

Masculinity, Mixed-Signals, and the Male Retreat From Women

It's official. Harvey Weinstein has been [found guilty](#) of rape and sexual assault. #MeToo movers and shakers around the world can rejoice – as well they should – over the conviction of a man who committed inexcusable crimes.

But while Weinstein deserves to be put away, has the movement his fall spawned gotten out of hand? Has it made life and relationships for average, well-meaning, good-hearted men difficult? A [recent article](#) in *The New York Times* suggests this is the case, particularly for high school boys.

#MeToo, the *NYT* reports, has opened a variety of conversations about appropriate sexual conduct. The young men participating in these conversations are eager to do things right and treat women appropriately, but they are growing frustrated by the mixed signals they are receiving. If they pursue girls in the old-fashioned way, they're unfairly labeled as perpetrators akin to Weinstein. If they try to purposefully gain consent and go about relationships with caution, they are rebuffed by women who despise their lack of pursuit.

Even worse is the lack of clarification and the double standard present in these conversations:

Last year, the private all-boys high school that Chris attends in Baltimore co-hosted an event with an all-girls high school. They discussed the #MeToo movement and sexual assault against girls.

Girls discreetly shared their own stories about assault and unwanted attention of their bodies as a way of giving boys greater insight into their experiences, said Chris, a high

school senior. ...

At some point in the discussion, some of his classmates asked questions, including one that challenged the 'double standard' where girls could hit boys but 'boys weren't supposed to hit back to defend themselves,' said Chris, who, like others in this article, did not want his last name used because he feared online and offline retribution.

'They were shut down,' he said. 'The girls kept saying that they shouldn't have to answer any questions,' because the boys should already know.

As a woman, I get what these girls are doing. Women know intuitively when attention from men crosses the line from acceptable to unacceptable, yet it's hard to explain this to the opposite sex. So we shrug and expect that men should "just know" what is right and what is wrong. But it doesn't work that way.

Once upon a time, there were certain standards of courtship, affection, and general interactions between the sexes. Men were pursuers, women were responders. If a man pursued and a woman didn't respond, then it was understood that there was no reciprocal interest and it was time for the man to move on.

However, political correctness, feminism, and the #MeToo culture have changed those standards. The result has been confusion on all sides, particularly on the part of men.

In his comprehensive work, [*The Closing of the American Mind*](#), Allan Bloom explains that men are negatively affected by these new rules because it cuts to the heart of a man's soul:

The souls of men—their ambitious, warlike, protective, possessive character—must be dismantled in order to liberate women from their domination. Machismo—the polemical description of maleness or spiritedness, which was the

central natural passion in men's souls in the psychology of the ancients, the passion of attachment and loyalty—was the villain, the source of the difference between the sexes. The feminists were only completing a job begun by Hobbes in his project of taming the harsh elements in the soul. With machismo discredited, the positive task is to make men caring, sensitive, even nurturing, to fit the restructured family.

These trends, Bloom explains, demand a re-education project, causing men to “accept the ‘feminine elements’ in their nature.”

A host of Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep types invade the schools, popular psychology, TV and the movies, making the project respectable. Men tend to undergo this re-education somewhat sullenly but studiously, in order to avoid the opprobrium of the sexist label and to keep peace with their wives and girlfriends. And it is indeed possible to soften men. But to make them ‘care’ is another thing, and the project must inevitably fail.

“All our reforms have helped strip the teeth of our gears,” Bloom continues, “which can therefore no longer mesh. They spin idly, side by side, unable to set the social machine in motion.”

And we wonder why young people today have trouble dating, marrying, and having families.

The cold, hard fact of the matter is that we have disabled these systems in the name of political correctness and feminism, preventing our young men from exercising the pursuit and protection of women which they are hard-wired to perform. That handicap is beginning to show, *The New York Times* implies, and the result isn't one that young women are going to be happy with:

Chris said that he had recently decided to step back from some of his friendships with women. He is not as open with them as he used to be, 'because conversations around gender have become stifling,' he said. 'Anything you defend when it comes to men leads to you being lumped in with bad masculinity.'

Some young women said they have noticed a self-imposed distance from some of the men in their lives.

Predators like Harvey Weinstein need to be sought out and punished. But must we punish the many good-willed men and boys out there in the process?

The boys who are simply trying to figure women out, and who hope to someday start a healthy family with a member of the fairer sex: Are these the people we should be punishing?

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[Image Credit: Pixabay]