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## **In Conclusion: A Fundamental Reconsideration of the Journey from Boyhood to Manhood**

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The crisis our sons face is both documentable and visible in the interrelated areas of education, physical health and work. It is less visible in the areas of emotional stress or fatherlessness. But what is not visible can be insidious. A goal of the White House Council is to consider all five components together, see the larger picture of how this crisis developed in response to needs of the past, and prepare our sons to participate more effectively in a considerably different future. It must be bold enough to re-invent boyhood just as we have re-invented girlhood.

Prior to the women's movement, girls learned to row the family boat only from the right side (raise children); boys, only from the left (raise money). The women's movement helped girls become women who could row from both sides; but without a parallel force for boys, boys became men who had still learned to row only from the left—to only raise money. The problem? If our daughters try to exercise their newfound ability to row from the left, and our sons also row only from the left, the boat goes in circles.

A family boat that goes only in circles is more likely to be sunk by the rocks of recessions. In the past, a man was a family's breadwinner and he might be with one company for life. In the future, advanced technologies make economic change the only constant, increasing the need for a family boat with flexibility—with our sons eventually able to raise children as comfortably as our daughters now raise money.

A White House Council on Boys to Men can provide leadership to help our sons adapt to the next generation's needs for more flexible family participation and more flexible work participation. To introduce both our sons and daughters to the trade-offs of both a traditional partnership (of each sex specializing in rowing on one side of the boat); and the trade-offs of a relationship in which both sexes feel comfortable rowing on either side of the boat.

Fortunately, just as socializing our daughters with the ability to raise money does not prevent them from raising children full-time, so socializing our sons with the ability to raise children does not prevent them from raising money full-time. And just as society benefits from many full-time mothers, so it will also benefit from men who are full-time firefighters, lumberjacks and soldiers.

When we opened options for our daughters to raise money, human resource divisions educated men (and often women) to not just force women into becoming imitation men, but to value women's unique contributions to work. As we open options for our sons to raise children, we need to work with both our sons and daughters to not just turn our sons into imitation mothers, but to value our sons' unique contributions to parenting. Since human resource divisions cannot be in every home, only the education system can communicate these understandings.

On one level, what it takes to be a man has always been about adapting—to be fighting at war one day, and loving at home the next.

On another level, in the past, virtually every society that survived did so in part by preparing its sons to be disposable: disposable in war, or disposable at work.



Twelve-year-old boys like Mohamed,<sup>i</sup> above left, are still trained in 2010 to kill and die before the “age of consent.”

We taught our sons the way we were taught—to consider themselves “real men” if they did what was healthy for the survival of society—whether to defend the country in war, or risk death building a railroad. Fortunately, what our sons learned to do to become a man was often healthy for the society; unfortunately, it was often unhealthy for our son.<sup>ii</sup> (Whether at war, or in coalmines, death was not that healthy for our sons.) In the future, the Council can provide leadership to sustain the respect for firefighters and soldiers that allows us to recruit protectors for our homes and country, even as we also make alternative paths to becoming a valued man just as respectable.

Leadership for the future must both question and honor traditional masculinity. Most of what traditional masculinity teaches a boy to do is a virtue which, when taken to its extreme, becomes

a vice. It is a virtue to compartmentalize emotions during a moment of crisis, and a virtue to express them when the crisis is over. It is a virtue to take risks, but when a boy learns that risk-taking makes him a man, he becomes a boy who drag races, boxes, or pursues football or extreme sports until death does he part. Our job is to equate neither traditional nor non-traditional masculinity with male identity, but to help every boy understand that the full breadth of human activity is his for the hard work. Our mentorship must help a boy know he can ultimately define and redefine himself, but before he does, maturity is to comprehend the trade-offs of each decision. Masculinity of the future is not conforming to a stereotype or imitating a role model; it is using the guidance of parents, role models and mentors to discover himself and create a better and better version of everything he discovers.

It is especially timely that we undertake this mission in a time of war when our boys and men are being called on to find in themselves the oldest valor and protectiveness, yet also to become a new kind of gentle man at home; in a time of recession, when boys and men must compete for jobs to survive, yet be kind and considerate to others; in a time of medical miracles, when science is available to help us understand the minds and bodies of our children, yet increasing numbers of our boys and young men are suffering brain disorders and learning dysfunctions with limited adult intervention on their behalf; in a time of social change, when our prisons and streets fill up with young enraged males, and male gangs violate our homes, yet we do so little to bring these boys their dads, or to even recruit male teachers. In our hearts we sense we could be doing more.

A White House Council on Boys to Men can do more. It can provide leadership toward helping parents and our culture teach our sons that the facade of strength is a weakness. It can provide leadership to help us help our sons row on both sides of the family boat—so our daughters may have equal partners. It can co-ordinate the nation's best efforts to parent, mentor, and teach each of our sons to discover who he is. It can end the era of boys and men as a national afterthought. It can provide leadership to raise young men our daughters are proud to love.

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<sup>i</sup> Picture accompanying article by Jeffrey Gettleman, "In Somalia, Children Carry Guns for U.S. Ally." *New York Times*, June 14, 2010, p.1.

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ii Warren Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993 and Berkely Books, revised edition, 2000. Part I.