

ALL MEN

MALE VOICES TELLING THEIR STORIES TO MAKE A CHANGE

03 The world in your likeness: THE male gender

Excerpts of testimonies are heard.

Man 1:

I think it's hard for a man to realize this. I mean, it's the norm for us.

Man 2:

If we've always said "tutti" (everyone, masculine form, TN) for all people then I understand there is a woman but why can't we say it?

Man 3:

It's not about being the privileged gender; it's about being the model.

Musical break

Irene:

Welcome to all men. And also welcome to all the other people listening. Thank you, as always, for being here. We have a busy episode ahead of us, so let's get started. First of all, I'll play for you some of the answers to last episode's question about your earliest male role models. Here's what you said:

Testimony 1:

My earliest role models were male figures outside my family: my karate teacher, (who was very sexist) and my guitar teacher. Because of my strong self-consciousness, I could not resemble them, so the desire to emulate them quickly turned into insecurities and frustration.

Testimony 2:

It was definitely my father but not because of emulation, quite the opposite actually, it was always by contrast. He was emotionally incapable and I was a hyper-sensitive child. We were completely at the antipodes.

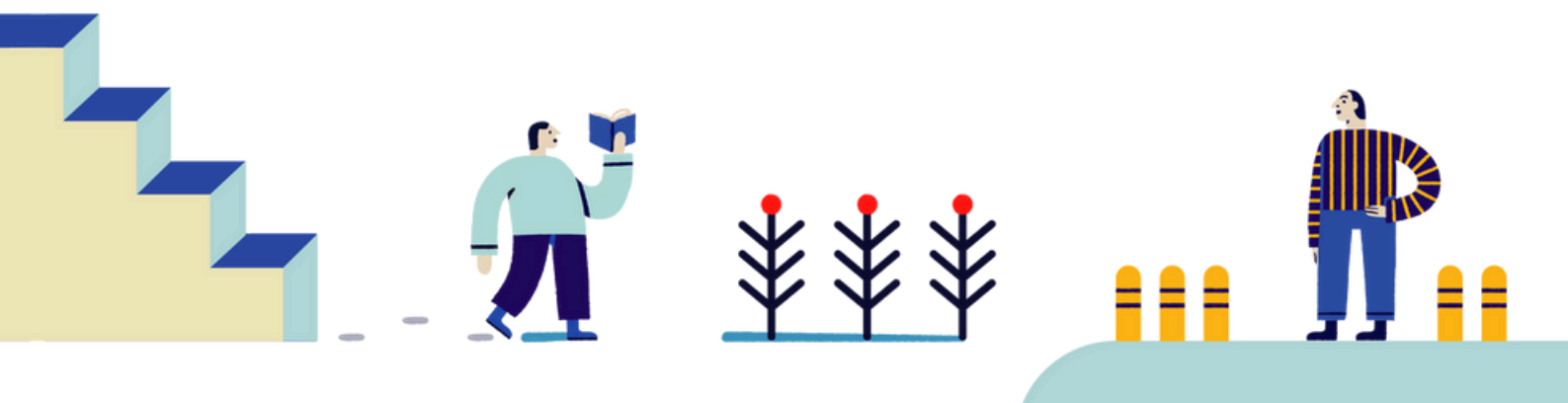
Testimony 3:

I can't think of any male role models who influenced my life. Like many, I kind of had a father, but he died when I was 11. Even before that, he often traveled for work. He didn't teach me anything useful for my life, I taught myself how to shave and how to be a father. However, I never stopped looking for a male role model, first my uncles and cousins, then some peers. I was only disappointed. Books and famous people never helped either. I probably didn't learn how to be a man, and I think that's ultimately a good thing.

Irene:

This is "All Men - Male voices telling their stories to make a change", a podcast that starts with the belief that the role of the male in eliminating gender-based violence is central, but that does not mean it is simple. And so men will be the ones to talk about it, because if the problem is systemic, the solution has to be collective.

Today's question is complex and it goes something like this: It was always clear to me that my gender was "the other one", that the world wasn't created for me or in my image, it did not speak to me. From the science book in middle school that, to explain human anatomy, only depicted the male body, to the fact that in my high school class there were 22 females and four males, yet the professors always said "Buongiorno a tutti" (good morning everyone, masculine form, TN) when entering the classroom. For a long time this seemed natural to me, I didn't question it, I always thought, "Whatever. That's just the way it is." Talking in the masculine form seemed normal to me. It took me a very long time to finally ask myself, "How come?". How come we use the masculine tense in a world where there are more women than men? It took me some time to realize that what seemed natural to me was the result of a social convention. Someone decided that, in Italian, to talk about men and women, we had to use the masculine. Someone decided that, in my science book, drawing a male body was enough. Someone in the medical field researched only on male bodies and decided that those results could fit all bodies—from car seat belts to the average number of hours of sleep you need to be healthy.



