

Topical Considerations

1. Sanders first became aware of feminist issues when he went to college, and his past experiences did not prepare him for the “gender lesson” he was exposed to there. Have you had a similar experience upon coming to college or at other times in your life?
2. In paragraph 7, Sanders states that he has feelings of guilt toward a number of minority groups or social causes, but that his feelings toward women are more complicated. What do you think might be the reasons for his conclusion? Can you identify with his feelings?
3. Do you think that Sanders wants his readers to become more sympathetic toward men after reading this essay? Use examples in the text to explain your answer.
4. How might the people from Sanders’ youth respond to this essay (i.e., lower-income, blue-collar men and women who stay at home)? How do you think the parents of Sanders’ college classmates (i.e., upper-class, white-collar men and women who are also professionals) would respond?
5. Might Sanders be sympathetic to feminist issues? Or would he argue that women, not men, are the privileged class?
6. Sanders’ friend Anneke says: “I wouldn’t be a man for anything. It’s much easier being the victim” (paragraph 8). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Rhetorical Considerations

1. Sanders begins his essay recounting a present-day discussion with a female friend. How does this help set up the argument that follows?
2. Sanders relates his argument entirely in the first-person, using personal anecdotes and narratives to illustrate his point. How might this essay differ if told from a more objective (third-person) point of view illustrated by statistics?
3. Sanders uses descriptive language throughout the essay. Does this language illustrate the issue of gender expectations and roles, or does it obscure Sanders’ argument?
4. Who would be the most sympathetic reader of Sanders’ essay? Explain your answer.
5. In paragraph 18, Sanders says that the fathers of his college classmates “were never laid off, never short of cash at month’s end, never lined up for welfare.” Do you think this statement is as factual as Sanders makes it sound? What is the effect of such a statement?
6. Sanders ends his essay with a question about women: “If I had known, then, how to tell them [women] so [that he was their ally], would they have be-

lieved me?” What is the effect of this question as a conclusion to the essay? Does it conclude Sanders’ argument well?

Writing Assignments

1. Write a letter responding to Sanders as if you were one of his female college classmates. Make sure to describe in detail the personal experiences that have formed your perspective on male and female stereotypes.
2. Look over Sanders’ conclusion and then write an essay answering his final two questions: If he had told his female classmates that he was an ally, would they have believed him? Do you think they would now?
3. Continue the dialogue between Sanders and his friend Anneke. Using the brief arguments begun in the few introductory sentences, construct a dialogue/debate between them, that has them remain true to their respective points of view.

Men as Success Objects

Warren Farrell

“With all the focus on the discrimination against women, few understand the sexism directed against men.” Such is the argument of author Warren Farrell, who examines the roots of men’s anxiety about themselves in this essay. Farrell’s focus is on men’s unequal responsibility to succeed in the workplace, to prove their worth by making money, to be, as the author puts it, “a wallet.” Warren Farrell is a psychologist and author of the 1986 bestseller, *Why Men Are the Way They Are* as well as *The Myth of Male Power* (1993). The following article first appeared in the November/December 1988 issue of *Family Therapy Network*.

BEFORE YOU READ

Have you ever heard a man complain about being a “success object”—in other words, someone valued for the money he earns rather than for himself? If so, cite some of the comments. Have you heard women make comments about men as success objects? What might these comments reveal about men and women’s attitudes toward the responsibility of earning money?

AS YOU READ

As you read this essay, list four generalizations Farrell makes about the way men and women view each other. Carefully compare each generalization against your own experience or observations. Do you agree or disagree with these generalizations?

Why or why not? In your opinion, do these generalizations weaken or reinforce Farrell's argument?

1 For thousands of years, marriages were about economic security and survival. Let's call this Stage I in our culture's conception of marriage. Beginning in the 1950s, marriages became focused on personal fulfillment and we entered into the era of the Stage II relationship. In Stage II, love was redefined to include listening to each other, joint parenting, sexual fulfillment, and shared decision-making. As a result, many traditional marriages consummated in Stage I failed under the new Stage II expectations. Thus we had the great surge of divorces beginning in the '60s.

