

MAKING GENDER REALIZATIONS

Jason Probst,
The Daily Evergreen,
Washington State U.

Men and women are from different planets. The sky in each is colored according to how they were raised, what they believe and most of all how they relate to each other and the opposite sex.

It's 10 after one, and I wonder if they'll show. "Just a casual get-together," I'd explained to each of them. "To kick around this post-sensitive men thing." "Whatsis?"

"Post-sensitive men. What we are. Where we're going. Beer, too." I played my trump card.

Men traditionally let logic of the day define what a man should be — without challenging that ideal. Did the sensitive men of the '80s teach us anything? Does a '90s post-sensitive man cry in front of his friends? Must he integrate feminist ideals while preserving his own masculinity? Shall he take out the catcher on an extra-innings suicide squeeze, spikes-first, to ensure victory?

And if he doesn't, is he a wuss or a sportsman? The issue of how men deal with today's gender conundrum had sprung.

We meet in the downstairs portion of Rico's, a dark local tavern with a clientele of mostly college intellectuals, grad students and professors. We pull up some chairs and hide ourselves in an empty corner.

The purpose of the meeting is to reach a common ground without prescribing gender stereotypes. To be comfortable in our masculinity without it being a badge or a tag. In other words, we want to redefine our post-sensitive male image.

Undertaking the deconstruction of maleness as a whole, we need beer, something that represents males past, present and future. We select a pitcher of Hefe Weisen; like us, it's rich, easy to indulge in and you can see right through it.

Jim Froembling, a Washington State U. senior and student body president, sits to my left. To my right is Jack Hamilton, a 28-year-old sociology major. Jack is a 12-year veteran of the Northwest rock scene, a recently trimmed longhair and a dyed-in-the-wool classic conservative with a women's studies minor.

Next to Jack sits Jessie Harris, a 23-year-old senior majoring in history. He's a student senator and an Army veteran. Rounding out the quintet is Randy Jorgensen, 45, an assistant women's studies professor who teaches a masculinity course and serves as assistant director of residence life.

"With a lot of men, the way they've been raised is to be competitive with other guys. If you can be the sensitive guy, you're cool," Randy says, "because the other guys are Neanderthals."

Jessie adds that while many men may come off as sensitive, feeling types, they don't do it out of egalitarianism but as a way of getting along. Being branded sexist is the scarlet letter in the '90s and is the fastest way to inhibit male-female communication.

"It's kind of a challenge just to change my girlfriend's oil in the car," Jessie says. "I mean, the implications of me changing her oil is that she can't do it for herself."

"It becomes a political act," I agree, wondering how Donna Reed would look on a creeper. Ole Donna, sliding out from underneath the Packard after a 12-point lube job, getting up just in time to rescue a pie from the oven.

Jessie continues, "My mom was working, had eight kids. Is she going to get in a fight for the right to change a tire? She's fight-

Roles are constantly changing. Women are standing on their own, and men are trying to keep their footing.

Conflicting agendas and converse views will

ing for the right to be recognized and respected, not to change tires."

Jack touches on something important and often overlooked: Working-class women and men have little in common with the theories that get considerable podium time in college classrooms and in academic writings.

"I come from a real blue-collar background, too. Ninety-nine percent of the [women's studies] readings I was assigned had nothing at all to do with my mother," Jack says.

The solution to dealing with the opposite sex is learning about our varied agendas and opinions. Male-female friendship remains a renegotiation of terms between pursuer and pursuee. Female friends give men access to insight from The Other Side and vice-versa. All of us agree that female friends are valuable once pressure of the sexual element is eliminated. Adding a sexual ingredient to a relationship is where men and women begin misunderstanding one another.

"The only trend I've noticed over the past 10 years is we don't fight [feminism]. We don't criticize it," Jack explains. "We just excuse ourselves from the table and go find something else to do."

Jim adds, "Our generation has become cynical and inactive. We'd rather watch a rerun of *Gilligan's Island* than *Crossfire*."

We order another pitcher of beer as I ask how men are supposed to relate to women in a way that benefits both. Randy compares the male role of the '90s to an engine being taken apart. "Maybe we're in the process of putting [the engine] together again," he says. "It may go back the same way — maybe men having more involvement with the family and women getting paid equally at work. But in the process of doing it, we'll understand it a lot better."

A blonde wearing cut-off jeans passes by the table. Appropriately cued, we turn to a more specific subject: sex.

We agree that the post-sensitive climate leaves the '90s man with a choice of two personas: The Bastard and The Great Guy — it's the Sean Penn/Ralph Macchio split.

The post-sensitive man, regardless of his sensibilities, secretly aspires to be In Charge. Being In Charge means never having to say he's sorry. Being In Charge means he's calling the shots. Being In Charge will eventually cause ulcers, but who cares? He's still In Charge.

He treats everybody like the underling penguins they are, and the job gets done. Afterward, he treats them to cocktails and reluctantly admits that he doesn't like being The Bastard, but that he's got a job to do.

Jack leans forward, with one paw wrapped around his mug, the other pushed flat on the table. "To be real honest, natural selection works like this: The women go out, and the bitches stay home."

