

# *Is There Anything Good About Men?*



HOW CULTURES FLOURISH  
BY EXPLOITING MEN

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## CHAPTER 1

### *An Odd, Unseasonal Question*

**I**S THERE ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT MEN? The question is provocative today, because hardly anyone dares to suggest that men are superior to women in any respect. Political correctness permits us to say that women are better than men at one thing or another. But it's mostly taboo even to suggest men are better at anything more important than opening jars and killing bugs.

In this book, I develop a somewhat radical theory about men and women. It holds that differences are rooted mainly in tradeoffs. If one gender is better at something, the superior ability will probably be linked to being worse at something else. Otherwise, it would be reasonable to expect that nature would have made both genders equally good at most things.

That is not the main point, however. I intend to go far beyond the questions of who is better at what. We want to know not just what men are good *at*—but also what men are good *for*.

One of the most important traits that make us human is our ability to create and sustain giant social systems that can evolve and adapt and compete against each other. These systems are called *cultures*. I shall suggest that cultures routinely exploit men in certain ways, which is to say cultures find men more useful than women for certain tasks. We shall ask what those tasks are and why cultures pick men for those.

The reasons that it has recently become taboo to say positive things about men are rooted in the women's movement and its wide-ranging influence. That, in turn, is grounded in the way men and women relate to

each other in our society and culture. Men and women occupy different positions in society, and always have. If anything, the separate worlds that men and women have long occupied have become merged to a degree that would have astonished many of our ancestors. But all is not yet quite equal, to the dismay of many. Why not?

One might instead ask, who cares? But people do care. In particular, men have long held higher positions in society than women have. Most rulers throughout history have been men. Even today, most countries are governed by groups consisting mostly of men. Elsewhere in society, men rule also: in corporate boardrooms, on town councils; even within families, men seem to have more authority. The Global World Forum recently rated most nations on various dimensions of equality, and it found not a single country in which women generally enjoy superior status over men. Nor did the Forum find full equality was reached in any. Thus, men have higher status than women in every country in the world today.

To simplify broadly, two main explanations have been put forward for why men have dominated culture and ruled the world. The first was accepted nearly everywhere until the twentieth century: that men were naturally superior to women. The forces that created human beings, whether they involved a divine power or the natural processes of evolution (or some combination), made men to be better and created women to help and serve men.

The second explanation was a reaction against the first. It said that women were not inferior to men on any meaningful dimension. Possibly women are superior, but definitely not inferior. Therefore, the difference in social standing had to be explained as oppression. Men must somehow be working together to keep women down. Men devised a clever system for themselves, called patriarchy, and they used it to share rewards and to oppress women.

This book offers a third explanation.

It's not that men are smarter than women (the first theory). It's not that men are wicked conspirators against women (the second theory). It's about some basic likes and dislikes. It's rooted in how men treat other men, and how that is different from the way women relate to other women. It's about how culture works. Due to an accident that just happened to be lucky for men, culture grew out of the way the men related to each other, more than out of women's relationships. There were crucial tradeoffs: Women's relationships

were vital for some other things. Just not for constructing large systems, like a market economy, or a large team. Because culture grew out of men's relationships—including competition, trading and communicating with strangers, and ample doses of violence—men were always in charge of it.

Gradually things are changing. Women have asked, and occasionally demanded, to be allowed into the giant systems that men built, and to varying degrees they have been let in.

Meanwhile, there are hardly any places in the world where men are asking (or demanding) to be allowed into giant social systems built up by women. That in itself is not surprising, because such systems hardly exist. But the lack of such female-created social systems is something worth pondering.

### **What this Book Isn't**

Before we get started, let's clear up a few things. This book is not against women. It is not even particularly in favor of men. Along the way I will have various, mostly positive things to say about both genders, but those are not the main point.

One core interest of the book is to examine how culture exploits men. This does not mean I am denying that culture exploits women too. Many cultures do exploit women, some more than others, and sometimes cruelly.

This is not a book based on personal experience. It is certainly not a complaint. I don't regard myself as a victim, either of women or of culture. Women have been very good to me, with a few minor exceptions. Culture has been good to me also, and also with a few minor exceptions.

