

# Trump's Vision of Manhood

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Is Donald Trump a real man?

He certainly wants us to think he is. He lives in a gilded man cave, glued to the TV screen, chomping down junk food and hanging out with bodacious models and beauty pageant contestants.

He loves to brag about his sexual prowess. In military school, he cultivated his reputation as a ladies' man. He reminded us on live television that he has big hands – and not just big hands. As the video released Friday told us in all too graphic detail, he thinks he's irresistible to women and entitled to force himself on them.

But is this how real men talk when they're with each other, in the locker room, in the bar, in Wall Street bacchanals? And is this how real men act? Certainly a lot of women believe that's the case (or have themselves endured harassment and assault), and the video allowed them to be voyeurs into a frat-boy world. A lot of men are rushing to assure them otherwise.

*One of the heartbreaking things about the Trump video is how many women see it as confirmation that this is just how men talk. We don't. @matthewteague*

A parade of Republicans has dissociated themselves from such behavior, and [men interviewed across the country](#) said Mr. Trump had crossed a line.

More broadly, this election raises the question of what vision of masculinity Americans are going to endorse. Mr. Trump's version clearly resonates with a segment of the American electorate. He tells it like it is. He gets results. Take that, political correctness police.

In the primary, he scored by unmaning his opponents. He mocked them as wimps and effete elites (Jeb Bush), too weak to get through a debate without water (Marco Rubio) and – the ultimate insult – not manly enough to attract beautiful women (Ted Cruz).

Even his mangled syntax can be seen as manly. "Part of Trump's appeal is that he's inarticulate," said Jackson Katz, the author of "Man Enough? Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump and the Politics of Presidential Masculinity." "He seems more real," as opposed to the intellectuals that Republicans have long dismissed as weak.

More substantively, Mr. Trump talks about Making America Great Again, a case he is sure to make in tonight's second debate. With his rejection of free trade, his resolve to build a wall to keep out immigrants and his swagger, he conjures an America where a man still gets good pay for an honest day's work. That man could provide for his family so his wife could afford to stay home. In this America, men don't face competition from immigrants or women for jobs. In this America, white men are restored to their dominant place in the economy, politics and the home.

Polling consistently shows that Mr. Trump has commanding majorities among white men without a college education. "It's much more difficult now to say I'm a real man," said Andrew J. Cherlin, a sociologist at Johns Hopkins University and the author of "Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America." "I take care of my family. I don't ask for any favors. That was their identity and it was based on a job with a decent wage."

But in other ways, Mr. Trump is a caricature, even a distortion, of American masculinity. Scholars point to an

enduring ideal of American manhood, epitomized by the Western — the strong, silent and chivalrous man. Gary Cooper in High Noon. Alan Ladd in Shane. “The cowboy types that show up in our imagination would have nothing to do with Trump,” said Michael Kimmel, a professor of sociology and gender at Stony Brook University and the author of “Angry White Men.” “He’s not a man who’s done a lick of real work in his life. Let’s see you change a tire. Masculinity in America has always been something that you prove with your hands – not the size of your actual hands.”

Paul Ryan touched on this alternate ideal of manhood in his denunciation of Mr. Trump’s words (if not of his candidacy) late Friday. “Women are to be championed and revered, not objectified,” he said. This in itself can be seen as retrograde, of course – feminists having fought long and hard to move away from the Victorian ideal that women need to be protected and worshipped.

Notably, many Republicans who denounced Mr. Trump over the weekend did so in similar chivalric mode. Mitt Romney said anyone with a daughter could not support Mr. Trump. Jeb Bush spoke about his granddaughters. Striving to be sensitive, they nonetheless still cast women as objects, not as peers.

Despite the protestations, sexual entitlement — in words and deeds — runs deep in American culture. Stanley Kowalski, in Marlon Brando’s indelible portrayal in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is another trope of American manhood. We don’t even have to look that far back. Even now, a string of professional and college athletes, celebrated as the epitome of manliness, have beaten, abused and raped women, often with impunity.

The aggression that characterizes Mr. Trump’s words and behavior is both a reflection and a cartoonish exaggeration of traditional masculinity. That very ideal of what it is to be a man has been under assault for generations. Feminists would argue – contrary to the emotional experience of many of Mr. Trump’s supporters — that reimagining the role of women does not demean or constrain men. Rather, the feminists say, it liberates them.

A men’s movement, championed by Mr. Katz among others, suggests that there are new ways to define being an American man — most notably by acting against sexual harassment but also by freeing men from the emotional straightjacket the Western trope imposed.

This election presents many choices. Now it may also determine which version of manhood we believe in – or what we choose to invent going forward.

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