

Gender Codependence

An excerpt from *The Hand That Rocks the World*, by David Shackleton

We saw in the last chapter that real gender equality involves offering both compassion and accountability to both women and men, and that feminism has focused on compassion alone for women and accountability alone for men. In this chapter we will explore what is behind this imbalance, how to understand the fact that it ruled the minds of the women (and men) who developed feminist theory, and why it has completely dominated society's understanding of gender for over fifty years now. This was quite a journey of discovery for me, over twenty years ago. I choose to offer it here in the form of a story, the intimate story of how I thought and felt as various events unfolded and my determination to understand, to get to the bottom of the gender conundrum moved me over a period of four years until finally I saw the wheels and levers of the psychological mechanism below the surface and worked out what was going on.

I offer it in this way for three reasons. Firstly, I want you to know me, because unless you know me, why would you trust what I say about these challenging issues. Secondly, the events that led me to the development of a new model of gender relations are useful to consider, for they showed me the deeper reality beneath the surface story. I am hopeful that relating them might help you to see it as well. Thirdly, I am inviting you to take a similar journey. The journey toward wisdom is necessarily one of some turbulence and stress, it takes dedication, patience and persistence in seeking what is true. By showing you my own journey from the inside, I hope to encourage you to a similar effort. Here is my story.

It feels like a regular evening as I walk into the Glebe Community Centre for the monthly meeting of the Ottawa/Hull Men's Forum. I have no inkling of the life-changing event that is about to happen.

It is February, 1990, two and a half years since my first wife left me, to my huge surprise. No, it wasn't that I thought we had a great marriage, only that I was completely unconscious of her truth or mine. But I am awake now and feeling strong. I have started a men's group and done a lot of work on myself in the last year. With the wonder of a small child, I have begun to see that the world is very different than I had thought, and that most men are still lost in the labyrinth of the male role. I am starting to see myself as a potential leader of the fledgling men's movement. I have begun attending regular meetings of the Ottawa/Hull Men's Forum, described as a male-positive, safe space for men growing out of stereotypes of masculinity.

The organizing group of the OHMF has arranged for this meeting to be about male violence against women. Three women from the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre have been invited to lead the group in an exploration of this issue. I arrive early: only a few men and the three women are present, sitting on chairs arranged in a circle. It is unusual to have women at the men's forum, and so I ask them, "Are you leading the discussion tonight?" In a sign of things to come, the women sigh and exchange despairing glances, and one of them turns to me and says scornfully, "Hierarchy already! No, we're not going to *lead*, we're going to *facilitate*!"

Rebuked, I sit quietly. More men arrive, we introduce ourselves, and the women are invited to begin their facilitation. They say that violence against women is a part of male behavior that men must help to eliminate. I certainly agree with that. They propose a debate and offer the contention: "Although not all men commit violence against women, all men benefit from it." At first, we are divided arbitrarily into two groups, for and against the contention. After a while, we are permitted to 'cross the floor' if we wish, in order to take the position on the issue that feels right to us. The debate is orderly and also passionate. I do not need to cross the floor, as I am already in the group that I feel has the right of the matter.

I think about how men's violence against women has affected my life. I remember that when my wife left me, she did so secretly, saying that she was taking our dog to the vet. I asked her later why she did it that way, why she didn't tell me she was leaving, indeed why she never said that she was even considering such an action. She said, "I was afraid you would be violent." I couldn't understand that. I could scarcely believe it. I had never hit her, raised my hand or threatened her, or even imagined myself doing so. In fact, I haven't hit anyone in my entire adult life. I felt sure that she must have been poisoned by the general perception that men are violent. I felt like I had lost a great deal through men's violence against women and gained nothing if even after nine years of living together my wife did not feel safe with me. How many years would it have taken, I wondered, for her to see me and not the prejudice? How much had that fear, never before expressed, kept her from really trusting me, kept us from coming closer? I think of the two or three times when I lost my temper and shouted at her. Was she thinking that I could begin using my fists at any moment?

I imagine a world in which men are never violent against women. It seems to me that, comparing that world to this, there is not a man in it that would not be better off. More trusted, more loved, more respected, more honored, more happy, more seen and understood. Less feared, less ashamed, less defensive, and less insecure. I know which world I would want to live in. There is no question that I feel diminished rather than advantaged by the violence of men against women.

The debate proceeds and some men have begun crossing the floor. To my surprise, they are crossing in both directions. Some are actually choosing the group that is arguing that they benefit from men's violence against women. I begin listening more carefully, more seriously to what they are saying. I had thought that this issue was obvious.

They are saying that they benefit from having their partner afraid of them. That someone in fear is like a slave, willing to obey them and reluctant to take a stand against them. They get to have their way much more often than is fair, because she is afraid to offend. I wonder what these men want from their relationships with women. Are they actually attracted to a relationship of fear? What about intimacy? What about happiness? Have they said these things to their wives? I cannot imagine that men in recovery, in the men's movement, should feel that they would benefit from fear on the part of their intimate partner. Yet it is so. For the first time, I sense a profound divide within the Ottawa men's movement.

The debate is over. It has been a valuable experience for me. I have much to think about.

