Women’s Empowerment Campaigns May Be Doing More Harm than Good in the Workplace

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Women’s Empowerment Campaigns

• #metoo
• Time’s Up
• Off the Sidelines
• #killallmen
• #becausepatriarchy
• #allmen-aretrash

Many women’s campaigns seek to combat males’ hostile behavior including domestic abuse, sexual harassment, sexual and nonsexual violence, and assault.
A Progression

• Such movements have become increasingly hostile to men. From
  • Pro-female → Anti-male

• In attempts to lift females, American society has diminished males.
The Prevailing Narrative of Masculinity Voiced Today

• Men are strongly prejudiced against women, entitled, privileged, corrupt, damaged, malevolent, dysfunctional, and unskilled when it comes to relationships and dealing with their emotions. Goodwin (2018) indicated that it is difficult to determine any constructive role for men, beyond apologetic retweeters of feminist memes.

• A male cannot express an opinion that is contrary to this pervasive narrative without being labelled a bigot, xenophobe, or worse. And even when they are not challenging women’s rights, men’s opinions are worth less because they are considered oppressors.
Increasing Vitriolic Attacks

• Boys are broken
• Men need deprogramming
• Masculinity is fundamentally toxic
• Men, who needs them? Don’t need to be alive anymore for the world to continue
• Men have made a mess of society
• “Perhaps we should slap a warning label on penises across the land. WARNING: OPERATING THIS INSTRUMENT CAN BE DANGEROUS TO YOUR AND OTHERS’ HEALTH”

Emily McCombs ☑️ @msEmily

New Year’s resolutions:
1. Cultivate female friendships
2. Band together to kill all men
Malebashing

• “Women Rule. Men Drool.”
• “Dead Men Don’t Rape”
• “So many men. So little ammunition.”
• “What do you call a man with half a brain? Gifted.”
• Men and Other Reptiles
• 101 Reasons Why a Cat Is Better Than a Man
• Are Men Necessary?
• The End of Men: And the Rise of Women
• What Do We Need Men For?
• Father Knows Best → The Simpsons
• APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men (9/2018)--Traditional Masculinity Is Harmful
The Law of Unintended Consequences

• The perverse unanticipated effects of policies and actions. It reminds us all to consider a program’s positive or negative “side effects,” but also further warns that a program’s primary impact may be to perversely impede or undo its intended purpose.

• Women’s empowerment campaigns, rather than advancing the cause of women in the workplace, may actually be impeding their progress.
Women’s Empowerment Campaigns May Have Unintended Negative Consequences

• Women’s empowerment campaigns that increasingly devalue males may result in unintended deleterious consequences for females. One such consequence is psychological reactance.

• Most people don’t like to be told what to do, especially if they feel it limits their freedom of choice.
Psychological Reactance and Associated Terms

• Behavioral directives (messages) that elicit perceived threats to freedom cause people to experience anger and negative thoughts which then arouses a negative motivational state (psychological reactance) aimed to restore the freedom perceived to be threatened. Attempts to persuade/influence people to do something often have the opposite effect (a “boomerang” effects).

• Psychological reactance also explains why threatened or eliminated freedoms seem more attractive (“forbidden fruit” effects; Adam and Eve). Objects or behaviors perceived to be off limits for certain audiences are more attractive to audience members to whom the restriction applies (“Romeo and Juliet” effects). The emergence of independence and autonomy in children around the age of 2 explains why reactance becomes common at this stage of life (“terrible twos”).
Reactance …

• Oppositional behavior in others is predictable when an effort is made to control/persuade/influence others such that they see that they have limited choices.

• Push hard enough against peoples’ freedoms and they will push back.
Poll: Clinton's approval rating up in wake of impeachment

December 20, 1998
Web posted at: 10:48 p.m. EST (0348 GMT)

(AllPolitics, December 20) -- In the wake of the House of Representatives' approval of two articles of impeachment, Bill Clinton's approval rating has jumped 10 points to 73 percent, the latest CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll shows.

That's not only an all-time high for Clinton, it also beats the highest approval rating President Ronald Reagan ever had.

At the same time, the number of Americans with an unfavorable view of the Republican Party has jumped 10 points, less than a third of the country now has a favorable view of the GOP.
Attributes of Psychological Reactance

• Groups can exhibit reactance, not just individuals, leading to group resistance.

