

Leaving the sisterhood: A recovering feminist speaks

By Elly Tams

Note: This article is also available in [Swedish](#) and [Romanian](#).

There is a recently published book by a group of feminists in the UK, entitled [The Lightbulb Moment](#). It is a collection of accounts by women about the precise moment they “saw the light” and became feminists. Religious, Road To Damascus style imagery aside, this book’s title resonates with me. I have experienced quite a few “lightbulb moments” myself with regards to feminism, especially in the last two years. But my realizations and illuminations have been of a quite different nature to those described in the book. For I am writing this after having been raised, educated and – yes – indoctrinated in feminist dogma for over 40 years, but my “journey” has involved leaving the sisterhood. And the sisterhood, that lovely, touchy-feely, all-girls-together, “feminine” club has punished me severely for my decision.

In 2010 I began writing a blog, using the pseudonym Quiet Riot Girl. I have been a participant in a few online communities over the years, and I have always enjoyed the way they give us the opportunity to play with our identities, develop personas and explore ideas and practices we may not have done under our “real names.” But when I created [Quiet Riot Girl](#), I had no idea just how life-changing my explorations would be. I was still a feminist when I started blogging (and tweeting) in 2010. As a critical feminist, I was aware how divided and sometimes incoherent feminists are on important issues such as sex, economics and bodily autonomy. But I was a “sister” nonetheless. If you take a look at [my first QRG Blog](#) you will see how clearly I identified as a feminist back then. But only a year later I had completely split from feminism and was writing as an “anti-feminist,” for example in my controversial essay, [Against Feminisms](#).

So what changed? And why? My rejection of feminism (and its rejection of me) is not just about choosing to use different labels to identify myself and my politics these days. This has been a dramatic sea-change on my part, which means I see the world completely differently now. There have been quite a few twists and turns in my personal ‘revolution’. Here are some of the key ones.

1) Rape Culture And Other Feminist Myths

The [feminist blogosphere](#) is full of articles and discussions describing what feminists call “rape culture.” According to them, women are not able to walk down the street or enjoy a drink in a bar without the fear of being hit on, harassed, and raped by men, those dirty dogs. When I first began engaging with feminists online, I was immediately struck by the fact that I did not recognize the phenomenon of “rape culture” they were talking about. And I certainly did not recognize men to be villains, as they were portraying them. I noticed that both men as a whole and individual men were being demonized by feminists. [Julian Assange](#) for example, still has not even been charged by the authorities, but feminist bloggers have already branded him a “rapist.”

In 2010 I wrote a piece called [Why Rapist Is A Dirty Word](#) and the reactions from feminists were telling. Some (as you can see in the comments) said I had no right to speak about rape as I have never been raped. Others called me a “rape apologist” or said I was “rapey!” My status as a woman was put into question, and “sisters” called for my feminism card to be revoked. When I tried to get my work on rape culture published by feminist websites and publications online, I was met with stony silence. It seemed as if I had broken a “taboo.” Undeterred, I continued to explore the issue and in September

2011, having given up on challenging the concept of rape culture within feminism, I had my article [Rape Culture And Other Feminist Myths](#) published at the Good Men Project. In that piece I said:

When I hear the word “rapist” I think of a man, and not a man who is capable of change, of reflection. We have to speak about and talk to men who commit sexual assault as if they are able to change, and we also must acknowledge men are not the only perpetrators, if we want to reduce sexual and intimate partner violence in society. Rape Culture is a myth. I reject it outright.

As a result of my stance, feminists, who still see “rape” as primarily sexual violence done by men to women, rejected me.

2) The Sex Wars

When I did finally realize how badly feminism treats men and masculinity, I was not able to identify as feminist anymore.

Sex is of course universal, and universally complex. My own [sexuality](#) and sexual politics have shifted over time. One of the reasons feminism and I parted company, is the “sex wars.” For all the puritanism that comes out of feminism, those girls are remarkably interested in sex! And especially the evils of heterosexual men.