Nor is this book a pitch to gain victim status for men. The modern widespread eagerness to claim victim status for one's own group makes me ill. If you read this book and end up thinking the main point was that men instead of women should be considered victims, or even assume this status alongside women, then you have completely missed my point, and I have failed to get my message across.

I don't want to be on anybody's side.

Many women are exploited and victimized in their culture. Many unfortunate women have had their lives compromised by society. But men

are used and exploited too. We are perhaps more accustomed to seeing how society exploits women, but perhaps that is all the more reason to take a look at the other side too.

The point is how a giant system of social roles, ideas, and conventions can push people to behave in certain ways, including ways that are not in their best interests. These may include working at a job you detest, putting up with being mistreated, or giving up some of your hard-earned money to support people or projects you may not like. It can even include marching across a field toward people who are trying to shoot you, instead of away from them, like any sensible animal would. Culture uses men in some ways and women in others.

If there is a message, it's that it would be better for men and women to appreciate each other's contributions more. Men and women have been partners throughout human history, mostly working together for the good of both. As partners, they have often done quite different things, thereby making different contributions to each other's welfare. That, after all, is how nearly all partnerships work. A bit of mutual gratitude would be quite appropriate.

### **Gender Warriors Please Go Home**

This book is not about the "battle of the sexes." I'm not trying to score points for men against women, or vice versa. I don't think the "battle" approach is healthy. In fact, I think the idea that men and women are natural enemies who conspire deviously to exploit and oppress each other is one of the most misguided and harmful myths that is distorting our current views about men and women.

Feminist theory has had the unfortunate side effect of accustoming us all to thinking of gender in terms of conflict: mainly men oppressing women, and men being threatened by female successes. Instead, I think men and women for the most part work together. Any time people work together, there are occasional conflicts, but these are not the main story. One goal of this book is to reinterpret the relations between men and women as more cooperative and complementary than antagonistic. I think most women don't really see men as the enemy, except as taught by some highly politicized Women's Studies classes. Likewise, most men don't see women as their enemy.

Several years ago, when I first began to give talks about how culture uses men, a fellow came up to me after a major speech. He identified himself as a group therapist who had been conducting all-male group therapy sessions for more than twenty years. He said something that has stuck with me ever since. In all those years of men's groups, he had never once heard any group of men talk about women as the enemy. It wasn't that there was no talk of women—on the contrary, men talked endlessly about women. And plenty of problems were brought up. But their talking was about how can we learn to understand women, how can we get along with women, how can we give them what they want and satisfy them, and how can we build or repair our relationships with women. It was never about how to exploit women or oppress them or “put them in their place,” or keep them from being successful at work. The feminist view of what male society is all about is wildly off the mark.

It is possible that women's groups sometimes discuss men as the enemy. Even so, I don't think that is as common as the gender warriors want us to think.

I spent many years teaching and doing my research at a fine private university in Ohio named Case Western Reserve University. It suited me well for many reasons, not least of which was most of the faculty and students seemed indifferent to politics. But the national politics did occasionally or eventually make an impact there. At one of these points, the university administration woke up to the idea that women faculty needed encouragement and support, and they proposed to set up a program to help the women junior faculty get help and advice in launching their careers.

“Junior faculty” is a technical term referring to young professors who do not yet have tenure. It's often a difficult phase of life, because for the first time you are no longer a student and so nobody gives you advice or tells you what to do, and you have to figure out how to juggle all the complicated demands of the job: teaching classes, serving on committees, advising students, running a laboratory and collecting data, and publishing instead of perishing. Across the nation, there were claims that women were finding this an especially difficult time, sometimes complicated by the rush to start a family before one reached the age of 40 and perhaps not getting enough help from the older, tenured (mostly male) professors. Hence, many universities were setting up special programs to help these young

women get their careers going. Somebody at my university finally noticed the trend and thought we should have one too.

The university polled the women faculty and contacted the campus women's center to solicit suggestions and comments to find out what the female junior faculty would most like from such a program. The women had a big meeting, discussed the proposal at length, and then voted to approve the plan with one major change: The university should offer it to both men and women.

Obviously, they thought that giving young professors a bit of help and advice was a good thing. But the women didn't think it was fair or necessary that only the female junior faculty should benefit from this. They came out strongly in favor of creating the program to be available to all junior faculty, male and female.