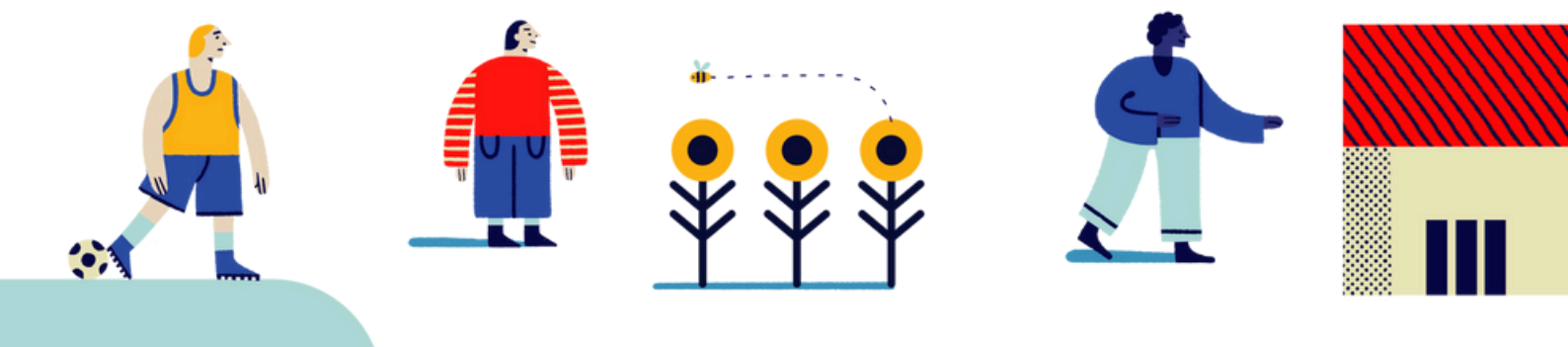
It took me forever to realize that the male gender, presented to me as the ONLY gender, was actually just ONE gender, same as the female gender. Or, at least, it should have been. The fact that we make the masculine correspond to the universal is a choice that carries consequences in all areas. And if it took me so long to realize this when the world kept pointing out to me that it was not meant for me, I can only imagine how difficult it could be for a man to realize that it's not normal for everything to always talk to you and about you. When did you realize that your gender is not the ONLY gender but it is, or should be, ONE of many?

Man 1:

This realization came very late to me during my undergraduate studies and thanks to the university environment because the impact of that different lifestyle was a complete 180 for me. It was about leaving home and having to confront myself with texts and people who were literally telling me things I had never heard before, it was a political practice I had never experienced before, and it put me in touch with realities that were completely unknown to me. All of this new variety came to me together with the idea that a lot was conventional and that nothing was natural. It's all very historical, at some point we came up with a certain idea because it was clearly comfortable to a certain power structure. I realized this very late, and I always say, "Luckily, I didn't cause too much trouble or seriously hurt the people around me before realizing it", because it was late when I understood that I was living in complete unawareness of myself and my actions. So there was a period of major personal readjustment that in some way lasted basically the whole time I was in university, where these constant connections, constant discussions were possible. This very particular life experience happens during those years, when you have a lot of time that you can either choose to waste or spend having experiences that would mark you in some way. For me, it was like that, I really came out of university a different person than how I went in, and fortunately, for the better. I wasn't fully aware of that, I was also very lucky to meet women who took their time to explain things to me for example, and I on my part listened to them. This was definitely not taken for granted.

Man 2:

Realizing that you, as a man, are not the center of a world that has always revolved around you makes you realize that you have most likely lived your whole life kind of like a narcissist, believing that you are owed everything just because.



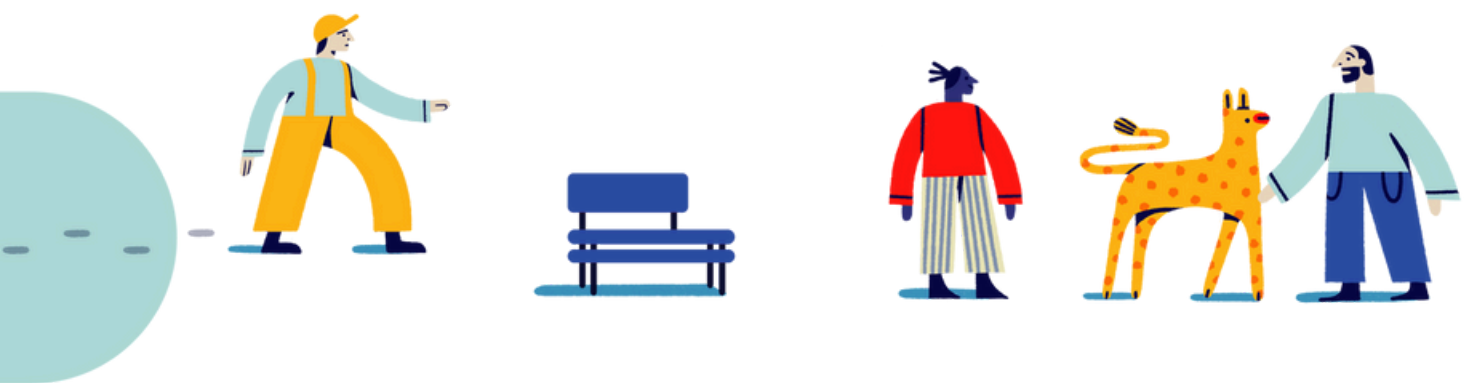
It's hard to figure out how to make that logical leap since, from an early age, they make sure you internalize certain types of thoughts, backward thinking like "Don't be a sissy. Don't cry." It's difficult to understand that that should have been a starting point for you to realize that society puts you at the center of that universe, and hands you a scepter that you never asked for and tells you that you must fill this role, you must play this role and wear this dress that is the only one you are allowed to wear for your whole life. It's only recently that I've accepted the idea that I, as a man, can't always be at the center of political, social, or cultural discourse, or any other social environment, whether it's at work, at school, or at home. But when you realize that, you realize that you've most likely spent your whole life talking over people and not listening, especially the women around you. And the only voices you ever gave credit to in your life were your dad's, your brother's, and your male friends'. To compromise by listening to a female voice would have undermined what it meant to be a man. I can't recall the exact moment, but I can recall how I felt when I realized.

