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"A must-read for any parent of boys."—**DR. MEHMET OZ**, Professor and Vice Chairman,  
New York Presbyterian Hospital, Columbia University

# boys adrift

**THE FIVE FACTORS DRIVING THE GROWING EPIDEMIC OF  
UNMOTIVATED BOYS AND UNDERACHIEVING YOUNG MEN**

video games • teaching methods  
prescription drugs • environmental toxins  
devaluation of masculinity

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD FROM THE AUTHOR

**Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D.**

*Author of *Why Gender Matters**

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## END RESULT

# *Failure to Launch*

Let's start with a lawyer joke.

So there's this lawyer.

He lives in a big mansion in a really expensive suburb.  
His toilet clogs up.  
He tries using the plunger.  
Doesn't do any good.  
So he calls the plumber.

The plumber arrives,  
fixes the toilet,  
and writes up the bill.

The lawyer takes one look at the bill and protests.

"You've put down a charge of \$250 for labor,"  
the lawyer says.

"But you spent less than half an hour doing that repair.  
You're billing more than \$500 an hour!

That's a lot more than I bill my clients, and I'm a lawyer!"

The plumber nods sympathetically.

"I used to be a lawyer too,"  
he says.<sup>1</sup>

## *What Happened to Money?*

NEAL BROWN started a plumbing business more than twenty years ago, not far from my home in northern MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND, near the border with FREDERICK COUNTY.

In recent years, Mr. BROWN has had trouble finding any young men who want to learn the plumbing trade or any trade.

"We approached FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS,"

Mr. BROWN told me.

"We asked them whether they would help us set up an apprenticeship program in plumbing.

They said fine, provided that we could recruit twelve students in the county for the program.

Now FREDERICK COUNTY has over forty thousand students spread over sixty schools.

How hard could it be to find twelve students, just twelve, not twelve hundred, just twelve?"

"How hard was it?"  
I asked.

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“We found ten.

In the whole county, only ten students wanted to learn plumbing.

Ten boys, no girls.

We couldn’t persuade any girls to give it a try.”

“I guess the idea of  
fixing backed-up toilets  
didn’t appeal to the girls,”  
I said.

“Actually, we hoped that at least some girls would be  
interested,”

Mr. BROWN said.

“We figured they might like the independence of being  
able to take care of plumbing problems without having  
to call someone.

But we didn’t get any girls.

Not a one.”

“I understand that  
girls have a better sense of smell  
than boys have,”<sup>2</sup>  
I said.

“So what did the school district say  
when you told them you only had ten students?”

“They said fine.  
Ten was enough.

And the need for trained plumbers is so great in the county,  
we told every one of those boys during the first week of training that  
we could guarantee them a job if they just stuck with the program.

Even an apprentice plumber can earn fifty thousand dollars a year  
right now if you’re willing to put in some hours.

And a master plumber . . .”

“What does it take to be a master plumber?”  
I asked.

“Four years as an apprentice,

two years as a journeyman,

*THEN YOU TAKE THE EXAM.*

*If you pass, you’re a master plumber,”*

Mr. BROWN explained.

“And a master plumber can earn how much?”

“Easily eighty thousand dollars a year, and that’s just working  
forty hours a week.

If you’re willing to put in the overtime hours, you can crack one  
hundred thousand dollars, no sweat.”

“Without a college degree?”

“Without a college degree,”

Mr. BROWN said.

“And we explained this to every boy in the class.

We said, just stick with this,

just learn this trade,

and you are literally set for life.

No college loans to pay back.

You’re set.

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Your job is secure.

No engineer in BOMBAY,

no factory clerk in BEIJING is going to be able to fix somebody’s toilet in  
BUCKEYSTOWN, MARYLAND.

If you learn this trade and you

do honest work,

you are set for life.”

“What happened?”

I asked.

“After one month, more than half the boys had quit.

They just had no interest in working.

They just didn’t care.

Earning lots of money just seems to have no appeal to them.

We were down to three boys by the middle of October.

That’s when the district shut the program down.”

“I would have thought  
young men would have been motivated  
by the prospect of earning lots of money straight out of high school.

Not many eighteen-year-olds can  
earn fifty thousand dollars a year,”

I said.

“I would have thought so too,”  
Mr. BROWN said.

## John Craft's Dilemma

JOHN CRAFT\* never went to college.

He started working in home construction right out of high school, thirty-five years ago.

Twenty years ago, he started his own company specializing in custom remodeling of luxury homes.

It's been a good business for him.

“Most of the jobs I do now start at half-a-million.

Quite a few run more than a million dollars,”  
he told me.

“And I've got a waiting list of work that's more than a year long.

Now of course I don't take all that money home.

Most of it goes for expenses, subcontractors, all that stuff.”

But JOHN isn't complaining.

His personal income is  
more than three hundred thousand dollars a year.

Not bad for a guy who never went to college.

But JOHN has a problem.

He can't find good help.

“It's been more than ten years since I've been able to hire any young man born in the U.S.A. and keep him for more than a month.

- Number one,  
*these young guys nowadays have no idea of craftsmanship.*

- Number two,  
*they don't have any interest in learning.*

None whatsoever.”

JOHN has a crew of six men,  
all in their forties and fifties,  
most of whom have been with him for ten years or more.

\*This man's name has been changed to protect his confidential information.

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“I figure I'll keep everybody together another five, seven years, ten years tops, build up my retirement fund, then I'm done.

When my guys are ready to retire, I won't have any way to replace them.”

He paused.

“Boys today are lazy,”

he said at last.

“They don't want to work.

They'd rather play video games.

They just don't have any motivation.”

“But human nature can't change in one generation,”

I said.

“If boys today are lazy, it's because our generation or our society made them that way.

So what did we do wrong?

What should we be doing differently?”



MILLER & LONG is the largest concrete contractor in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

- They built the huge new stadium for the CAROLINA PANTHERS.
- When the INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE decided to build new headquarters, MILLER & LONG poured the concrete for their 1,275,000-square-foot complex.

In recent years,

- Brunei,
- Egypt,
- Ethiopia,
- Ivory Coast,
- Singapore, and
- Turkey

have all built new embassies in Washington, DC, and guess who was hired to pour the concrete in each case:

MILLER & LONG.

Miller & Long has also built a small clinic in El Salvador.

- That seems a bit strange, because MILLER & LONG does no business outside the United States.
- They are headquartered in BETHESDA, MARYLAND.
- So why did this huge company build a clinic in a foreign country, at their own expense?

“More than three-quarters of our workforce is from EL SALVADOR,”

is the answer I received  
from MYLES GLADSTONE,  
vice president for human resources  
at MILLER & LONG.

“They live here, but they still have family back home, and they’re naturally concerned about their family back home.

Building this clinic was one way we can support their community.

MILLER & LONG also built about one hundred homes in EL SALVADOR after the big earthquakes in January and February 2001.

The company spent a lot of money on that project.

But Miller & Long wasn’t the only company down there.

- All the big American construction companies were down there, helping out.
- All the companies get a big chunk of their work force from El Salvador.”

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“So you have trouble  
recruiting young people from the United States?”

“That’s right,”  
he says.

“We’re doing several ongoing projects to try to recruit young people, women and men, to get them to check us out.

We work with the local high schools.

We also recruit men and women who have just been released from prison.”

“How successful have those programs been?”  
I asked.

“Terrible,”  
he said.

“We have maybe half a dozen success stories.  
They’re the poster boys for these projects.  
Only half a dozen.”

“Half a dozen out of how many recruits?”

I asked.  
“Fifty?”  
One hundred?”

“Hundreds,”  
he said.

This was starting to sound familiar.

- I first heard about MILLER & LONG’s good works in El Salvador from JEFF DONOHOF, a neighbor of mine.
- He and his relatives operate a large commercial contracting company, DONOHOF CONSTRUCTION COMPANY.
- For several years, Mr. DONOHOF made valiant efforts to recruit young people to enter the trades:  
to become
  - an electrician,
  - a plumber,
  - a welder, or
  - other skilled craftsman.

He would begin his talks by asking all the students:  
“How many of you plan on going to college?”

Almost all the students would raise their hands.

Then he would ask,  
“How many of you can tell me why you’re going to college?  
What do you want to do that requires a college education?”

Usually only about five or six students raise their hands  
to answer this question.

So he would continue:

- “For those twenty of you who plan on going to college, but don’t know why you’re going to college, I’d like to make a few suggestions before you take on twenty or thirty or forty thousand dollars of college debt.
- I’d like you to consider a career in the trades.
- If you become a licensed electrician or carpenter, you can earn as much or more than your friends who go to college.
- You’ll be earning good money right out of high school, and
- you won’t have any college loans to pay back.”

He seldom found any student who was interested.

**In fact he's given up doing the talks.**

"I just don't get it,"

Mr. DONOHUE told me.

"Most of these kids have no particular interest in going to college.

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They can't even tell you why they're going to college.

But then **when you explain that there are good jobs in the trades that don't require a college education,**

**they just give you a blank look.**

**I don't understand it."**

"How come

nobody wants to go into the trades?"

I asked.

