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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Men and boys are the forgotten casualty in gender warfare. This paper examines how a renewed understanding of marriage and family life can help boys and men succeed.

Boys and men today lag on a number of different factors. Males experience a higher dropout rate from school, they attend university less, they have a higher suicide rate, higher rates of homelessness and they are more likely today than in the past to live at home with their parents between the ages of 20 and 29. Canadians are marrying less, living together more, and experiencing higher rates of marital breakdown than in prior decades.

Research shows family breakdown (which amounts today to father absence) has detrimental effects. Conversely, fathers are an integral element of family life. In face of a feminist outlook which demonizes masculinity, men and marriage, an alternate thesis puts men and women in cooperative partnership and credits marriage with human flourishing.

This thesis, put forward by scholars such as Margaret Mead, George Gilder, David Popenoe and David Blankenhorn, among others, views marriage as a civilizing force for men, an institution created to include men in the procreative capability of women. Marriage allows men to compete with the “sexual superiority” of women, as per George Gilder.

A strong marriage culture brings untold benefits to men, women and children. However, the benefits of marriage for men and boys are the focal point of this paper. Married men earn more money, enjoy greater health benefits and have connectivity with the long-term future through children. Married men help raise children in unique ways. Boys learn appropriate masculinity, how to be less violent and how to respect and include women through healthy role modeling.

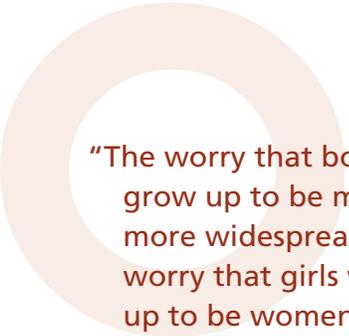
Recommendations fall into the realm of culture and community, not government public policy. These include changing attitudes to male/female relationships, changing attitudes toward the nature of sex in relationship and remembering that marriage was designed as a cultural institution that allows children to be affiliated with both parents, particularly fathers.

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## INTRODUCTION

It may not be raining men, but fall 2010 certainly brought a downpour of stories about masculinity, males, and what it means to be a man or a father. To name but a few, *Newsweek* ran a cover story in September called “Man up! The traditional male is an endangered species; it’s time to rethink masculinity.” *The Globe and Mail* featured articles about “the new masculinity” and failing boys. The *Ottawa Citizen* asked whether “fathers are the disposable parent” and *Maclean’s* jumped in with a cover on “Why our boys are growing up to be underachieving men.”<sup>1</sup>

These news stories reflect a statistical trend. Boys are starting to lag behind girls in some areas, like education. In others, boys have long been at risk. For example, our crime statistics are made up largely of men, ditto on some social problems, such as homelessness.



**“The worry that boys will not grow up to be men is much more widespread than the worry that girls will not grow up to be women”**

MARGARET MEAD, ANTHROPOLOGIST

An overlooked component in the boys-falling-behind phenomenon is family breakdown. Research shows family breakdown affects boys and men, sons, fathers and fathers-to-be. Yet today we ignore this research, and current statistics show we marry less and divorce and live common-law (which is less stable) more. All this amounts to a long-term burden on men, women, families and communities at large.

However, the point of this paper is not to say that family breakdown conclusively causes boys to lag. The point is to consider men and boys as the forgotten casualty in gender warfare and examine how a renewed understanding of marriage and family life can help boys and men succeed.

To examine the status of men (men as they are, rather than men as feminists would like them to be) we have to rethink the current feminist framework for assessing gender relations. This framework sees men as oppressors and masculinity as a threat. It has severely limited our understanding of boys, men and related social issues. George Gilder, an American writer is able to move beyond this in his book *Men and Marriage* (1986). Based on extensive research, he frames an interesting theory: That masculinity is less clearly biologically defined than femininity and that men need to be taught healthy masculinity. It is more difficult for boys to become men and the risks of failing to do so are greater, oftentimes taking the form of increased criminality and other assorted social and medical ills.

Research shows family breakdown (which amounts today to father absence) has detrimental effects. Conversely, fathers are an integral element of family life. Masculinity poorly expressed can indeed be threatening. But until such time as we clearly identify the causes of boys failing in school, or boys entering gangs, or underachieving men living at home and smoking dope, to name a couple of examples, we can expect to see more of the same problems.

## IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

The following statistics lay out the problem, from young boys to older men.