But wait. The women have more to say. They stand up together and move to the centre of the room. To my group, to the men who do not believe that they benefit from men's violence against women, they say this: "You men are worse than the men who beat their wives, the guys in the strip clubs and using prostitutes. You are pretending to be deconstructing masculinity, you are pretending to be growing into new and more whole, more conscious and responsible men, yet you are denying the very benefits you get from the violent, patriarchal system that you are a part of. You should be ashamed."

My God! I am reeling from this. I didn't see it coming. My heart is pounding and I can't think. What can I say? What can I do?

A man talks about his pain, about the way that he is also injured by the patriarchal system. The women interrupt him. "Don't tell us about your pain. Your pain is insignificant. You are the oppressor!"

Another man speaks of his experience with his ex-wife. "She accused me of sexually abusing my three-year-old daughter. How could I prove my innocence?" he asks with tears in his eyes. "I haven't been allowed to see my children for three years." "A woman would never lie about such an issue," he is told.

We seem helpless in the face of the angry accusations of these women. I have recently read Warren Farrell's *Why Men Are the Way They Are*,¹ and I try to describe some of his ideas about the equality of

men and women, how men are victims of violence more often than women are. Even as I speak, however, I feel guilty and ashamed of the anger that I am feeling and that is probably in my voice, and I am ignored by the women.

Another man speaks more eloquently. “Your pain is real and needs to be heard,” he says to the women, “but so is our pain. We do not deny your pain as women; please do not deny ours as men.” He too is shamed in response.

The situation is incredibly charged. The women are clearly feeling unheard and angry, their worst fears about the men’s movement confirmed before their eyes. The men are feeling shamed and devalued, accused by women who will not listen. We close the meeting in great awkwardness, with stiff thanks for the facilitation. The women leave in silence, obviously hugely offended. Some men huddle and talk in low tones, others leave quickly. I feel abandoned, the naughty boy standing in the corner, sent to bed without my supper, punished and feeling guilty for not being how I ‘should’ be. I compliment those men that I think spoke well, and leave.

I know that something pivotal has happened for me. I see that I am far from healed, far from secure and strong in my manhood. I don’t know the nature of the wound I am carrying, but I know that it disqualifies me from leadership. I am not ready. I must withdraw from a public role in men’s issues while I heal myself.

The Forum was never able to heal the divide that was exposed that evening. The drama played itself out over the next weeks and years. The women sent a letter to the Forum, protesting the way that they were ‘abused.’ The organizers responded with a formal apology, promising that they would make sure that it never happened again. They renamed the Forum “The Ottawa/Hull Men’s Forum Against Sexism” and declared it actively pro-feminist. Men not of that persuasion were subtly (or not so subtly) unwelcome. The Forum continued for another three years, never again attracting the numbers it once had, before ceasing to operate from lack of attendance and lack of energy among the organizers. An offer from a new group to restart it on an unaligned, non-ideological basis was rejected by the holders of the name and the mailing list, who felt that they could not allow it to continue as other than specifically pro-feminist. It died, and has never revived.

I am either blessed or cursed with a passion to get to the bottom of things. Most days I think it is a blessing. For years I struggled to understand what happened that day. It seemed pivotal to the gender debate, as if the vast forces that move us had risen for a moment to the surface, like a great sea monster from the depths.

Gradually, some things became clear to me. First was that the three women in that room were anything but powerless. In that encounter, they were both the formal leaders of the program and also the emotional and moral centre of the experience. They controlled all of the structure of the event. They felt to me like unshakeable rocks against which I and the other men battered ourselves in vain. Yet, as I replayed it over and over in my mind, I realized that they were sincere in their belief that they were victims, being abused even as they were defining the terms of the debate and overpowering the protests of the men. They did not experience their power over us as a feeling of power. I knew that this was important. They were incredibly powerful to us, yet they felt powerless and abused even as they exercised that power. How could this be, I wondered?

Slowly, I realized that I was the same. As I listened to women talk about men’s power, about the oppression of women and the patriarchal advantages I had as a man, I saw that I didn’t experience them as power. Indeed, my position that evening had been the denial that men’s violence against women gave them any advantages at all. Yet clearly, the fear of violence seemed to dominate a lot of women’s lives, and they saw violent men as very powerful. I began to get an inkling that power, between the genders at least, is very much in the eye of the beholder, and that this is very contrary to the way it *feels*. But I still

didn't have an explanation for these facts. Nor did I have any sense of why this issue carried so much energy for me, why I experienced the accusation of those women as so powerful in my life. How could their shaming of me remain so devastating when I didn't agree with it, didn't think that they were right about me? What was the nature of their power over me?

In 1991, at a ten-day experiential, personal growth workshop, I found a piece of the answer. It was my first experience with people dedicated to discovering the truth about themselves, undistracted, over several days. For the first few days I risked little, but watched very carefully. I learned that when people dropped their guard and confessed their fears and failings, they were not shamed, but rather supported and held through the experience. What's more, they seemed to emerge stronger and with more self-respect, not less.