Mr. DONOHUE replied:

**I think it starts with the parents, and the teachers.**

**They look down their noses at what they call "blue collar" work.**

- They think we're just digging holes and throwing bricks around.
- They don't have a clue that modern construction techniques are more high-tech than most desk jobs.
- We upload the architect's plans directly into our earthmoving equipment, which uses laser guidance and GPS systems to grade the site to extremely close tolerances.
- **It's more like brain surgery than it is like building sand castles at the beach.**
- **But the parents and the teachers think that if a kid doesn't go to college, that kid's a failure.**
- **We require smart people, highly motivated people who totally understand what they're doing.**
- *We're just not able to find those people in this country any more.*

跟我2018年上課時, Evans 老師說的是一樣的

- So **we have to hire people from El Salvador or from Mexico or Guatemala, and train them.**

Mr. DONOHUE isn't alone in his observation.

- The social critic Dr. CHARLES MURRAY observed early in **2007** that **many high school students from middle-class families**
- **"go to college because their parents are paying for it and college is what children of their social class are supposed to do after they finish high school."**<sup>4</sup>
- Those kids may have very little idea what they want to do at college.
- Few of them have given any thought at all to the trades.

Dr. MURRAY's analysis is harsher than Mr. DONOHUE's.

- **"A bachelor's degree in a field such as**
  - **sociology,**
  - **psychology,**
  - **economics,**
  - **history, or**
  - **literature****certifies nothing."**

he writes.

- "It is a screening device for employers.
- **The college you got into says a lot about your ability, and that you stuck it out for four years says something about your perseverance.**
- **But the degree itself does not qualify the graduate for anything.**
- **There are better, faster and more efficient ways for young people to acquire credentials to provide to employers."**

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MURRAY observes further that **we have entered a peculiar age, an age in which physicians and lawyers are more plentiful than good plumbers.**

- The spread of wealth at the top of American society has created an explosive increase in the demand for craftsmen.
- Finding a good lawyer or physician is easy.
- Finding a good
  - *CARPENTER*,
  - *PAINTER*,
  - *ELECTRICIAN*,
  - *PLUMBER*,
  - *GLAZIER*,
  - *MASON*

—the list goes on and on—  
is difficult, and it is a seller's market. . . .

- **[M]aster craftsmen can make six figures.**
- **They have work even in a soft economy.**
- Their jobs cannot be outsourced to India.
- And **the craftsman's job provides wonderful intrinsic rewards that come from mastery of a challenging skill that produces tangible results.**
- How many white-collar jobs provide nearly as much satisfaction?<sup>5</sup>

Forty years ago, even thirty years ago, there was no shame in a young man choosing a career in the trades.

- Beginning in the early **1980s**
  - —and **particularly after publication of the *Nation at Risk* report in 1983**—
- a consensus grew in the United States that every young person should go to college, regardless.
- **“Vocational education” lost whatever prestige it had, and came to be viewed in some quarters very nearly as a dumping ground for the mildly retarded.**
- **Principals and superintendents began to see classes in auto mechanics or welding as expensive diversions from the school's core mission of ensuring that every student would go on to college.**
- The consequences go beyond plumbers who charge exorbitant rates.
- The downside is a **growing COHORT of unproductive young men who see no meaning or purpose in their lives.**

賤穀傷農

賤工

## *The Lesson* *of the* *Pribilof Islands*

In May **2005**,

Professor JUDITH KLEINFELD of the UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS invited me to ALASKA, where I spent several days meeting with NATIVE AMERICAN leaders who are concerned about what's happening to Alaskan native boys.

A growing proportion of those boys are disengaging from school, dropping out as early as sixth or seventh grade, drinking beer, and getting in trouble.

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LARRY MERCULIEFF, a Native Alaskan and deputy director of the ALASKA NATIVE SCIENCE COMMISSION, made a comment during one of these meetings that I found disturbing.

I stayed after the meeting to ask him to explain what he'd said.

“When I was growing up,”  
he told me,  
“I learned to hunt the sea lion with the older men of my tribe.  
I learned about patience.  
I learned about using my senses.  
All my senses.  
I would go out on the ice with the older men and  
we would sit for hours, waiting for the sea lion.  
Hours.”

“What’d you do while you were waiting?”  
I asked.  
“Play a game?  
Talk?”

LARRY shook his head.  
“Think of a Buddhist monk meditating.”  
he said.  
“That’s the closest thing to what we were doing.  
We were silent.  
We were aware.  
I could sense the sea lion approaching when it was still five miles  
distant.  
I can’t tell you how I did that, but there is no doubt that I  
knew, with absolute certainty, when the sea lion was  
approaching.”

“So how did you actually do it?  
Kill the sea lion, I mean,”  
I asked.

“Our traditional life depended on the sea lion,”  
he answered.  
“You must kill the sea lion at precisely the right moment.  
Its lungs must be filled with air.  
Otherwise, the animal will sink to the bottom when you shoot it, and  
you will not be able to retrieve it.  
You must be patient.  
You can’t shoot it as soon as you see it.  
You must wait for it to take that deep breath.  
You may have to wait several minutes after you spot it.

時機，恰當時間點的必要性

Then the leader will give the signal.”  
“He tells you when to shoot?”  
I asked.

“He doesn’t say anything.  
You watch him out of the corner of your eye.  
He fires first  
—then all of us fire within a tenth of a second of his shot.  
All the shots hit the animal in the head.  
That’s how it is supposed to be.  
And that’s how it was, every time.  
The animal dies instantly, floats on the water, and we retrieve it.”

“So what’s different about the young men you saw?”

LARRY had said something during the meeting about how the young  
men in his tribe now insist on going out on their own.  
They don’t want any guidance from the older men, and the  
lack of guidance shows in the way they hunt the sea lion.

I wanted to hear more about that.  
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“Those young men were talking.  
Laughing.  
Joking.  
Punching each other.  
Drinking beer,”  
LARRY said.

“They weren’t watching the sea.  
They weren’t paying attention to the wind.  
They were never quiet.  
A sea lion appeared and they didn’t even notice.

- Then one of them saw it and yelled.
- They all grabbed their guns and started shooting wildly.
- They didn’t kill it.
- They wounded it.
- It swam away.

You could see the blood trail in the water.  
That’s the worst possible outcome.  
A wounded animal.  
The sea lion will die, but when it dies it will be of no use to the  
tribe.”



Fifty years ago, LARRY explained, young men and old men spent whole days and nights together in traditional underground structures they called “men’s houses” (*gayiq*).

In these small, confined spaces

—only somewhat larger than the sweat lodges used by Native American tribes in the southwestern UNITED STATES—

the art of hunting was passed from one generation to the next.

“Then the missionaries came.  
They destroyed the men’s houses,”

LARRY said.

Because Native religious ceremonies were occasionally conducted in the men’s houses, the missionaries regarded the houses as **PAGAN TEMPLES** that had to be demolished.

LARRY believes that the destruction of the men’s houses was a factor in the severing of the bond between the generations.

But, as LARRY explained, many other factors contributed to the isolation of the younger generation.

The introduction of grocery stores probably did more than the razing of the men’s houses to wipe out the original Alaskan native way of life.

- Once a native woman could go to the store and buy food, she no longer needed the men of the village to hunt for her.
- When the men no longer needed to hunt, the central purpose of the men’s houses was lost (or so LARRY and other Native Alaskans have told me).
- The nature of hunting changed.
  - The hunt was no longer an activity essential to sustain life.
  - Hunting became a mere entertainment, a pastime.

More fundamentally:

- the young men of the island no longer see any mission or purpose in their lives.
- The young women are doing better in school and are usually better-qualified for the jobs that are available:
  - jobs as a teacher,
  - clerical worker,
  - home health aide.
- The men don’t want those jobs.

Professor KLEINFELD told me that

- INUIT women in BARROW have the same labor force participation rates as women in NEW YORK, while
- men lag far behind national labor force participation rates.<sup>6</sup>

LARRY told me that on his island, 70 percent of the young men are either incarcerated, disabled by alcoholism or drug abuse, or dead from suicide.

More than two out of three.

- The Pribilof Islands are located in the BERING SEA, about one thousand miles west of ANCHORAGE.
- The only way in or out is by plane, which is expensive, so most residents are essentially **MAROONED** on the islands.
- They have their own names for the four seasons:
  - Tourist Season (June and July),
  - Almost Winter (August and September),
  - Winter (October through March),
  - and Still Winter (April and May).
- The islands are among the most remote and inhospitable inhabited locations on the planet.

You and I don't live on the [Pribilof Islands](#).  
So **what does this story have to do with us?**

In November **2006**,

- Professor KLEINFELD sent me an e-mail about a recently published analysis of young men who don't want to work.
- The author of this analysis had suggested that the disengagement of so many young American men from the workforce is due to changes in the North American economy about which we've all heard so much:
  - **fewer good jobs in factories, with the good jobs now primarily in the service sector.**<sup>7</sup>
- Professor KLEINFELD wrote:
- Let me add a complexity based on my unique vantage point in [ALASKA](#), where **traditional male jobs in construction and natural resources and mining have NOT declined**.
  - Many young men are not taking these jobs. . . .
  - Many are floundering.
  - **Many don't want jobs requiring physical strength and hard labor.**
  - **Even apprenticeships which offer high wages and benefits are going begging.**

## What's Going On?

A team of reporters for the *New York Times* recently documented a growing trend among young and middle-aged men throughout the United States:

**more and more able-bodied men are out of work and are not even looking for work.**

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- These men aren't included in the unemployment statistics because they've given up looking for a job.
- They may be from middle-class families, most of them are white, and many have some college education.
- Their ranks are growing rapidly.
  - In [MICHIGAN](#), 18 percent of able-bodied men between the ages of thirty and fifty four
    - —almost one man in five—
    - are not working and not looking for work.
  - In [WEST VIRGINIA](#), that figure is now up to 24 percent, almost one man in four.
- Forty years ago, in the same age group, only about one able-bodied man in twenty was unemployed and not looking for work.
- Today, **nationwide**, it's about one man in seven.
  - Most of these men could find work if they had to, according to the *New York Times* investigative team.
  - But these men "have decided they prefer the alternative [i.e., not working]."

