



Don't Take It Personally: Thoughts from a Male Feminist

Jonathan Soper

Tokenism does not change stereotypes of social systems but works to preserve them, since it dulls the revolutionary impulse.

- Mary Daly

Stereotypes are one of the worst forms of social ignorance. No one knows this better than the very people who are the unfortunate brunt of any given stereotype. Feminists, though not the most victimized social "class," are one of the most viciously stereotyped groups in our modern society. "Feminazi," "man-hater," all sorts of words are used to describe this greatly feared, almost mythic view of the modern feminist. Granted, the popular view is changing with education, slowly and surely, but many men still view feminists in this way. They appropriate their own definition of the word in order to twist the image of the feminist into a snarling, irrational embittered beast of some sort. Turn on the AM radio on any given afternoon, and you will hear Hannity or Limbaugh frothing at the mouth about "these women's libbers and their crackpot liberal agenda."

It seems, to me anyway, that in this day and age there are two popular views of women in society: they are either (1) rabid, militant and anti-male; or (2) doting, conservative housewives. It is these very classifications, these shining examples of the dichotomous nature of our culture, that threaten the destruction of harmony between the sexes. It is the same in politics, in religion, even in our social class structure. "You're Republican? Don't you have people to oppress and rainforests to destroy?" Or, "You're a Christian? Don't you have people to oppress and rainforests to destroy?" If you're pro-choice, you're anti-gun. If you're pro-women, you're anti-men. No one desires to be the victim of a stereotype, and yet we reinforce them every day in our lives by using "morals" and "issues" as excuses for lack of discourse. We succumb to our social programming. There is a switch somewhere, deep in our synapses, which constantly prods us to choose one "side" over the other. We have perpetuated conflict by believing it to be necessary.

Of course, this is a crucial aspect of our current sociopolitical/economic system. If you don't operate from a strict sense of black or white, left or right, you run the risk of being labeled a pariah. Strangely enough, the discourse so vehemently espoused by those in power is actually something they neither need nor desire. If true discourse were to occur en masse in this country, stereotypes would begin to crumble and the American dialectic would begin to lose its foothold in people's minds.

But how are we to counter this? It's the same as the discussion of how possible it is for us to become truly independent from oil. Stereotypes are so firmly rooted in our culture that we have to consider the possibility that they will never be eradicated. However, if we start analyzing labels and scrutinizing the force-fed propaganda we see every day, we may have a chance of striking at the foundation of the problem. For instance: feminism. There is a mind-boggling array of definitions for the word. Personally, I believe feminism is more than simply elevating women in the social class structure. The "feminine" is more

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Interview with Dr. Christa Walck

Margot Hutchins

Dr. Christa Walck was appointed Dean of the School of Business and Economics (SBE) in August. She is the second female Dean of an academic department in MTU's history.

tbt: How did you end up here at MTU?

Dr. Walck: It was very serendipitous, actually. My doctoral work was in the area of Medieval Russian history. At the time, people in the humanities were having a difficult time finding jobs, so I completed an introduction to business program at Harvard. I ended up working for Comerica Bank and MTU was one of our customers. I came up in January, the snow was up to HERE, and I said to myself, "This is where I need to be." Within a year I had a job in the business school.

tbt: How did you end up Dean?

Dr. Walck: They asked me...and I agreed, eventually. (she smiled)

tbt: I understand you presented at the Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) conference. Do you consider yourself a feminist?

Dr. Walck: Of course I'm a feminist, but I'm probably what you would call an "old school" feminist. I believe in equal rights and equal pay for women. It seems like now feminism is a perspective on the world that's associated with a general concern for justice and equity and I'm not sure why those are only feminist concerns.

tbt: In your presentation, you discussed how Wal-Mart uses the feminine rhetorics of community, diversity, and caring. Can you tell me a little about that?

Dr. Walck: I've been reading some interesting things about public/private spheres and place. Wal-Mart is an issue in our community. People object to Wal-Mart not just because of questionable labor practices and over-consumption, but also because it blurs the distinction between public and private space. Downtowns are conceptualized as public places—when downtowns die because local businesses can't compete, there is a perception that Wal-Mart usurps community space. Also, Wal-Mart is larger than some governments, which leads to

a shift in economic power from the public to private domain.

tbt: Why did you decide to keep teaching after you were appointed Dean?

