

**OCCUPY WOMEN**  
**A MANIFESTO FOR SUCCESS, HAPPINESS AND FREEDOM IN A WORLD RUN BY MEN**

by Maureen F. Fitzgerald, PhD

**Preface**

*Occupy Women* is the most important book I have ever written.

This book began about ten years ago as I was writing a book for my daughters. That book, titled, *Gritty is the New Pretty* is all about helping girls develop resilience, courage and self esteem. But as I was writing I kept getting this deep nagging feeling that something was missing. Looking back I am surprised it did not hit me sooner, particularly given that I am a lawyer and expert on gender equality!

In any event the big light that went on in my head was this: Even if I raise my daughters to be confident and courageous, they will still have to fight off a whole society that sexualizes and degrades them. At that point, I changed the direction of my writing and proceeded to write three books on the barriers that hold women back. This book is the third in that series. The first is on corporate barriers (*Lean Out*) the second is on motherhood barriers (*Motherhood is Madness*) and this book is on society-wide barriers.

In my initial research for this book I asked myself many questions. They ultimately became my “Table of Contents” because as it turned out, these provide a quick summary of the ways in which we hold women back. Although there are undoubtedly more barriers, these seem to arise most frequently. Here are some of my original questions:

Why do we as a society:

- value masculine traits more than feminine traits?
- devalue roles that females tend to occupy, like nurses?
- stereotype women, particularly wives and mothers?
- pressure women to be beautiful, sexy and nice to everyone?
- exclude women from law making and governance?
- pay women less than men for similar work?
- the tolerate the abuse and rape of women?
- use language that excludes women?
- allow millions of women to live in poverty?
- accept pornography and the sex-trade of girls?
- rarely see women in or behind the news and other media?
- sexualize young girls and criticize powerful women?
- discriminate against women just because they are female?
- devalue emotions, intuition and other feminine strengths?
- make it difficult for women to gain high position in corporations and government?

In this book I provide answers to all of these questions and indeed the chapters of my book map loosely onto these particular barriers.

I use the metaphor of a tree to describe “women's problems.” I see the visible problem like poverty, violence and discrimination as the branches of a tree. Underneath the tree are its roots which consist of the things we cannot see, namely our beliefs, institutions and tools. In dealing with the struggles of women, we tend to see only the branches and thus spend significant time trimming the branches (think rape relief centers!) when it is also be useful to (carefully) dig up the roots such as deep seated biases.

## **Introduction**

The blunt truth is that men still run the world. ....When the suffragettes marched in the streets, they envisioned a world where men and women would truly be equal. A century later, we are still squinting, trying to bring that vision into focus. – Sheryl Sandberg

Have you ever wondered why women worldwide suffer so much poverty and violence and why so few are in powerful positions of influence? Why are so many women poor and why are so few at the top of corporations or government? More importantly, why have women barely advanced in the world over the last century and why in many ways have they slipped backward?

Many of us like to think that women’s struggles are mostly historic and that it’s just a matter of time before things dramatically improve for women. We think that rape and violence is a personal problem between individual men and women. When women are kept prisoners in their homes we think it’s just a handful of machismo fathers (from a particular cultural or religious background) who are trying to protect their wives and daughters from potential harm (usually from other men).

We also think that if we teach women how to grow food they will benefit from increased food production and avoid poverty. We believe that when girls and women gain more access to education they will eventually be able to take charge of their lives. We assume that female graduates will move organically into the highest positions in corporations and government and work alongside men in creating laws that benefit everyone.

But this has not happened and many of these explanations are simply not true. They most definitely do not provide the whole picture and thus these myths provide a distorted view of what is really going on. Indeed this reasoning actually masks the deepest causes of women’s suffering and slow progress.

The truth is this: Many if not all of “women’s problems” today are not historic, temporary, individual, cultural or even religious. They are universal problems experienced by all women. Although we like to think they are relatively small and suffered by a few, most of the symptoms suffered by women are in some way related to a much larger problem and that problem is female lack of power. And this lack of power persists because at this point in history we live within an out-dated type of societal structure that keeps women down.

