

How we overlook the value of women

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In the modern world, women are needed and utilised more than ever. However, society still struggles to see the actual value of women and their contributions to the world we live in. By not acknowledging the true value of women, we as people are doing ourselves a disservice.

Why is it that a woman will be called beautiful before intelligent?

When society describes women, the most common words we use are 'beautiful', 'cute' and 'sexy'. We describe women superficially and hyper-focused on appearance rather than the actual depth of character, behaviour and personality. Researchers used an algorithm to determine the top adjectives to describe women versus men in 3,5 million books. The research found that the most common words used to describe women were 'sexy' and 'beautiful', whereas men were described as 'righteous', 'rational' and 'courageous' (Hornbek-Copenhagen 2019). This demonstrates how the world sees women's value in their physical appearance. By doing this, we are completely overlooking what women are capable of doing and being. It is like having a book filled with incredible stories, knowledge and answers and only seeing value in the front cover instead of the more profound meaning and value inside the book. We have always been told to never judge a book by its cover, yet we still make the mistake of judging women based on how they look instead of who they are. It just simply doesn't make sense to not use something to its full purpose and value. I believe society is overlooking the gift we have in women.

These biases and perceptions have adverse effects on people all over the world. By overlooking the actual value of women, we are limiting what women can achieve and contribute to society. We are limiting their opportunities by not recognising their intrinsic value. The US military prides itself on trying to achieve equality within its organisation.

This can be seen in evidence as early as 1948 when former president Harry S. Truman declared equality in the armed forces. To achieve this, they decided to analyse the results from performance reviews. They found that there was no difference in objective measuring systems such as grades, fitness scores, class standing (Smith 2018). Although in subjective reviews such as US military leaders assessing individuals personally, they found significant differences in evaluations. They found that women were more likely than men to be attributed negative traits. The most common negative attribute given to women was 'inept' (displaying no skill). This study emphasises how women still aren't seen as of equal value in the workforce. Even though objective tests prove that women are equal in the workforce, our misguided perception of women is holding them back significantly. People in power need to challenge themselves to see the value of women more honestly and objectively for women to be given a fair opportunity in the modern world.

I believe we often miss the value of women in the world because the way we celebrate and reward men vs women is very different. In the case of the Apollo 13 mission, many of us don't know the story of the woman who helped save their lives and bring them back home. Judith Love Cohen, an engineer on the Apollo 13 space mission, was that woman. On Apollo 13, an oxygen tank had exploded, leaving the surface module utterly destroyed and forcing the astronauts to use what is known as a Lunar module as a lifeboat (Wikipedia 2021). In short, these men had almost no chance of making it back alive and safe. Judith had also been pregnant at the time of the crisis, and on the day she was in labour, she quickly went to work to grab a printout of the problem to work on in the hospital. On this day, she made a tremendous contribution to the Abort Guidance System by making vital calculations to ensure a safe and viable route for these men to get back home (CK QLS 2021). Her contributions inevitably saved these men's lives. Without her contribution, these men would be dead and the entire mission would be a failure, yet she was never recognised or awarded for the enormous value she contributed to the mission. She was never recognised or awarded for her value. This mission would not be successful without this innovative and intelligent woman.

You may be thinking this was a long time ago, and things are different now. Are they? I don't believe so. Things may have changed and even may have improved, but the underlying problem remains the same. Today, the USA women's soccer team has won 4 world cup titles, including the 2015 and 2019 world cups. At the same time, the men's soccer team has won none. In fact, the men's team has never even made it to a single final. Their highest result, which was 3rd place, happened more than 90 years ago. In the 2019 Women's World Cup, the American viewership was 22% higher than the men's (Hess 2019).

On top of this, the US women's team has generated 1,9 million dollars more than the men's team in 2016 and have made more money than the men's team from 2016 to today (Hess 2019). So the US women's soccer team wins more world cups than the US men's team, the US women's team has a more extensive viewership than the men's team, and the US women's team generates more money than the men's team, and yet the US women's team still gets paid 38% of what the men's team receives (Kelly 2019; Siregar 2019). Does this make sense? These women clearly provide much more value than the men's team and yet still aren't rewarded the same.

I challenge all of us women and especially men, to put in the effort to notice and appreciate the value of women all around us. Don't be afraid to develop role models who are women. I think it is vital for women to have powerful and influential females they can look up to in all industries, and men, I promise it won't make you less of a man if you look up to one woman. I personally look up to many women, such as Greta Thunberg, an environmental activist who has been challenging world leaders on climate change since she was 15 years old. I admire her conviction and passion for the issue and find it quite inspiring. There is so much value in looking up to men and women. There is so much value in women, and I promise you will find it if you open your eyes.

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