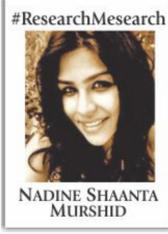


The case for feminist men



#ResearchMesearch
NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

I was at a four-person *adda* a couple of weeks ago where I was the only woman. One of the three men pretended I wasn't there about 98 percent of the time. He never made eye contact with me. When he spoke, which was a lot of the time, he looked at the other men in the group. When I spoke, he looked at his feet. I wondered whether it was because he was a misogynist, it's quite possible that that's what it was, as exemplified by the fact that he basically gave me little room to speak, and to him it was the most normal thing to do. Or, if I were to be gracious, I could put it as: he was awkward. Perhaps, this person was not intentionally dismissive of my—a woman's—presence, but his exposure to women has been limited which precluded him from developing social skills to converse with women. This, in turn, is perhaps related to the kind of school that he attended and the kind of gender roles that was modelled to him as he was growing up. But, no matter what the cause, this episode of dismissal highlights the importance of *creating or making space* for oppressed groups. And, this applies to all situations that involve power structures. White people must make space for POC, men must make space for women, Bengalis must make space for marginalised ethnic groups, those in power must make space for those who are not, and then fight for them, without needing to be at the centre of the fight, without the promise of credit. That men get away with ignoring the presence of another person, possibly because she's a woman,

exemplifies why some men endorse patriarchy, or are themselves victims of this vicious system unwittingly. There's institutional and personal support for this. Patriarchy gives men the permission to control women through laws (such as those that relate to women's bodies like abortion) and relationships in which they hold power over women and other men just by virtue of being a particular brand of "man." But, being "that" man is problematic, even harmful, for men. Here are some reasons: One: Patriarchal norms dictate that men assume the role of breadwinner, provider, and protector, like it or not (while women tend to the family, run the household, bear and rear children). Two: Such norms prescribe a certain kind of masculinity that all men are encouraged to perform, a kind of masculinity that disallow boys and men from expressing emotions, that makes boys and men "weak" if they do. Harmful phrases like "boys don't cry" are used instead of affection, comfort, and/or protection, as imagined sex differences are used to create real differences in how boys and girls think about achievement, competition, emotions, and connection. It is, then, not a coincidence that men often don't know how to forge real connections with other people; why competition and notions of winning taint male friendships; why men are taught to think of themselves as self-reliant, independent, strong. Three: Patriarchy dictates men to perform manliness—often by denigrating femininity, others on the gender spectrum, and other forms of masculinity, as in anything that doesn't fit the idea of masculinity—as if by prioritising manliness, men's status can increase. This focus on acquiring status result in men



"Look at how boys' toys include bigger and more realistic guns and ammunition with which they presumably protect girls' Barbie's with thin waists and 'perfect' hair."

posturing masculinity by "exuding (real or perceived) power"—for example, by buying big cars, or by telling people how much money they make, or how resourceful and moneyed their families are at the expense of forming meaningful relationships and talking about how they feel. This kind of posturing and competition among men, for resources, property, and women allow low comments to be downplayed as "locker room talk." Four: Patriarchy dictates that men have to garner power in order to be "men." This is why women's anatomical parts often become *galis* or swear words, and if men don't perform masculinity they are

"reduced" to female reproductive anatomy. As if being a vagina, through which entire human beings literally emerge, is synonymous with being weak. Five: In other words, patriarchy creates the need for men to be powerful. Men get the message that power can buy them anything and everything. So deep is that need that they do so by any means, including by denigrating other human beings. Six: This kind of masculinity prioritises certain behavioural traits and states over others, which means some (or many) men will have to act and pretend to be a certain masculine way even if they don't quite fit the profile of the man that society wants

them to be. Masculinity is then extremely toxic for men. Seven: Media reinforces toxic masculinity. Look at how Batman went from being a regular, even thin man to a wall of muscles. Look at how toys have become gendered over time. Look at how boys' toys include bigger and more realistic guns and ammunition with which they presumably protect girls' Barbie's with thin waists and "perfect" hair. Eight: Toxic masculinity makes it okay for men to marginalise and subjugate other men who don't subscribe to rigid ideas about masculinity, LGBTQ populations, women, other ethnic and religious minority groups. It makes them

