



By Margaret Evans, Editor

Somewhere between Harvey Weinstein and Al Franken, I started to get uncomfortable with the MeToo movement.

Oh, who am I kidding? I hated it from the get-go. The way it dumped every sexual offense since the beginning of time into one big cauldron, mixing them all up into an unsavory stew with indistinguishable ingredients.

From an unwanted wink at the office to a brutal rape in a back alley, the harmless to the horrifying have now been lumped together under the same catchy banner and sealed with everybody's favorite symbol of solidarity - the hashtag. If you ask me, it makes too much of the wink and too little of the rape and distorts everything in between.

And besides all that, it just rubs me wrong.

Truth be told, it's nothing against MeToo, really. I just don't like movements. In fact, once a good idea becomes a movement, I usually start moving in the opposite direction.

Here's why, I think. For a movement to take flight in this brand-centric era, it must blur lines of distinction, generalize particulars, distill variegated storylines into simple slogans. A movement needs a message. Something blunt and brash. Something like, "Men are predators. #MeToo." Or "Trump is evil. #Resist." Something completely devoid of nuance - which is where truth lives - that can easily fit on a poster.

Y'all all have known my weird, wordy self long enough to know this kind of thing just goes against my grain. It's like nails on the chalkboard of my mind.

That doesn't mean I don't agree with some, or even many, of the sentiments that get melted down and recast into The Big Sentiment - the one that ends up on the official tee-shirt. But there's just something in my personality that won't let me wear that tee-shirt.

I've been reading a lot about "personality" lately, and how it affects our interactions with the world . . . including our politics. According to the Oxford Research Encyclopedia, there's been a good deal of research over the past decade suggesting a correlation between certain personality traits and political orientations. In particular, people with a high degree of "openness" (one of the Big Five) overwhelmingly identify as liberal, while those with a high degree of "conscientiousness" tend to lean conservative. There are other traits that seem to correspond with one of the two general orientations - to varying degrees - but the openness/liberalism and conscientiousness/conservatism connections are the most firmly established thus far.

It's worth noting that, according to this same research, many of our personality traits are largely heritable - as in, passed through the genes - and fairly stable throughout our lifetimes. Not only are we "born that way," but, with some exceptions, we tend to stay that way.

Writing for *Science Daily*, Canadian psychologist and professor Jordan Peterson says, "People's values are deeply embedded in their biology and genetic heritage. This means you have to take a deeper view of political values and morality in terms of where these motives are coming from; political preferences do not emerge from a simple rational consideration of the issues."

Peterson goes on to argue that we need people of both liberal and conservative orientations in order to have a functioning society.

"The fact that variability still exists in these motivational systems, from an evolutionary perspective, means that neither one is sufficient on its own. There are costs and benefits to each political profile and both appear critical to maintaining an effective balance in society."

I'm not sure what any of this has to do with my aversion to hashtags and tee-shirts - if anything. As the political scientists from Oxford remind us, there are plenty of other factors that influence our politics - but most of those are fairly obvious and have been written about ad nauseam. The "personality factor," not so much.

And it fascinates me.

If I'm perfectly honest with myself, I am fairly moderate in both my openness *and* my conscientiousness. I'm genuinely curious and truth-seeking, but unlike some *really*

"open" people, I don't indulge in risky behavior. Like drugs. Or bungee jumping. As for conscientiousness - I always get my work done on time . . . but seldom ahead of time. And I've been known to let laundry sit in the dryer for three days. (Okay, five.)

Considering all that, it's not surprising that I fall somewhere in between the two political persuasions currently polarizing our nation. And that in-between position may have something to do with my reticence to join movements that take strong, aggressive stands *for* this and *against* that. Who knows? Maybe it's some other personality trait altogether. "Agreeableness" is also one of the Big Five, along with "Extraversion" and "Neuroticism." They all figure into our political profiles.

The reason this is all so intriguing - and I think important - is that politics has become the last acceptable prejudice here in the US. While relationships between men and women aren't perfect - hence #MeToo - decent people everywhere agree that sexism is wrong. And while race relations have a ways to go still, we all agree that racial discrimination needs to be eradicated. There's a widespread sense that we all want these problems to subside - sexism and racism, and lots of other isms - and that we're moving in that direction. Making a concerted effort.

But politics? Boy, I don't know. I think we're going backwards. I see people on social media making public comments about their political rivals - without the least bit of shame - that reek of rank prejudice and tribal animosity, the kind of talk I thought we'd long ago banished from polite society.

I have a theory about why this is - though I have no research to back it up. The theory goes like this: Human beings are tribal by nature. Over the past decades, we've worked hard to eradicate our tribal divisions - racial, ethnic, even divisions between nations. But we still have that tribalism in our DNA - that undeniable energy - so now we're directing it at our political foes. We seem to have a deep-seated need to circle the wagons around "our own" and fight against "them." And at this moment in history, politics is all we have left. Besides football.

Is that completely crazy? Maybe. Like I said, it's only a theory. I came up with it during my morning coffee and Dove Chocolate, and I'm already starting to doubt it.

But here's what I'd like you to take away: Next time you find yourself cussing out a political opponent on Facebook, remember it's quite likely he comes by his politics "naturally." He was born that way. And remember, too, that even though you disagree with his ideas - and maybe even his values - chances are he's as necessary to a stable, functioning society as you are.

Science says so.