On about the sixth day, we did an exercise involving shadow fighting with opponents from within the group. We chose partners and mimed fighting, with or without imaginary weapons, and then changed partners and did it again. After several changes, I noticed a pattern. When my opponent was a man, I would fight energetically, striving to win. When I was in conflict with a woman, however, I would be more anxious and more restrained, and try strenuously to ensure a draw. I remember a moment of astonishment when I discovered myself fighting with a sword in my left hand. I am right handed, but I had taken an imaginary sword in my left hand, because my female opponent had done so. Why was I allowing her to choose the weapons and the rules? I had never before had any awareness that my behavior was so different with women than with men.

On about the eighth day, the workshop leaders hauled three mattresses into the middle of the room and said, "OK, each of us is going to have a tantrum." "Right," I thought, "you've got to be kidding." I couldn't imagine myself doing such a thing at thirty eight years old. I made sure that I was toward the end of the line that formed around the wall. But, as I watched, I saw that people were really getting into it. One by one, they opened a door into their rage and kicked and screamed and wept. I decided that when it came to my turn I would give it a try and see what happened. I had no notion of any anger in me that needed to come out, but I had moved myself into a willingness to discover what might be there instead of a fear-based denial of there being anything in me that I didn't already know about.

As I ran out to the mattresses, I felt sure that I would end up feeling foolish. But almost immediately I found myself kicking and pounding the mattresses, and words began to pour out of me. Over and over I cried, "It's not fair, it's not fair." There was huge emotion in the words and a great sense of release. "It's not fair." I knew that what I was shouting was my outrage from my childhood, when I would argue with my mother and not once over many years (and still to this day) did she acknowledge to me being responsibly wrong about anything. Instead, if the argument began to go against her, she would end it with an unanswerable phrase like "You'll see when you grow up." Or, "You can't understand because you're not a woman." Or worse, "You're always completely unreasonable, there's no sense arguing with you." At one level, I was dreadfully afraid that she was right, that what seemed right to me was totally wrong, that I was self-centered and arrogant and unworthy, as she claimed. At another level, I knew that this was her defense because she knew that she was on shaky ground. Her unwillingness to ever admit it drove me crazy. I was incensed at her dishonesty. For twenty years I had carried that anger inside me, not suspecting its existence, but unable to really trust a woman because I expected her to turn against me, and to deny all responsibility for her words or her actions.

The next day brought a new exercise. A rolled up blanket, tied with cord, was brought into the room. One by one, we were invited to have the blanket be whomever we wished, and to say and do what we needed to. Each person's session was contained within a formal ritual designed by the leaders, to identify the action as sacred space, as symbolic and not something that could or should occur in the real world, with the real person. This was deep psychological work.

My heart was pounding with fear as I contemplated what I wanted to do. I knew, now, that I had a great deal of rage at my mother. I knew also that I had never really expressed it to her, because of the power that she had over me, the fear that she would abandon me and throw me out of our home. (When I was four, because I refused to run with her for a bus, she got onto the bus alone and left me crying in fear at the bus stop. Unknown to me, she got off at the next stop and watched me crying. She waited until she thought I had learned my lesson before coming back to reclaim me. I always ran after that.) So I had never allowed myself to win a fight with her, but contained my anger and held back my rage, as I had shown myself so eloquently in the shadow fighting exercise. Could I give myself permission to say and do what was in my heart? Was I ready to go past my fear of abandonment, still real in me twenty years after leaving home?

I still didn't know as I walked out to begin my work. For a while I just walked around the blanket, looking at it lying on the floor, trying to find the courage to speak my truth and unshame my anger. I started talking to it, asking questions like "What did you think you were doing to me? Why did you never hug me or kiss me? Why couldn't you tell me you loved me?" Gradually, I began to feel my anger. I began to shout. "Don't you know how much that hurt me? Couldn't you see how afraid I was?" I began kicking the blanket and screaming, "I hate you. I hate you." I kicked it across the room, picked it up and slammed it down on the floor. I kicked it so high it lifted one of the ceiling tiles. With tears rolling down my cheeks, I stomped my mother's head into the floor. For the first time in my life, I experienced my anger without shame. At thirty eight years old, after spending my life till then unconsciously circling around her, I killed my mother and began the process of setting myself free and growing myself up.

The process of discovering the source of one's shame and recovering from it is not trivial. It involves looking deep into one's soul and learning to love what one finds there. It is fearful because what one expects to find is guilt, is unworthiness, is inferiority, is everything shameful. It can only be accelerated through intensity, through the passion with which we pursue it. Sometimes, if we are willing, life brings us to moments when we are able to go very deep and return richly blessed.

My journey of understanding continued. Further insight came when I discovered the field of addiction recovery. I began to recognize my own codependence and the denial patterns with which I had concealed myself from myself. Over the course of a year, in 1992, I read voraciously about addictive behaviors, attended a weekly twelve step self-help group called Adult Children Anonymous, entered weekly therapy with a Jungian analyst, and intensively studied my own behavior in my current relationship. I began to see the patterns, the ways that my new partner, her family and I were all codependently intertwined and interlocked, and the layers of rationalizations with which we hid the real nature of our relationships from ourselves and each other. As I did, I stopped my part of the dance, the deception. I confess that although all of the literature had warned me, still I thought that I would be able to reach them, to help them to see and share the truth that I was discovering. What happened instead was that I was rejected. But, for the first time, I had the strength not to take it personally.

