



The Voice of our Fathers: The Forgotten Power of Good Men

By Kristine Stringham

FAMILY MATTERS

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What can stop a culture of cads? Faithful fatherhood offers enduring guardrails and societal strength.

This Father's Day, I want to advocate for the power of righteous manhood. Currently, our Western culture frequently discusses patriarchy. And while abuses of authority are real, too often the necessity of the power of good men—which protects and builds women, families, and societies—is forgotten. As long as there are selfish men who would use their strength to harm women, protectors are needed. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints promotes a *dad* culture where women can thrive working alongside noble men; each secure in their roles as males and females.

A quick search on Instagram reveals a lively and negative conversation about patriarchy sponsored by many Latter-day Saint women. A sample of such posts:

A picture of a woman with her mouth gagged, [captioned](#), “As a Mormon woman, I absolutely upheld and perpetuated the patriarchy.”

On a prominent influencer’s page, a [graphic](#) of flowers, captioned, “Patriarchy taught me that caregiving and ‘nurturing’ are ‘women’s work’ and therefore, less valuable.”

And, a picture of a young mother and two young children, captioned with a [description](#) of her loss of faith, “topped with a growing resentment toward the patriarchy.”

For some, the perceived ‘patriarchy’ in the Church may look bad. Priesthood offices being restricted to men, the lopsided ratio of men and women who speak at General Conference, and male bishoprics sitting on the stand are commonly cited examples. However, while making observations about how the Church is led, it is worthwhile to zoom out and look at the relationship between men and women more generally.

The dance between the sexes has always been complex. Women are physically [smaller](#) and [weaker](#) than men, and the only of the two sexes that can become pregnant. To be female is to be inherently vulnerable—as a fact of biology—and the way in which men have responded to that vulnerability has foundationally affected [civilizations](#) throughout history.

Even with the many advances modern Western women have achieved, a sobering Canadian [statistic](#) reminds us of the remaining injustice. In 2022, women and girls were the victims of 90% of reported sexual assaults, with the vast majority (96%) of the perpetrators being men. Having disproportionately received mistreatment and abuse, women have been warranted in using strong voices as we look for ways to protect ourselves.

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In *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*, Louise Perry differentiates between *cads* and *dads* as she looks at significant social changes occurring from the 1960s onward. As sex was taken out of the marital context, the influence of single men who viewed women only as objects of their sexual desires—the *cads*—increased, while the role of fathers caring for families—the *dads*—diminished. This shifting influence, starting in the 1960s, changed society for the worse.

Perry begins her book by describing two individuals, Hugh Hefner and Marilyn Monroe, as central to this sexual revolution.

[Hefner and Monroe] never actually met, but ... in 1992, Hefner bought the crypt next door to Monroe's ... for \$75,000, [telling](#) the *Los Angeles Times*: 'I'm a believer in things symbolic ... [so] spending eternity next to Marilyn is too sweet to pass up.' At the age of ninety-one, Hefner got his wish. The long-dead Monroe had no say in the matter.

Not only in death was [Monroe's](#) voice ignored, but this was a continuation of what had occurred during her life. Young and desperately needing money, she posed nude for a picture and signed release documents using a fake name. Four years later, Hefner used it as the centrefold in his premier edition of *Playboy* magazine, which made him millions of dollars. Hefner did not get Monroe's consent for this publication. She received no further compensation and [told a friend](#) she had "never even received a thank-you."

Hefner used Monroe for personal monetary gain; the ringleader of a huge crowd who sexually objectified Monroe. When asked late in his life by the *New York Times* if he had any regrets about the negative effects of the *Playboy* revolution, Hefner [replied](#), It was "a small price to pay for personal freedom." The sexual revolution is the "story of the triumph of the playboy—a figure who is too often both forgotten and forgiven, despite his central role in this still recent history ... the likes of Hefner (who) achieve(d) the goal of liberating their libidos while pretending that they were liberating women" (Perry).

Hefner's magazines normalized a sexual narrative freeing men, particularly the highly socio-sexual playboy types (the *cads*), from the social responsibilities of paternity. Women lost their [leverage](#) when premarital sex became normalized. To gain access to sex, men no longer needed to prove their worth to women as potential dads. Hefner decoupled reproduction from sex by supporting the Pill and the legalization of abortion.

This “had nothing to do with a commitment to women’s wellbeing. Hefner never once campaigned for anything that didn’t bring him direct benefit, and when fear of pregnancy was one of the last remaining reasons for women saying ‘no,’ he had every reason to wish for a change that would widen the pool of women available to him” (Perry). The youthful appearance of a fertile woman was what Hefner desired, but not the children she would bear. The resulting sexual culture “promotes the interests of the Hefners of the world” (Perry).

Look around and ask who is calling the shots. Do the *cads* (the men seeking sex without family commitment) or the *dads* (the men who prioritize their wives’ and children’s concerns) have outsized influence?

When observing the sexual-dating culture of young adults—those who are a couple of generations downstream of the sexual revolution with its disintegrating familial patterns—pre-marital and deviant sexual behaviour is somehow perceived as the norm. Consider dangerous growing [sexual trends](#) among young adults with a [gendered pattern](#) of women being the ones targeted. A BBC-commissioned [survey](#) found that 38 percent of women between 18 and 29 years old had experienced specific abuses during sex, with obvious [risk](#) to both physical and mental health.

