

The Tangled Chains On The Swing Set of Solipsism

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If you aren't a Manosphere skulker, you might have missed this interesting debate about female solipsism. [Susan at HUS](#) scoffed at the idea, and wanted to see *proof*. [Vox Day at Alpha Game](#) took a swing, [Dalrock made a good stab at it](#), and found some divorce stats that tend to favor the idea, but I thought a more easily-provable aspect of female solipsism might arise from his first point, that solipsism was proved by "...the tendency of women to think anything being discussed is about them personally." He did not, however, have any solid facts for this, so he expounded on the divorce stats instead.

But there's actually some evidence out there, if you know where to look. No one is doing studies looking for solipsism in women, but [observation certainly suggests the presence](#).

According to Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever in their book *Women Don't Ask: The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation*, "Women often worry more than men about the impact their actions will have on their relationships. This can prompt them to change their behavior... sometimes by asking for things indirectly, sometimes by asking for less than they really want, and sometimes by trying to be more deserving of what they want (say by working harder) so that they'll be given what they want without asking."

In other words, women have a greater sense of self-importance and sensitivity to their personal actions than men -- signs of solipsism. Remember, solipsism isn't "selfishness", as many Manospherans mistakenly believe; it's more akin to "self-involvement", and that can be a positive or negative thing. A woman can be completely giving to the people in her life, sacrificing much, and still be *utterly solipsistic*. By putting nearly every issue in terms of "*how does that effect me?*" or "*how do my actions effect others?*", **the female solipsistically maintains a frame that has herself at the center of the picture.** She might be "self-less"...but she still has the "self" front and center.

If possible, try this exercise sometime: when you're in a group that solicits volunteers, say for the decorating committee or the outreach board or the weasel rescue squadron, or whatever, **listen carefully to how people volunteer themselves. Men will have a tendency, I think you will find, to offer their help without qualification or explanation, and leave their participation open-ended: "What needs to be done?"**

Women, on the other hand, will tend to lead with their reservations and exceptions, their level of participation and explain in detail just what they can and cannot offer in terms of resources. **They're perspective tends to be more "What can I do?"**

It's a subtle, but extremely telling indicator of solipsism, I admit, and it's not universal. It's subject to the same maddening variability most female psychological issues are, comparatively speaking. But if you passively observe how men and women take different approaches toward volunteering their labor and resources for the collective effort, you can see a hint of solipsism.

Further, the constant demeaning of their own ego and accomplishments some women demonstrate in an effort to "not hog the spotlight" or "be a bossy show-off" is actually another sign of solipsism. A non-solipsistic person (say, a typical dude) when asked to report on something for a group, will usually go out, do some half-assed research, slap together a half-assed report, and make a half-assed presentation spiked with charm and humor. When he's done, he sits down relieved that it's over and he can go to lunch. He may even *forget that he even presented*, as one colleague of mine did when someone congratulated him on his report.

His personal investment in the work is minimal, so his investment in the response is minimal. He's usually concerned more with the group getting ahead and distinguishing himself in some way than he is in how people think about him. One of the advantages of the male-centered corporate world is clearly the "don't take it personally, it's just business" perspective that allows men to fail, regroup, and continue on without agonizing over their failure. They simply aren't that personally invested in it. The "self" is missing.



It's the kind of slap-dash, cocky shoot-from-the-hip attitude that corporations love to cultivate in mid-to-upper management, because it presents a low-key, calm and cool demeanor that seems completely capable of handling crisis situations without a fuss. Hence the dude who phoned it in gets the attention of upper management for his lack of solipsism (or his demonstration of intellectual laziness, your pick).

But a female colleague prone to solipsism will behave *much* differently. She may carefully research the topic, spend days agonizing over the report's appearance and content, and then deliver a mindfully-given oral presentation sprinkled with apologies, acknowledgements of failure, pleas for understanding and mercy, and other subtextual signals that all mean, in one way or another, *"I am the focus, here, not the information, not the organization, just me and whether or not I do well or not...and I've pre-supplied plenty of reasons for the group's hamsters to reject me utterly for my poor performance and pay me attention, or elicit sympathy from other people who might appreciate just how hard I toiled on this."*

Afterward, if she doesn't get praise for her work, she obsesses about what people "really thought" about her. She assumes that they will judge the quality of her work product based on their feelings for her, not on the ultimate utility of the work. I've seen that happen to even savvy businesswomen: they get bogged down in the details of personal perception and group dynamics and they take every. little. thing. *personally*.

