

10 August 2000

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" Boys to Men " .

Dear Sir,

When we think about young people today, especially young men, we often despair - the risks they take, youth suicide etc., if only they had thought of the consequences.

It has been called The Generation Gap. I call it The Testosterone Gap.

Young men have wildly fluctuating levels of testosterone swirling through their veins that often causes them to act irrationally, dangerously and antisocially - mix this with alcohol and what a potent mix we have, invincibility combined with a dulled consciousness.

By the age of 30 or so, these levels have largely settled to an even and gently undulating concentration. With maturity he is able to recognise the effects of this hormone on his thinking and actions. Look at the figures - the alarming numbers of cases of suicide, attempted suicide, hospital admissions for fighting etc., car accidents and initial drug use all peter out after the 28 - 30 year bracket.

By the age of 40 or so ( the policy makers ) he has largely forgotten the power testosterone can exert so he tries to rationalize the young person's behaviour and make laws to try to stop the young people taking risks- to protect him from himself.

Up until 30 years ago this need and willingness of young men to take risk was admired and cherished in our society. Indeed in many cultures today risk taking is seen as an important initiation into manhood. This is now missing from our modern western society.

We have all taken dangerous and irrational risk - whether it was paddock bashing, shooting rabbits, speeding around in cars, fooling around with bullets or fireworks, going to war or taking drugs. Did we stop to consider how dangerous it was - YES - that is precisely why we were doing it, because it was dangerous.

My suggestion is that we somehow need to re-introduce risk taking into our young men's lives. We need to engage them in dangerous behaviour - safely- is this

possible ?

There are already organisations who do this such as Scouts, Air / Army cadets and sporting clubs. But we as parents need to cater for those young men who do not fit into these structures and therefore have no 'safe' channels of risk-taking.

We need to be there to supervise our young men, to let them know that risk-taking and facing danger are important parts of becoming a man. We need to find new ways of channelling that aggression, adrenalin, passion and energy into constructive and character building risk taking.

Will we be viewed as responsible parents trying to develop our youth's souls, or will we be labelled irresponsible and foolhardy by the policy makers ?

Your's Faithfully

Stephen McMullen.  
Wagga Wagga.

Post Script : Although this letter was written and published 2 years ago, I sent it to you 2 days after a student from Newcastle High school was killed in a snowboarding accident at Thredbo. This is an extremely tragic accident and my total sympathy goes to the family, friends and teachers involved. However, I await the all too common knee-jerk reaction from the Department of School Education banning all 'dangerous activities and sports'.

It is also 5 days after I took 24 students and 6 parents to Falls Creek skiing and snowboarding for 2 days. This was one of the most valuable and pleasurable experiences I have had in 7 years' teaching. I truly believe that it was also invaluable to the students.

It should be the parent's responsibility to engage their sons in these activities, but today, like so many other things, it is left up to schools and teachers.

I ask you to resist any further legislation aimed at 'protecting' our sons from responsible risk taking.

Thankyou,

Stephen McMullen.