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He Was a Man

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Madelin Lapp

He Was a Man

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an awe-inspiring author and speaker who describes how she considers how equality for women can be achieved in today's civilization in her TedX talk and book *We Should All Be Feminists*. Her experiences have not been out of the ordinary, but she shows courage in displaying how unethical these experiences are to all women, especially those in her culture. Adichie speaks of anger, contentment, and passion throughout each passage, relating each to feminism in a way that speaks volumes. The constant reoccurring motif of everyone being able to be a feminist is relevant in each narrative, and can be easily related to by many. The quote "because he was male and I was not" (Adichie 7) is seen in several passages, showing the overwhelming assumption that men are more powerful, and that is not the situation in Adichie's eyes. Universally society sees men as the hierarchy, and women are left behind and expected to be at their every waking call.

One of the initial stories that Adichie tells is of her elementary school class. She speaks about how her teacher "assumed it was obvious" (Adichie 12) that a boy was granted control of the class and not a girl. Though this occurred during her childhood, it demonstrates how women have been in the shadows of men from the beginning, and that even things from childhood can still haunt one today. This realm no longer needs to be structured by the physically dominant gender: however, as the social world has evolved, our way of thinking has not. She illustrates it as a 'natural' feeling that only men should rule, since that is all people see within the world and what the media presents. The majority of the time, women are looked down upon because they are actually standing up for something they believe in, or doing things that 'only a man can or

should do.' Adichie states that "in a literal way, men rule the world" (17). The population of women may be surpassing men, but they absolutely do not have jurisdiction over the majority of businesses or occupy as many positions in the government.

One of Adichie's more recent stories is about when she walked into a hotel and was accused of only being there for sex. Adichie states that "a Nigerian female alone cannot possibly be a guest paying for her own room" (19). This is because it is constantly assumed that women do not acquire money of their own, as shown in her other passages where she was not acknowledged for paying a man on the street, but rather the man she was with. This demonstrates the recurring theme of men being better than women, simply because of their gender. Using the thought process that men are in places for legitimate reasons entirely based on their gender is belittling towards women. Not being able to go to places unattended is a monumental problem. These women in Nigeria are incapable of living their lives independently purely as a result of not being men.

The idea that Adichie addresses is that both sons and daughters must be nurtured differently. She states that "masculinity is a hard, small cage" (Adichie 26), and explains that girls can "aim to be successful but not too successful, otherwise you will threaten the man" (Adichie 27-28). This also draws to her first story: that from the beginning, women are trained that they are the lesser gender and less important to the rest of the world. Characterizing a man as someone who is strong physically, and can manage and support his entire household is extremely biased. More men around the world are staying home to care for their children while women go to work, because they see the importance of their partner's dreams, and the need for their child to see them, too. This minute change can help a family thrive and demonstrate to children that a

relationship is a team effort and should not be one-sided. By raising children differently, Adichie states that “in fifty years, in a hundred years, boys will no longer have the pressure of providing their masculinity by material means” (27). This not only will modify the way men get treated, but will also boost women gaining more respect. If everyone is socially granted to use similar mannerisms and not have them be classified by one gender or another, it will create a more equal society.

The underlying theme of men ruling is constantly portrayed by her repeated expressions of “because he was a boy and I was not” or “because he was male and I was female” emphasizes the assumption that men have more capabilities over women in everyday society. Her story from primary school acknowledges that women are raised from the beginning that they have less influence in worldwide culture, regardless of their knowledge or willingness to make a stand. Her other life experiences show that women are not seen as self-sufficient, and that if they are alone they are assumed to be doing wrong. This makes it even more challenging for a woman to hold a position of power since they cannot even have the same mannerisms or lifestyle as a man without getting degraded. When raising a child differently, if society teaches both genders that they are equal, after a vast time it can be true. Keeping men and women in this small cage of who they are supposed to be and stereotyping them into something they are not is feeding the underlying assumption that there is a superior gender. By recognizing these issues and changing everyday habits to help, it is possible to slowly turn the tables and create equality throughout the world for all genders, given the time.

Works Cited

Adichie, Chimamanda Amanda N. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Fourth Estate, 2017.