If Bob checked his watch twice during her presentation, that was a *deliberate slap against her*. If Wanda frowned at the wrong time, it was because something she said in the presentation that conflicted with Wanda's own plans or plots -- and that could be a good thing or bad thing *for her*, she'd have to watch it. If Elaine came over afterward and gave her some tips, then it was a *deliberate attempt to sabotage how she performed in the future* by making her needlessly self-critical. Even a compliment on an improved performance leads to a spiral of self-doubt, *"Ohmygod, he thinks I really sucked until now! He must hate me!"*

In every situation, it is the woman and her performance or contribution that was involved as the fulcrum. Dudes don't take things personally in business. Women take everything personally in business. I'm no stranger to this -- I've worked most of my life in female-dominated careers. I've been the only dude in an office with dozens of women. I've worked for female bosses and had female supervisors who, despite their success and achievements, constantly analyzed and over-analyzed and dissected their own performances in a way that would lead to public ridicule if demonstrated by a dude (ridicule from other men -- women would just see him as either a workoholic freak who can't lighten up or an anal-retentive whose self-esteem was so low he couldn't help but obsess).

Dudes do the job and move on. If we get pissed off about something, *we get pissed off* -- we don't usually *worry*. Especially not about what other people think about us in the organization, unless we really screwed up in a big and spectacular way. We're just not that involved in these corporate careers the feminists envied so much. We know, in our masculine heart, that while we contribute to the success of the endeavor, that we, personally, just aren't that important in the grand scheme of things. The tendency of women to obsess over just that seems to lend evidence to solipsism

I'm born out by this observation by Forbes magazine recently, when their [Forbeswoman columnist, L.C. Coleman reported](#):

..female counterparts with equally great (or better!) ideas fell prey to subtly career-sabotaging “nice girl” blunders like over-explaining, **apologizing unnecessarily**, using minimizing words, being the last to speak, and believing that others know more than they did, just to name a few.

Mistrusting yourself is still self-involvement and demonstrates solipsism. Worrying that Jim took offense to something you said about his department during your presentation and obsessing over everything he says or every look he gives you (when Jim was probably just staring at your boobs and wondering what kind of underwear you were wearing today and missed the whole perceived barb) is almost uniquely a female response, **and suggestive of solipsism.** Worrying that others perceive you as too aggressive or too pushy, and taking steps to undercut your own performance, are equally more feminine, **and more suggestive of solipsism.**

If you're looking for a source for this, look no further than the Female Social Matrix -- the Swingset. Remember, the Matrix (a node of which is formed when any two women communicate or work in the same proximity) is constantly seeking Consensus, and each node is constantly attempting to influence that consensus without appearing to actually lead it.

The perception among many, if not most women in the corporate world is that the Consensus sees that pushy, self-aggrandizing, loud and borderline-incompetent behavior is frowned upon in the business environment. **And that's true -- as far as it goes.** When women work in an environment with other women, and the Matrix rules are in effect, **the result is that other women in higher positions within the Matrix will use just about any excuse to keep younger, more attractive, and potentially-smarter women from getting to the top of the crab basket.**

If that means casually "suggesting" proper demeanor and attire to a young "protege" that will help them "get along around here", the older woman has effectively spiked any future competition with the woman by subjecting her to her own Hamster, spinning madly about why everyone thinks she's a bitchy slut now for wearing those shoes and interrupting that time. I saw this happen to a housemate, once. She was a young undergraduate in her senior year taking pre-medical classes at a major private university. She had a part-time job as a lab assistant on campus. Within a week, three different (female) colleagues came by her desk to "helpfully" tell her that the damn male-oriented, male-dominated Administration unofficially frowned upon women who used their sexuality to distract from their performance, and any "provocative" clothing would be a sign that she wouldn't be taken seriously as a scientist.

