

I am the Patriarchy

I read this line from Brené Brown, "Holy *#\$%. I am the patriarchy." After the example she gave, I had to agree that I was the patriarchy, too.

"We ask men to be vulnerable, we beg them to let us in, and we plead with them to tell us when they're afraid, but the truth is that most women can't stomach it. In these moments when real vulnerability happens in men, most of us recoil with fear and that fear manifests as everything from disappointment to disgust. And men are very smart" (*Daring Greatly*).

We, the women, keep men from being vulnerable.

I remember the first time my husband admitted he didn't know how to fix something. He seemed paralyzed with bewilderment. I was distraught that this was a deficiency in him, and maybe in me (how could I choose a man who didn't know how to fix a kitchen sink?). It definitely qualified for a shaming moment and one not to be used in a blog post.

This was a moment for us to hush up, an Achilles' heel to ignore. Enter shame, the belief that my husband's weakness made him unworthy of love. I even felt that weakness in my man was somehow my inadequacy, too.

I rushed in to fix and prop up and bolster with my St. Crispin speech, "Once more into the breach, dear man." And in my heart I murmured *And if you don't, what do you think this does for your masculinity?!*

We don't want male inadequacy. We tell them to "man-up" and we preach a dangerous message, counter to the one Jesus taught where the weak, lowly, brokenhearted, outcast, and crucified are the leaders. We teach men that covering up their weakness is sexy to us. We teach men shame about their own limitations.

Talk about a damning lie. Nothing is so damaging to intimacy as shame.

We'd rather men pretend to be vulnerable, than really know them in their pain. Pretending means they don't ever share the core fears they have. Tell me, have you ever heard your man say...

I'm afraid I cannot keep this pace up.

I'm afraid we've never had enough for your expectations.

I'm afraid I'm not good enough in bed.

I'm afraid I leave you unsatisfied in life.

I'm afraid I am disgusting to you.

I'm afraid our children don't like me.

I'm afraid you don't like me anymore.

Interestingly enough, I think Walter White of *Breaking Bad* is facing every one of these but (at least by Season 2) cannot share them with his black and wife, intolerant wife named Skyler (for more see *Breaking Bad* Season 1).

Let me ask you, has your husband ever felt free to admit any of these to you? How would you feel if he did?

If I claim to love my husband, I darn well want to hear all these things. I want him to feel the safest in my bed, the most vulnerable in my arms, the most himself in our home.

But for most of our female lives, we don't live like we are working on becoming safe women.



Instead, we talk about male headship and we, WE enforce male rule, simply by refusing to see men as weak. We've turned the honor of being a man (and there is an honor to it) into a sentence. "Go sit up on that throne, rule the family, rule the church, rule our finances, but don't you dare, ever, ask for my help." Some men, we've bullied them into dominance and then we leave them on the throne, expecting them to be super human.

And in the process they become less than human. A man who's forbidden from being weak, tends to do one of two things (and I grant these are oversimplified): blow up or shut down.

Which one do the men in your life prefer?

God did not tell women to leave final decision making to men. Male headship doesn't mean "tie-breaking vote" (headship is a metaphor that involves much more interdependence, like a head depending on the body). And women do not honor men by outlawing fear and vulnerability.

Enforcing male dominance comes in many forms, some so common we don't even think of it as dehumanizing. Our enforcement means we'd rather watch our man die trying to please us than give up. These are the words of a man in a yellow Izod golf sweater who told Brené Brown, "My wife and daughters would rather see me die on top of my white horse than

watch me fall off. You say you want us to be vulnerable and real, but c'mon. You can't stand it. It makes you sick to see us like that."

We must start seeing how we refuse to let men be weak. Here's my starter-kit list.

- Believing my husband is substandard when I have to do manual labor due to his absence/illness/unavailability. e.g. snow shoveling.
- Avoiding eye contact when he admits feeling overwhelmed.
- Taking over when he seems to fumble.
- Assuming his emotional absence (shut down) is normal and natural for men and refusing to pursue his feelings.
- Showing embarrassment when he's afraid.
- Expecting him to shoulder the hardest work (emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually) without complaint.
- Never asking him what he's afraid of.
- Refusing to offer him the understanding and sympathy I offer my girlfriends when he's overwhelmed.
- Expecting him to tolerate more criticism than a woman.
- Growing quickly impatient when he doesn't demonstrate mastery over a project: from booking social events, to filing our taxes, to fixing the kitchen sink.
- Becoming business-like and cold when he asks for help.
- Knowing our girlfriend's needs and wants more than we know our own husband's.
- Hiding his mistakes from our kids, as if they (like me) cannot handle him vulnerable.
- Expecting him to have more strength than I do.
- Expecting him to shoulder more grunt-work.
- Expecting him to "man-up" (whatever that means) when I want him to do something unpleasant.
- Expecting him (when you're both equally fire-arm trained) to inspect every scary sound in the house and calling him names (even in your

head) when he shows hesitation.



AMC's "Mad Men" women laughing at a failed kitchen sink fixer-upper.

And since this list (would you care to add more?) destroy the mutual interdependence God created between men and women ([1 Cor 11:11](#)), I'd like to devote a week to admitting how we, women, are the patriarchy. Perhaps the men could join in with some examples they've noticed, too?

If you're on twitter or facebook may I suggest this formula for sharing:

"Taken over the social calendar because I can't stand seeing him botch it up. #IamthePatriarchy"