

OP-ED

Gay men need to be feminists too

By Rich Benjamin

EVEN IN THE ALL-MALE environments that I've frequented, from golf courses to gay bars to locker rooms, I never encountered the kind of brutish sexism that Donald Trump broadcast as he campaigned for office. And yet I know his continuing insults against women are not singular; attacks are festering from a wide cast of misogynists, from the Leslie Moonves type to the "incel" type to the Alabama statehouse type.

This is forcing some soul-searching on me — namely confronting the worsening attitudes toward women next to the rapid-fire gains of gay male liberation in recent years. If any group has been steadfast in its support of gay men, it is feminists. In return, are we gay men who claim to be feminist really so?

You know that social lore that valorizes gay men as more refined and more sensitive — so aesthetically superior to everyone else? It enables many of them to get away with scandalous chauvinism. Knowing quite a few gay men at the top of their professions — media, fashion, philanthropy, academia — I witness a fraternity of privilege

frighteningly indifferent to the backlash against women. The gender pay gap continues, never mind the inequality in political representation, and the horrifying spate of antiabortion rights laws.

How much internalized sexism still lards our interactions with women? Gay men might march toward universalized marriage and child-adoption rights. But that ethos shouldn't seduce gay men to downplay gender-based prejudice. Our growing inclusion into marriage and child-rearing doesn't necessarily intensify gay men's bond to women; it can heighten our empathy for entitled straight men. As gay men become more invested in heterosexual normativity, we have to redouble our efforts to dismantle its worst aspects.

One friend confided to me that she believes that gay men, at this historical juncture, are at least as misogynistic, if not more so, than straight men. Gains in feminism have chastened straight men, she claimed, but not their gay brethren. Another woman, an official at a major cultural institution in New York, told me earlier this year that she finds straight and gay men equally sexist, just in different ways. Straight men tend to need more from women, sexually and

personally, so they couch their misogyny in subtle ways to finesse what they want. Gay men tend to need less from women, she said, so they're at liberty to tell women exactly what they think; gay misogyny is more cutting and blunt.

Shifting personal identities in this country also now blur our social thinking. Young folk are running around America saying they are beyond categories. Above identity. I am post-feminist, post-gay, post-work, post-this-and-that, they say. I am just me.

Those post-label acolytes — who declare race, gender and vocation as outdated straitjackets, imposed by left and right doctrine alike — often dismiss women's everyday adversity. Such a creed essentially dismisses feminist activism as outworn, while celebrating individualism, consumerism, sexual freedom and self-empowerment as the true harbingers of a woman's liberation. People of all genders who have declared themselves and the moment post-feminist have spoken prematurely, just like those who said the nation is post-racial.

Any gay man paying attention could have felt the war against women brewing even back during the Obama years. In 2015, I cer-

tainly sensed it when watching congressional Republicans grill Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards, an interrogation based on discredited videos that allegedly "exposed" fetal tissue sales. I wondered at the time if and how my gay brethren would show up for this female leader and the cause.

At first blush, abortion rights look like the least of any gay guy's problems. Few gay men are causing unplanned pregnancies or raising a child in circumstances where they just can't cope. But reproductive justice touches more than abortion access. Meaningful reproductive justice also concerns access to high-quality, stigma-free reproductive and sexual healthcare. The core issue is control of one's own body and life — which touches the heart of gay rights. Feminists understand how all these rights are connected, but gay men don't always empathize.

Even though gay men are not engineering the recent surge of state laws restricting reproductive rights, nor committing the alarming number of sexual assaults against women, we are implicated in the imagistic, commercial and workplace misogyny that is still strangling women's advancement.

Feminists, from the Daughters of Bilitis to the Notorious RBG, helped pave the way for gay male liberation. Women cared for a previous generation of gay men suffering from AIDS. Today's gay male elites should be standing for women: combating sexual assault; advancing women's reproductive rights; demanding paid maternity leave and support for child care; defending immigrant women escaping domestic violence and rape; and supporting all those women who are decidedly not "post-work," but rather represent nearly two-thirds of the minimum-wage workforce.

Gay men shouldn't dominate the debate, but neither should we hang back in apathy, fatigue or fear of saying the wrong thing. The post-gay, post-work, post-feminist movements might sound fashionable, but the spate of anti-women legislation demands we show up for women. Gay men may have become more liberated, but feminism hasn't run its course.

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My daughter and I are spending the summer at Dad Camp

By Nathan Deuel

WHEN THE LAST DAY of school came around this year, my daughter and I had a plan. Three months, more or less, stretched out before us, and we would take advantage of her free time and mine while we could — spending each long summer day doing something together.

I call it Dad Camp. My wife and daughter and I moved to L.A. after five years in chaotic parts of the Middle East. My wife is a journalist, and in those days, she was often working as a war correspondent. Our family life was anything but routine. When we got back to the States, we looked around at what seemed normal for families here and followed suit. We enrolled our daughter in the local school and a kids soccer league. We carpooled. And then suddenly, school was about to let out.

It seemed like all the other parents we knew were signing their kids up for something called "camp." Growing up, neither my wife nor I went to camp. (I remember being on my bike most of the summer and begging to watch TV.) But our daughter would go on to attend an art camp and a surf camp and a woodworking camp. Some of the programs were administered by nearby Loyola Marymount University, staffed by student "counselors" who always seemed to be galloping around and smiling big toothy grins.

It worked out well. My wife's hours are long. I teach undergrads at UCLA. When my daughter was in summer camp, I did my own writing. But this year, that didn't look so great to me. My kid was about to turn 10. And I was about to turn 40. When LMU sent the usual emails announcing its camp offerings, it occurred to me: Maybe I could be the one with the grin, galloping around?