Man 3:

Probably when someone made me notice, I mean when I started having people (women) that began pointing this out to me. I think it's difficult for a man to realize this, I mean it's normal, it's the reality for many people, not just men. I never realized that I was a man, I never noticed my gender. Maybe because it's more normal to feel like a man? I don't know, I certainly never realized it. Anyway, you're permeated by this thing, and you don't tend to make an issue of it, because you're a man (and probably because of that) you don't even ask yourself whether the feminine exists. The masculine automatically becomes the neutral gender, and that's normal. Then again, even if you ask yourself the question and don't care about the answer, being a man can only be an advantage anyway, so who gives a shit?

Man 4:

It all started in high school when I left the protective bubble of my family and friends and started interacting more with the other gender. Until then, there had been a total male domination in all areas of my life. In high school, us males were the minority for the first time, so we were much more exposed. That's when I began to introspectively examine my behavior, not before.



Man 5:

In terms of language this awareness has only been achieved in the last few years. I always thought that was the norm, and that you could if you wanted sometimes say "tutte" (everyone, feminine form, TN) and sometimes say "avvocata" (female lawyer, TN). At first, while I understood the reason for this need, the whole discussion seemed exaggerated to me. If we've always said "tutti" (everyone, masculine form, TN) for all people then I understand there is a woman but why can't we say it? The problem was that I was included in that "tutti" while women were not, and since words are important, they are the home of concepts, it's clear that I had to make an effort to get used to the idea that it's not only right, but also necessary. As soon as I understood this, I immediately accepted it in my work, family, and personal relationships. I like it now because I understand the reason.

Man 6:

I think I only became aware of the issue of gender in recent years. I regret this and have often asked myself why it didn't happen earlier, I mean why wasn't the issue more pressing when we were in high school or college? Why did we talk about abortion, euthanasia, and a thousand other issues, such as school reforms etc., but not about this issue? So I wasn't fully aware of it either; I wasn't educated on the subject. There's definitely been a transition in recent years, maybe in the last ten years, but to be honest I've been fully aware of the issue and what it entails for about four or five years, now I pay attention to language and social conventions. Clearly, all of this was there before and certainly I identify with what you said about school because I studied social sciences and, being the only boy in the class for almost all the school years, I was constantly reminded of it. When the teacher entered the classroom, she would say: "Good morning, boys. Since Adriano is in class, we have to say, 'good morning, boys' and not 'good morning, girls'". I was constantly reminded that the mere presence of a man in the room meant that the masculine form was conventionally used. That part was definitely there, but at the time I still wasn't considering it a cultural product, and being a cultural product probably decided by the more dominant male culture. When I thought about greetings and how men and women are addressed, I considered it a result of a convention, and being a convention, I thought of it as something decided upon as the most functional and easiest solution. However, I didn't think it implied giving one sex prevalence over the other.



Man 7:

I realized it too late anyway. I'm ashamed to say that it was so late, but it was when I wrote a bachelor's thesis on the status of women in the West during my third year. It was a topic I probably would never have chosen or looked for on my own, but it was one of the options on a list. I emphasize "Western" because, at the time, there was a stereotype that women were only oppressed in other cultures etc. but, through my research, I saw all the limitations on women in our society for the first time. Our society prides itself on being more evolved than others, yet there are still countless of micro and macro limitations on women today.

Man 8:

Look, I never thought using the masculine to refer to everyone was, how can I put it, interfering or doing something wrong. I always thought that if we have to use the masculine, then we should use the masculine, and vice versa. When in doubt, use the masculine form, as it is neutral. That's how I've always known it. Is that how it was always explained to me? I don't know. Did I just accept it as an explanation and never question it again? But at school, I don't remember any teacher introducing the topic and asking, "Guys, what do you think about this?" Absolutely nothing. And I never experienced it as discrimination against women. For my personal life I have always had a much closer and deeper relationship with the female gender by the way, I have always had much more attention, affection, and esteem for women than for men. So, I never experienced it as an injustice against women. I always considered it to be something like this: In German there is the article "das", which is neutral, in Italian there isn't, so the masculine is used as neutral.

I have always understood it this way, in fact the first few times someone talked to me about these things (and you are definitely one of those people so you can see the time jump I'm doing) I was taken aback for two reasons. Firstly, I didn't feel in the least bit affected by this pseudo-accusation of discrimination because that definitely wasn't my intention. I have always declared which side I was on. Secondly, I always thought it was an accepted convention, not a choice. It was later that I understood that conventions are created by those with the power to do so, those in power create conventions, practices, and customs that are implemented to maintain and perpetuate their power, ensuring that the distribution of power remains unchanged. But I came to that realization much, much later.



In fact, it now strikes me as odd when I hear a woman use the masculine form. For example, when I hear a woman praying and she says "E io sarò salvato" ("And I will be saved", masculine form, TN) I think, "What do you mean?", you are a woman... But I hear a lot of women use the masculine form, and it strikes me as odd now, but it didn't strike me as odd for half a century. But again not because I thought that the masculine gender had some kind of privilege but because I considered it a fact, and I felt at peace with myself because I knew what my intention was (even if I realize that it wasn't clear to other people), because I know what's going on in my mind. I felt at peace and I never worried about discriminating against other people, but in good faith. Then maybe I actually did so without realizing it, and of course, I'm sorry. If that happened, I'm sorry it happened, even if I didn't realize it. But I can swear to my good faith because I had no reason to claim that the masculine is superior to the feminine. I never thought that, and I still don't today. For me, it was a result of culture. Since culture is not knowing that you know, I didn't know I knew that stuff.