She took the news to heart, and started to wear far more conservative clothing (she had been pretty demure to begin with) until, when you added her lab coat, you had the academic equivalent of a burkha. Her boobs were safely hidden from the eyes of professors and grad students alike, she put her gorgeous hair up all the time, and she wore glasses instead of contacts. She dropped her number at least two points through selective wardrobe, hair, and make-up choices. And yes, she was "taken more seriously" -- while the three harpies who "helped" her made a point to flirt outrageously with every man in the Administration.

The higher-positioned within the Matrix have a vested interest in seeing other women do well...but not *too* well, and *never* as well as they do. They have spun solipsism into a subtle art, using ostensibly friendly, sisterly overtures, or opportunities for "woman-to-woman mentoring", to undermine and sabotage potential rivals while publicly maintaining the illusion of a united front.

The higher-positioned woman ***uses the younger woman's own solipsism against her***, encouraging her to look at herself not just as another chick trying to achieve in a hard work environment (as her male counterparts do), **but as a *de facto* representative of the wider female Matrix**, and therefore both responsible to it and subject to it in the name of Consensus. Feminism, in particular, is an insidious method of Consensus-building, because it has implicit within the idea that a woman who does not participate in the Feminist Consensus is an ostracized traitor to her own gender, not merely a cog in a corporate machine trying to make it to the top.

In other words, she uses the younger woman's solipsism to utterly undermine her

confidence and assertiveness, while scoring Matrix points for being "helpful" to a sister in the icky old world of nasty mens.

And the natural result of this sabotage?

When it comes to determining where to spend their time and money, investors reward confident sounding entrepreneurs the same way that supervisors and mentors reward confident and assertive protÃ©gÃ©s.

Now, if you're still doubting, then consider this: there are a plethora of articles out there about how a woman can survive and even thrive in a "male-dominated business world" (I prefer the term "male designed-and-created business world", but I digress). That is, we have women talking to other women. Importantly, even those these women are in the same meta-Matrix, the reader and the author don't personally know each other, so it's safe to think that the advice contained therein will be free from personal, solipsistically-driven cattiness.

In [7 Ways To Excel In a Male-Dominated Workplace](#), author Jane Fang advises women to speak up for themselves, as opposed to waiting patiently and quietly for their work contribution to be acknowledged. Good enough advice -- if you don't ask for a raise, you probably won't get one. But then she follows with superb demonstration of female solipsism, as well as the FSM's perspective on how organizations should be run:

Sadly, most bosses are too busy to figure out **what the most equitable project allocation is**, and it often comes down to who yapped last to them about that hot media deal or the new partnership your company is launching.

Emphasis mine. The reason this is compelling is that this is a woman speaking to other women, offering advice that must be needed or it wouldn't have been said. Anthropologists and historians use that standard all the time -- if a medieval monastic order has an ordinance prohibiting carnal knowledge of goats, then you can reasonably assume that the violation of goats was a serious enough problem to warrant a rule. Similarly, if the problems above didn't exist, no one would write about them and no one would read them.

But notice something about the bolded section: the whole way she frames the issue is telling: the focus isn't on individual achievement or the achieving the ultimate goals of the company, **the two areas where dudes are most likely to focus**, but on *whether or not the boss was "fair" and "thoughtful" in parceling out the work*. That's a pristine solipsistic perspective: while focusing on individual achievement is often self-centered, it's rare that individual achievement in an organization comes at the expense of the goals and purpose of the organization. The solipsistic nature of individual women and women in general ("The Matrix") put the emphasis not on the ultimate goal, but how that goal was achieved and whether or not it was fair and equitable.

For men, the issue is the RESULT. For women, the issue is the PROCESS.

It doesn't matter to men how the work was parceled out: the greater the challenge, the greater the achievement. Tell a man to do the impossible and he's got a good chance to do it, not because he was fair and thoughtful about who on his team deserved the best parts of the project, but because he put everyone's egos on the back burner and focused their attention on the goal.

