

Men Talking to Men, About Men

BY JOHN LEONARD

This is a risky article to write. Any time a leader gets too far in front of their constituency, they risk being labeled "a fruitcake" instead of a visionary. While I really don't want either label applied to me, I think it's time to bring out an issue that is a "male concern" that is getting spoken of in locker rooms, in quiet male lunches and over an adult beverage or two all over the USA.

It's about the state of the American Male.

And I have to say, in many parts of the world I travel to, especially western cultures, it's an issue there also, Not surprisingly, in the "under-developed nations," this isn't even on the radar screen... which is equally disturbing in contrast.

And of course, since part of my world is swimming, I want to put it in that context as well.

Let's start with some statistics:

In an article by Janice Shaw Crouse in "American Thinker," she writes; "the male-female ratio on college campuses has changed dramatically. Women outnumber men by 4-3. Men currently make up only 43% of college graduates." According to USA Today, 135 women receive bachelor's degrees for every 100 men. That imbalance is predicted to widen in the coming years.

This creates huge social issues between educated women and the under-educated, immature/irresponsible young men who make up their marriage prospects.

Again quoting Mrs. Crouse; "Is it any wonder that men are avoiding today's college campuses? Hostility towards men and masculinity begins in day-care and increases every year in school thereafter."

Now how about these facts from the National Educational Association (NEA) from their "rankings of the states" in 2008.

In the 2007-2008 school year, Elementary School Teachers are 85.9% female (nationally) and 14.1% male. In Secondary Education, is 60.2% female and 39.8% male. Anyone want to hazard a guess about how many males are working in the nations Pre-School environments?

Now as any male can tell you, males and females are indeed very different. (and viva la difference!)

- Females can sit still while they learn. (boys can't.)
- Boys have to move to think. (girls don't)
- Females are "cooperative and collaborative."
- Males have to learn to be both, but its swimming upstream against the hard wiring.
- Females can learn from listening and watching. Boys have to "experience" to learn best.

Ever watch little boys and little girls play? Before adults get to interfering? Little boys run into each other, push each other, bash into each other, and laugh about it with glee. Little girls look at them doing this like they are idiots, while they play quietly and without "violence." It's not really violence, it's masculine touching.

A few years later, how does the little girl know the boy "likes her"? When he pushes her, or pulls her hair or in some way expresses physical manifestations... and what do little boys do when they are playing? They are still "bashing into each other."

In early pre-teen and teen years, what games do boys like best? Games that allow and encourage them to "bash into each other."

In early adulthood, what do males do when "hanging out?" Whack each other a good shot in the arm... wrestle, tussle, etc.

Then from the 20's on, well into their 70's and 80's, how do males "relate" to each other? They tease the living hell out of each other... never letting up, constantly "getting on" one another in small ways and large. The teasing replaces the socially unacceptable "whacking" but it's really a different expression of exactly the same thing.

How do you know two guys don't like each other? They are inordinately polite to each other. Buddies tease the hell out of each other. To the point where female observers, unfamiliar with the motif, may be shocked and mistake teasing for dislike.

Does any of this seem even remotely familiar in the company of women? Of course not.

But what is going on today, is that young males are being raised in a "female-centric" series of environments where female behavior is acceptable, and natural male behavior is demonized and unacceptable. So the "maleness" is being removed from our young males by our system of raising children... It's a heck of a lot easier to manage a pre-school class with female behaviors than with male behaviors. And then the female elementary school teacher takes over, and male behaviors of wandering around, touching everything, "fidgeting" and moving while talking, are considered worthy of labels like "ADHD" which should really be "IDHACHTHT" ("I Don't Have A Clue How To Handle This").

As swimming coaches we know, an ideally attractive "male" swimming environment would be radically different from the ideal "female" swimming

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environment. (Which we have in very many clubs today, because it looks like "disciplined" practice, which parents and administrators like...)

There is nothing wrong with highly regulated, structured practices where everything is done in nice straight lines with perfect precision, and it may be better suited to the female personality, which by and large is built to "master" any environment in which they place themselves. As any coach of successful males can tell you, there are "teachable moments," but it's not constant... males want to learn by doing, and experiment and have more independence in how they learn.

Hence the near-total maleness of an activity such as skateboarding. No teachers, no parents, no instruction. Tons of creative, opportunistic learning and experimentation.

If it was possible, would it be better to run some separate male and female practices? I think so. (not all, but "some")

But the bigger issue is how our society can adapt to serve its male populations better in their formative years. How can we make both male and female traits "acceptable" and "OK?" How can we celebrate the differences, instead of creating a system that devalues one or the other?

If we don't, that education gap will grow larger. The achievement gap will widen. And we'll wind up with a huge population of couch potato males. Can we as a society afford that? I think not.

And neither do the majority of males talking about their sons and daughters over lunch and in the locker room.

Value both sets of traits. Find ways to educate both genders.

Is this about the future of Western Society? Yes, I think it is.

John Leonard