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The Real Man

Who or What Exactly is the Real Man?

by Peter Baker

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John Wayne

Who or what exactly is the real man? What are the images and ideas in our head that tell us how we, and other men, should be? At first sight, the answer might seem obvious yet, as with many definitions, it can prove more elusive on more detailed examination.

Mike Tyson doesn't break down and cry when he's knocked out an opponent and neither does John Major after he's half-destroyed the U.K. economy.

Would we qualify as a "real" man if we had bulging biceps like Sylvester Stallone or Chuck Norris? modelling ourselves on mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent probably wouldn't push us very far up the "real" man league table, but what about Superman? Not only does he have phenomenal physical power but he also, after all, believes in truth and justice and always wears his underpants on the outside.

Would becoming a political leader like Bill Clinton make us a "real" man because of the massive political and military power at our fingertips or would we be fatally compromised if, like him, we had a powerful wife? Could we claim "real" man status if we possessed the massive intellect of scientist and writer Professor Stephen Hawking or would being severely disabled rule us out? And what if we were the next Rudolf Nureyev? How would our superb

physique and athleticism balance against the fact that we were not just a dancer but a ballet dancer?

Perhaps the core characteristic of the "real" man is that he's in control. When Rambo decides he's going to rescue American prisoners in Vietnam, he doesn't faff around asking permission or filling in paperwork. And he certainly doesn't let the massed ranks of the Vietnamese army stop him either. Through his physical strength and aggression, he gets the job done. A man like Mike Tyson does much the same in the boxing ring: big, muscular and intimidating, he can flatten most of those who dare step inside the ropes to challenge him.

But physical strength is not the only means of exercising power. Virgin tycoon Richard Branson's financial strength pushes him towards the top of the "real" man super league.

Despite his hippy-like appearance, through his business empire he can virtually hire and fire at will, extending his power over the lives of thousands. And even though Prime Minister John Major may be more of a wimp than Margaret Thatcher, imagine how much more feeble he'd seem if he wasn't the most powerful political figure in the U.K.

As well as having control over others, "real" men must also control themselves. Mike Tyson doesn't break down and cry when he's knocked out an opponent and neither does John Major after he's half-destroyed the U.K. economy. A "real" man must keep a tight rein on his feelings, pretending to the world (as well as himself) that he's on top of everything. He thinks logically and rationally and doesn't get carried away with his emotions. More expressive men like Woody Allen are seen as wimp-like because they're more ready to reveal their fears, anxieties and sense of inadequacy.

To be in charge, a man also has to be active. Clearly, this involves more than sitting around thinking. That's why a man like Stephen Hawking can be recognised as a genius but still fail to make the grade as a "real" man. Just compare him to John Wayne on his ranch. Every day, Wayne's out looking after his cattle and, when someone tries to steal them, he goes searching for the cattle rustlers as well. He doesn't sit back in his rocking chair and ask his wife to do it. A "real" man always has to be ready to act. If he sees a car over-heating on the hard shoulder, he's ready with the monkey wrench to help out the damsel in distress. And even if he doesn't know how to fix cars, as long as he can just bang the bonnet he can save face. It doesn't matter too much what he does, so long as he's doing something.

What's more, if a man wants to be in control, he must be independent. He shouldn't be living at home with his parents when he's forty nor can he be tied down by his wife and 2.4 kids in a little house in the suburbs. The "real" man is free and easy, with no strings

attached. He sleeps under the stars at night and roams the motorways by day. Nobody tells him what to do - no boss, no dependants, no government. In his spaghetti westerns, Clint Eastwood was the ultimate symbol of male independence - he was so free, he had neither a past nor even a name.

Being dominant also means that a "real" man has the capacity to protect others. In fact, it's almost his duty to do so. Take the story of *The Magnificent Seven*. At first, Yul Brynner and his gang of gunfighters simply hoped to make some money by protecting a Mexican community from marauding bandits. But they ended up providing their services for free when they witnessed the terrible suffering of the peasants. No "real" man could let those around him, particularly his own family, be exploited or destroyed. Instead, he uses his physical strength or, in some cases his financial power, to protect the weak and the defenceless.

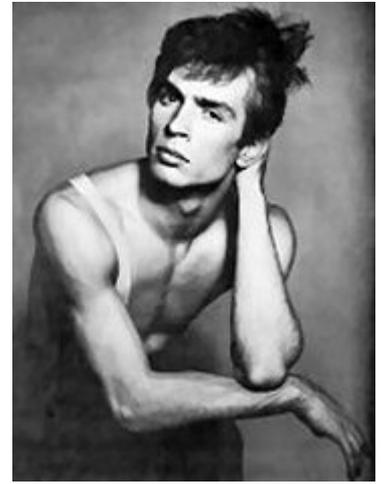
He can do all that because he's also fearless. The "real" man isn't afraid of working on a building site without a hard hat, walking through the park late at night or pushing his heart to the limit with beer, cigarettes and junk food. When it comes to fighting for his country, he doesn't turn and run; instead, he grits his teeth and marches straight into the hail of fire. In *Terminator 2*, you don't see Arnold Schwarzenegger shaking in his boots when the "baddy" comes after him. Of course, that's probably because he's an android, but when it comes to fear, it sometimes seems as if all men are supposed to behave more like machines than human beings.

And, finally, the "real" man is always on top when it comes to sex. He's a great lover. That's why Richard Gere is envied by so many other men. There's no doubting his great sexual power over women: not only has he been seen giving women shuddering orgasms in almost all his films, but he's also considered desirable by millions of women across the world and ended up marrying one of the most beautiful (even if it didn't work out). It seems anyone aspiring to be a "real" man must have women falling at his feet. A gigantic penis, never-ending orgasms and a thrust rate that would put a pneumatic drill to shame also help.

But - and this is a very big but - sleeping around only earns you points as a "real" man if the people you're having sex with are women. If you're gay, you can expect to be refused membership of the "real" men's club, no matter what your other talents. "Real" men wouldn't dream of spending a night with another man or even touching him, unless it was to deliver a fatal karate chop to his neck. It's certainly hard to imagine a James Bond film ending with him snuggling beneath the duvet with weapons' boffin "Q" rather than Pussy Galore, Honey Ryder or any of the other "Bond girls".

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Rudolf Nureyev