

## THE MALE HARNESS

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[Assignment: In this paper you will take a stand on societal treatment of men and women, specifically which gender is more caught in the "harness" of society. The stand you take will be your thesis. In developing your paper, plan to compare the attitudes of society toward men and women in the areas of work, child rearing and home.] .

(1) Historically, gender roles have been rigidly defined. The female raised the family while the male provided. Recently, women's movements have made a broad range of goals accessible to women. Unfortunately, men are not as privileged because these broad-ranging role options are still not available to them. Society still confines today's male in a harness of stereotypical expectations. In most cases, the man is still expected to do what males have been traditionally expected to do: hold a job, own a house, and provide for a family.

(2) From birth the male is treated differently than the female. The male baby does not receive pampering. He is taught to play rough, be strong, and show no emotion. On the other hand, while many young girls are encouraged to play with dolls, many are also encouraged to try out ways of playing earlier reserved for boys. They are also allowed to show emotions but also to be assertive. These gender rules are reinforced throughout children's lives. Children grow up learning their expected roles. The difference, as Herb Goldberg, author of "In Harness: The Male Condition" states, is that the female can readily "move between the traditional definitions of the male and female behavior and roles" (238) and the man cannot. The workplace is a prime example.

(3) Males are taught to study hard and make wise educational choices in order to prepare for a solid career. They know that they are expected to pay for a house and to support a family and these require considerable resources. So the male usually does not have the option of choosing a low-paying job even if it would be personally more rewarding. However, today many women have the luxury to opt for a lower paying job that may be more fulfilling to them especially if they are already supported by a male. Women's activists have demanded that women be treated as men's equals in all spheres and have all options available to them. Goldberg points out that a woman "can be wife and mother or a business executive" (283). Whereas a woman has flexibility, a man does not.

(4) As part of the harness society imposes, most middle-class males are expected to own a home and if they are to be considered successful providers, this home must be a substantial one. Once a man has purchased this home, he is expected to do many of the unglamorous tasks such as yard work, caulking, wiring, and unclogging sinks. These tasks are now in his job description. In addition, women's movements have also added cleaning, cooking, and child rearing to the male's list of responsibilities. Meanwhile, the woman enjoys some of the nicer aspects of home ownership such as getting to choose the house and decorate it to her own taste. But the care of home and family no longer defines her. As Goldberg writes, the female has a choice: "She will be loved for having 'feminine'

interests such as needlework or cooking, or she will be admired for sharing with the male in his masculine interests" (283).

( 5 ) Having a family is another traditional expectation from men. The male is expected to be the financial provider for his family and the father is traditionally required to be the authoritative disciplinary figure. At times this leaves him looking like an ogre. Once again the female has more options. She can either stay home and care for the children or send them to day care. The female is the one most closely involved with rearing, so she usually has an emotional advantage with children. Since she can spend more time with the kids, she often develops a closer bond. Usually, it is the mother who reaps the emotional satisfaction of seeing many of the children's "firsts" and accomplishments. Thus while men are now required to provide both monetary and emotional support in the family, they still remain the "heavies."

( 6 ) Today's society stipulates the male's role, yet leaves the female less harnessed in role expectations. The male is expected to perform within a narrowly defined set of rules. In contrast, the woman has been granted freedom to choose and move from role to role. As Goldberg explains, society forces the male to act as a man is expected to act. These expectations "cause him to feel comfortable only when he is functioning well in a harness" (283). People supporting the accomplishments of women's liberation should not forget the binding harness that still confines men--society must also free our males.