

Is It Time for International Women's Day to Lose Its Victimhood Status?

This International Women's Day, I recall how I spent it last year – meeting one of the sanest men on the planet, Jordan B. Peterson, during his book tour in Melbourne.

Although Peterson is famous for his appeal to young men who have never been told to make their beds, his clear thinking is a boon to anyone frustrated by the contradictory ideologies of our time. That includes me.

It strikes me as odd that on the one hand, our society seems to celebrate women at every opportunity. That's not necessarily a bad thing. But it becomes a confusing thing when said society is also meant to accept, simultaneously, that gender is something wholly irrelevant to our makeup as human beings.

Suddenly we are told that, as women, we are not so special. In fact, our womanhood is an illusion.

Most of us can see past these kinds of contradictions in our culture, simply because we know, innately, women are different from men, and that *is* something to be celebrated.

Let's hang onto that word "celebrated", because too often, when women are the subject, victimhood is the main focus. Women are constantly starring as victims of the male patriarchy, of inequality, of sexual/physical/emotional/abuse. Even the meme "female empowerment" assumes that women have been denied power that is rightfully theirs.

That is why I have to smile wryly as IWD looms: the voices that dominate its representative body, its showgirls, are

never the powerless type; nor are they unassuming, stay-at-home mothers like me, whose power is consumed – voluntarily – serving the needs of my family. In fact, one gets the impression that to be quiet, unassuming and a stay-at-home-mum is to betray the movement that has given rise to such gestures as IWD.

I say “gesture” purposefully. I’m for celebrating women, appreciating women, empowering women, respecting women. But I also believe that women will achieve most for themselves when they take responsibility for themselves and do not brand themselves as survivors of millennia of male dominance.

We will achieve more if we resist the pressure to adhere to a set formula of feminist virtues prescribed for us. There should be room for disagreement over values such as a career, social prestige, power, influence, accolades, sexual freedom, access to abortion. There should be more debate as to whether the pursuit of each of these things really benefits women.

To be a strong, intelligent, interesting, socially responsible woman should not be incompatible with choosing to stay at home with small children.

I try not to feel patronized when IWD comes around; patronized and rallied to support the sisterhood that leaves me in relative peace and quiet the rest of the year. It’s on every ordinary day that I appreciate the women around me the most – my grandmother, a bright spark who chose to stay home to raise six children.

And my mother, who chose to walk away from a promising career in publishing, to raise a snotty little rascal like me – and senses no appreciation by the wider sisterhood for it.

If I fail to celebrate IWD with the exuberance and gratitude that every social media platform would have us believe every female is doing, it is for these reasons.

Would that more women have the sense to realize that imbuing the next generation with respect and appreciation for mothers is a crucial element to maintaining the cause for women. Being a strong and steady presence in the lives of their children by staying at home is a viable and respectable occupation for a modern woman.

Perhaps, after all, “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” Or, more deviously, “men rule the world, but women rule the men.” That is, marriage and family have a crucial part to play in promoting a better life not only for women, but for everyone. As a stay-at-home mum, I might argue I have more ambition than my corporate counterparts in undertaking this enterprise.

That runs counter to the increasingly popular narrative that marriage is a drag and children are a burden. And yet, I am finding that these commitments may be the most effective means for enriching my existence, and improving that of wider society too.

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