violent towards these groups, it makes them justify the use of violence—it's the manly thing to do, even when they do it to posture strength, power, and status; even if they don't actually want to. And, if they're not directly involved in violent acts, this kind of toxic masculinity allows them to look the other way when such acts take place. Nine: It is, then, not surprising that this kind of toxic masculinity leads to mental health problems, higher odds of engaging in risky behaviours such as substance abuse and risky sex that increase their odds of contracting HIV/AIDS, and use of violence, all of which stems from the need to display strength and disregard for danger, and disengagement from "feminine" acts like self-care. In sum, toxic masculinity has created fragile masculinity—masculinity that is threatened by almost anything, from women's participation in the labour market to perceived slights, which in turn leads to a sense of insecurity that turns into anger, which then finds expression in violence. So, how do we fix this? By disassembling structures that maintain toxic masculinity, by showing men how it poisons their lives, and the lives of people they claim to love in the rare occasion that they are able to admit to having emotions. We address this by making it okay for men to cry, for boys to play with dolls, by creating spaces in which men can talk to each other and everyone else about their emotions without being shamed for it, by making it such that if men are told that they are feminine they say thank you, they feel appreciated, they express their feelings, and they pay it forward. Nadine Shaanta Murshid is Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University at Buffalo, State University of New York.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Why Stephen Bannon had to go



ELIZABETH DREW

In many, if not most, US administrations, some figure emerges who convinces the president couldn't function without him (it's yet to be a her). The indispensable aide is, indeed, one of the most well-worn tropes of the modern presidency. Karl Rove was "Bush's Brain"; Harry Hopkins held Franklin Delano Roosevelt's prolific White House team together; Bill Moyers appeared on a magazine cover as "Johnson's Good Angel." Without such a figure, the story inevitably goes, the administration would be a mess, if not a disaster. As often as not, the trope is invented or encouraged by the particular indispensable figure. Journalists usually fall for the story, regardless of how well-founded it is: it clarifies everything, and it gives them something to write about. The indispensable aide is only too happy to reveal some dramatic story about how he saved the day, devised some particularly ingenious idea, or prevented some terrible mistake. But, as often as not, the soi-disant crucial figure oversteps. In the Reagan White House, Don Regan, who succeeded James Baker as Chief of Staff, fancied himself the prime minister: he inserted himself into photos of Reagan with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and made the fatal mistake of hanging up on Nancy Reagan, who was dedicated to looking after her Ronny. Regan was soon out. Presidents themselves aren't particularly fond of reading how some super-smart aide saved their bacon. All presidents have healthy

egos—if others are so smart, why aren't they president? The wise president-elect identifies a peacock and avoids the species from the start, or knows how to keep its feathers in check. Barack Obama was plenty pleased with himself, with reason, but such was his dignity that no super-aide emerged during his presidency. It didn't occur to his advisers to try to outshine him. Stephen Bannon wasn't particularly wise as a White House aide—he couldn't contain his inner peacock—and Donald Trump's ego is

future needed their own victims, be they Mexican immigrants or billionaire bankers. A wall—phantasmagorical or not—would keep out the "bad people" Mexico was "sending us." As it happened, of all the people around Trump, Bannon most matched these views. A person like Bannon, who presents himself as a learned figure and confirms one's own brilliance, is a person one wants to have close by. Trump is essentially a "whatever works" kind of guy. Once elected, he brought in

the millions he had attained from a stint at Goldman Sachs and through a fortunate investment in the TV comedy "Seinfeld." He also flourished with backing from the billionaire Mercer family. The Mercers, who made their fortune through the high-tech genius of patriarch Robert Mercer and a hedge fund he led, fund Breitbart News, a far-right website formerly edited by Bannon that promotes ultra-nationalism and white supremacy, with a whiff of anti-Semitism. Bannon's ostensibly radical views were dressed up in a fancy set of principles embroidered with name drops of far-out thinkers. In trade and immigration, for example, Bannon's acquired philosophy aligned with Trump's political opportunism (Trump's more liberal, often Democrat-backing former self is another story). It was a mistake to see Bannon as Pygmalion to Trump's Galatea, or, as some did, as the Trump White House's Rasputin. Bannon reinforced the nationalist inclination that led Trump to overrule his daughter Ivanka and his economic advisers by withdrawing from the Paris climate agreement. And Bannon intruded on foreign policy by getting himself put on the National Security Council for a while, until two of the generals in Trump's administration, namely National Security Adviser H R McMaster and John Kelly (now the chief of staff), got him removed. (Bannon was believed to be behind the recent push to force out McMaster, mainly by suggesting he's "anti-Israel.") But Bannon's role as genius-without-portfolio—in which Trump indulged him, until Kelly arrived and clarified chains of command—was his undoing. Without any defined responsibilities, he intruded where he wished and ended up with a lot of enemies. He had plenty of time to fight internal battles by feeding reporters stories about his White

