
REFLECTIONS ON WARREN FARRELL'S *THE MYTH OF MALE POWER*

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Introduction

My responses towards this book varied from astonishment that I had never seen discrimination against men so clearly, to discomfort with what seems to be Farrell's bitterness and resentment towards women, and at some of the specious conclusions he reaches. Between those extremes, I experienced many painful memories of what it meant for me to grow up to be, and to be, a man.

Regrettably, Farrell seems to neglect full discussion of men's violence to women, and to each other. Perhaps he considers that this topic has been well discussed elsewhere. Maybe he decided to focus upon men's experiences of worthlessness and disempowerment – which he has done thoroughly and usefully – but I personally think that more linking back to how those deeply-conditioned aspects of male roles lead to violence would be useful.

It is as though he remembers at times, in the midst of his anti-feminist complaining, to mention that what humanity needs is a gender liberation movement that works for men in ways that the women's movement has been working for women. I believe that this is true, and that it will be more likely to occur if men take more initiative to make it happen. I also recognise some truth in his assertions that for men to do so flies in the face of their traditional training to protect and serve women.

Farrell asserts that feminism has gotten it very wrong in portraying men as the enemy. He asserts that both genders have been servants to the next generation, both serving each other through their different attributes and roles, to achieve the common goal. Women have had to struggle, both individually and collectively, to overcome their role conditioning of worthlessness and subservience, and to face fearful reaction when doing so. It seems overdue that men join them in creating new roles and equality for us all, and Farrell provides some ideas which may explain why many men have not.

When male power is referred to, it tends to be in relation to control of resources – money, possessions, employment opportunities, status and to the violent or intimidating control of women and children. What Farrell has done is to examine some other aspects of power, namely: self-worth, role choice, role obligations, health, longevity, and legal equality. Where I think that he falls short, is in linking these two approaches to definition.

I am not going to attempt to review the whole of Farrell's book. What I wish to

present are some aspects of the many which have moved me the most from the vast collection of statistics and research findings he presents.

Male role training

Farrell lists myths and traditions, mainly drawn from European cultures, regarding male role training in which men are taught to dissociate from their feelings of hurt, fear and vulnerability, as they are taught competitive and combative roles. Their role models are heroes who never show weakness, and problem-solve with whatever violence is required to get the job done. The problems the heroes face are generally – directly or indirectly – to do with the protection of others, particularly women and children.

The word ‘hero’ comes from the Greek ‘ser-ow’, from which also comes the word ‘servant’. There is a story of a mother who wanted to travel to Argos to see the statue of Hera, the principal female deity of the Greek pantheon. (‘Hercules’ or ‘Herakles’ means ‘for the glory of Hera’.) The mother had no beasts of burden, so her two sons pulled the cart for a considerable distance. Upon arrival, the sons were cheered and statues were built in their honour. The mother prayed that Hera give the sons the best gift in her power. The sons died. The message seems to be that men will get honour and approval if they support women, and the best thing that can happen to them is that they will die at the height of their glory.

When King Aegeus of Athens fathered a son, he would not see the son until the son, Theseus, could lift a massive boulder that nobody else could lift, and he had slain the Minotaur. This symbolises the father training the male son for the role of protector. After Theseus had slain the Minotaur he forgot to raise a flag, as he had been instructed to. Aegeus thought that Theseus had died, and he killed himself. This may symbolise male disgrace, but is also consistent with Aegeus being grief-stricken at the loss of his son.

Spartan boys aged seven were trained with ‘games’ such as ‘steal the cheese from the altar’. This involved risking life and limb to take food. The more such a society is under threat, the harsher is its training for protector/provider roles, and the harsher its procedure for circumcision (rarely referred to as ‘genital mutilation’). Dissociative training began at birth!

Roman gladiators were cheered on by the Vestal Virgins, and the gladiatorial games were presided over by female deities. Today this tradition exists with cheerleader teams of women for men’s sports teams. Men’s teams often carry the names of warriors or fierce animals. Farrell invites the reader to imagine alternative team names, such as the ‘Atlanta Sensitives’.

