

Men Need More Self-Control and Less Self Esteem

Perhaps it is a historical pendulum that swings both ways. At times, society emphasizes personal self-control. Today, the emphasis is on building personal self-esteem.

I cannot attest to women, but when it comes to men, the so-called experts are completely mistaken. Men generally do not suffer from poor self-esteem. Or, to put it in a more relevant social perspective, men who do terrible things generally do not suffer from chronic low self-esteem.

Consider the greatest tyrants in history. Did Lenin or Stalin ruthlessly slaughter millions of their own citizens because they felt bad about themselves? Was Adolf Hitler a timid, cowering man who crumbled before cheering crowds? Or did he speak with complete confidence, certain that he was chosen to bring about a thousand-year Third Reich?

Even in recent political history, leaders like George Bush, Barack Obama, and Tony Blair were all highly criticized for their actions in Iraq, and even accused of having committed war crimes by some. You may think what you want of the men and their policies, but please do not believe any of them lack self-esteem.

A few years ago, I heard a radio commentator argue that unemployed men should collect disability if they cannot find employment. He reasoned that without some type of income, those men – crushed by low self-esteem – would commit rape, beat their wives, steal, engage in violent acts, and become intoxicated more often. The commentator never considered that those unemployed men should demonstrate more self-control, instead of directing their anger toward others. Nor did he seem to mind that filing for disability when you are not disabled is illegal. In his opinion, low self-esteem governed men's actions more than self-control.

How often do we hear about the star high school athlete accused of acting inappropriately with a girlfriend? A "big man on campus," he has the respect and admiration of the entire school and community, wins countless awards, and is often the newspaper headliner. The young man basks in endless admiration. Yet, it is not uncommon that such a boy is accused of rape, committing a crime, cheating, or bullying the smaller guys. He has all the self-esteem anyone could want, but possesses little personal self-control to restrain his actions.

In a real world example, suppose you are walking down the street

toward your car late at night. You learn that groups of young men are walking towards you on each side of the street. You also learn that the guys on the left side are overflowing with high self-esteem, while the guys on the right possess tremendous self-control. If you had to select, which side of the street would you walk? With your life possibly in the balance, it is unlikely that you would take a chance on the men who feel good about themselves. True, they have superior self-esteem, but can they control themselves? You would certainly choose to walk toward the young men on the right side, who can control their behavior.

Raising men's personal self-esteem sounds like an easy antidote to the violence and problems that males produce – but only in theory. In the real world, we prefer to coexist with men who can control their emotions, delay self-gratification, and engage in acceptable social behavior. If you review the examples I note above, it would almost appear that self-esteem is the problem, and not the solution.

Perhaps the self-esteem movement is better geared toward women. Perhaps, for whatever reason – cultural or genetic – females really do benefit from a society that cultivates more personal self-esteem in them.

But I do not believe this is necessarily true for men. Male self-control leads to more patience, discipline and focus in career and marriage, and physical restraint. It also leads to less procrastination, acting on emotion, extramarital affairs, and illegal or criminal behavior. They may also be less susceptible to alcohol and drug abuse.

Our society would greatly benefit if more men demonstrated these character traits. We can achieve this best by encouraging more personal self-control.

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