The final piece of the puzzle came to me in the spring of 1994, during a workshop on community building. On the first evening, a man took a major risk in talking about his need for emotional support in caring for his disabled daughter. A woman responded by shaming him for not dealing with his emotional needs as she had dealt with hers. Her attack was halted by several people who spoke of their distress with her action, but the woman defended herself throughout the weekend. On the last day she privately asked my opinion why her words were taken so seriously, when other things that had been said (e.g., one man saying to another, "When you said that, I felt like ripping your face off!") were not challenged.

Sometimes I learn something by explaining it. I told the woman that men have a great fear of being shamed by women. I realized that *men's fear of being shamed by women is of similar magnitude to women's fear of being physically abused by men*. I suddenly understood that mixed workshops need to have two fundamental rules: no violence and no shaming. The two are of equal importance for ensuring

safety: one limits men's power in order to ease women's fear, and the other limits women's power in order to reduce men's fear.

The woman thanked me for my explanation, and we parted on good terms. I mention this because what happened next was remarkable. In the next workshop session, the same woman immediately declared that she was about to leave the workshop because a man whom she had asked for help in understanding something had verbally abused her, and she felt so devastated that she had to leave. For the next hour and a half, virtually all of the men (and one or two women) assured her that what had happened would not happen again, and pleaded with her to stay. Not a single one questioned her story; her interpretation was accepted without question. I sat in the circle in stunned amazement, watching a woman take over the workshop agenda so that it all revolved around her, while feeling and expressing complete powerlessness and victimhood. It didn't seem important to anyone to discover what really happened – the woman's story was accepted as fact, and my guilt was presumed. What mattered was that a woman was offended and felt victimized, and it seemed that the men felt a deep need to fix it, to make her feel ok again. After an hour and a half of support and reassurance, the woman consented to remain and the room finally relaxed. I had received another clear and unmistakable lesson about the power of women, their inability to feel that power, and the deep need in men to try to fix things for them.

I spoke at the end about the group dynamic that I thought I had seen and I noted that no one had wondered whether the woman had described what happened accurately. I told my own version of our interaction to the group and commented that something very important to understand about the power relationships between men and women had happened in that room. I spoke pretty strongly, and I described the device of threatening to leave the group as “emotional blackmail.” My heart was pounding and I felt the negative judgments of just about everyone there.

At 6am the following morning, after a night of intense and dynamic dreams, I found myself pacing my room with a new model of gender relations churning in me. I had somehow assembled the full answer about what was going on that evening back in 1990 at the Ottawa/Hull Men's Forum, what was going on in the workshop right where I was, and what is still going on at the deepest level between most men and women in our society. I developed what I call the “Gender Codependent Matrix”, a model which identifies women's personal and social power as equal to that of men, but less visible because of its different form. At that workshop, my mind finally found its way to the simple underlying mechanism, the model that explains gender power in personal relationships and in society, and which we will explore for the rest of this chapter.

Key to understanding this model is the notion of codependence, which is a form of addictive relating. We are codependently engaged with someone when we transact with them to get our needs met, but hide the truth about our transactions from ourselves and each other with rationalizations, stories that preserve a reassuring but false picture of ourselves. A trivial example might be a husband who “has a shell around him” and a wife who “nags”. The wife will explain her behavior by saying, “It's because he has a shell around him that I have to repeat and emphasize everything in order to get through to him.” The husband will report, “I wouldn't have a shell around me if I didn't need it to cope with her nagging.” Each is entirely sincere at a conscious level, each believes their own story, but the mutual codependence can be seen in the fact that each escapes from guilt, each makes the other responsible for their own behavior. Therefore, neither feels powerful. The structure is dysfunctional in that it is dishonest, but it provides something each needs – a way to escape from responsibility and a kind of stability, perhaps a defense against the vulnerability of real intimacy. The pathology lies in the fact that both parties are (unconsciously) lying to each other and to themselves, and each feels powerless, each feels that their behavior is determined by the other.

The Gender Codependent Matrix, like much of the material in this book, is challenging. It is a fundamental reframing of our modern understanding of gender relations. The usually accepted feminist

theory of gender relations is a theory of one-sided oppression of women by men, a model in a moral system of right and wrong, guilt and innocence. The Gender Codependent Matrix is a theory of codependence, a model in a *health* system, not a moral system. It is a *disease* model of addictive, dysfunctional behavior which is nevertheless completely understandable in terms of underlying psychological needs and constraints. Achieving this understanding, however, requires us to undo the moral polarization of the feminist model, to take women off the pedestal of innocent victimhood and redeem men from the basement of moral indictment. It requires that we see men and women as simply human beings, equally guilty and equally innocent, but stuck in a compulsive, largely unconscious pattern that is about trying to get our needs met.