Man 9:

I realized it very, very late. Because the world is male-oriented. I'm part of the male gender and as a white, heterosexual, cisgender man, I largely benefit from male privilege and, I'm not trying to justify it obviously, but it's more difficult to realize when you benefit from something that is objectively a privilege but is presented and sold to you as normal. I realized this very late when I started taking an interest in feminism and talking about it with my first girlfriends during my university years. So very, very late.

Man 10:

When did I realize that the male gender is a gender but not the gender? Probably too late. As I grew up, I started thinking about what you mentioned: the fact that we say "tutti" (masculine form, TN) even when it's only women, but you can never say "tutte" (feminine form, TN) if there's also a man. It probably began when the woke universe and culture took hold. So, six or seven years ago.

Man 11:

Actually, quite recently—I'm talking about seven years ago—which is still recent for me. Before, it was never something I considered because, as you say, it eventually becomes normal. But the normality that comes from convention means it's a code, something conventional, that within a certain culture, that's how people think and reason. If you adapt to that way of thinking, it becomes normal because it's standardized.



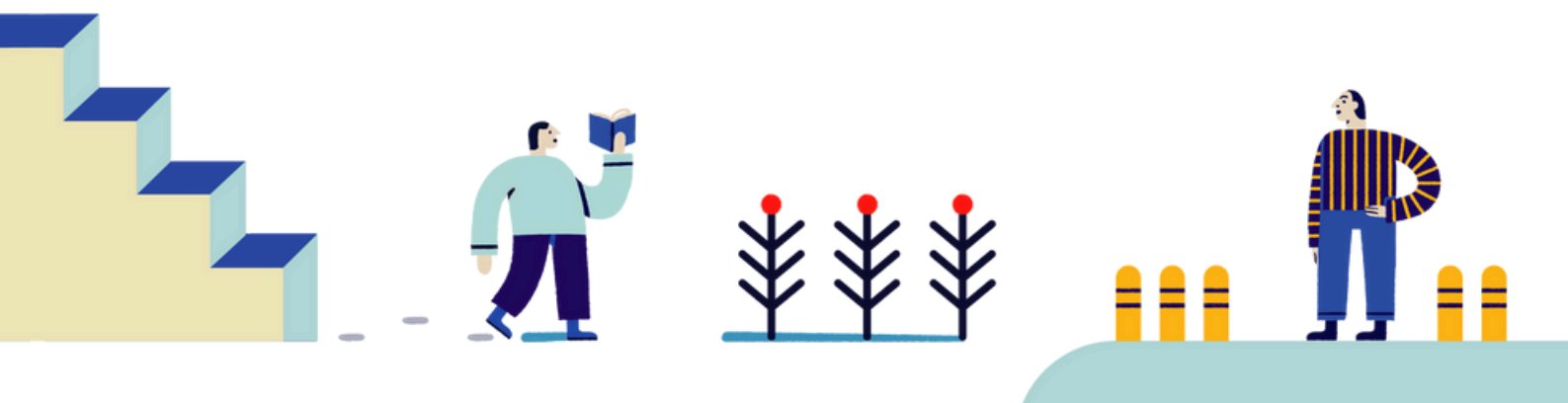
So no, I never noticed it until I met you seven years ago. Until then, I didn't have the means or tools or maybe I did, but I wasn't interested. But when I started following your page, a whole new world opened up to me, and I started asking myself a lot of questions. I'm someone who asks himself a lot of question, I'm always overthinking but oh well, that's okay. It's true that the world is custom-made for men, but not for men and women. That's actually a very sad thing. From that moment on, I began to understand that there were places where issues related to this type of discussion were being addressed. I started to take an interest, but I can't say "Oh, yes, I always have."

Man 12:

Very late to be honest, in the sense that I wasn't fully aware of it in high school. There was a lot of emphasis on being good citizens and living together in peace and harmony. It wasn't until university, through books, meetings, and encounters with other people and their stories that I realized this symmetry didn't exist. For example, it's not the same thing to send a resume with skills and ignore the name—and therefore the hypothetical gender—of the person who has those skills. Studies show a correlation between the name a person uses and whether they choose to send a photo. And this is very sensitive regarding whether it is a female or a male sending it, whether they send a photo or not. There are biases, even at the structural level. I noticed this in my university course, where the percentage of female students choosing STEM subjects is a sensitive issue. Other issues are related to the rules of the game. For example, if I were female and had a functioning uterus, I would have the option of having children, but this choice would not be feasible in every potential career. This does not concern me in some ways because pregnancy, breastfeeding, and caring for children in the first few months are still almost entirely female responsibilities. During my time at university I realized there was a difference, that certain things didn't happen to me, but they did happen to all the women I spoke to. I thought, "This can't be a coincidence. There must be something behind it." And that something is proof that there really is a difference between being male and female.

Man 13:

While arguing with my sister, she broke my glasses, and my grandfather slapped her. My grandpa never laid hands on me before, but he felt entitled to give her a corporal punishment because my sister had broken my glasses. I was upset, mostly because he slapped her. Later, I thought about it: "If the roles were reversed, my grandfather would probably have been angry with me, however, I don't think he would have slapped me".



