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Web Site

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Letters to the Editor

"The Mail," The American Enterprise, 1150 17th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, or fax (202) 862-5867, or e-mail TAE@aei.org

Main Editorial and Production Office

The American Enterprise
1150 17th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 862-5886, or e-mail TAE@aei.org

Office of the Editor in Chief

The American Enterprise
23 Hurd Street, Cazenovia, N.Y. 13035
(315) 655-1033

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Men—It's in Their Nature

This past spring, my son spent a month in Israel with his senior class. Only one activity disappointed him. While camping in the Negev Desert, special counselors from a progressive-socialist kibbutz paid a visit and led the students through a sensitivity exercise. The students were told to walk out into the desert until they were completely alone. The counselors (mostly American-born) supplied them with a pencil, paper, matches, and a candle and instructed them to absorb the quiet calm of the desert, to record their feelings, and to "find themselves."

The girls happily complied. Most of the boys did not. They scattered into the desert, quickly became bored, and sought out each other's company. Then they threw the pencils and paper into a pile, and used the candles and matches to start a little bonfire. The boys loved it; the sensitivity trainers were horrified. They viewed the boys' behavior as an expression of primitive violence—a lethal masculinity straight from *The Lord of the Flies*.

Later in the evening, the students sat in a circle while the girls read their impassioned reactions to the "haunting loneliness" of the desert; the boys could barely suppress laughter—confirming once again the worst fears of the sensitivity trainers. Gender equity experts in America's schools, universities, government agencies, and major women's groups would share the distress of the kibbutz counselors, having spent more than a decade trying to resocialize boys away from "toxic masculinity."

In a great number of American schools, gender reformers have succeeded in expunging many activities that young boys enjoy: dodge ball, cops and robbers, reading or listening to stories about battles and war heroes. A daycare center in North Carolina was censured by the State Division of Child Development for letting boys play with two-inch green Army men. The division director described the toys as "potentially dangerous if children use them to act out violent themes."

Activities deemed "safe" by the gender equity experts and the teachers they inspire include quilting, games without scores, and stories about brave girls and boys who learn to cry. The goal is to resocialize boys, freeing them from male stereotypes, and, ultimately, to promote genuine equality between the sexes—which for the reformers means sameness.

But decades of research in neuroscience, endocrinology, genetics, and developmental psychology, strongly suggest that masculine traits are hard-wired. There are exceptions, but here are the rules: Males have better spatial reasoning skills, females better verbal skills. Males are greater risk-takers, females are more nurturing. Boys like action, competitive rough-housing, and inanimate objects, and they are the one group of Americans who do not spend a lot of time talking about their feelings.

Try as they may, parents, teachers, and gender facilitators have not been successful in rooting out male behavior they regard as harmful. An "equity facilitator" tried to persuade a group of nine-year-old boys in a Baltimore public school to accept the idea of playing with baby dolls. According to one observer, "Their reaction was so hostile, the teacher had trouble keeping order." And then there was Jimmy. At age 11, this San Francisco sixth-grader was made to contribute a square to a class quilt "celebrating women we admire."

He chose to honor tennis player Monica Seles who, in 1993, was stabbed on the court by a deranged fan of Steffi Graf. Jimmy handed in a muslin square festooned with a tennis racket and a bloody dagger. His square may be unique in the history of quilting, but his teacher did not appreciate its originality and rejected it. American classrooms are full of Jimmys.

Efforts to change boys like Jimmy or my son and his bonfire companions will be difficult if not impossible. Nature is obdurate on some matters. While environment and socialization do play a significant role, scientists are beginning to pinpoint the precise biological correlates to many typical gender differences. A 2001 special issue of *Scientific American* reviewed the growing evidence that children's play preferences are, in large part, hormonally determined. Researchers confirmed what parents experience all the time: Even with counter-conditioning, boys and girls gravitate toward very different toys. (See the article by Iain Murray on pages 34 and 35, which lays out some of the new scientific findings on sex differences.)

The entire anthropological record offers not a single example of a society where females have better spatial reasoning skills and males better verbal skills, where females are fixated on objects and men on feelings, or where males are physically docile and females aggressive. In the face of what we know, it is altogether unreasonable to deny the biological basis for distinctive male and female preferences and abilities.

