

Wingspan™

INSIDE THE MEN'S MOVEMENT

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EDITOR OF

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To Peter, Nick, Luke, and Mark

You may never really understand what the men's movement means, but
you certainly know what it means to be loving brothers.

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WINGSPAN INSIDE THE MEN'S MOVEMENT.

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Men's rights activists pull no punches in exposing what they see as society's misguided attempts to help women by shaming men. Men's righters are sometimes accused of "hating women," while they see themselves as refuting insidious lies spread by feminists (both male and female).

Though the mythopoetic men generally refrain from using language as hard-hitting as that in this piece, there is an increasing awareness among mythopoetic men that males have been getting a bum rap. And as Jack Kammer of the Baltimore Commission on Men demonstrates, even *Iron John* may be quoted to help sound the men's rights wake-up call. 



"MALE" IS NOT A FOUR-LETTER WORD

BY JACK KAMMER

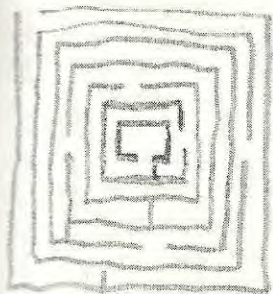


ITEM: FOR months after six men raped a woman in Big Dan's Tavern in New Bedford, Rhode Island, in 1983 the media reported that a barroom full of male patrons had cheered the crime. As University of Dayton English professor Eugene August observes, the news stories included "righteous denunciations of the average man as secret admirer and blood brother of the gang rapist." In a March 5, 1984, story on the rapists' trial, however, *Time* magazine quietly reported that "aside from the six defendants and the victim, only three people were in the bar, and that the bartender and a customer sought to call the police, but were prevented from doing so by one of the six." Professor August is left to wonder "why the media engaged in such an orgy of sexist caricaturing."

ITEM: Writing in a 1988 edition of *Spectator*, Fredric Hayward, director of Men's Rights, Inc., reports that in a sample of 1,000 advertisements, he found that men were 100 percent of:

- Jerks in male-female relationships
- Those who were ignorant
- Incompetents
- Those who smelled bad
- Those who were put down without retribution
- The objects of rejection
- The losers of competitions
- The targets of anger
- The victims of violence

ITEM: Warren Farrell devotes a chapter of his successful 1986 book *Why Men Are the Way They Are* to "The New Sexism." He analyzes dozens of anti-male cartoons, books, magazine articles, and advertisements, and, by reversing the gender assignments in his examples, helps readers see clearly the bigotry they embody. "In the past quarter century," Farrell writes, "we exposed biases against other races and called it racism, and we exposed biases against women and called it sexism. Biases against men we call humor."



ITEM: In 1991, before the National Coalition of Free Men succeeds in having Hallmark mend its ways, the greeting card company manufactures a product that shows on its cover a stylish young woman saying, "Men are scum." Since the card is from Hallmark, America's premier purveyor of sentiment and warmth, the incredulous shopper expects to open the card and read something like "S for sweet, C for cute, U for understanding, and M for magnificent." Instead the inside panel says, "Excuse me. For a second there, I was feeling generous." In announcing its decision to pull the card from distribution, Hallmark acknowledges that the product was one of its best-sellers.

This is male bashing—the mean-spirited mockery and categorical denunciation of American men. Sincere criticism it is not.

John Gordon, Ph.D., professor of English at Connecticut College and author of *The Myth of the Monstrous Male and Other Feminist Fables*, tells us that male bashing is hardly a new phenomenon. In Dr. Francis Baumli's anthology *Men Freeing Men*, Gordon asserts that "the ongoing flood of anti-male hate literature" is "a continuation of an old campaign. Men are the main targets these days because they always have been." He cites *The Feminization of American Culture* by Ann Douglas which "documents the history of two of the most popular and influential genres of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the anti-male novel and the anti-male tract. These works—thousands of them—were part of a campaign," Gordon says, "to represent men as barbarians whose urges had to be leashed in by the forces of decency—meaning women—if civilization were to survive."

But clearly male bashing is more common and ferocious today than it was, say, 30 years ago. Why is it happening so prominently now? Obviously, feminism unleashed a torrent of simple, crude, unenlightened animosity toward men. Rather than suggesting an evenhanded redistribution of power between men and women, feminists chose instead to frame sexism unilaterally according to the by-now familiar victim-perpetrator model. Only men had power. Only men were using it selfishly. Only men required self-improvement. Only men were wrong.

