

GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN



**WOMEN TALK CANDIDLY
ABOUT THE BALANCE OF
POWER BETWEEN THE SEXES**

JACK KAMMER

Helen Fisher

Helen Fisher, Ph.D., is an anthropologist at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. She is the author of *The Sex Contract: The Evolution of Human Behavior* and, more recently, *Anatomy of Love: The Natural History of Monogamy, Adultery and Divorce*.

Jack: You mentioned on the phone that you think a book like this is really needed. Why?

Helen: Because there is a huge silent majority of women who are fond of men, who have fathers they worry about, brothers they have compassion for, husbands they support, and sons they are trying to raise. They see men as people who need the same kind of understanding that women need. For years, if not almost a generation, women have been grumbling about men. Has there been any other book like this—in which women talk about what they think is going on with men?

Not that I know of, except maybe Women Respond to the Men's Movement. Do you know about that?

No. What is it?

It's pretty nasty. It's a collection of women critiquing the men's movement essentially by saying patriarchy, patriarchy, patriarchy, eighty-seven times per chapter.

Blamers are a personality type and they seem to have outdone themselves on this particular issue. You know, we have a lack of sophistication about history in this culture. We tend to blame men for patriarchy, when in fact it was simply caused by evolution.

In hunting-gathering societies, for millions of years, men and women were relatively equal. Women left camp in the morning to do their gathering. They commuted to work; they left their children in day care. They came home with at least fifty percent, if not seventy or eighty and sometimes one hundred percent, of the evening meal. In the past, the double income was always the norm. Men and women were built to put their heads together, there was general equality in hunting-

gathering societies. Then with the beginning of plow agriculture, men and women both settled down on the farm and women lost their ancient roles as gatherers. Men's roles as farmers became much more important. Not only did men have to till the soil with heavy plows, but they had to protect the soil. So the roles of plowman and warrior became more important, and an economic imbalance between men and women emerged.

But patriarchy wasn't a plot concocted by men. It was the result of an ecological conundrum. The big animals were dying out. The smaller animals were harder and harder to hunt. The fishing spots were being taken up. With the beginning of plow agriculture some ten thousand years ago we saw the evolution of a patriarchal society among our Western ancestors, and the establishment of all kinds of new rules. But these rules were not only directed at women; they also constricted men.

Is there an analogy in modern culture between the plow diminishing women's roles and the computer diminishing men's?

There seem to be two important trends that are enabling women to return to economic equality with men. One is globalization. We're moving into an age of communication. Women are more skilled at communication than men are, on average of course, which probably comes from millions of years of living on the grasslands when women had to raise their children by talking, cajoling, reprimanding, soothing, educating their young. Women are very fine at language skills, and I think the next century is going to be built with words. Look at all the women on television and in journalism, for example. The second factor is that we're moving more and more toward entrepreneurship, the small business. Something like four out of five new businesses are started by women, not by men. The traditional kind of company is very hierarchical, but the emerging business structure, in which all kinds of freelance, satellite people provide services and income to each other, is a very female business model in that transactions are not hierarchical but lateral instead. With the rise of service industries, women—and men—have all sorts of new opportunities.

So why aren't men also starting small businesses?

That's a good question. My guess is that there's probably not as much of a Glass Ceiling for men in traditional companies, so they have more incentive to stay.

Could it also have something to do with enthusiasm? Something about who's been hearing the pep rally for twenty years? Women have been hearing, "Yea, women! Go for it!" and men have been hearing "You're scum, you're a dog, you deserve every bad thing that ever happens to you!"

I don't know whether that's it. If more men are staying in the large companies, my guess would be that (a) there are more opportunities for them, (b) they are less likely to take a real chance, because they can't afford the risk. For millions of years women have been attracted to men with resources. Young girls like men with fancy cars or gold bracelets, middle-aged women like men with stable jobs and boats and houses, and older women like men with status, money, securities. So men are probably psychologically less willing to jeopardize a very standard job than women are. I don't think that men have the freedom to experiment. Men in every culture around the world sacrifice more time, health, happiness, and comforts in order to achieve and maintain rank than women do.

[The] "sacrifice-to-feed" is the male form of nurturance. In every class, men with families provide their own womb, the family's financial womb. They provide their bodies. But the psychology of disposability leaves them without placards saying "my body, my choice."

Warren Farrell, Ph.D.

The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex

What does that tell us about women's Glass Ceiling?

Oh boy. What does it tell us? Well, I don't know. Do you have an idea?

I'm thinking that most men do not rise to elevated positions in corporations and that elevated positions in corporations are not all they're cracked up to be.

Sure. You get up there and you work continually. I think that women just want that choice. They want the choice to not have the Glass Ceiling there. Men don't have a lot of choice either.

