

Here's to All the Men Who Help Women Reach the Finish Line

For all the downsides of social media, an upside is its ability to draw attention to otherwise overlooked stories of personal triumph and human kindness.

You may very well have already seen [this video](#) of three runners participating in the “Love Run” half marathon in Philadelphia who stopped to help an exhausted woman cross the finish line. At first, two runners try to help her continue by providing support under her arms. But as her legs turn to jelly, another runner stops to join the two men, picking up the collapsing runner and carrying her. Even more kindly, the man stops to set her down steps before the finish line so that she can have the satisfaction of completing the race on her own two feet.

There are many obvious positive messages to take from this video: With all the negative stories we hear about crime and conflict, it's easy to forget that the overwhelming majority of people are not only decent, but also kind and willing to help someone in need. The video is a reminder to always see the bigger picture of a situation. The runners who stopped may have been shooting for personable best times, but were wise enough to recognize that those goals were less important than helping someone else, a fellow runner who had come so far and needed help to complete her journey.

Self-sacrifice, empathy, and kindness are a big part of the video's appeal, but what also struck me was the men's physical strength. The men who stopped to help this woman were all willing to physically carry her, along with their own weight. One was even able—after having run 13 miles himself already—to

scoop her up in his arms and carry her the rest of the course.

Most discussions of men's strength today are about how it can be a threat to women. That's certainly true, but this video made me think about how frequently men's strength is used for women's protection and advancement, and how underappreciated this phenomenon is.

Discussion of the differences between men's and women's physical strength rarely draw much attention these days, though it manifests itself subtly in the traditional divisions of labor that remain in most households and the economy. Generally, women do more of the housework, but men are more likely to do the heavy lifting and assume whatever physical danger may be necessary. They haul out the garbage and move the furniture, get on the roof to clean the gutters and under the car to change the tire on the side of the highway.

American women mostly get to take for granted that the men around them won't use their physical advantages against them. And even more than that, we expect that men would defend us against other men who would seek to overpower us. By custom, we teach our sons to never, ever hit a girl, and encourage them to recognize that part of being a good man is defending a woman or weaker person against an attack or physical threat.

Of course, violence against women remains a problem today. Too many men flout norms, abuse women, and take advantage of them sexually. We need to continue to work to change this. But at least in America, we have a strict legal code to hold such men who abuse women accountable. For good reason, this problem—the violent crimes that men too often commit—receives most of the public's attention. But while of course we work to improve this situation, it's also important not to ignore how often men's strength is used to women's advantage. Men are our front-line soldiers protecting women's interests against enemies abroad; they are the majority of our police officers and firefighters, risking their lives to protect ours. They

are working in our sewer systems and power plants, on bridges and trains to keep our economy functioning.

A lot of time is spent building awareness of all the ways that women's contributions to society are overlooked. Women work without pay to raise the next generation, help sick family members, and volunteer in our schools and communities in countless unseen ways that make neighborhoods and civil society work. Given the history of discrimination against women, such awareness-raising is important. Yet men do a lot of underappreciated work too. Progressive feminists and women's studies professors tend to paint a picture as if all men are smoking cigars in board rooms, raking in unearned pay, while women toil thanklessly. That's a gross distortion of men's experience. Most men are working hard for no more than adequate pay in jobs that make the economy go round, but that don't bring much glory.

There should be a counterpart to that saying that behind every successful man is a woman. We should recognize that women's advancement rests on a society that keeps men's power in check, and good men are instrumental to protecting women's rights and progress. After all, the sexes aren't runners competing in a winner-take-all contest, but are rather partners helping each other through life's journey.

I'm grateful to those Philadelphia runners for so perfectly reminding us all of that.

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