

## What's Keeping Men From Engaging In Gender Equality?

The Pedestal Effect May Be The Unspoken Enemy Of Men's Engagement In Gender Equality

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[Words In The Bucket](#)



Photo by: Exile on Ontario St / Source: Flickr

Every day, we fight a war against gender inequality. We fight systems that oppress people for being who they are. This means, being killed because of your sexual orientation, as in Chechnya or being unable to use the bathroom of your choice as it is the case in North Carolina.

For women and girls, the struggle is to have a life free of sexual violence, for equal access to opportunities, and control over their own bodies. In recent years, while some men have jumped in the equality waggon, pushing for a meaningful conversation about masculinities and what it means to be a man, the majority remains attached to harmful notions of masculinity.

Today, there is plethora of resources on how to be a feminist, an ally, how to raise feminist boys or boys that respect genuinely others. Videos, books, Ted Talks, podcasts and innovative art exhibits that are helping us understand better the layers and complexities of the relationship between gender issues and masculinities. There is more openness to talk about the issues that men and boys face. This is a fundamental step in achieving gender equality, an equality that includes men and boys too.

### A silent enemy

Despite these advancements, there is a growing silent enemy of men's engagement in gender equality. It manifests in subtle and sometimes, misleading ways. It is called the Pedestal Effect. This concept comes from the engagement of men as allies against Gender-based Violence (GBV) but its definition can be perfectly applied widely.

It “[refers to men’s unearned praise and the greater likelihood of being listened to](#)”. In sum, this means, putting men in a pedestal by praising them for actions, words or gestures that seem in line with gender equality, but might not.

Do we give men credit for “promoting gender equality” when in reality they are leveraging their power and privilege for their own benefits? What happens when we praise people or companies for gender equality actions that are motivated by profit? What about when we praise men for performing the same tasks that women are expected to perform?

## **To praise or not to praise?**

There is a real threat in praising men and boys for acting in ways that seem in tune with gender equality but lack authenticity or real understanding of gender issues.

This happens when men are praised for “doing the dishes or helping at home” as if a divine presence is favouring mortals. Running a household, caring for family members, and providing meals take time and effort. [This is called the “mental load” and it is carried primarily by women.](#) Men doing chores are not doing “a favour” or [helping their wife or partner](#). We are assuming our fair share of the responsibility as adults living in joint space. So please, bite your tongue when you are tempted to praise men/boys when is unearned and make sure you call others when that happens. Even more, [support men that use their soapbox to fight for equal rights in meaningful ways, for instance, for parental leave.](#)

## **Champions of gender equality...not?**

In June 2017, boys in a secondary school in Exeter, UK were confronted with two issues: hot temperatures and a rule against wearing shorts to school. Girls were not affected as they are allowed to wear skirts. When the school administrators refuse to change the rules, the boys devised an idea: [wear skirts to school](#). The news went viral and [the images of the boys wearing skirts took over the internet](#). Finally, the school gave up to the pressure and changed the rules to allow boys to wear shorts. They fought for their rights to equal treatment and they won.

Does this make them champions for gender equality? No, it does not. Is wearing a skirt a political statement? It could be. In this case, these boys are not challenging patriarchy by presenting themselves in a way that seems to emasculate by society, they are leveraging their own privilege to their benefit. If you ride the metro to rob the passengers does not mean you support public transportation. If you want to praise boys and their families who are challenging gender inequality, listen to Joe’s story [who fought to change the rules to allow Trans boys to be admitted to the Boys’ Scouts](#).

## **The Axe Effect**

Since 2015, Axe, a Unilever brand, has taken a U-turn in its narrative on men and masculinity. The recent launch of the [“The Man Box” report](#) -developed by [Promundo](#) and Unilever- is a good contribution to the discussion around the factors that shape young men’s experiences in becoming men. But Axe and its “Axe Effect” have been built on millions of dollars and decades of the most misogynist, sexist advertising. Unilever and Axe have made millions in profit by selling young men deodorant that would make women -literally- fall at their feet, as [you can see in dozens of videos in multiple languages that show clearly this line of thinking](#).

Today, thanks to this report and two new ads ([2016](#) and [2017](#)), Axe enjoys the Pedestal Effect, getting praised for a sudden change in spite of its record and history. For how long would this change last? Is this a genuine change or only a strategy to increase profits? If the profits go down, would they stick to this new version of men or would they return to the safe-profit bet, even if it is harmful and sexist?

The Pedestal effect is harmful and it gives a halo of authenticity to actions and behaviours that might reinforce inequality. Our common responsibility is to make them visible and call the bluff when it happens. Not all men are guilty of patriarchy and gender inequality, but they are all responsible for confronting it without expecting to get praised for doing it.

*Do you have any stories about the #PedestalEffect in your life? Share them with @DefyGenderRoles or @wordsbucket using #PedestalEffect.*