The point of this story is that there is often much less than meets the eye to the so-called Battle of the Sexes. From reading feminist accounts of gender politics one gets the impression that men and women have been collective enemies throughout history (and still are). Instead, I think that in general men and women look upon each other rather favorably and try to treat each other fairly. The generosity of these women professors in wanting to share their programs with their male colleagues is hardly an isolated incident. Nor is such fairness one-sided. Men, too, have been actively and vocally in favor of extending their rights and privileges to women. Even in that story, it was male deans and administrators who had first raised the idea of starting a program for the women faculty.

### **About Feminism**

Any fair assessment of modern American feminism would have to assert that on the one hand, there has been some brilliant and insightful scholarship that has advanced our collective understanding of the truth. Likewise, it would have to acknowledge, on the other hand, that some of it has fostered hatred and readily sacrificed the pursuit of truth for the sake of self-interested political gain. Feminism is a big tent, covering many different views and attitudes.

Many of us, especially those of us past a certain age, have affectionate memories of the feminist movement in the 1970s. We associated feminism with promoting equality, challenging entrenched wisdom, touting openness to free thought and new ideas, and searching in an idealistic spirit for positive views toward both genders. These days many people associate feminism



with something quite different, even the opposite: promoting women at the expense of men, defending dogmas, stifling new thought, and deploring men. I used to call myself a feminist but, like many men *and* women, I have grown uncomfortable with the label, given what it has come to mean.

Quite possibly both the old and the new views have something to them. In her book *Who Stole Feminism?* Christina Hoff Sommers argued that the feminist movement had indeed changed from a men-welcoming, idealistic movement promoting one kind of utopia into an antagonistic and often stridently anti-male movement. The very success of the 1960s–1970s feminism at achieving many of its reasonable goals caused many to think the job was done. Fewer moderate women joined, and this left the movement to be taken over by the more radical and fanatical types.

Although feminist ideas are mentioned from time to time in this book, I want to emphasize from the start that I am not debating any actual feminist scholars or the movement of feminist thought itself. In fact, I strongly suspect there is no point in debating with feminists.

The business of feminism was aptly summarized by Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, two scholars who have spent their careers in Women's Studies programs and who wrote a thoughtful book, *Professing Feminism*, on what passes for scholarly activity in those departments. Crucially, they pointed out that most feminists do not pay any attention to criticisms from non-feminists. They listen a little bit to criticism from each other—but that mainly concerns the purity of their commitment to feminist politics and doctrine. When scientists criticize each other, they focus mainly on research methods and how well different possible theories fit the data. That sort of thing is not common in Women's Studies, according to Patai and Koertge.

That means that even if an outsider like me made the most brilliant, correct, and insightful point against some feminist claim, the feminists wouldn't listen or change their views one iota. So why bother?

### **Meet the Imaginary Feminist**

There is however one reason I will occasionally need to mention feminist views. For better or worse, feminists have dominated discourse about gender and how men and women relate to each other. Their views have become the standard, conventional wisdom. Many readers will automatically think of standard feminist views when I bring up issues like why women

earn less money than men (e.g., the system of patriarchy oppresses women by not giving them a fair wage).

My argument is not with actual feminist scholars, and especially not with the most open-minded and thoughtful among them. Indeed, my thinking has been informed by them, some of whom are quite brilliant. Rather, my argument is with a certain stereotyped feminist outlook. I am arguing not with actual feminists, but with *feminists as they are perceived by men*.

Let me therefore introduce a character, the Imaginary Feminist, who will crop up from time to time to remind us of the established wisdom. The most advanced intellectual feminists may object to what she says and to my depiction of her. They may say, “that’s not necessarily what all feminists assert.” I agree. I don’t care. I need to address the misconceptions that many men have about gender relations. The Imaginary Feminist represents these. The extent to which actual feminists are responsible for these views is debatable; it might be extensive or it might be less. But before you dismiss the views of the Imaginary Feminist as irrelevant, ask a few men whether her comments are indeed those they would expect many feminists to express.

