a conscious attempt to rinse the woman right out of the picture by reducing her to a sexless number, denying her uniquely womanly circumstances, and thereby treating her like a man. One set of statistics I do employ, however, are those that feminism never hawks around—my own calculations of how much women work as mothers and home-makers.

It is not 'equality' we are aiming for when we seek to make women over in men's image; it is masculinization. It is past time for women everywhere in the Western world to find the strength to be true women, not *ersatz* men. We must forge a world that is shaped around women's needs equally as much as it is currently shaped around the needs (and indulgences) of men. In a world that empowers women, a woman gets her due, equally as much as a man gets his due. That is the kind of equality women need.

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