

Scene on Radio

The End of Male Supremacy? (MEN, Part 12)

<http://www.sceneonradio.org/episode-58-the-end-of-male-supremacy-men-part-12/>

Celeste Headlee: So, this is it. I feel like people are gonna say, is that all?

John Biewen: I know. We know, right? We could just change the name of the podcast to MEN and go right on, doing hundreds of episodes on sexism, patriarchy, the damage done by bad masculinity.

Celeste Headlee: And I suspect that some listeners would enjoy that. We've gotten a lot of positive comments from you, and some of course challenging us to do things or say things differently.

John Biewen: Including the gentleman on Facebook who basically called me a sissy. But yeah, we've loved hearing from you all, through reviews, emails, and social media.

Celeste Headlee: Many of you kept the conversation going on Twitter. After the episode about the scientific battle over gender, Shanna tweeted: "Episode 3 ... is so infuriating that I needed to take a break to get through it, but I couldn't be happier that they dove into this topic. So glad this show exists."

John Biewen: After Part 4, our Feminism in Black and White episode, Ursula tweeted: “None of us have any excuse – if we ever did – for continuing to misuse the term intersectionality.”

Celeste Headlee: We’ve heard from women’s studies professors telling us they’re using MEN episodes in their classes. And Wesley, a university career counselor, tweeted, quote: “I am weaving these discussions and points into my counseling sessions with young men. It has really planted a few seeds!”

John Biewen: Other folks have chided us, mostly gently, for things that we haven’t covered, or covered enough. It took us ‘til late in the series to give more than a nod to gender non-binary folks. Guilty, but we always knew we were going there. A listener wrote suggesting we do an episode on the indigenous perspective on gender, which we just mentioned a time or two but didn’t delve into. Another man suggested we talk about penis size as a revealing point of sensitivity for men.

Celeste Headlee: I might have been absent for that episode, by choice. Also, though we talked about homophobia, we didn’t hear directly from gay men about their relationship to masculinity, except from a trans gay man, Melvin, in Part 9.

John Biewen: We also chose to focus mostly on Western and ultimately American culture. We were clear about that. There’s a whole world out there of stories about patriarchy and the damage it does across the globe.

Celeste Headlee: All of these suggestions are worthy, and anyone else doing a 12-part series on a topic as massive as patriarchy would have made other choices about what to do with those dozen episodes. But John, we called the series *MEN*, and the focus we kept coming back to was patriarchy *as constructed by* people who look like you – cisgender, heterosexual men, and in our Western culture, white men.

John Biewen: That’s right. Much like our previous series, *Seeing White*, in which we turned the lens on white people and whiteness. So much reporting and writing about “gender issues” in our society looks at the experience of women and LGBTQ people, and how people in those marginalized groups are faring *in the face of* sexism and the other isms that come with patriarchy.

Celeste Headlee: And there’s nothing wrong with any of that reporting. But there’s plenty of it. So for this, it was important to put the camera in selfie mode and take a good hard look at men’s role in misogyny.

John Biewen: Because we’re the source of it. We are the problem.

Celeste Headlee: The *primary* problem. Because another thing we’ve come back to again and again is that patriarchy is systemic, it’s the water we all swim in – the water we *learned* to swim in. So we’re all trained to perpetuate it, and a lot of us do so in various ways, whatever our gender.

[MUSIC]

John Biewen: With that, welcome to the finale of *Scene on Radio*, Season Three. Part 12 of our series, MEN. I'm John Biewen.

Celeste Headlee: I'm Celeste Headlee. If you're just finding us, please go back and listen, starting at Part One. All of this season we've taken, I think, an illuminating, troubling, and often gripping journey into male dominance – how we got it and how it works.

John Biewen: In this episode, we're gonna step back and try to look at where we are as a society in the long struggle for gender equality, and how we can push ahead. Before we get to that, though, let's take a couple of minutes to review. Celeste, do you have a favorite takeaway – something you find yourself telling friends when you talk about this project?

Celeste Headlee: Yeah it's definitely the wasted time and energy and money and ideas. The massive, unnecessary waste. Century after century of women being kept in a box by sexism, not allowed to develop their talents or live out their dreams, not allowed to contribute. What ideas have we never heard and what innovations were never made? It's infuriating to me. How about you? What stands out?

John Biewen: After our *Seeing White* series, in the previous season, I found myself using the word “clarifying,” to describe what the project had meant for me personally. That's the best word I've got for this journey, too. There's a way in which you think you know things, having been exposed to social critiques and some history and feminist thinking. But, by asking these

kinda more precise questions, as we've done together – questions like, How did this actually go down? When did patriarchy start, and how, and why? 'Oh, so "the cave man" having bigger muscles than the cave woman is not the answer to that question....'

