

## **The Hypocrisy of “Women & Children First”: Let’s Scrap the Bio-Cultural Bias** By Dr. George Simons at [www.diversophy.com](http://www.diversophy.com) February 3, 2009

In the rush to the lifeboats on the Titanic the Captain shouted, “Be British, boys, be British.” It has in fact been researched to show that the exhorted British politesse might indeed have cost a few more male lives as the ship went down, but it also invites reflection on the underlying cultural values that penetrate attitudes, and certainly media reporting almost worldwide about the value of women and children. “Women & Children First” rises from a set of beliefs that I would strongly suggest cost more lives than the ones they save. During the current ubiquitous crises from Burma to Gaza to Zambia each side whines incessantly about the other side’s violence as aimed at civilians defined, almost without exception, as “innocent women and children,” to justify its own identical behavior. “Women & Children First” is in fact the emotional trump card for gaining the trick of world opinion in the ongoing games of national, ethnic and religious gotcha!

The hidden and sometimes not so hidden mental paradigm says that “men are the problem” and killing them (or having them kill each other) is the solution. Both the reality and the fictions that shape our realities are supported by this dogma. During the haute adolescence of the Women’s Movement, writers of novels and screenplays romanticized an all distaff world, where at best a few hardy male specimens were kept for purposes of artificial insemination to propagate the female race while research went forward to see if science could indeed entirely replace the need for a medical stud farm.

If we were to spell them out in more detail, what beliefs lie beneath such thinking in real life and in literature?

- Women and children are by definition innocent. Men are not.
- Women and children are prized possessions and, to feel prized and prize them, need to be fought over.
- Men have the duty to do this fighting.
- Women and children are necessary; men are disposable—cannon fodder.
- Women and children are collateral damage. Killing men is the right thing.

On TV, in the movies men are blown away and no one takes notice. Women and children are threatened or harmed and horror sets in. So it is in life. Yes, there are fantasy Barbarellas, Wicked Witches and Manga MANglers, but only as side dishes to the main menu.

On a certain Pacific island that I visited It was once explained to me by the locals that headhunting had a very specific social purpose. In order to prove himself a protector and defender, a man had to venture into the wild and come back with the head of another man (probably a guy from the neighboring tribe on a similar mission). Meanwhile the ladies stayed at home and each created a sack into which one lucky fiancée would receive a severed head. The sack was then hung from the ceiling of the living room of the longhouse where the couple resided. No one ever told me what happened to the girl whose guy had lost his head over her. She shrugs and tries again, I suppose.

I have called this a “bio-cultural imperative” or bias. One could conceive of the struggle between nature and nurture in the human sciences somewhat as an endless civil war in

which the front line is ever changing to the advantage of one or the other side—there is neither armistice nor truce nor a clear definition of where the border lies exactly. So one can ask to what degree culture impacts biology as well as the reverse. So when we cannot prove biology, we can speculate on culture as it is something over which we feel a bit more control. Given that male does not equate to fighter-protector in all species or cultures, it suggests we look at values and beliefs. So, until we can create artificial beings (along the value lines of the creators, no doubt) we will continue to “fix” cats and dogs and send men to war.

As long as there are real or imagined enemies, men seem willy-nilly educated for deadly combat in the environment in which they grow up. This seems to be intensifying rather than decreasing with the entertainment technology children in the “developed world” today enjoy almost non-stop. When I was a boy my cousin Artie and I were armed, I won’t deny it. I had a double barreled shotgun that shot corks on a string and he had a tin cap pistol. We ran around the house in the days of WWII dressed as cowboys and Indians or, depending on the last motion picture show, flying imaginary sorties of balsa wood B-17s and P-40s.

Our grandmother babysat us while Mom was off making real Tommy guns (Thompson Products contribution to the real War) and Dad, rescued from the unemployment of the Great Depression, was happy to bicycle daily to the Jack and Heinz factory to machine bombsights. Grandma Barbara was a peaceful woman sorely tried by our shooting each other (and her) to cries of “Bang-bang, you’re dead!” and, “No, I shot you first!” as we scampered from table to couch and sometimes behind her skirts for cover.

At a certain moment of exasperation, she went up to the attic and brought down Grandpa Tony’s 12 gauge double-barreled hunting rifle and declared, “if you don’t stop this racket, I will shoot both of you.” Needless to say this quieted the frontier for a couple days, until we regained the courage to violate the ceasefire. We knew the distinction between real weapons and make-believe. Yup, we grew up on war games styled by past current conflicts. We also played Hearts and Parcheesi.

Fast forward the boyhood clip to my neighbor’s kid today. Fully equipped with playstation, internet connection and DVD simulators, he kills more virtual villains (read, “other guys”) in a couple days than Artie and I could ever have dispatched in our few short years as the child soldiers of Forest Drive. At his age, anything longer than it is wide is a gun or a sword, flamethrower or rocket launcher. If he grows up to be an archeologist such items will be tagged phallic symbols, but at age 7 he is forever knocking off invisible snipers and stalkers with my crutch while we adults are complaining about inflated prices and swapping recipes.

Orson Scott Card’s novel, *Ender’s Game* describes the ultimate playstation where young people are picked for their video game expertise to conduct what is in fact a real war under the guise of an electronic simulation. Not so far from the reality of the games designed for recruiting by the US Army and Silicon Valley collaborators.

Men don’t in fact like war, but conscripted or propagandized into its patriotic necessity, they do their best to make a game out of it. Our instinct is the preservation of human life, and so to be able to pull the trigger the enemy must be stereotyped as something less than human, *huns, krauts, nips, chinks, gooks, slants, towelheads*, etc. Maybe it was easier when a tribe

called itself “the human beings” and outsiders were all considered non-human or sub-human. Maybe related to our Cro ancestor’s genocide of the Neanderthals. Tribalism makes killing easier and, fortunately in an age of football, tribes can still be formed out of diverse populations.

Men are cajoled into lauding the “ultimate sacrifice,” while their parents, spouse, children and friends are encouraged to displace their sense of loss with pride and patriotism. Unfortunately such human sacrifices do not propitiate the gods of war but in fact encourage their thirst for more.

Is it a glad turn of events that we are asserting more equal rights for women in the military and women now honored as suicide bombers? Probably not, as permission to kill still begins with the justification for killing men. Occasionally proponents of peace will briefly hit on this truth, and sing about the “Universal Soldier,” but generally speaking when Johnny comes marching home again, if he has survived, it is to a hero’s welcome for bravely dealing death to other people’s soldiers. “When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again” has been given patriotic lyrics to replace the original (“Johnny, I hardly knew ye....”):

“Ye haven't an arm; ye haven't a leg, hurroo, hurroo  
Ye haven't an arm, ye haven't a leg  
Ye're an armless, boneless, chickenless egg  
Ye'll have to put with a bowl out to beg...”

We will continue to slaughter women and children as long as we fail to see that the value of a single man’s life is of equal value to that of a woman or a child. ‘Nuff said.