- Maturity differences exist between the sexes in kindergarten. According to Dr. Leonard Sax, author of three books on gender and education: “The largest study of brain development of children, conducted by the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md....shows very dramatically that the brain of the five-year-old boy — in terms of maturity, particularly in the language area — is at about the same place as the brain of a 3-and-a-half-year-old girl.”<sup>2</sup>
- A higher percentage of boys drop out of school. The drop out rate among young men was 12.2 per cent in 2004-2005, compared with 7.2 per cent for young women. The drop out rate is decreasing for both genders. However, it has always been higher for boys than girls. This presents problems in a new economy that demands higher education in order to get a job.<sup>3</sup>
- There are more women than men at university. The Canadian average is nearly three women to every two men on campus. Today, 59 per cent of Canadian undergraduates are women.<sup>4</sup>
- More men than women lost their jobs in the recent “mancession.”<sup>5</sup> In 2009 in Canada, the unemployment rate was 9.4 per cent for men and 7.0 per cent for women.<sup>6</sup>
- Men are more likely to be living at home with their parents today. Nearly double the rate of men between the ages of 20 and 29 live at home today as compared with 1981.<sup>7</sup>
- Male suicide rates are four times those of females and have been increasing since the 1950s.<sup>8</sup> In 2004, men committed suicide at a rate of 17.3 per 100,000, as contrasted with women at a rate of 5.4 per 100,000.<sup>9</sup>
- Men are denigrated in pop culture, in ads, television shows and media reports. This topic is the subject of a book called *Spreading Misandry: The teaching of contempt for men in popular culture* and it’s worth mentioning here.<sup>10</sup>
- Not often included in statistics regarding the status of men are marriage rates, which are likewise declining. “Over half of first unions are now common-law for Canadians between 20-29.”<sup>11</sup> In 2006, 69 per cent of families were married couples, a steady decline over the past 20 years.<sup>12</sup> Research shows that common-law relationships dissolve more readily.<sup>13</sup> When families break down, this amounts to father absence for children; single mother households still make up 80 per cent of single parent households (though lone father households are on the rise).<sup>14</sup>

## LOOKING BEHIND THE STATISTICS

Male-female relationships are competitive and adversarial when seen through a feminist lens. (What professions have more female CEOs? Does parliament have enough female representation?) Feminism likewise teaches that men hold greater power, which they use to discriminate against women. For the average feminist, marriage stands as evidence of patriarchal capitalist domination over women. For example, Arie Hoekman, a United Nations Population Fund representative from the Netherlands, told

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a colloquium in Mexico City in 2009 that family breakdown represented a triumph of human rights over the patriarchy.<sup>15</sup>

The tradition of feminist disdain for marriage and men is long and deep.<sup>16</sup> Yet the attitudes of feminists in universities don't match with the average woman. As Christina Hoff Sommers, an American writer recently put it in *Slate* magazine: "The feminists now in power in our universities and in Washington see the world differently—as a zero-sum struggle between men and women, in which their job is to fight for women. But that is not the attitude of most women, whether conservative or liberal in political outlook. Men are their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons; when they are in trouble, so are the women who care about them and, in many cases, depend on them."<sup>17</sup>

An alternate thesis puts men and women in partnership and credits marriage with human flourishing; furthermore, it places the balance of power firmly in female hands. This assessment more aptly reflects human nature and desires, since polls show the vast majority of young people not only desire to get married, but will eventually do so. For example, in 2008, 91 per cent of teen girls said they expected to get married, as did 89 per cent of teen boys. A similarly high percentage of adolescent boys (85 per cent) said they expected to stay with the same partner for life.<sup>18</sup>

## *What makes a man?*

Margaret Mead, the well-known anthropologist wrote in her 1949 book *Male and Female* that boys need to learn to become men. "In every known human society, every where in the world, the young male learns that when he grows up, one of the things which he must do in order to be a full member of society is to provide food for some female and her young."<sup>19</sup> She goes on: "The worry that boys will not grow up to be men is much more widespread than the worry that girls will not grow up to be women."<sup>20</sup>

This is an idea meticulously expounded upon by George Gilder in *Men and Marriage*. Gilder reflects on the wandering male, the man of the *Maclean's* cover story, deemed an underachiever. "Men lust, but they know not what for; they wander, and lose track of the goal; they fight and compete, but they forget the prize; they spread seed, but spurn the seasons of growth; they chase power and glory, but miss the meaning of life."<sup>21</sup> He goes on to say that it is through women that men can find their future and fulfillment: "Women conceive the future that men tend to flee."<sup>22</sup>