Yes, exactly. On the stock market, options are commodities that people pay money for whether they exercise them or not. Do you think that maybe women are paying a price for their options?

Their options of working? I think it's natural for women to work. It's a natural part of the human female.

I mean the option of not working. If an option is a commodity, is it not understandable that men would expect to be compensated for the options they are giving up?

I don't think that men expect a great deal, to be honest with you. I really don't. They somehow deep in their souls think they've got a pretty good deal. They even feel a little bit guilty for having such a good deal. It is strange that our society has gotten men to think that they shouldn't expect more out of life. Don't they have more heart disease? Don't they die younger? Don't they commit suicide more often?

But it's strange. When you ask people who's happy in their marriages, a lot more women say they're unhappy in marriages than men do.

It's worth pondering whether men are happy because they're married or married because they're happy. And the surveys don't necessarily tell us what's going on in the marriage. These responses could be just a reflection of what women expect and think they have a right to.

You may be right. Perhaps women expect more out of marriages than men do.

So what do you think of this constant harangue about patriarchy, patriarchy, patriarchy?

The whole question of patriarchy has gotten out of hand. Naomi Wolf came out with that ridiculous book *The Beauty Myth*, in which she basically blamed men and the entire advertising industry for the fact that women had to remain beautiful and thin all their lives. But for millions of years, men have been attracted to women who look youthful. That was an evolutionarily adaptive response on men's part because

clear eyes, white teeth, smooth skin, a youthful appearance indicated that the woman was more likely to have fresher eggs and more likely to bear more viable young. As a result, men forever have been attracted to women who look healthy and young. If the New York City advertising, cosmetic and clothing industries fell into the Hudson River tomorrow morning, women would re-create them, because the female human animal instinctively seeks to look youthful, healthy and attractive. Now that has nothing to do with patriarchy.

What do you think of what's being said these days about matriarchy?

If we're defining matriarchy as "female rule," there's never been such a thing. There's no archaeological evidence of one. There's no question that there are living cultures in which there are female goddesses, fertility cults and so on. But even in those societies the vast majority of ranked positions are held by men. So we have no evidence of a matriarchy anywhere in the past or anywhere on earth today.

What spawned this desire to believe in matriarchy?

My guess is that it was a feminist attempt to balance the issue of women, men and power. But even though there's never been any evidence of a matriarchy, there's a solid kernel of truth to this feminist plea: for millions of years in hunting-gathering societies there was relative equality between the sexes. Had they said *that*, instead of saying that we came from a primitive matriarchy, they would have been correct.

I want to suggest that what you just said about the feminists being partially right is also partially wrong...

Oh, it's quite wrong.

But for a different reason. Even societies which would by classical, androcentric definitions of power be thought of as egalitarian weren't necessarily actually egalitarian because there has been no analysis applied to the noneconomic resources that were largely controlled by women. When we talk about equality between the sexes, we only talk about making sure women have equal shares of what men have. We are not yet talking about men having as much of what women have.

And I think that's going to be the really hard part in our move toward gender equality.

There's no question that there are all kinds of things that women have that men deserve too, like more time with their children and less pressure to succeed in the material world. We need to begin to appreciate the sacrifices men make at work in order to be good husbands and good fathers. Women's sexual and reproductive resources are enormous and men expend a great deal of effort to gain access to them. Women are the custodians of the egg and it's men who flutter around women in order to reproduce themselves.

It's not just the egg. The guys who are paying prostitutes for sex or having affairs have no interest in the egg.

No. They are looking for sex, friendship, excitement, affection—a vast array of psychological comforts. But millions of years ago, those males who sought sex had more children, passing along to modern men their interest in sex and all the psychological benefits they acquire from women's worlds.

So there's affection?

Of course. Men love affection.

Acceptance?

Acceptance is very important to men.

And as you mentioned, relationships with the children are something men want to have.

Absolutely. That's one reason why divorce is so difficult for men.

Would it be a good idea to ask women to acknowledge that they've got these resources?

Yes, I think that women should recognize the incredible power of their sexuality. In fact this is one of the problems with sexual harassment. I feel very sorry for men. Women say, for example, "I have the right to wear anything I want to the office."

But they do have that right.