The Gender Codependent Matrix came to me about four years after the events at the Ottawa Hull Men's Forum that I described at the beginning of this chapter. It took four years of holding the question open, struggling to understand what was really going on between men and women. Four years of fairly intense personal work for me to get myself to the place where I could hold women accountable as well as have compassion for them, and have compassion for men as well as hold them accountable. I do not want you to underestimate the difficulty of such pioneering journeys of personal growth and discovery. You, dear reader, are probably one of those pioneers, or you wouldn't be (still) reading this book. It is important for you to know that healthy social transformation on this scale is not an impractical dream. It has happened before. Moving from a system of moral judgment to one of balance is actually part of the process of human maturation, as we will see when we consider the path of wisdom development in chapter 6. This is precisely what was achieved by Alcoholics Anonymous in its remarkable development of the twelve step recovery program.

Until about eighty years ago, alcoholism was seen as a moral failing. Not just by the sober, but by drinkers as well. Organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League exhorted drinkers to reform themselves. Churches, psychologists, social workers, upright citizens, all were active but nothing really worked. Then a couple of self-confessed drunks started something that came to be known as Alcoholics Anonymous – without doubt the most effective social healing movement of the twentieth century. For the first time, significant numbers of alcoholics began to recover – and to stay recovered.

AA's basic accomplishment was the *reframing* of alcoholism from moral failure to disease. They stopped *blaming* drunks. AA had no quarrel with people who wanted to drink, but if you wanted to stop and were finding it difficult, AA would help you. Drinkers could stop seeing themselves as moral degenerates, let go of their shame and begin to *heal*. Not to get *better* (notice how moral terms still contaminate our language about sickness), but to *recover*, to become *healthy*. It was also discovered that the disease of alcoholism affected more than just the designated drunk. The modern notion of codependency, of addictive and enabling behaviors that all the family engages in, has shown us that the polarized, "He's the drunk, she's the victim" thinking actually undermined the efforts to reform. Of course it was difficult for him to recover on his own – he was but a part of a larger, addictive family and social system. Today we "get it"; our culture has embraced and understood the disease model of alcoholism to the point where it *feels* right – of *course* that's the way it is.

However, when it comes to gender, we are still deeply wedded to polarized moral thinking, to finding guilty male perpetrators and innocent female victims. Consequently, what we are doing to improve things isn't working well at all. Our programs for domestic violence, for instance, are founded on *reforming* men who are seen as morally deficient, exercising their patriarchal power to oppress and control women. These programs overlook the family-wide, culture-wide codependent patterns that give rise to violence as just one of their symptoms. With a false and mistaken formulation, domestic violence programs usually fail to produce real or lasting change, despite the frequently sincere efforts of all concerned.

Modern gender politics is founded on this 'men bad, women good' moral judgment. Feminism, as an ideology of oppression, is *inherently* chauvinistic, in that it defines a class of innocent victims and a class of guilty oppressors. The good guy/bad guy, morally superior/morally inferior foundation of such a model undermines from the start the notion that it is about equality. Check it out. From sexual harassment to zero tolerance on male violence against women, from “no means no” sexual consent legislation to the bias against fathers in family court, we live today in a world which tends to see women as morally superior and men as morally deficient, while simultaneously paying lip service to gender equality. For most of us, men as well as women, this feels right. Indeed, addiction can be defined as that state in which our thoughts and our feelings lie to us about what is true. To an alcoholic, his drinking *feels* right; it feels like it will solve her problems and remove her anxiety. What's more, his thoughts agree with his feelings: one drink won't hurt, she tells herself. AA calls these rationalizations "stinking thinking". They *feel right* to the addict. But they aren't right, and they don't lead to right action or to recovery. To find something that will *work*; that will stand a chance of restoring health, we must reframe the issue.

Here is my vision of how it will look and feel when we move to a health model of gender. We will lose our obsession with who is right and who is wrong, who is the victim and who the perpetrator. These are not categories that make sense when thinking about a disease. Instead, we will recognize symptoms and patterns of dysfunction. We will give people responsibility for their personal recovery, without shaming them for moral failure or protecting them like children behind a blanket of innocent victimhood. We will celebrate with them every step forward into greater health. Perhaps best of all, men and women will work *together* to heal, rather than accusing and shaming from morally defended positions.

OK, that's the vision – so what's the model? What does the gender codependent matrix look like? Here it is.

	Reward	Punish
Men's Power (External) - <i>Physical</i> - <i>Economic</i> - <i>Political</i>	Protect Provide Represent	Attack Abandon Oppress
Women's Power (Internal) - <i>Moral</i> - <i>Emotional</i> - <i>Sexual</i>	Honor Nurture Favor	Shame Abuse Reject

Gender Codependent Matrix

In codependence, we transact unconsciously around needs, trying to manage the other party who has something we need by either supplying (reward) or denying (punish) their needs. In the larger gender dynamic, the codependent exchange of responsibilities has occurred as follows. In general, men have had

what we can call external power, i.e. physical (greater personal strength and military might), economic and political. Women have had internal power: moral, emotional and sexual. We are in the strange situation today in which men's power has been well-articulated by the women's movement, while women's equivalent and balancing power remains unrecognized.

Note that feminism focuses on just one quarter of the pattern shown above, the box at top right. The major feminist concerns are all there – male violence against women ('attack'), women's economic struggles after divorce and in the workplace ('abandon') and lack of political power ('oppress'). The gender codependent matrix doesn't deny the reality of these concerns; it says rather that they represent only a quarter of the whole picture. It asks us to expand our understanding to include women's power to 'oppress' men, and men's and women's powers to reward each other as well. This is a common development in the physical sciences, where a later theory expands our worldview and shows us a more complex and complete fundamental reality underlying our previous view. Einstein's theory of relativity did this to Newtonian mechanics, for instance, as did quantum mechanics to classical particle physics.