Gilder argues that the key to civilization lies in female hands. The "prime fact of life is the sexual superiority of women," and "the crucial process of civilization is the subordination of male sexual impulses and male biology to the long term horizons of female sexuality."<sup>23</sup> The main way to subordinate the male sexual impulse is through marriage. "Once the man marries he can change," writes Gilder. "He has to change, for his wife will not long have him if he remains in spirit a single man. He must settle his life, and commit it to the needs of raising a family...He must submit...to the values of maternal morality and futurity."<sup>24</sup>

Gilder suggests that female identity is written into a woman's life more so than male identity is written into a man's. "[F]emale sexuality is a long, unfolding process. Even if a woman does not in fact bear a child, she is continually reminded that she can..."<sup>25</sup>

As a result, women are more confident in their identity, while appropriate masculinity must be learned. "As a physical reality, the male sexual repertory is very limited. Men have only one sex organ and one sex

act, erection and ejaculation. Everything else is guided by culture and imagination. Other male roles, other styles of masculine identity must be learned or created," says Gilder.<sup>26</sup>

### *Enter marriage as a civilizing force*

Gilder writes that "the very most important roles of husband and father in a durable marriage are a cultural invention, necessary to civilized life, but ultimately fragile."<sup>27</sup>

**"Historically, marriage has been an attempt to tie the man to the mother-child bond. The mother-child bond has always been strong and the man has always been the weak link for all sorts of reasons we can think of, so society in its wisdom has set up this institution that says, look, how about if we arrange it so that the man hopefully stays with this woman and child throughout life"**

DAVID POPENOE, SOCIOLOGIST

Gilder, Mead and others see marriage as a civilizing institution, one that includes men in procreation, attaching them to their children for the sake of the mother, the father and any children. David Popenoe, professor of sociology at Rutgers University and author of several books and articles on fathers and family described marriage and men this way in an interview with CBC journalist Andy Barrie: "Historically that's what marriage has been all about. It's an attempt to tie the man to the mother-child bond. The mother-child bond has always been strong and the man has always been the weak link for all sorts of reasons we can think of, so society in its wisdom has set up this institution that says, look, how about if we arrange it so that the man hopefully stays with this woman and child throughout life."<sup>28</sup>

Marriage functioned as a civilizing force particularly when sex was reserved for within marriage. Gilder writes that men became more economically productive to get sex or love. "It [hard work] was the only way he can get sex from the women he wants, or marriage from the one he loves." He goes on: "The outcome is set by work and women. If he finds work that affirms his manhood and a girl who demands that his sexuality succumb to hers, he is likely to become a valuable and constructive citizen. If on the other hand, he sees long term work and marriage as a woman's world, he will tend to exploit both jobs and women as a short term way to money and pleasure."<sup>29</sup>

In short, winning women used to be about a lot more than wining and dining, buying flowers, or sending eCards. Hard work won the woman and made the man, but may also have been a factor in economic growth. Gilder argues that historically, sex followed achievement of manhood or accompanied it. In short, men had to work hard to establish a household such that marriage—and in a bygone era, sex—could occur. He cites academics who examine the industrial revolution in England and credit marriage (and social stigma around sex outside of marriage) in part, for that achievement. "A couple generally could not get married unless it was economically independent, with a separate household. Thus sexual energies were directly tied to economic growth and since strong sanctions were imposed on premarital sex, population growth was directly connected to economic productivity."<sup>30</sup>

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A recent study tying fidelity to wages appears to bear witness to the idea of men forming identity by acting as family provider. Christin Munsch, sociology Ph.D. candidate at Cornell University and author of the study found that “the more economically dependent a man is on his female partner, the more likely he is to cheat on her.”<sup>31</sup> Ironically, the study also found that men who made significantly more than their partners were also more likely to cheat. A major shortcoming of the study is that it included marriage and cohabiting relationships as if the two were comparable. Nonetheless, the correlation between provision and faithfulness is interesting.

As a result of greater female confidence in our sexuality, Gilder suggests that women must teach men. Women must “manipulate male sexual desire in order to teach men the long term cycles of female sexuality and biology on which civilization is based.”<sup>32</sup>

The current approach to sex turns this advice on its head. Sexual freedom, abortion and the birth control pill have all contributed to a climate in which women are lowered to the short-term sexual drives of men. And while boys are lagging girls on some critical points, this does not mean girls are thriving. To the contrary, Dr. Sax, in his book *Girls on the Edge* discusses girls and self-objectification, sexting and a general state of heightened anxiety even amongst high achieving girls.