2 The increasing incidence of divorce altered the fundamental relationship between women, men, and the workplace. Before divorce became common, most women's income came from men, so discrimination in favor of a woman's husband benefited her. But, as the divorce rate mushroomed, the same discrimination often hurt her. Before divorce became a common expectation, we had two types of inequality—women's experience of unequal rights in the workplace and men's experience of unequal responsibility for succeeding in the workplace. To find a woman to love him, a man had to "make his mark" in the world. As women increasingly had to provide for themselves economically, we confined our examination of inequality between the sexes to inequality in the workplace. What was ignored was the effect of inequality in the homeplace. Also ignored was a man's feeling that no woman would love him if he volunteered to be a full-time househusband instead of a full-time provider. As a result, we falsely assumed that the experience of inequality was confined to women.

3 Because divorces led to a change in the pressures on women (should she become a doctor, marry a doctor, or have a career and marry a doctor?), that change became "news" and her new juggling act got attention in the media. Because the underlying pressures on men did not change (women still married men who earned more than they did), the pressure on men to succeed did not change, and, therefore, received no attention. With all the focus on discrimination against women, few understood the sexism directed against men.

4 The feminist perspective on relationships has become like fluoride in water—we drink it without being aware of its presence. The complaints about men, the idea the "men are jerks," have become so integrated into our unconscious that even advertisers have caught on. After analyzing 1,000 commercials in 1987, researcher Fred Hayward found that when an ad called for a negative portrayal in a male-female interaction, an astonishing 100 percent of the time the "bad guy" was the man.

5 This anti-male bias isn't confined to TV commercials. A sampling of the cards in the "Love and Friendship" section of a greeting card store revealed these gems:

"If they can send one man to the moon, why can't they send them all?"
 "When you unzip a man's pants . . . his brains fall out."

"If we can make penicillin out of moldy cheese . . . maybe we can make men out of the low-lives in this town."

6 A visit to the bookstore turns up titles like *No Good Men*. Imagine *No Good Women* or *No Good Jews*. And what do the following titles have in common? *Men Who Can't Love*; *Men Who Hate Women* and the *Women Who Love Them*; *Smart Women/Foolish Choices*; *Successful Women*, *Angry Men*; *Peter Pan Syndrome*.

7 Feminism-as-fluoride has left us acknowledging the working mother ("Superwoman") without even being aware of the working father. It is by now well recognized that, even among men who do more housework or more childcare than their wives, almost never does the man truly share the 24-hour-a-day psychological responsibility of ministering to everyone's needs, egos, and schedules.

8 But it is not so widely recognized that, despite the impact feminism has had on the contemporary family, almost every father still remains 24-hour-a-day psychological responsibility for the family's financial well-being. Even women who earn more than their husbands tell me that they know their husbands would support their decision to earn as much or as little as they wish. If a woman marries a successful man, then she knows she will have an option to work or not, but not an obligation. Almost all men see bringing home a healthy salary as an obligation, not an option.

9 A woman today has three options.

Option 1: Full-time career.

Option 2: Full-time family.

Option 3: Some combination of career and family.

10 A man sees himself as having three "slightly different" options:

Option 1: Work full time.

Option 2: Work full time.

Option 3: Work full time.

11 The U.S. Bureau of the Census explains that full-time working males work an average of eight hours more per week on their jobs than full-time working females.

12 Since many women now earn substantial incomes, doesn't this relieve the pressure on men to be a wallet? No. Why? Because successful women do exactly what less-successful women do—"marry up," that is, marry a man

whose income is greater than her own. According to statistics, if a woman cannot marry up or marry someone with a high wage-earning potential, she does not marry at all. Therefore, a man often reflexively backs away from a woman he's attracted to when he discovers she's more successful than he is because he senses he's only setting himself up for rejection. Ultimately, she'll dump him for a more successful man. She may sleep with him, or live with him, but not marry him unless she spots "potential." Thus, of top female executives, 85 percent don't get married; the remaining 15 percent almost all marry up. Even successful women have not relaxed the pressure on men to succeed.

