

FEMINISM AND ACCEPTED ABUSE:
WAS THIS THE INTENT OF THE MOVEMENT?

BY Timothy J. Muise

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Growing up in the 1970's I was exposed to the feminist movement on a daily basis. Fair wages, equal rights, gender acceptance and abolishment of second-class citizenship all seemed legitimate causes to me. I was on board as most of the females in my life were compassionate and nurturing people who I felt deserved kind treatment. I admit I did not know much about Gloria Steinem, but I was all for respecting women.

Gloucester, Massachusetts in the 1970's was certainly not the bastion of fair treatment for women. Our female "sweat shops" were fish processing plants where our mothers stood on an assembly line like conveyor belt packing fish. Much tougher than it sounds, but it did actually pay a decent wage. We also had our fair share of waitresses, chamber maids and school teachers. I do not remember too many professional type females in the circles I traveled. It is more likely than not that I was afforded a pretty unfair view of the role of the woman in society, but I did develop a respect for their gender and an affinity for their company.

As the larger battles for gender equality were being won at the national level it became more common to find women in roles that were many times thought to be just for men. College presidents, company CEO's and high ranking politicians were women. I saw women "fishermen" in my hometown, and one, Linda Greenlaw, was the largest money making fishing captain in the city one year. What was most shocking to me was the amount of women entering the field of law enforcement. My lifestyle at the time instilled in me little respect for cops as I thought they made their living off the misery of the downtrodden, but I felt that maybe the compassion of the women could improve the profession. Boy was I wrong!

Today a women in law enforcement can be just as sadistic as the men in that position, and it is incredible that society is no longer shocked by this. I can remember when the first few high profile women-in-law-enforcement scandals broke people were a bit taken aback, as society viewed women as a bit more ethical and honest than the power brokering men. When women supervisors signed off on the beating of Rodney King I knew the ladies had broken a gender barrier in a very negative way. When Condoleezza Rice jumped on board the "Weapons of Mass Destruction" bandwagon I think the final nail was driven into the coffin of the theory that female compassion could outweigh the spiral into abuse that positions of power often bring. These days we hardly bat an eye when a woman is involved in an abuse scandal. Female teachers seduce adolescents in their charge and society makes jokes about it. Female soldiers place electrical diodes on the testicles of a prisoner, arm in arm with their male counterparts, and the prisoner is the only one who is "shocked". No outrage. No public debate about gender equality. Just good old generic abuse delivered by a woman. Society now accepts this fallen form of equality as the norm. I cannot imagine this is what the feminist movement was looking for in my youth.

Today's prison system is full of women guards, supervisors and high ranking administrators. They are as abusive as their male counterparts, and sometimes more so. Massachusetts had a female Commissioner of Correction, Kathleen Dennehy, who signed off on crooked investigations into purported prisoner suicides. Many in the reform movement believe some of these suicides were actually homicides committed by prison guards. They also had a female Superintendent, Kelly Ryan, who signed off on crooked investigation reports concerning the rape of a female prisoner in her charge. No public outrage, not even after the United States District Court found her liable when the

prisoner sued her. In fact she was promoted and now runs a male prison with over 1300 prisoners. Outrageous! Who could have guessed that the female jailer could turn into the same shell of a human that her male counterparts have been for over 200 years in American corrections? Under the hood of the executioner may well be a salon coifed head wearing lip stick and eye liner.

When did we, as a society, become anesthetized to women as abusers? Is this an effect of the cause that abuse is becoming more and more accepted as a whole, or is it an even more glaring depiction of how this value depleted time in our history is manifesting in more and more classes of the "less than"? The immigrant is "less than". The Muslim is "less than". The prisoner is "less than". When you make a class of humans less than another class you erode the social fabric. You risk Hitler's ovens and you create female Heinrich Himmlers and Adolf Eichmans. I am forced to live with, for the next few years, some of the department of corrections female Himmlers and Eichmans, but that does not mean I will not tell their tragic tale to all who will listen.

"You can judge the level of any civilisation by how they treat their prisoners.", said Federov Dostoevsky. In Massachusetts were are on the steep decline. Women now play an integral role in that rapid decline and, I am sad to say, have joined the ranks of those that Samuel Clemons so eloquently described when he said: "If you want to see the scum of the earth and the dregs of humanity go down to your local prison and watch the changing of the guard." More and more of these dregs are of what was once known as the "fairer" sex. No longer. Was this the intent of the feminist movement???

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