House rivals, though he would switch someone (for example, former Chief of Staff Reince Priebus) from rival to friend, as convenient. Bannon was a troublemaker as much as a policymaker—and the two roles didn't mesh. Trump also began to see Bannon as a "leaker." And Trump's White House is all too leaky: many who work there let reporters know that they have, at best, mixed feelings about working for Trump, but believe it the better part of valour to stay and protect the country from his leadership. Bannon's braggadocio took him to the most dangerous terrain on which to confront Trump: the president's obsession with his election victory. The ambiguity of winning the Electoral College vote (not, as he has falsely claimed, by the greatest margin since Reagan) but losing the popular vote by nearly three million votes, dogs Trump. That's why he invented millions of "illegal" voters and had maps printed showing the states he won in red, covering most of the territory of the United States, even suggesting to at least one reporter that his newspaper run the map on the paper's front page. Suggestions by Bannon that he played a major role in Trump's election victory were poisonous to the relationship between the two men. And so this White House misfit finally had to go. Now that Bannon is gone, however, he will hurl missives from his new-old perch at Breitbart, to which he returned the same day as his announced departure. And Trump will still be Trump. Elizabeth Drew is a regular contributor to The New York Review of Books and the author, most recently, of Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2017. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)



PHOTO: AFP

particularly fragile. Both are or were misfits in their roles. Trump had spent his business life surrounded by family and flunkies: no stockholders or vice chairmen with their own ambitions. The two men were a mismatch made in White House hell. As a candidate, Trump went with his instincts, and his instinct in the 2016 presidential race was that blue-collar workers and others who feared for their economic

billionaires to populate his cabinet, and so far seems to have gotten away with telling his supporters that really rich people are needed to run the country. Bannon, on the other hand, wrapped himself in what might be loosely termed a philosophy, which consisted of a nihilistic anger toward any "establishment." But his was faux populism: while politically Bannon championed blue-collar workers, he lived on

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Ennui indicators
- 6 Instructive
- 11 Improvised
- 12 Earthy pigment
- 13 Eucalyptus eater
- 14 Airborne honkers
- 15 Automotive buy
- 17 Aesthete's concern
- 18 Altar site
- 20 Instrument quality
- 22 Illuminated
- 23 Espresso maker
- 26 One of the Barrymores
- 28 Oscar hopeful
- 29 "oh, puh-leeze" reaction
- 31 Eggs Benedict need
- 32 Outside of a gyro
- 33 Agent from DC
- 34 Espy
- 36 Error
- 38 African capital
- 40 Orders of the court
- 43 Only veep from Maryland
- 44 lbs's cousin
- 45 Iron, e.g.
- 46 In sorry shape

DOWN

- 1 Ox of Asia
- 2 Excitement
- 3 "Oh, why bother?"
- 4 "And that's the truth!"
- 5 Operation reminder
- 6 Unsharing type
- 7 Of the deep
- 8 "In a hurry, are we?"
- 9 Evaluate
- 10 Underground deposits
- 16 Airport abbr.
- 18 Out of the wind
- 19 Understanding feeling
- 21 Uttered
- 23 Inky smear
- 24 Adult polliwog
- 25 Arsenal contents
- 27 Ethiopia neighbour
- 30 Audio problem
- 33 Ironworker's place
- 34 Ensnaring scheme
- 35 Attendant
- 37 Is in the red
- 39 Athena's symbol
- 41 One of the Kennedy's
- 42 Oinker's spot

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

LOBE STOLID
 TRAS TOPEKA
 SALT APEMEN
 ALLERGEN
 JEB RUBES
 NAOMI SPARE
 ELI LIT
 MENDS HOLES
 OCTET APP
 GORGEOUS
 BOURNE RILE
 UNSEEN ANNA
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