Dr. Miriam Grossman too, a veteran campus psychiatrist at UCLA wrote her book *Unprotected: A campus psychiatrist reveals how political correctness in her profession endangers every student* because she was seeing high rates of suicidal, depressed and anxious female students in her office. Grossman slowly learned that risky sexual behaviour was to blame in many cases. One night stands or “friends with benefits” affected young women more than young men, landing the girls in her office for psychiatric counselling.<sup>33</sup>

While a consciousness is slowly awakening that girls are negatively affected by sexual licentiousness, we’re nowhere close to examining how it might harm boys and men. Certainly, due to the birth control pill amongst other factors, the destigmatization of sex outside of marriage is a bell that cannot be unringed. Still, an enterprising economist might consider examining the connection between sexual freedom and the underachieving male. In the *Maclean’s* cover story, “Alysse,” a 23-year old political science graduate describes how her female friends are “constantly looking to improve,” while her male friends are “more concerned with the here and now.” She recounts that the men in her life appear to say “I get paid enough and that’s all I’m concerned with.”<sup>34</sup>

Why men say this remains the million dollar question. However, the fact that motivation to tie the knot, build a family and work hard to support that family is lower than it used to be cannot be disputed.

## IDENTIFYING BENEFITS OF FAMILY FOR MEN

### *Husbands, fathers: A distinct, non-negotiable role*

If you asked Brian Murray, general manager of the Ottawa Senators, what he thought marriage and family can do for hockey players, you might be surprised at the answer. “You’re more committed. You have something to go home to,” he recently told a reporter. He went on: “I think these guys start to realize that there are other people depending on what they do with their lives.”<sup>35</sup> Another sports reporter writing about Ottawa Senator Mike Fisher’s wedding this past summer commented that marriage improved some hockey players’ games. “The fact is many a player has improved his game after getting married.”<sup>36</sup>

It's not likely that even the marvels of marriage can save a bad hockey season, but research shows that marriage and fatherhood do play a critical role in developing men.

UC Berkeley and Nobel laureate economist George Akerlof identified how fatherhood impacts men in a lecture ten years ago entitled "Men without children," saying "the impact on society of men neither marrying nor living with children" was significant.

Conversely, he found married fathers are:

- More attached to the labour force
- On average earn higher wages each year they are married
- Have less substance abuse
- Commit less crime
- Are less likely to be the victims of crime
- Have better physical and psychological health
- Live longer
- And are less likely to be victims of a serious accident.<sup>37</sup>

Married men work harder. "In short, married men are substantially more likely than their single counterparts to receive high performance ratings: high performance ratings, in turn, appear to increase promotion probabilities so that married men are also more likely to be promoted."<sup>38</sup> Marriage helps men keep commitments. "Males who marry and males who get and keep jobs, which are circumstances of clear advantage for child rearing, share a common foundation—they keep commitments. Such men come from common environments—they had fathers who wed their mothers."<sup>39</sup>

For children, a large and growing body of literature identifies that "all other things being equal, father absence means children are two to three times more likely than peers with married fathers to experience:

- Greater infant mortality
- Poorer physical health
- Greater likelihood of depression
- Poorer school readiness and performance
- Poorer cognitive, motor and verbal skills
- Highly elevated probability of living in poverty
- Highly elevated (120 to 165 per cent) risks of sexual abuse
- School drop-out
- Teen child-bearing

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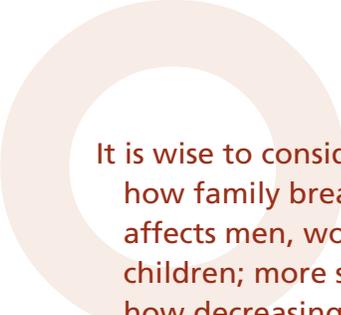
- Criminal/violent behaviour
- Elevated likelihood of being incarcerated
- Drug use
- Child obesity
- Decreased feelings of adequacy and confidence
- Lowered demonstrations of empathy toward others<sup>40</sup>

Both daughters and sons who grow up with fathers experience many benefits. For the purposes of this paper, the points below focus on the positives for boys:

Boys who grow up with dads are less likely to be violent. They have their masculinity affirmed and learn from their fathers how to channel their masculinity and strength in positive ways. Fathers help children understand proper male sexuality, hygiene and behavior in age-appropriate ways.<sup>41</sup>