Again, I freely admit she doesn’t speak for all feminists (as if anybody does). She represents the sorts that men notice the most. These include the ones who have campaigned to have urinals removed from public lavatories so that men will be forced to sit down to urinate, on the grounds that when men urinate standing up they are dominating and oppressing women. These include the ones who cheered the news that Title IX accomplished more in the way of canceling men’s sports teams than promoting women’s teams. They include the leaders who urged women to become lesbians because sex with men was “sleeping with the enemy.” They include the ones who insult men who hold the door for them or, more generally, who attack anything men say and ultimately try to intimidate men from having or expressing opinions. In short, these are the grumpy and simplistic ones who explain everything in terms of male wickedness and oppression.

### Who Stands Out?

When I proposed this book, I said that the hostility between the sexes had been overstated. I mentioned as an example the women’s suffrage

movement. I pointed out that women got the vote because a majority of men, only men, voted to extend the vote to women. That was hardly resistance. I said compared to the way men react when they really do want to resist somebody—such as when men fight a military invasion by an enemy—men had essentially welcomed women with open arms and affirmative action.

One reviewer objected strenuously. She said I should learn some history. The campaigners for women's suffrage had endured verbal and occasionally physical abuse. Hunger strikers had been force-fed, and so on.

She was right about those particulars, of course. On the other hand, I was also right about the voting. To understand the correctness of both views, one has to distinguish between the general pattern and the most salient and confrontational minority. It works both ways.

The actions of the male majority are indisputable, because the election depended on them. Most men voted to extend the vote to women. These men were not conquered or overwhelmed by invaders, nor were they cowed into submission.

To the suffragettes and others, however, the support from the relatively silent majority of men was less visible perhaps than the overt hostility and occasionally violent abuse from the most vocal minority. Hence, one can understand that many women saw men in general as actively resisting them. The nasty few left much more of an impression than the friendly many.

The same logic applies, with roles reversed, to the way men today perceive feminists. No doubt there are many women who identify themselves as feminists yet who do not hate men and may even like them, who may believe in equal opportunity for everyone rather than advancing the cause of their gender at the expense of men, who believe in telling the truth even if it is not favorable to their cause, and who do not resort to moral intimidation to silence men and dominate any debate. Yet these are not the feminists who stand out to men. The confrontational minority of feminists act as if they represent all feminists (indeed all women), and men have had much more contact with them than with the more harmoniously and peaceably inclined ones, precisely because they are outspoken and confrontational. It is with their views that I will occasionally need to take issue. They are the ones for whom the Imaginary Feminist speaks.

## Oppression and Prejudice

One main theme that the Imaginary Feminist will bring up over and over is that society is riddled with prejudice against women and that the history of male–female relations consists of various ways in which men have oppressed women. This has become a standard view. If you question it, the Imaginary Feminist does not typically respond with carefully reasoned arguments or clear data. Instead, she accuses you of being prejudiced and oppressive even for questioning the point.

If she does point to evidence, it will be something like “women earn less money than men” or “people prefer sons to daughters.” These are supposed to qualify as proof.

In science, especially social science, statistical data are often a bit slippery and there are often several possible explanations for any finding. Having spent my career engaged in this business, I can vouch for what goes on when you try to publish the results of experiments you have done: There is debate among the reviewers chiefly as to whether you have ruled out all other possible explanations, other than your preferred one, for your findings.

Yet sometimes claims about oppression and prejudice seem immune to this process. They are not treated with the same strict discipline that other scientific theories must encounter.

Take the difference in salary. This will be discussed at several points in this book, but for now we are concerned with the simple question: Do women’s generally lower salaries prove that society oppresses women?

Other researchers have examined this question, and the oppression hypothesis routinely has taken a beating. There are multiple possible explanations for the gender salary gap, and several have much clearer support than oppression. Men are more likely than women to work full-time rather than part-time. On average across the population, men are more ambitious than women. They work harder and put in hundreds more hours per year. Men are less likely than women to take a few years off during the crucial career-building years of their thirties. Men take bigger risks than women. Men are more willing to sacrifice other sorts of career benefits, such as freedom from travel requirements, low stress, and even personal safety, for a higher salary. Men are more likely than women to negotiate for a higher salary. All these contribute to higher male salaries.

The preference for boy babies is an interesting case, particularly to me because early in my career, I used to lecture about this in connection with prejudice against girls and women. The research finding I read when I was writing my first lectures back in 1979 was that parents were more likely to have another child if their first or previous child had been a girl than a boy. The explanation given at that time was that parents really want sons, and so if they have a girl, they regard the reproductive event as a failure and are eager to try again, whereas if they have a son, they are satisfied and so they stop. It made sense to me. As a trusting young member of the field, I believed what was in the journals, and I passed that interpretation along in my lectures.

