

ing and fishing themselves but also related activities like hiking, photography, and feeding wildlife) totaled over \$100 billion in 2001, amounting to around 1 percent of GDP.

Despite these statistics, all is not well in the world of hunters. Like many activities and traits identified with men, and particularly men who live in rural areas, hunting is under attack on a number of fronts. Environmentalists say they don't like the way hunters invade the wilderness. Animal rights activists don't like the way hunters treat animals. Psychiatrist Karl Menninger has opined that hunting is a "socially accepted" form of sadism, with hunters under the sway of an "erotic sadistic motivation." Dr. Joel Saper also worries about the sexual aspect of hunting, stating that hunting "may reflect a profound yet subtle psychosexual inadequacy." Maybe it's because guns are so, well, phallic, but this theme is a constant in the anti-hunting literature. Clinical psychologist Margaret Brooke-Williams has postulated that "Hunters are seeking reassurance of their sexuality. The feeling of power that hunting brings temporarily alleviates this sexual uneasiness." No wonder lots of rifle-toting men have grown decidedly defensive about their hobby.

I'm pretty sure that most of the people I saw shopping in Cabela's on Super Bowl Sunday weren't worrying much about their sexual inadequacies. Judging from the number of strollers in the store, hunters do just fine between the sheets. In fact, instead of pathology, what is most in evidence when you are around hunters can only be described as joy.

Hunters and fishermen participate in their sports because they love the pursuit of game and love opportunities for spending time in the outdoors. They spend billions on their hobby, and endure conditions that would make most of us question their sanity, because it provides deep rewards and satisfactions. Former congressman Dick Armey, an avid fisherman, once stepped off an open boat where he had just spent 13 hours angling in the cold rain, and stated: "Women just don't understand how much fun we're having."

My friend Andy and his dad recently spent a day hunting on my family farm, tromping up and down the fencerows on a day when the weatherman was warning of frostbite from single-digit temperatures and brisk winds. They loved it. In an interview I conducted, former NFL star and current hunting and fishing television show host Larry Csonka described falling from a horse at a dead gallop in the midst of a buffalo hunt: "It was a frigging holiday."

If you don't hunt, you might not understand people who do. But, then, most hunters can't really explain or justify why they do it, either. If you listen to what hunters say, they hunt just because they enjoy hunting. That's a bit circular, but it satisfies most male practitioners. Tim Renken, long-time outdoors writer for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, has thought about this subject more than most people, and he describes his own urge to hunt this way: "It's instinctive. The whole drill—getting ready, going out, calling the dogs, picking up the gun, gathering with

the guys—it fulfills an urge, one that some people feel more strongly than others. Our species existed for thousands and thousands of years in a lifestyle that required that men go out in groups and bring back the necessities of life.... It's the same feeling a person gets picking up a baby, holding the hands of a child, and seeking women. Nature arranges that we feel pleasure in doing the things we must do."

That hunting is in our bones may help explain what surveys have long shown. Compared to people who engage in other outdoor activities like hiking, hunters are less likely to "achieve their goals" or be "successful" on their trips. The fact is, hunters often come home empty-handed. Yet polling shows that hunters are the most *satisfied* with their outdoor excursions, regardless of success.

Of course critics of hunting are not persuaded by the argument that "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." They will point out that certain instincts are no longer productive. But the case for hunting and fishing can also be made on pragmatic grounds, even from the point of view of the wildlife. One example is white-tailed deer. In 1925, the Missouri Game and Fish Department counted less than 400 deer in the state of Missouri. Today, there are perhaps 800,000. That is in large part a testament to wildlife management helped along by the license fees paid by hunters.

In his book on hunting, David Samuel notes that federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment raise nearly \$400 million per annum to support game conservation. Hundreds of millions more are raised by state agencies. Ducks Unlimited has raised almost a billion dollars since 1937, and restored seven million acres of wetlands. Pheasants Forever has planted ten million trees and restored 300,000 acres of warm season grasses. The National Wild Turkey Foundation has helped to triple the number of wild turkeys in the U.S. in the past generation. Hunters were the first conservationists, and remain among the most effective ones.