The unconscious translation of ‘our team winning’ is ‘our society protected’. Violence against men is entertainment and is applauded. Violence against women is abhorred. The fundamental purpose of violence against men is the

protection of women. The beautiful princess does not marry the conscientious objector.

Subservience to beauty

Males are trained to be subservient to female beauty. Women are the thread of life, men are life's servant. Beauty is a sign of health and reproductive capacity. The stereotypes of beautiful women are young and in good health, and have generally involved them having wide hips, well-formed breasts, good teeth, skin and hair, and a high degree of symmetry. These 'genetic celebrities' are featured in beauty contests, cheerleader teams, and stereotypical fashion models.

The biblical story of Jacob and Rachel symbolises how a man has to earn the right to marry a beautiful woman. Jacob was required to prove that he could support three other women, and their children, before he could marry the beautiful one. Her beauty was the prize that led him to do this. Beauty and the Beast is another story which teaches that the man has to prove himself and offer guarantees of protection before he can have a beautiful woman.

Women as property

Feminists have asserted that men have regarded women as property, without considering that he was expected to die before this 'property' got hurt, or sacrifice his life in other ways for her sake. Last century, in America, a man went to prison for his wife's crime. He went to prison if the family became bankrupt.

Property was handed down through males because it was their responsibility to provide property. The ritual of a father giving away a daughter symbolises the responsibility of protecting her being handed over to another man. Would a woman being given a man to protect and provide for be seen as her power over him?

Chivalry as slavery

In old Europe, a gentleman wore a sword, with which he could defend women or his honour. He was 'gentle' because he could not use it against women. But a man who insulted a woman could be killed. The more duels a gentleman won, the more eligible he became for marriage.

Black American slaves were forced to risk their lives doing the dangerous work. They were separated from their children so that they could work where directed. The slave who worked out in the fields was a second-class slave, and the one who worked in the house was a first-class slave. When blacks were required to stand, or give up their seats for whites it was called subservience. The slave helped the master put on a coat, opened the door for the master, and so forth. These behaviours, when expected of men towards women are not seen as evidence that she is the master and he the slave.

Sexual mores and homophobia

Pre-marital sex, sexual freedom, and homosexuality have been condemned because they do not ensure adequate commitment or protection of off-spring, and the latter does not lead to any off-spring. In such situations men gain the benefits of sex without having committed themselves to service. This is not good training for male roles in a society under threat. Men have to earn a woman's sexual 'favours'. Women do not see men as giving sexual favours. Women give these 'favours' in return for his part of the deal. Beauty power and sexual power are not nearly so available for men to exploit.

War hero or war slave?

Almost one out of three American men is a veteran. Before men can vote, they have the obligation to protect that right. Women receive the right to vote without the obligation to protect it. Only women and children killed in war are 'innocent'. Does this mean that men are never innocent victims of war, or somehow 'guilty' of it? Maybe war will end when men's lives are no more disposable than women's.

The psychological draft of boys begins early. Circumcision without anaesthesia encourages dissociation from pain at an early age. Parents take longer to pick up a boy infant who is crying. Male sports are more violent. Boys who show their fear and hurt are ridiculed – one form of which is to call them 'girls'! Boys have always been subjected to more, and more severe, corporal punishment. The military roles of their heroes emphasise disposability – uniform, shaven head – a dehumanised, component **servicing** in a larger machine.

Since women have been accepted into combat roles, combat positions in the armed services have been divided into dangerous versus less dangerous. Only men can be forced into the dangerous combat positions. Women can volunteer. During the Panama invasion and the Gulf War, American weeklies asserted that women were now equally sharing combat danger, but they were killed or injured at around one third the rate men were. ("My body, my choice" for women, "my body, not my choice" for men.)

A traditional aspect of military training – of male training generally – has been 'hazing' of team members. This ensures that the individual components of the machine can be relied upon. Boys do this to other boys to teach each other to be men. "Being a man" means being willing to be a protector – to protect others before protecting yourself. However, hazing women is harassment, and the penalty could be ruin for a who harasses a woman. This reinforces the men's belief that women are privileged, and they are afraid to rely upon her as she has not been 'tested'.