Back in 2010 I wrote a post called [Sex For Sale](#). Though I now disagree with my former self about much of it, the piece is important to me because it shows how I refused even then to accept the feminist panic over sex work. As I say in the article, “When I talk about sex work I include myself in the picture. And I include you too. If we don’t talk about it as participants, then we are “othering” the women who overtly exchange sex for money. (And now I would say “men and women!”)

The term “othering” is key here. Feminists LOVE to talk about [sexual objectification](#), by which they mean the sexual objectification of women. But I know that in the 21st century, men are also objects of desire, and [young men](#) in particular are splashed across billboards and TV screens wearing next to nothing. But this [metrosexual](#) masculinity is ignored by feminism. Feminists maintain that it is women, not men who are objectified in our culture. And they love to blame the sex industry, and heterosexual men’s desires, for women’s “othered” status as “sex objects,” as victims of the “male gaze,” and ultimately as victims of sexual violence by men. But in my view it is feminists who objectify men and women the most. Whether they are “sex positive” feminists or “anti-sex and anti-sex industry” feminists, they simplify and objectify people into caricature portraits of “victims” or “perpetrators.” I refuse both labels and therefore I don’t fit the feminist mould.

3) No, Seriously, What About The Men?

The first time I remember hearing the term [misandry](#) was only a few years ago. I was a director of a feminist non-profit providing training for women in the music industry. We were at an “equal opportunities” training day and a man there suggested my organization might be sexist. I was angry, and incredibly dismissive of him and his views. I thought the “misandry” that he spoke about didn’t exist.

I don’t want a medal for realizing it does. I am recounting this anecdote to underline just how rare it is for feminists to take sexism against men seriously. During my PhD gender studies program I referred often to a “dictionary of feminist theory.” The entry for “misogyny” was long and detailed. There was no entry for “misandry.”

When I did finally realize how badly feminism treats men and masculinity, I was not able to identify as feminist anymore. In an [article at the Good Men Project](#) I wrote about the awful jokey retort feminists and their allies use when anyone brings up men's issues in a discussion: "whatabouttehmenz?". Incidentally, I *do* think I deserve a medal for the fact I was banned from the website called [No, Seriously, What About Teh Menz?](#). NSWATM is supposedly a forum for people who care about men, misandry and masculinity, but I was banned for challenging Sady Doyle, the prominent American feminist blogger, activist and, er...man hater!

The list of well-known feminists who spend a good deal of their time and energy demonizing and putting down men is long. We all have our "favourites" – Amanda Marcotte, Melissa McEwan, Cath Elliott, Jill Filipovic and Gail Dines spring to mind. But I have found myself identifying the UK Guardian journalist [Suzanne Moore](#) as particularly guilty of misandry. In one of her weekly columns, Moore relayed a story about her young daughter asking her why she is a feminist. Her reply?

"Because men do horrible, horrible things."

4) Who Is Silencing Whom?

Feminists, especially online, often talk about [Silencing](#). They claim that men attempt to shut feminist women up using a variety of nasty techniques. These include "mansplaining," "gaslighting" and "sexual bullying." I won't explain the concepts – A Voice For Men readers will be familiar with them, as I am sure they have been used against you in many an argument with feminists. In a rather strange discussion on [Feministe](#) blog a while ago, I was accused of all the things men are supposed to do to silence feminists. In fact they called me a man and awarded me an "honorary penis" which I treasure to this day.

The lovely ladies at Feministe also banned me from commenting on their blog. In April 2011 I made a list of all the people who ban and block me online, named after a feminist blog of the same name, called [101 Wankers](#). I have now reached and surpassed my "target" and have stopped counting. But this didn't shut me up, so in March 2012 Julie Bindel the well-known anti-sex industry UK feminist, along with some of her friends, "outed" me. My pseudonym Quiet Riot Girl was revealed to belong to me, Elly Tams, and I was labeled an "anti-feminist," "homophobic," and a "troll."

