

# On Boys and Men – Part I

Petyr Rieke, Feb 1, 2026

## Facebook Announcement

Well, I finally am out of bed long enough to actually write. While I managed a lot of reading during the last few months, it was just physically untenable to try to use a keyboard. So, my usual day is to have a leisurely breakfast, get out and do two laps up and down my street and then sit down at my computer and get some writing done or go out to the shop and fiddle around with the new microscope I just bought. At this point two laps and two hours of work wears me out. But still my stamina is coming back slowly.

As part of this writing, I have finished a review of Richard Reeves book “On Boys and Men.” It is the first popular book on the subject, that really puts some meat into the subject and makes practical suggestions. There were previous writings on the role of men in society such as the rather useless mythopoetic books like Bly’s “Iron John” that came out some 20 years ago. Despite the general audience that Reeves targets, the book is still not easy reading. So, I will help you out here and In Part I of my review, I summarize his observations and his suggestions.

I pretty much agree with many of his argument but believe that it does not go far enough. His solutions focus on enhancing the model roles of fathers in the family and male teachers in education. However, as many of you know, the problem is the 18–25-year-old males who have withdrawn from society. These are the “Non-Responders” to use Reeves’ term. They no longer have intimate contact with either family or school. Reeves basically admits that attempts to reach these young men have been a total failure. Some young men tune into the ideology of characters like Andrew Tate in which women are at best subservient wives and at worst obedient sex slaves. I hope to address this issue in Part II of my rants on the subject.

You can find the full essay at my [website](#) in PDF format as well as an essay on the evils of men like Andrew Tate.

## Introduction

I finished reading Richard Reeves’ book “On Boys and Men” and intend here to provide a review of the book and some support and criticism of his conclusions. I outline the basic organization of the book as well as provide some personal context to his observations.

First, I am not a parent and have no progeny. I you think this disqualifies me from adding my experience to the matter, you don’t understand the problem. I do have my son-in-law who came into my life when he was 20 years old. I have also had quite a few interns work in my chemistry laboratory most of whom were young men with a few young women. In addition, for 5 years, I ran an Electrathon America club the objective of which was to design and build (no set designs or kits) a go-cart sized electric racer. About 15 high school age men and women participated. When it comes to working with a wide variety of teenagers and young adults, I have had significant experience that I have found greatly rewarding.

Indeed, part of the problem as I will discuss is that we assume good parents and good teachers are enough. This is especially not true for young men.

## The Guts of the Problem

If one asks GPT4 to “Define feminism” I got back “**Feminism** is a social, political, and cultural movement advocating for the rights and equality of women in relation to men. Its core belief is that women should have equal opportunities, rights, and treatment in various aspects of life, including social, economic, and political spheres.”

If you ask “What is the Opposite of Feminism” you might get something like “The opposite of feminism can generally be described as anti-feminism or male chauvinism. These terms represent ideologies or beliefs that oppose the principles of feminism, including gender equality and women's rights.”

If you ask “What would a pro male equality movement be called” you might get something like “A pro male equality movement could be called "**Men for Equality**" or "**Men's Equality Initiative.**"

The problem here is that the definition of feminism does not imply a diminution of men but only equality between the two primary sexes. (I will forgo, for now, the varied definitions of sexuality and recognize that most people identify with the sex assigned them at birth.) However, there does NOT seem to exist a term that is sexually neutral describing equality of opportunity between the sexes. The “opposite of feminism” is presumed to be chauvinistic and a men’s equality movement does not apparently exist according to GPT4.

I consider myself a feminist primarily because I grew up in the late 60 and early 70s when I was astounded at how many young women were focused on or coerced into adopting a traditional stay at home mommy role. (Someday I will relate the sewing class I took as an elective in my sophomore year of college. Imagine an intense and focused, hippie type with two long braids, reeking slightly of pot and with a remarkable semblance to Charles Manson, sitting amongst a gaggle of sorority types whose ambition didn’t extend beyond getting their M.R.S. I made a lovely little dolls dress and I think the teacher was very happy to have me take a real interest in the craft.) Hence, I found it difficult to relate to women and focused on school or work; sports like backpacking, skiing, running; as well as crafts like engine rebuilding and carpentry. There was of course a moderate amount of drinking. Life was full of fun things to do and women added little to that experience.

