**Opening New Doors: The Modern Woman’s Case for Preserving Chivalry** From the *Princeton Tory*

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Is it chivalric in the twenty-first century for a boy to push the handicapped button on the wall to open the door for me, or, perhaps more accurately, to have the door open itself for me? Something gets lost in translation when chivalry is transmitted through electronics. But why should it make a difference if either way the door is opening without my expending any effort? In fact, the automatic door would be a most chivalrous invention, if all that mattered were that doors be opened for me. But, the fact of the matter is that it doesn’t feel the same when the door is opening seemingly of its own volition without a person physically opening it.

The reason for chivalry cannot simply be women’s need to have someone help them with the simple task of opening the door; if this were the reason for the tradition, an automatic door would do just as well, if not better, as an automatic door is often faster and more reliable than a person in opening doors. However, human contact is essential for the true nature of chivalry to shine through. The action is empty if there is no person behind it, because chivalry is so much more than the act.

Chivalry is about the recognition and respect that go along with these somewhat calculated interactions dictated by its guidelines. The actions are just empty shells masquerading as chivalry if there is no feeling behind them. Opening the door for women is only one aspect of chivalry; however, it is representative of the entire spectrum of practices prompted by chivalry, and one which is more common and more concrete than most other interactions, so we can take this example and move from it to other types of chivalry.

Everyone wants to be recognized as a person. We live in a society where we expect and need validation in different spheres of life. Even the most basic and obvious quality of a person being human requires some level of recognition.

There is a certain contentment one feels when one walks down the street and exchanges a knowing look, or a smile, with a stranger. When we are recognized for more specific or defining characteristics, there should be a parallel feeling of being accepted and recognized, as long as we are proud of this trait. It is not uncommon for people to realize that I am an observant Jew, and sometimes this recognition prompts the person to greet me with “Shalom.” By no means do I view this as offensive. If I am proud of being a Jew, I should feel happy and contented that I am being recognized for who I am.

Since older social rules have historically dictated that men should treat women according to the guidelines of chivalry, when men follow this code of conduct, they are doing nothing more than recognizing an obvious fact about me: I am a woman. And if I am proud of this reality, there is no reason I shouldn’t feel a similar warmth and acceptance when people treat me as such.

Whether women should be treated with these unspoken social rules in the first place is perhaps a more controversial matter. Anything in life can be mentally manipulated to fit into the confines of one’s own preconceptions. Chivalry is no exception.

Historically, chivalry came about to prevent knights from abusing women. In effect, chivalry was created as a safeguard for the respect of women. However, women sometimes misunderstand chivalric gestures as indicating inferior status, to which they are justifiably sensitive due to history of inferior treatment of women.

But this is not the nature of chivalry. What this boils down to is a vicious cycle of accusing men of doing what women are trying to avoid.

Women might say that chivalry degrades them and reflects a vision of women that is antiquated and patronizing. They might feel that chivalry suggests female weakness and inferiority and thus that women aren’t entitled to respect.

Yet, chivalry was created as the antidote to this fear; it was created to ensure that women were respected, and that is still the sentiment behind it today in its evolved form. How could we then berate men for the very measures they take to prevent these concerns from occurring? What do we want from them?

I think it’s safe to assume that every time a man opens a door for a woman, he isn’t thinking that she is incapable of exerting the amount of effort required to open the door. He is showing her respect and recognition. In fact, it is customary to open doors for those whom we respect, such as professors, dignitaries, and the like. By opening the door, men are simply displaying their respect for women. Of course, it is important to show respect and recognition to everyone, but it stands to reason that one should actively seek to display respect to those who might not feel respected. In general, it is important to be more proactive in showing respect to those who are not like you, since they may be more doubtful of being respected by you. Thus it makes sense that men needed to display their respect for women since women have felt that men viewed them as inferior.

Today, chivalry is a necessary virtue precisely because it is so controversial. Clearly, there was and still is a source of contention among women about whether men respect them; there is still some level of insecurity among women. Men need to be proactive in their displays of respect towards women because it is questioned whether they truly respect them. The fact that chivalry is often misconstrued as a disrespectful treatment of women means that women are not sufficiently convinced that they are respected; thus, the reason for having chivalry still exists and reinforces the need for chivalry in our society.

As long as women need confirmation that they are respected, chivalry is important. All of the practical applications of chivalry are simply external examples of an interior attitude of respect. So chivalry should live on, even if in the future all doors open by themselves, global warming renders the guy’s proffered jacket unnecessary, and cars drive themselves.