But in fact, there are alternative explanations. I have seen multiple sets of parents, even some who obviously had strong pro-female sentiments, go through the same pattern of having another child after a daughter but stopping after a son, and it seemed absurd to accuse them of anti-female bias. They loved their daughters. What they said, and what research evidence also shows (if anyone had bothered to look before attributing parental choices to sexism), is that girl babies are generally easier than boy babies. Not always, of course, but often enough to account for the pattern we are describing.

Many couples are apprehensive as the birth of their first child approaches. How will their lives change? Will they be good parents? Will they be able to cope? And then a sweet little girl baby arrives. A bit of adjustment here and there, and the couple thinks, hey, this is not bad at all! What was everyone warning and complaining about? Having a baby is easy and so very satisfying. Let's have another!

Boy babies are more trouble. They scream and cry more often than girl babies, and louder too. (Incidentally, this well-documented finding has been recognized as an important challenge to the conventional claim that females are more emotional than males.) Once they start crawling and walking, they get into things. They make bigger messes. They climb the furniture and pull the draperies. They fight with other kids. Parents who have boys think, this is difficult. Let's not have any more of these.

Recently I visited China. The preference for boys there is well entrenched in the culture and it is hard to deny that there is overt preference, to the point of prejudice. Today, with the one-child policy preventing parents from trying again if they have a daughter, it has been necessary to make it

illegal to determine a baby's gender before birth, because of selective abortion of female fetuses. When a couple has a son, my Chinese colleagues told me, everyone congratulates them: "That's great!" If the couple has a daughter, friends carefully say, "Also good!" In rural areas, where laws are somewhat less stringent, couples who have a daughter are sometimes permitted to try again for a son, whereas if the first child is a son, no more children are allowed.

Yet even there, it may be overly hasty to attribute these attitudes to oppression and prejudice. My Chinese colleagues pointed out that Chinese tradition and law stipulate that a son is responsible for taking care of his parents in their old age. A daughter is not. If your son does not provide for you, you can sue him, and there were such cases in the courts, as reported in the newspapers I read while I was there. You cannot sue your daughter, though. In a society that does not have reliable pensions, Social Security, and other provisions for the elderly, this is extremely important. The desire for a son is not necessarily a sign of some irrational bigoted hatred of the female gender. It may simply be a prudent concern with who is going to feed you when you are too old to work. You can't count on your employer or the government to do it. You can't even force your daughter to do it. But you can force your son to do it.

The law and tradition are themselves quite relevant to one theme of this book. Males are required to support their parents, while females are exempt from this requirement. This is not to say that Chinese society is full of laws that favor females across the board. But it is one small sign of what we shall focus on in this book, namely how societies choose to use men. If that law applied to women and not men, our Imaginary Feminist would quickly use the word "exploit," as in society is exploiting women by making them do things that it does not require men to do. If we want to understand gender and culture, we need to have our eyes open to how society exploits men as well as women.

### **He, She, and It**

I shall propose that men and women are different in some basic ways and that some cultures—successful ones—capitalize on these differences to outperform rival cultures. The Imaginary Feminist asks, why not matriarchy? Why can't women rule? I say, yes, why not? Whatever works is

likely to be tried, eventually, and what works best will prevail over rival systems.

It has been tried. Unfortunately, those matriarchal cultures and societies did not stand the test of time. There is probably a good reason. In fact, I shall suggest that women can rule, and even quite effectively. But usually they don't. It's not a matter of competence or capability. More likely, it has to do with the willingness to take the risks and make the sacrifices that are involved in competing for power.

To understand why men and women have the lives they do, it is necessary to move beyond thinking of them as enemies. A more useful way of thinking will include at least three entities rather than the duo of men against women. The third is the cultural system itself.

The system is not exactly an independent force. But humans use systems to make their lives better. In other writings, I have gone so far as to conclude that culture is humankind's biological strategy. It is how people attempt to solve the basic biological problems that all species face: survival and reproduction. We have culture, a system that shares information, coordinates different tasks, and increases wealth. In general, we live vastly better in culture than we would live if we were suddenly left by ourselves in the forest and had to scrape by with our own muscles and wits.