• Vicarious reactance: reactance can be aroused by the mere observance of a threat to another’s freedom, without the perception of one’s own freedom being potentially directly threatened (President Bill Clinton).

• Men resist external influences more than women. Thus, it is not surprising that research supports the notion that men are more reactant than women.

• Increased levels of reactance are aroused when forceful, dogmatic, controlling, explicit (threatening), fearful, and threat-to-choice language, generally defined as the direction and degree of distance from neutrality conveyed by the message source. Authoritative directives create reactance.
Attributes of Psychological Reactance... cont’d

• **Fear appeal messages** are high pressure social influence attempts that tend to arouse psychological reactance.

• While comments against offensive behavior and injustice are seen as legitimate and vital for social progress, when individuals are disparaged by *thousands of strangers online* such behavior may be seen as bullying and lead to greater sympathy for the offender and increased reactance.

• Individuals with relatively **higher scores in aggressiveness** showed a boomerang effect of anti-violence messages since they actually increased their favorability of attitudes towards violence.
Interventions on college campuses to reduce sexual violence and aggression often fail with men at high risk for sexual aggression who are a key target of such interventions because such programs are likely to generate “hostility reactance.”

As members of a highly individualistic society (the US is the most individualistic culture in the world), Americans do not like to be told what to do or how to feel. When others try to influence their behaviors or opinions, Americans often respond with psychological reactance. Reactance is not as prominent in more collectivist cultures.
Factors Leading to Increased Levels of Reactance

• In summary, many of these messages emanating from women’s empowerment movements are directed at men for whom reactance is aroused more easily than for women and many of these communications use strong, explicit language in the hopes of changing men’s antisocial behavior leading to push back from males in the form of psychological reactance and boomerang and forbidden fruit effects.

• Moreover, these messages are being communicated in individualistic cultures such as the U.S. where attacks against individuals are seen as particularly intolerable. Indeed, just watching the multitude of acerbic messages of rage directed at men can lead to increased levels of reactance which will often influence them to adopt positions opposite those intended by the message.
Consequences of Reactance

• Reactance leads to individuals devaluing the actions being promoted, increasing their *positive affect* toward the actions being discouraged, refusing to submit to pressure, and expressing aggression or hostility toward the source of the message.
• Increased gender segregation and sex partition
• Decreased mentoring for females
• Increased sexual harassment training and backlash from males
  • male participants who completed training were significantly less likely to view coercion of a subordinate as sexual harassment than were nonparticipating males or females, less willing to report sexual harassment, and more likely to blame the victim.
  • other investigations indicate that participants who come into the training with more of a tendency to harass showed greater acceptance of harassment after the program.
  • attitudes toward sexual harassment and sexual harassment incidence seem to be unaffected by these trainings.
• Women’s health care negatively impacted. Male bystanders may avoid performing CPR on women because they fear hurting them, or even being accused of sexual assault. Respondents expressed concern that touching a woman’s chest could be construed as assault or unwanted sexual touching.
Mitigating Reactance: Diminishing Anger and Negative Affect

Preventing reactance is about minimizing perceptions of freedom threats which serve as the motivational catalyst for resistance to another party’s persuasive intent.

- **Choice-enhancing postscripts.** (Remind targets of their freedom to choose after being exposed to a persuasive message.)
- **Narratives.** (Rather than use arguments and evidence use stories as a means of influence. Research on narratives indicates that stories may be more effective than logical arguments in changing beliefs and attitudes.)
- **Empathy/perspective taking.** (How they would have felt and thought if they were in the communicator’s position?)
Mitigating Reactance: Diminishing Anger and Negative Affect (cont’d)

Preventing reactance is about minimizing perceptions of freedom threats which serve as the motivational catalyst for resistance to another party’s persuasive intent.

• **Language intensity.** ("Do not write on these walls under no circumstances" vs. “Please do not write on these walls.”)

• **Become a tempered radical.** (Tone down radicalism by presenting beliefs and ideas in ways that are less shocking and more appealing to mainstream audiences.)
Tempered radicalism ...

• Researchers Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully have found that to advance new and drastic ideas, it may be helpful to first be an extremist and then become a tempered radical by presenting a bold vision in ways that are less outrageous and more likely to engage majority audiences.

• Radical thinking is often necessary to put an original stake in the ground. But once the idea is planted, what is needed is a toned-down approach to reach a wider audience—a tempered radical.