Celeste Headlee: Right. 'Cuz she had pretty darn big muscles. There's also the nature-nurture question that we dealt with, right? We found there is no simple answer to that. But it was clarifying, too, to hear the arguments and then to realize that actually, the subtleties of any innate, biologically-based differences between male and female humans, *on average, statistically*, just don't matter that much. Not compared with the overwhelming conditioning we get from our sexist culture.

John Biewen: We're social creatures, built by culture as well as our genes and hormones. We direct our own evolution. Let's remind folks of some of the other highlights of the series. Previously, on MEN:

Louie C.K.: How do women still go out with guys when you consider the fact that there's no greater threat to women than men? We're the number one threat to women! Globally and historically....

Londa Schiebinger: So in the ancient world, there was the theory of humors, which explained where men and women fit in cosmology. Women were cold and wet, men were hot and dry. And of course the valued quality was heat.

Rousseau, voiceover: "The women's entire education should be planned in relation to men. To please men, to be useful to them..."

Ditz: So that there's this bright line between the independent head of household and his dependents, and those dependents are everyone from his wife and children to his free white servants and his enslaved servants, both men and women.

Mel Konner: Margaret Meade came up with this concept of womb envy, in response to Freud's concept of penis envy. Penis envy seems kind of ridiculous to me.

Celeste Headlee, whispering: Me, too.

Alice Walker/Sojourner Truth: And when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman?

Glenda Gilmore: And so they literally bailed on African-American suffrage. *Most of the white women suffragists did.*

Linda in Spanish. Voiceover: And I thought, well yes, I can give him a ride. ...

(Eva): It's like it's not like the groping that was so terrible. It was the years and years and years of like very insidious undermining....

Janey Williams: I think it's this unspoken, unconscious knowledge that I think we all have, as women, about how the rules work. (kind of laughs). There are no repercussions.

Zoe Crichtonburg: We had a three- star general come in and speak to the class about his principles of leadership. Number one, be a man.

Tom Digby: The kind of emotional makeup that's needed for war is not something you can just turn on or off like a light switch.

Gong sound. Long Duk Dong: What's happenin', hot stuff?

Tim Yu: This is how a stereotypical Asian male character is portrayed.

Mark Anthony Neal: In many ways, black men are the canary in the coal mine for the crisis of American masculinity.

[MUSIC]

Lewis Wallace: You'd hoped that I would have been a daughter. Why did I have to go over to this other thing that was more like my dad and my brothers?

Raven: And I now know that you don't, you're not trying to be like your dad or your brothers. You're trying to be like you.

[Huck] You definitely have to get pissed off at someone when they call you gay. **[Ben]** *Not pissed because they're—* **[Huck]** Not pissed because they're being homophobic, no. Maybe you are pissed because they're being homophobic, but you have to ACT like it's an insult at least.

Jim Rome: You have to have a kill or be killed mentality, and I haven't seen that from him, either. If the guy wanted to be the guy, we'd know it.

Terry Real: The lie of patriarchy is dominion. The delusion of dominance over the feminine, including Mother Nature, will kill us.

[MUSIC FADES]

[BREAK]

John Biewen: So, as we record this, the 2018 midterm elections are behind us. The Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearings and the confirmation of Justice Kavanaugh are among other recent events.

Celeste Headlee: There's a lot going on in the gender wars right now, notably the Trump presidency itself.

John Biewen: Yeah. So, where are we going from here, as a culture? We could go on for hours with that conversation right? But let's kick off that conversation with an optimistic view, from one of the scholars we interviewed early on.

Celeste Headlee: We said, way back in Part Two, that we'd come back to Mel Konner. He teaches anthropology and behavioral biology at Emory University, and he wrote the book, *Women After All: Sex, Evolution, and The End of Male Supremacy*.

John Biewen: Remember, he's the guy who said women are superior to men, as a group, (**Celeste:** Oh I remember that) mainly because of the two very damaging traits that men are far more likely to display than women – namely, physical violence, and exploitive sexuality, as he calls it – the tendency toward sexual assault and harassment and so on.

Celeste Headlee: But we promised we'd come back to that last part of Mel Konner's subtitle, *The End of Male Supremacy*, because he thinks we're well on our way to that goal.

John Biewen: He does. And he spends a good bit of his book making that case. Now, before women start throwing things at their radios – well, before you throw your podcast listening device at the ground, hearing us talk of “the end of male supremacy” being close at hand – we know, and Mel Konner knows, that there's a lot of work to do before achieving that. But, here's Mel.

