

Why Men Are Being Told to 'Be Careful' About Holding a Door Open for a Woman

Recently my workplace instigated new measures to ensure a safer, more equitable environment. This included learning what constitutes sexual harassment. As part of this exercise, I was asked to rate the acceptability of a man holding a door open for a woman.

Although it was deemed "generally acceptable," men were advised to be careful with this gesture, lest the female recipient think it springs from a sense of her inferiority and incompetence.

Where does that leave men who want to show courtesy— respect— to women? Between the devil and the deep blue sea as far as I can tell. It traps them in a societal no-man's-land, where they rightly feel damned-if-they-do, and damned-if-they-don't.

The presumption in campaigns such as Me Too and Time's Up is that men have an inherent will to tyrannise over women which they cannot or will not control. The door of reason and respect is being slammed in their collective face.

Is it a surprise, then, that there is a male [backlash](#) against this slur?

Interestingly, these men are gaining female allies. French actress Catherine Deneuve, for example, published an [open letter](#) signed by 99 other influential French women, disagreeing with Me Too.

The letter criticised the movement, claiming it supports the "Victorian idea that women are mere children who have to be protected." It said: "... as women, we do not recognise

ourselves in this feminism, which beyond denouncing the abuse of power, takes on a hatred of men and of sexuality.”

Trust the French to be ahead of the times— and have the self-confidence to break the taboo surrounding female victimhood.

But men can feel victimised too. The broad-brush approach of the “women speaking up” campaign can make decent men feel not only guilty, but resentful.

I have a husband, five blood brothers, nine brothers-in-law, and a son; so I hope I’ve learned a little about how men tick. And, my goodness, if there’s one thing I’ve discovered, it is that men only flourish, and are their best selves, when they are beneficiaries of mutual respect.

The worst thing about the general denigration of “men” is that it may become a self-fulfilling cliché.

So I believe it is up to women who have a healthy and authentic regard for the men in their lives, and men in general, to take some deliberate steps towards bringing about more respect and harmony between the sexes.

We could start by expecting, and graciously accepting the door held open for us by a gentleman, letting him know by our “thank you” and smile that we do not regard it as a ploy to belittle us but rather, as the sort of thing that real men do.

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