Ask a girl in junior high or high school about the boy whom she would "absolutely love" to ask her out to the prom and chances are almost 100 percent that she would tell you her fantasy boy is *both* good-looking *and* successful (a jock or student leader, or someone who "has potential"). Ask a boy whom he would absolutely love to ask out to the prom and chances are almost 100 percent his fantasy girl is good-looking. Only about 25 percent will also be interested in a girl's "strong career potential" (or her being a top female jock). His invisible curriculum, then, taught him that being good-looking is not enough to attract a good-looking girl—he must be successful *in addition* to being good-looking. This was his experience of inequality: "Good-looking boy does not equal good-looking girl." Why are boys willing to consider themselves unequal to girls' attention until they hit their heads against 21 other boys on a football field?

In part, the answer is because boys are addicted. In all cultures, boys are addicted to the images of beautiful women. And in American culture this is enormously magnified. Boys are exposed to the images of beautiful women about 10 million times per year via television, billboards, magazines, etc. In the process, the naturally beautiful girl becomes a *genetic celebrity*. Boys become addicted to the image of the quasi-anorexic female. To be the equal of this genetic celebrity, the adolescent boy must become an *earned celebrity* (by performing, paying on dates, etc.). Until he is an earned celebrity, he feels like a groupie trying to get a celebrity's attention.

Is there an invisible curriculum for girls and boys growing up? Yes. For girls, "if you want to have your choice among boys, you had better be beautiful." For boys, it's "You had better be handsome *and* successful." If a boy wants a romantic relationship with a girl he must not only be successful and perform, he must pay and pursue—risk sexual rejection. Girls think of the three Ps—performing, paying and pursuing—as male power. Boys see the three Ps as what they must do to earn their way to female love and sexuality. They see these not as power, but as compensations for powerlessness. This is the adolescent male's experience of inequality.

Topical Considerations

1. Who is Farrell's ideal reader? Do you think that his argument will win "opposing" readers to his side? Where and how?

2. In paragraph 4, Farrell discusses unfair depiction of men in advertising. Can you think of some examples to support his claim? Do you think that women are also depicted unfairly? What are some examples?
3. What are the differences between men's and women's options, according to Farrell? Looking back over your own experience and the experience of people you know, do Farrell's claims ring true to you? How so? If not, where does your experience differ?
4. Do you agree with Farrell's statement in paragraph 8 that "If a woman marries a successful man, then she knows she will have an option to work or not, but not an obligation"? Why or why not?
5. Has Farrell changed your way of thinking about gender issues? Are you more sympathetic to his cause? Why or why not?

Rhetorical Considerations

1. Farrell begins his argument with a discussion of divorce and its effects on men and women. How does he use this to introduce his argument? Do you think his introduction functions effectively?
2. How effective is the analogy that Farrell sets up in paragraph 4—that "the feminist perspective on relationships has become like fluoride in water"? Do you think this analogy might offend some readers?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Farrell's use of statistics in his essay?
4. How would you describe Farrell's voice in this article? What kind of person do you think he is from his tone? Use passages from the text to support your answers.
5. Because Farrell does not use personal anecdotes as does Sanders, his essay might seem more objective. Is it? If yes, cite where and why. If no, describe why not.

Writing Assignments

1. More and more men are staying at home while their wives work. Pretend that you are one of those husbands and respond to Farrell's argument in a letter.
2. Using Farrell's argument as your opposition, write a debate or a dialogue in which you refute Farrell's stance point by point.
3. Try to formulate your own lists of options for men and women today. Explain these options, and how and why they are similar to or different from Farrell's.
4. Write a response to Farrell's piece in which you defend his opinion. Then write a response in which you oppose it. Finally, write about Farrell's essay as if you were a "reporter"—that is, summarize the text in a neutral manner.