Some might object to the need to talk about the culture or the system as a separate entity. Isn't the system just something made up by people? In a sense, yes, but that does not imply that people can simply dissolve it or change it. When the bank forecloses your house, or your firm's economic outlook leads to downsizing and you lose your job, or war is declared and you are summoned to put on a uniform and risk your life—then it becomes quite obvious that the system has power that individuals cannot deny or even very effectively resist. Almost everybody wishes the great economic collapse of 2008 could be reversed, but it can't. The system is not a fiction at our command.

The system uses people in different ways. People put up with this because, mostly, they are better off with it than without it. True, the system is created by people, but they also experience it as beyond their power to control. We may try to change our culture by voting, but that exercise reveals how little control we really have. You can vote in every election all your life and still remain dissatisfied with your culture.

This book seeks to understand the relationships and interactions among men, women, and culture. Even that simple triangle is not a complete explanation, however. Most cultures have had to compete against other cultures. To survive, a culture has to do more than provide decent lives for the men and women in it. It may have to accumulate the wherewithal to compete against other cultures. Competition can be economic, military, technological, or intellectual. Often it has been simply demographic: Larger groups typically prevail over smaller ones.

In short, cultures have challenges. To survive, they must use their men and women effectively. That does not necessarily mean using men and women in the same ways. In fact, most cultures have used men and women in somewhat different ways.

### **How Can Men Be Exploited if They Run Everything?**

Let's turn now to one of the most important and basic questions about this book's project. When I tell people I'm studying how culture exploits men, the first response is often to question how anyone could possibly think that society exploits men, given that men are in charge of everything. This is a fair objection, and we should take it seriously.

How, indeed, can we say that men are exploited by society? On the one hand, it is true that men dominate society. They occupy the vast majority of power positions as presidents, prime ministers, and other rulers. Except for those few countries that have constitutions requiring half of the legislature to be female, the parliament or congress is generally full of men. The private sector is no different. Most large corporations are headed by men. There is some debate as to whether there is a real "glass ceiling" that actually prevents women from rising to the top, but regardless of how it comes about, the power elite is full of men.

This is a standard riposte if anyone starts to point out the problems or difficulties men have. Certainly, the Imaginary Feminist won't listen to any talk about men being oppressed. Men shouldn't complain. Only women have the right to complain. It seems a straightforward step from noting that men are on top of the elite power structures to saying that it must be great to be a man and that society is set up to favor men with privileges and advantages, not to exploit them. The Imaginary Feminist gets quite angry at any insistence that culture victimizes men, and she would point to evidence of male rule.



In the United States, at last count, men occupy the presidency and vice presidency. They hold all but one of the Supreme Court seats. They hold a bit over 80% of the seats in the Senate and in the House of Representatives. The same is true for the office of governor of specific states. Men occupy more than 90% of the CEO positions in the Fortune 500 top American corporations. And so on. Similar patterns occur throughout the world.

In short, and to oversimplify, men run the world. Seeing this, it is easy to think (as many feminists have) that society is set up to favor men. It must be great to be a man.

Hence the question, once again: How can you say men are exploited, if they run everything?

The answer to this is important, because it opens the door for many of the other points this book will make.

### **Meanwhile, at the Bottom**

The mistake in that way of thinking is to look only at the top of society and draw conclusions about society as a whole. Yes, there are mostly men at the top. But if you look at the bottom, really at the bottom, you'll find mostly men there too. These are the worst outcomes society has to confer. And in each case, men far outnumber women.

Look at the prisons, for example. According to the U.S. Department of Justice statistics, nine out of ten prison inmates is a man. Life doesn't get much worse than being in prison, at least not in America. (If you really want to see worse than just being in prison, look specifically at Death Row. There are almost no women ever on Death Row. Is anyone calling for some affirmative action there? The courts demanded that other institutions, like universities and corporations, work toward equal representation of men and women. How about the courts applying the same criteria to themselves and insisting that women get half of seats in the electric chair? But of course that would be ridiculous.)