Tell a woman to do the impossible, and she accepts that you've asked her to do what can't be done (at least by her and her team) and therefore abandons all but nominal allegiance to the result and focuses almost entirely on ensuring a fair distribution of the workload. She doesn't see a greater challenge as an opportunity for greater achievement -- she sees it as a personal attack and an attempt to question both her leadership and her ability. SHE is at the center of the equation, and by extension her team is. All that matters is that everyone was treated fairly and equitably at the end of the day, and no one can blame her if they weren't.

A result-oriented perspective on work and other issues gives men a decided advantage in business. They can simultaneously push for individual achievement and distinction AND work tirelessly and selflessly toward a common goal. Even if leadership barely acknowledges their contribution, everyone within the Male Social Matrix (a weak and anemic thing, compared to the FSM) knows that Jim screwed around this time while Bob burned the midnight oil and came up with that thing that saved the company millions. And they'll talk about it at lunch, too, or call each other out if things get heated.

But women? A process-oriented approach to work often decreases institutional momentum toward a specific goal. When the focus is on whether there are enough shovels to go around, and who has to take turns, and not on how much dirt everyone moved that day, the social friction created by this solipsistic perspective is a serious drag on performance. But even if the goal fails, women will still look on their experience as a "victory" if *the way* they did it was agreeable to everyone. By worrying about themselves and how to ensure fair play and a level playing field for everyone else -- and assuming that everyone else is also worrying about those things first -- women allow their solipsistic nature to cloud their perspective in business.



I got called out on this once when I was early in my secretarial career. It's instructional. It's also long and involved, so I'll refrain from my usual post padding with pretty pictures of pre-feminist pin-ups and let you focus on the story. Besides, I'm leaving for Las Vegas in a few hours with Mrs. Ironwood, and I really can't spare the time.

But this is an observational example of the Tangled Chains On The Swing Set of Solipsism that is implicit in the female character. Susan, pay attention: this might be technically anecdotal, but I'd hope you credit me with at least being able to make an objective observation about the subject. Note that some names have been changed, because I couldn't remember them all.

About 18 years ago I was working in a medical office with 13 women as a temp, and we were all destined to slave away for weeks on digitizing old records. While we weren't being paid based on how *much* we did, the fact was that there were 15,000 files to get through, a monumental job by anyone's estimation. I was the only dude (again!), the rest were women ranging in age from 21 to 58. The FSM with a Southern accent.

15,000 files among 14 people gives you about a thousand per person. We could each do about a hundred a week, if we worked steady. By the end of the first week, I'd made my quota and then some . . . but it became clear that not everyone was being as diligent. I posted a list of employees along with how many completed files they had for the week, just to show everyone where we were and how much we had ahead of us. I thought it was pretty innocuous -- wasn't that the point, getting the job done?

Apparently not. Within two days my list disappeared and I was called into my supervisor's office. The list was on her desk.

"What exactly are you trying to accomplish here, Mr. Ironwood?" she said, reprovingly.

"Uh . . . digitizing medical files?" I really didn't understand what the problem was.

"Of course you're digitizing medical files!" she said, exasperated. "And I can't help but

notice that you did more than everyone else."

"Thirty-five more," I said, proudly. "I figure I can get another five done a day, if I press myself."

"Stop it."

"Huh?" WTF? Wasn't I here to do a job?

"I said *stop it*, Ironwood. Stop posting this list -- it's bad for morale. Did you see Betty in the break room?" Betty was in her 50s, on her third career, and was slow as January molasses when it came to processing files. I could get five done in the time it took her to do one, and she hated the computers and the computer system. She didn't even really understand what "digitize" meant, but she made cookies and always was the center of conversation, a kind of matronly figure for the other women. "She was close to *tears*, after she saw herself at the bottom of the list. And you have Angie and Courtney at each others throats, because they're running neck and neck and Angie is convinced she's better than everyone else."

