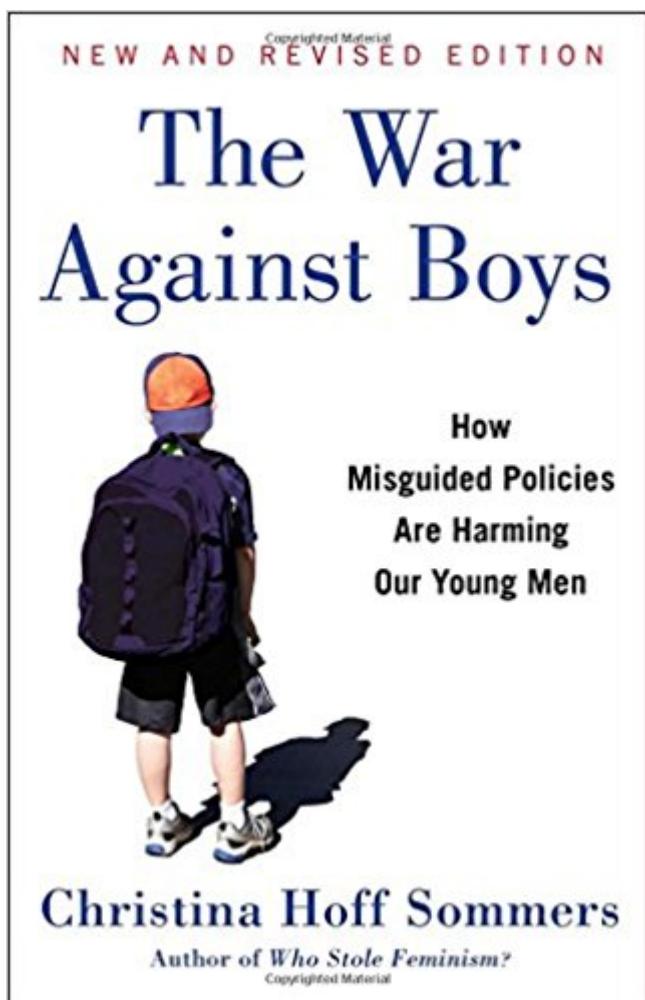


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# The War Against Boys: How Misguided Policies Are Harming Our Young Men



## Synopsis

An updated and revised edition of the controversial classic--now more relevant than ever--argues that boys are the ones languishing socially and academically, resulting in staggering social and economic costs. Girls and women were once second-class citizens in the nation's schools. Americans responded with concerted efforts to give girls and women the attention and assistance that was long overdue. Now, after two major waves of feminism and decades of policy reform, women have made massive strides in education. Today they outperform men in nearly every measure of social, academic, and vocational well-being. Christina Hoff Sommers contends that it's time to take a hard look at present-day realities and recognize that boys need help. Called "provocative and controversial . . . impassioned and articulate" ("The Christian Science Monitor"), this edition of "The War Against Boys" offers a new preface and six radically revised chapters, plus updates on the current status of boys throughout the book. Sommers argues that the problem of male underachievement is persistent and worsening. Among the new topics Sommers tackles: how the war against boys is harming our economic future, and how boy-averse trends such as the decline of recess and zero-tolerance disciplinary policies have turned our schools into hostile environments for boys. As our schools become more feelings-centered, risk-averse, competition-free, and sedentary, they move further and further from the characteristic needs of boys. She offers realistic, achievable solutions to these problems that include boy-friendly pedagogy, character and vocational education, and the choice of single-sex classrooms. "The War Against Boys" is an incisive, rigorous, and heartfelt argument in favor of recognizing and confronting a new reality: boys are languishing in education and the price of continued neglect is economically and socially prohibitive.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Marilyn Gardner "The Christian Science Monitor" Provocative and controversial...Sommers's voice is impassioned and articulate.Danielle Crittenden "New York Post" In Christina Hoff Sommers's splendid new book...she shows the damage that is being done to our sons by adults determined to stop them from being, well, boys.Mary Eberstadt "The Washington Times" This book promises to launch and influence an enduring national debate....The author trains her empirical and polemical skills on an issue of demonstrable and often poignant urgency.Richard Bernstein "The New York Times" The burden of [this] thoughtful, provocative book is that it is American boys who are in trouble, not girls. Ms. Sommers... makes these arguments persuasively and unflinchingly, with plenty of data to support them.

