Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Impulsiveness, Hollywood, and Toxic Attention

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, November 8th, 2017

Somewhere along the way, men who become sexual predators learn they can be impulsive and get away with it. But there's got to be more to it than that. Getting away with something doesn't mean you're going to keep doing it. When a man sexually harasses a woman, her response is negative. What motivates the man to keep harassing? There has to be a reward for impulsiveness from society.

Adam Leipzig confronts this in his piece on the issue that's larger than Harvey Weinstein. Hollywood insiders knew about Weinstein's "bullying tactics, brutal language, and piggish dealmaking." Now that women have come out to reveal Weinstein's predation to the world, people are condemning his acts, condemning him, and condemning toxic masculinity. Yet, as Leipzig points out, the condemnation "feels like sound and fury directed at a single perpetrator, not actual change for an awful truth about our society at large."

What is the truth about our society at large? Although Leipzig confronts the problem—the "social construct that the world is made by and for men"—he doesn't get into why this social construct exists to begin with. There must be something deep down in our society creating the conditions in which men are rewarded for bad behavior. These men have autonomy and they're at fault. But, as with all criminals, there's a role society plays.

The Problem of Attention

One of the starting points for parents is teaching impulse control, an executive function that, according to KinderCare Learning Centers, "Keeps you from blurting out every thought in your head, walking into traffic because you're in a hurry, or leaving work in a huff because a coworker slighted you." Impulse control is also what keeps you from grabbing a coworker of the opposite sex somewhere they don't want to be grabbed. All sorts of activities teach impulse control, including good old-fashioned board games, games like "Red Light, Green Light," and mindfulness.

If teaching impulse control is standard parenting, then why do so many men give into the impulse to sexually harass women? Is it that parents and teachers don't actually teach boys impulse control? Rather, it's that boys and young men get attention for giving into impulses.

School authorities punish bullies, but everyone knows who those bullies are. Bullies who get ostracized from social groups can become adults who go to prison. The punishment didn't stick, but they learned they could get things, such as attention, through bullying.

Bullies who are included in social groups can become adults like Weinstein who, as Leipzig points out, uses bullying tactics in his professional life. Loud kids and class clowns who say whatever they want typically have groups of like-minded friends, as opposed to the quiet kids whose names no one knows.

I must admit I was one of the loud kids. I got attention by saying whatever I wanted in class, which made people laugh. Later, as a young adult, I discovered this attention had been somewhat toxic. I'd been conditioned to think following my verbal impulses got a positive response. It hurt my young adult relationships. And, particularly when I was intoxicated, I found myself following other dangerous impulses with women that nearly crossed the line of sexual harassment. It took a good friend to tell me what I was doing wrong, and I thank him for it. Did any of Weinstein's friends tell him what he was doing wrong?

The Media and Toxic Attention

Always the astute observer, Leipzig pointed out that Trump, the man who promoted sexual harassment with his "grab 'em by the pussy" remark, got far more media attention than anyone else during the presidential campaign. Regardless of whether that attention was positive or negative, it was attention nonetheless. Would Trump have won the election without that attention? Whatever the case, some outlets noted the president's tendency to act like a chimpanzee. Famous scientist and conservationist Jane Goodall said Trump's performances were like those of male chimpanzees during their dominance rituals. His chest-thumping gained him the most press coverage, which helped him win the presidency.

Pixabay

Weinstein is another attention case. Coverage of Weinstein's disgrace is everywhere. It's of the public shaming sort, and yes, Weinstein should be shamed for what he did. Sadly, some men may just see a powerful man who did whatever he wanted to beautiful women, and they may seek to emulate it. Where's the coverage of positive, powerful male role models?

Not every form of attention is toxic. Social entrepreneurs harness their attention-getting powers, their public speaking skills, to shed light on societal problems in hopes of solving them through business. One example is Muhammad Yunus. Yunus saw that Bangladeshi women weren't able to get good loans, so he charged interest on loans and used that capital to provide loans to women. Yunus has received some press attention in the past, but compared to someone like Weinstein, it's minimal, and I'm willing to bet you've never heard of him.

As the old saw goes, we can't help but stare at a trainwreck. Right now, the trainwreck is toxic masculinity. Our impulse is to stare in disgust at the lecherous man staring at the beautiful woman. These sexual predators need to make recompense, and men all over need to stop. But if society doesn't stop staring, if we don't start paying more attention to men who are treating women the right way, our attention risks becoming toxic.

Image/Pexels

This entry was posted on Wednesday, November 8th, 2017 at 3:57 pm and is filed under Film, Discourse

You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.