

Karel de Roy

Wrong man

Men are no good. This clear, hermetic statement came from the mouth of my friend Wil Velders-Vlasblom, who was the chairwoman of the National Police Emancipation Committee in the 90s. The findings of the committee were evidently disappointing. The extent to which female members of the police forces were insulted and abused was shocking. As expected, my friend's concise conclusion about the encountered misconduct caused massive outrage in the national press. She made several attempts to put her remark in the right perspective, because those who took the statement literally didn't quite understand what she meant by it. However, that didn't make much of a difference; as Wil herself put it, the damage was done.

Men. The species suffers from structural design flaws. Of course, that's nonsense; nature doesn't make mistakes. But the image of men generally behaving badly towards women inevitably arises. Are men who are no good also considered wrong men? That depends on what is meant by "wrong men." The term "wrong man" has been emerging frequently in recent years. To my knowledge, it is not an officially coined term, but I suspect that most people have a certain image in mind when the term is mentioned. In my opinion, the wrongness lies primarily in the improper or implausible relationship between certain men and women (and men) belonging to an entirely different category. In my own perception, the wrong man is the lover of a woman (or another man) who, in several respects such as social status, cultural background, interests, behavior, appearance, education, and clothing, does not fit with that woman (or man), but who is sexually attractive enough for the partner to overlook these objections. This means of course that, once the sexual excitement wears off, the relationship loses its justification.

There may be as many interpretations of the term "wrong man" as there are people who use it. I can best explain mine by using an example. For the sake of convenience, I'll consider a stereotypical couple. The woman is well-educated, often at an academic level, nurtures a corresponding interest in art, literature, music, speaks proper Dutch, and dresses modestly and refined. Her husband is poorly educated, uninterested in art, enjoys music of the noisy sing-along genre, doesn't read, speaks with an accent, sometimes wears flashy clothing, and is tattooed. Yet, both arouse sexual interest in each other, usually thanks to well-proportioned bodies and attractive faces. Or perhaps precisely because of the strikingly different characteristics of the partners: the sexual attractiveness of the wrong man due to his wrongness! The wrong man in this example is certainly not necessarily wrong like the majority of the policemen from my friend Wil's research. But often he is. In his behavior, he displays a certain sense of superiority towards women.

In many cases, there will be a certain degree of mutual disdain: that of the wrong man who condescendingly looks down on women and that of the woman who looks down on the lower status of her partner. An interesting question is to what extent the judgment of the peers of both parties plays a role in the sustainability of the relationship. In many cases, friends and family of the individual partners will exert pressure through their disapproving attitudes.

I can provide an insight into a practical case based on my private definition of the wrong man. It concerns my relationship with a lover I met through a dating site. When I saw him for the first time, I was pleasantly surprised by his brusque, rugged appearance. He said he was attracted to older men, and this was one of the few qualities I could admit to possessing without hesitation. At the same time, the differences between us were evident. Apart from being almost twenty years younger, Bart, as he was called, was a tough guy with rigid opinions that he generously shared. On the one hand, he boasted of his highly developed sense of justice and truthfulness, but on the other hand, he expressed his aversion to certain social phenomena, such as foreigners in general and Moroccan men in particular. He supported this with personal experiences he had when he lived in a notorious district in the capital and was seriously harassed by some Moroccan fellow residents of the apartment complex where he had a flat, especially when he was vulnerable after being involved in a motorcycle accident for a few weeks. My rather feeble attempt to contain his persistent generalization of the issue of foreigners was fruitless. Bart came from a socially disadvantaged family. He had escaped the pressure of his dictatorial father by running away from home at a young age, and he had worked his way up to become a waiter in a renowned restaurant in the capital through circuitous routes. However, he was unlucky enough to lose his job at a fairly young age due to the physical consequences of that motorcycle accident. Since then, he has been living on social benefits. He manages to get by through vigorous training at the gym. Physically, he remains in excellent condition. Naturally, he has adorned his body with tattoos, especially on his arms. He has a decent singing voice and enjoys passionately performing sentimental songs with a vibrating echo. He is obstinate and extremely short-tempered, prone to uncontrollable fits of rage. I strongly suspect that his quick-temperedness was fueled by the intensive yet explosive contacts he still maintained with one of his brothers and his father. It was only when he definitively broke ties with them that he regained control over his emotional state, and a sort of calmness finally settled in our relationship. We have now contentedly settled into our intimate friendship, and I visit him at his small apartment in the Achterhoek on average once a month. From the very beginning, I made it clear that I did not want to live with him because I had become attached to the freedom I had gained after my relationship with my previous boyfriend fell apart, but with whom I continued to maintain a very friendly, albeit strictly celibate, relationship. Bart was jealous of my ex and only accepted the situation after several years. The pressure from friends and family, which I mentioned earlier, also played a role in my relationship with Bart. The

only contact he had with one of my brothers was not successful, primarily because he noticeably struggled with a sort of need to prove himself and went overboard without moderation. The few friends who have seen him have expressed astonishment about our relationship. I stoically maintain that it is my conscious choice to shield Bart from my private life, but of course, I occasionally feel guilty that embarrassment also plays a role: Bart is not a trophy I proudly display. That is not fair. If I assess Bart according to my own "definition" of the wrong man, he is one. But if I could have introduced him to my old friend Wil – unfortunately she passed away several years ago – I think her judgment would be that he is a good man.

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