Nearly twenty years ago, I got a divorce and, as is my usual approach, I tried to examine the problem from a broad social perspective as well as the usual self-centered perspective. I went looking for literature on men’s role in society and the family. I found little to none on the subject of men. There were a few books like Robert Bly’s “Iron John” which were quote “mythopoetic” unquote. What the fuck does that mean? More importantly these concepts in this format would not be of interest the average young man and I found them too spiritual. Men were supposed to get in touch with our feelings and the media reported on men’s weekends out howling around the campfire or learning to cry. This was less than helpful; it was demeaning.

While the libraries and book stores had shelves full of books on feminist ideology. It was generally assumed that the whole of literature and history was men’s ideology and there was no need for a

specific discussion of the subject. Growing up in the 60s and 70s, I did understand why this was so. It was essentially true; men dominated almost all aspects of society.

In summary there is no men's movement and Reeves' book "On Boys and Men" appears to be the first popular, non-academic text on the subject. It outlines the progress of women, the state of young men in society and suggest some steps we might take to bring young men back into the fold of society. As was most feminist literature, this book is clearly written from the perspective of an upper-middle-class white (UMCW) person. This was one of the problems with feminism when it pronounced that women could have careers and a family. Well, damn it, most women and men, even today, do not have careers. They have jobs that pay near minimum wage, which have no advancement path and require minimal training. Further if you make a fuss, like try to unionize, you can easily be replaced by another worker.

While I grew up UMCW and am now UMCW, I spent a considerable portion of my youth in mundane jobs like janitor and stock boy as well as many years of hard labor swinging a sledge hammer and working as a lumberjack. Even for my bosses, the job was just a fucking job that put food on the table. I took pride in some of these jobs, but, in other jobs, we were just waiting for quitting time and hitting the bars. Believe me no one takes pride in moping a dining hall floor and one's only major concern is if the boss is going to come by and fire your ass for slacking off.

This UMCW perspective therefore taints Reeves' solutions to the boys and men problem and I think his solutions rely too much on parents and teachers. I will make the argument that young men need more positive interaction with men other than their dads and more with male coworkers and bosses. The male work place is adversarial while the female workplace is more cooperative. The duty of older men is to welcome younger men into the fold and show them the ropes. The problem isn't young men. The problem is us old guys. But for now let's focus on what Reeves' has to say.

## What's in the Book

In the first part of his book, Reeves catalogs various measures of the success of women and the decline of men in the social arena including family, education and employment. One could accuse him of cherry picking but the extensive examples given clearly indicate we have a problem with young men. Older men formulated our lives when men were given a preference in our society. Hence age plays an important role in how we prioritize this problem. Young men have no deep perspective of what a dominantly patriarchal society really means. Older men have little perspective of how dominant women have become in many areas.

But onto the book with my brief commentary on the principal takeaways. To summarize:

- 1) Young men are not attending college in the U.S. at the same rate as women who now slightly dominate the college campus population. In other countries women can be as much as 75% of the student population. I support a few scholarships at my local community college and during the annual breakfast they announce the individual recipients. Keeping count, I find that roughly 70% of all scholarships go to women. When I point that out to the college foundation that distributes scholarships and raises money, their response is that it is in proportion to the number of applicants. Back in the 70s such a response would have been considered insensitive at best if not outright sexist. It was assumed women did not want to

go to college. We cannot have a similar response now; we have to take positive action to encourage men to apply to college or post high school training and apply for scholarships. Simply stated community colleges provide a huge bang for the buck.