Another interesting way to conceive of the current abuses of men is to accept the feminist allegation that men have treated women as children. Now that women are asserting their independence many of them are having what could be called a difficult adolescence, a still-immature stage which is often accompanied by a know-it-all attitude and haughty disrespect for former authority figures.

Farrell suggests that male bashing, the New Sexism, is at least in part some modern women's reaction to their failure to achieve their primary (and sexist) fantasy—being taken care of by a man who makes even more money than they. As women's earnings have increased recently,

Farrell points out, it is inevitable that fewer and fewer men will be able to fulfill that fantasy, and more and more women will feel angry, frustrated, and resentful toward men, whom they see now only in terms of their shortcomings. Furthermore, focusing on men's imperfections allows women to avoid the painful task of attending to their own.

This suggests yet another way to understand male bashing. Since male bashing is nothing if not offensive, and since, as the old adage goes, The best defense is a strong offense, we might ask, Are some women and their male protectors feeling a heightened need to defend something, trying to avoid an egalitarian sharing of some female domain or prerogative which men have begun to claim equally for themselves?

If in the early 1960s, when women were knocking on the door of corporate and academic America, seeking access to jobs, educations, and careers, men had mounted a scurrilous campaign about women's shortcomings, foibles, and imperfections, fair-minded people surely would have seen it for what it was. If, for example, a prominent male business executive had written, "The majority of women who compete with talented young men for careers and entrepreneurial opportunities are air-headed bimbos who have refused to study diligently, save their capital, work hard and devote themselves to the important and noble task of making money, who only want to file their nails, and who pose a serious threat to our hallowed American economy," no one could have failed to see that his real agenda was the exclusion of women from a male domain.

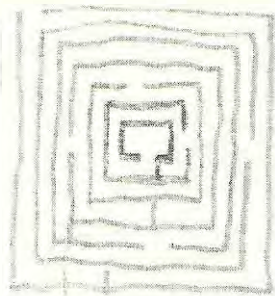
Perhaps, then, we can discern a clear payoff for women in male bashing, a classic example of which is found on the book jacket of Phyllis Chesler's *Mothers on Trial*: "Dr. Chesler shows that the majority of fathers who challenge nurturing mothers for custody are absent or psychologically damaging parents who have refused to pay child support and have kidnapped, brainwashed, economically intimidated and physically and sexually abused both their children and their wives." (For those readers who are unaware of her reputation we should mention that Dr. Chesler is considered a serious, sophisticated, and credible philosopher—not a ludicrous crackpot—of feminism.)

One of the most recurring and underlying themes of male bashing is indeed the unfitness of men to care for children. Certainly we cannot entrust our little babies to people who are sexually depraved, clumsy, selfish, hormonally inclined to violence, helpless, emotionally crippled, and generally morally inferior. We must leave that important work—"demeaned and devalued" as it may be—to women.

Since many men today are expressing an interest in being as involved with their children as women have been, it is understandable—as distinguished from acceptable—that some women will feel threatened. *The Motherhood Report*, published in 1987 by researchers Louis Genevie, Ph.D., and Eva Margolies, lends credence to this analysis.



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Genevie and Margolies found that 1) only about one mother in four thought that fathers should play a fifty-fifty role in raising the children; 2) mothers want fathers to help more with the children, but not to overshadow their role as primary parent; 3) two out of three mothers seemed threatened by the idea of a father's equal participation in child rearing; and 4) mothers themselves may be subtly putting a damper on men's involvement with their children because they are so possessive of their role as primary nurturer. Male bashing in this light can be seen as a not-

so-subtle damper on men's involvement with their children, especially when divorce, separation, or simple jealousy force the designation of one parent as primary and the other as second class.

Moreover, even the most amateur politician knows that the party who defines the terms of the discussion will win the debate. As long as



feminists keep sexual politics

focused on men's failings, they will enjoy total immunity from scrutiny or calls to make changes other than the ones they have found to be in their immediate self-interest.

Keeping attention focused on men's shortcomings requires that men's shortcomings be found—or fabricated—at every turn. Writing in the *Liberator*, Frank Zepezauer marvels at the resourcefulness and flexibility of the process. He describes how three sociologists working with three different types of raw material all delivered the same fuel for male bashing. The first commented on the fact that men still put in longer work weeks than women by saying that "men are trying even harder to maintain their superiority." The second sociologist saw a picture of Native American women grinding corn while the men stood watch. Her interpretation: "The men were as usual leaving all the work to the wom-

en." The third, after examining the many ways in which males, like the Indian men standing guard, took risks to protect women and children, concluded that this was another way that males maintained dominance, their own version of a "protection racket." As Zepezauer detected, the process is really quite simple. "Whatever a guy does, you find a sneaky, self-serving reason. He holds a door open for you? He's asserting dominance. He doesn't hold the door open. He's insulting your dignity."

