

Why America Has a Generation of 'Little Men'

There's a lot of talk these days about the problem with young, uninspired, and allegedly lazy males.

According to Pew Research, this problem is evident in the fact that young men ages 18 to 34 are more likely to [live at home](#) with a parent than are young women of the same age.

According to the Census Bureau, this problem is evident in the fact that more women [earn college degrees](#) than men.

And according to young women, this problem is evident in the fact that all the young men around them seem to have "[gotten really soft](#)."

There are [many theories](#) as to why these problems are intensifying, including the decline of physical labor, the set-up of the education system, the move away from apprenticeships, and the general attitude of men-bashing which seems to prevail in today's society.

But while all these theories likely have a role in the decline of men, there is another that we may have overlooked. This theory is one advanced in the 1930 book [The Conquest of Happiness](#), written by British philosopher Bertrand Russell.

In his book, Russell argues that children need to learn to deal with boredom early in life. As Russell saw it, too many modern parents (and by extension one could argue teachers and other adults influential in children's lives) whip their children around from one activity to the next. In doing this, they teach children to love pleasure and become addicted to excitement.

Instead, Russell urges parents to let their children –

particularly boys – have times of “fruitful monotony,” in which they can be busy and working, but not necessarily in an activity that is exciting or stimulating:

“A boy or young man who has some serious constructive purpose will endure voluntarily a great deal of boredom if he finds that it is necessary by the way. But constructive purposes do not easily form themselves in a boy’s mind if he is living a life of distractions and dissipations, for in that case his thoughts will always be directed towards the next pleasure rather than towards the distant achievement.”

Those who fail to follow this advice with their children, Russell notes, stand to reap serious problems in future years:

“For all these reasons a generation that cannot endure boredom will be a generation of little men, of men unduly divorced from the slow processes of nature, of men in whom every vital impulse slowly withers, as though they were cut flowers in a vase.”

It’s not hard to recognize that these symptoms are evident among many young men of the current generation. Is it possible that society’s quest to continually entertain children in recent years has indeed resulted in this epidemic of “little men” we see?