The term "troll" is particularly effective, because it is so generally accepted, way beyond the feminist blogosphere, as a word meaning someone "bad," "untrustworthy," "subhuman" even. I have been called a troll on many occasions, and even though I know it is used politically, the label hurts. When there are TV programmes about "[RIP trolls](#)" who trawl Facebook for tributes to recently deceased people and then deface them and abuse grieving relatives, it is difficult to be called a troll and stand tall and proud. But overall, in the light of my treatment by feminists and others who don't like what I have to say, I am left with one question.

Who is silencing whom?

5) Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics

One of the things I have found hardest to accept about feminism is just how incoherent it is, and how it often uses dodgy data and – well, actual lies – to promote and justify its statements. I studied gender to PhD level and beyond, and so have based a lot of my own work on feminist theory and feminist-influenced research. Was it all wrong? The answer is yes and no. In my [Against Feminisms](#) essay I show that I reject ALL feminist assumptions and basic positions. But I do not claim everything written by a feminist to be useless. Feminist theorists and writers whose work I have not abandoned altogether include Camille Paglia, Judith Butler and Gayle Rubin. But I think they all still focus too much on women, and women's issues, which weakens their arguments. I need another article, or maybe a second

PhD to demonstrate how feminists are inconsistent in their views, and how research they use is often very poor. But here are a couple of recent examples:

In her recently published book, [The Sex Myth](#), Brooke Magnanti, more famously known as Belle de Jour, showed how anti-sex industry feminists use bad data and poor analysis to come up with what I can only call lies about adult entertainment and “misogyny.” Magnanti shows how feminist campaigners have based some of their activism on wrong stats about the relationship between the number of lap dancing clubs in an area, and the level of rape in that same place. UK based feminist organizations such as [Object UK](#) and the [Fawcett Society](#) often present “facts” about violence against women that on closer inspection are not facts at all. Or are only part of the story.

The Fawcett Society provide us with another example of feminist dodgy data. They currently have a campaign about the way women are economically hit harder by the recession than men. I find the figures they use to be particularly insulting to all of our intelligence, because they ignore the “fact” that we all know from our own lives, that in the vast majority of cases, men and women live together, are in families whether nuclear or extended, and support each other. Another fact ignored by feminists is how fathers who do not live with their children, and who often don’t even have much access to see their children, tend to pay the mothers of their children considerable amounts of money in child support.

6) The Bigger Picture

The issue of [fathers and fathers’ rights](#) is one which brings me onto my last point. In my recent conflicts with feminists, particularly on the internet, I have found them to be incredibly small-minded, insular and unaware of wider issues in society that don’t affect them directly. The feminist blogosphere is dominated by young, white, middle class women who do not have to worry about whether they are allowed to see their children or not, if they are likely to be called up to fight in a [war](#), or where the next meal is coming from. Globally, when it comes to major crises such as famine, natural disasters, armed conflict and unemployment, everyone, not just women, suffers. Even in America, the [military draft](#) is compulsory for young men, not women, but feminists have dismissed that as an important gender issue.

The constant whining by well-heeled feminist women about [so-called male privilege](#), was probably the final straw for me as far as my relationship with feminism was concerned. Privilege? What privilege?

In the title of this piece I call myself a “recovering feminist.” Whilst I don’t think I was “addicted” to feminism, the phrase was deliberate. Giving up the dogma that has dominated my life thus far has not been easy. There are even parallels between how alcohol or drugs, say, can serve as a “prop,” a “safety net,” a way of trying to avoid some of the harsher aspects of reality and what feminism offered me. Without the comfortable delusion of feminism I am more vulnerable now. Without the “gang,” the “club” (the “cult?”) I sometimes feel alone. Sometimes I am alone. But I have no regrets. Apart from feminism’s misandry, lies, silencing tactics, and oppressive sexual politics, in writing this I have been reminded that even when I was still a feminist, who happened to think for herself, I was cast out and derided. Being a feminist, for me, was often being in the sisterhood without any sisters. I will never go back.

This article is posted on the internet:

<http://www.avoicemen.com/feminism/thedailybeast-abc2020-leaving-the-sisterhood-a-recovering-feminist-speaks-thedailybeast-abc2020/>