Mel Konner: Anthropologists take the long view and I know that women are impatient to get this equality thing moving faster at every level of society and every walk of life. I'm totally with them on that, and it's their impatience that explains progress in the past, and fortunately they've been joined by some men who are also impatient about this.

John Biewen: Not all that many men, let's be honest.

Celeste Headlee: But Mel's point is that in historical terms, change has happened pretty quickly, after many, many centuries, and millennia, of literal patriarchy – men dominating, and essentially owning, women. He says, look at the last couple hundred years

John Biewen: He starts his book in 1869, with feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton giving a speech at the National Woman Suffrage Convention held

that year. She was arguing, of course, for women's right to vote, which may have seemed like a distant dream at that point.

Mel Konner: Half a century after that women get the vote. And then half a century after *that* you have second wave feminism, which was a movement responsible for a lot of important steps forward, in women's education, women's influence.

Celeste Headlee: Education is a pretty dramatic example that Mel Konner likes to talk about. Mel is 72 years old. When he was born, women were a small fraction of college students, and many elite universities had quotas – for example, Stanford would admit only one woman for every three male students until the late 1960s. New laws around that time made those quotas illegal.

John Biewen: So Mel describes a graph that he likes to show his students, with two lines on it, showing men and women as a percentage of all college graduates in the country. It starts in 1967, when one-third of those graduates were women.

Mel Konner: And today, two thirds of college graduates are women. You look at these two curves and they cross each other at around 1981 or '82. And I like to, I put my finger on the slide on that point and I say, OK, here we are at fifty-fifty. That's what we were aiming for, right? We should have stopped at fifty-fifty. Obviously, I hope, being ironic here. The young women didn't get the memo. They just blew right through fifty-fifty.

John Biewen: Konner sees no reason to doubt that this will happen in other areas. Including politics. If you look at the graph showing the number of women in the United States Congress through our history, it's flat, flat, flat, and then it heads upward at a rather steep incline.

Celeste Headlee: Well, yes and no. If your graph shows the whole 240-some years, sure, that upward climb of the last few decades looks really impressive. But I gotta say, the progress does not feel "steep" to me.

John Biewen: I hear you. It's a matter of perspective. And I suppose it's fitting that Mel Konner, a male scholar, is highlighting what he considers rapid advancements for women...

Celeste Headlee: While as a woman, I've reached 48 and it hasn't felt very rapid to me, right? We have a record number of women in Congress now, that's true, but they still only make up 25 percent of the House. We need 100 percent more women to make it equal. But I get his point, too. The other difference is that I'm a journalist, looking at things year by year, and he's an anthropologist – he looks at cultural change over eons.

John Biewen: So by that standard, this is downright sudden. The first woman was elected to the U.S. House in 1916, Jeannette Rankin. Half a century after that, in the late 1960s, women are still less than five-percent of the House and the Senate. In 1985, still just five women in the Senate, out of a hundred, of course.

Celeste Headlee: And yes, the line on the graph goes up from there. 1992 was called the Year of the Woman because four -- *four* -- new female members were elected to the Senate. After that there was steady growth, and 2018 was another real step forward. In the House, the number of women jumped from 84 to more than one hundred in just one election.

John Biewen: And that group features historic numbers of women of color, including the first black female member from Massachusetts, the first two Native American women, and the first two Muslim women ever to serve in Congress.

Celeste Headlee: So in the House and the Senate, after 2018, almost one-fourth of the members are women. I mean, come on, I'm sorry, but it's pretty sad that I'm supposed to be excited about that.

John Biewen: Mel Konner's point is that if that line keeps trending upward the way it is, or speeds up, women will have half the seats in our national legislature pretty soon.

Celeste Headlee: Or more than half. We are fifty-one percent of the population. Because, as Mel says, there's no reason to think the trend will stop at fifty-fifty. Because he thinks women have advantages, in the world we live in now, that make it almost inevitable that women will continue to gain power and influence, and end male supremacy.

[MUSIC]

John Biewen: So why does he think that? First of all, he says, some of the structural forces in society that held women back for so long have been cleared away. For most people and most jobs, it's no longer an advantage to be bigger and stronger, which men are, on average. Most people are not farmers or ditch diggers or longshoremen anymore. He also says, despite how it seems if you read the newspaper every day, warfare is in a steady, worldwide decline. Wars between nations, and the numbers of deaths from war, have declined a lot since World War Two.