Successful wildlife preservation and ever-growing suburbs have even turned many creatures into pests. Nationwide, over 500,000 cars and deer collide each year, resulting in an estimated 100 human deaths, and hundreds of millions of dollars in insurance claims. In most of their range, white-tailed deer have no natural predators, except for guys in four-wheel-drive pickup trucks with gun racks in the back windows. Without hunting, deer populations would skyrocket, creating hunger, disease, and, eventually, a population collapse.

Deer hunting season here in northwestern Missouri, as in much of rural America, is a tradition enjoyed by almost everybody. The first day is usually the busiest, but each day as the season progresses, more deer hang from tree branches, as hunters prepare their game for the freezer. By the end of the weeklong season, the town where I live looks like a venison orchard, with gutted deer beneath most branches capable of bearing the weight. We managed to kill one deer for every male between the ages of 14 and 70 in my home county this year.

Before you hang your deer, you generally drive around with it in the back of your pickup for a while, taking it at the very least by the coffee shop for bragging purposes. One acquaintance of mine who had spent years in the city before arriving here banged into this reality on the first day of hunting season one fall. After pulling into a local convenience store with her young daughter in tow, she left the car to pay for her gas. When she returned, her daughter, now surrounded by pickups with dead deer, was screaming about Bambi.

The hunter's commitment to his sport extends far beyond his time in the woods. When hunters can't hunt, and fisherman can't fish, and they don't need anything at Cabela's, they watch lots of television shows about hunting and fishing. There are two cable networks fully devoted to outdoor sports, and numerous other networks with regular shows.

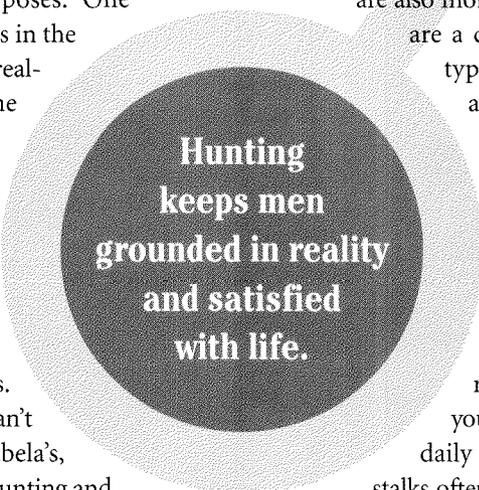
The prototype of all outdoor programs is the fishing show, usually two guys in a boat catching and releasing bass amidst lively banter. Bass fishing has become a major competitive sport, with tournaments, big prize money, and endorsement contracts for the winners. The shows encourage a vast bass fishing sub-industry, including products like the "Vibrastrike," a water-activated vibrating fishing lure. Every manly tackle box should have one.

If surveys show that hunters can enjoy their outings without bringing home any game, the same cannot be said for the people who are featured in hunting shows. They *always* get their deer, turkey, bluefish, or alligator. Yep, you can hunt alligators in Florida—because alligators are cannibals, and it actually helps to increase the population by hunting the bigger gators who gobble up the smaller ones. I've learned from TV hunting shows that if you want a pair of alligator boots made from your kill, the critter needs to be at least nine feet long. That's news you can use.

Nobody does hunting enthusiasm like rock star and outdoorsman Ted Nugent. On his show he recently hunted deer with a 53-pound-test bow and an arrow with a special blade you can buy on his Web site. Nugent said he was hunting because "I want to feed my family the purest of protein." He practices with his bow every day so he won't "be confused by the intensity of it all. It is very exhilarating." Ted got his deer, but only after long tracking through the Texas scrub, hollering at intervals that "the beast is dead, long live the beast."

Another recurring theme in hunting and fishing entertainment is the transfer of lore between generations. Most hunters hunt because their fathers did. A boy's first expedition is almost always under the watchful eye of a male relative, and surveys show that hunters who are introduced to the sport by peers are less likely to continue than hunters who have their first experience with their fathers.

Many of the weekly hunting and fishing shows depict the first hunt of an adolescent male. The pride taken by fathers is palpable,



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shining right through the commercials for tree stands, shotguns, and deer scent. Hunters who go to the woods with their dads first are also more likely to follow the ethics of hunting. Ethics are a constant theme in hunting literature. Some types of hunting just aren't considered kosher, and the censure received from a father when the rules are broken is more likely to leave an impression than the fear of conservation agents or nagging from buddies.

