

Playboy Says Terms Like 'Toxic Masculinity' Aren't Helpful. But Did Playboy Give Us Toxic Masculinity?

These last few weeks, amid the flood of sexual assault allegations stemming from what pundits are calling [the Weinstein Effect](#), it occurred to me that perhaps the gender feminists are right.

After all, an objective person can only read so many stories about powerful men chasing women with manhood in hand—quite literally—before the thought creeps in: maybe masculinity really *is* toxic.

While few would argue with the assertion that there are aspects of hyper-masculinity that are unseemly, Dr. Debra W. Soh, a columnist at *Playboy* magazine, says conflating the alleged behavior of Harvey Weinstein and co. with maleness or masculinity is a mistake.

“As someone who has worked both clinically and in a research capacity with incarcerated sex offenders, let me get one thing out of the way: Most men do not rape or sexually harass women,” wrote Soh, who has a PhD in Sexology. “Following from this line of logic, predatory sexual behavior is not the result of being male and having a sex drive; it’s that some men willfully choose to act in an unethical and non-consensual way.”

This view of men as prowling sexual predators likely stems from the fact that men are highly sexual creatures. While the popular line that men think about sex every seven seconds is [a myth](#), recent studies found that the average man thinks [about sex 19 times per day](#)—once every 1.26 hours. That’s about twice

the average of a typical woman.

This data would seem to confirm the age-old conventional wisdom that men, generally speaking, are more sexual creatures than women. But it would be a mistake to suggest that a stronger sexual appetite is intrinsically toxic, Soh argues.

“There has been a growing trend in recent years to shame and pathologize men for having inklings of sexual interest in women with terms like toxic masculinity, but this doesn’t offer any meaningful solutions,” she writes. “There is a difference between healthy sexuality and sexuality that transgresses against others.”

ICYMI my thoughts on why terms like “toxic masculinity” aren’t helpful [#sfwhttps://t.co/f8mgDZayG0pic.twitter.com/9d2ZWL91zs](https://t.co/f8mgDZayG0pic.twitter.com/9d2ZWL91zs)

– Dr. Debra W Soh (@DrDebraSoh) [November 8, 2017](#)

Soh is mostly correct, but she is also writing for a magazine that sells sex. *Playboy* doesn’t just acknowledge sexual appetite; it embraces and applauds it. And this could also be part of the problem.

Playboy helped usher in a sexual revolution that was based largely on the idea that impulses need not be restrained. The idea of free love proved an intoxicating one, certainly more so than traditional virtues such as modesty, self-restraint, and humility. And it reshaped culture and thought in ways we likely don’t yet fully understand.

The great thinker Aldous Huxley, for example, suggested sexual liberation was the manifestation of our culture’s embrace of

nihilism.

“...philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality,” Huxley wrote in [Ends and Means](#) in 1937. “We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.”

So what does masculinity look like absent virtue? It’s quite possible we’re witnessing it. And it looks, well, [toxic](#).

As one writer succinctly put it [recently](#), “We laugh at sexual morality and are shocked to find perverts in our midst.”

A culture that mocks values such as prudence, temperance, and fortitude will be a garden of delight for the appetite; just don’t expect it to bear much good fruit (or joy). It is likely to produce—after the party, of course—much emptiness, despair and confusion. The solution to toxicity lies in acknowledging that virtue actually exists.

“Virtue—even attempted virtue—brings light,” C.S. Lewis noted in *Mere Christianity*, “indulgence brings fog.”

Playboy is right that masculinity is not inherently toxic. But the magazine (which I’ve read for the articles) probably helped pollute masculinity.

—

[Image Credit: Promifotos.de at the German language Wikipedia [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>) or CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons]