Chivalry or Gender Bias?

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Into my senior years at school, some of my peers went jocular about a Hindi movie they had just seen. The film had a scene featuring a football match between young men and women. The cheeky hilarity purring the gossip was about how the men's team let the girls score one goal after another feigning a gawky capitulation as if going down gallantly before the fair sex.

To the actors and movie watchers, the antic may have passed as a show of chivalry but for the cautious Director or Producer of the film it was a ploy to skirt censorship by avoiding tackles, dribbles or fouls between players at two ends of the gender scale. A real contest would have involved all that rough and tumble, so a female walkover was considered both safe and entertaining, not without a sexist implication though.



"Hey, Ed—is the next one a guy or a girl?"



This lighter, somewhat mischievous, vein apparently contrasts with a serious research finding in the US that female-named hurricanes kill more than those with male names. A June 2 Washington Post item by Jason Samenow based on a groundbreaking study at university of Illinois and Arizona State University revealed that 'People don't take hurricanes as seriously if they have a feminine name and the consequences are deadly. According to the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, female – named storms have historically (1950-2012) killed more as people have had lower risk perception about them and they ended up taking less precaution than they would otherwise have done were they male-named.

Even a study insider, a co-author admitted that the results implied an "implicit sexism".

Making decisions about storms based on gender of their name logically assailable as this is, it nonetheless seems empirically borne out.

The judgements, however, are said to be 'subtle and not necessarily hostile toward

Women-they may involve viewing women as warmer and less aggressive than men.'

The Washington Post article triggered an avalanche of reactions—some 615 comments were posted with most of them gone ballistic in reactions ranging from trashing to forceful rebuttals. Some were critical of the study, others taking a snipe at The Washington Post for publishing it.

Some excerpts are worthy of note in the way they uphold respect for women:

- That's the most moronic explanation attributed to hurricane deaths that I have ever heard.
- Since they didn't start using male names until 1978, is it not just plain logic that there would be more female-named hurricanes in history?
- By removing gender and substituting average severity, the title of the original story could have been "People tend to pay less attention to less powerful storms." The fact that the female named storms ended up causing more damage isn't relevant to the alerts and attention paid to the alerts at the time of the storm.
- It's the fact that sexism is so ingrained in our society that female-named storms somehow don't sound as bad to our subconscious. It's not really active discrimination rather than subconscious sexism.

The message to take from all this is that in a male-chauvinistic world it is the macho in some form or shape that has men profile women as something of a boxing sack.

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