Does this mean biology is destiny? As anthropologist Lionel Tiger (who is part of the male symposium beginning on page 24) says, "biology is not destiny, but it is good statistical probability." There is still room for equity. A fair and just society offers equality of opportunity to all. But it cannot promise, and should not try to enforce, sameness. The natural differences between men and women suggest there will never be mathematical parity in all fields; far more men than women will choose to be mechanics, engineers, or soldiers. Early childhood education, family medicine, and social work will continue to be dominated by women.

Boys will prefer bonfires to diaries and any teacher who requires them to contribute squares to a quilt should brace herself for insensitive images of monsters, dangerous animals, and weaponry. The male tendency to be competitive, risk-loving, more narrowly focused, and less concerned with feelings has consequences in the real world. It could explain why there are more males at the extremes of success and failure: more male CEOs, more males in maximum security prisons.

Of course, boys' natural masculinity must be tempered. Social theorist Hannah Arendt is believed to have said that every year civilization is invaded by millions of tiny barbarians—they are called children. All societies confront the problem of civilizing their children, particularly the male ones. History teaches that masculinity constrained by morality is powerful and constructive; it also teaches that masculinity without ethics is dangerous and destructive.

We have a set of proven social practices for raising young

men. The traditional approach is through character education to develop a young man's sense of honor and help him become a considerate, conscientious human being. Sociologists make an important distinction between pathological and healthy masculinity. Boys who exhibit aberrational masculinity define their manhood through anti-social and destructive acts; instead of protecting the vulnerable, they exploit them. Healthy masculinity is the opposite. Males who possess it—the vast majority of American boys and men—strive to be helpful and to achieve. They sublimate their natural aggression into sports, hobbies, and work. They build rather than destroy. And they do not exploit women and children, they protect them.

Efforts to civilize boys with honor codes, character education, manners, and rules of good sportsmanship are necessary and effective, and fully consistent with their masculine natures. Efforts to feminize them with dolls, quilts, non-competitive games, girl-centered books, and feelings exercises will fail; though they will succeed in making millions of boys quite unhappy.

Dissident feminist Camille Paglia is one of the few scholars who values maleness: "Masculinity is aggressive, unstable, combustible. It is also the most creative cultural force in history. When I cross...any of America's great bridges, I think—men have done this. Construction is a sublime male poetry."

This sublime poetry has been unappreciated in American society for more than a quarter of a century. But that appears to be changing. The awesome display of masculine courage shown by the firefighters and policemen at Ground Zero, the heroic soldiers fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, the focused determination and exemplary leadership of President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, and General Tommy Franks, have rekindled in Americans an appreciation for masculine virtues. Many courageous and even heroic women took part in all these endeavors. But fighting enemies and protecting the nation are overwhelmingly male projects.

The gender activists who fill our schools and government agencies will continue with their efforts to make boys more docile and emotional. But fewer and fewer Americans will support them. Maleness is back in fashion. And one reason is that Americans are increasingly aware that traditional male traits such as aggression, competitiveness, risk-taking and stoicism—constrained by virtues of valor, honor and self-sacrifice—are essential to the well-being and safety of our society.



BIRD'S EYE guest author Christina Hoff Sommers is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and the author of *Who Stole Feminism?* and *The War Against Boys*.

Karl Zinsmeister will return in our next issue.

This issue of *The American Enterprise* was commissioned by Karl Zinsmeister and edited by Karina Rollins and Eli Lehrer.

Sidelights

Fifty percent of Americans believe **Hillary Rodham Clinton's** new memoir *Living History* should be filed in the history section of libraries and bookstores, according to CNN/USA Today/ Gallup Poll. Twenty-two percent believe it belongs in the fiction section.

