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Commentary**Male Backlash Muddles and Misses Facts**

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First, it was Iron John running around the woods. Now, it's a Harvard professor intent on slighting women and a male group complaining about paternity obligations. Kimberly Gadette recommends they all "wake up and smell the diapers."

Editor's Note: The following is a commentary. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily the views of Women's eNews.

(WOMENSENEWS)--Every now and then, Western history belches out some group of men who protest their miserably high status in life, claiming that society is treating them unfairly.

I'm almost embarrassed for them. It's as if Halliburton, having been granted contracts in the billions of dollars to do work in Iraq and New Orleans, would feel slighted if it lost the job to work on the asbestos problem in my neighbor's guesthouse.

To preserve their maligned manhood, Robert Bly and the Iron John movement of the 1990s sent men into the woods to beat their drums and chests in order to rediscover personal pride in their manstuff.

Now we have Harvey C. Mansfield, Harvard professor and author of "Manliness," the testy, testosterone-infused justification of male assertion over the weaker sex published by Yale University Press last month. Ostensibly, it's a rebuttal to feminism. But the injured tone of the book makes me wonder: Did some overpowering 5-foot-2, eyes-of-blue babe once turn him down for a date?

"Drawing from science, literature and philosophy, Mansfield examines the layers of manliness . . . Our 'gender-neutral' society does not like it but cannot get rid of it," proclaims the book-jacket blurb.

"Women show a secret liking for housework and diaper changing," Mansfield writes at one point. "Men look down on women's work," he says elsewhere.

From layers of beaded necklaces of the male Masai warrior to the high collars and cravats of Frenchmen leery of the guillotine, men have historically felt the need to protect their necks. Today, in the modern war room of the business world, we see the same instinct translated into the male executive's silk tie.

But what sort of war does Mansfield see the male executive fighting today? Perhaps it is his own war against women gaining any more ground? "Now that women are equal, they should be able to accept being told that they aren't, quite," he tells us.

He thinks that the business world is doing just fine on the male-female score, describing it as "gender-neutral." If you find this out of touch, consider his own proud biography: "He has hardly left Harvard since his first arrival in 1949 and has been on the faculty since 1962."

'Rise Up From Your Endowed Chair'

Mr. Mansfield, rise up from your endowed chair. Take a walk outside of your ivory towers of academia, maybe to a company, any company. According to the 2005 statistics from the Census Bureau, women on average earn 77 cents to each dollar paid to their male co-workers.

Or maybe take a stroll over to a nearby Fortune 500 company, where a recent study by Catalyst, a women's research and advocacy group, finds that the percentage of female board directors has inched forward by just one-half of a percentage point per year. At that rate women won't be even with men in the boardroom until 2076.

In his book, Mansfield frequently refers to "government subsidized daycare" that lightens the load of the working woman. Government subsidized daycare? Being news to me, I did some research, but only came up with a few abandoned state programs from the 1990s.

Here's an excerpt from a 2000 House Ways and Means Green Book, "Child Care," offering data from 1995: "64 percent of families with employed mothers paid for child care for their preschool-aged children. Nonpaid child care was most typically provided by relatives."

Harvey? Hello? Wake up and smell the diapers!

Nor does Mansfield know about a glass ceiling. Why should he? The only glass he sees is directly under his feet. And why would any man standing on top want to go below? Isn't going below . . . beneath him?

Enough About Harvey

But enough about Harvey. On to more whine with cheese from the National Center for Men, an advocacy group founded in 1987 to help right the wrongs of individuals and families who have been damaged by discrimination against men. They have issues--oh boy, do they have issues! Here are some quotes from their Web site:

"Men die about eight years earlier than women."

Though no supporting facts are given, it sounds about right to me. To maintain good health, doctors recommend a low-fat diet and exercise. Consuming cheese doodles and beer and lolling on the couch does not make for longevity. Darn the luck, if only men liked housework. By getting off that sofa and washing a floor, scrubbing a toilet, raising a kid, they, too, might live longer.

"In almost every category of disease, men suffer more often than women."

Again, no scientific data is offered. If males do indeed have special powers in math and science--as Mansfield's pal and ex-boss, deposed Harvard President Lawrence Summers, has been known to claim--might we have some evidence to support such an assertion? Facts, fellas, facts.

"When it comes to unwanted, unborn children, men have responsibilities without rights. A man's life can be held hostage to an unplanned pregnancy, but his female partner will have complete control over her reproductive life and future. He can't force motherhood on her . . ."

Actually, in South Dakota, with the newly-passed anti-abortion law, he most certainly can.

Roe v. Wade for Men

The NCM--or, as I call it, the "National Center for Milquetoasts"--has recently filed a lawsuit in a U.S. district court in Michigan on behalf of Matt Dubai, a 25-year-old computer programmer who disputes having to pay child support for his 7-month-old daughter. Officially trademarked as "Roe v. Wade for Men," the group argues that since the mother claimed to be both infertile and on birth control, the resulting pregnancy was not Dubai's fault and he should not be held monetarily accountable.

Note to men: If the woman you're dating says she's both infertile and taking birth control, perhaps wearing a condom is a good idea until you can determine whether she's Ms. Right or Ms. Taken.

As to family issues, yes, sometimes a woman may unjustly take a man for a ride. However, there are legitimate avenues for men to pursue--state registries, nonprofit educational groups, state representatives, family law attorneys--if they feel they are being deprived of their parental rights. But just how "manly" is it to want to be free and clear of all paternal obligations?

Perhaps like our president, there is a pervasive sense of irresponsibility that's creeping into our countrymen's psyches. Wage a war but have no exit strategy; take no accountability for the thousands of dead and wounded; and pay very little, if anything, toward veterans' health benefits when these broken men come limping home.

"Manliness favors war," Mansfield concludes at the end of his book. If that's the ultimate definition of manliness . . . womanhood has never looked lovelier.

Kimberly Gadette is a humor writer based in Portland, Ore. Working on her second novel, her columns and articles entail a deep dismemberment of topics including politics, sex, pop culture, dating, male sports and dogs. Currently juggling seven columns, she's been published over 60 times in the last year in publications from the West Coast to the East, as well as internationally.

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