The *American Journal of Sociology* finds that, “societies with father-present patterns of child socialization produce men who are less inclined to exclude women from public activities than their counterparts in father-absent societies.”<sup>42</sup>

And Dr. Popenoe explains, “[f]athers are far more than just “second adults” in the home. Involved fathers – especially biological fathers – bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring. They provide protection and economic support and male role models. They have a parenting style that is significantly different from that of mothers, and the difference is important in healthy child development. According to the evidence, fathers make important contributions to their children’s intellectual competence, pro-social and compassionate behaviour, and psychological well-being.”<sup>43</sup>



**It is wise to consider both how family breakdown affects men, women and children; more specifically how decreasing marriage rates, increased rates of cohabitation and endemic rates of sex outside stable relationships of any kind may affect other elements of life and community**

## CONCLUSION

Where feminists believe the institution of marriage oppresses women, a more rational disposition sees marriage as an inclusive force that brings men into closer contact with women and children such that all participants can thrive. A prominent non-religious, non-partisan American marriage scholar, David Blankenhorn, says the fundamental relational gap to bridge in our society today is between men and women.<sup>44</sup> One way in which to achieve this is through marriage. Feminists will continue to hold this in disdain, with complaints that this values women only as mothers. This limited perspective ignores the positive attributes marriage brings men and women, as well as ignoring human desire. Most people desire lifelong marriage, not a series of short-term, fanciful and inevitably superficial pseudo-commitments. And where women are mothers, marriage

allows children to know both mother and father and is unrivalled as the best way to raise them.

In today's society, as family breakdown is more common, it is wise to consider both how family breakdown affects men, women and children; more specifically how decreasing marriage rates, increased rates of cohabitation and endemic rates of sex outside stable relationships of any kind may affect other elements of life and community.

Blankenhorn defines marriage this way: "In all or nearly all human societies, marriage is socially approved sexual intercourse between a woman and a man, conceived both as a personal relationship and as an institution, primarily so that children resulting from the union are understood to be emotionally, morally, practically and legally affiliated with both of the parents."<sup>45</sup>

Since women are more obviously affiliated with any children, marriage has the cultural benefit of tying men to family. This in turn brings long term benefit to men. And the long term presence of men helping raise families brings long term benefits to women.

In short, where the status of men is lackluster, so too will be the status of women. A renewed vision of male-female relationships, and a renewed approach to marriage brings with it benefits for all.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Recommendations are primarily intended for communities, family and extended families, not government.*

### ***Place a higher value on marriage***

Value placed on marriage will ensure that men are included in families and present for children, something that research shows is critical both for the children and society at large. Marriage is desired by teenage boys and girls alike. Consideration for the personal and societal benefits of marriage should be included in high school.

Many areas of social policy, for example, homelessness, fail to speak to root causes and long term solutions. Those living on the street are most often men and most often estranged from family. Though the situation is complex, a long-term understanding of the importance of family relationships could ensure fewer people find themselves alone without family support. (This is not to say that every person living on the street can be reunited with family; rather, it is to point to the importance of family relationships in preventing some social problems.)

### ***Discourage divorce in all but the most severe cases***

Divorce is hard for many adults and is always a loss for the children. It is most often a grave loss for fathers. Couples should be encouraged to stay married through church support, in secular counseling, and through a general societal recognition that though marriage is hard work, divorce doesn't always bring happiness.

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## *Stress cooperation in male/female relationships*

For men, this may mean greater emphasis on working harder and thinking long term. Ideally, life-long monogamy and sex only within marriage would be encouraged. Male leaders in the community should stress this and mentor young men who may believe that multiple short term sexual encounters increases their “masculinity.”

For women, this may mean placing more positive expectations on men, particularly prior to marriage. This may involve not falling victim to our culture of male denigration alongside one of female victimhood. This requires more empowered women, not less and does not imply a return to *Leave it to Beaver*; rather involves a complementary accommodation of male and female characteristics and desires in conjunction with talents and skills.

## *Remember the definition of marriage*

David Blankenhorn defines marriage this way: “in all or nearly all human societies, marriage is socially approved sexual intercourse between a woman and a man, conceived both as a personal relationship and as an institution, primarily so that children resulting from the union are understood to be emotionally, morally, practically and legally affiliated with both of the parents.”<sup>46</sup> ■

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