



UP

One Man's Journey to Feminism

Peter W. Pruyn

he / him / his*

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Cover photo: 7,500 feet over Galveston Bay early on a Saturday morning. ©2020 Peter W. Pruyne.

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Content warning:
Contains descriptions of physical and emotional violence

* Pronounced "prine". He/him/his: This is the set of pronouns I ask others to use when referring to me. People who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming may use pronouns that do not conform to binary male/female gender categorizations, such as "they, them, theirs."

Afterwords

Understanding complexity benefits from multiple perspectives. What follows is a collection of afterwords written by individuals of diverse backgrounds and professions. Writers were invited to write their afterword as open letters to a person or group of their choice. This collection will be added to over time.

From a Business Perspective by Alex Prout

Alex Prout is head of international advisory services for Nuveen, a financial planning company. Previously, Alex was head of Asia Pacific for Deutsche Asset Management and COO, global sales and distribution for Morgan Stanley Investment Management. Alex is co-founder of I Have the Right To, a victim's rights and advocacy organization and father of survivor Chessy Prout, whose book I mention in the Introduction. Alex is founding chair of the Solidarity Council of Vital Voices, a global leadership development organization for women, and a recipient of their Voices of Solidarity Award for 2018.

Why is gender equality in the workplace important? It is a question gaining more and more attention by Human Resources, but also consequently more air time in the hallways and boardrooms of the corporate world. Gender equality is not a new issue, however, but one which has existed in countless societies for centuries. We now know that statistically companies in the US with a diverse workforce perform better and tend to be more profitable. We also know, from a sense of fairness, nurturing a level playing field in the workplace, where all can achieve their full potential regardless of who or what they are, is the right thing to do. Yet somehow, in the corporate space, change and improvement has been slow to non-existent when it comes to representative benchmarks like the gender pay gap and percentages of women in management/board positions. According to the analysis, we are missing performance enhancement opportunities as a result.

Why are changes so difficult? The stats above are compelling. Yet we have not really made significant progress, and are theoretically losing productivity and profitability as a result. It makes sense if you have a diverse workforce, functioning communication channels and a merit-based career advancement culture, the atmosphere for productivity will be a healthy one. Current power structures are dominated by the Old Boy's Club, and the unlevelled playing fields we see in the workplace are part of the design to maintain the status quo of the club. Change will not come "organically" within our collective lifetimes—the gender pay gap is expected to take nearly 200 years to close at our current pace. We will need to take intentional and dramatic actions to close the gaps and level the playing field.

Why do I care about gender equality? And why should you? My path to becoming an advocate

for gender equality came from my own experience with statistics and the attitude and stance of an entrenched power structure.

As a father of three girls, I must admit I do spend time worrying about what the future workplace will look like for my daughters. Will they be treated as equals to their male peers? Will their careers advance based on the merits of their hard work and capabilities? Will they be targets of harassment or worse?

Six years ago, I was having a water cooler conversation with a colleague at the office. I had just read a *New York Times* article which featured the statistics that 1 in 4 women will be victims of sexual assault before they graduate college. I turned to my co-worker and said, “Statistically, one of my daughters will be a victim of rape...” with my thoughts turning to my eldest daughter who was just about to graduate high school and head to college.

Three months later, our world was changed by sexual assault. But it was the assault of our 2nd daughter, a freshman in high school. As a father, I had much to learn about sexual assault—how the crime impacted my daughter, physically and mentally, how to properly support her through her healing process, how to navigate the criminal justice system. During this process, I also learned about institutional complicity. I naively assumed the school my daughters attended would be conscientiously protecting them. They attended a boarding school in New Hampshire, St. Paul’s School, which I also attended. My daughter, by all measures, did the right thing. She spoke up and sought help after her assault, she cooperated with the police, and her perpetrator was arrested. Yet, when she returned to school, she was ostracized by friends, bullied and harassed by her peers, and offered little to no support by the school, which eventually led to the departure from “her” school. After a very public criminal trial (and conviction), many victims of abuse at St. Paul’s School came forward to tell their stories. And eventually the Attorney General of New Hampshire brought criminal charges against the school for negligence and cover-ups of abuse. Their active isolation and silencing of victims and lack of transparency and accountability provided me horrifying insights into institutional complicity and the impact of a culture gone bad.

I pray and hope many men read Peter’s book about his journey to feminism. Men are in the power seat. We are the Old Boy’s Club. Therefore, we are in the best position to bring meaningful change. We need to break the cycle. Perpetrators of sexual assault are men (99%) and typically White (57%). Sexual assault is a crime of power and thrives in environments where men have power over their victims (religious organizations, youth organizations, athletics, schools, the workplace). We can break this cycle. But it will take coordinated work—in our homes, in our schools, in our places of worship or social gathering, and in our workplaces. We need to speak up about consent, discuss the meaning of healthy relationships, and focus on building an environment where mutual respect and integrity are the foundations of our behaviors.

From the Perspective of a Mother of Boys by Aisha Ellis

Aisha Ellis is the mother of three boys. She has worked in the mental health field for seven years.

My Sons,

As I have watched you all grow over these years, I have always believed that each of you has unlimited potential. I have raised you to believe in yourselves and the bond of brotherhood.

Recently I was given the opportunity to read the memoir of my dear friend Peter, and by the end I had a new sense of clarity about not only how far you three boys can go in life, but also about how much of the world is still unknown to us.

Peter's book made me realize that we are not limited to only the parts of the world that we are born and raised in. There is an enormous world beyond the familiarity of the cities, state and country you have grown up in.

As young capable adults, I would like for each of you to search beyond home and travel the world, see new places, experience cultures, learn new things, take chances, and be free.

Be limitless, be more than what you "think" you're supposed to be. Dream big and then make those dreams your reality.

This is the most recent lesson that I have learned, and I plan to spend the rest of my life seeing beauty, learning new and amazing things, and traveling and living my life to the fullest.

One other thing. No matter what you do, your life will have ups and downs. Another thing I learned from Peter's book is that when you're down, it's O.K. to ask for help. We all know that for many Black men, mental health isn't a thing. Make it a thing. Know that it's O.K. to ask for help. That's how you get back up.

I love you all!

Love,

Mama

Afterword TBD

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