Some may object, saying these types of sexual behaviors could reflect women’s desires and not just men’s. While probably true for some women, at the population level [women](#) have a more restrictive sociosexual orientation than men. Hook-up culture—especially with its increasingly deviant and violent behavior—is more reflective of male desires with women aggressively objectified. Women [report](#) significantly higher regret than men after casual sex, in addition to feeling [fear](#) in some sexual situations. What used to stay on the fringes of society is now becoming mainstream in the lives of young people. Just from the few examples linked to above, of which there are many more, it’s not alarmist to think something troubling and dark is going on.

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Our current thin culture of sexual consent is not robust enough to safeguard women from harm. The line between assault and pressured agreement to engage in degrading

sexual activity is blurry, and women are being hurt. To protect women from this we need “a sophisticated system of sexual ethics ... demand(ing) more of people, and, as the stronger and hornier sex, men must demonstrate even greater restraint than women when faced with temptation” (Perry). While some may see *chivalry*—which encourages men to protect women—as condescending, such a system is advantageous for women. Women are not left to fight off the cads themselves; they have the dads for backup—who can and should shoulder the responsibility of keeping aggressive men in check. This has often played out as older men—specifically fathers—keep younger men’s behavior “banked and cooled” within safe boundaries (Durants).

The feminist writer [Mary Harrington](#) says,

[Feminists attacking] chivalry as a set of social codes has ... been absolutely catastrophic ... And it was brought about by ... women who felt safe enough doing it, because they were fairly civilised, fairly privileged, and they were confident that they could demand that the men in their lives would treat them well. And, they didn’t think about men and women in different social contexts who maybe needed a clear set ... of guardrails, and they didn’t specifically think about how much more vulnerable it would make the women.

Within this chivalrous structure, Perry suggests a culture where parental and community involvement can hold young men accountable in dating through “[strategic](#), brief, and celibate” courtships leading to marriage. This counterculture argument is not one Perry always believed in. She was raised in a secular environment and internalized Westernized sexual norms. Observing the effects of the modern dechristianization of the West while studying history, anthropology, and working at a rape crisis centre in her twenties, she [conceded](#) Christian sexual ethics work in this complicated world. Early Christianity brought about revolutionary [changes](#) for women living in the Greco-Roman context, such as the equal worth of women to men, marriage laws that required women’s consent, and the single standard of sexual continence for both men and women. The now thirty-three-year-old Perry describes herself as an “[agnostic Christian](#),” believing in Christian values, but unsure of the supernatural truth claims. In a way, she serves as a foil to the Latter-day Saint women mentioned earlier and others like them who criticize the structure of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In light of an argument for chivalry, consider the *dad* culture the Church fosters. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” [teaches](#) “fathers are to preside ... in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.” The Church Handbook [stipulates](#) that a Bishop or Stake President must be “loyal to his wife and family.” While single women can serve as Relief Society Presidents, Bishops and Stake Presidents must be married men. Male priesthood leaders reiterate [counsel](#) like President Howard W. Hunter’s that “tenderness and respect—never selfishness—must be the guiding principles ... between husband and wife ... Any man who abuses or demeans his wife physically or spiritually is guilty of grievous sin.” Counsel passed down to young men through the Aaronic Priesthood Theme [states](#), “I will prepare to become a ... loyal husband, and loving father ...”

The term ‘patriarchy’ is heavy with negative connotations, but not one the Church claims—with no hits when searched on the church website. However, the organizational structure of the Church is full of patriarchs—*dads*—who channel their passions in holding one another accountable for safeguarding women and children. Arguments made against the Church’s reliance on male officers fall short of proposing a better way of mobilizing groups of good men in taking on the responsibility of protecting women against the selfish desires of predatory men—particularly high-status men who have outsized influence for harm. Father-protectors unite their wills with those of their wives and each other in creating a culture that promotes the safety of women and children. Women’s biology holds women accountable to motherhood through pregnancy and post-natal care, but a social structure is needed to empower women to rightfully claim men’s participation in the supportive role of fatherhood. The structure and doctrines of the Church provide this by sublimating individual male needs while prioritizing the call to be husbands and fathers.

At some point in every woman’s life, she will grapple with what it means to be a woman due to its confusing mix of strength and vulnerability. Biologically, humanity depends on the sacrifice of women for its procreation while men have the advantage—and responsibility—of physical strength. It’s understandable that resentment can flare within this female conundrum, but it is the reality in which we live. I’m grateful for my husband, who has never once used my vulnerability as a woman against me and

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honored my voice as we hope for an eternity together. I'm surrounded by good men--dads--who love their wives, work hard to provide for their children, and teach their sons to do the same, but I recognize I cannot be naïve to the reality many women face in defending themselves and their children from men--cads--who would harm them.

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In this post-sexual revolution world, I place my confidence in voices that bring the strengths of men and women together in ennobling ways. I worry the current conversation led by some women in the Church criticizes and diminishes the voices of *dads* while the *cads* continue their destructive behavior. Many good men are listening and wanting to participate in productive discourse, like President Nelson, who issued a [plea](#) for the women of the Church to use our voices. I'm so grateful for the Church and for the men who serve within it.

This Father's Day, may we remember our fathers, brothers, sons, and husbands and speak more often of their goodness. The world needs these good men.

About the author

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