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In "Real Men and Pink Suits," Blow discusses the controversy that arose over Twitter messages CNN correspondent Roland Martin posted during the 2012 Super Bowl, which some readers viewed as homophobic and which led to Martin's suspension from CNN and to calls for his firing. In this editorial, Blow does not take sides on what should happen to Martin; rather, he sees the controversy as a "teachable moment" about the power of words and how concepts of masculinity affect society. As you read, take note of Blow's description of the often-unintended consequences of words and ideas that reach far beyond the speaker or writer. Do you find his argument and the evidence he cites to be compelling? Do you agree that speakers and writers need to be careful about the unintended effects that their words might have?

TWITTER CLAIMS ANOTHER CASUALTY.

This week, Roland Martin, a bombastic cultural and political commentator was suspended by CNN from his role as a political analyst on the network for Twitter messages published during the Super Bowl.

"Real Men and Pink Suits" by Charles Blow from the *New York Times*, February 10, 2012. Copyright © 2012 by the *New York Times*. Reprinted with permission of the *New York Times*.

One message read: "If a dude at your Super Bowl party is hyped about David Beckham's H&M underwear ad, smack the ish out of him! #superbowl." Another read: "Who the hell was that New England Patriot they just showed in a head to toe pink suit? Oh, he needs a visit from #teamwhipdatass."

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation said the messages advocated "violence against gay people" and asked CNN to fire Martin. CNN called the messages "regrettable and offensive" and suspended him "for the time being." Martin issued an apology in which he said that he was just "joking about smacking someone."

There is vigorous debate online about what Martin meant, about GLAAD's reaction, and about CNN's policy on who gets suspended or fired and for what kinds of statements.

Martin and GLAAD have signaled, over Twitter, that they plan to meet and discuss the matter. Maybe something positive will emerge from that.

But whether it does or not, I don't want to let this incident pass without using it as a "teachable moment" for us all about the dangerous way in which we define manhood and masculinity. At the very least, Martin's comments are corrosive on this front.

I follow Martin on Twitter. I know that he likes to joke and tease. I have even joked with him. So I can believe that, in his mind, he may have thought that these were just harmless jokes in which the violence was fictional and funny.

But in the real world—where bullying and violence against gays and lesbians, or even those assumed to be so, is all too real—"jokes" like his hold no humor. There are too many bruised ribs and black eyes and buried bodies for the targets of this violence to just lighten up and laugh.

We all have to understand that effects can operate independent of intent, that subconscious biases can move counter to conscious egalitarianism, and that malice need not be present within the individual to fuel the maliciousness of the society at large.

(This is not to say that Martin has been egalitarian on this front. In fact, a widely cited 2006 post on his Web site suggests otherwise. In it, he criticized the Rev. Al Sharpton for appealing to black churches

“to become more accepting and embracing of homosexuality.” Martin wrote that gays and lesbians “are engaged, in the eyes of the church, in sinful behavior.” Furthermore, he said, “My wife, an ordained Baptist minister for 20 years, has counseled many men and women to walk away from the gay lifestyle, and to live a chaste life.” And he compared homosexuals to adulterers, disobedient children, alcoholics, and thieves.)

Words have power. And power recklessly exerted has consequences. It’s not about being politically correct. It’s about being sensitive to the plight of those being singled out. We can’t ask the people taking the punches to also take the jokes.

And it’s about understanding that masculinity is wide enough and deep enough for all of us to fit in it. But society in general, and male culture in particular, is constantly working to render it narrow and shallow. We have shaved the idea of manhood down to an unrealistic definition that few can fit in it with the whole of who they are, not without severe constriction or self-denial.

The man that we mythologize in the backs of our minds is a cultural concoction, an unattainable ideal, a perfect specimen of muscles and fearlessness and daring. Square-jawed and well-rounded. Potent and passionate. Sensitive but not sentimental. And, above all else, unwaveringly heterosexual and without even a hint of softness.

A vast majority of men will never be able to be all these things all the time, but they shouldn’t be made to feel less than a man because of it.

And this narrowed manhood ideal has a truly damaging effect on boys.