The areas of physical, economic and political power held mainly by men are familiar to us. However, women's power areas have not been sufficiently articulated by either women or men, and so merit discussion.

Women have moral power over men. It has been recognized throughout history that women are the protectors of morals. Alexis de Tocqueville observed this in his 1834 tome *Democracy in America*,ⁱⁱ and it was specifically noted by the conference that arguably launched the women's liberation movement, in Seneca Fallsⁱⁱⁱ a hundred and sixty years ago (although that document incorrectly described the power as being given to women by men). But what is moral power? This is the power to say whether an action or a person is OK, is worthy, is right or wrong. As I see it, this power balances men's superior physical strength and military might. It is the honor code by which society has traditionally tried to ensure that the violence of the warrior is used only against the enemy, and never against the women and children he is supposed to protect. The most devastating thing that can be done with moral power is to use it to shame someone, to assert that they are morally deficient, flawed, unworthy.

Sociopsychologist Howard Schwartz recognizes the power of shame in his *Revolt of the Primitive: An Inquiry into the Roots of Political Correctness*.

"How does political correctness get its power over its opposition? The stands taken as politically correct are often quite radical and have a great deal of opposition to them among more traditional elements of the university. These traditional elements are often rapidly and decisively overcome. They often stand quite mute in fact. How does that happen? Much of the answer may be found in an understanding of the way the PC University mobilizes the power of shame through public humiliation. ... [U]nder the aegis of university administration, such practices have become the norm."^{iv}

Ironically, the existence of feminism itself is perhaps the best evidence against its claims. If men really were the oppressors of women, why would they ever have allowed all of the legislation against their interests, such as equal pay, sexual harassment or violence against women laws? Feminists correctly point out that men are more numerous and thus appear to be in control in the legislature, the courts, the media, the police and the universities. Why haven't men exercised this power and defeated feminist initiatives at every turn? It is because we are ashamed, and we are ashamed because women have told us that we should be. Feminism itself is an exercise of women's moral power to define what is right and what is wrong, what is morally important and what should be done about it, and to coerce men, through shame, into prioritizing women's gender issues and ignoring their own.

This power has operated throughout history, although it has not often been specifically recognized and noted. Philosopher Ferrel Christensen writes that "In the [1900s] the women's 'purity crusade' created laws against pornography, prostitution, and male homosexual acts. Without a single vote, the women

involved were able to shame male legislators into doing what the crusaders perceived as being in their own best interests as women.”^v

The roots of this power lie in infancy, when the mother was the source of moral authority, the one who decided when we were good and when we were bad. Our fathers may have carried out the sentence, but for most of us mother was both judge and jury. Today most men still give this authority to women. This was why I could not stand up to the women at the Ottawa Hull Men’s Forum, this was why I was devastated by their shaming of me, even though I had only met them that evening. They were *women*; I gave them the power to judge me and I felt unable to refute their judgment.

It is not comfortable to admit this about myself, but it is necessary because it is true. If you can contemplate the possibility that this might be universally true for most men, then you have an alternative explanation for feminism, that it is a *power play* by women in the ancient gender dance of codependence.

The notion that women are powerful as individuals and as a group is difficult to absorb, since it is hard to reconcile with their claimed and obvious vulnerability and victimhood. Let me illustrate it.

Sociopsychologist Howard Schwartz offers us this, in his *The Revolt of the Primitive*.

“Thus, we find, on the one hand, that the image of the woman as passive, helpless victim is ubiquitous in our society, with whole classes of institutions having been created to protect these victims. On the other hand, and indeed partly through the manipulation of this image, women have manifested enormous power in the transformation of almost every aspect of society.

... An example of this contrast occurred at the University of Michigan in 1992. This case involved a sophomore student in an introductory Political Science course. The student, in a paper criticizing telephone polling, invoked a hypothetical Dave Stud, who, while knowledgeable about a certain area of taxation, refused to answer a pollster's question because he was busy entertaining three beautiful ladies in his penthouse. This male student's female teaching assistant responded this way in the margin of the paper: ‘This is ludicrous & inappropriate & OFFENSIVE. This is completely inappropriate for a serious political science paper. It completely violates the standard of non-sexist writing. Professor Rosenstone has encouraged me to interpret this comment as an example of sexual harassment and to take the appropriate formal steps. I have chosen not to do so in this instance. However, any future comments, in a paper, in a class or in any dealings w/me will be interpreted as sexual harassment and formal steps will be taken. Professor Rosenstone is aware of these comments & is prepared to intervene. You are forewarned!’ (*The Michigan Review*, 1993)

The disparity here between the frail, vulnerable woman, grievously damaged by the merest mention of male sexuality; and the powerful woman, capable of mobilizing the full weight of the University of Michigan against a hapless sophomore, is breathtaking.”^{vi}

The clear conclusion, paradoxical and therefore difficult to embrace as is most wisdom, is that women are both powerless *and* powerful, simultaneously. Of course, the corresponding truth is that men are both powerful *and* powerless, simultaneously. When we realize this, the inherent equality between men and women becomes much easier to see. However, when we embrace only one side of the truth and deny its opposite, we do a disservice to both genders.