In Boot Camp, women are exempt from some of the more demanding requirements, and go sick four times as often. During the Gulf War this meant that men had to

carry out the tasks that the women could not. Ironically, complaining about this discrimination could make a man vulnerable to charges of discrimination. During the build-up to deployment, it has been noted that more than 40% of the women on US ships likely to be sent, become pregnant. Having similarly avoided their tour of duty, many American Army women serving in the Gulf War then aborted their pregnancies. Such action leads men to distrust women on their team. This distrust and resentment is then seen as discrimination and backlash against women.

These patterns are reflected in other countries where equality is claimed to exist in the armed forces, i.e. Denmark, Russia and Israel. Men must serve. Women have the choice and rarely take it!

But don't only men make war?

Men are found to be non-violent in societies that have adequate amounts of food and water, and are isolated from attack. Also, in these societies, female gods are found to be more prevalent and more recognised. These societies, such as Tahitian, Minoan Crete and Central Malaysian Semai, have been called matriarchal societies, and upheld as examples of female leadership. Yet they were partnerships that were not under threat. In societies under threat we see violent men fighting violent men – sacrificing themselves to protect women and children. When men are used to defend or fight for provisions and safety, male war-gods tend to be prevalent because the survival of the society depends upon men's prowess and sacrifice in war.

Women in power have sent men and women to their deaths at rates similar to when men have been in power. Mary Tudor (Bloody Mary) had 300 Protestants burned at the stake. Elizabeth I mercilessly pillaged Ireland when it was known as the Isle of Saints and Scholars. Indira Ghandi, Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher wasted men's lives in senseless wars. When Margaret Thatcher sent only men to their deaths in the Falklands War, her popularity increased, with both sexes! When the US attacked Iraq, 76% of US women approved, as did 86% of US men. Throughout history women have scorned men who refused to fight in wars. Neither sex is innocent.

Desensitisation to violence against men

The average American child sees 40,000 people killed on TV before the age of highschool graduation. 97% of those 'killed' are men. Killing men is entertainment.

As a rule, women are not killed in movies unless:

1. It is a horror movie. (Killing a man is not horrible enough to make it a horror movie).
2. She is shown to not be a 'real' woman, thus undoing her right to protection,

i.e. she is an alien; she has all the negative characteristics of a man; she is clearly crazy or a murderer (Fatal Attraction).

3. She threatens the life of an innocent woman.
4. She has been seen in no more than three scenes – she has not been shown as a person, a real woman.
5. The rest of the movie is focused upon avenging her death. (It is therefore a morality film about protecting women.)

Men are twice as likely to be victims of violence than women are, yet male victims are far less visible. Men are the greater proportion of homeless. Male sexual abuse survivors number more than half the number of females, yet go much less noticed or assisted. They may also be less willing to seek help, since to do so is to admit failure as a 'man'.

The glass cellars of the disposable sex

Farrell makes a play on the 'glass ceilings' metaphor, coined by feminists to describe the invisible barriers put in the way of their progress in corporate and business situations. The male networking and prejudice that appear to operate these barriers, asserts Farrell, are a consequence of men's fear of not being able to fulfil their only worthwhile role as provider. They see it as difficult enough competing with the other men, without also having to compete with women. The prohibition against 'hazing' also leads to the men not being able to 'test' the woman under pressure.

Another factor that may be operating in the 'glass ceiling' scenario, is that the highly-paid, high-status jobs are also extremely stressful and demand sacrifices of family time, personal health and longevity. Maybe most women are too sensible and self-valuing to take these jobs?

In the US, a study ranked 250 jobs from best to worst, based on a combination of salary, stress, work environment, outlooks, security, and physical demands. Twenty-four of the worst 25 are nearly-all-male (95 – 100%) jobs (the 25th is professional dancing). These jobs included: heavy truck driver, sheet-metal worker, roofer, boiler-maker, lumberjack, carpenter, construction worker, construction machinery operator, football player, welder, millwright, ironworker, miner, fire-fighter. The men who do these jobs are relatively uneducated, invisible and disposable.

In the US almost as many men are killed every day at work as were killed on an average day in the Vietnam War, and 94% of occupational deaths occur to men. One reason the jobs men hold pay more is that they are hazardous jobs – they get a 'death profession bonus'.