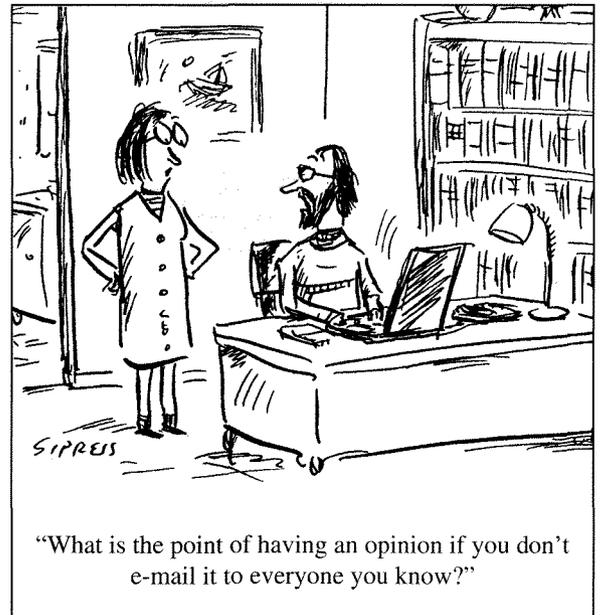
☛ At a speech in Washington, D.C., PBS's **Bill Moyers** stated that the Republicans are planning the "deliberate, intentional destruction of the United States of America." ☛ A proposed mural at the University of California, Riverside has offended some at the campus. Academic affairs director **Elisa Haro** saw the images of Shakespearean actors as "pilgrim invaders" that reminded her "of my colonization, and I don't like that." There were also complaints that the cranes in the mural were white, and that there were no same sex couples. ☛ A UCLA study found no significant correlation between secondhand smoke and death due to coronary heart disease or lung cancer. ☛ The European Central Bank predicts the European Union's economy will grow by only 0.7 percent this year. ... Unemployment in Germany has risen to 4.49 million. Germany has a population of over 82 million and is the biggest contributor to the E.U. budget.

An exiled Burmese girl wrote a letter to the *Bangkok Post* asking **George Bush** and **Tony Blair** to "please eliminate the Burmese dictators immediately. We need only one missile. Help us, please." ☛ The number of terror attacks in the world fell sharply in 2002, according to the State Department's Patterns of Global Terrorism report. There were 199 terrorist attacks last year, a 44 percent drop from

2001. This is the lowest figure in over 30 years. ☛ In Western Europe, 35 percent of software is pirated, in Eastern Europe it's 71 percent, concludes the Business Software Alliance in its annual survey on software piracy, estimating the global cost of software piracy last year at \$13.08 billion.

The dictator of Belarus, **Alexander Lukashenko**, decreed that the heads of companies, unions, and other organizations may not call themselves "presidents." Only Lukashenko himself may have that title. ☛ The Rift Valley Institute reported that, over the last 20 years, more than 11,000 people have been kidnapped in slave raids in the Sudan. Only about 500 have made it back home. ... Musician **Bob Geldof**, organizer of the 1980s Live Aid charity, told the London *Guardian* that "the Bush administration is the most radical—in a positive sense—in its approach to Africa since Kennedy." Geldof described former President **Bill Clinton** as "a good guy, but he did f--- all" to help Africa. ☛ The *New York Times* reported that incest is a serious health concern in Saudi Arabia, noting that in some parts of the country "more than half of the marriages are between close relatives." Inbreeding can produce such genetic disorders as sickle cell anemia, spinal muscular atrophy, diabetes, and possibly deafness and muteness.

Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, dean of Islamic Studies at the University of



Qatar, issued a fatwa permitting women to carry out suicide attacks, "even without the permission of her husband, and the son without the consent of his parents." ... An Australian and a German caught kissing in Dubai were sentenced to six-month jail terms, which were suspended under condition they not do it again. ☛ After weeks of striking and a halt to garbage collection, city cleaners in Marseille, France resorted to spraying the streets with lemon-grass perfume to diffuse the stench from mountains of festering trash. ☛ Sales of French wine in the U.S. dropped 13 percent over the last year.

Two thirds of Israelis believe Israel could co-exist with a Palestinian state, according to a Pew Research Center poll. Only 17 percent of Palestinians think that is possible. ... "I'm making a conscious decision to take this whole Judaism thing seriously," **Geraldo Rivera** told the *Washington Post*. "I think the Jews need me right now."

—BB