



HEROISM AND GENDER

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ABSTRACT

A discussion of heroism and how men and women react differently. The double standards between men and women in society.

Keywords: Heroes, heroism, masculinity and heroism, save the day

INTRODUCTION

When a young woman is brutally gang-raped on a college campus, many men feel compelled toward bravery. Emboldened with courage, they will often challenge the perpetrators head-on, seeking justice for someone who may be a complete stranger. Such a response is called heroism, deeply valued across cultures.

More broadly, when men are confronted with dangerous situations, they will consider strategic and heroic actions aimed at creating desirable outcomes. It helps that most receive training early on--through sports, play fighting and teasing from peers--about how to think and act courageously, which serves to refine and strengthen their natural instincts. They learn to quickly calculate alternatives and solutions and act on that information in order to survive.

Still, not everyone responds this way, which raises the question of why some make the choice. History suggests that few of us wake up with the intention of being heroic; usually,

things unfold spontaneously, a spur-of-the-moment decision. According to the dictionary, heroism is an instantaneous desire to help someone without expecting any financial or moral reward in return. It is a gift given unselfishly; its value is even greater when people place themselves in grave danger, risking their lives, regardless of the cost.ⁱ

MASCULINITY TO THE RESCUE

Men have saved innumerable lives throughout history, perhaps from the very beginning of time. Following the sinking of the infamous Titanic, for example, reports indicate that only 19% of the men aboard survived, largely because hundreds of engineers and other males sacrificed their lives for the benefit of women and children passengers.ⁱⁱ For a great many men, such heroism comes automatically; it is an instinct they are born with.

There are numerous examples of just how brave and altruistic men can be. Recently, a sixty-one year old Brazilian homeless man, a victim of poverty and social oppression, rushed to save a woman he didn't know, sacrificing his own life in the process.ⁱⁱⁱ Last year, a South Dakota firefighter overcame dangerous conditions to rescue a woman and her cat from a burning house.^{iv} Before that, Carlos Arana, a firefighter from Valencia, Spain, performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on a two-month old Yorkshire terrier,^v causing eyes to water (and tugging at our heartstrings). In 2005, California Highway Patrolman Kevin Briggs stopped a distraught 22-year old father of a newborn child from jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge.^{vi} In Afghanistan, two brave soldiers confronted suicide bombers and saved colleagues' lives.^{vii}

These and countless other episodes make it clear that most men are born with empathy and a deep-rooted concern for others that repeatedly facilitates their transformation into everyday superheroes, where they perform life-saving miracles for no other reason than that it is the right thing to do.

Sadly, the fact that so many will readily step in and help those who are being victimized is often overshadowed by reckless claims that males, generally speaking, are responsible for violence around the globe. Many college-level women's studies devotees maintain that masculinity is violent and oppressive by definition. In contrast to what numerous female academics say, masculinity has proven, time and again, to be an incredible gift to society.

WOMEN AND HEROINISM

It is ironic that women, many of whom seem to lack the life-saving trait, are often quick to manipulate men into heroic behavior. Certainly, there are vast numbers of females who have saved the lives of children, often driven by maternal instincts. There are also accounts of women--doctors and nurses--who went beyond the call of duty to help others. But for most females, dangerous situations and loud noises--and men--are unsettling and immobilizing. They might respond with words, but they often go running for safer spaces.

In the aftermath of a house fire or similar tragedy, for example, it is not all that odd to hear a man say, "I saw women stand around crying in hysterics while valuable minutes were slipping away. Another guy and I ran in and did what we had to help those who were in trouble."

Not surprisingly, most people believe that the feeling of "terror" is more common in women than men,^{viii} and that many females have the "poor princess syndrome," where they anxiously wait for a knight in shining armor to rescue them.^{ix}

It's been said that if a woman who has been sexually assaulted comes forward and tells her story, she is heroic. But in reality, this act can really only be considered brave or courageous. In fairness, the difference between the concepts is probably misunderstood by most people. It's not heroic, for instance, for someone to witness a car accident and dial 911 for help. That's just good citizenship. But to crawl into a crumpled, burning car and pull someone out, at considerable risk to life and limb? That's heroism.

MALE DISPOSABILITY

There are other areas of life where the distortions of gender-twisted thinking are rampant. If the U.S. homeless population was entirely female, it is unlikely that there would be a "homelessness" problem. Rather, those unfortunate feminine souls would have access to incredible shelters, much like those set up for battered women. Aside from providing clean, decent housing, those facilities feed, counsel and educate the clients they exclusively serve.