"But . . . I did more than twice what Betty did!" I protested. This was crazy. We had a job to do, a quota to fill, a definite metric of progress . . . and I was getting yelled at for paying attention. To object to my work because I was "hurting someone's feelings" implied that a) emotional feelings were important to getting the job done, of which I was unconvinced, and b) I was somehow responsible for my co-workers feelings to begin with. Shit. I was just grinding mindlessly at data entry.

"That's my point!" she said with a disgusted sigh. "You're trying to make everyone else on the team *feel bad* about the job they're doing."

"Uh, shouldn't they? I mean, you could fire Betty and let me grind through her stuff and probably save--"

"MR. IRONWOOD!" she bellowed. "The only one in danger of losing their job is *you*. I will *not* have a disruptive influence on my team. You trying to promote yourself over everyone else, clearly, and you're trying to sow dissension among your teammates. What are people *supposed* to do when they see this list?"

"Uh, *work harder*?"

"They're going to start getting *competitive*. They're going to start to stress out that they aren't keeping up. They're going to start to blame each other for falling behind, and then every lunch hour will turn into a big bitch fest about who isn't doing their part."

I shrugged. "Doesn't bother me -- I work through my lunch."

"You *WHAT?*"

"I work through my lunch," I said, slowly and deliberately. "Because I've got a *thousand* and change of these things to get through, and I don't want to spend the rest of my life here doing it."

"You *know* you don't get paid for that!" she said, her nostrils flaring. "I don't want to see that on your time card!"

"Oh, no problem. I'm just trying to get the work done."

"You're just trying to *sabotage my team*," she said, eyes narrowing. "*No more* working unpaid during lunch. *No more* posting stupid lists to start fights. Got it?"

I answered in my best Blue Pill Beta ass-kissing tone, and then went back to work. I was so angry that I redoubled my efforts -- the male ability to work through problems through work was in full bore. I got nearly two hundred done that second week, but the following Monday morning found me once again in my supervisor's office. Her nostrils were flaring already, and I knew I was in trouble.

"What the hell is *this*, Ironwood?" she demanded. "I thought we had a word last week!"

"We did!" I said, confused. "I didn't post *anything*. I'm *not* working through my lunch. I'm *not* claiming anything extra on my time card!"

"Yet you still finished almost *three times* as many files as Betty did." She said it like I had walked up to the old biddy and slapped her. "She was in here this morning, crying her eyes out, because she's worried I'm going to let her go."

"And that's *my* fault?"

"*You're* creating an environment that's hostile to her," she said, falling back into Personneleese. "*You* are deliberately trying to turn her co-workers against her."

"How?" I demanded. "All I've done is sit at my desk and enter data!"

"Oh, I think you know *very well* how," she said, eyes narrowing. "And I won't put up with it!"

"I'm still in the dark," I shrugged. "Unless you can elaborate further. Can I go now?"

"One more thing," she said. "About lunch..."

"I told you, I didn't put my lunch on my timecard. Consider last week a gift."

"It's not that. You're the *only one* who doesn't eat lunch in the employees lounge."

I shrugged again. "So?" Honestly, it was the *last* place I wanted to spend the precious half-hour that divided my day. I didn't eat lunch at all most days, I just went out to my car and smoked cigarettes and read.

"So I want to remind you that company policy says that the *only* place where you may eat is in the Employee Lounge."

"I'm not *eating*," I shrugged. I did a lot of that on that job. I figured that would handle it. It didn't -- my boss looked at me like I just spit on her.

"You don't *eat*?" she asked in disbelief. Lunch was the sacred birthright of every clerical worker. My co-workers started discussing when lunch was, what they brought or ordered that day, and the glories of lunches past nearly every morning like daily prayer.

"Not lunch. Why, am I *required* to?" I admit, I was a little sarcastic at that point.

"No," she said, slowly. "But the rest of your co-workers would appreciate it if you would *join* them."

"Why?" I was really confused about this -- I was getting the definite impression that my co-workers were forming a Consensus against me. "I don't eat, I just read. They're too loud to read in there."

"Nevertheless, I want you in the lounge at lunch time," she insisted. "And I recommend you eat *something*. You're making your co-workers uncomfortable by not *participating*."

