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"Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win great triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

—Theodore Roosevelt

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Mean-Spirited, Cruel and Ugly

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Editorial

Heteropatriarchal Gynophobes!

Amid the flurry of college rankings that appears at the start of each school year, a curious and, at Dartmouth, controversial college listing appeared last month. The September 2000 issue of *Men's Health* magazine featured a special report on the "Best and Worst Campuses for Men." *Men's Health* identified "the 10 most male-friendly colleges in America" and "the 10 most antimalle schools in America," and suggested that its readers attend only the former.

The project, while not entirely serious, at least calls attention to the special concerns of men, a shrinking minority among students, in academe. In 1997, full-time college enrollments were 45 percent male and 55 percent female—and the U.S. Department of Education predicts that the ratio of boys' entry into college will continue to worsen.

Despite this, the prevailing view among educators is that girls are disadvantaged, and systematically victimized, in American schools—a view persuasively challenged by Christina Hoff Sommers in her recent book, *The War Against Boys*—and so require "Take Your Daughter to Work Day" as well as special preferences in college admissions, to increase female enrollment. Former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch, now a scholar at the Brookings Institution, asks, "When will it be fair? When women are 60 percent or 75 percent of college enrollments? Perhaps it will be fair when there are no men at all."

Dartmouth College was named one of the ten most antimalle schools—a designation that surprised few Dartmouth men. After all, Dartmouth has argued that forcing fraternities to accept women would lead to "norms of civilized behavior" in the otherwise brutish all-male houses. Dartmouth's well-financed Women's Resource Center rails against the heteropatriarchal gynophobes that they consider most students to be, through such programs as last winter's "Sex Series" (see TDR, 4/10/00) and various posters and fliers touting dubious and accusatory statistics.

"Take Back the Night" marches charge the majority of male students with complicity in rape and sexual violence (every man's a potential rapist, they say; it's part of the patriarchal culture)—not to mention the "Frat Rape" accusation that's chalked on the sidewalks from time to time. And while campus gynocentrists can throw around these accusations, there's no similar leeway for men. Offhand remarks or jokes can create a "hostile environment" or "stigmatize" women—and can be punished through official disciplinary action. After all, women may be the majority, they may be the beneficiaries of special academic programs and institutional support, but they remain, by definition, an oppressed minority. So men at Dartmouth and similar schools live, as Sommers has written, "in a state of permanent culpability."

And so Dartmouth's administrators expressed shock at the *Men's Health* article. "The kind of impression one might get from reading" the magazine, WRC Director Giavanna

Munafò told the *Daily Dartmouth*, "is that [political correctness] won the battle zone at Dartmouth and the old boy network lost" (she thinks that's false). Some college officials laughably scrutinized *Men's Health's* methodology, saying it didn't constitute a scientific study. But the overall consensus was that the notion of Dartmouth as antimalle is "ludicrous," as Senior Associate Dean of the College Dan Nelson put it.

"In the period of time that I've been affiliated with Dartmouth," he said, "there has been less pressure on students to conform to stereotypical gender behavior than there used to be—and that's a good thing for men and for women."

The belief that gender is a purely social construction—that there isn't any inherent difference between the sexes is a common, and favorite, one in academe. And so there's a belief that's what badly constructed by the male culture can be reconstructed in a preferable way. So schools and colleges like Dartmouth endeavor to liberate students from "stereotypical gender roles," and especially to extract boys and men from the "straightjacket of masculinity."

"We must raise boys more like we raise girls," advises Gloria Steinem. "We've deconstructed the old version of manhood," Barney Brawler, director of the Boys' Project at Tufts University, told *Education Week*. "But we've not [yet] constructed a new version." Last spring, the Boys' Project held workshops on "Reinventing Boyhood."

But all these social engineers are becoming increasingly frustrated by important recent developments in genetics, endocrinology, and neuroscience, which have identified some biological correlates of "stereotypical gender behavior." A recent issue of *Scientific American* explored children's play preferences as hormonally determined. "It appears that perhaps the most important factor in the differentiation of males and females is the level of exposure to various sex hormones early in life," wrote psychologist Doreen Kimura of Simon Fraser University. Laura Allen, a neuroanatomist at UCLA, has discovered various structural differences between men's and women's brains. What these discoveries and others suggest is what many take as common knowledge—that differences in behavior and personality between men and women may be innate, not socially conditioned.

Andrew Grossman, on page 10 of this issue, reviews the curious case of a boy who, after a botched circumcision, was (under the advice of an academic sexologist) raised as a girl. He was miserable and exhibited male tendencies throughout childhood and adolescence, until finally discovering the truth. Now he's an older married man, with three adopted children, and works in a slaughterhouse.

It's perhaps surprising that a community—academe—that so vigorously touts "difference" would systematically endeavor to erase one of our most basic differences. ■