In 1992, under pressure from feminist groups, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a unanimous decision, defined obscenity in terms of what harms women! Not what harms people, or what harms society, but what harms women. Our highest court could not see the blatant one-sidedness of this decision (or, seeing it, could not oppose it, for shame). Even the extreme external power and success possessed by Supreme Court judges does not remove or compensate for their subjection to the moral power held by women. The fact that women sincerely deny this power, the fact that they genuinely do not feel it, does not mean that they lack it. That is the purpose of the codependent cover story, to hide and deny the reality of

uncomfortable facts. The uncomfortable facts are that in this area of moral shaming, women are powerful and men are powerless. Women are also perpetrators, men are also victims.

In a similar way, women hold emotional power over men. By emotional power, I mean that women have had the role of emotional provider, doing the emotional work for the family in a similar way to that in which men have done the economic work. Thus, in general, grieving, nurturing, excitement, love and passion have fallen to women to feel and express, while men have been “stoic” and unfeeling, and “held the fort”. Because of fifty years of feminist rhetoric, we are liable to see this as yet another cross for women to bear, but it is in fact a power area just as much as is the economic power of men, because men, through social conditioning and stigma, cannot readily do this emotional work. Since psychological health requires that emotions be expressed, vicariously if not personally, this male incompetence gives women a significant power over men. (If it seems that this power is overstated, consider that in the two years after a marriage failure men commit suicide at ten times the rate that women do. What have they lost that is so devastating?)

Finally, let us examine sexual power. I am not saying that men’s and women’s physiological sex drives are different: the evidence suggests that they are not. Yet, to men, women have the sexual “goods”; men need the sexual favors of women in a way that women do not need from men. At a deeper level, what men really need is the approval, the validation of women, expressed most fundamentally and unmistakably through their consent to access to women’s bodies. After all, a woman doesn’t open her body to just anyone. Men know that this is the acid test, the real thing. When a woman shares her body with a man, she is risking pregnancy (or used to be, when these cultural mores evolved). So she is selective – usually highly selective. Men, hungry for the validation, the approval implicit in being thus selected, strive to ‘score’ with a woman. (The word ‘score’ itself is very revealing – as in sports, the motivation for scoring is the adulation, the validation of one’s skill, prowess, worth.) Thus sex is a “seller’s market”, and women, with the ability to accept or reject, possess the primary power. Thus in the dating dynamic the man takes risk after risk as he initiates each increment of sexual intimacy, and at each step the woman can favor him, refuse, or postpone. The sexual power lies with her.

An aspect of this could be referred to as ‘beauty power,’ and a number of authors (e.g., Warren Farrell) have explored this dynamic in depth. Robert Bly speaks to this in his *Iron John*:

“I remember a man telling me of a summer he spent at fifteen working as a busboy in a Catskills resort. He and the other boys were doing all right until one day a tall, blond, beautiful self-contained, high-cheekboned sixteen-year-old girl walked into the dining room. It was all over in a moment. The fifteen-year-old boy sank under the waves, bubbles came up; he was lost.

“It is interesting that neither he nor his equally moved friends ever talked to her. Instead they spent hours after work discussing who spoke to her today, what she wore at breakfast, whom she walked up with, who sat at her table. Her face and its beauty, which seemed inaccessible, or invulnerable, made them all feel like hicks, inarticulate clods of earth, hopelessly matter-ridden louts. She was above matter.

“For three weeks the obsession went on; they woke up every morning feverish. Then the summer ended; she left, that was it. There was only one event in the summer, that one. ...

“The girl, on her side, is equally confused. She may in reality be lacking in self-esteem, be insecure, shamed, even victimized, but on the outside, in the radiance from her face, she is queenly, self-possessed, golden and invulnerable.” vii

Do you see, do you feel the codependence here? Remember that codependence, addiction, is a spiritual disease, one in which we worship the wrong gods. There is indeed an aspect of worship in the boys’ relationship to the beautiful girl. They put her on a pedestal, make an idol of her. Yet, although she is so immensely powerful in their lives, she probably experiences little or none of this power *as* power. In

codependence, no one is really powerful, since everyone is dependent on another. Still, there is an asymmetry; the power that there is belongs to her, the boys worship her and not the other way around. At some unconscious level (remember, this is a dance of unconsciousness), she knows this.

Boys grow out of this inarticulate beauty-worship, of course. One way is that, as they begin to *achieve*, to become competent providers or potential providers on the world's terms, they begin to feel a little more equal, that they have something to offer, something to trade that might be worth the shining value of a woman's beauty and sexual favors. But the basic dynamic, the power of female beauty and sex to compel men's attention and inflame their desire continues. Women can and do trade on their beauty power, on their sexual power, to get things that they want. A beautiful woman almost always marries above the social class of her origin; this is so common that it is iconic, we expect it.

