

# Why I Call Myself an Equalist

By Joni Baird

Huntington, New York

July 2018

My evolution towards calling myself an Equalist instead of a feminist began in 1997, when I began working with Bill Baird whose U.S. Supreme Court case *Baird v. Eisenstadt* legalized birth control in 1972. After witnessing the coat hanger death of an unmarried mother of nine at Harlem Hospital in 1963, Bill devoted his life to fighting for women's rights.

Despite his having been involved in five high court women's rights cases, three that bear his name, Bill has been shunned and even invalidated by feminist leaders.

This dates back to when the second wave of feminism began. In March of 1971, feminists banned Bill from speaking at and attending a "no men allowed" demonstration in Albany, New York. This despite his birth control case pending in the U.S. Supreme Court. Helen Jarvis of the Women's Strike Coalition said women are "...capable of speaking for themselves, thank you" and that "Baird's struggle is the same as ours but it's our struggle."

In June of 1971, Bill was banned from another women's conference at Columbia University. One woman interviewed by the press said, "...We don't need Bill Baird to help." That same year at a "Women's March for Equality" Ellen Mintz of the National Organization For Women, told reporters that, "What happened to him [Bill being banned from speaking] happens to women all the time."

In a 1993 *New York Times* piece, the reporter wrote that Gloria Steinem "Won't shake his hand." Ms. Steinem has never publicly discussed his legalizing birth control.

I have made attempts to have Bill appear on The Rachel Maddow Show with no response. On 6/27/18 Rachel Maddow's program focused on the future possibility of birth control becoming illegal. While she acknowledged Estelle Griswold for her work legalizing birth control for married people, Bill's five-year battle to legalize birth control for all including unmarried people was not mentioned.

In 2011, feminist and Harvard professor Jill Lepore wrote in an article "Meanwhile, the last legal obstacles to contraception were overcome" citing that Estelle Griswold did so in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which was only for the two states that outlawed birth control for married couples. This is a pattern with hundreds of published works. Bill is left out of history. However, many legal scholars have recognized the major impact *Baird v. Eisenstadt* has had on hundreds of cases in the U.S. and abroad. To their credit, *The New Yorker* published my correction of this revisionism.

Bill was blocked from funding too. I once put forth 67 proposals to various foundations and was turned down. Global Fund for Women stated they would only give grants to "organizations led by women..."

What struck me about all of this was not the personal aspect of these invalidations but what it meant for women's rights. The idea formed in my mind that we might be better served to refer to ourselves as Equalists. Many feminists attack this notion fearing that the gains they fought for won't be validated or that it is a way of being polite in asking for women's rights. They feel we are trying to make men feel less threatened. I disagree and believe that removing gender barriers helps to focus on the core issues at hand.

I felt that such discrimination hurts a movement's ability to reach common goals. As Equalists, we believe that "labels disable" and create "us versus them" dynamics unnecessarily fragmenting movements. Therefore, Equalists focus on the content rather than the form of the world's many imbalanced, fear-based paradigms.

Equalists believe all human beings are citizens of Planet Earth and set multiple goals for their liberation. We believe that in order to be collectively harmonious, abundant and balanced, certain universal tenets apply. Those tenets are inherently feminist with regard to our desire to radically change the current domination paradigm (occupied by all genders) to allow for equal pay, freedom from aggression, child friendly work environments, and gender diversity. Through this shift, matriarchy and patriarchy are changed to "humanarchy."

Being an Equalist does not negate the current state of inequality as many movement leaders fear but rather seeks to eliminate the pendulum that so often swings from one side to another and alienates others. This can result in dangerous humiliation dynamics. The goal includes not fragmenting humanity by race, gender, religion or non-religion, or nationality but steadfastly focuses on our united humanity.

Equalists seek to create a new vision of what power, freedom and equality look like when applied to the new systems to be imagined. We collectively oppose oppressive forms of power while simultaneously creating radical ways of reinterpreting power to benefit all. We need to begin building communities that operate as examples of these radical changes that include how we interact with and handle resources, the environment and human relationships. We believe these actions will promote not diminish individuality.

Equalists are against unhealthy behaviors and systems rather than the people involved in them. We believe that through education, dialogue, intervention, and building strong non-dominator communities, the dominators will not have the environment by which they can reproduce unhealthy patterns. By opposing their behaviors rather than their inherent human worth, we preserve their dignity and create an environment for their possible change.

Equalists recognize they are more powerful collectively. They address all issues of systemic dysfunction through education, models of economic abundance and discourage systems that coagulate wealth for a small percentage. Hoarding resources cuts off the economic circulation of the collective.

Equalists believe in empowering individuals to move society forward and not passively relying on what has historically been small numbers of radicals. We recognize that it is not fair that such people have to sacrifice their lives, freedom, families and livelihoods because others do not participate in the collective goals.