

What Do Women Want? A Willingness to Protect

For decades now, well-meaning men have found to their consternation that many modern feminists openly resent gentlemanly gestures of service such as opening a door for them. Some of the offended women have actually assumed that the offer condescendingly suggests that they are too weak to open a door for themselves.

The culture today is saturated with messaging for women that “Strong is the new pretty,” that they are no less physically capable than men. It’s common for advertising, for example, to depict women as [muscled, badass, warrior athletes](#). “Be the hero you never had,” one Nike slogan reads, over [the image of a female fencer clad like a medieval knight and roaring in victory](#).

Of course, biological males competing in women’s sports are demolishing this notion of physical gender equality, but from watching Netflix, you’d think that [petite supermodels](#) are just as capable of laying waste to multiple hulking male aggressors as Batman is.

All this modern, culturally-conditioned confidence and feminist self-reliance aside, do women *in the real world* still prefer a male partner who is willing to step in and defend her from threats?

Psychologist Rob K. Henderson [wrote recently on his Substack newsletter](#) about a [2022 research paper](#) which investigated whether men and women prefer romantic partners who are willing and able to protect them from violence. The authors of the paper argued that partnering with people who were able to protect you is naturally advantageous in a dangerous world, and that this preference has shaped the psychology of human

mating. The results of the study also run counter to the protestations of touchy feminists about what women value highly in a male partner.

In a series of seven studies, the researchers asked 4,508 women and men about a series of scenarios involving going on a date with someone from the opposite sex. Male participants rated their female dates, and vice versa.

The researchers gave different information to three different groups of the participants. Each participant was told that his or her date was “average” in physical attractiveness. All the female participants were asked,

Now, imagine that you are out on a date with this man. The two of you are leaving a restaurant where you had dinner. As you leave, an obviously drunk man, stumbling out of a nearby bar, approaches the two of you from behind. You don't notice the drunk, but your date does, right as the drunk lifts his clenched fist and swings it toward your head.

But the next part for each of the three groups was different. Participants in a “willing to protect” scenario read this:

Seeing you are in danger, your date grabs the drunk's arm, shielding you from the blow, and forcefully pushes him to the ground. The drunk, surprised, quickly gets up and runs away.

People in an “unwilling to protect” scenario read this:

Seeing you are in danger, your date steps away from you and the drunk. Fortunately, the drunk aims poorly and misses your head, swinging at the air instead and falling to the ground. The drunk, surprised, quickly gets up and runs away.

Participants then rated how attractive the date was as a long-

term partner on a scale from 0 (not at all attractive) to 10 (very attractive).

The results indicated that for both women *and* men, seeing that your date was willing to protect you increased his or her attractiveness – not significantly so for men rating female dates, but very significantly (nearly five times as much) for women rating male dates. In fact, “discovering the male date was unwilling to protect you was a deal-breaker for women.” The women gave those dates a rating of 2 out of 10 in attractiveness.

But they gave a man who attempts to protect them (but fails) a 7.5, and a man who attempts to protect them (and succeeds), an 8. “As long as a date tries to protect you—even if s/he fails to do so, and even if you are harmed by the assailant as a consequence of this failure—s/he is judged as more attractive,” the researchers concluded.

I’m reminded of the 2014 Swedish film *Force Majeure*, which tells the story of Tomas, his wife Ebba, and their two children vacationing at a ski resort in the French Alps. While lunching at an outdoor restaurant, the family observes a controlled avalanche designed to prevent snow from piling up to dangerous levels.

But the avalanche rolls so swiftly and threateningly close to the restaurant that Tomas panics and bolts, leaving his family to fend for themselves even though Ebba calls out to him to help her protect their children. When the expected catastrophe doesn’t materialize, the humiliated Tomas has exposed himself to be less of a man than a family patriarch is expected to be. The film is about him trying to recover his manhood as the family dynamics begin to disintegrate.

Tomas struggles with what the film’s director Ruben Östlund [called](#) these “expectations on gender, the role of the man and the woman.” As he [told](#) an interviewer: “Very often we

are forced into those roles, like how a man should stand up and protect his family when something dangerous is happening. When Tomas doesn't do that, he is in many ways losing his identity."

But the role of protector was not "forced" on men; it developed naturally because of their normally greater size, upper body strength, and aggression. For all of human history, the formula has been: the men protect the women, and the women protect the children. Feminism and the biological incoherence of gender ideology notwithstanding, men are still generally and rightly expected to be the protectors of women. If a man fails at that – particularly by running away – the shame and guilt can be especially profound.

Östlund goes on to say pessimistically of men: "We are struck by survival instinct. It's comparable to a truck going towards you and you throw yourself to the side. It's not a rational thing. It's just a reaction. This whole 'women and children first' is a myth."

This notion makes for an intriguing film, but in reality Östlund got it completely backward. [A 2014 Yale study](#) of Carnegie Hero medal recipients confirms that it is not selfishness that gives rise to intuitive, spontaneous action, but altruism. People who risk their own lives to save others, even total strangers, are the ones who act on the right thing without thinking. Pausing to consider the risks is what leads to acts of self-preservation.

No doubt there are some men in whom the survival instinct would override the instinct to protect; and these days the male backlash against decades of feminist abuse is so intense that many men would *consciously choose* self-preservation over coming to the aid of a damsel in distress, especially a stranger. But it seems that, contrary to the minority of volatile feminists who bristle at even having a door opened for them, most women naturally believe heroic altruism and the

chivalrous male instinct to protect makes for a highly attractive man.

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