By contrast, the occupations that are still 90% carried out by women, have most or all of the following attributes: physical safety, indoors, low risk, desirable/

flexible hours, ability to psychologically 'check out' at the end of the day, no demands to relocate, high fulfilment relative to training, contact with people. These types of jobs are lower paid, despite gender, because there is an oversupply of applicants.

Women tend to interpret men's ability to earn more as an outcome of male dominance rather than as an outcome of male subservience. Men have been, and still are, under greater financial pressure, and they have been conditioned to sacrifice themselves as protectors and providers. Hence they are more inclined to take the higher-risk, higher-paid, less desirable jobs. Following income is primary, following fulfilment secondary. Men also work more hours in the workplace than full-time working women, work less desirable hours, and are more prepared to relocate.

Why do women live longer?

The more industrialised a society becomes, the more life expectancy increases for both sexes, but it increases twice as much for women as it does for men. In 1920 women in the US lived one year longer than men. In 1993 women lived seven years longer. Industrialisation means that more men work away from their loved ones. It has increased women's options, but only brought more of the same for men.

Blacks die earlier than whites from twelve of the fifteen leading causes of death. Men die earlier than women from all fifteen of the leading causes of death. That blacks die six years sooner than whites is acknowledged as being related to powerlessness. How come we do not see men's lower life expectancy as related to powerlessness?

A typical 1890s woman had eight children, almost died twice in childbirth, worked very long hours carrying out childcare and housekeeping tasks, and was dead before her last child left the home. A typical 1990s woman has two children, has a very low risk of death in childbirth, has many choices about childcare and household tasks in a world of convenience equipment, clothing and food, and has 25 years to live after her youngest leaves home.

The advantages of technology and medicine have allowed her to choose pregnancy and dramatically reduced her risk of dying in childbirth, yet these advances are often criticised as 'male'. The cost technologies have had on the planet is blamed on men, yet surely women are equally responsible. With regard to contraception, men are criticised for developing forms of safety for women and not taking responsibility directly, yet "trust me" from a man is laughable while "trust me" from a woman is backed up by the law even if she lies!

Medical research into women's health is funded twice as much as men's health. A search of medical journals found that articles on women's health featured 23

times more than those on men's (Collins, 1990). Men die of prostate cancer at about a quarter the rate that women die of breast cancer, yet the death-to-research funding ratio between breast cancer and prostate cancer is 47 : 1. The State funds mammography programmes, and education about self-examining for breast cancer. Men are not educated or assisted in these ways to check for prostate or testicular cancer. New products and potentially dangerous drugs have been tested upon male prisoners and soldiers. Clearly, men are less valuable than women.

Men are more likely to suffer mental illness, women are more likely to be treated for mental illness. Men do not report depression as much as women do. Men have had more training to dissociate from feelings, and not voice pain or fear. The more successful he is, the more he must suppress it.

The suicide sex

Males commit suicide at an increasingly greater rate than females, as they age. The statistics may be conservative as an unknown number of men kill themselves in motor vehicles, through not taking medications, etc.

Up until nine years old, boys and girls have equivalent suicide rates. Between 10 and 14 the boys' rate is twice as high. Between 15 and 19 it is four times as high, and from 20 to 24 it is six times as high. By the age of over 85, men's suicide rate is over thirteen times that of women.

Men whose wives die are ten times more likely to commit suicide than a woman whose husband dies. Men whose wives die are eleven times more likely to commit suicide than men whose wives are alive. Men have been called "the sex who cannot love", yet the loss of love is so devastating! Because men are socialised to hide fear, pain and vulnerability, a woman partner is often a man's only link to intimacy.

Ninety-one percent of men who suicide are white, middle-class, and well educated. Men who are successful become dependent upon success to attract love. When such a man loses his success, he fears that he will lose/never attract love.

Men who feel worthless through lack of love/respect and the inability to support their loved ones, do not see suicide as a selfish act. They feel so worthless, or that they are a burden, a failure, a disgrace, and that it would be a benefit to their loved ones if they remove themselves.