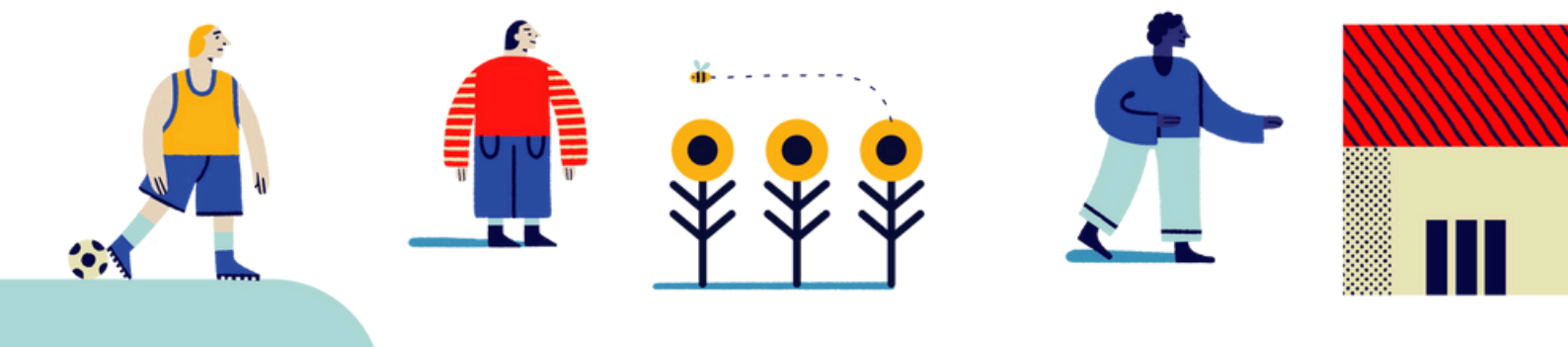
In his view, where roles are well-defined and there's a hierarchy between males and females, he probably felt entitled to punish her. This upset me. I often think about this when people ask me to remember my grandfather or things like that. I don't think about the good times we had; I think about these horrible things. Because they actually are really awful things.

Man 14:

A bit late actually, but it's an easy question to answer. As you know, in high school I was the only boy in my class. The teachers, not everyone but most of them, would say "Good morning, girls," when they entered the classroom, even though I was there. One day, I said, "Excuse me, I'm here too". My classmates turned around, looked at me, and said, "Shut up," so I did. That's when I realized it wasn't a problem for me. After all, I went on field trips, and so on, and I was the only boy, it was clear that there was another gender. I mean, I was right there among them; how could you not realize it? It was very simple. I have to admit that I was a little late, but it was very simple. Another episode: As a child, like many Italian boys, I played soccer and I was lucky enough to play on the same team as three or four girls. It was a coed team. We had three girls, we had the strongest player, who was the team's star. For that reason, even from the age of seven or eight, I no longer had a problem with it. Looking back, I'd say they were ahead of their time. They really were ahead of their time. I'm talking about 1995-96, which was quite a while ago. Nowadays, this wouldn't surprise me anymore. But, thinking about how it was back then, I have to say it really surprises me. I think that if there are four girls and four boys in a room, why would you say, "Hi, guys"? It's something I still wonder about, but unfortunately, that's how it is. There are many dogmas that should be dismantled, but they are centuries old, and, unfortunately, I think it will take centuries to dismantle them.

Man 15:

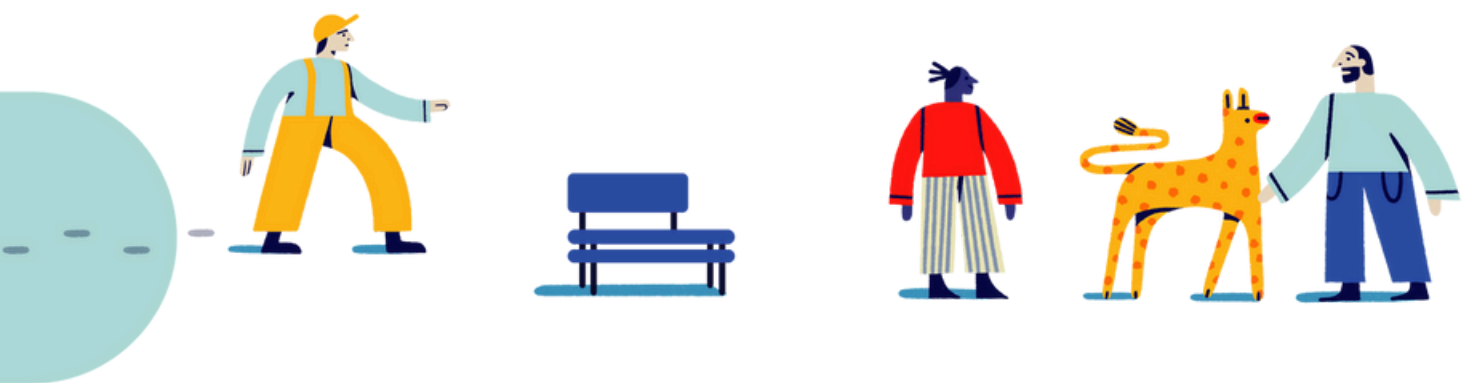
Probably when I became more involved with masculinity. Growing up as a woman, I never had any political awareness, and I wasn't even aware of certain dynamics. Discrimination based on my sexual preference, being a lesbian, was much more obvious to me, so I felt it more heavily than being a woman. Perhaps it was because the bad experiences I had with catcalling or inappropriate advances always happened in situations where it was obvious that I was a lesbian. It happened when I was with my girlfriend at the time or with my ex.