The other truth is this: Humans have lived on this planet for almost 4 million of years yet it has only been in the last 3000 years that men and women have not lived as equals. Indeed archeological evidence suggests that from about 10,000 years ago women were not only worshipped as goddesses but women had a somewhat higher status and were more respect than men.

Here is my take on the world: We currently live in societies where small groups of men are in control of politics, money, media and power. They also maintain their control by keeping others out of power, and specifically women.

Although this sounds somewhat sinister I do not ever think of this as a problem with men. Importantly, I see this as a problem with our whole “operating system.” This system has been researched by many academics and has apparently been evolving over thousands of years. It was essentially designed by men for the benefit of men.

So here’s the question I want to ask: Who gave men all this power? Who built the political system, the economic system and the corporate laws that allow our hierarchal institutions to flourish? How did we as a society come to think that this type of societal organization is the best or only way to function? More importantly, why can’t we see what really going on?

Many years ago legal scholar, Catherine McKinnon, used the metaphor of a playground to get this quandary across. She asked women why they would want to play in a playground where the slide is so massive that women can’t even step up onto the first rung of its ladder. Or why we would want to play on the swings that are so high that when we get pushed off we break our legs. She suggested that it might be easier for women to build a whole new playground rather than to try play in or rebuild the one that’s been built for men.

But changing it seems so daunting as author Ken Dolan-Del Vecchio explains:

“One reason for our complacency is that the roots of inequality within our society have grown deep, strong and validated by law. Europeans brought with them to this land a hierarchal system of wealth and property ownership that was the forebear of our current economic and political order. Within that system, hierarchies based upon class, gender, race, and sexual orientation were mandated by law.”

And we can’t really blame women for inaction. Not only is the problem invisible but most women do not have a moment to spare. Nor do they have access to information or practical advice on how to easily dismantle a patriarchy! Indeed, the type of research-based information contained in this book took me almost ten years to find, read, understand and synthesize.

Yet I personally think that if we are able to shift this system so it better reflects and represents women, we can build a better world with men and women as full partners

So what shall we do?

First, we must admit that women in the world today are held back and suffer in ways that men do not. We must recognize that it’s not the fault of men or women but rather a system we built that favors a few. We must acknowledge women’s reality and see the link between “women’s problems” (such a violence, poverty and discrimination) and our society-wide “operating system. “

Second, we must look at the various parts of this system and notice how they work together to keep women down. We must investigate our personal *beliefs* as well as the *institutions* we built upon these beliefs as well as the *tools* we use to reinforce this system - just as an anthropologist would.

Third, we must take action and build a better society - men and women together as partners.

As you read this book you will begin to see how our institutions and biases work together to maintain the status quo and women are held back, not by particularly evil people, but by our whole societal system. You will also learn (in the form of 21 strategies) how to dismantle this system and build a new one that is good for women and the whole world.

### ***A note about this book***

I am not the first woman to write about how women in the world are held back by our whole society. Nor am I the first to talk openly about our patriarchal roots and our male-favoring institutions. But what I have done here is explain these concepts in a straight forward and practical way. My aim is to quickly educate women so they can both understand what is really going on and take action (without having to read several 300-page academic books).

In this book I do three things:

- I acknowledge women's reality and shine a light on the link between "women's problems" and our patriarchal system. I refuse to blame men or women and instead blame the system.
- I describe the problems that we can see (such as poverty and discrimination) and also the relationships to the deeper roots of the problems. These include our *beliefs* about women, our *institutions* (such as our corporations) and our *tools* of implementation (such as the media and religions).
- I provided specific action steps that both men and women can take to bring about positive and long-lasting change.

In writing this book, I hope to stimulate a movement.

I want to remind all women that they are perfect just as they are and that although they are currently being treated poorly and unfairly in our society, as human beings, they deserve so much more and in my humble opinion are never secondary.

Please join me in this Occupy Women Movement. As actor Emma Watson so eloquently said in her famous 2014 speech to the United Nations (launching the UN-based movement, "HeforShe"): "If not me, then who? If not now, then when?"