They do have the right, there's no question about it. But in the mating game they should know that there are consequences to wearing a blouse that is scooped down to your nipples and a skirt that is up to your fanny. Men respond to this. They respond *naturally*. We've got men absolutely terrified in the office. They don't know how to behave anymore. And they don't know how to behave because the sexes see sexual harassment so differently and both men and women need to be educated into what the other honestly considers sexual harassment. We have to show women how *not* to smile. How *not* to touch. You can't go casually grazing a man on the elbow and asking him what he thinks of the memo you wrote. You can't touch him like that. You can't walk in and start sucking on the tip of your pencil. And you can't go and lean over his shoulder and let your hair flop against his cheek. Actually, you can. Our society certainly permits women to do that. But as an anthropologist I know there's something much more primitive going on called the human mating game. In fact, we probably weren't designed to work together at all. Women were designed to go off gathering and men were designed to go off hunting and we were probably designed primarily to pick each other up and to flirt with each other. So men respond to all kinds of subtle cues that women give off—all of their makeup, all of their cosmetic smells, the way their dresses swish, their high-heeled shoes, all kinds of things. And then women wonder why men aren't respecting the rules. Basically, the rules have not been defined. And neither men nor women understand what's going on.

Do you have any idea of what goes on in sexual harassment sensitivity training at corporations?

No. I don't. And I need to know.

Do you suspect that it's balanced?

I doubt it, because sexual harassment is an issue that unfortunately has been controlled by women. I feel very strongly about this: we have to educate not only men but we have to educate women into the kinds of signals they are sending off.

It's interesting; it reminds me of a business situation that a colleague told me about recently. It was a very hot summer day in a crowded

meeting room. A man was seated behind a woman. Suddenly, she leaned back and swept her hair up onto her head and then tossed her hair out, just, I guess, because she was too hot. Immediately, the man sitting behind her looked at my colleague, who was next to him, and said, "She wants me." Now, this sounds absurd. But she had probably sent at least two signals. Perhaps he had received her smell. Moreover, the "head toss" is a primitive gesture. Horses do it, birds do it. And women do it. This man picked up a primal courting cue. Should the woman have not tossed her hair? I believe in freedom. Of course she should have the option to toss her hair. But she should *know* the signals that she is sending...

And the man should also know...

And the man should begin to realize that he has responded to a primitive signal, but he has to respect her ignorance and not take this as a come-on. The mating game is powerful and primitive. It's not going to go away. And if we don't respect it, we're going to continue to misunderstand each other on a very basic level.

There's a great deal that both sexes need to learn about that. But unfortunately right now all the blame is on men.

What would you say to women who are going to object that you are placing restrictions, you're just like men, trying to control women's choices?

I would say that very deep in the human spirit are ancient evolutionary drives, and if we don't respect them, we aren't going to have good will toward men *or* women.

Now, just for the record, are you blaming women for their behavior in the office?

No. I'm interested in educating women. And I'm interested in educating men. There's this big biological dance and we don't have our steps down. We don't get it. Neither of the sexes gets it.

Do you see any connection between the issues we're talking about and social problems other than the obvious ones like sexual harassment?

Well, we've got some real social problems, like drug abuse. That's a real social problem.

Do you see a connection between these gender issues and drug abuse, crime, teenage pregnancy?

We've got a great problem in our inner cities because a great many women move into business and men move into drugs and into jail and die.

Is that because men are naturally more inclined to break laws?

No, it's because many inner-city ghetto men don't seem to have the same opportunities that women do. They don't achieve their basic role as providers, so they turn to drugs and crime in frustration and die out.

Since in the past thirty years we have taken from men the exclusive province of being providers, would it be wise for us as a society that's concerned about men and crime to open up options for men, other than options that require them to have money?

Absolutely.

Do you have any thoughts about what those options might be from an anthropological perspective?

Oh boy. It would be great if we had larger numbers of older men playing more nurturing roles to get young men going. But once again the problem is that the genders tend to have different interests. We're not alike. Even if we opened up enormous opportunities for men in day care I doubt that men would go for it.

Men wouldn't want to do it in day care. That's a woman's thing. Women have day care where they all sit in one place and they all do the sedentary things. A male style of day care would probably require four acres.

Right. And it would be very good for children. I'm making a speech to a country day school about whether we should see gender as a resource.

I wonder if the school uses terms like class mother. And I wonder if they schedule their parent meetings at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Right. You have pinpointed yet another legacy of our patriarchal past. For a long time it was women who were at home and women who had that domain. But things are changing.

What about other social problems?

There certainly is a family form in America that is totally matrilineal. Women get their government checks and the community is largely female-oriented. Males do not play an important role in family life. There's no question about it.

From an anthropological point of view, what's likely or maybe even inevitable to happen in that circumstance?

We're seeing it happen. The men get their esteem and their money by selling drugs and robbing and end up in jail and dying. It's incredible the percentage of men in the underclass that can't get into the mainstream, can't get the resources of society, so they take alternative routes and die out.

We've got a lot to learn. But I'll say this. It has been said that men want to be needed and women want to be cherished. Men's desire to be needed comes from millions of years ago when our ancestors evolved the human drive to pair up and raise their children as a team. If we can make men feel needed *and* cherished, we'll come a long way toward ending the war between the sexes.

Advance Praise for Good Will Toward Men

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