That was the main focus of my thinking, my political thinking was directed toward that type of discrimination rather than toward being a girl. I realized that being male is just a gender once I realized I was a boy and so it was more an issue of deconstructing and understanding the political power of my body as it was perceived as male. For me, all of this awareness came later, once I had gained social status because now I fit in, at least in terms of appearance, as a straight guy. I'm even married to a woman, so I'm at the top of the social hierarchy, of the pyramid if you will. I am at the top because I am also white so I now have a whole series of privileges that I now understand I have because I have followed a feminist path that has given me the tools to understand things I could not understand before.

Man 16:

Very easy question... (laughs, EN). Since I was a child, I have had female role models who raised me, guided me, and accompanied me through fundamental stages of my life. Then again, I have always reflected a little on my gender, my identity, and my sexual orientation, because in my teenage years came the awareness of my homosexuality, so in a sense I always imagined it a little, I always knew that the male me was not the only gender. However, I can certainly tell you about all the times I realized with difficulty that mine was the privileged one, starting with family aspects when I was little. For example, with my cousins, whom I met once a year during the summer because they came from out of town, we would get together and spend time together, but my brother and I were never asked to set the table or help tidy up, whereas my female cousin was, and she was the oldest. In this, I noticed this strong discrepancy that the adults imposed in some sense, but which we did not see or perceive. And it was very strange for us. The same was true for my other younger and older female cousins in small tasks such as helping to make coffee or expecting to be asked to help, expecting help with everyday chores, the same happened with my female friends. However, perhaps because I have always been close to people who are very dear to me and enlightened in some way, it was something that seemed very strange to us. It was something that came to us from outside, like an external agent, rather than something we felt was innate, but I think that's quite reasonable.



Man 17:

That's a difficult one. Anyway, it happened too late, because there are so many things I realize as I experience them, as I grow up. I'm 38 years old, it's been a 38-year process. You realize that you have certain extra possibilities, let's put it that way, and also fewer possibilities in a sense. Because, for example, when my adopted son arrived, my wife was on a six months' maternity leave. Technically, it's also possible for the father to take a maternity leave (which is still called maternity), but try and find a man in Italy who went to his employer and said, "OK, I'm taking a six months' maternity leave" and wasn't laughed at or fired. I believe there are many positive aspects and some negative aspects due to the fact that you have a well-defined and specific role within society. It is a continuous process. Every time I find myself in such a situation, I realize that a light bulb goes off in my head: so I am a man, they are reminding me of that in some way.

Man 18:

Perhaps when I realized that all those activities we did separately as males and females tended to divide us into genders. But then I gradually realized that the world was structured around the bodies, the needs and expectations of males. The first time I really realized that my gender was a gender and not the gender, or at least that it should have been like that, was when I was allowed to be an altar boy and my female friends at the parish youth club weren't. That's when I said to myself, why not? And why couldn't they be priests? Well, they can be nuns, so why can't they be altar girls? That's when I realized that there was a fundamental injustice and that the way I interpreted the world as if it were sterile and completely fair for everyone, designed for everyone, was in fact totally unbalanced and offered me opportunities that were not available to others. And so I said to myself: wait, it's not about being the privileged gender, because even that risks of being a slippery concept, it's about being the model. Which is much more subtle when you realize it, because at that point what comes to mind is to flee from that thought as quickly as possible, you don't want to consider it because if you consider it thoroughly, you can't help but rethink everything and you can't help but feel guilty. And that sense of guilt, if you know how to work with it, becomes a sense of responsibility and becomes beautiful because it means, damn it, I can learn a lot of things, I can become a lot of things that I'm not, I can discover many things about myself that I didn't think were possible. But if you leave it and see it like that and no one helps you understand that this guilt can become something else, either you run away completely and deny it, or you turn it upside down and what you get is a great annoyance, a colossal annoyance.



Musical interlude

Irene:

As always, there is so much to say. Please know that I live in fear that this final moment will sound like a sermon, so I try not to take up too much space, but I feel that in order to aid understanding, I need to linger a few minutes longer today. Please bear with me, if you can. I am a lover of word choices, and I couldn't help but notice a repetition in the various answers. Perhaps it gets lost among the many testimonies, so I will take the liberty of playing the recordings again so that you can hear it too.

Excerpts of testimonies can be heard

Man 1:

Only in recent years, I have asked myself many times why it didn't happen sooner.

Man 2:

It's something I've only become aware of in the last few years.

Man 3:

For me, this awareness came very late.

Man 4:

Very late, actually.

Man 5:

Very, very late.

Man 6:

A little late, actually.

Man 7:

Probably too late.



Man 8:

Too late, anyway.

Man 9:

Too late, anyway.

Musical interlude**Irene:**

Late. The word "late" does not simply mark a point in time but carries with it an evaluation. When did you realize that your gender was not universal? In high school, at university, seven years ago. Too late, anyway. Which means that, at least for the people telling the story, it would have been better to realize it sooner. Regardless of when this realization occurred, sooner would have been better. Instead, it happened late. Too late, anyway.

I spent days thinking about this word and asking myself the question: late for whom? Certainly late for the men who responded, because this delayed a series of other questions that helped them or are helping them understand a little more about their gender and the cages in which they find themselves having to perform it. But then also late for the people around them, for the women around them.