Celeste Headlee: There is debate about whether that's a lasting trend or a temporary anomaly. But because the military is traditionally a male bastion, if war is central to the lives of nations, that means more power for men. But it seems, at least for now, that most nations are turning to war as a solution to conflicts less often than in the past. That's good for women.

John Biewen: And then there's this: Reproductive freedom.

Mel Konner: The ability to separate sex from reproduction is possibly the single most momentous change in modern times. It removes one of the greatest disadvantages that women have faced throughout history and across the world.

Celeste Headlee: The ability to decide when to have children, or whether to have children at all, is something we take for granted in modern, rich societies. But it's really new in historical terms, and tremendously liberating to women. Now we just need to protect that right from the people who'd like to chip away at it.

John Biewen: So those are some of the changes that have created more of a level playing field for women. But going a step further, Mel Konner argues that we increasingly live in a world in which traditionally feminine qualities are valued and constitute advantages for people who have those qualities.

Celeste Headlee: Really?

John Biewen: Obviously, we're not all the way there yet! We've spent a lot of this series talking about how society teaches men to be competitive and domineering, and too often rewards that behavior. And, again, look who we elected president last time.

Celeste Headlee: Terry Real, the psychologist we heard from in the last couple of episodes, describes American masculinity as being at war with itself – a war between two visions of manhood. The old, patriarchal version, as represented by bullies like Donald Trump, and a newer, more progressive kind of manhood. So the optimistic take is that Trump's election was the dying gasp of toxic masculinity – one last big backlash in the face of the longer-term trend toward a kinder and more relational kind of American man.

John Biewen: We can hope, but of course it's not about hoping. The forces of old-school patriarchy will keep fighting, and they have to be overwhelmed.

Celeste Headlee: There are some hopeful signs, though. Even while Donald Trump sits in the White House, it is true that organizations of all kinds, even corporations, are increasingly looking for people – and leaders – who can collaborate and cooperate.

John Biewen: Just the other week, a column in the *Wall Street Journal* said employers, more and more, are looking for leaders who display, of all things, humility. That sounds like good news for a lot of women.

Celeste Headlee: And humble men. The *New York Times* recently made the point that, until not so long ago, corporations thought it was “risky” to put a woman in charge because, heaven forbid, she might have her period and what would that mean? Blood everywhere! (Laughs.) But now, in this #MeToo moment, hiring a woman as your CEO could look less risky than hiring that hard-charging dude who might have a history of sexual harassment. And not be able to keep his hands off of people.

John Biewen: And might not be able to keep his job.

[MUSIC]

John Biewen: Let’s face it, the struggle continues and it will for some time. Our listeners can guess as well as we can how long it’ll really take to dismantle male dominance. How optimistic are you, Celeste, at this moment? Maybe one way of asking that is, is #MeToo a momentary blip, or the beginning of a real turning point in the culture?

Celeste Headlee: I'm of two minds on this. Because the practical side of me knows that we have had these moments before. There have been times when women have risen up in anger and said that's enough, time's up, to use another hashtag.

John Biewen: After Anita Hill, for instance.

Celeste Headlee: Absolutely, and there have been other little milestones. And each time we've made incremental progress. But here we – I still make less than my male colleagues. Right? I mean, we're still here. That's one side. The other side is that I notice a change in the way women are complaining. Previous generations put most of their energy into convincing men. That was the point of the movement. Convincing men that we're as good as you are, that it's in your best interests to stop stepping on our heads. And I think women are just too mad to do that anymore. I think we're at the point where we're like, look, screw trying to convince you. Either get with the program or get out of the way.

John Biewen: I sense that, too. And I don't, I'm certainly not going to disagree with it as a kind of impulse and as a strategy and it seems very powerful to me. At the same time, I do think that men are *hearing* the message. I didn't even want to say "getting" the message because that sounds like a grasping. I think it's being heard. And it's really unclear – I think men are all over the place, there's a whole spectrum of how men are responding to hearing that message that basically 'we've had enough' from women. And I think, one thing that makes me a little bit hopeful is the sense that, even the way that a word like "mansplaining" has become very familiar

in the culture just in the last, what, five, ten years? That ends up being, I think, kind of an influential thing, like, oh, it's actually not cool to be that guy. And I feel like that kind of ripple will spread, along with these other things like, duh, don't sexually assault or sexually harass the women you work with.

Celeste Headlee: And I think the empowering part is that women have stopped caring. Except for the men who are close to you in your life, who, you really care if they're on board or not, right? But everybody else? I mean, I'm one of those pissed off feminists. I've had enough. I'm tired of being logical about it, I'm tired of making the case and presenting the graphs and charts. That time is over. And it's, that's enough. I'm ready to move on.