"In *lunch*?" I asked in disbelief.

"Courtney and I talked last Friday, and she mentioned that it was strange that you didn't sit in with everyone else. In fact, you have apparently become the topic of some speculation, Ironwood. You disappear for the entire lunch period, then come back and barely say a word to *anyone*."

"I . . . I'm just *working*," I said, even more confused. "I'm just sitting in my car reading."

Her eyes narrowed again with suspicion. "Are you *really*, Mr. Ironwood? Because that's not what your co-workers think."

I waited. I didn't say anything. I was getting *pissed*. She waited for me to defend myself, or to give a good excuse for my behavior, or something. But I wasn't playing. Even back then I recognized her baiting tone as a shit test. And even back then I knew how to deal with an obvious shit test. That's one difference between men and women in the workplace:

when a dude has had it, that's it. She wanted me to ask "*so what do my co-workers think?*" with some level of concern, and I wasn't biting.

"Your co-workers think you're flirting with the receptionist across the hall." She said it as if I'd bent the poor girl over and ravaged her. She was attractive -- but I'd only spoken to her twice, she was engaged, and at the most I'd smile at her through the glass doors of her office as I went in and out of the building.

"Well, I have a girlfriend," I protested (yes, this was when Mrs. I and I were shacking up, albeit seriously at that point, and at the time I resented the implication.). "I'm not flirting with anyone! I'm reading a book in my car!"

"You aren't where they can *see* you," she emphasized. "That's a problem."

I just stared at her blankly. "Why . . . is where and how I choose to spend my lunch time . . . of any *possible* concern to anyone other than myself?" I tried to be diplomatic and logical.

"The problem, Mr. Ironwood, is that your actions lend to the perception that you are . . ." she trailed off, suddenly at a loss.

"That I am . . . what? Molesting puppies? Smoking dope? Abusing myself?" When stated in those terms, she started to look silly, and she knew it. And yes, I actually said 'abusing puppies'. I still remember that.

"The perception that you are not a *team player*."

"Yet I perform at twice the level of . . . some other co-workers," I pointed out. "How is that not being a 'team player'? And how is spending lunch by myself . . . or the perceptions of my co-workers . . . relevant to my job performance? By every objective metric I've been an ideal employee. I'd be happy to review my performance with my agency, if you'd like." The threat was implicit -- if this kind of thing continued, I'd get the temp agency involved. While that wasn't the end of the world, it would call attention to the matter, and my boss was in the same social circle as the owner of the temp agency. I knew that. I might not be in the FSM, but I know how to use it.

"Just . . . conform to the company policies as they are explained to you, Mr. Ironwood. That is all," she dismissed.

While I was seriously resentful, I also needed the job. Cushy temp work in the air-conditioning paid a lot better than construction or waiting tables. Beside, I was still enough of a Puerarch to want to subvert the whole operation just to spite her. So I appeared to knuckle under and concede. I started spending my lunches in the employee lounge where I was subjected to all sorts of inane feminine chatter. My one concession to eating was bringing in a single, phallic banana every day, carrying it around with me wherever I went,

and then devouring it in seconds at the start of lunch. After that . . . well, I can't read when thirteen women are comparing their weekends and jockeying for matrix position over microwavable pasta. There's just too much distraction.

But I can write. I'm a writer, everyone knew that. I had a book and everything. It was easily the most interesting thing about me. I started bringing a notebook to lunch with me, and I would sit over in the corner and write stuff down. Sometimes I doodled. No big whup.

Enter Female Solipsism: the practice had an *immediate* and intriguing effect. Suddenly, everyone in the building was extremely interested in just what I was writing. And it became A Thing.

Because every woman there was convinced -- utterly convinced -- that I was writing stuff about *her*. Specifically, stuff that was *unflattering* to her. She was *sure* of it, be she 21 or 51.

If that isn't solipsism, I don't know what is.

It only dawned on me that this had become A Thing when Courtney, mid-20s, came to me after lunch and actually flirted with me for the first time. Courtney was office hot, definitely doable, but she clearly had a higher opinion of herself than I did. Still, I was polite, if laconic.

