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THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS PROBLEM FOR ANIMALS? MASCULINITY

DECEMBER 2, 2020

Let's be clear from the start: gender is the largest determinant—beyond race, class, geography, or any other attribute—in how much humans harm animals. 'Being a man' is associated with eating 'meat'—and it's the single most critical social issue that animal advocates need to face if we are to end the exploitation of our fellow beings.

It is men who overwhelmingly engage in exploitative behaviours they believe confer strong masculine identities upon



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The world's most dangerous problem for animals? Masculinity

Let's be clear from the start: gender is the largest determinant—beyond race, class, geography, or

them: hunting, angling, rodeo, betting on animal sports, and others. It is even men who buy the most fur, often as gifts for women to announce prestige. (It may surprise you that, for shopping in general, men are more likely to purchase “gender-congruent products” because men, it seems, have a greater need for “boys’ toys” to feel like men more than women

need “women’s things” to feel like women.) But of course, the vast majority of the abuse of animals comes through our food system, which is dominated by ‘masculine’ performances.

As scholars Timothy Pachirat and Gail Eisnitz have documented in their books (*Every Twelve Seconds*, and *Slaughterhouse*), there are almost no women working on the ‘kill floors’ of slaughterhouses. And men, wrapped up in images of what it means to be a man, continue to dominate the bodies of animals through the heavier consumption of ‘meat’. Globally, men eat around 57 percent more meat than women, according to the US Department of Health. And most vegans are women—in the UK, about two-thirds of vegans identify as women; in US it’s more like four to one. Veganuary, the campaign to get people to choose vegan in January, attracts around 82-88 percent women every year, and only 10-15 percent men.

For the academic Brian Luke, the reason for this disparity is that those who identify as men, especially ‘masculine’ men, continue to benefit from animal

attribute—in how much humans harm animals. ‘Being a man’ is associated with eating ‘meat’—and it’s the single most critical social issue that animal advocates need to face if we are to end the exploitation of our fellow beings. Dr Alex Lockwood, writes.

Dec 2, 2020



“You throw them and I’ll hit them”

Horribly, these words weren’t spoken by a cricketer or baseballer, but instead a worker at a farm operated by Bernard Matthews – the UK’s largest turkey producer. *Abigail Penny, Executive Director of Animal Equality UK*

Those “ways” are wrapped up in the “benefits” of meat consumption for providing a social identity that confers power, domination and control over others. Sadly, these have come to be seen as ‘masculine’ traits—not, as Ed says in his video, because they accurately define men, but because they are

marketed to us by food companies. We’ve been socialised into these roles. And ‘real’ men lap it up.



Take this fresh example. In the US state of Georgia, which Joe Biden flipped from Republican to Democrat in

November’s elections, there are two Senator runoffs, hugely important for America—and the world—because they will decide whether or not President-elect Biden can get legislation, including climate legislation, through the powerful Senate. One of those run-offs is between David Perdue (Republican) and Jon Ossoff (Democrat). On American Thanksgiving, Perdue tweeted this message:

As academic Jan Dutkiewicz noted, there is so much to unpack here. The incumbent ‘real man’ David Perdue expresses his masculinity—fitness to govern, fighting spirit, and ability to dominate his rather scared looking wife—

writes.

Nov 25, 2020



Bittersweet the happily-ever-afters of cow

escape stories

As an antidote to the tragic examples highlighted in our recent video - *When animals escape slaughter* - we bring you a round-up of mainstream media and viral reports of escaped cows who made it to sanctuaries. But for all the happiness these stories bring us, is there a bittersweet epilogue?

Nov 20, 2020



Are mink false eyelashes fuelling the fur trade and

heart attack) meat. Perdue also makes it clear there are 'sides' to take: masculinity and meat on one, and emasculation and plant food on the other. He asks Georgia to take sides: the real men vs. the "pussies".

Perdue (who made millions out of the pandemic using **insider knowledge**

gained as a Senator about the virus, by selling and buying shares before others knew its impact) is telling voters to choose him so he can continue to dominate: animals, women, and them. This domination, he believes, and believes voters agree with him, is a symbol of his ability to govern; and that a plant-based diet is a symbol of weakness to govern. As the scholar **Corey Wrenn** puts it, "In Western Culture, masculinity is a performance of domination, while femininity is a performance of subordination ... The entire capitalist system in this sense is a patriarchal one, as nonhuman animals, women, and exploited workers are all feminized through subordination."

Ecofeminists such as **Carol J. Adams**, **Josephine Donovan**, and **Greta Gaard** have long shown how messages like Perdue's are part of the "**sexual politics of meat**" in our societies: the ways in which gender and speciesism go hand in hand. The Perdue tweet is exemplary of how these gender norms are used to organize differences in violent hierarchical relationships within patriarchal societies (between men and animals: 'real' men and

future
pandemics

As a coronavirus mutation on a Danish mink fur farm shocks the world, a new report by Moving

Animals reveals how popular brands are still selling false eyelashes made from mink fur.

Nov 17, 2020



Pet trade death trade: Europe's forgotten victims of trafficking

According to one report, trafficking of animals - including "pets" - is the third most common form of international trafficking after weapons and drugs. But what exactly does this terrible journey look

The world's most dangerous problem for animals? Masculinity emasculated men; men and women). Gender rules of both masculinity and femininity position women and animals together as subordinate to men.

companion
animals?