How the justice system protects women

A man convicted of murder is 20 times more likely to receive the death penalty than a woman convicted of murder. No woman who has killed only men has been executed in the US since 1954. Approximately 70,000 American women have murdered in that period, and almost 90% of their victims were men. Since the

1976 reinstatement of the death penalty, 120 men and only one woman have been executed. She preferred execution.

Being male contributes to a longer sentence more than race or any other factor. In Washington, which has strict sentencing guidelines, sentences for men are 23% longer. Women are 57% more likely to get a treatment sentence, and 59% are more likely to be released early from prison. Women have to post less bail for equal crimes. There is also a tendency for the man in male-female crime partnerships to be convicted more often, and to get more severe penalties. This is often achieved by getting the woman to testify against the man in exchange for suppressing charges against her, which reinforces the impression that women are innocent and men guilty. Should they both commit a second crime, he has a worse record and the cycle repeats.

The people who operate the system do not seem able to see a woman as able to commit crime, nor to serve an equal sentence for an equal crime. The unconscious conditioning to protect women and to not care about men works to perpetrate an unjust justice system. Women are more likely to be believed if they say they are innocent, and less likely to be believed if they say they are guilty! In the US there are several (Farrell suggests twelve, but I find he is stretching his definitions somewhat) defences available to women who are charged with murder, that are not available to men. I have listed some:

1. The Innocent Woman Syndrome tends to reduce a woman's chances of investigation, conviction, and sentence.
2. PMS has been used to get several women off murders – even of their own children!
3. The Husband Defence: A woman attempts to murder her husband, but he does not press charges, and defends her attempts to kill him.
4. The Battered Woman Syndrome: Women's claims of abuse are not always examined, and the man is not alive to testify.
5. The Depressed Mother Syndrome: Women killers of their children have this defence.
6. Mothers Do Not Kill": The woman is not investigated thoroughly if she makes up a story of abduction etc.
7. The Plea Bargaining Defence: As above in joint crime with a man.
8. The Svengali Defence: The woman under the influence of the man.
9. The Contract Killer Defence: Woman who get men to kill present or previous male partners.

Women's prisons are safer and designed more for rehabilitation. Women prisoners are budgeted twice as much money as men, have more education and training programmes, and some have child-care facilities.

Women's liberation: role choices for women

When a couple has children, the woman is 43 times more likely to take six months or longer off paid work than the man. She assumes three choices: take paid work full-time, mother full-time, or some combination. He typically assumes only one option – paid work full-time. Farrell suggests six classes of women:

1. Traditional married woman. Sees no options.
2. Three options with poor marriage. Opts to remain unhappy rather than take paid work, too.
3. Single mother married to the government. Three options at a subsistence level.
4. Traditional single working woman. Worked to keep her family from starving. Often without child support payments from children's father.
5. Modern single working woman. Not supported by a man unless has children.
6. The have-it-all woman. Has a man who provides economic safety net from which she can choose her options. This class is the new royalty. Few men have an equivalent position. 70% of the wives of male executives (vice-presidents and above) do not hold paid jobs outside the home.

Meanwhile most men only perceive one choice: worth through providing and protecting. This traditional choice can involve three drafts: to war; to be an unpaid bodyguard; to take the hazardous jobs. "My body, not my choice."

Women's anger at men

Farrell sees divorce as having had a new influence in women becoming angry at men.

Women are more subject to beauty culture. Men tend to be attracted to women who are in the prime of fertility. Women feel more disposable as they age. Divorced women with children feel doubly disposable – she is less attractive as a package deal, without necessarily considering that divorced men are already paying for an existing family that he sees little of. He is reluctant to commit because he has this burden and already feels disposable and afraid of a repeat.

Divorce also forced middle-class women who used to be able to take jobs they liked for little pay, to take jobs they liked less for more pay. Feminists told them that they were segregated into lower-paying and meaningless jobs, without pointing out that men had always had these pressures, and were also in low-paying, meaningless jobs elsewhere. The roles were divided, but not necessarily the opportunities. Since women have joined the paid workforce the traditional trade-off has modified to the situation that women who take child-care and house-keeping roles lose opportunities and progress in the paid workforce, while

men still lose time with their loved ones and tend to take the more stressful jobs.