Moreover, the law-enforcement system has a strong bias against men. (Imagine if our society were half as indignant about the police engaging in gender profiling as it is about their racial profiling!) Warren Farrell documented this in his book *The Myth of Male Power*. When men and women are convicted of the same crimes, the men get much longer prison sentences than the women. This is on top of the fact that men are more likely to be

charged and prosecuted in the first place, so that the few women who are convicted are probably much more serious offenders than the average male convict. For example, if a man and a woman are arrested together for some offense, the standard procedure is to get the woman to testify for the state and then grant her immunity or a reduced sentence, so that the man is held mainly responsible.

Another group at the bottom of society is the homeless. More men than women are homeless. In fact, for many years homeless people were almost exclusively men. Farrell has also noted how attitudes toward the homeless changed with gender makeup. When homeless people were almost entirely men, they were regarded as immoral trash, and they were called bums and tramps. The first homeless women were called bag ladies, and the “lady” term denotes a respect that was never accorded the males. Gradually, the increase in female homelessness made that population seen as a group deserving of support, care, and interventions, instead of contempt. But we still do not hear of “bag gentlemen.”

Women are not 51% of the homeless. Exact numbers are elusive, of course, but the preponderance of males is indisputable. A recent Italian study on homelessness concluded that about 15% are women. The U.S. National Coalition for the Homeless notes that there are about three times as many single homeless men as women.

The point remains. Homelessness is another category of life at the bottom of society. And far more men than women are to be found there.

Let’s now look at one place that’s another kind of bottom and also clearly indicates societal exploitation. That’s death on the job. Society needs people to do all its various jobs, and some of those jobs are dangerous. Somebody has to climb out on the roof, or exchange gunfire with the criminals, or run into burning buildings, or sail the stormy seas to rescue the desperate, or even just drive cars and trucks on the busy or dark roads that kill so many. Some of those people will end up injured or, in the worst case, killed. According to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, these days there is still a severe imbalance in death on the job, by about twelve to one: 92% of Americans who die in the line of work are men. This is true despite the fact that there are almost as many women as men employed in America.

One more spot at the bottom deserves mention: being killed in battle. Most societies in world history have needed to put warriors on the battlefield,

and many have failed to come home. These casualties have overwhelmingly been men.

That's changing, one might say. Women are entering combat and sharing the risk. Although correct, it is beside the point. Women's progress in sharing the risk of combat death is accompanied by women sharing many of the rewards that society has also, such as prestigious and well-paying jobs. Plus, women's progress into high-paying jobs has been faster than their progress into risk and danger. Much has been made in the media about the second Iraq war, in which women did enter combat and take fire and, yes, get shot. Even so, it was hardly a matter of shouldering half the risk. In 2007, the Iraq war passed the sad milestone of 3,000 American deaths (including everything from being shot in combat to being killed in a traffic accident). Of those dead soldiers, 2,938 were men. The 62 women comprised about 2% of the deaths.

None of this is meant to minimize or ignore women's suffering. Women have suffered plenty of bad things over the centuries. Even those who were not killed in war have often found hardship, victimization, and sometimes death as a result of war. My first point is just that the conventional view of men enjoying lives of ease and privilege while women toil and suffer is not correct.

Men are more expendable than women, at least from the perspective of the cultural system. Actually, this will be one of the keys to understanding the different ways that culture uses men and women. The idea has several roots, some as deep as the basic ability to make babies for the next generation, to enable cultures to compete simply by outnumbering their rivals: a culture needs only a few men but as many women as possible.

### **Seeing Both Sides**

Yes, there are more men than women at the top of society, but there are also far more men than women at the bottom. The two are related. Society uses men and women differently.

In this instance, the error that led to thinking society simply favors men was understandable. Women felt they were at the bottom of the power structure, and so they looked up toward the top and saw men there. It was easy to think that the whole system is set up to benefit men and make men superior. Even today, whenever someone starts to say that life can be hard

for men, the quick and loud response stifles any further discussion: men are still in charge, so quit complaining.

Probably the one-sided conventional view had its roots in the feminist critique of society as patriarchy, which is to say a conspiracy by men to exploit women. Feminists have acknowledged that they look at the world from women's point of view. Sitting there, they looked up toward the top. They saw men at the top, and they thought, men are in charge of things, wow, it must be great to be a man. Society must be set up to benefit men.