> is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C. She has a PhD in philosophy from Brandeis University and was formerly a professor of philosophy at Clark University. Sommers has written for numerous publications and is the author of >. She is married with two sons and lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

Christina Marie Hoff Sommers (born 1950) is a former philosophy professor in Ethics at Clark University and is now a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. She has written other books such as Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women, Freedom Feminism: Its Surprising History and Why It Matters Today, One Nation Under Therapy - How the Helping Culture Is Eroding Self-Reliance, Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life: Introductory Readings in Ethics, Right and Wrong: Basic Readings in Ethics, etc. [NOTE: page numbers below refer to the 251-page hardcover edition.] She wrote in the Preface to this 2000 book, "This book tells the story of how it has become fashionable to attribute pathology to millions of healthy male children. It is a story of how we are turning against boys and forgetting a simple truth: that the energy, competitiveness, and corporal daring of normal, decent males is responsible for much of what is right in the world." Boys need discipline, respect, and moral guidance. Boys need love and tolerant understanding. They do not need to be pathological. For many years women's groups have been complaining that boys are benefiting from a school

system that favors boys and is biased against girls. The research commonly cited to support the claims of male privilege and sinfulness is riddled with errors. In this book I try to correct the misinformation and to give an accurate picture of where the boys are. A review of the facts shows boys, not girls, are on the weak side of an educational gender gap. (Pg. 14) She observes, "boys are resented, being seen both as the unfairly privileged gender and as obstacles on the path to gender justice for girls. There is an understandable dialectic: the more girls are portrayed as diminished, the more boys are regarded as needing to be taken down a notch and reduced in importance. This perspective on boys and girls is promoted in schools of education, and many a teacher now feels that girls need and deserve special indemnifying consideration. (Pg. 23-24) Later, she adds, "The gender theorists and activists have recently begun to tell us that boys too need attention" because "under patriarchy males are socialized to destructive masculine ideals" The belief is inspiring a movement to construct boyhood in ways that will render boys less competitive, more emotionally expressive, more nurturing---more, in short, like girls. (Pg. 44) She acknowledges, "Sex differences in violence are very real: physically, males ARE more aggressive than females." Unfortunately, many educators have become persuaded that there is truth in the relentlessly repeated proposition that masculinity per se is the cause of violence. Of course, when boys are violent or otherwise antisocially injurious to others, they must be disciplined, both for their own betterment and for the sake of society. But most boys' physicality and masculinity are not expressed in antisocial ways. (Pg. 62-63) She states, "The natural gender differences between men and women mean we cannot hope to get statistical male-female parity of competence and aptitude in all fields. The same seems true of preferences: there will always be far more women than men who want to stay home with children; there will always be more women than men who want to be kindergarten teachers rather than helicopter mechanics. Boys will always be less interested than girls in dollhouses. This does not mean that our sex rigidly determines our future." (Pg. 88-89) She asks, "Why, in the face of so much persuasive counterevidence, do so many social theorists, psychologists, and educators persist in maintaining that gender is socially created? The answer is fairly obvious: many fear that the findings of such research could be used against women. From a historical perspective, that fear is understandable. It wasn't all that long ago that intelligent men were deploying the idea of innate differences to justify keeping women down socially, legally, and politically" It was then taken for granted that women were not just innately different but naturally inferior and naturally subject to men. (Pg. 91) But she adds, "I would argue that turning a blind eye to real differences and dogmatically" (Pg. 91)

insisting that masculinity and femininity are *created by culture* pose even more serious dangers of their own. This movement to change our children's concept of themselves is unacceptably invasive---indeed, it is deeply authoritarian. (Pg. 98) She then engages in a lengthy critique of Carol Gilligan, who *is the theorist who, almost single-handedly, initiated the fashion of thinking about American girls as victimized, silenced Ophelias.* Her views on male and female development are beacons for gender-equity activists and teachers everywhere. (Pg. 99) She adds, *Gilligan presents very little in the way of data to back up her claims. Most of her published research consists of anecdotes that are based on a small number of interviews. Apart from these interviews, her data are unavailable for review, giving rise to some reasonable doubts about their merits and persuasiveness.* Despite the glaring lack of published data, Gilligan's conclusions have largely gone unchallenged. (Pg. 102) She says, *Because [Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*] the book was published by Harvard University Press and because its author is a professor at that premier university, readers naturally assume that she did genuine studies, with the usual controls and professional review.* (Pg. 108) She concludes, *With the success of *In a Different Voice* and with the considerable resources available to her at Harvard, Gilligan might have gone on to answer her scholarly critics.* But that is not what she did. In the years since the publication of *In a Different Voice* Gilligan's methods have remained anecdotal and impressionistic---with increasingly heavy doses of psychoanalytic theorizing and gender ideology. (Pg. 111) Later, she adds, *Gilligan's central thesis---that boys are being imprisoned by their conventional masculinity---is not a scientific hypothesis. It is an extravagant piece of speculative psychology of the kind that sometimes finds acceptance in schools of education but is not creditable in most professional departments of psychology.* (Pg. 133) She suggests, *Fathers appear to be central in helping sons develop a conscience and a sense of responsible manhood. Fathers teach boys that being manly need not mean being predatory or aggressive. By contrast, when the father is absent, male children tend to get their ideas of what it means to be a man from their peers. Fathers play an indispensable civilizing role in the social ecosystem; therefore, fewer fathers, more male violence.* (Pg. 130) She summarizes, *American boys do not need to be rescued. They are not pathological. They are not seething the repressed rage or imprisoned in *straightjackets of masculinity.* American girls are not suffering a crisis of low self-esteem; they are not being silenced by the culture. The vast majority of girls and boys are psychologically sound. But when it comes to the genuine problems that do threaten our children's prospects---their moral drift,*