More than one person said, "I hope I didn't do too much damage in the years when I didn't realize this." And this brings us to a central point of this podcast, whose ultimate goal, I remind you, is to find a collective solution to gender-based violence. Much of the harm that is done, in this case by men towards women, is done in good faith. By this I do not mean that there aren't any men who actively want to harm women, I am simply saying that they are not the majority. The majority causes harm without knowing it. That's why it's so difficult to talk about it, because realizing that you've caused harm without consciously deciding to do so is terrifying. Because you no longer have any certainties. Because you can't help but ask yourself "So how many things am I still not seeing? How much harm am I still causing now, today, without realizing it?"

I don't believe that intentions are worthless. If a person causes harm by choosing to do so, to me that is not the same as someone who causes harm unknowingly. Unfortunately, however, the effects produced often disregard the original intentions. I can decide to push you to the ground, or I can accidentally bump into you and cause you to fall. In either case, I must take responsibility for the effect produced.



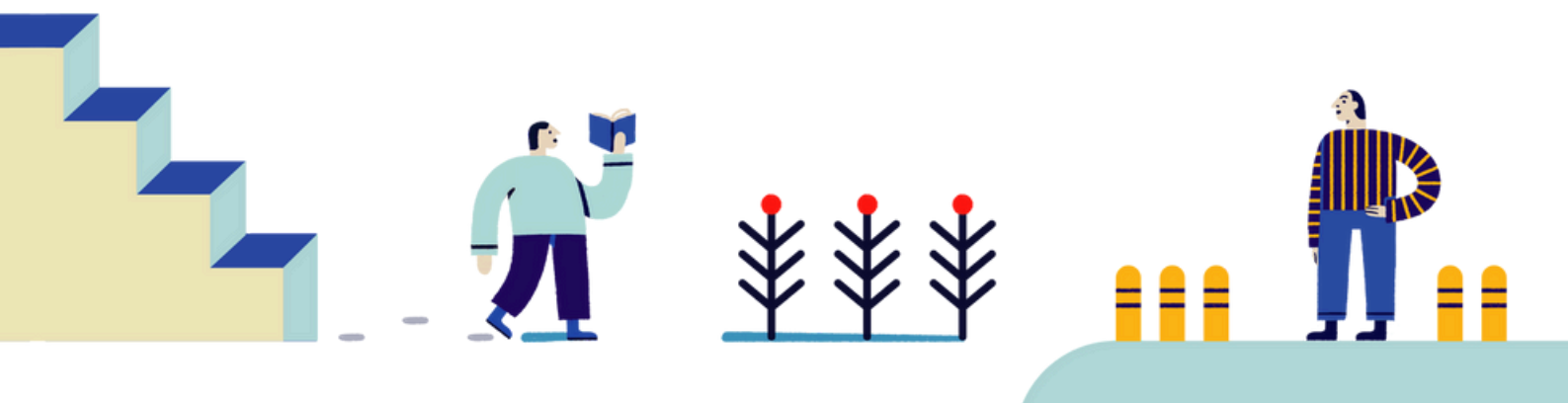
Because if you hurt yourself when you fell, I am called upon to be responsible for that damage. Which means, simply and for starters, apologizing. Showing concern, understanding how to make up for the situation, making yourself available to do your part. If you accidentally make me fall, I don't think badly of you, but if I point out that you pushed me and you take no responsibility for it by saying, "I didn't do it on purpose," well, then it's a little harder to continue to think well of you. Especially when it evolves into "since I didn't do it on purpose, you're exaggerating and it's not true that it hurts." Obviously, there are many degrees of pain and different types of pain, some are more discomfort than pain, but the thought process remains the same. I can understand that you didn't realize it, but once I point it out to you, what's stopping you from changing your behavior?

Often the answer is that the fear of admitting to having done something wrong is equivalent to admitting to being a bad person. The fear that a possible confession (yes, I admit it, it was me) will lead people to think badly of us. Will lead us to think badly of ourselves. The fear that sin and sinner coincide as concepts. I know that I am, or at least try to be, a good person, so if admitting that I have done wrong threatens to make me look bad, then I prefer to minimize the effects of my behavior, deny that what I said or did is problematic, blame it on "you can't say anything anymore" and other versions of this defense. Instead, we are here together to tell each other that doing harm is not equivalent to being a bad person, if it was not done on purpose. But if you realize you have done harm and choose not to take responsibility for it, that's when the problems begin.

Are you still with me? Can I go on a little longer?

The topic of language has been touched on often because it is a striking example. The Italian language does not have a neutral gender, it does not provide for it. It is not like English, for example, where if you do not want to specify a person's gender and therefore do not want to use he or she, you can use they. In Italian, we do not have an equivalent of "they", we do not have a neutral gender. We have an "maschile sovraesteso" (generic masculine, TN). Which is not neutral, it is precisely masculine... as default.

The convention says that when referring to a mixed audience, the masculine form should be used. Even if there is a majority of women. Saying "Buongiorno a tutti" ("Good morning everyone", masculine form, TN) when there are 9 women and 1 man in front of you is linguistically correct. But in fact, the issue is not what is linguistically correct, the issue is whether it is the only alternative.

