

## Yo! Wake up, boys!

Keith Norbury, Oak Bay News, October 2004

One of the most alarming trends of recent years is that the proportion of males entering university has steadily declined.

It has reached the point where only out four out of 10 university students have penises. This isn't just the case in Canada, but everywhere in the English-speaking world.

More alarming than that is the fact that males w account for fewer than half the students enrolled in law schools and medical schools.

It's a story I've been meaning to investigate for some time. Yet whenever I bring this up, staff members roll their eyes and say such things as: "Ah, the poor men!"

They miss my point. I'm not asking for sympathy for my sex. I simply think its a fascinating phenomenon that will have huge repercussions - future generations - and by fascinating; I mean "scary."

It may even result in a paradigm shift, which as scary a concept as you can imagine.

The women in my office don't see this as a big deal. Even if men don't go to university, they'll still earn more money than women by working as plumbers, carpenters and mechanics.

I could live with that - but what I've heard anecdotally is that the boys aren't even taking that kind of training. We have a shortage of skilled trades. I suspect it's because many modern lads don't want to get their hands dirty any more than they want them to touch a book.

My suspicion is they all want to become video game designers and computer hackers-which may explain why computer science remains one the few areas of study at university where men continue to outnumber women by a wide margin. I don't pretend to know the reasons why so any young men eschew higher education. One young guy I know quite well told me: "Dad, you think the only way to be successful is to go to university."

He was wrong. I don't think that at all. But I do think higher education is a path offering better rewards than dropping out of high school, sleeping past noon every day and hoping for the best. Anyway, this isn't a new phenomenon. It's been decades in the making. Six years ago, Crawford Kilian (who is a college instructor and science fiction writer) wrote a piece entitled "A Culture of Louts" in the *Georgia Straight*. You can imagine what that story was about!

Kilian asked Pat Clarke, a former president of the B.C. Teachers' Federation, "What has changed in schools since the early 1980s?" Clarke's response: "That is a bit

of a puzzle. But there's a pervasively influential boy culture', and some boys are allowing this to marginalize them."

Boys will be boys - but I'm not convinced that boys are any more deranged by their hormones than members of my generation or that they're any lazier. We grew up the '70s, for God's sake.

Somehow, though, enough of us boys managed to get our acts together to find meaningful employment as the nation's doctors, lawyers, plumbers and newspaper commentators. My fear is that the next generation of men will deprive themselves of those opportunities. I wouldn't trade my university degree - and the 13 meandering years it took to earn it - for anything. Yet too many young men nowadays fail to see the value of higher education. Even if they do, they have a harder time obtaining it. As Kilian's piece noted, girls tend to earn better grades in high school. So it's no surprise that, as university entrance requirements have become more stringent, fewer boys have achieved the necessary grades.

My suspicion is the grade squeeze is only one factor. We can spread the blame around a whole lot more. Maxim magazine. Jack Black. The World Wrestling Federation. Video games. Rap music. EPSN. The Internet. Marijuana. Beer. Boys have many distractions today. My sense is that many of them also have a little too much attitude. (I'm generalizing, of course. So please, grandmothers, don't write to tell me about the wonderful exceptions. I know they're out there.)

The other day, I happened across an interesting documentary on PBS (or was it Spike TV?), where a scholarly young man whose name I didn't catch, spoke eloquently (yet sadly) of how young men have come to see themselves in the world. They're stoic, yet full of false bravado. They're inspired by trash-talking role models who show little respect for anyone else - least of all other men. In short, he described the louts and yobs from a scene out of *A Clockwork Orange*.

Yet the young scholar also praised sensitive New Age guys such as former home-run king Mark McGwire, for tearfully establishing a centre for abused children and for his camaraderie with rival slugger Sammy Sosa. The subtext was that modern young men need more role models like them and fewer like rappers and pro wrestlers. I nearly gagged as I swallowed the point.

I'm not convinced that today's young men are that anti-social. Indeed much of the disconnect is just good-old-fashioned old-fogeyism on the part of older men who've forgotten what yobs they could be. Many of us got on with our lives and educations once the testosterone levels started to stabilize.

I'm concerned, though, that today's young men won't give themselves that chance.

They face a future where women will dominate respected professions such as medicine, law and publishing - because they will have learned the critical thinking skills needed to run the world. The rest of the work will be left to the robots.

So what are the men going to do all day?

My guess is that, by day, they'll sleep. Then they'll get up and get stoned, bash each other on the head and pass out. Then again, they might be put in charge of raising the kids if any of the educated women in their lives will trust them - or if any women will have kids with them. Women aren't dumb, as their university entrance scores attest, so they will find other ways to procreate. The robots can tend to the kids just fine.

The human race won't require men and the fantasies of radical feminists will become reality. It doesn't have to happen, boys, if you wake up, lose the attitude and educate yourselves. Yo!