**It is a significant cultural shift from three decades ago. . . .**  
[These men are] in the prime of their lives [but] have dropped out of regular work.

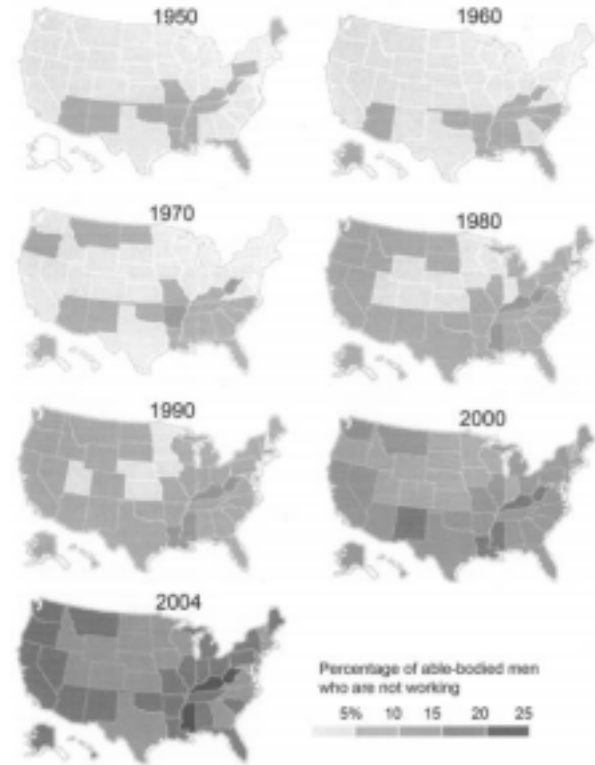
- **They are turning down jobs they think beneath them . . . even as an expanding economy offers opportunities to work.**<sup>8</sup>
- Instead, they live off the income of their wives or families, or off their own savings.
- The **traditional male provider roles**
  - —**hunting among the Alaskans,**
  - **factory work and the trades for American men—**
- **have been eliminated or made obsolete or, as in the case of the trades, have simply lost their appeal**
- **The new jobs in the service industry don't interest many young men.**

Our situation is not as dire as that of the Native Alaskans of the Pribilof Islands.

- Not yet.
- But the more I listened to LARRY and the other Native Alaskans, the more I saw parallels between their situation and ours.
- I am not suggesting that we should try to turn back the clock to the days when the man was usually the sole or chief provider for the home.
- But I am suggesting that the emerging twenty-first-century economy, in which many women will earn more than their husbands
  - —if they have husbands at all—
- requires a rethinking of the role of men.
- If a thirty year-old man is not the principal wage earner in his home, then what is his role?
- Certainly the man could take over the principal responsibilities for child care.
- But men staying at home full-time to
  - provide not only all the child care but also to
  - clean the house and
  - do the laundry and
  - cook the mealsare still a rarity in North America.<sup>9</sup>

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### More and more lazy men: percentage of men age 30 to 54 not working and not looking for work



The proportion of able-bodied men who choose not to work has been rising steadily over the past fifty years. These men are not included in unemployment statistics because they are not looking for work.

ANDREW BEVERIDGE and SUSAN WEBER-STOGER, QUEENS COLLEGE

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So what is the man's role, if his wife is the principal wage earner?

- The answer, in too many cases that I have personally witnessed, is that **this man becomes a parasite in his own home.**
- The wife is still saddled with many or most of the child-care responsibilities and housekeeping chores in addition to the burden of being the chief breadwinner.
- Tension between husband and wife commonly ensues.

Let me stress that I fully endorse the idea of a full-time homemaker father.

- I applaud a man who makes the choice to
  - stay home and
  - raise the children,
  - clean house,
  - do the laundry,
  - and so forth.
- But very few men make that choice.
- More often, the stay-at-home dad is
  - not vacuuming the carpets, he's
  - seldom making more than a token attempt to do the laundry, he's
  - not preparing the meals and cleaning the kitchen, and he's
  - not taking primary responsibility for child care.
- Mom's working full time while Dad is working part-time or not at all, but nevertheless **Mom is stuck with more than her share of the chores**
- That's a situation many Moms will put up with for only so long.
- Sooner or later it occurs to them that they might just be better off single.

## The Changing

## American Household

Within the literary genre of "chick lit," there is an even faster-growing subgenre of books about productive young women saddled with underachieving boyfriends or husbands.

- One of the most successful such books in this genre is [ALLISON PEARSON's \*I Don't Know How She Does It\*](#).
- The heroine is a woman named KATE REDDY.
- She's a hedge fund manager working seventy hours a week and earning a salary in the high six figures.
- She is also the mother of two small children.
- Her laid-back husband earns a small fraction of her income but does less than half of the child-care chores.
- There's lots of dark comedy in the story because her husband just doesn't understand what motivates her.
- If you're so tired and overworked, he asks her at one point, why not just call in sick and sleep late?
- At [CHRISTMAS](#), her husband wonders why the nanny received a much nicer present than he did.
- **Because the nanny is more important in my life, and helps me more than you do, is KATE's response.**
- For all the popularity of this genre, it's not what the future holds, for better or worse.

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Not many young women willingly sign up for KATE REDDY's position  
⇒ earning most of the money and still having to do most of the child care.

- What's actually happening is quite different.
- **The marriage rate among young Americans continues a decades-long downward spiral.**
- The household of the future
  - —indeed, the household of the emerging present—does not look like KATE REDDY's home.
- **The emerging norm is young and middle-aged men who have never married and are unlikely ever to marry, on one side; on the other side, young women with or without children, using professional help (nannies, day care) to raise their children.**
- When one investigative team asked college students whether it was better to get married or to go through life single, two thirds of the young men said it was better to get married.
- **More than half the young women said it would be better to go through life single.**<sup>10</sup>

The American household is changing.

- In 1930,
  - 84 percent of American households were led by a married couple
  - —and most of the remaining 16 percent were led by a widow or widower.
- Households led by single, never-married adults were rare.
- Not any more.
- In October 2006,
  - the *New York Times* reported that for the first time in American history, **households led by a married couple are now in a minority.**
- The greatest demographic change over the past fifty years has been in the rapidly surging number of adults living alone.
  - Adults living alone now comprise 27 percent of American households.<sup>11</sup>
- It used to be unusual to find a man between the ages of thirty-five and forty who had never married.
- Just twenty-five years ago,
  - only 8 percent of American men in that age group had never married.
- That proportion has nearly tripled in just the past thirty years:
  - it's now up to 22 percent and still rising rapidly.<sup>12</sup>
- The *Washington Post* reported in March 2007 that **married couples with one or more children now constitute less than one-quarter of all households in the United States.**
  - This proportion is roughly half of what it was forty years ago.
- Isabel V. Sawhill, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, has concluded that
- “The culture is shifting . . . [Before 1970], if you looked at families across the income spectrum, they all looked the same: a mother, father, kids. . . .”
- Not any more.
- **Marriage with children has become**
  - **“the exception rather than the norm.”**
- And there's no sign of any taper in this trend.

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH

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Examining the numbers, [UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN](#) sociology professor [PAMELA SMOCK](#) has no doubt that “the percentage of children born outside of marriage is also going to increase.”<sup>13</sup>

- **The decline in marriage rates cuts across all demographic groups.**
- “It is a mistake to think of this [drop in marriage rates] as just happening to the underclass at the bottom,” says [CHRISTOPHER JENCKS](#), professor of [SOCIOLOGY AT HARVARD](#).<sup>14</sup>
- Likewise, the proportion of young men (age eighteen to thirty-five) living at home with parents or relatives has surged over the same thirty years.
  - That proportion has roughly doubled,
- while the proportion of young women in the same age group living with parents or relatives has remained constant.<sup>15</sup>
- Young women and young men are now following different life scripts.
- Young women are getting jobs, establishing themselves in the workplace, then (in many cases) thinking about having children.
- But a growing number of young men are just not on the same page.
- As a consequence, having children without being married
  - —which would have been unusual for middle-class white women just thirty years ago—
  - is now common.
- In 2004,
  - 36 percent of babies born in the United States were born to unmarried women.<sup>16</sup>
- Right now, for the first time in American history,
  - there are fewer adult women who are currently married than there are women who are unpartnered (either single and never married, or divorced and not remarried).
- Fifty years ago,
  - married women outnumbered unpartnered women by roughly two to one.<sup>17</sup>

# Whatever Happened to Money and Sex?

Traditionally, one of the factors driving Western society has been the fact that women prefer successful, affluent men over men who are less successful.

- Because men understood that women would be reluctant to marry men who couldn't comfortably support a wife and children, men were motivated to be successful.
- That simple mechanism has suffered a double whammy in the past forty years.
- First,
  - sex has been divorced from marriage.
- Second
  - —and here's what's really disturbing to those of us in the over-thirty crowd—
  - sexual satisfaction has been divorced from women altogether.

色情氾濫

男女舊時代互需的因素，慢慢被科技和文化互傳消除，減弱

If you don't work with today's teenage boys on a regular basis, you may not understand the extent to which pornographic images of women have replaced the real thing.