their cognitive and scholastic deficits---the healers, social reformers, and confidence builders provide no solutions; on the contrary, they exacerbate the problems and stand squarely in the way of what needs to be done to solve them. (Pg. 157) She concludes, *We are at the tail end of an extraordinary period of moral deregulation that is leaving many tens of thousands of our boys academically deficient and without adequate guidance. Too many American boys are foundering, unprepared for the demands of family and work. Many have only a vague sense of right and wrong* (Pg. 157) *We have created serious problems for ourselves by abandoning our duty to pass on to our children the moral truths to which they are entitled and failing to give them the guidance they so badly need* (Pg. 157) *we must again recognize and respect the reality that boys and girls are different, that each sex has its distinctive strengths and graces... we must dedicate ourselves to* (Pg. 157) *improving the moral climate in our schools and providing our children with first-rate schooling that equips them for the good life in the new century* (Pg. 157) *I am confident we can do that. American boys, whose very masculinity turns out to be politically incorrect, badly need our support* (Pg. 157) *If you are a mother of sons, as I am, you know that one of the most agreeable facts of life is that boys will be boys.* (Pg. 212-213) While some of Sommers' arguments may not be persuasive (e.g., her prescriptions for *moral education*) to all, and she perhaps criticizes Carol Gilligan at too great length, this is a remarkable, and very thought-provoking book about American boys (and, by extension, American girls!), that will be of great value to anyone wanting to inquire into this area.

Informative, and very well meaning. It highlights the poor research on which public school policy is currently based, and makes an impassioned plea to help correct the underlying problems that have developed in our education system. It paints certain educational movements with a broad brush. While acknowledging that boys can be successful in the current system I came away with the impression that there was malice underpinning the whole educational strata which is not what the author suggests, it is just the impression I take away. This book will ignite a fact-fueled indignation.

The public at large does not care what happens to boys in school or later in life. They will find it is a big mistake to have done this.

updated version of an earlier book. Love it. GET THIS BOOK for everyone who has boys, or cares about boys, for those who want good men for their daughters to marry. Young boys need help today

Excellent book, I recommend it to anyone that has a little more intelligence than a chimpanzee. Boys and girls are anatomically different, also the brain is wired differently. There is not such thing as one is better than the other. Both sexes complement. Chimpanzees feminist think that placing skirts on boys and lipsticks is an equal society. While other countries are designing education that serves better for either boys and girls, or even more diverse individuals in specialized classes. Australia, New Zealand, and U.K. Not to mention a lot of asiatic countries. USA is becoming weaker by the day. Our mothers that have this mentality betray Mother Nature and every principle of morality. USA is going to be under cyber attack, a lot of countries had lost respect for us. While other nations recognize strengths and weaknesses of each sex they will have the advantage in any aspect of society. Both sexes can be equally intelligent and capable of many things but can not perform equally in a communistic view of the so called feminist movement. By the way, I am a legal resident in the USA, English is not my first language. But the largest tread to national security of this great nation is internal. I am scientific enthusiast and real social statistics should be able to be replicated, representing all population. Bare on mind that statistical data can be manipulated to give a result that you want to hear. I am married with no kids, we were not able to conceive. But we have only 4 nephews no nieces. I wonder how they will fare with the ideal of these women to attack such innocent minds. If it was on my power I will concede in this war of them a win. On the sole issue of a moral that this does not lead to any good. Kindness, equality is not reached with tie up numbers in statistics; it only enforce a sex war that is no benefit to society at all. Women and feminist had betrayed a lot of Americans already. I am a man that will not concede to place a skirt or lipsticks to be equal to a woman. I do not want to be a woman. My wife at this moment was giving me a lecture that I should not express my opinion because that is not a manly thing to do. I should be stoic with my lips closed. There is no bigger betrayal to this country, by stating George Washington is less important than Marilyn Monroe.

This is an excellent study of the problems we are creating for ourselves, and the need we have to make changes in education. We have been concerning ourselves with equality of methods when we should be concerning ourselves with equality of results.

I bought this book for my wife and ended up reading it myself. Very sad book with an inspirational story that reminds us to love our family and live that love.

This is a must read. Combine it with the Sax book and it shows a true attack on boys in our society.

Great read.

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