Women came to see that they had two jobs if they worked outside the home, without seeing the greater time men spent working outside the home or the work that he did around the home (often outside). The average working woman works 26 hours outside the home, the average working man, 48. The average man works 61 hours per week, the average woman 56. These figures include all paid and unpaid work, as well as commuting time.

Financial pressures

Divorce led women to examine their sources of income, without noticing that divorced men took on five payments rarely required of women. These include (in the US context): child support, mortgage payments on a house no longer lived in, apartment rental, alimony, dating. Thus men only had more of the same, more pressure to take on the provider/earner roles.

Men are less likely to attend (46%) or graduate (45%) from college. Men have greater pressure to generate income before gaining higher education. Women's Studies Departments in universities and colleges only emphasise to men that they are worth less than women.

Women control consumer spending by a wide margin. With spending power and women's greater rate of watching TV, comes power over TV programming, etc. Women are to TV what bosses are to employers. Half of 250 made-for-TV movies in 1991 depicted women as victims.

Farrell asserts that in restaurants men pay for women about ten times the rate that women pay for men. This may be justified with the argument that men earn more, yet if two women go to a restaurant is it assumed that the one who earns more will pay?

Men's violence against women and men's worthlessness

In Farrell's discussion of women's anger towards men, he does not emphasise women's anger towards men as a consequence of men's violence towards, and intimidation of women. And in his summary of the violence that is committed against men, he neglects to discuss the matter of who this violence is committed by. He does assert that society cannot train men to be warriors, then expect them not to be violent, but does not expand enough upon this.

Training as a warrior/protector certainly involves the modelling of violent and coercive methods of problem-solving. It also involves training in dissociation from feelings, especially fear and pain, and certainly proscribes vulnerable behaviours such as disclosing such 'unmanly' and 'weak' experiences.

However, the main value of Farrell's book, to me, is that he has emphasised the many elements of male role training that lead men to the deep, but mostly

repressed, understanding that they are of little worth unless they are prepared to prove themselves – perhaps sacrifice themselves – as protectors and providers for women, who therefore seem to be of greater worth. I had never seen this pervasive message of worthlessness so starkly before, yet deep in my own psyche I had thoroughly absorbed it – if only to conclude that I could never really measure up.

I knew it throughout my childhood and youth, yet, like all men, I concluded that I was the exception – the terrified coward who had to hide my fear and my hurt for my entire life, and pretend, as best I could, to be a man. The tough guys made it look so easy, and the occasional ‘sissy’ was both a relief that somebody was weaker than me, and a horrifying reminder of what I would prefer to forget about myself.

I was bewildered to learn, in adult life, that I was a representative of male power. It had always seemed to me that women held the power. Did I not have to risk humiliation and pain by taking the initiative in social and sexual contacts? The woman always seemed to have the power to turn me away. Possibly to ridicule me! I had to ask her to go out with me. I had to ask for a dance. I had to ask for sex. And I had to know how to satisfy sexually without any useful education whatsoever about how to do that. It never occurred to me that women felt as powerless as I later came to understand that they did.

I expect that most men fear women in this way, and many repress it. We have the understanding that we have to prove ourselves – in competition with all the other men – to gain the acceptance and affection of a woman. And then we have to risk disclosing our forbidden underbelly of insecurity, fear and pain to her when reaching out for love and sex. Some men come to resent women for this, and any action that is perceived as rejection can trigger this resentment, along with the fear, and the terrible, repressed pain that we are fundamentally worthless.

Is this deep, and often unconscious, sense of worthlessness the powerhouse of men’s violence against women? Tragically it is expressed through the only problem-solving approaches in the warrior training: intimidate her or beat her into ceasing the behaviours that prompt his feelings of fear and pain – of rejection and worthlessness. Do not give her the chance to reject sexually, by raping her with the full power of raging or callous hate.

What I have taken from Farrell’s book, that he does not seem to have emphasised, is that we will not break the cycle of male violence, and its applications for power over women, until we value men and teach them that they, too, are worth being encouraged into the full range of roles available, with no shame for choosing other than provider/protector roles.

Farrell, W. *The Myth of Male Power*, Random House, 1993.