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BOYS ADRIFT

- In the general population, the best estimates are that roughly 70 percent of college-age men now use pornography regularly.<sup>18</sup>
  - Among those men, use of pornography can readily ESCALATE from an occasional diversion to a daily pastime and finally, to becoming the preferred sexual outlet.<sup>19</sup>
- In one HARVARD study, 69 percent of men who sought help for sexual problems were experiencing “compulsive masturbation”
  - —meaning that they were masturbating more than they thought they should be,
  - and/or they were sometimes masturbating in
    - inappropriate places or
    - at inappropriate times.
- Fifty percent of the men in the same study were described as being “pornography-dependent,”
  - meaning that they could not achieve an erection without pornography.<sup>20</sup>
- More and more boys are discovering that they prefer a sexy image on a computer screen to a real live woman with expectations, a woman who has her own agenda, a woman who may say things that the boy doesn't want to hear.
- I've been seeing more and more young men in my office
  - —men age eighteen to twenty-eight—
  - who are dealing with the consequences of their overuse of pornography by asking for VIAGRA or CIALIS or LEVITRA,
  - because they find it difficult to get aroused by real women.

Sex and City 裡面的 Charlotte 和 Trey,  
第一任丈夫，他必須使用雜誌才能勃起

  - One in three college men now reports erectile dysfunction.<sup>21</sup>
- And I'm seeing other young men who use a different strategy:
  - they disengage from the dating scene altogether, using pornography as their only sexual outlet.

Here's an excerpt from an e-mail I received from a man in his late twenties after I wrote an article for the *Washington Post* related to this topic.<sup>22</sup>

Dr. Sax,

I think you're being very narrow-minded.

- Recently I've really gotten into Japanese anime, especially the videos.
- I love the girls in those videos.
- There [*sic*] **sweet** and **submissive** and nice.

The real girls I know aren't anything like that.

- **I would rather watch the anime girls** than be with real girls.
- Why is that so bad?
- It's not my fault.

It's the fault of the girls I know.

- **They're too demanding.**
- They expect the guy to do everything, pay for everything, make them laugh, do it all.
- Why is it so bad to prefer something different?

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH

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**The problem is that the technology has gotten so good, and the images are so lifelike, so real, that when those girls bat their eyelashes at him it's easy for him to forget that they're just pixels on a computer screen, not real girls in his room.**

Not everyone agrees on this point.

- A recent scholarly monograph concludes that the young man for whom masturbation is the preferred sexual outlet may merely be responding, appropriately, to "today's fast-paced social life characterized by
  - **INDIVIDUALITY,**
  - **IMPERSONALITY,**
  - **MATERIALISM,** and
  - **SOCIAL ISOLATION.**"<sup>23</sup>
- Another critic dismissed concerns about pornography as the outdated prejudice of "moralists and religious conservatives."<sup>24</sup>

Recently, a number of critics have **BEMOANED** the extent to which the culture of pornography has been mainstreamed in our society.<sup>25</sup>

- **Lingerie has become evening wear.**
- **Young women can take classes at the local fitness club in aerobic striptease.**
- "Girls Gone Wild" has very nearly become primetime fare.<sup>26</sup>

These critics understandably see this development as a sign of cultural decadence.

- But I think they may have misdiagnosed the underlying dynamic.
- I asked a sixteen-year-old girl, as gently as I could, why she was wearing a Hooters outfit to a school Halloween party.
  - Her shorts were very short, and her top displayed her natural endowment in a manner that invited comparison with Dolly Parton.
    - "Why?"
    - she mused.
    - **"If you don't dress like this, nobody will even notice you."**
- To **get the attention of the crowd**, girls increasingly tell me that they have to dress like the models in *Maxim* photo shoots
  - —or act like the ditsy girls on "Girls Gone Wild."



## The Stick of Duty

Traditionally, boys who wanted money and/or sex were motivated to be successful in their job or career, because success was the surest route to money and sex.

- But there have always been boys who were not particularly motivated.
- The carrots of money and sex were not sufficient for them.
- A stick was needed.
- In some cultures, the stick went by the name of “DUTY.”
  - KOREAN culture still has this sense of duty, and
  - ENGLISH culture once did.

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- In VICTORIAN ENGLAND, a young man might undertake a life of work that was not particularly appealing to him because his family would be dishonored if he did otherwise.
- In SOUTH KOREA today, and
- among first-generation Korean immigrants to the United States,
  - it is not unusual to find young men and young women who are doing a particular job, or even pursuing a particular career, not because they prefer it but because they believe that their duty to their family requires it.

The stick of duty was never as strong in North American culture as it was in British or some East Asian cultures.

- In any case, it is weak today.
- American boys today are unlikely to take a job they find demeaning or boring, or pursue a career that does not interest them, solely because of a sense of duty to parents or family. In this regard I think we can perhaps sense the primate tendency of young females to affiliate with their parents, and young males to abandon them (we discussed this aspect of primatology in chapter 2).
- Girls will follow societal norms unless they have a good reason not to.
- But the boy who disrespects society's norms may raise his status in the eyes of other boys.
- The culture of VICTORIAN ENGLAND, like the culture of present-day KOREA, managed to OVERCOME THESE PRIMATE TENDENCIES.
- But in modern American culture, “duty” doesn't have much influence for most boys or young men.

## Failure to Launch

PARAMOUNT PICTURES released the movie Failure to Launch on March 10, 2006.

- MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY stars as a funny, friendly, good-looking thirty-five-year-old who is utterly devoid of ambition.
- He lives at home with his parents.
- His mother cooks his breakfast, washes his laundry, and vacuums his room.
- His character has no clue that his parents want him to leave.
- Their desperation leads them to hire a professional “interventionist,” whose assignment is to motivate MCCONAUGHEY's character to leave his parents' home and get a life.
- FAILURE TO LAUNCH was the number-one movie in the United States for the first three weeks after its release, grossing more than ninety million dollars at the box office just in the three months between its March opening and the release of the DVD in June.
- I was struck by how accurately the movie captured a phenomenon I'd been tracking in my office for seven years.

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH

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Two days after I saw the movie,

I wrote an op-ed for the Washington Post entitled “What's Happening to Boys?”

- I began by pointing out how the movie captured key features of the phenomenon I've been seeing in my practice: in particular, the fact that the main character was intelligent.
- He is perfectly capable of success and achievement, but he simply has no motivation to accomplish anything real.
- I wasn't prepared for what happened next.
- For three consecutive days, my article was the most e-mailed article on the Post Web site.
- The Post invited me to host an online chat on this topic.
- The chat line was open for just sixty minutes.
- Staffers at the paper shut the line down after 395 posts, which they told me was more than double the previous record for a sixty-minute chat of about 170 posts.



I was fascinated by the variety of comments I received, some of which were from men who were completely unapologetic about their situation.

- Here's one, from the online transcript of the *Washington Post* chat, from a twenty-six-year-old living at home:<sup>27</sup>

- Well, what IS the problem?
- If my parents are happy to have me, why shouldn't I stay with them?
- Why should I be in any hurry to have a career, wife, and children?
- Am I really obligated to have "direction"
  - —direction towards where?
- You say there's something wrong with young people like me, but I would say it's worse to imagine that following the prescribed path to career and family will magically transform your life into a constant state of bliss.
- Today's hero is not the blazing, iconoclastic industrialist of AYN RAND, but the slacking, chilled-out Dude of THE BIG LEBOWSKI.
- Why is he wrong, while TAGGART and REARDEN\* are right?
- Until you can answer that, the idea that I merit some kind of concerned examination is ridiculous.

\*Author's note:

■ TAGGART is DAGNY TAGGART and  
■ REARDEN is HANK REARDEN,  
both of whom can fairly be  
described as "blazing iconoclastic  
industrialist[s]" in

AYN RAND's  
novel Atlas Shrugged.

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BOYS ADrift

Another young man asked,

"Why is the definition of adulthood wasting most of one's income on a rent or mortgage?"<sup>28</sup>

- He was a twenty nine-year-old man living at home with his parents.
- He didn't see anything wrong with that.

I replied:

- The definition of adulthood is not how you spend your money, rent vs. ownership, and so forth.
- The definition of adulthood, I believe, is being independent of your parents.\*
  - You can live in a tent in a forest and not pay any rent at all.
  - But if your room and board are subsidized by your parents, you are still a child, no matter what your age.
- You may not place a high priority on independence.
  - You may prefer being comfortable, well-fed and warm over being independent, uncomfortable, and hungry.
- That's your choice.
- My concern is that we are seeing many more young men who seem to value being comfortable and well-fed over being independent and grown-up.
  - Like you, these men don't see the problem.
  - They attach very little value to economic or spiritual INDEPENDENCE.

But the online chat was only the beginning.

- Over the next two weeks, my article was reprinted in about three dozen major newspapers around the United States.
- On April 4, I went to the studios of NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO in WASHINGTON, DC, to be the featured guest in a forty-minute interview on the NPR program ON POINT, broadcast nationwide.<sup>29</sup>
- By the end of April I had received over one thousand e-mails from all around the country.

呵呵，熱議(議論紛紛)

I threw out my original draft of this CHAPTER.

- The e-mails I received turned out to be more interesting than anything I could say.
- In the remainder of THIS CHAPTER, I'm going to share with you a few of the most provocative, most outrageous, and most profound of those e-mails.

