

Physician Explains What's Wrong with the APA's Masculinity Guidelines

Family medical doctor and psychologist Leonard Sax has garnered a reputation for being a voice of common sense when it comes to matters of parenting. According to Sax, today's children operate in a "[culture of disrespect](#)," a culture which many parents have fostered by trying to be their child's friend rather than parent.

Dr. Sax's common sense approach to life recently extended beyond parenting, however, when he made several observations on the American Psychological Association's (APA) guidelines on dealing with the male sex. In an article entitled, [Psychology as Indoctrination: Girls Rule, Boys Drool?](#), Dr. Sax has some agreement with the APA. Men, he notes, are less likely than women to seek help for mental health and more likely to commit suicide.

But there are several other things which the APA gets wrong. The first is the idea that "masculinity is a social construct." According to Dr. Sax, this "assertion is politically correct," but not academically verified. The fact that "typically masculine characteristics – such as risk-taking and the propensity for violence" are observed in males beyond the human species debunks the theory that these traits are learned from societal attitudes.

Second, Dr. Sax takes issue with how the APA suggests these toxically masculine men be treated. They recommend a type of "conversion" therapy in which "traditionally-masculine men" become "enlightened, gender-egalitarian men." According to Dr. Sax, "The authors of the APA guidelines present no evidence that their conversion therapy for masculine men would be

effective.”

Finally, Dr. Sax notes a significant absence in the APA guidelines: the failure to delineate between sheepdogs and wolves. As Dr. Sax explains, less than ten percent of the population can be classified as a “sheepdog” or a “wolf.” In contrast to “sheep,” the more docile members of the population, sheepdogs or wolves tend toward more violent behavior. Whether or not these tendencies are channeled toward a protector or predator persona is where the difference lies:

The authors of the APA guidelines show no awareness of the distinction between sheepdog and wolf. Instead, the guidelines very nearly equate being a traditional man with being a wolf: a Harvey Weinstein, a sexual harasser, a bully, a violent criminal. Nowhere in the guidelines do the authors show awareness that society depends on sheepdogs. Without police, without soldiers, without heroic warriors, society becomes vulnerable to the wolves among us. In recommending that males be indoctrinated in “gender-egalitarianism,” the APA guidelines sound suspiciously like castration.

Dr. Sax concludes his article by saying:

Years ago, I visited a boys’ school in Maryland. The school counselor, Judy Collins... said, “You can’t turn a bully into a flower child. But you can turn him into a knight.” Her motto: “Affirm the knight.”

Could this be the solution to what is now termed “toxic masculinity”? If instead of running them down and automatically labeling them “toxic,” would we experience a host of well-behaved, strong, and gentlemanly young men if we channeled their energy into being protecting sheepdogs instead of being predatory wolves? Is it time we “affirm the knight”?

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