

Male Throwbacks  
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There is sorrow, but no surprise, at Afghanistan's fanatical Muslim treatment of women. The Taliban government represents the worst culture and religion of the past. The Taliban men preside over a dying nation with a crashing birthrate, with the few trapped competent people slipping out of the country.

The documentary recently aired on MSNBC, "Ayenda," tells the story of the Afghan women's soccer team that escaped from the Taliban's hellhole. The film underscores the terrible choices these young women had to make, just to be able to do what young women nearly everywhere else now take for granted.

The modern, advanced world, has transformed society, particularly how men treat women and what women are finally permitted to do: make choices about their lives. We have been moving toward the long aspired partnership between the genders in every aspect of life. Women are no longer excluded from governance, sports, the military, universities, science, and marriage choices, but only under law in the increasingly secular societies of the west. Wherever religion dominates, women are still property, not partners.

However, even in the most enlightened societies of the west, some very ugly remnants of the past still blight the lives of what should be equal women partners. Unfortunately, the male holdovers from the ugly past believe it is their right to grab, to take whatever they like from women, to sexually brutalize them or grope and molest them. Some, like former President Trump, believe they can do so.

What has changed, however, is that when these abuses are finally addressed by the law (and by the distaste of the vast majority of decent men), such primitive males are prosecuted, fined millions, and jailed.

Our culture is obviously progressing. We see men and women of comparable expertise on television in panels discussing law, medicine, and sciences, and they seem to treat each other as partners. Television masterpieces, such as Star Trek, pioneered in showing a future of astronauts of both genders and diverse races, treating each other as partners.

Popular books feature women protagonists as detectives, sometimes gay, and sci-fi stories in which the genders are decidedly equal partners. Our young people have been educated to expect this, and are horrified when a university fraternity boy rapes an intoxicated girl who is a guest in his frat house.

But the bad old culture still lingers. Women in the military have silently put up with abuse, until now. It appears that testosterone has two sides: protection of women or sexual abuse. It is not surprising that when women first entered male fields (fire fighters, miners, universities, government) conspiracies still protect men who abuse their subordinates and rebuff attempts to subject powerful men to prosecution. Their superiors should know better, but do not.

An issue that really surprised me: the abuse of women working alongside of men in Antarctica, has finally gone viral. One would think that working in such a difficult environment would bond men and women to see each other as team mates, instead is rife with sexual abuse and rape and refusal of superiors to punish offenders. One woman reported that she had to protect herself, carrying a hammer among her tools, to swing at a violent rapist who was after her. Reporting abuse to superiors too often resulted in punishment of the woman herself.

Fortunately, the press is doing its job: reporting abuse of power and making such stories available to the public.

I still believe that most men in the modern world behave decently and treat their partners with respect. Most decent men have wives and daughters whom they treat with respect. I was reared by a father who told his two daughters that they could be anything they were capable of. "Even Ginger Rogers does everything Fred Astaire does on the dance floor, except do it backwards and in high heels." And he said women surgeons had smaller hands and had to be twice as good as male doctors.

Gender partnership is a work in progress: requiring education, good will, and all of us listening to our better angels. Bullies must be outed.

684 words

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