They are right that men are generally in charge of things. These men may have some problems, but it is quite fair to say that they enjoy a large share of the rewards society has to offer. In that sense, some men really do have it good. It is even correct to say that throughout most of history (things may be slowly changing now), the men at the top have enjoyed rewards and benefits better than those women could hope to attain. But the other conclusions—that it's therefore great to be a man, and society is set up to benefit men—are biased by the error of ignoring the downside.

One of the most interesting books about gender in recent years was by Norah Vincent. She was a lesbian feminist who with some expert help could pass for a man, and so she went undercover, living as a man in several different social spheres for the better part of a year. The book, *Self-Made Man*, is her memoir. She is quite frank that she started out thinking she was going to find out how great men have it and write a shocking feminist expose of the fine life that the enemy (men) was enjoying.

Instead, she experienced a rude awakening of how hard it is to be a man. Her readings and classes in Women's Studies had not prepared her to realize that the ostensible advantages of the male role come at a high cost. She was glad when it was over, and in fact she cut the episode short in order to go back to what she concluded was a greatly preferable life as a woman. The book she wrote was far different from the one she planned, and any woman who thinks life is better for men will find it a sobering read.

We shall have plenty more to say about the men at the top. They are an important part of the story about how culture uses and, yes, exploits men. The men at the top do often enjoy a big share of the rewards culture offers, so some may be reluctant to say they are exploited. Culture does, however, use them for its own advantage, even while it dispenses big rewards to them. But for now, we need to balance our recognition of men at the top by also seeing the men at the bottom.

After all, if we simply made the same kind of reasoning error but in the opposite direction, we could focus exclusively on the men at the bottom. We could say, look at the people ground up by society, imprisoned, executed, unemployed, sent to early deaths, and we would see that they are mainly men. Extrapolating, we could reasonably conclude from them that society is set up to benefit women by protecting them from these miserable fates and by sacrificing men instead. We could say, it must be great to be a woman. This conclusion would be wrong and biased—just as wrong and biased as the conventional wisdom about how great men have it.

### **Making Different Choices**

The fact that men outnumber women at both the top and bottom of society is an important clue to how culture uses the genders differently. Although in modern society women can be found in just about all walks of life, men still outnumber them at the extremes, and in the past this difference has been even greater.

It is simple but misleading to focus on one aspect and concentrate on that. Unfortunately, that's what conventional wisdom has done. If you follow the popular media, you see and hear plenty about the gender gap in pay and the general unfairness about women earning less than men. Meanwhile, you will see and hear very little about the gender gap in occupational death. I have yet to see anyone writing that it's unfair for men to be killed so much more often than women.

Very likely, those two gaps have some link. Society has to pay people more to take dangerous jobs. All else being equal, would you take a job that carried a significant risk of being killed or maimed, rather than a job with no such risks? Of course not. But there are such jobs, and the culture needs somebody to do them. It knows nobody will choose such jobs if all else is equal—so it has to make all else not equal. The standard way to do that is with pay. Society increases the pay for dangerous jobs in order to get people to take them. This is called a tradeoff.

Tradeoffs will be important throughout this book. In fact, I think gender theory needs to acknowledge tradeoffs much more than it has.

Consider, then, the tradeoff of money and danger. Suppose you were contemplating two jobs, identical in most respects, but one of which had a higher risk of injury and death. On that basis, as I've said, any rational

person would choose the safe job. But now suppose the employer for the dangerous job was willing to increase the salary. How much more money would you want to compensate you for a slight increase in risk? Most likely, you would accept a slight increase in risk for a huge increase in salary. (After all, every time you drive on the highway you accept a slight risk of being killed, but the anticipated benefits of the trip make it worth it.) Therefore, the question becomes one of trading off money against risk: how much more money versus how much increase in risk.

Confronted with such tradeoffs, men and women tend to see different tipping points. I'm sure it is possible to pay the average woman enough extra to make her willing to take more risk. But the average man will take that same risk for a smaller increase in salary. And so the employing organizations tend to stop there. Many research studies have shown that men put more emphasis on money when choosing jobs and careers than women do. As a result, these men earn more than the women who took the safer careers. As another result, some of these men will end up injured or killed, more so than the women who took the safer careers.

Taking and doing those dangerous jobs is thus one thing men are good for. That is one way that most cultures use men more than women.