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The Great Feminization

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October 16, 2025

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ILLUSTRATION: SCOTT MENCHIN

In 2019, I read an article about Larry Summers and Harvard that changed the way I look at the world. The author, writing under the pseudonym “J. Stone,” argued that the day Larry Summers resigned as president of Harvard University marked a turning point in our culture. The entire “woke” era could be extrapolated from that moment, from the details of how Summers was cancelled and, most of all, who did the cancelling: women.

The basic facts of the Summers case were familiar to me. On January 14, 2005, at a conference on “Diversifying the Science and Engineering Workforce,” Larry Summers gave a talk that was supposed to be off the record. In it, he said that female underrepresentation in hard sciences was partly due to “different availability of aptitude at the high end” as well as taste differences between men and women “not attributable to socialization.” Some female professors in attendance were offended and sent his remarks to a reporter, in defiance of the off-the-record rule. The ensuing scandal led to a no-confidence vote by the Harvard faculty and, eventually, Summers’s resignation.

The essay argued that it wasn’t just that women had cancelled the president of Harvard; it was that they’d cancelled him in a very feminine way. They made emotional appeals rather than logical arguments. “When he started talking about innate differences in aptitude between men and women, I just couldn’t breathe because this kind of bias makes me physically ill,” said Nancy Hopkins, a biologist at MIT. Summers made a public statement clarifying his remarks, and then another, and then a third, with the apology more insistent each time. Experts chimed in to declare that everything Summers had said about sex differences was within the scientific mainstream. These rational appeals had no effect on the mob hysteria.

This cancellation was feminine, the essay argued, because all cancellations are feminine. Cancel culture is simply what women do whenever there are enough of

them in a given organization or field. That is the Great Feminization thesis, which the same author later elaborated upon at book length: Everything you think of as “wokeness” is simply an epiphenomenon of demographic feminization.

The explanatory power of this simple thesis was incredible. It really did unlock the secrets of the era we are living in. Wokeness is not a new ideology, an outgrowth of Marxism, or a result of post-Obama disillusionment. It is simply feminine patterns of behavior applied to institutions where women were few in number until recently. How did I not see it before?

Possibly because, like most people, I think of feminization as something that happened in the past before I was born. When we think about women in the legal profession, for example, we think of the first woman to attend law school (1869), the first woman to argue a case before the Supreme Court (1880), or the first female Supreme Court Justice (1981).

A much more important tipping point is when law schools became majority female, which occurred in 2016, or when law firm associates became majority female, which occurred in 2023. When Sandra Day O'Connor was appointed to the high court, only 5 percent of judges were female. Today women are 33 percent of the judges in America and 63 percent of the judges appointed by President Joe Biden.

“The *New York Times* staff became majority female in 2018.”

The same trajectory can be seen in many professions: a pioneering generation of women in the 1960s and '70s; increasing female representation through the 1980s and '90s; and gender parity finally arriving, at least in the younger cohorts, in the 2010s or 2020s. In 1974, only 10 percent of *New York Times* reporters were female. The *New York Times* staff became majority female in 2018 and today the female share is 55 percent.

Medical schools became majority female in 2019. Women became a majority of the college-educated workforce nationwide in 2019. Women became a majority of college instructors in 2023. Women are not yet a majority of the managers in America but they might be soon, as they are now 46 percent. So the timing fits. Wokeness arose around the same time that many important institutions tipped demographically from majority male to majority female.

The substance fits, too. Everything you think of as wokeness involves prioritizing the feminine over the masculine: empathy over rationality, safety over risk, cohesion over competition. Other writers who have proposed their own versions of the Great Feminization thesis, such as Noah Carl or Bo Winegard and Cory Clark, who looked at feminization's effects on academia, offer survey data showing sex differences in political values. One survey, for example, found that 71 percent of men said protecting free speech was more important than preserving a cohesive society, and 59 percent of women said the opposite.

The most relevant differences are not about individuals but about groups. In my experience, individuals are unique and you come across outliers who defy stereotypes every day, but *groups* of men and women display consistent differences. Which makes sense, if you think about it statistically. A random woman might be taller than a random man, but a group of ten random women is very unlikely to have an average height greater than that of a group of ten men. The larger the group of people, the more likely it is to conform to statistical averages.

Female group dynamics favor consensus and cooperation. Men order each other around, but women can only suggest and persuade. Any criticism or negative sentiment, if it absolutely must be expressed, needs to be buried in layers of compliments. The outcome of a discussion is less important than the fact that a discussion was held and everyone participated in it. The most important sex difference in group dynamics is attitude to conflict. In short, men wage conflict openly while women covertly undermine or ostracize their enemies.