Dr. Walck: I've been fighting to teach Ecology and Organizations for a long time...I finally got to teach it last year. I wanted to keep the sustainability focus in the business school. So, I offered to teach it again this fall.

tbt: For the readers that don't know, what is "sustainability?"

Dr. Walck: Sustainability is the concept that environmental, social, and economic systems are interdependent and for any one of these systems to continue sustainably, the others must continue as well.

tbt: As far as the thread of sustainability in SBE goes, what would you like to see?

Dr. Walck: I have encouraged the business school faculty to work with the focus areas of the university and sustainability is one. The more the business school can be aligned with major themes of the university, the better off it will be. Sustainability is the theme I am most closely aligned with. I try to identify faculty members with an interest in sustainability and encourage it. I try to get them in touch with other sustainability activities on campus. Ten years down the road, I'd love to have the business school in a building that is the top of the line in eco-design—as a showcase for the integration of business and technology for sustainability.

tbt: Would you call yourself an eco-feminist?

Dr. Walck: I'm a feminist and an ecologically minded person, but I wouldn't call myself an eco-feminist. I prefer to disentangle the two perspectives. Eco-feminists often try to conceptualize the earth as feminine or "mother." I appreciate that people going in that direction are contrasting it with a typically male version of the world. My perspective is the environment is a concern for everyone and I want to be as inclusive as possible

tbt: Do you have any suggestions for young



women who are going into the business world?

Dr. Walck: Have a good work ethic, be fair and honest in your dealings with others, be confident in your abilities, ask for help when you need it, and learn how and when to compromise. Businesses talk the diversity talk, but they don't always walk it—look for an organization in which management actually puts diversity into practice. Talk to the women that work there about their experience in the organization. Many women are walking away from organizations today to start their own businesses—this trend will probably grow, and young women need to develop entrepreneurial skills early so they have a better chance of success.

tbt: Do you have any advice for women at MTU?

Dr. Walck: Take advantage of the growing number of women on campus in faculty, staff and executive positions to build your network and find mentors. Work for change, but be patient, too. If you feel isolated in a unit with few women, reach out to women elsewhere on campus. The best thing I ever did my first year at MTU in 1986, when I was the only tenure-track woman in the business school, was to join a reading group of women faculty across campus—the women I met there are still my core group of female colleagues at MTU to this day.

I never knew I was a feminist until...

Tammy R. Worachek

Have you ever experienced sexual harassment and actually told your harasser that you didn't like their actions? If so, did they respect you enough to stop? Some women are not so fortunate in other countries.

I have always considered myself to be equal among others. As a woman who gets along well with men both socially and in the workplace, I have never felt uncomfortable around them—until my studies abroad.

For example, while walking down a street during my studies abroad, I was surprised to have so many men yell, whistle, grunt, oogle, honk their horns, and even physically reach out and touch women as often as they did. Perhaps I sound paranoid, but just imagine letting someone pass you by only to have him or her end up behind you again, and again... and again.

One day as I was walking, I stepped aside several times to allow a man to walk in front of me, only to repeatedly end up behind me. Eventually that same man followed me and a companion onto a bus—and this time he sat directly behind me. Then I realized that the hand that helped itself to firmly

hold my right buttock didn't belong to my traveling companion.

My first reaction to being followed by this man, only to have him eventually grope me, was to reach out and touch him back—in



the nose. Apparently I touched his nose hard enough to break it, at least I assume so after watching his head bounce back and forth off the back of the bus seat. The mess of blood that poured forth from his nose was also a sure tell indication. Because I wasn't prepared for this type of situation, I perhaps inappropriately fell back onto the physical reactions I grew up with.

Sometimes men in other countries often have no fear of marginalizing women. Right now you are probably thinking, "How naive can this writer be to think American men don't do this?" Well, I do have personal experience working in a predominantly male setting. I spent six years working in a high-stress male-dominant workforce. Until one visits a society that isn't as supportive with equal rights as America's is though, it isn't possible to know just how fortunate we are. Feminism has certainly made some differences in this country.

If you plan to travel abroad someday, perhaps you could ask yourself these questions: what would you do if you were placed in my situation; how would you handle yourself? Hopefully your answer will resort to a more sensible response than that of physical force.

Pink Shawl Campaign: Making Change Visible

Kristin L. Arola



Jill and Kristin Arola in their pink shawls at the Spirit of the Harvest Powwow.