[MUSIC]

John Biewen: Here's another thing to think about, Celeste. If we have a world in which, let's say, fifty percent of members of Congress are women. Fifty percent of corporate executives are women. Maybe more, right?

Celeste Headlee: Yeah, fifty-one percent is my goal, John.

John Biewen: How does that change the world? Or does it?

Celeste Headlee: Well, I would like to think that it makes the world slightly less competitive. We do have evidence from countries in which they have mandated that there's an equal number of board members, for example,

corporate board members, between men and women. And we've found that the women are less likely to take dangerous risks, for example. They tend to be safer. You wouldn't have had the bank failure if more women had been in charge is what many experts say. But here's the other thing. It literally does mean that some men are going to lose out. Right now when the vast majority of positions of power are held by men, this isn't gonna be entirely kumbaya. It does mean men have to give up some stuff.

John Biewen: I also think, though, that there's a sense, and I think there's a parallel, too, with racism, that people who look like me get threatened because of a kind of assumption that if white supremacy ends, if patriarchy ends, that'll just be a flipping of the hierarchy and we'll be treated the way that we treated you all for the last hundreds of years.

Celeste Headlee: Oh, you'd be in trouble, wouldn't you.

John Biewen: Right? And I'm sure there are plenty of women who would smile at that image.

Celeste Headlee: Putting you guys in corsets and making you scrub the....
(laughs)

John Biewen: But I also think that that's not the world that most feminists are talking about creating, right?

Celeste Headlee: No. And we have so far to go. All feminists are talking about is equality, that's literally what feminism is, is equal treatment for both

genders. We're so far from that. We automatically get paid less. We automatically get fewer opportunities to be promoted, we get fewer considerations to become executives. Let's not worry about tipping it to the other side until we actually reach balance.

John Biewen: Yeah, but I'm also talking about something deeper, which is, maybe we create a world in which we're not so stratified. We don't have such an intense, winner-take-all society that some people talk about in terms of the economic system. Maybe we create a world where the *world* is actually more nurturing and we take care of each other better.

Celeste Headlee: Well, if research gives us any clue, with more women in power, that world you're talking about is more likely achievable. Women are more likely to bring us the kind of meritocracy many people are deluded into thinking we already have. Yes, I think that men lose something in this equation because you've had extra for so long. And you're going to lose that extra that you've had, hopefully. But you gain something. I mean, this is something we've talked about all season long, is that toxic masculinity and patriarchy hurts men as well. And there's a gain, and hopefully what you gain by dumping this toxicity is going to outweigh the extra bonus that you guys have enjoyed.

[MUSIC]

Celeste Headlee: So, John, the full-time production staff of *Scene on Radio* consists of ... you, right?

John Biewen: It does. With wonderful institutional support from CDS, and from our friends at PRX, our distribution partner ... and the huge contributions from collaborators like you and the indie producers we worked with this season...

Celeste Headlee: But I expect you'll want to take a breath and then turn to your next series. Have you thought about what it might be?

John Biewen: I have ideas. Haven't decided for sure just yet. Folks should feel free to let us know what they'd like us to take on next. Send a comment on the show's Facebook page or tweet at me. @SceneonRadio

John Biewen: Celeste, what a joy and an honor to work with you on this season. You brought such wicked intelligence and heart and good humor to this. So I'm really grateful. Thank you so much.

Celeste Headlee: It's really been a pleasure and I feel like I should put "wicked intelligence" on my business card now. It really has been a great collaboration, and shows how the two genders can work together.

John Biewen: Watch on our website on SceneonRadio.org for a bibliography, if you'd like to keep learning stuff. And, soon I hope, a study guide, for teachers or folks who'd like to just lead a discussion group on these ideas.

Celeste Headlee: John Barth was our editor this season. His sharp eye and ears helped to make these episodes better. Thanks to everybody at

PRX, who brought the show to your headphones and helped get the word out.

John Biewen: The music, all season long, by Alex Weston, and by Evgueni and Sacha Galperine. Theme music by Alex Weston. Huge thanks to the composers, and to Joe Augustine of Narrative Music, who provided music production help and made this great scoring possible.

Celeste Headlee: The CDS Communications Team is led by Liz Phillips. Whitney Baker created the show's website, sceneonradio.org. Mara Guevarra created the episode art. Harper Biewen designed the MEN logo.

John Biewen: My bosses are Lynn McKnight, Associate Director at CDS, and Director Wesley Hogan. *Scene on Radio* comes to you from the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and PRX.