- 2) Reeves argues that the gender pay gap is in reality a parenting gap. Among singles or marrieds without children the pay gap is minimal. Once a couple decides to have children the women often choose child care over career. The old canard that women “can have it all” just does not work out well for families. Having one parent being a stay-at-home care giver is for most families the preferred option. Usually, it is the mom who chooses to be the primary care giver especially during the preschool formative years. It is arguable whether this is choice is driven by biology or sociology.
- 3) Men often choose STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) jobs while women often choose HEAL (Health, Education, Administration and Literacy) jobs. The STEM jobs especially those requiring just a 2-year or 4-year degree are being automated and/or replaced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) while HEAL jobs are less susceptible to automation or AI. So called Career & Technical Education (CTE) jobs are a mixed bag. A good plumber or machinist can make an excellent living provided they have the ability to operate as an independent contractor. This requires basic business school knowledge including marketing and accounting. Further CTE entry jobs are difficult to find as the field is carefully screened by independent contractors or union halls. You often have to know someone to get a foot in the door. And pay for an entry level framing carpenter job, for example, is basically \$15/hr. i.e. minimum wage. Still, it is a promising option for many young men if you can get them to actually attend a community college or trade school. Overall, regardless of education, men are finding their traditional jobs in manufacturing or the trades decreasing in pay and demand.

I recently spent a few days in the hospital where male nurses were unusually common and I asked each of them how they got into the field. Their reasons were part happen-chance and part job pay scale. Only one came from a military background. All of them did not seem to have any qualms about taking on a traditionally female role. This was unusual. In other hospitals, I rarely met male nurses and on one occasion a female nurse reported me for being too verbally aggressive, despite the fact that I was responding to her being verbally aggressive. I like having a male nurse.

- 4) Another argument that Reeves makes is that men are excluded from families. Either they work too much so as to allow their spouse to stay at home or they pay for child care with non-functional visitation rights. These visitations don't allow them enough interaction time to be parents but rather they become an afternoon of entertainment and the fathers pay for the privilege of being a babysitter. Either way many boys never have fathers. They only get a female perspective and that hinders their ability to deal with life as young men trying to find jobs.

The wife of one of my friends, dumped him as soon as they had adopted the two children she so desperately wanted. It seemed just a blatant scheme to just get his money and he became persona non grata. More of my acquaintances simply have had to endure an

uncooperative spouse and fight for occasional visitation. Once the kids get old enough, usually middle teens, they can appreciate and choose their company of one or both parents. Some men play the long game. They get revenge as they stick around as non-sexual partners and put on a happy face until all the kids graduate from high-school and then file for divorce.

Marriage and kids have a lot of risk. From a young man's perspective: why even play the game?

- 5) Another key point the Reeves makes is that young men have become asocial. They don't have many friends if any at all and don't meet women anywhere. Studies have shown that women are more adept at building social networks from an earlier age and this is in part a brain development difference. The statistics on suicide and depression are, well, depressing. Men are 3-4 times more likely to commit suicide than women and the gap is increasing especially among young men. Matthew McConaughey comical role in "Failure to Launch" is a very unfunny reality for many families. Many societies are seeing the same hermit like behavior in young men. In Japan some parents hire young women to befriend their sons. Damned if I can remember the name of the comedic movie that plays off just this theme. Efforts to draw them out do not seem to work.

I will note that as a young man, I also had many deep feelings of inadequacy that led me to not seek social interaction especially in the job market. I'd rather let my girlfriend organize our social interactions. Going out to buy tires and get automotive parts was troubling because I did not want to seem unknowledgeable on the subject. I feared that older men would scoff at my naïve questions and yet readily tell my girlfriend all she needed to know. But I will talk on this aspect in much greater detail in part two of this rant after we discuss what Reeves suggests we do about young men.

- 6) Per Reeves, young men are "Non-Responders" meaning that basically everything we have tried just doesn't work. What more can I say but **no one is getting the job done**. It wasn't OK in the early 70s to blame women for their status. We cannot do the same for young men. We cannot shrug our arms and say: "Well, we tried."
- 7) Nature vs Nurture. Reeves discusses the obvious male tendencies to take risks and have a penchant for porn. Hell, I remember the first, black and white, full-frontal, girlie magazines, we found in a ditch about 4 miles from home. We hid it in the cloths hamper where mom found it almost immediately.