Ask anyone who knits, paints, or sews and they'll tell you each piece they make usually holds some significance for them, whether it's a memory of the time and place they made it, or a thought of the person for whom they're giving it to, or certain symbols within the piece that mean something larger. However, I had never fully encountered the power of our creations until participating in the pink shawl dance at the Spirit of the Harvest Powwow at MTU.

Inspired by the Intertribal Council of Michigan and a grant through the Avon Breast Care Fund project, Native women from across the state have begun making pink shawls to raise awareness for breast cancer awareness. Native women are *three times* more likely to die from breast cancer than any other group, and Deb Muller, a Huron Pottawatomi who has been actively involved in the project, says she has had enough.

She thought that having women make pink shawls and then dancing with these shawls during a special designated dance at powwows would help make the disease, its survivors, and its treatment visible. Punkin Shananaquet, another active participant in the state-wide project says the shawls are "meant to raise awareness and create sisterhood among North American women."

Shawls represent the love and warmth that women provide, and by putting the shawl on we are embracing life. When women wrap themselves in the pink shawls we have made with their mothers or sisters or aunts or friends, we are not only symbolizing security through unity, but are also trying to bring attention to women's health. Breast cancer is often very curable if caught early, and the shawls serve to remind women to get in the habit of checking our own breasts, paying attention to our bodies when something doesn't feel right, and scheduling regular mammograms once we reach 40 years of age.

The significance of the pink shawls rests not only in their color, but also in their design. My mother designed both of our shawls, which are made of the same material. They are shiny pink on one side and have a pattern on the other. Appliqued on the shiny pink side of my

shawl are four bears (representing my bear clan) arranged for the four directions. Each bear has a lightning bolt painted on it in the colors for the four directions, white, yellow, red and black. In the middle is a thunderbird, representing power. In describing my shawl to me, my mom said the thunderbird represents a powerful woman who is surrounded by my bear clan ancestors and guides. She also chose the shiny pink fabric because it reminds her of a blanket I had when I was younger that I loved to curl up with. When putting the fringe on my shawl, which I did myself, I realized she was right. Spending evenings with the slippery pink shawl on my lap as I tied colored string to the edge of my shawl reminded me of the comfort and security I always felt as a child when I wrapped up in my shiny pink blanket.

This sense of comfort and individual meaning all women—young, old, breast-cancer survivors, and family members of victims—involved in the pink shawl dance contributed to breast cancer awareness is a powerful thing. The dance and the pink shawls reminded me that when combining individual perspectives and histories to a cause bigger than ourselves, we can not only make visible important issues, but can also provide warmth and comfort to those in need.

Don't Take it So Personally

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than just the essence of a woman. For example, I'm a male feminist. Seems oxymoronic, but only if you operate on stereotypes. When we free ourselves from broad categorization, we will be able to create personal definitions that exist only for ourselves, and then connect with other people based on the similarities between our different contexts. As I've progressed through life, I've come to believe that we live in a society which was founded on a patriarchal social construct which gives the de facto authority in social decisions to the male figure, and that this social construct is misguided and harmful. I believe that as a man, I have the ability to use my de facto status as a platform from which I can affect change in the current system, and work towards a society in which we are all viewed as *humans*, not as classifications within our humanity; a society in which our differences are not saddled with "positive" or "negative" labels. Stereotype or not, sure enough, the world is "ruled" by men, at least politically and socially; and in our effort to create distinctions with which we associate value, we have upset a critical balance between male and female. When man and woman concentrate more on arguing over our petty differences, we cease to work in harmony with each other. The possibility of societal balance dwindles with every accusation, every pointed finger, and every utterance of "you'll never understand."

The malignancy of this problem arises when we see that stereotyping is a vicious and unyielding cycle. For example: the man-hating feminist. The very idea that most men hold to that stereotype is a stereotype in and of itself; as is the idea that most feminists see men as some kind of apocalyptic plague that needs to be exterminated. In my own observations, I've noticed that a lot of women tend to avoid trying to explain feminism to men, and in that same token, many men loathe attempting to explain what they think about feminism to a woman. This mutual dismissal, I believe, is one of the greatest hindrances to progress in the areas of feminism, and in society in general. It is not that we should worry about where one side stands vs. the other. It is the very fact that we have chosen to *create* sides, when there need be none.