太可愛了

\*In suggesting this definition, I was thinking not sociologically but biologically.

From a biological perspective, an individual has reached adulthood when one is

- A) independent of one's parents and
- B) sexually mature.

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH

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From: yogabody125@yahoo.com

Subject: **Shortest Date in History**

Dear DR. SAX,

I read your op-ed in the *Washington Post* with great interest.

I'd like to add a different perspective.

- I'm a 35-year-old single woman, with my own house, car, career etc.
- I've worked hard to get where I am, and I've had to move a lot to move up.
- Now I'm finally in one place for a bit and can actually date.
- But many of the single men I meet still live with their parents, or else they are STILL figuring out what they want to be when they grow up.
- Mostly, I just want to smack them.
- Would that be OK?

Case in point.

Two weeks ago I had the shortest date in history.

It was at a coffee shop with a guy named MICHAEL.

MICHAEL is 32.

He's always wanted to be a journalist but quit a couple jobs along the way (red flag #1) and now works writing proposals for an architecture firm.

But he hates that job too (red flag #2) and is thinking of quitting and getting his MFA and teaching creative writing.

Me:

"How can you teach creative writing

if you haven't done any?"

I asked MICHAEL how he spends his free time.

Mostly he hangs out at bars with his friends.

He hasn't been to any of the local museums or theaters or anything remotely requiring intelligence (red flag #3).

He asked if I had an apartment nearby.

I said I owned a home.

He freaked.

"Wow, you're quite the grown-up, aren't you?"

he said.

Well, uh, yeah, dude, I'm 35.

Total date time:

2 cups of coffee.

35 minutes.

I can't tell you how many times this has been repeated.

I go out with a guy, turns out he's a total slacker.

I don't want to date these guys.

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I want to tell them:

Get a grip!

Get a job!

Have a dream!

Do I need to go all JFK/MLK on their sad sack selves?

Anyway.

**Last year, after more bad dates than I can count, I gave up.**

I got myself a nice 25-year-old boy toy, whom I call when I want and ignore when I want.

He's not that bright, but who cares?

There's no future.

He lives at home with his parents.

Sigh.

*Datelessly yours,*

RACHEL

Dear Dr. Sax,

As a 24-year-old college graduate,

- I knew that after graduating, I was supposed to get a job and move out of my parents' home, so I moved to the other end of the country.
- I love the independence, the freedom, and my personal space.

My brother is a different story.

- I see so much of him in the comments people posted [on the *Washington Post* chat]: especially the young men who added their two cents.
- My brother went to college, dropped out, worked in a restaurant for a while, broke up with his live-in girlfriend, and ended up back in my parents' basement.
- He still works in a restaurant, but **he doesn't do ANY chores, he never makes any attempt to help out**, and he doesn't seem to care about moving on with his life, though he's made some half-hearted attempts.

*\*Author's note:*

JFK/MLK is an abbreviation for

[John F. Kennedy](#) / [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH

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He's got a good thing going:

no rent,  
few responsibilities other than entertaining the family dog,  
free food,  
sleeping till noon,  
and the knowledge that my parents will help pay for college again  
if he decides that's what he wants.

Why look to the future when he can have a wad of bills at the end of a shift in the restaurant?

- It's easy money, and it's a lot of money, but it won't get him anywhere.
- He doesn't care.

I think a lot of young men have a very short-sighted view of the future:

the next party,  
the next short-term job,  
the next free meal.

He's not living at home for the family aspect; he's there because it's free and it's easy.

Another example:

- my boyfriend of over six years.
- He's never lifted a hand at home.
- His mother does everything for him:
  - laundry, meals,
  - picks up his dishes (which he leaves scattered in various rooms around the house),
  - she makes his bed, etc.

**I told him that if he was going to spend time with me, he was going to do chores, especially washing the dishes.**

- I made it very clear that I wasn't going to be his mother and pick up after him.
- Neither was I going to put up with laziness in getting things done.
- **I've had to explain to him that sometimes you just have to do unpleasant things so you can enjoy yourself later.**
- He wants instant gratification
- —and I know he gets that from video games.

Your comment about STEVEN JOHNSON's book was right on.

- I've read JOHNSON's book.
- My boyfriend thinks that book is as close to the Truth as you can get.
- **Play more video games and pretend it's mental development.**
- Gladly!
- It's very frustrating.
- I'm worried, especially as we intend to move in together this summer, and I like to have a very neat and clean apartment.

Thank you for the chance to comment.

I fully intend to show this to my boyfriend.

笑死我了  
木已成舟  
老媽都管不了了，你憑什麼認為你改的了？  
可憐的白癡女人，癡心妄想，自以為了不起

Keep up the good work!

ANNA M.

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Dear Dr. Sax,

I read your article on the *Washington Post* website today and

- I was struck by your description of what I am going through right now.
- I am a 25-year-old woman,
- married eight months to one of these “boys.”
- My boy will be 29 in August.

I am experiencing what it's like to live with one of these boys after they finally leave their parents.

- My husband and I met online.
- He and I graduated from college the same semester in **2002**.
- **I graduated with two majors** in four years.
- **He graduated with one major** that took **seven years**.
- When we met in early **2004**, we were both living with our parents.
  - At that time, I was looking to leave the nest.
  - He seemed content to be at home.
- I fully believe that if he hadn't met me, he would still be there.
- He told me that he passed his time
  - playing **NINTENDO**,
  - surfing the Net,
  - watching TV, etc.
- He lived in luxury with a nice car, nice clothes and spending money
  - —all on his parents' dime.
- He worked a retail job that didn't pay much, but it fit his laid-back, **JOVIAL**, “not serious” personality.
- He claims that he didn't pursue a professional career because he didn't know what he wanted to do.
- **He once wanted to do outdoors work** with **DNR**\* etc. but **he claims that the chemistry and biology required were too steep of a price to achieve his dream job.**

PETROS ARAYA

\*Author's note:

DNR is the abbreviation for  
**DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES.**

I overlooked all of this as just being who he was.

- He is intelligent.
- I thought the way he lived was
  - not because of him necessarily,but rather might be due to
  - the foundation of money and security
  - —and lack of responsibility—
  - **which his parents had set up for him.**

英文寫的不好

看吧！又是一個狂妄自大的白癡女人，  
自以為是他媽，可以指使他東指使他西。

男人不會為女人改性子的，只會依照他的本性去追女人。  
他必須透過想要成為他想成為的人而學習，而改變，  
他無法透過「我為了你這個女人而犧牲，而扭曲自己」的機制改變。

這叫生物性，後天改不了的。

只有女人會「我為了你，犧牲我自己的一切。」

男人只會認定女人應該為他犧牲，成全他。

- I thought this would change when we got married, that he would grow up and do things on his own:
  - balance a checkbook,
  - get his own insurance,
  - do at least some of the housework
  - etc.

I have learned that he doesn't know how to do any of these things.

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- He is so financially inept that he has practically crippled our young marriage.
  - I am the professional.
  - I make twice what he does at his job at the mall.
- Couple that with the late hours he works, and I am pretty much by myself in running our household.

It frustrates me that what seemed to me to be a lack of motivation due to others enabling him has developed into a lack of understanding of adult responsibilities.

- I am perplexed.
- How can such an intelligent person be so utterly clueless?
- I feel like his mother.
- If I relied on him to pay the bills, file our taxes, get loans, clean up etc. it simply would not get done.
- We would be out on the street.
- As much as I tell him that I need help with the bills and that I need his understanding and support, the ignorance just gets that much worse.

The thing is,

his family always bailed him out and they still try to.

I forbid it.

- He gets upset that I am upset but he never takes any interest in things even though he says he will.
- I think he just believes everything will magically work out every month like it has in the past.
- Luckily, I have made it work so far.
- But I know that eventually our reserve finances are going to run out.
- I can't imagine what will happen then.
- I don't see any motivation in him to improve.
- If I try to pull him from the XBOX or the TV, I'm the bad guy.
- He doesn't seem to realize that his \$10/hour salary cannot cover everything that he wants:
  - cable,
  - Internet,
  - car,
  - cell phones.
- But I magically make it happen every month
  - —because I'm working my butt off.
  - Sometimes I even have to coerce him to shower and to shave.

I love my husband.

- But I am constantly haunted by something he once told me.
- He said that I might need to lower my expectations in life because he didn't know whether he could provide them for me.
- What I find funny now is that I'm the real provider.
- I don't feel like part of a team.
- It's wearing on me.
- He has no idea.

無解，非離婚不可，除非女方甘願肝腦塗地

Thank you,

SARAH C.

From: "Rachel Riggs" rachelriggs@hotmail.com

Subject: What's Happened to Boys?

Dear Dr. Sax,

I believe that what's happened to boys is directly related to what's happened to girls.

- Girls today feel that they don't need boys so much anymore.
- And boys have figured that out.
- Girls used to give motivation to boys to be successful so that the boys could "take care of them."

Without that motivation, what is left for the boys?

- Video games, where they can still be the hero.
- Sleeping around
  - —because, as you succinctly stated, girls still have sexual needs—
  - but we've learned how to satisfy ourselves in that aspect, also.
  - No, it's not the same, but it will do in a pinch.
- If you'd like to take it one step further:
  - what if women decide that they've had enough of
    - ✓ men and
    - ✓ their huge egos, and
    - ✓ their testosterone-fueled wars,
    - and
  - start stock-piling frozen sperm until they really DON'T need men anymore?