"So," she said, after meaningless bullshit. "Whatcha writin' about?"

It took me by surprise. "Oh, just character sketches and stuff. Notes. I'm working on a new book." I didn't mean anything by it at the time -- I'm a writer. I've been "working on a new book" since I started writing. It's a stock answer.

Courtney, however, took it to mean (rather solipsistically) that I was writing a new book . . . about her. Or the someone in the group. She asked me more probing questions, and as I figured out what she was trying to do, my answers became more and more vague and mysterious and she got more and more agitated. I hadn't given her *one single piece of concrete data*, yet by the end of the day 'everyone knew' that I was writing a book about Courtney. Or someone in the group, but Courtney was pretty sure it was about Courtney, otherwise I wouldn't have been so mysterious. In FSM terms, Courtney had used the episode to "push" herself up in position, because a dude writing a book about you is incredible attention, the coin of the realm in the Matrix.

The next day, *four women* approached me before lunch with meaningless reasons, and all four managed to mention my writing somehow. I didn't take the bait. My notebook remained on the corner of my desk until lunch. At lunch, now that I was aware of the interest in my book, I began to take notes with more purpose. In fact, most of the stuff I was writing down had *nothing to do* with anything or anyone in the office. But it was the

way I wrote it that perpetuated the myth. I waited until there was a break in the conversation, for instance, and then scribbled something down furiously while everyone in the room watched and tried to keep from looking like they were watching. Then I'd stop, the conversation would resume, and I'd wait for another break.

As an experiment, I decided to pace my notes based on which woman was speaking. I picked Margaret, one of the older women, for no real reason. Every time Margaret opened her mouth, I was writing. It took a few times before she was aware of it, and then she got uncomfortable. Then some of the other women clued into it, and were immediately abuzz. Margaret started blushing, and ended up excusing herself to the ladies' room.

I hadn't said a word. It was fucking *hysterical*. In the literal sense.

By the end of the day, everyone was *certain* the book was about Margaret.

The next day, I focused on Lisa, and wrote down stuff mostly after she was talking. Lisa got flustered, too, but instead of running and blushing, she started paying a lot more attention to her diction and word choice. Half-way through lunch, I switched and did the same thing with Courtney again. After lunch, Margaret approached me as I was heading back to my desk.

"You know, Ian, I really don't appreciate that!" she said.

"What?" I asked, genuinely confused.

"You writing about me in that notebook," she accused. I almost smiled. Instead I affected a confused expression.

"What do you mean? Who said I was writing things about you?"

"Everyone knows-- look, I'm just a very private person, and if you want to know anything I would appreciate it if you would come to me, personally, and not rely on other people. Okay?"

"Uh . . . okay," I agreed. Not only had she assumed that I was writing about her, she was absolutely convinced that I was talking to other women in the office about her.

Every day that week I ground away at the pile of files and then amused myself with the luncheon Solipsism Floor Show. It became a game for me: how little could I say and do and still inspire wild speculation about my "book"? Just how much of a tizzy could I through these ladies into . . . without doing a *damn* thing but my job?

If women weren't solipsistic, then it wouldn't have worked. As it was, it worked spectacularly well.

Wednesday it was a divided room, as I wrote only after the younger women (less than thirty) spoke, and ignored the older women. Thursday, Janet -- who hadn't spoken two words to me the entire time I'd been there -- started pumping me for information about my life and my book over in the corner. I gave her as little as possible, and gave her no false information, and figured I was just frustrating her. Only I didn't realize what she'd done -- with our little private conference, she'd made it appear to the Matrix that she had the inside scoop, and she used that leverage brutally in the free-for-all that followed.

That afternoon, when I was coming back from the Men's Room (the Fortress of Solitude, I called it), I caught that old biddy Betty trying to slyly leaf through the notebook.

"Excuse me?" I said, coming up from behind her and slamming my hand down on it. "Is there a problem?"

"Oh, I was just looking for some staples," she said, airily.

"There are none in my notebook. Check the supply closet. That's where I'd put them."