Farrell has seen the same process in different terms. "*The Hite Report*," he writes, "found that *men* prefer intercourse more than women; the *American Couples* survey by Schwartz and Blumstein found that *women* prefer intercourse more than men. Hite interpreted her findings to mean that men preferred intercourse because intercourse is male-centered, focused on penis pleasure, an outgrowth of male dominance and ego gratification." But Schwartz and Blumstein, Farrell notes, interpreted their findings in the opposite way: "We think women prefer it because intercourse requires the *equal* participation of both partners more than any sexual act. Neither partner only 'gives' or only 'receives.' Hence, women feel a shared *intimacy* during intercourse" Farrell concludes that "the findings are diametrically opposed, yet both interpretations could only consider the possibility that women favor intimacy and equality, and men favor ego gratification and dominance. This is distortion to fit a preconceived image—or, when it is applied to men, the new sexism."

Speaking as he often does of men in terms of father figures, Robert Bly comments on the same problem. In *Iron John* he writes "that something in the culture wants us to be unfair to our father's masculine side, find self-serving reasons for his generous words, assume he is a monster, as some people say all men are."

Blaming men for each and every male-female problem, as John Gordon suggested earlier, is not new. Shakespeare confirmed it in *As You Like It*: "O, that woman that cannot make her fault her husband's occasion, let her never nurse her child herself, for she will breed it like a fool!"

Indeed, sometimes male bashing seems to be nothing more than some feminists' celebration of their ability to make men wrong, an out-of-control demonstration of their skill in framing issues just the way they wish, to make men and only men say, "Oh, yes, I'm so sorry. I can see now that I must confront and take responsibility for my attitudes and actions. Forgive me please and assuage my guilt!" Sometimes it seems male bashers must be laughing incredulously to themselves, shaking their heads and saying, "When are these chumps going to wake up?"

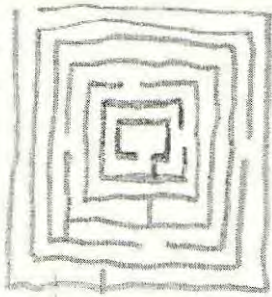
It almost goes without saying that along with its power to defend women from scrutiny and from encroachments on their domain, the



The wound that unifies all men is the wound of our disposability. The wound of believing that we were loveable if we sacrificed ourselves, if we died to help others. We are disposable as soldiers, as workers, as dads.

—Warren Farrell, 1991

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strong offense constituted by male bashing can have aggressive applications as well. Male bashing can be like carpet bombing, softening up men's determination to defend themselves, destroying male morale, and inclining men to surrender at the first sign of hostilities, paving the way for dictators, tyrants, and aggressors of all sorts.

The offensive uses of male bashing can be broad indeed. The more widely one can assert the idea of male beastliness and comparative female virtuousness, the more one can justify whatever special treatment of women one seeks, the more likely one is to find ready acceptance of even the weakest accusations—whether they be of employment discrimination, parental unfitness, sexual harassment, rape, child sexual abuse, date rape, domestic violence, or simple social or marital impropriety, to name but a few possibilities. On the topic of domestic violence, for example, R. L. McNeely suggests in the November-December 1987 issue of *Social Work* that the popular and aggressively asserted misconception that only men commit spousal abuse may be contributing to "men's social and legal defenselessness."

Why do men not protest more vigorously against male bashing? The answer seems to be that we have been made to think we deserve it. We are, after all, male. We are, on the ladder of life, at least a rung or two below women, closer to the worms while women consort with the angels. It's not our *fault* really. It's just, you know, that nasty testosterone. We begin early on to learn what Dr. Roy Schenk has called the Shame of Maleness. We learned that we are not sugar, not spice, not anything nice. In the 1990s, little boys are learning only a slight variation on that theme: they are "rotten, made out of cotton"; girls, on the other hand, are "dandy, made out of candy." While young boys are learning to devalue themselves as males, the only defense with which our supposedly male-dominated culture equips them is a feeble response: "Oh, yeah? Well, you've got cooties!" It is easy to see the difference between boys' allegations of what the girls *have*, and the female allegations of what the boys *are*. Males—inherently—are inferior. We deserve what we get.

