

PLUGGING MEN INTO WOMEN

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As we interacted with an old colleague, James (not real name), the young man proudly, and in a somewhat boastful tone, informed us of how he had “gone through all the stages of a relationship before the age of 40”. Dated, wedded, divorced and married again. His experience attracted lots of comments from fellow men, many marvelling at just how James had managed all this. However, he represents a lot more men out there that pass through women’s life as a kind of joke, or for sheer fun, leaving them badly bruised. James made no single mention of the whereabouts of his former wife. It was all about him, him and him.

Now, social media has redefined the flow of information, making so much of it accessible by a mere click on the phone screen. In one of the posts I



Men wearing high-heel shoes walk in the street during the “Walk A Mile In Her Shoes” event in Kampala Uganda. Conducted world wide, the event is an opportunity for men to raise awareness in their community about the serious causes, effects, and remediations to men’s sexualized violence against women.

accessed recently, there was this joke: when two men have slept with one woman, they pat and joke over it. Yet when two women get to know they are sharing a man, they grab each other by the neck. I am trying to visualise just how important it is to understand the world of women and men in order to clearly appreciate the challenges facing the women’s movement today in the effort to address women’s problems.

In yet another post on social media, a professor attempts to explain the ways

of men and women. According to him, when a man cheats on his wife, it does not necessarily mean that he doesn’t love her. Men are easily turned on and the sex drive comes so quickly in their minds. But dangerous is the woman who cheats on her husband – for by the time she does so, she has fully emotionally disassociated herself from her husband. The reasoning is that women only offer their bodies to a man they love, yet a man does not need to love a woman in order



to have sex with her. Little wonder, then, men find it easy to joke about their sex escapades while women take sex rather passionately and treat it as sacred.

The above examples demonstrate the sharp contrast between the ways of men and women, and how these diverging perceptions ultimately affect any attempts to achieve absolute 'sanity' in our society in favour of women.

I have attended a few conferences hosted by women's organisations, and one thing I observed is the temptation to



Ethan Musolini, a renowned motivational speaker, believes that mistrust and resistance to the movement is fuelled by the way the movement packages its message. He says, "I have heard some women's rights activists who think men are evil beings standing in the way of women's dreams. This hinders men's involvement in the movement."



isolate men from women's engagements. In the end, you have women spending time lamenting about their problems, while pointing their "guns" towards men as the oppressors. Temporarily, many achieve the desired empathy within their circles, but this does not translate into tangible solutions at family level.

I do understand that the women's movement in Uganda has over the years attempted to address, among other issues, women's land ownership, female genital mutilation, early marriages, divorce, bride wealth and discrimination at the workplace, as well as sexual harassment, which is today taking centre stage at international level. These are very pertinent issues, but in order to effectively address them, women just cannot work in isolation. Men must be actively coopted into the discussions, including employing them in women's organisations by way of setting a precedent for inclusivity.

Recalling the example above regarding how men and women perceive their sexual involvement should help us not to view men as aggressors (even when they mostly are), but rather to understand the differences between the two sexes. Is men's behaviour towards women something they learn or it is within their natural psyche? Take an example of men's insatiable sexual appetite that gets them to marry more than one woman. Women, on the other hand, culturally do not commit to more than one man and generally do not approve of their men relating with other women – which is a source of family feuds.

If men's character is not something they are socialised into, how, then, can we talk them out of it? The same applies to issues of men controlling family land and property at the expense of

women, and taking women as property at the time of marriage. While some of these things are explained by cultural practices, could some be generally as a result of inborn human character? Either way, even as the women are trying to understand the behaviour of men, they must coopt the men as partners rather than set them up as targets of the women's movement. Otherwise we risk reaping resentment.

I have twice experienced the anxiety of knowing a baby's sex at the time of childbirth. Before we look at men in their grown state, we've got to first appreciate them from the time of birth. Ideally, all children are precious gifts from God and, as little babies, they bring the same amount of joy to their parents. Not many parents regret or show remorse at having produced either a girl or a boy. What this means, therefore, is that how we culture children from an early stage defines to a large extent what they become later in life. It is at this point that the women's movement (as mothers) ought to focus its energy on ensuring that boy children grow up respecting girl children, as opposed to subscribing to stuff like "prove that you are a man".

I know of an online group created by an American friend of mine entitled "My Growing Edge". His focus is a deliberate attempt to help men achieve responsible 'manhood' by respecting women. There have been a lot of

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discussions already, and many men clearly appreciate the need not only to respect but also to protect women seen as mothers, sisters, wives and daughters. However, ironically, while the online group, comprising more than 90 members, includes women, the women scarcely participate in the discussions. This to me suggests a serious inherent problem – that some women are just not comfortable sharing their concerns on the same platform with men. This is something that requires further study to appreciate the intrinsic differences between the sexes, and how these impact on the women's movement efforts towards addressing the issues affecting women.