Of course, if a woman is too punishing in the dating dynamic, she risks the man resorting to one of his own power areas – physical force, for example, and so she doesn't experience her power over as a feeling of power. Instead, like him, she feels anxious rather than secure. This feeling of powerlessness on both sides is a major symptom of codependence, and completely misleading since it seems obvious on each side that the other holds the power that matters.

Recall the observation made earlier of the power wielded by the women in the Ottawa Men's Forum, even as they felt themselves to be powerless and abused. This false feeling of one-sided power and oppression by the other party completely explains feminist analysis of male power, and also explains why it totally overlooks the other side of the pattern, namely men's powerlessness in the face of women's power. So, for example, women have used their moral power to identify date rape, i.e., women's experience of men's power, as the important dating issue, while most men remain afraid or ashamed to acknowledge (perhaps even to feel) their own powerlessness in the same dating dynamic. When they do speak up about their own fears, e.g., about how devastating a false accusation of rape can be, they are often shamed in response. The dance of codependence is complex and confusing. For the moment we have oversimplified it by privileging women's experience over that of men, because of our ability to empathize with women, but hardly at all with men.

Dissident feminist Camille Paglia writes,

“When I was young, I thought teenage boys were the most awkward, miserable, antsy, bratty, scuzzy, snickering creatures on God's green earth. Now at midlife and, as it were, *hors de combat*, I see them quite differently. Watching them rampage on the street or at the shopping mall; I find them extraordinarily moving, for they represent the masculine principle struggling to free itself from woman's cosmic dominance.

“Teenage boys, goaded by their surging hormones (at maximum strength at this time), run in packs like the primal horde. They have only a brief season of exhilarating liberty between control by their mothers and control by their wives. The agony of male identity springs from men's humiliating sense of dependence upon women. It is women who control the emotional and sexual realms, and men know it.”^{viii}

What Paglia describes here is not the whole story of teenage male behavior; it is just an overlooked piece. It is overlooked today because it is sympathetic in tone towards men. It recognizes male *powerlessness*, and so contradicts the one-sided story of our time. Paglia has learned to empathize with boys, to see deeper than they do into their souls (they do not know in any conscious sense, or course, about their own dependence on women), into their issues and their challenges, and to feel for them. It is a rare gift in our present climate, from either men or women, and it is received by this male with gratitude.

Let us pause to recap. I have presented an alternative theory of gender relations and some basic supporting evidence. I have told at some length the story of how I came to this theory, twenty years ago. My experience since that time has confirmed the validity of the model, but also the difficulty of

communicating it. Codependence, as an addiction, has enormous power over both our thoughts and our feelings – and what else do we have with which to discern what is true? The feeling associated with codependence is one of victimhood, of being oppressed because one perceives the other party as having the power that matters. So women, who got in touch with their powerlessness first, have told a story of oppression by men. They remain codependently unaware that it is their moral power, their ability to shame men that is driving our whole society to address women's issues and deny men's issues. They are exerting enormous power in an unbalanced, dysfunctional way even as they continue to feel victimized and righteously innocent.

Since the Gender Codependent Matrix derives from traditional patterns of relating between men and women, the feelings that it gives rise to match the historical relationship. So feminists, like conservatives, see women as needing protection from men even as they declare that women are the equal of any man. They see women as victims of male power even as they talk about girrrl power and female empowerment. The rhetoric is about equality, but the feeling is more like Victorian moral chasteness, which is why they will never *feel* equal, no matter how much legislation and policy addresses their issues. The problem they have identified is being addressed in the outer world, because that is where they feel it to be, but that is not where the problem actually lies. The real problem is internal, the codependent addictive relationship and cover story of denial, and that is where the only real solution lies as well. More of us must move into recovery.

I am aware from personal experience that there is pain in admitting that one has been addicted and moving into recovery. Yet some do it, and from the other side they report joy and no regrets. For each individual, it comes down to what we really want. If we want to know what is true, we find it. It may take persistence and courage, but we really do find it. Conversely, if we stay addicted, then that is what we want. At the deepest level, the level that lies beneath our cover story of innocence or ignorance, we know what is true and we are in control and responsible.

i Warren Farrell, Ph.D., *Why Men Are the Way They Are: The Male-Female Dynamic*, McGraw Hill, NY, 1986.

ii Alexis de Tocqueville, "Democracy in America," 1834. Quoted from reprint, ed. Phillips Bradley, Vintage Books, NY, 1945, vol.1, pp.315-8.

iii "Resolved, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak, and teach, as she has an opportunity, in all religious assemblies." Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, Women's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, 1848. Cited from <http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/seneca.html> on February 20, 2015.

iv Howard S. Schwartz, *The Revolt of the Primitive: An Inquiry into the Roots of Political Correctness*, Praeger, Westport, CONN, 2001, p.152.

v See Shiela Rotham, "Women's Proper Place." cited from Ferrel M. Christensen, *Pornography: The Other Side*, Praeger, NY, 1990, p.53.

vi Howard S. Schwartz, *The Revolt of the Primitive: An Inquiry into the Roots of Political Correctness*, Praeger, Westport, CONN, 2001, p.158-9.

vii Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MASS, 1990, p.135.

viii Camille Paglia, "Homosexuality at the Fin de Siècle," *Sex, Art, and American Culture: Essays*, Random House, NY, 1992, p.24.