Nov 12, 2020

As scholar [Ayce Feride Yilmaz](#) puts it, “meat has historically figured and continues to do so in interrelated oppressive structures, practices and

meanings” inscribed in society, particularly in reference to gendered identities. Women are identified as “pieces of meat” (or colonized/Black people as “brutes”). As Professor Laura Wright, author of [The Vegan Studies Project](#) and editor of [The Handbook of Vegan Studies](#), puts it: “the mythology of meat and the ways that a meat-based diet not only is cruel to animals but constitutes sexist and racist ideology.”

Is all masculinity toxic?

Is all masculinity toxic?

That’s the position I started from when I created a [podcast](#) about ‘relinquishing masculinity’ as pre-requisite for responding to the climate emergency. I argued that masculinity is out of control. It has led to the building of structures based on masculine attributes –what we call patriarchy–that are destroying our planet through the demands they make for men to dominate others as a means of showing off power.



For that is all ‘masculinity’ is: a socially

constructed list of behaviours and characteristics. It's not stable, but changes both within and across societies. It is not an in-built set of 'natural' or innate behaviours or traits universal to some humans. It is a set of rules that we are taught: and that's why women can 'be a man' too (just look at [some of the defences of Priti Patel's](#)

[bullying](#)). Sadly, the rules for masculinity have come to be exemplified through dominance and control. 'Toxic' masculinity is simply its most obvious, destructive form. But all rules for any form of 'gender behaviour' are toxic to the degree that other forms of behaviour, that don't fit the rules, are considered inferior.

The same is true of 'femininity' of course, in reverse. Femininity is socially constructed to be *not* powerful but submissive; it's a performance that must be repeated, policed, and controlled if it is to work as a set of rules for identifying particular 'types' of human being. What is a 'feminine woman', or a 'feminine man', and how are they different from other men and women? You could name the attributes, I bet—the insults, and the colours.

To transgress rules means to risk punishment: ostracism from the group; perhaps worse. The author JJ Bola begins [Mask Off: Masculinity Redefined](#) with the story of how, walking along a street with family, he held hands with his uncle—a perfectly normal practice for

spotted holding hands by non-African boys from his London estate, he felt ashamed and hid. In Britain such physicals act can signify homosexuality; that it is not 'masculine' to hold hands with other men. It was a rule of *this* society (but *not* his African society) he had transgressed.

Many of the men I interviewed for the podcast did not agree all masculinity was toxic. Chris Hemmings, author of [*Be A Man*](#), felt that male camaraderie can be positive. He and others were persuasive about the benefits of male friendship and groups such as the [*North East Young Dads and Lads Project*](#) that work 'just for men' to avoid the shame they'd feel if exposed to the gaze of women while expressing vulnerabilities. Yet even this is ascribing to those gender rules—that men should not show vulnerability.

Masculinity kills: animals, women... and men

For men in Western societies, [*we die from these rules*](#). In many countries, suicide is the biggest killer of men under 45, and three quarters of all deaths by suicide in the UK are male. Men have higher cancer mortality rates in all forms of cancer that affect both men and women, because of men's under-utilization of healthcare services. In terms of those taking their own lives, a major cause is that the 'correct' behaviour for men is to not show weakness. It is also to be overwhelmingly reliant on one other person—a non-male

emotional support. If that relationship breaks down, men in their midlife have no other safety net. They die from a lack of someone to talk to.

Men's attempts to live up to what The Samaritans call a "gold standard" of male experience, which "prizes power, control and invincibility" is a major factor in why men fail to learn how to process emotions, die by suicide, or refuse to get a cancer screening. During the pandemic, in America 54% of women said they'd worn a mask outdoors, compared to only 34% of men. This is "performative masculinity" at its worst. It makes men sick, and die.

As the American sociologist Michael Kimmel argued in his seminal work on the construction of manhood, building identities on such practices as eating some (manly) foods but not other (feminine) foods leaves us with a "perilous masculinity" which, as scholars Ruby and Heine note, "is tenuous and fragile. That is, in most cultures, manhood is earned through social displays, competition and aggression, and is socially, rather than biologically determined."

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ourselves as gendered and speciated beings.

All this is tiring, and exasperating, for us—
but of course worse for animals. As Carol
Adams told me in 2019: “I keep hearing
the call for men to ‘renew the man card.’
Well I’ve had my library card for 30 years,

why is the ‘man card’ so fragile it needs to
be renewed every time they eat?”

Gender identification—separate but
related to biological sex—remains a set of
socially agreed upon rules for how to act.
To act outside of the rules is to be denied
access to privilege. It remains that *all*
masculinity is based on rules of
behaviour that, even in their most benign
form, constricts people from behaving in
alternative ways. This has to be left
behind. As others have written
elsewhere, “Our goal as humans should
not be to merely align our behavioral
decisions with the stereotypes of
whatever sex or gender we happen to be.
Instead, we should seek to behave in a
way that reduces meaningless misery
and brings joy to ourselves and the lives
of others.”

It is time for men in the animal movement
to “do” critical gender work. The animal
rights movement has of course had its
own reckoning with toxic masculinity—
something that was being pointed out
before #MeToo came along. But there is
plenty of work still to be done—men must
step up and do it. As Laura Wright told me

that they are willing to stand up to other straight, white men ... and call them out for their racism, sexism, speciesism, and homophobia, then this is where we are, and this is why most men aren't vegan. I can talk all day about veganism, but who cares? I'm just a woman."

Dr Alex Lockwood is an academic and author of the vegan memoir *[The Pig in Thin Air](#)*, that makes the connection between climate change and the food we eat. He is writing a report for The Vegan Society on the policy we need for a UK plant based food system.

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Nov 10, 2020

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Oct 23, 2020

exploitation of
our fellow
beings. Dr Alex
Lockwood,
writes.

Dec 2, 2020



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