Bari Weiss, in her letter of resignation from *The New York Times*, described how colleagues referred to her in internal Slack messages as a racist, a Nazi, and a bigot and—this is the most feminine part—“colleagues perceived to be friendly with me were badgered by coworkers.” Weiss once asked a colleague at the *Times* opinion desk to get coffee with her. This journalist, a biracial woman who wrote frequently about race, refused to meet. This was a failure to meet the standards of basic professionalism, obviously. It was also very feminine.

Men tend to be better at compartmentalizing than women, and wokeness was in many ways a society-wide failure to compartmentalize. Traditionally, an individual doctor might have opinions on the political issues of the day but he would regard it as his professional duty to keep those opinions out of the examination room. Now that medicine has become more feminized, doctors wear pins and lanyards expressing views on controversial issues from gay rights to Gaza. They even bring the credibility of their profession to bear on political fads, as when doctors said Black Lives Matter protests could continue in violation of Covid lockdowns because racism was a public health emergency.

One book that helped me put the pieces together was *Warriors and Worriers: The Survival of the Sexes* by psychology professor Joyce Benenson. She theorizes that men developed group dynamics optimized for war, while women developed group dynamics optimized for protecting their offspring. These habits, formed in the mists of prehistory, explain why experimenters in a modern psychology lab, in a study that Benenson cites, observed that a group of men given a task will “jockey for talking time, disagree loudly,” and then “cheerfully relay a solution to the experimenter.” A group of women given the same task will “politely inquire about one another’s personal backgrounds and relationships ... accompanied by much eye contact, smiling, and turn-taking,” and pay “little attention to the task that the experimenter presented.”

The point of war is to settle disputes between two tribes, but it works only if peace is restored after the dispute is settled. Men therefore developed methods for reconciling with opponents and learning to live in peace with people they were

fighting yesterday. Females, even in primate species, are slower to reconcile than males. That is because women's conflicts were traditionally within the tribe over scarce resources, to be resolved not by open conflict but by covert competition with rivals, with no clear terminus.

All of these observations matched my observations of wokeness, but soon the happy thrill of discovering a new theory eventually gave way to a sinking feeling. If wokeness really is the result of the Great Feminization, then the eruption of insanity in 2020 was just a small taste of what the future holds. Imagine what will happen as the remaining men age out of these society-shaping professions and the younger, more feminized generations take full control.

The threat posed by wokeness can be large or small depending on the industry. It's sad that English departments are all feminized now, but most people's daily lives are unaffected by it. Other fields matter more. You might not be a journalist, but you live in a country where what gets written in *The New York Times* determines what is publicly accepted as the truth. If the *Times* becomes a place where in-group consensus can suppress unpopular facts (more so than it already does), that affects every citizen.

“The rule of law will not survive the legal profession becoming majority female.”

The field that frightens me most is the law. All of us depend on a functioning legal system, and, to be blunt, the rule of law will not survive the legal profession becoming majority female. The rule of law is not just about writing rules down. It means following them even when they yield an outcome that tugs at your heartstrings or runs contrary to your gut sense of which party is more sympathetic.

A feminized legal system might resemble the Title IX courts for sexual assault on college campuses established in 2011 under President Obama. These proceedings were governed by written rules and so technically could be said to operate under the

rule of law. But they lacked many of the safeguards that our legal system holds sacred, such as the right to confront your accuser, the right to know what crime you are accused of, and the fundamental concept that guilt should depend on objective circumstances knowable by both parties, not in how one party feels about an act in retrospect. These protections were abolished because the people who made these rules sympathized with the accusers, who were mostly women, and not with the accused, who were mostly men.

These two approaches to the law clashed vividly in the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings. The masculine position was that, if Christine Blasey Ford can't provide any concrete evidence that she and Kavanaugh were ever in the same room together, her accusations of rape cannot be allowed to ruin his life. The feminine position was that her self-evident emotional response was itself a kind of credibility that the Senate committee must respect.

If the legal profession becomes majority female, I expect to see the ethos of Title IX tribunals and the Kavanaugh hearings spread. Judges will bend the rules for favored groups and enforce them rigorously on disfavored groups, as already occurs to a worrying extent. It was possible to believe back in 1970 that introducing women into the legal profession in large numbers would have only a minor effect. That belief is no longer sustainable. The changes will be massive.

Oddly enough, both sides of the political spectrum agree on what those changes will be. The only disagreement is over whether they will be a good thing or a bad thing. Dahlia Lithwick opens her book *Lady Justice: Women, the Law, and the Battle to Save America* with a scene from the Supreme Court in 2016 during oral arguments over a Texas abortion law. The three female justices, Ginsburg, Sotomayor, and Kagan, “ignored the formal time limits, talking exuberantly over their male colleagues.” Lithwick celebrated this as “an explosion of bottled-up judicial girl power” that “afforded America a glimpse of what genuine gender parity or near parity might have meant for future women in powerful American legal institutions.”

