

Darwinian View of Women  
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It has taken thousands of years in which human beings struggled to evolve into the extraordinary beings we are today. Over that time, certain assumptions were widely accepted about the capabilities and values of women, the smaller and physically weaker of the two genders. Women were expected to provide sexual pleasure to men, to bear children and rear them, and to be free domestic and farm labor. Men were able to maintain this system through brute force, and later, religion and law.

Today, however, we now know that women can do anything that men can do that requires brainpower, not muscle. They are doctors, lawyers, teachers, political leaders, astrophysicists, and astronauts. We laugh at the 19th century doctors and scholars who opined that women's brains were smaller than men's brains, and that if they were admitted to universities, their wombs would shrink and they would not bear children. Unfortunately, ISIS and other reactionary religions still promote this view.

On the issue of violence alone, a UN report entitled "Families in a Changing World" that surveyed 86 countries and families of all incomes, family laws still protect perpetrators of violence against its women. In 2017 alone, 137 women were killed by a family member every single day. It is only recent indeed that modern societies prosecute wife beating under the law. Despite that great step forward, too many women are still beaten and too often murdered by husbands.

Is this some sort of throwback to a more primitive time that certain men believe that women (wives and lovers) are their property and if they offend, should and can be beaten or murdered?

It is fascinating that despite our pride in our progress, there were always some men (a very few) who suspected that if women were educated as men were, they would be as capable of thought and leadership as men. The philosopher Plato said as much 2500 years ago, but he was an outlier. Aristotle, his colleague, believed the opposite, and Aristotle was the preferred expert for centuries thereafter.

The American John Stuart Mill in the 19th century believed as Plato did, and had more evidence that this was so; women were beginning to demonstrate their qualities. It is only one century since women were legally emancipated and given the vote. At least in law (and in theory) most modern men and women have political, economic, and intellectual equality.

But how do we, even the enlightened ones, come to terms with a Darwinian factor that has long puzzled us? Are we the only species in the world that finds value in females past childbearing, who live decades beyond their youthful beauty, sexuality, and domestic labor?

Some men, even our most powerful leaders, still judge women for their beauty and sexuality, and scorn them after menopause. Our President, when accused of rape (by a number of women over many decades), dismissed these accusations because these women were "not my type" (not beautiful enough to rape?). And who can forget his behavior during the Republican presidential debates when he scorned each competitor with insulting nicknames but reserved his most scorn for the sole female candidate, Carly Fiorina, by insulting her face? How primitive of him.

We have long thought we were alone in having women long outlive their fertility, a Darwinian mystery. We have recently learned that we share this amazing phenomenon with whales and dolphins, who also have females surviving decades beyond childbearing (perhaps elephants too) and these females are leaders of the pack! They have experience and wisdom; they know where the food is; they know how to help younger females rear their young.

Apparently, even in primeval human cultures, post-childbearing women helped the group to survive. They had experience and wisdom; they knew how to find nourishment from plants, assist in childbirth, and set bones and treat wounds for the tribe's hunters. They were, and still are, capable leaders and sources of wisdom. There is beauty in that.

When we finally elect our first woman president, we will catch up with the more enlightened societies among us, including the whales.

681 words

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