看吧！

我就是這樣說的啊！

三月九號，做完第二章後，我就提出這說法了。

男人很蠢，說不定還真沒有

I love men.

- As a divorced woman,
- I really miss a male presence in my home.
- There's just something about
  - men and
  - testosterone and
  - physical strength
  - that really turn me on.

呵呵，誰不喜歡

「紅塵一驢妃子笑，誰知荔枝萬里加鞭疾駛來」？

- The world would definitely be a worse place without men.
- But women are evolving, not necessarily in a good way, and men are reacting.

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BOYS ADrift

RACHEL RIGGS  
COEUR D'ALENE, IDAHO

Dear Dr. Sax,

As a 29-year-old woman,

- I'm smack in the middle of the "failure to launch" generation.
- I grew up in Northern Virginia.
- **I went to my 10-year high school reunion last year.**  
*END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH* <sup>143</sup>
- **All of the girls I went to school with have moved out, gone to college, gotten real jobs, etc.**
- **Almost all the boys live at home, have menial jobs, and don't know what they want out of life**

### I think the boys' laziness started in high school.

- Honestly I think at least some of the blame lies with parents.
- All the girls had curfews in high school.
- We all had to tell our parents where we were at all times.
- We had to keep our grades up.
  - Not a single boy I knew had a curfew.
  - Most were allowed to slack off in school because they had "difficulty focusing" or they were diagnosed with "sensory integration disorder."
- The girls had jobs at the mall.
  - The boys got allowances from Mom and Dad.

哇！美國也重男輕女？

### Even within the same family, there were different rules for boys and girls.

- **Now we've reaped what we've sown.**
- **The girls have discipline.**
- **The boys have PlayStations.**
- I'm newly divorced.
- I'm not sure I want to remarry.
- There just aren't any worthwhile men out there.
- My generation of men aren't looking for partners
  - —they're looking for a new Mommy.
- I'd much rather be on my own than be with a man who can't stand on his own two feet.

Sincerely,  
SHARON S.

Dear Dr. Sax,

Thank you so much for bringing attention to this phenomenon.

- I'm a 28-year-old woman and
- I've noticed that my friends and I, instead of talking about our future weddings, families etc. are now talking about the fact that having a relationship with one of these boy/men works against our eventual goals:
- successful careers and having children.

*BOYS ADRIFT* <sup>144</sup>

Instead we talk about

- how we're going to work on our careers, and
- if we haven't found someone by the time we're of a good age,
  - we'll adopt or
  - find some other way of having children on our own and
- we'll just support ourselves.
- The "FAILURE TO LAUNCH" phenomenon is precisely the reason for this shift.
- Why take on some boy/man who would then move into our homes and expect to be taken care of by us?

Thanks again, and keep us all posted if you come across a solid conclusion as to why this is happening.

有啥屁用？  
腦外科手術？

ALLIE

Dear Dr. SAX,

I read your *Washington Post* article and it really hit home.

- My never married fiancé who still lives with his mother called off our wedding a little over three months ago.
- He's a teacher with a master's degree.
- He pays his mother \$250 a month for room and board (way below market rates).
- He doesn't even have a savings account.
- He has spent every cent he has ever made on
  - electronics,
  - car stereos etc.

I knew all this, but **because** we are

- both Christians,
- both teachers, and
- have many things in common, and because
- **I fell in love** with him,

**the thought never occurred to me that he would back out.**

- He kept reassuring me that he would leave home.
- I thought he meant it when he spent \$7,300 on a ring.
- Oh well.
- Now I'm glad he backed out because it would not have worked out.
- **I have never married.**
- **I own my own home.**

美國社會不給國中小幼稚園老師高薪，  
安份守己，做良心事業的男人不會有錢到吸引高教育女性  
(請不要跟我凹特例)

除非就如同 Dr. SAX 所言，  
女人重新定義男人的社會角色，把男人當花瓶，或是把男人當褓母

Thank you for listening.

MAXINE C.  
GEORGIA

Dr. SAX,

I sent this to NPR during their interview with you:

- Perhaps the men-staying-at-home phenomenon is a reaction to the feminist era.

Before that era, there was no other option than men going to work and women staying at home.

- Now perhaps there are men hoping to be "found" by a rich woman and marry her and not have to work.
- I know MANY men who want to marry me simply because I am a lawyer.
- It's gotten to the point that I don't want to tell a man what I do for a living until after we've decided to date steadily.
- My boyfriend was depressed for a week after I told him I want to practice *PUBLIC INTEREST* law.

"What?!"

he said.

"There's no money in that!"

He never recovered.

Thanks,

PENNY  
RESTON, VIRGINIA

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH

DR. SAX,

I read your article in the Washington Post and found it very interesting.

- While you raise some valid points, I find some of your points to be highly culturally biased.

I come at this as a native-born American of Pakistani heritage.

- **In every other country in the world, it is completely normal and expected that children live with their parents in adulthood.**
- This is seen as mutually beneficial.
- The older generation is REVERED in those countries, unlike this country.

呵呵

『家有一老，如有一寶』

傳承的智慧，不是美國主流社會的追求，  
所以美國的老人是廢物

一九七十，一九八十年代，常聽：

『美國是少兒的天堂

青年的戰場

老人的墳塚』

- I believe this comes from a joint family system where **parents and children are ACTIVELY INVOLVED in each other's lives.**  
重點是美國人不會叫小孩子做事啊！
- Children can live with their parents to save money and they will take care of their parents when they are old.

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BOYS ADRIFT

**Many in the United States seem to feel that family ties stop at age 18.**

- Kids can't come home.
  - **Those kids will be unlikely to help their parents when they may need help in their old age.**

國情不同，美國人沒有返哺報恩的觀念  
他們是英雄主義，不知感恩圖報

- **We have somehow established that a MOTHER'S DAY CARD and a CHRISTMAS CARD suffice for familial obligations.**

這就是我的意思啊

生日怎麼會是辦桌請客慶祝小孩呢？

應該是小孩要辦活動感恩媽媽才對吧！

我就一直說啊！

又不是皇親國戚，富二代，搞花裡花氣的慶生會幹嘛？

小孩子真的有快樂到永生難忘？

根本就是傷害生命的活動

- I believe **this generates severe social consequences.**
- Children benefit from growing up close to their extended families or in joint families.
- I take your point that kids living with parents can create disincentives to work.
  - I also **concur** that in some cases, maybe they do

need to be evicted.

- But I believe it is a case by case matter.

**I find your advice to charge rent to be offensive.**

- **Families are not money-making endeavors.**

Best regards,

ALIYA HUSAIN

WASHINGTON DC



I received several responses like Ms. HUSAIN's, mostly from people who were born and raised outside of North America.

- These people observed that in countries such as
  - India,
  - Pakistan,
  - Italy,
  - Portugal,
  - Spain, and many
  - Latin American countries,
  - it's common for adult children, both women and men, to live with their parents.
  - That's true.
- But in those other countries, the adult children are more likely to be integrated into the household.
  - **In many cases, those adult children may help to operate a family business.**
- The distinctive feature of the "Failure to Launch" phenomenon is that the American young man is
  - coasting,
  - slacking off,
  - relying onhis parents to provide everything for him while he has a good time.
- This is something new.
  - **There is no country with a tradition of parents working while their adult children slack off at home.**
- In Italy,
  - there is a centuries-old tradition of the *mammoni*, men who choose to live at home with their mothers for their entire life.
  - However, **such men are still expected to be productive**; it would be profoundly un-Italian for such a man to expect his mother to provide all the household income while he plays video games and surfs the Net.<sup>30</sup>
- Likewise, in Japan,
  - **demographers have expressed concern about the growing number of adult men who are living at home with their parents, refusing to work, while the young man's mother serves the son meals and cleans up his room.**
  - These boy/men are referred to as *bikkikomori*, literally "pulling away, being confined."

- One key difference between the JAPANESE *HIKKIKOMORI* and the American "failure to launch" is that
  - the *HIKKIKOMORI* men themselves are, with very few exceptions, miserable.
  - They wish that they had more motivation.<sup>31</sup>
- The American slacker dude, by contrast
  - —epitomized by Mc Conaughey's character in *Failure to Launch* or
  - by Owen Wilson's character in *You, Me, and Dupree*—
  - is perfectly content to be dependent on others.



From: "Ian Farache" ian.farache@gmail.com

Subject: NPR interview

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH

I just finished listening to your interview on NPR.

- I'm 23 and living at home.
- I've been wondering why I lack either the motivation or the willpower to leave.
- Maybe having ADHD as a child has something to do with it.
- I did hear you say that Ritalin and Adderall might cause a lack of motivation.
- That to me is not a huge leap of logic.

*I remember taking the medication at the age of 8 or 10 and becoming completely despondent.*

- The term "slacker" runs through my mind constantly.
- If you would e-mail me some information about this subject I would appreciate it.

IAN

GLEN CARBON, ILLINOIS

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BOYS ADrift

What does society tell us should be our goal?

- A career spent in a cubicle on the phone trying to convince people that Bunco spark plugs are the best spark plugs in the world?
- And then, after 30 years, your company moves to Mexico and cuts your pension?

No thanks.

From a bored 23-year-old.

JEFF

GOOD AFTERNOON DR. SAX,

I'm male, 27 years old,

- married, and in grad school, working toward a doctorate in medieval literature.
- I also teach Latin.
- **My wife and I don't have a TV because of how much time it wastes and how much mindless junk there is on it.**
- However, **I have played computer games in some form since my parents got me a computer when I was in high school.**
- Before that I sometimes used to go to friends' houses and play computer games there.
- **Once I got to college, I had more time to play computer games if I wanted to**

I don't think you understand the computer game phenomenon when you talk about it sapping the motivation of male 20-somethings.