The idea that we deserve what females dish out carries through to adulthood. As Bly observes, "A contemporary man often assumes that a woman knows more about a relationship than he does, allows a woman's moods to run the house, assumes that when she attacks him, she is doing it 'for his own good.' "

Apparently we even think we deserve bashing in a physical sense. In his book *Wife Beating: The Silent Crisis*, Roger Langley includes a chapter on battered men. He says that "the response most often heard—from both men and women—to a story of a man beaten by his wife is: 'Good for her.' "

Is male bashing really all that harmful or are men's objections to it—as they have been characterized—simply "whining"? That's a fair ques-

tion to which there is a fair answer. Male bashing wounds men; it injures boys; it harms everyone who lives with or near them; it hurts everyone who seeks to have a relationship with them. In short, it is detrimental to everyone. It further rends our already tattered social fabric.

If we can agree that the American family is in serious decline, we might observe that the weakest element of the family is its male component. Male bashing only tramples fatherhood and husbandhood more thoroughly. In *Iron John*, Robert Bly, without referring specifically to male bashing, explains how it can damage marriages. "Conscious fighting," he wrote, "is a great help in relationships between men and women A good fight gets things clear, and I think women long to fight and be with men who know how to fight well." A man who has been bashed and browbeaten into guilt, shame, and submission, of course, knows not how to fight at all.

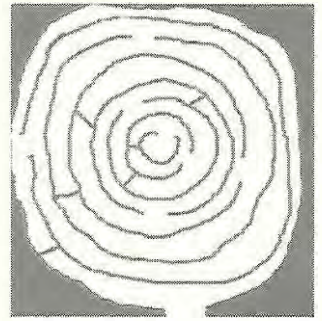
Male bashing also damages the young men families try to raise. In 1938, a social scientist named Tannenbaum articulated a theory of "labeling" that is still cited in the professional literature on juvenile delinquency:

There is a gradual shift from the definition of the specific acts as evil to a definition of the individual as evil, and that all his acts come to be looked upon with suspicion From the individual's point of view there has taken place a similar change. He has gone slowly from a sense of grievance and injustice, of being unduly mistreated and punished, to a recognition that the definition of him as a human being is different from that of other boys in his neighborhood, his school, street, community. The young delinquent becomes bad because he is defined as bad.

The process of making the criminal, therefore, is a process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing, making conscious and self-conscious. The person becomes the thing he is described as being.

Though Tannenbaum here refers to a boy being stigmatized in relation to other boys, we can perhaps see that male bashing stigmatizes all boys in relation to the rest of the human race. Researchers Myra and David Sadker found that "boys are more likely to be scolded and reprimanded in classrooms, even when the observed conduct and behavior of boys and girls does not differ." The effect of treating boys as if they are evil is to encourage and direct them toward evil.

Bly explains another deleterious effect of male bashing when he describes how undue harshness toward men saps our society of its vigor. "All the great cultures except ours preserve and have lived with images of . . . positive male energy Zeus energy has been steadily disintegrating decade after decade in the United States. Popular culture has



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just as women started asking why the "glass ceiling" is all men, we must start asking why the "glass cellars" are all men.

Death Professions 94% of all people killed in the workplace are men.

Draft Draft registration is a male-only club. In the 20th century, over 99% of people killed in wars have been men. It is only men who enter the service who are required to serve in combat if needed. Why are women getting combat options but not sharing in combat obligations?

Suicide Why do men commit suicide 5 times more often than women?

Hostages Why does no one call it sexist when Saddam Hussein releases only women and children? Why does no one object to making hostages an all-male club?

Homeless The street homeless are approximately 90% men.

Assassinations Nearly 100% of political assassinations have been of men.

Prisoners Approximately 92% of all prisoners are men.

Executions Over 99% of the executed are men.

Early Deaths In 1920, men died only one year sooner than women; in the 1990s men died seven to eight years sooner. Why?

Disease Men die sooner than women from all of the ten most lethal diseases.

—Warren Farrell

been determined to destroy respect for it, beginning with the 'Maggie and Jiggs' and 'Blondie and Dagwood' comics of the 1920s and 1930s, in which the man is always weak and foolish."