That is, females who are supportive of the things that make men are the "women." Females who reject Sega, *Monday Night Football* and beer are the "bitches," those who stay home and nag.

Men and women who admit and allow differences between genders help both sides to understand each other. Maybe when men and women can expect that from one another, they will have arrived, together.

Amen.

always exist, and like it or not, there is little any of us can do to ensure world peace or smooth communication between men and women. It's a crazy world. What we learned from our interviews with friends

and colleagues can be summed up this way: Men are confused. Women are confused. Both are to blame for confusing each other. Any questions?

The new feminists. My younger brother seems to have as good a definition as anyone. "It's like... chicks who are feminists... but who still want to, you know, mess around with dudes. Right?"

Keeping true to the '90s tradition of the just-add-water instant genre, this is the newest faction of feminism to emerge from a traditionally male-centered society. When I asked my roommate if he knew anything about this sound-bite-turned-interest-group, he said he'd read a "Do-Me Feminism" article and found it to be "really hot." The most I could glean from the whole thing was that Drew Barrymore had something to do with it.

We meet at a café just outside the U. of Illinois campus. The high-octane coffee and background jazz have fueled many a long night and provoked many good conversations.

We push together two tables, and I make introductions: Chantelle Allen, a junior sociology major researching the depiction of women in the media; Kim Murphy, a recent graduate in political science; Danielle Landron, a junior engineering student; and Sharon Farlow, a junior journalism major. I buy everyone a round of water — with the Midwest humidity, hot caffeine is out of the question — and we set out to determine the status of feminism in the '90s.

We start by trying to come up with a better definition — thanks, bro, but no thanks — but we can't settle on just one. So we begin defining what feminism isn't.

Feminists aren't all "feminazis," as the Rush Limbaughs of the world would have people believe. And they're not all lesbians, Chantelle

points out.

"Just because you want women to develop to their optimum level doesn't make you a lesbian," Chantelle says. "I try to stay away from the term feminist altogether. It doesn't matter who I love sexually. I'm still a woman, and I want to be treated equally."

Still, sexuality can't be ignored. "You make me wanna shoop," Salt 'n Pepa unabashedly tell hot men, announcing a new female eroticism.

"Women are getting more into sex and their bodies," Danielle says. "It's great that women are feeling more comfortable in their sex lives — you know, like saying, 'I like it when you touch me there.'"

But for all the strides women make in overcoming the sexual inhibitions, there are still hurdles — pregnancy, diseases — that keep them from total sexual freedom and control.

"Doing it, with a capital 'I,' alters a relationship irrevocably," Kim says. There's a difference between admitting you enjoy sex and being defined by it. Enter the so-called "Do-Me Feminist." The June 1993 *Details* cover features Drew Barrymore on her back, with her legs up in a "V." "Generation Sex," the cover line reads, with the "Sex" dipping between her legs.

"I think she's being what a man perceives a woman to be," Chantelle says.

"Supposedly she has control of her sexuality, but all she's done is make her sexuality into a marketable product," Kim adds. "I think anti-feminism means that you define yourself in relation to a man."

But, Danielle says, you can be a feminist and still want to live the "traditional" female role.

Danielle, who was raised by a single mother, grew up career-oriented. Marriage, maybe. But kids, no way.

Kelly McEvers,
The Daily Illini,
U. of Illinois

"I got to college and started going into the career shit. Then I fell in love, and I decided that I do want to be married, that I do want to have kids. I want to have a great family, and I want to do a kind of job where I can take care of my family, too. My friends tell me I'm selling myself short. But this is what will make me feel good."

But society is hung up on masculine and feminine roles. Shoulds outweigh wants.

"Just because I am a woman, it doesn't mean I don't like drinking beer and hanging out," Sharon says. "Why do specific roles have to be attached to these activities?"

Beyond the bar scene and into the classroom, men and women still are stuck in roles.

Danielle, whose engineering program is 80 percent male, says that people in her high school were surprised at her high SAT math scores and that she had won a science internship over male applicants.

"They always say, 'She got it because she's a woman, and they needed a token woman, or token minority,' instead of saying you got it because you were the best. Especially in a field like engineering," Kim says.

This feeling of implied inadequacy creeps into women's conversations, even among each other.

"[Women] try to one better each other," Sharon says. "Everything from 'What size shoe do you wear?' to 'How much did you pay?' My male friends never do that."

Kim agrees. "When I'm with my male friends, we do the barroom conversation. There's no real point. We're just saying funny things."

But conversations change when they turn to male-female relationships.

"Female friends only talk about finding a date, having a date, who's my date, who's her date and could that boy be my date," Sharon says. "Men ask what it's like to be a woman — what do women want from men?"

Men and women are on equal plateaus, worlds apart. We speak different languages — see the same things but react differently.

Feminism doesn't have to be a big political movement, Chantelle concludes. The issue is out there. Now it's up to individuals. "We have to work on interpersonal relationships, on internal change," she says.

And it's not just about women, Kim says.

"It is about both women and men embracing problems together."

Kim Atkinson from The Daily Evergreen contributed to this report.



PHOTOS BY TOM HARRIS