- That's only part of the picture.
- **The other part is that computer games allow people to do things that feel as significant or important as the things they wish they could do in real life but don't see any way of doing.**
  - I don't mean that people are playing BATTLEFIELD 2 because they wish they could be shooting lots of people.
  - But they do wish that they could be doing something that mattered.
  - **When they're playing that game, they can, for a few hours, feel like they're doing something significant.**

- When I started grad school, I had a rough first year or so.
  - Many times I came home feeling like I was never going to be any good as a scholar, like I had no hope of ever actually doing anything significant, or making any serious contribution even just in the academic community.  
*END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH*
  - But I could turn on the computer and play <sup>449</sup>X-WING and feel like I was helping to defeat the GALACTIC EMPIRE.
- If you want to feel significant,
  - feeling like you just destroyed the DEATH STAR helps for a little while.
- Or a few years later, I would play MORROWIND.
  - As I wandered around that world, I could help a wounded traveler, or rescue captives from bandits, or discover a secret upon which the survival of a city depended.
  - And there, at least in that world, I could succeed.

One thing that's key in most computer games is that there is positive feedback.

- In flight simulator games, you don't just defeat the other pilots:
  - you also get a badge.
- There's an implicit pat on the back.
- And you get a sense of achievement.
- If you're not getting a sense of achievement anywhere else in life, computer games are pretty tempting as a way of getting that feeling.
- It's built into them.

Not only is there the sense of achievement, but there is also in many games beauty and adventure.

- In MORROWIND, you can wander through a really beautiful, detailed, vivid world.

Now I prefer reality.

- But I live in SOUTH BEND, INDIANA.
- There aren't lots of places to hike or even to walk.
- I can't afford to travel much.
- I would love to wander on a misty shore and hear the waves, or hike through mountains and valleys.
- I can't do that here.
- I daydream about
  - the one time I went to the PACIFIC NORTHWEST, or
  - the years when I lived in SWITZERLAND.
  - Or, instead of daydreaming, I can play a game that gives me something similar, though of course nowhere near as real or as good.
- The desire for beauty is very strong
  - —*so strong that one might accept all sorts of false substitutes if one couldn't find the reality.*

Of course the sad thing is that spending lots of time on computer games can keep you from achieving the very things the desire for which sent you to computer games in the first place.

- Who has time to study and get involved in urban development if he spends all day playing *SimCity*?
- Of course I agree that people should stop wasting time in front of the PC/XBOX and go do something real.
- But in order to treat a problem it may be helpful to know something about how it seems to those who suffer from it.  
*BOYS ADRIFT*<sup>450</sup>

I hope this is helpful.

Sincerely,

RICHARD R.

NOTRE DAME  
SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

Another post from the *Washington Post* chat:  
WhatisanAdult:

DOC,

I fall into that mold.

- I tend bar for a living.
- I live at home.
- I have fun.
- I pick up more pretty girls than I can count, so what is my motivation to have a family, career, etc?
- What if my happiness is defined differently from yours?

I've dated more than one attractive, highly-paid professional woman and stolen her away from her boring corporate boyfriend who makes multiples of my income.

- The women tell me they are sick of their non-exciting life.
- The **burbs**, playing the role of the little homemaker.
- We have FUN together.
- We talk about music, art, cool stuff.
- They don't seem to miss their "successful" exs much at all.

**I am not hurting anyone.**

- So why do I need the suit, the tie, kids, stroller, the BMW, just because I am 30?
- Seems sort of shallow to live that way.

因為你不會永遠有30歲的臉

My response to CASANOVA:

I'm glad that you are enjoying life.

- You wrote that you are picking up "more pretty girls than I can count, so what is my motivation to have a family, career, etc.?"

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH 151

What is, or should be, the motivation for having a family or a career?

- The **motivation to have a family and a meaningful career is not (and should not be) grounded in the desire to pick up pretty girls.**
- It should be grounded, rather,
  - in the desire **to be of use,**
  - **to serve others,**
  - **to give your life some meaning beyond the pleasure of the moment.**
- If those objectives have no real meaning to you, then nothing I or anyone else says will have much impact.

If FUN (capitalized, as you capitalized it) is the be-all and end-all, then by that standard you're doing extremely well.

- I think
  - **at some point that you may find that having FUN is not satisfying,** and that
  - **a meaningful life requires more than picking up pretty girls.**

- At that point, you may see the point of having a career and a family.
- Or you may not.
- But **I wonder what your parents would have to say about this?**

外國人沒有時間觀  
也對父母沒大沒小  
所以怎麼跟他講都是白講的

From: "Max Geller" ms\_geller@coloradocollege.edu

To: leonardsax@prodigy.net

Subject: I am that kid

Listening to your interview on NPR today,

I needed about 15 seconds before I realized you were talking about ME.

- I'm a white,
- sub urban,
- semi-affluent male

who has been on academic steroids\* since the third grade.

I have no work ethic.

I'm graduating in a month and a half.

Can I be of service to you?

MAX GELLER

*\*Author's note:*

"Academic steroids" is a slang term, growing in popularity, referring to medications such as

- Adderall,
- Ritalin,
- Concerta,
- Metadate,
- and so on.

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BOYS ADRIFT

My name is MIKE.

- I'm 33 years old.
- I don't live at home, but rather in a home paid for by my parents.
- I'm in graduate school, but my efforts there have been **lackluster**.

Like many of the young men you mentioned, I play too many video games.

- I agree that they offer a fantasy world with a beginning, middle, end, and accomplishments.
- All with no risk, and nearly certain achievement

I wonder about my lack of motivation.

- All the way back to grade school, I hated academics.
- It's not that I dislike learning.
- On the contrary, I love to learn.
- I just hate school.
- Always have.

I used to be a teacher at a small private school working with autistic kids.

- Before that, I had a string of dead end jobs, which seldom lasted as long as a year.
- My days were punctuated with pot, video games, and beer.
- I lived hundreds of miles from home, but my parents have sent me money every two weeks for
  - —many years.
- They make enough that it doesn't impede their own comfortable existence.
- Still I do have occasional guilty moments.

I was married for a time

- —for 6 years.
- Ironically, I always considered her lazy.
- At the end of a day's work, her favorite thing to do was watch TV and drink beer.
- It bored me to tears.
- My answer was to get into video games.
- That's when my fixation started.

I was a late bloomer in the video game world, discovering them in my mid-twenties.

- Before that, I preferred to get high
- —or read
- —or see a documentary
- —or take in a museum.

My parents are enablers.

- They make it easy for me to do less than I might otherwise have to do.

I did live for one year once without any support from my parents.

- It started out exhilarating.
- I worked hard at a bookstore, earning raises and respect.
- But **eventually I burnt out**.
  - Beer and pot **sapped** my energy.
  - Depression took hold.
- Yes I was independent,
  - but I was still a self-destructive mess.

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Now I am back in the fold.

- I struggle with motivation.
- I struggle with depression and anxiety, but I do live a cleaner and healthier life.
- I have a year and a half of grad school done, but I'll be lucky to make any use of this degree by the time I get it, at the pace I'm going.
- I don't think the answer is "your parents are enablers, they should cut you off."
- Of course you might predict that I would say that.
- But the issues are complex.

I hope that this is useful information for you.

Thank you for the opportunity.

MIKE



Dear Dr. Sax,

You've perfectly described my 31-year-old son, adopted in Taiwan at 5 weeks of age.

- It may interest you that it used to describe his twin sister as well.
  - Both had high IQs and difficulties fitting into the small New England town we lived in.
  - In college they both suffered from depression and dropped out.
- She found housing near her school, did some entry-level jobs, finally got married and now has some sense of direction.
- She talks of going back to school, getting a real job etc.
- He does not.
- He flunked out several times, came home, pretended to get jobs but never did
  - — until we gave him an ultimatum: either get a job or get out.
- He got a job.
- Later he also moved into an apartment.
- The job moved away and he has not found another for several years.
- He seems content to exist on his leftover college fund.
- He plays video games and online role games with a few friends.
- He's a nice person
  - —but with no ambition and no desires.
- He has never shown motivation.

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BOYS ADRIFT

I often wonder if the overwhelming importance for males of achievement in sports early in life offers some explanation for this total giving up if one is not oriented toward sports.

呵呵，可憐天下父母心

[no name given]

I often hear from parents who, somewhat like this mother,

- are convinced that their son's lack of motivation
- can be traced to the day when he wasn't asked to play in the pickup basketball game,
- or when he didn't make the junior high football team,
- or when he discovered that he just wasn't particularly good at sports.

However, I also hear from parents of other boys, athletically talented boys,

- who are convinced that their son's lack of motivation is due to the fact that
- he grew accustomed to
  - being the star,
  - the best athlete,
  - the golden boy.
- Once he finished high school and realized that he was never going to be good enough to play professional sports, he lost interest in life.

那就是小時候沒教好啊！

I agree that much of mainstream culture puts a tremendous emphasis on boys' being good at sports, just as it puts an overwhelming emphasis on the physical attractiveness of girls.

- Boys who are athletically talented are far more likely to be popular than boys who aren't any good at sports, just as girls who are slender and pretty are far more likely to be popular than girls who are obese.