Lithwick lauds women for their irreverent attitude to the law's formalities, which, after all, originated in an era of oppression and white supremacy. "The American legal system was fundamentally a machine built to privilege propertied white men," Lithwick writes. "But it's the only thing going, and you work with what you have." Those who view the law as a patriarchal relic can be expected to treat it instrumentally. If that ethos comes to prevail throughout our legal system, then the trappings will look the same, but a revolution will have occurred.

The Great Feminization is truly unprecedented. Other civilizations have given women the vote, granted them property rights, or let them inherit the thrones of empires. No civilization in human history has ever experimented with letting women control so many vital institutions of our society, from political parties to universities to our largest businesses. Even where women do not hold the top spots, women set the tone in these organizations, such that a male CEO must operate within the limits set by his human resources VP. We assume that these institutions will continue to function under these completely novel circumstances. But what are our grounds for that assumption?

The problem is not that women are less talented than men or even that female modes of interaction are inferior in any objective sense. The problem is that female modes of interaction are not well suited to accomplishing the goals of many major institutions. You can have an academia that is majority female, but it will be (as majority-female departments in today's universities already are) oriented toward other goals than open debate and the unfettered pursuit of truth. And if your academia doesn't pursue truth, what good is it? If your journalists aren't prickly individualists who don't mind alienating people, what good are they? If a business loses its swashbuckling spirit and becomes a feminized, inward-focused bureaucracy, will it not stagnate?

If the Great Feminization poses a threat to civilization, the question becomes whether there is anything we can do about it. The answer depends on why you think it occurred in the first place. There are many people who think the Great Feminization is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Women were finally given a chance to compete with men, and it turned out they were just better. That is why

there are so many women in our newsrooms, running our political parties, and managing our corporations.

Ross Douthat described this line of thinking in an interview this year with Jonathan Keiperman, a.k.a. “L0m3z,” a right-wing publisher who helped popularize the term “the longhouse” as a metaphor for feminization. “Men are complaining that women are oppressing them. Isn’t the longhouse just a long, male whine about a failure to adequately compete?” Douthat asked. “Maybe you should suck it up and actually compete on the ground that we have in 21st-century America?”

That is what feminists think happened, but they are wrong. Feminization is not an organic result of women outcompeting men. It is an artificial result of social engineering, and if we take our thumb off the scale it will collapse within a generation.

The most obvious thumb on the scale is anti-discrimination law. It is illegal to employ too few women at your company. If women are underrepresented, especially in your higher management, that is a lawsuit waiting to happen. As a result, employers give women jobs and promotions they would not otherwise have gotten simply in order to keep their numbers up.

It is rational for them to do this, because the consequences for failing to do so can be dire. Texaco, Goldman Sachs, Novartis, and Coca-Cola are among the companies that have paid nine-figure settlements in response to lawsuits alleging bias against women in hiring and promotions. No manager wants to be the person who cost his company \$200 million in a gender discrimination lawsuit.

“Anti-discrimination law requires that every workplace be feminized.”

Anti-discrimination law requires that every workplace be feminized. A landmark case in 1991 found that pinup posters on the walls of a shipyard constituted a hostile environment for women, and that principle has grown to encompass many forms of masculine conduct. Dozens of Silicon Valley companies have been hit with lawsuits alleging “frat boy culture” or “toxic bro culture,” and a law firm specializing in these suits brags of settlements ranging from \$450,000 to \$8 million.

Women can sue their bosses for running a workplace that feels like a fraternity house, but men can’t sue when their workplace feels like a Montessori kindergarten. Naturally employers err on the side of making the office softer. So if women are thriving more in the modern workplace, is that really because they are outcompeting men? Or is it because the rules have been changed to favor them?

A lot can be inferred from the way that feminization tends to increase over time. Once institutions reach a 50–50 split, they tend to blow past gender parity and become more and more female. Since 2016, law schools have gotten a little bit more female every year; in 2024, they were 56 percent female. Psychology, once a predominantly male field, is now overwhelmingly female, with 75 percent of psychology doctorates going to women. Institutions seem to have a tipping point, after which they become more and more feminized.

That does not look like women outperforming men. It looks like women driving men away by imposing feminine norms on previously male institutions. What man wants to work in a field where his traits are not welcome? What self-respecting male graduate student would pursue a career in academia when his peers will ostracize him for stating his disagreements too bluntly or espousing a controversial opinion?

In September, I gave a speech at the National Conservatism conference along the lines of the essay above. I was apprehensive about putting forward the Great Feminization thesis in such a public forum. It is still controversial, even in conservative circles, to say that there are *too many* women in a given field or that women in large numbers can transform institutions beyond recognition in ways that make them cease to function well. I made sure to express my argument in the most

neutral way possible. To my surprise, the response was overwhelming. Within a few weeks, the video of the speech had gotten over 100,000 views on YouTube and become one of the most viewed speeches in the history of the National Conservatism conference.