But that is not what we see in a downtrodden part of society that is, unfortunately, dominated by men. In a sexist world, masculinity is unworthy of such humane and caring

treatment. In fact, male lives often seem to have little value. Over the next 20 years, for example, a team of 8,000 men will be exposed to deadly radiation as they work to disarm and remove melted fuel from Japan's Fukushima power plant, which suffered a triple meltdown following the 2011 tsunami. How many will become diseased or die as a result?

Cynically, some might say that if the Catholic Church had been protecting and covering up for priests that had actually molested ten thousand little girls, instead of boys, on an almost daily basis, the organization would be thoroughly destroyed by now, its pedophiles and other members imprisoned or dead.

BOYS AND MEN ARE STEREOTYPED

Boys and men are stigmatized, marginalized and penalized by for being born male. They are also held to a double standard. Society seems happy to take advantage of them, capitalizing on their eagerness to help others or throw themselves at a challenge. When men grow up, they are relegated to risky and often deadly occupations; they dominate the front lines of societal conflict and war. Some might deny that our world rests on the premise of "women and children first," but a cold, hard look at reality quickly refutes this idea.

The truth is, women almost always assume that men will save them and bear what may be a very heavy cost. They use males to do the heavy lifting and then dispose of them when they are satisfied. Where are the calls for equality when human life and survival are at stake? Nowhere, it seems. Males are disposable and women are indispensable. There is no equality: women are on a pedestal, coddled from birth to death.

TOXIC FEMININITY EXPLOITING HEROISM

When a woman seeks to exploit a man she smiles, flicks her hair, or gives him a peck on the cheek. Most men respond accordingly: they want to buy her gifts, shower her with attention, and take care of her for the rest of her life. Such feelings are, however, obsolete relics of our hunter-gatherer past, harkening back to a time when men were, by nature, designed for protection. And yet, modern women continue to deploy these manipulative tactics on a regular basis. In fact, it isn't only them who take advantage in this way; businesses also use females to tap into the male wallet.

This toxic femininity, where women manipulate men with charm and sexuality, permeates our world. Female infants and girls learn to manipulate fathers, uncles and men from early on.^x If she cries for help, daddy comes to the rescue. If she gives dad an ultimatum, he quickly succumbs. From the day girls are born, they embrace the tenets of male subjugation and abuse. As they grow up, most become learned master-manipulators, withholding what men desire most and giving in only when there is an exchange they deem worthy. For the majority of women, life with men is a simple repertoire of basic manipulations.

Arguably, some are fairly harmless. Few people will likely find fault with requests for help in fixing a leaky toilet or avoiding the abusive words of a barroom troublemaker. But when it comes to the sorts of manipulations that lead to male violence and death, or which contribute to the pain that males suffer from domestic violence or in other settings, such enticements are undoubtedly wrong. Moreover, while many women are quick to allege--and college-level women's and gender studies programs are narrowly focused on--violence against women, they ignore equally disturbing concerns about male suicide and rape, and violence against men.

A MALE REVOLUTION

Now, though, men are realizing that a rigged and biased game is afoot.^{xi} They are stepping off treadmills and pulling noses from grindstones, and taking a serious look at the ugly gender politics that is all around them. A hurricane of awareness is circling the planet, helping men to recognize manipulation and resist heroics based on exploitation. Whether they are coal miners, office workers, artists, fathers or students, they are embracing the modern--and amazing--masculinity.

Using the power of the Internet, a growing number of young men are sharing and collaborating with millions of like-minded individuals to readjust the trajectory of their lives. Brimming with pride, the enlightened among them are channeling their innate heroism to raise awareness and empower others to free themselves like they have and become the most remarkable and resourceful beings on Earth.

Gloria Steinem once said to her female minions, “*Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.*”^{xii} But her statement seems especially relevant to today’s male. Around the globe, men are taking these thoughts to heart, casting off behaviors that have outlived their usefulness and freeing themselves from abusive patriarchy. Many are seeking to understand their self-defeating motivations and behaviors, and are dreaming of a time when they cut through the shroud of exploitation and focus on their own goals and happiness.

Everywhere one looks, a wave of consciousness is washing ashore: men are going their own way (MGTOW), discovering online communities and growth. Among them, Warren Farrell’s White House Council on Boys and Men^{xiii} is making significant political headway ([sign the petition here](#)), while the academic *New Men’s Studies*^{xiv} is playing an energetic role in leading boys and men out of the darkness.

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AUTHOR PROFILE



Tim Patten has written two books about male empowerment and *Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)*, and many articles on men’s issues that have been published.

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