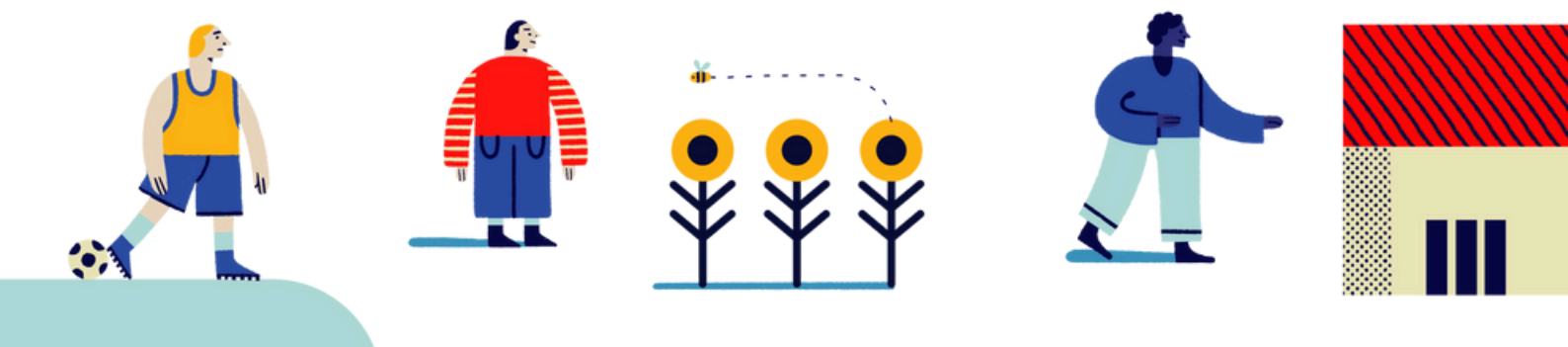


I realize that it can be difficult to understand what it means to feel named when the world names you all the time. I realize that it is difficult to understand what it means for a woman to hear "Buongiorno a tutti e tutte" (both masculine and feminine form, TN) when you have always been greeted. Of course, in that "Buongiorno a tutti" we are also referring to women, but we are not naming them. And naming is a way of bringing something into existence, of making it real. It is a way of saying "I see you." Choosing to use the feminine form is a gesture of care as well. And some will say, "But is it really that important?" Some women might say no, other might say yes. The question is: what have you got to lose? Perhaps the women in the audience won't notice, but perhaps you will have improved their day.

There are no negative effects in mentioning the feminine form as well. Do you want to be sure that everyone feels included, even those who do not identify with either gender? "Good morning to all the people here, it's a pleasure to have you here". It's a revolutionary detail that, if not noticed, does no harm, and if noticed, can make people smile, sometimes even move them. I open every episode of this podcast by saying welcome to everyone, meaning all men, for obvious reasons, and then I add welcome to all the other people who are listening. The reason is this. It's an attempt to make people feel seen, not to hurt them by making them invisible, even without meaning to.

But how can it be so important to mention the feminine when very often women themselves speak of themselves in the masculine and demand that we refer to their role in the masculine? This is an objection that I could have pretended not to know about, and we would have said goodbye and agreed to meet again in 15 days. But in for a dime, in for a dollar.

First of all, many women, as well as many men, let's say many people in general, do not know that many terms in the Italian language have a feminine form. Saying "avvocata" (female lawyer, TN) is not creating a neologism; "avvocata" is present in the dictionary of our language. It works like this: if I am crossing the street, I am a "pedone" (male pedestrian, TN), even if I am a woman. Because some words in the Italian language are only masculine. If a man controls the entrances and exits of a place and is perhaps even armed, he is a "guardia" (female guard, TN), even if he is a man, because some words in the Italian language are only feminine. If I enter a classroom and teach a lesson, I am a "insegnante" (teacher, TN), but if my male friend enters a classroom and teaches a lesson, he is also a "insegnante", because some words in the Italian language remain unchanged when the gender changes. But if my male friend hoes the land, he is a "contadino" (male farmer, TN), if I hoe it, I am a "contadina" (female farmer, TN) because some words in the Italian language change when the gender changes. No one has invented neologisms. "ingegnera, architetta, sindaca" (female engineer, architect, mayor, TN) are all words that follow the same rule as the widespread "contadina, maestra, schiava" (female farmer, teacher, slave, TN).



The question we must ask ourselves is: why do I have no problem saying "contadina" but refuse to say "sindaca"? Is it just a matter of the sound? Does it sound bad? Even "Coronavirus" is not very beautiful, but we have learned to say it. It is no coincidence that we struggle to decline positions of power in the feminine form but not humble ones. We wonder why women themselves present themselves in the masculine form, right? Have you ever tried asking those women? The answer is often clear: because they take me more seriously. Because in a society designed in the image and likeness of men, presenting oneself in the masculine form immediately earns prestige, status, and competence. The repercussions are endless, starting with the fact that if I don't name something, I will be surprised every time I encounter it and continue to consider it an exception. And we know that the most important task of exceptions is to prove the rules. The thing is, if I am immersed in that rule, I don't notice it is there, and if I don't even notice it is there, how can I ask myself if it is okay or if it should be questioned? Someone once said that culture is not knowing that you know. Asking ourselves questions is a way of becoming aware of the things we know, so that we can then ask ourselves whether we like them, whether they convince us, and whether there are more useful alternatives.

That's why I would like to remind you that if you would like to answer the question posed in this episode as well, you can do so by filling out the anonymous form at www.irenefacheris.it/tuttigliuomini.

You will hear some of the responses at the beginning of the next episode. Since I have gone on at length today, I will make it up to you with a spoiler: in the next episode, we will talk about the greatest difficulties these men have had to overcome once they started thinking about these issues, which for some have been going on for years and for others have only just begun. We will hear from them in 15 days.

Until then, remember, these issues affect all men. Because all men have the extraordinary privilege of being heard by other men, such as those who will never listen to this podcast. Talk to them. Talk to each other. Change things.