It is good that people are receptive to the argument, because our window to do something about the Great Feminization is closing. There are leading indicators and lagging indicators of feminization, and we are currently at the in-between stage when law schools are majority female but the federal bench is still majority male. In a few decades, the gender shift will have reached its natural conclusion. Many people think wokeness is over, slain by the vibe shift, but if wokeness is the result of demographic feminization, then it will never be over as long as the demographics remain unchanged.

As a woman myself, I am grateful for the opportunities I have had to pursue a career in writing and editing. Thankfully, I don't think solving the feminization problem requires us to shut any doors in women's faces. We simply have to restore fair rules. Right now we have a nominally meritocratic system in which it is illegal for women to lose. Let's make hiring meritocratic in substance and not just name, and we will see how it shakes out. Make it legal to have a masculine office culture again. Remove the HR lady's veto power. I think people will be surprised to discover how much of our current feminization is attributable to institutional changes like the advent of HR, which were brought about by legal changes and which legal changes can reverse.

Because, after all, I am not just a woman. I am also someone with a lot of disagreeable opinions, who will find it hard to flourish if society becomes more conflict-averse and consensus-driven. I am the mother of sons, who will never reach their full potential if they have to grow up in a feminized world. I am—we all are—dependent on institutions like the legal system, scientific research, and democratic politics that support the American way of life, and we will all suffer if they cease to perform the tasks they were designed to do.

Helen Andrews is the author of *Boomers: The Men and Women Who Promised Freedom and Delivered Disaster*.

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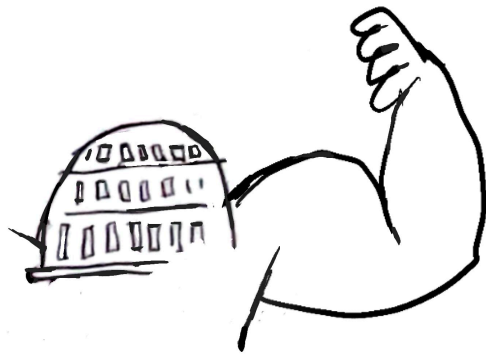
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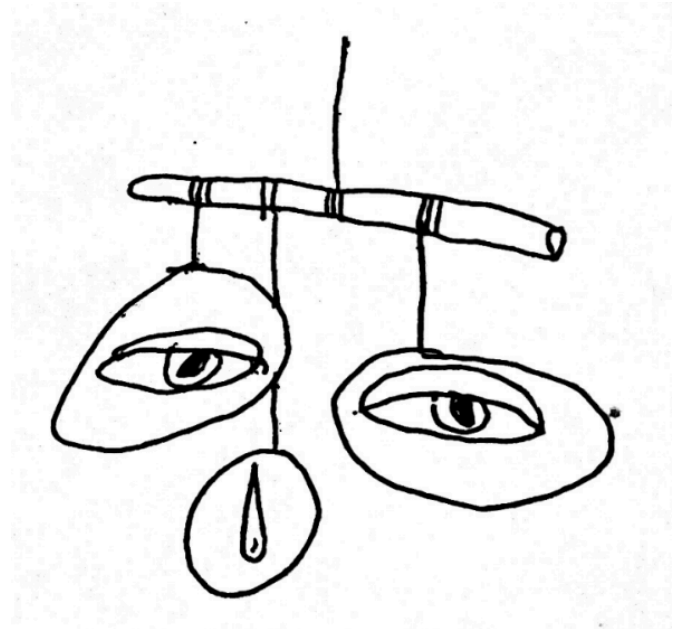
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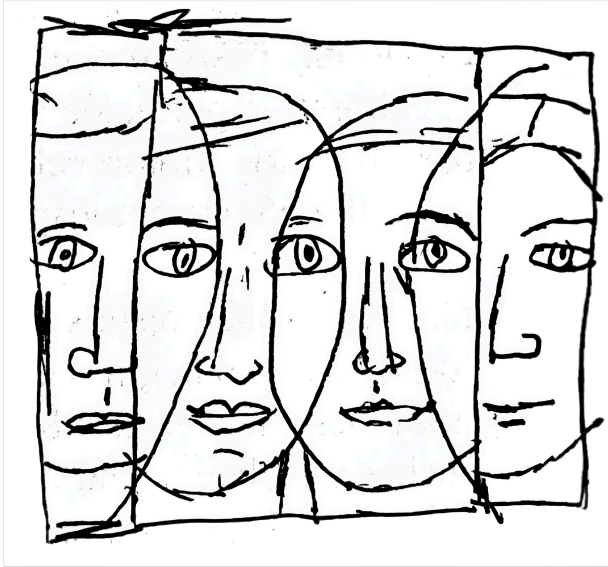
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