But the *Failure to Launch* phenomenon appears just as likely to occur in athletically talented boys as in klutzy boys.

- Parents often attribute their son's lack of motivation to his athletic **PROWESS**
- —or to his lack of athletic prowess.
- I think both attributions miss the point.

Another post from the *Washington Post* chat:

Missoula, Mont.:

Hey, Mr. SAX,

being out of the nest isn't so great for everybody.

- My advice to young men:
- take as much time as you need.
- The real world is very rough.
- The people advising you to move out are the ones who've made it.
- Others may not see it the same way.

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My response:

I agree that the real world is very rough.

My question for you is:

- what's the best way to help young people to face that reality?
- If your child is ten or fifteen years old, then by all means, shelter him or her from that harsh reality.
- But what if your child is twenty-one, or twenty-six, or twenty-nine?
- How long is a parent expected to shelter a child who is not mentally or physically handicapped?

My own belief, based in part on my twenty years of medical practice, is that if parents continue to shelter their adult child after the age of twenty-one years, the parents may make it less likely that the adult child will ever be willing and able to meet the challenges of the real world.

- Of course one has to make reasonable distinctions.
- If your son has just graduated from college and he's 22 or 23, looking for a job, I see no harm in his living at home while he's conducting his job search
- —provided that you and he have discussed, openly and up front, how long this situation can last before you will expect him to find some kind of part-time job to help pay his expenses.
- One month?
  - Fine.
- One year?
  - Too long.

Dear Dr. Sax,

I have 3 sons.

- My 25-year-old has an honors degree, a good job, he's married and a homeowner.
  - Successful launch.
- My youngest is in college.
  - He is very likely to launch:
  - when he is home during summer we barely see him and he is very uncomfortable about accepting money from us for tuition or car insurance or anything else.
- Our middle son, now 23, is a classic failure to launch.
  - Despite 6 years of college, some of it part time, he only has a 2 year degree.
  - Of my 3 boys, he's the only computer game player.
  - He is addicted to video games.

I believe that in *CERTAIN SUSCEPTIBLE INDIVIDUALS*, playing video games gives them control of a fantasy world without the discomfort and uncertainty of real world social interactions.

- This same son was diagnosed as ADD in first grade.  
*156 BOYS ADRIET*
- We tried Ritalin, but after getting to a dose that caused palpitations without any noticeable behavior changes we decided that was not his problem.  
少恐怖了，美國人為什麼這麼迷信吃藥呢？
- He tested in the gifted category, did well on the SAT, but his grades were all over the map due to lack of focus and a bout of depression in his senior year.

Thank you for focusing on this.

Carol in [SOUTH CAROLINA](#)

This e-mail highlights two recurring issues.

First:

- **variation within a family.**
- It's not unusual to find a situation like this one where one son "fails to launch" while his brother does just fine.
- I agree with what CAROL said about **individual susceptibilities.**

Second:

- **it's common to see these boys struggling with depression.**
- **It's often hard to say which comes first.**
  - Is the boy depressed because he's unmotivated and failing to launch,
  - or is he unmotivated because he's depressed?



Dear Dr. Sax,

I listened with great interest to you on NPR yesterday.

- I'm the mother of a 33-year-old male
  - —handsome, charming, personable, tall, college graduate (that took 6 years and 4 schools).
- He has "failed to launch" no matter what my husband and I have done to help him, beginning right after he graduated from college.
- We bought him a car and clothes for job interviews.
- He wasn't interested.
- He liked the good life:
  - hanging out with a bunch of kids he met in college who did drugs and stayed out all night and slept the better part of the day.

Finally, after consulting with a psychologist who encouraged us to let him fall to the very bottom, we let it happen.

- He became homeless.
- Out on the street.
- When he called us in desperation, we offered him yet another opportunity to launch.
- He joined the Army.
- He completed Basic and even did months of Advanced Individual Training.

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH  
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- Then just as the war with [Iraq](#) broke out, he figured out a way to get out of the Army.
  - But we did not allow him to live with us again.
  - We are still helping him financially or he would not be able to live on his own.
- He's living in our beach place rent-free for 8 months a year.

He has been working somewhat more steadily but he is still not capable of saving for a rainy day or even cover the basic costs of living.

- He has no aspiration to become anything.
- He says he dislikes "corporate" America.
- He is resentful of us, yet at the same time he needs us to help him.
- My husband and I have been self-starters, self-made successes.
- Over the years, with hard work, we have managed to become financially comfortable.
- We are in our mid-60s, but we still work, because we enjoy what we do.
- So how can we help our son to get on with his own life??
- And stop leaning on us????
- We have told him countless times that when we die then no one is going to be able to help him anymore.

I would love to hear from you.

D.C., near [BOSTON](#)

From: "Mike Cleveland" Mike.Cleveland@dhs.gov

Subject: Failure to Launch

Dr. Sax,

I read your article and the chat in Washington Post online.

- I was struck by the pervasiveness of this “Failure to Launch.”
- Professor KLEINFELD’s website\* indicated that this trend began in the early 70’s.

\*[www.boysproject.net](http://www.boysproject.net)

- I find that timing interesting because that’s when the military draft ended and we went to an all-volunteer force.
- The draft may have had a significant effect on young men in ways not readily apparent.

The military was a place for many boys to finish growing up.

- The additional supervised time after high school, age 18–24, may have provided the “catch up time” boys need to be on the same level with their female counterparts
- Mature role models.
  - Older and wiser heads were in positions of authority and exercised that authority.  
跟之前講Alaska Pribilof Island 的地下屋 gayjiq 很像
- Responsibility.
  - Boys learned that they would be held accountable.
  - Rewards and punishments were easily understood.

The draft

- —or more precisely, the threat of being drafted—
- may have encouraged young men who did not want to do military time to apply themselves in college.  
真有趣，跟不想當兵就去考研一樣
- Dropping out of college could lead you to be drafted into service.
- I do not advocate returning to a draft.
- But, programs which give boys a structured environment with more time to mature seem to have merit.

Regards,

MIKE CLEVELAND

[ELKVIEW, WEST VIRGINIA](#)

Dear Dr. Sax,

I heard your interview this morning on NPR.

- I tried to call but could not get through.  
可憐的媽媽，求助無門
  - I too have a son, 26 years old,
  - who is a “failure to launch.”  
END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH
- My son’s situation is a little different from many of the young men you talk about because he doesn’t live with me.
- He lives in a house that his Dad left to him, with conditions, before his death six years ago.
- My son was a smart student who did not apply himself to his studies.
- He seemed to lack discipline to study and really did not put very much effort into his studies.
- He scored very well on his SATs though.
- He entered [NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY](#) but dropped out after one year.

Now, five years later, he seems to be sliding down the slippery slope of “failing to launch” his life.

- My son is a wonderful conversationalist.
- He is interested in his tory, biology, space exploration, etc. There is a myriad of subjects that he is really knowledgeable about.
- He is
  - charming,
  - respectful,
  - polite
  - —and tall and
  - handsome!

He has so much enthusiasm for other areas of his life

- —but it doesn’t seem to apply for planning for his own life.
- What will he become?
- What will he do?
- What will be his life’s work?

It troubles me.

- It doesn't seem to trouble him at all.
- My son has had every opportunity.
- He has chosen not to return to college.
- Did he make this choice with full understanding of what it would mean for his future?
- I don't believe he ever really thinks about the future.
- I want him to do something with his life.
- His Dad would have wanted that for him too.
- I know that my son misses him very much, but it's been 6 years and he must find a path for himself.

I would so appreciate a reply whenever you have the time.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A Most Concerned Mother,

MARY W.

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BOYS ADRIET

From: "Kent Robertson" kent@costreview.com

Subject: NPR interview

I thought I would share an epiphany I experienced during your interview.

- With 4 sons, teen and pre-teen, this "Failure to Launch" trend is one I need to get in front of.  
呵呵，四個孩子的爹也很擔心
- You mentioned that these men are quite content despite their lack of motivation.
  - Well, why the hell not.
  - These man/boys have it all.
  - **Their material needs are handed to them.**
  - The over-indulgent Moms will see to that (didn't the mother who called in make that clear?).
  - **Their emasculated fathers usually have little say.**

Here's the epiphany

—or confession, if you like.

- I sense that I am only a marital separation away from sinking into such a **funk**.
- When I think how little I would need to be content, compared with how much I produce, it's amazing.
- But somehow it works.
- I work ridiculous hours and earn ridiculous money.
- Yet I personally spend only about \$200 per month of it on food, haircut, **sundries**.
- Whatever new clothes I have are given to me as gifts, because I have little interest in how I look.

I live in a comfortable home in a pleasant neighborhood, and a whole wonderful busy suburban lifestyle, but only because I want that for my wife and children.

- *Take my dear ones away and I need none of it.* [emphasis in original]
- I have seen many grown men, when their marriage fails, drift toward the man/boy zero-ambition style of life, living in a **shanty** or maybe back home with parents, in pursuit of personal gratification over everything else, exploiting every sexual opportunity, not unlike the man/boys you described on NPR.

END RESULT: FAILURE TO LAUNCH  
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You mentioned “*the engine that runs the world.*”

- As for me, I think that the engine is the love of a good woman and the ambitions we have together for the family we are raising and for the world we want them to inherit.
- Has our intellectual elite and our popular culture tinkered with “the engine that runs the world”?
- Have we violated something that the ancients knew intuitively but which we have arrogantly ignored?

KENT ROBERTSON