Perhaps the most severe manifestation of male bashing may be found in the fact that for decades if not centuries the suicide rate for young men has exceeded the rate for young women, and that in recent years the gap has widened dramatically to a ratio of about four to one. In 1985, Edward S. Gold's doctoral dissertation at the Virginia Consortium of Professional Psychology investigated the "personal need systems" of a group of college students who had demonstrated suicidal or near-suicidal behavior. Among the males he found a common denominator: "lowered ego strength." "It is entirely possible," Dr. Gold said, "that the women's movement has had a lot to do with that. There has been a constant barrage of finger-pointing, a tremendous amount of criticism of men on nearly every front." Keep in mind that a whole spectrum of suffering exists between happiness and the extreme of suicide. Male bashing, simply put, can make men miserable.

But now let's turn to the optimistic part of this essay. What can we do about male bashing? A story from Bly in *Iron John* poses the question nicely:

A friend told me [that] at about thirty-five, he began to wonder who his father really was. He hadn't seen his father in about ten years. He flew out to Seattle, where his father was living, knocked on the door, and when his father opened the door, said, "I want you to understand one thing. I don't accept my mother's view of you any longer."

"What happened?" I asked.

"My father broke into tears, and said, 'Now I can die.'"

Fathers wait. What else can they do?

What we can do is stop waiting and get on our own offensive, an offensive in which the best masculine values constitute both the medium and the message. Calmly, patiently, fiercely, resolutely, lovingly, we can isolate, identify, and demand the cessation of that which damages us unfairly—especially the pervasive notion of the inferiority of masculinity—and replace it with a balanced analysis of the wounded relationship between woman and man, including a proper recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of both genders.

As a kid growing up I "knew" that male-female problems among my parents' friends were always the man's fault. Only the women would talk about them, and I therefore heard only the woman's side of the story. Nora Ephron candidly admitted that one of the reasons she wrote *Heartburn*, the story of her failed marriage to Watergate sleuth Carl Bernstein, was to control the version of the story that was told. Unlike my father and his male friends, and unlike the strong-but-silent Bernstein, we can begin to speak our truth, to confront the falsehoods and

half-truths about us and resolve never to let our sons say what Bly reports hundreds of men have said to him: "My father never stood up to my mother, and I'm still angry about that."

We should not only assert our truth to our female companions and partners, but also hold it out for our brothers to acknowledge, embrace, support, and share. All of us doing men's work know the power and the strength that arises from a man who says, "I'm glad you listened. I'm glad you understand. I thought I had a 'personal' problem. I thought I was the only one who felt this way."

Good, strong women will want to join our campaign once they see that good, strong men are at long last taking action. They should be invited and welcomed. In some circles, against some offenders, they can in fact lead our effort.

Finally, as we rise to our feet and signal "Enough!" we can take pride in knowing that it is precisely because we are good and always trying to be better that we have listened so long to the allegations that we are bad.



**BOOKS ON
MEN'S
AWARENESS**

Francis Baumli, ed., *Men Freeing Men: Exploding the Myth of the Traditional Male*. Jersey City, NJ: New Atlantis, 1985. Eye-opening anthology of men's rights issues covering everything from the men-only draft to battered and murdered husbands.

Richard F. Doyle, *The Rape of the Male*. St. Paul, MN: Poor Richard's Press, 1976. An angry book full of horror stories of men abused by women and the judicial system.

Warren Farrell, *The Disposable Sex: The Myth of Male Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster, forthcoming. The only man elected three times to the board of the National Organization of Women (NOW) of New York City issues his long-awaited, heavily documented debunking of feminist claims that men hold most of the power in our society, concentrating on such topics as the draft, men as workers in 98 percent of hazardous jobs, perception that killing or beating up of men in movies is viewed as traditional entertainment, while even the slightest violence against women is viewed as intolerable, dangerous precedent-setting abuse. This book represents the first half of what Farrell originally intended as one volume called "The Ten Greatest Myths About Men." The rest of his material will appear in a book tentatively entitled *The Female FOE (Fear of Equality)*.

Roy Schenk, *The Other Side of the Coin: Causes and Consequences of Men's Oppression*. Madison, WI: Bioenergetics Press, 1982. Schenk blames the general belief in female spiritual superiority for many of men's social problems, especially their feelings of guilt for wanting sex. A strident cry for recognition that males are worse off in U.S. society than females are.

Kenneth Wetcher, Art Barker, and F. Rex McCaughtry, *Save the Males: Why Men are Mistreated, Misdiagnosed and Misunderstood*. Washington, DC: PIA Press, 1991. This reader-friendly book explores such men's health topics as workaholicism, post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression, and substance abuse. ♀