When I broached Dad Camp to my daughter, there was a nearly heartbreaking moment of silence. I prepared myself for disappointment. "Sure!" she said. "Sounds great!"

I started a list of ideas. Friends and colleagues weighed in. One nonsensical co-worker observed that parents all over Los Angeles couldn't hire people to take care of their kids for the summer, so Dad Camp wasn't very special. A few friends were pointedly envious of my job in academia, which makes Dad Camp possible. At least one friend was encouraged to see me breaking with the long history of dads who maybe make it to a summer ballgame or two, or take two weeks off for a family vacation of some kind, but aren't in the habit of spending all summer with their kids.

I thought about my own dad, who

when I was young worked a lot, including many Saturdays. I remembered the day in third grade he was supposed to help chaperone a field trip, forgot, arrived late, and for some reason brought me a package of these markers that had some kind of smell agent so that the purple one smelled like grapes. He handed the gift to me, sweating through his suit, and then he had to go back to work.

I know how fundamentally lucky I am. And I know this summer may be one of my last chances to cash in that luck with a daughter who still enjoys spending time with me.

Together, we sat down at the beginning of June with a fresh iCal and began populating the summer weeks with the ways we could be together. Plans include Dodgers games, the opening day for "Toy Story 4," a birthday camp out at San Onofre State Beach, various hikes, museum visits, surfing, more campouts, and also some chores, doctors appointments, house maintenance and a dose of what you might call "service learning": volunteering and job shadowing.

The first morning of Dad Camp we were supposed to go to MOCA downtown and have lunch at the Nickel Diner. I was making coffee when I heard her voice, hesitant: "Dad, I don't think I want to go to a museum." I could have hung it up, graded the last of the semester's straggling papers. I gripped the kettle, grit my teeth, tried not to get upset. Was our summer over before it started?

"Well, what do you want to do instead?" I asked.

My daughter smiled at me, laced up her roller skates and told me to grab my skateboard. We hit the Venice boardwalk and then after lunch and a nap we went surfing.

So here's how it's working out. The calendar is a work in progress. Our plans keep changing. We fight a little, mostly over adding TV to the "to-do" list. There have been a lot of requests for ice cream and sometimes I worry about the "real" work I'm not doing.

But then I think about how the two of us are extending a special and fleeting moment, a happy intersection between what she wants and what I can provide. My own dad died young, at 59. He had talked so often about the trips we would all take when he retired, when everything would start happening.

It turned out the Nickel was closed anyway. And we would go to MOCA another time.

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JEFF HUTCHENS/Getty Images

THE POPULATION of sub-Saharan Africa is expected to double by midcentury, according to the latest United Nations estimates, and the world will add another 2 billion people.

How to address the world population crisis

Spending money on family planning works. So why is it only 1% of our foreign aid budget?

By Malcolm Potts and Alisha Graves

IN THE LATE 1960s, for a brief moment, population growth commanded the kind of political, popular and academic focus that climate change does now. But today, even as the population crisis grows more severe, it has largely fallen off the agenda.

Paul Ehrlich's seminal book on the subject, "The Population Bomb," was published in 1968, when there were 3.5 billion people in the world and the population was growing by about 2% a year, with about 60 million more births than deaths annually.

Early this week, the United Nations Population Division published its population projections to the end of the century. The report announced that the rate of population growth has slowed to about 1%, but today there are more than twice as many people (7.7 billion) than when Ehrlich's book came out. That means that each year, 80 million more people are born than die — the equivalent of adding a new Germany to the world every 12 months.

The report projects that world population will likely add an additional 2 billion people by 2050. Feeding 9.7 billion people won't be easy, especially given the abundant evidence that climate change will negatively affect the food supply, including in areas experiencing some of the greatest population pressure. The population of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, is expected to double by midcentury, and that of Niger will nearly triple. Already more than 40% of infants in Niger are stunted — malnourished to the point where they will never reach their full human potential. Tens of millions of people will likely try to migrate from the region if drought worsens and crops fail.

Or consider Pakistan and Nigeria, both countries that doubled in size between 1990 and 2019. These increases not only have brought rising levels of human suffering, they have geopolitical implications for all of us. A poor country cannot build schools and train teachers fast enough to keep pace with rapid population growth. In turn, it becomes impossible to create enough new job opportunities. The 9/11 Commission report emphasized that a large population of young men with poor education and few job opportunities is a recipe for "social tur-

bulence."

The U.N.'s latest report estimates a global population of 10.9 billion by the end of the century, but its projections are not written in stone. The report also points out that if families the world over had, on average, one-half fewer children going forward, the population by century's end would have begun to decline, to about 7.3 billion. Conversely, if families have, on average, one-half child more, the population would reach 15.6 billion by the end of 2099. The huge difference that a half-child average makes could well determine whether our children and grandchildren live in a sustainable world, or one that is in danger of collapse as population pressure destroys the complex biosphere on which all life depends.

John Bongaarts, a respected American demographer, has pointed out that only 1% of all overseas development aid is spent on family planning, although it is one of the most cost-effective forms of foreign aid. A drop in family size facilitates better education, reduces maternal and infant mortality, facilitates economic development and sets the stage for more democratic government.

Family planning is an investment: It pays for itself by reducing the cost of education and health services in a poor country with rapid population growth. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the U.S. was the world leader supporting voluntary family planning. Many nations, including South Korea, Thailand, Colombia and Brazil, would be poorer and likely less stable without the support the U.S. gave to accelerate a decline in family size.

An important first step would be for the international community to move from investing 1% of foreign aid in family planning to investing 2% in it. Surveys show that hundreds of millions of women around the world would like either to have no more children or not to have more children in the next couple of years. Based on this fact, and our own experience working in many countries, we believe that increasing aid in international family planning could make that half-child difference.

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VENICE BEACH, one item on the Dad Camp "to-do" list.