He argues that culturally we are "fragile." Yeah, I remember being young and uncertain how to act. When it came to romance, that was the women's purview and somehow, we were supposed to understand what to do next. The key was to wait until the late twenties when women started to get antsy about their own relationships and began looking at the men in their lives in a much more utilitarian sense.

And of course it is all due to Testosterone. OMG, The dreadful and deadly and odious testosterone. The big T is closely associated with male rage. And I understand that. Rage is

something that sneaks up on me, I have learned to see the signs and do something positive to vent before it becomes out of control. But it also drives men to take sudden risky actions that save lives.

But the male psyche for risk is more than instantaneous testosterone driven reaction to danger. Our hormones allow us to endure longer term physical endeavors. Sometimes it's about keeping your shit together in difficult physical and mental circumstances and doing so for the next two weeks and often longer. Sometimes it's about 6 hours of the top most effort you can give. Pushing hard at just below sprint speed; meanwhile chugging water and sucking down rations. Sometimes it's about keeping your entire team moving. The male energy is a broad spectrum of physical effort. Still, I have had the pleasure to know a few women who can join a trained and well-led male team and do just fine. But I've never met any female choker-setters. (If you are one, drop me a note.)

And apparently despite considerable effort to the contrary, no one understands why men still choose the hard sciences more than women. Reeves quotes a reference as "Men are more attracted to things, women to people." Is it that simple? No, but in many stereotypes, there is a nugget of truth. For simplicity, let's assume that men and women have an interest or disinterest in particle physics described by a Boltzmann distribution. (Actually, it is probably more like a Poisson distribution with almost everyone scrunched up on the zero-interest side.) Men may well have a mean shifted towards an interest in this arcane science (Oh! May the wrath of particle physicist fall gently upon my head) but it may also be wider. As a consequence of the very low sample population available at the ends of this distribution many physics departments may have no women employed in particle physics.

How do you deal with this, personally, on a daily basis? My philosophy is to try to see who has that internal power to achieve their goals, those who actually have goals. Often it is rare. And often it is very different than mine.

- 8) The politics of sex. Then there are two chapters that you can basically ignore on how both the left and right use gender politics. We get enough of the "Me Too" crap as well as the "Queer Hate" crap from media. I will say that I pay attention to how much of it I read. It is a good measure of extreme views and occasionally some one like Reeves steps forward and writes intelligently on the subject. It takes a book not an Op-Ed. As do frankly most subjects.
- 9) Then Reeves suggest solutions to the problem and these breakdown into six categories
  - a. Redshirt Boys. Give them an extra year before entering either grade school or college. I was pre-shirted. Born on Oct 8<sup>th</sup>, I was put in school early. I was always the youngest and smallest student in all of my classes. Lots pros and cons there let me tell you.
  - b. More Male Teachers. I think this is especially important in the Middle School years when young men do not want to be cuddled and women teachers are just moms in disguise.

- c. Vocational Education. I think ALL boys should participate in at least two major technical, hands-on subjects. But we must avoid too early a separation into a two track career path
- d. Push men to consider more female dominated HEAL jobs.
- e. Make it possible, technically and mentally, for Men to get paid family leave and don't diminish the value of being a stay-at-home parent regardless of sex.
- f. Ensure divorce does not estrange the father.

And that's it. My technical review of the book is done. It's not perfect and I'm sure a few will say "what about." But this is the message I pulled out of the book. I've added a few comments here and there and for the most part I believe Reeves has outlined the problem very well and I agree with many of his point. However, I believe the thing that is missing is a focus on how to work with young men in their late teens and early twenties. Getting a job, talking to adults and meeting women are social skills. We need mechanisms to encourage that interaction. Young men lack confidence. Older men need to understand that lack of confidence and create mentoring opportunities.

In my next rant, I'd like to go into this problem in much greater detail. But that will take some time as I need to consolidate my own thoughts on the subject and provide examples. But to a large degree the message will be that men organize themselves differently than women and tend to be overly competitive with one another. In the job market, a new hire might be seen as future competition rather than a cooperative teammate. Men need to learn to mentor young men and the methods for doing so are different than those women use to mentor other young women.