

Sometimes being male means going absolutely ape

by Mike Evans

I am normally a rational guy, one who tempers action with wisdom, who understands that discretion is often the better part of valour, who is proud of the level to which he has ascended on the evolutionary scale. So how come I find myself tempted, at least twice annually, to devolve from my upright posture, into a hunched-shouldered, hairy-fingered, knuckle-dragging, inarticulate peacock? How is it that behaving like a baboon affirms that I am a man?

I suppose that a little contextualizing might be beneficial here.

I used to be an athlete. I competed four sports at a provincial level and a fifth at a national level for several years. I believe in playing hard, playing to win, but also in playing clean and fair. With that in mind, I was involved in an intramural flag football game last Monday. Actually, my involvement was nominal. The operative clause above is "used" to be an athlete. I am now decrepit and rundown. In other words, suffering from a severe muscle cramp (honestly!) and not wanting to be a liability to my team, I sat on the sidelines for all but one play. But I was definitely involved.

The game was very close; the exceptional athletic gifts of one or two players and the committed efforts of the rest kept my team in the lead, to our opponents' surprise, until the final three plays. And so, accordingly, the competitive spirit was intense. Too intense. Naturally, believing in sportsman-like behaviour, I sought to smooth the waters. More fool, I.

A member of the opposition was involved in a crunching collision with one of my teammates. A flag was thrown on the play for a running infraction and the fellow who was bowled on to his backside mistakenly believed he had been fingered for blocking on a punt return. I tried to assure him that he was innocent, and, invoking a disdainful remark, suggested he "just play the game."

Now it gets interesting.

At first I thought he was joking. His arrival in my face, however, six inches taller and fifty pounds heavier, convinced me my initial impression was incorrect.

"Let's go," he said.

"You wanna scrap?" I countered.

"Cocksucker!" he replied.

"Motherfucker!" was my response, I've seen Eddie Murphy in concert.

"C'mon!" he said.

"Do it!" was my well conceived response.

We engaged in five minutes of the macho tradition of belly-bumping. If you had been a casual observer you might have thought we were dance partners especially fond of one another. He certainly tried to suggest that I had an unnatural affection for him. And, being so much taller, he breathed on my nose. A lot.

Because we were on the sidelines no one intervened in our confrontation. Disappointed, no doubt, we separated; but not without exchanging meaningful stares and pithy remarks.

"Nice glasses," he said (I was wearing prescription sunglasses so that I could see the ball).

This new strategy on his part had me completely baffled. It was like a good change-up. I whiffed. "What?" I asked.

"Nice earring hole," was his follow-up, "You got another in the right ear?"

Aha! I was on more familiar turf now. "Dummyfuck," was my rejoinder. I have always been eloquent on the field of battle.

Oh, I almost forgot the most important aspect of this story. There were women present and no doubt they heightened our aggressive responses. After all, they were his friends.

After the game, when we all shook hands and congratulated the winners, my new-found antagonist and I exchanged additional pleasantries in the center of the field

after everyone else had retired to the sidelines. I think we both deserve some credit for not trying to grind one another's knuckles.

And yet, returning to my car, I was filled with a vague dissatisfaction, a kind of horrified suspicion of cowardice because I had not punched this person in the head. First. It would have had to be me punching him first because 1) he was so much bigger than me he would likely have kicked my ass in anything resembling a fair fight and I needed the element of surprise; 2) if I hit him first and decided to run, the moment's confusion created by my blow might have given me enough time to escape in my injured condition (I had a muscle cramp, remember?); and 3) if I hit him hard enough that he actually went down I could have stood over him and breathed on his nose before his friends dragged me away for a beating (that's the wonderful thing about male-bonding—friends will do that for you).


All of which brings me to the ultimate point of this disquisition: why do young men become flaming buffoons in the presence of young women? Is it some sort of vestigial rutting instinct? Is it erection anxiety? Do we fear the spectre of impotence and so assert our virility by attempting dominance over one another? Do we fight because we fear the wee, floppy dinky? That's not my problem—I'm a sophisticated, intelligent, well-hung adult.

If you have read this far, you young men who recognize a disquieting similarity to yourselves, as I do, perhaps we still have something to talk about. For instance: 1) disquisition: noun, "long or elaborate treatise or discourse on subject"; 2) vestigial: adjective, being "now degenerate and of little or no utility but well developed in ancestors"; 3) impotence: noun... oops, I'm sorry, I'm sure you are quite familiar with this one.

You wanna scrap?

(All definitions are from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*.)

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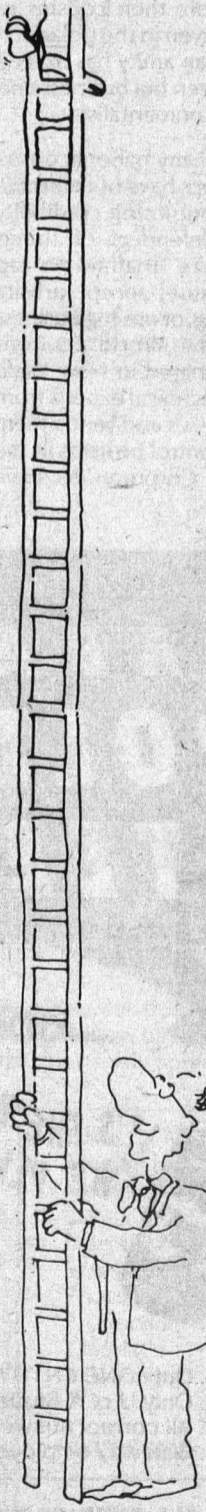


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