We as the sexes, as *humanity*, have failed on a massive level in our perceptions of one another. We have traded the complexities of human interaction for the ease of decision

making that ignorance offers. Yet deep down we yearn for the celebration of individuality, which is why offense is so easily taken in the application of stereotypes. I'll cite a recent example that I witnessed: in the course of a conversation, a woman offered: "Y'know, because men are all assholes." One of the men who overheard her was highly offended. He believed that she may as well have directly insulted *him*, because she did in fact refer to *all* men. However, mathematics has no place in these social interactions. "All" is not all-inclusive. It is indicative of an ignorance which needs to be rectified. The man who takes personal offense at such a comment is guilty of the same level of ignorance as the one who lobbed the accusation. It is the same with a woman who takes offense when a man says "All women are manipulative." To expend the amount of energy it takes to get upset about such a comment is to waste the energy that could have been used asking *why* that assumption was made. I ask you, why have peace and understanding become blacklisted as some kind of misguided hippy idealism? We as a culture, for some reason, have come to think that true harmony is not possible. We are so entrenched in our view of human nature that we have ceased to attempt to change it. It is possible for us to understand each other. It is possible for us to be truly sympathetic. It is possible for us to come together as a culture and to avoid the bitter separation that stems from assumption and ignorance. As men and women, we need to stop taking things so personally and begin analyzing the motives and reasons behind this baffling discord that we suffer. If we each, on an individual level, seek to be cognizant of context, perhaps we can start the revolution one conversation at a time, and begin to work towards true balance.



Mark your calendars for a hufilm Gala Event — the Premiere of Robert Greenwald's new film:

WAL-MART: The High Cost of Low Price

Tuesday, November 15, 8pm

Minerals and Materials Engineering, U115

Admission Free!

Independent filmmaker Robert Greenwald (Outfoxed, Uncovered) and his team have spent months interviewing former employees, manufacturers, and citizens in a full-scale investigation into the practices of the world's largest retail chain. This film promises to bring to light much about the corporation's inner-workings in very personal terms. And Wal-Mart executives are gearing up for a battle. Check out the trailer, movie short, and more information on www.walmartmovie.com.

RESOURCES

Barbara Kettle Gundlach Shelter 337-5623
domestic violence shelter; 24-hour crisis line
Career Counseling 487-2313
Counseling Services 487-2538
Dial HELP 482-4357
*Crisis intervention: a gentle, helpful voice,
24 hours a day, 7 days a week*
Educational Opportunities Office 487-3539
Employee Assistance Program 482-2299
Houghton Community Health Center 483-1860
Keweenaw Pride pride@mtu.edu
*an MTU group for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
Transgendered or Questioning Students, Staff,
Faculty, Community Members, Friends, and Allies*

Legal Services of Northern Michigan 482-3908
Office of Student Affairs 487-2212; 487-2465
Office of Residence Life 487-3404
On-campus emergencies 123
Society of Intellectual Sisters (SIS)
<http://www.sos.mtu.edu/sis/>
*Promoting sisterhood primarily among African-
American women and scholarship among members*
Society of Women Engineers
<http://www.sos.mtu.edu/swe/>
Western UP District Health Department . 482-7382
*AIDS testing, family planning, immunization,
pregnancy testing*

WHAT IS tbt POLICY ?

The TechnoBabe Times is dedicated to the empowerment of women in all aspects of technology.

We want **tbt** to be a place where voices not usually heard or seen on campus or in the community can be seen & heard. We want to be a publication that encourages new and different voices. And so: we solicit thoughtful, reflective, critical writings (or drawings or mixed media pieces or poems or...) that offer us all positive views and smart actions...

If you have any ideas, questions or comments—or wish to advertise in **tbt**—please contact our staff at tbt@mtu.edu. You may also write the list to submit a piece of work or to become part of the **tbt** staff (all girls and boys interested in the cause are welcome!).

THANK YOU to the CCLI for help on this issue.

TBT IS: **staff:** Kristin Arola, Stephanie Boettcher, Anna Cynar, Margot Hutchins, Ariana Jo Jeske, Robyn Miller, Diane Koskela, Kacie Scholl, Jon Soper, Cassie Thiel, Lindsey Worden, Tammy Worachek **president:** Michelle Edith Jarvie **layout:** the committee **faculty advisor:** Anne Frances Wysocki