Hunting correctly, following the rules, respecting the game and property you hunt on—these are important lessons best taught by a male authority figure. If you keep the rules of the woods when no one is watching, you are likely to be upright in other parts of your daily life. Fathers taking their sons on pre-dawn stalks often transmit important lessons about manhood even more than about sportsmanship.

Hunting and fishing are also important because they remind humans of the proper order of the world. They teach that we have responsibilities toward animals, but that we are different. As urbanized humans become more and more disconnected from nature, it is important to guard against confusion and romanticization of the natural world. In a world where a Princeton professor like Peter Singer argues that a healthy animal has more value than a damaged human or a newborn baby, hunting and fishing can help us keep reality before our eyes, and our priorities straight.

In a world where many of the things men are hard-wired to do are now discouraged, hunting is particularly important to keeping men grounded in reality and satisfied with life. Hunting allows men to exercise what Harvey Mansfield calls their "spirit-ness." Larry Csonka makes the same point when he describes the importance of wholesome rough-and-tumble to men, whether it comes through football or fishing. Sometimes the sales committee can replace the hunting party, says Tim Renken, as men compete for promotions instead of supper. But there are moments when the aggressive and challenge-seeking natures of men need to be satisfied more directly and simply.

It is of course important for men—and the civilization and women around them—to temper some of these natural impulses. But to expect to eliminate them is foolishly unrealistic, unfair to men, and ultimately bad for society—which, despite all modernization, still needs the unsentimental decisiveness that hunting hones. Philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset once argued that "the greatest danger to the existence of hunting" is "reason." Hunters can't really explain why they hunt. But the urge is there, and too fundamentally a part of our makeup to be ignored.

We won't all be hunters. But the powerful drive that makes men hunt is something that benefits everyone.



# Boys *Under* Attack

Christina Hoff Sommers was right

By Karina Rollins

Three years ago, Christina Hoff Sommers presented a radically titled book, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men*. Back then, a war against boys seemed an odd charge in a society that had accepted as fact the leftist feminist claim that boys are, by definition, beneficiaries of the reigning “patriarchy,” and girls, second-class citizens. After all, esteemed institutions like the Association of American University Women had commissioned studies that showed widespread “gender bias” against girls in school, and television and newspapers were filled with authoritative-sounding reports hammering home gut-wrenching stories of short-changed girls robbed of their self-esteem, left miserable and suicidal.

What was the evidence for these claims? As Sommers discerned from painstaking research, they stood on shaky ground at best; at worst, they were wholesale perversions of fact. Far from the constant claims that school is designed to suit boys’ needs at the expense of girls’, Sommers showed that when it comes to education, “we have a genuinely worrisome gender gap, with boys well behind girls”:

Girls read more books. They outperform males on tests of artistic and musical ability. More girls than boys study abroad. More join the Peace Corps. Conversely, more boys than girls are suspended from school. More are held back and more drop out. Boys are three times as likely as girls to be enrolled in special education programs and

four times as likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). More boys than girls are involved in crime, alcohol and drugs. Girls attempt suicide more than boys, but it is boys who actually kill themselves more often. In a typical year (1997), there were 4,493 suicides of young people between the ages of five and 24: 701 females, 3,792 males.

But these facts—and an abundance of other evidence disputing the cry of anti-girl discrimination—did little to quell the thirst for girl salvation. While the mainstream media trumpeted that study commissioned by the AAUW proclaiming girlhood misery, studies and reports demonstrating its grave flaws and misinformation, as well as Sommers’ *The War Against Boys*, were barely mentioned.

Other sob stories about the sorry lot of girls didn’t even have faulty studies to back them up—they were simply asserted, and accepted, unquestioningly, by much of the media and the American public. “The research commonly cited to support the claims of male privilege and sinfulness is riddled with errors,” Sommers charged in 2000. “Almost none of it has been published in professional peer-reviewed journals. Some of the data are mysteriously missing. Yet the false picture remains and is dutifully passed along in schools of education, in ‘gender-equity’ workshops, and increasingly to children themselves.”

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Karina Rollins is a TAE senior editor.