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While on a run in my neighborhood this week, I spotted an elderly woman walking from her car to her front gate. In order to avoid a possible sidewalk run-in, I began crossing the street. I turned around when I heard her shout, "Thank you!" and I waved back in acknowledgement.

Living in a major U.S. city during a global pandemic, I have grown accustomed to surveying my environment with caution (and paranoia) as I go for my daily walks or grocery store runs. I have read the many articles discussing the ways in which COVID-19 can be spread through loud talking, from surfaces and even by brief interactions like walking past someone on the sidewalk.

However, while social distancing is a new phenomenon for me, social accommodation is not. After all, I'd been socialized as a woman/girl long before I was socialized to live during a pandemic.

As I was scrolling through my Twitter feed last week, I came across a tweet by First Things editor R.R. Reno that stated "The WWII vets did not wear masks. They're men, not cowards. Masks=enforced cowardice."

When I read comments about how "real men" don't wear masks and see pictures of white men holding military assault weapons while protesting stay-at-home orders, I observe how the social construction of masculinity has equated safety with weakness and recklessness with bravery.

Although Reno later apologized for his comments, it's clear that toxic masculinity has written its own rules during the pandemic, valorizing "freedom" and extreme individualism over care for the collective, even at the expense of human life. There are certainly both men and women who are heroically risking their own lives for the sake of others during this pandemic. However, the emotional and mental load of caring has unevenly fallen on women, starting at home.

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Social-distancing and social accommodation for the sake of the collective have taken gendered form at a time when communal resistance is necessary for the protection of life, particularly the most vulnerable.

As I kept running, I realized that the type of gendered socialization that usually hinders women's self-advocacy and individuation is actually a burdened virtue that must be practiced during a pandemic. I am used to making my body small in order for others to share a public space; moving to the other side of the sidewalk is not new for me. During a time when social contact could mean infection or even death for those around us, it is morally imperative to accommodate for the sake of the other.

In her book *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, philosopher Lisa Tessman identified burdened virtues as those that are "practically necessitated for surviving oppression or morally necessitated for opposing it." These virtues have an "unusual feature of being disjoined from their bearer's own flourishing" but are nevertheless necessary given the unrelenting burden of oppression and injustice that people may find themselves in.

In a patriarchal society, women and girls are raised to put others' needs before their own. In Christian circles, this is often praised as a trait that puts one in solidarity with the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. The problem with this type of socialization is that women and girls are disproportionately expected to self-sacrifice for boys and men. This trait can often hinder self-advocacy or individuation, and can result in a woman or girl consistently denying her own needs for the sake of the other.



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In her essay "Who Is Jesus for Asian Women?", Asian feminist theologian Hyun Kyung Chung notes, "Self-denial and love are always expected of women in the Church as in the family. But why isn't this teaching applied to men?"

Gender scholar Lynn Phillips refers to this gendered archetype as "The Pleasing Woman," a woman who seems to lack, or at least ignore, her own desires and is expected to tailor her appearance and behaviors to the needs of others. Behaviors like making sure everyone at a gathering is happy and well-fed before sitting down to eat or relax, navigating a difficult board meeting by making sure that everyone is satisfied, and moving to the other side of the sidewalk, bus, bleacher, etc. in order to ensure that others have enough room are clear examples of this socialization.

As a woman, I am used to surveying the room and adjusting my behaviors to ensure that others are comfortable and happy. I sometimes think this is virtuous. Other times, I am keenly aware that I am not as skilled in boldly stating what I want or what I need, even if it makes others uncomfortable.

Current circumstances aside, I would argue that the archetype of the "Pleasing Woman" can have harmful effects on a person's psychological, moral and spiritual growth, as I have observed in my own life and in the lives of many women around me.

However, although these habits of social accommodation may be disjoined from my own flourishing in the long-term, in order to survive (quite literally) and ensure the survival of others during this pandemic, we are all required to adopt these virtues. We are morally required to deny our own desires for freedom or mobility in favor of the common good, in order to oppose the injustice the pandemic has caused. We are all morally obligated to cancel birthday parties, concerts, gatherings, visits to family, weddings and even funerals, for the sake of the whole.

Many Catholic social justice communities of which I am a part argue that disobeying safety directives is a societal failure to honor human dignity, especially of the most vulnerable among us. Catholics have a moral obligation to confront the harmful aspects of gender socialization that directly contradict the Catholic social teaching principles of promotion of the common good, solidarity and preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.

Sentiments like " 'real men' don't wear masks" or "do what you want" in the face of public health guidelines directly endanger the populations most vulnerable to COVID-19, and they present a false dichotomy between science and religion. Equally harmful are messages that take advantage of virtues such as care and consideration by only applying them to women and girls for the maintenance of patriarchal structures.

Psychologist Carl Jung might say that this uneven gender balance of virtue is due to the "Great Mother" having been silenced and repressed within our society. Characteristics most attributed to "femininity" have been stigmatized as being weak or a sign of being controlled, when in reality they are the primary characteristics needed during times of global crisis.

In the best of times, we must seek a balance of both social accommodation for the sake of the collective *and* self-advocacy for the sake of the self. During this pandemic, the former must be embraced for the sake of the preservation of human life and for the common good. If only both of these traits could be balanced in our gendered world — and reassessed during times of oppression and injustice. For now, I will continue to cross to the other side of the street.

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