In *Boy Culture: an Encyclopedia*, which was published in 2010, the editors point out: “Boys are men in training. As such, most strive to enact and replicate hegemonic masculinity so that they achieve status among male peers, and pre-emptively guard against accusations or perceptions that their masculinity is deficient.” The editors went on to quote a 2001 study in which a boy who does not measure up to dominant prescriptions of masculinity is “likely to be punished by his peers in ways which seek to strip him of his mantle of masculinity.”

In fact, a 2005 report entitled *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America*, which was commissioned by the Gay, Lesbian

and Straight Education Network, found that a third of all teens said that they are often bullied, called names or harassed at their school because they are, or people think that they are, gay, lesbian or bisexual.

We have created this culture, and we can undo it.

Start with this fact: The truest measure of a man, indeed of a person, is not whom he lies down with but what he stands up for. If we must be judged, let it be in this way. And when we fall short, as we sometimes will, because humanity is fallible, let us greet each other with compassion and encouragement rather than ridicule and resentment.

Whatever was in Martin’s heart, what was in his Twitter messages wasn’t helpful. They may not lead directly to intimidation or violence, but they may add to a stream of negativity that feeds a culture in which intimidation and violence by some twisted minds is all too real. I don’t believe that Martin wanted that.

Let’s show the whole of mankind that men can indeed be kind, even to other men who dare to wear pink suits.

GRETEL EHRLICH (b. 1946) is an essayist and novelist best known for writing about the American West. Born in Santa Barbara, California, she earned her undergraduate degree at Vermont's Bennington College and attended film school at the University of California, Los Angeles. She was a documentary filmmaker for ten years before she turned to writing. Inspired by her time on a sheep and cattle ranch in Wyoming, where she had been making a film, Ehrlich wrote *The Solace of Open Spaces* (1985), a collection of essays that was met with great acclaim. Her next book, a novel, was also set in Wyoming: *Heart Mountain* (1987) imagines an internment camp of Japanese Americans being set up on a ranch during World War II. Not surprisingly, this former filmmaker is known for bringing a visual, cinematic dimension to her work. After being struck by lightning in 1991, and following several years of recovery, Ehrlich began traveling, first to the Himalayas and then to Greenland—an experience described in *This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons in Greenland* (2002). Her essays have been published in numerous periodicals, including *Harper's*, the *Atlantic*, and *National Geographic Traveler*.

In "About Men," Ehrlich meditates on the pervasive myth of the cowboy. Using advertising's Marlboro Man as her starting point, she redefines "cowboy" in sometimes surprising ways. Before you read this essay, make a list of your preconceptions about cowboys and then see how Ehrlich systematically challenges these notions with logic and her own close observations. What rhetorical strategies does she use to accomplish her purpose?

"About Men" from *The Solace of Open Spaces* by Gretel Ehrlich. Copyright © 1985 by Gretel Ehrlich. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Group (USA).

WHEN I'M IN NEW YORK but feeling lonely for Wyoming I look for the Marlboro ads in the subway. What I'm aching to see is horseflesh, the glint of a spur, a line of distant mountains, brimming creeks, and a reminder of the ranchers and cowboys I've ridden with for the last eight years. But the men I see in those posters with their stern, humorless looks remind me of no one I know here. In our hellbent earnestness to romanticize the cowboy we've ironically disesteemed his true character. If he's "strong and silent" it's because there's probably no one to talk to. If he "rides away into the sunset" it's because he's been on horseback since four in the morning moving cattle and he's trying, fifteen hours later, to get home to his family. If he's "a rugged individualist" he's also part of a team: ranch work is teamwork and even the glorified open-range cowboys of the 1880s rode up and down the Chisholm Trail in the company of twenty or thirty other riders. Instead of the macho, trigger-happy man our culture has perversely wanted him to be, the cowboy is more apt to be convivial, quirky, and soft-hearted. To be "tough" on a ranch has nothing to do with conquests and displays of power. More often than not, circumstances—like the colt he's riding or an unexpected blizzard—are overpowering him. It's not toughness but "toughing it out" that counts. In other words, this macho, cultural artifact the cowboy has become is simply a man who possesses resilience, patience, and an instinct for survival. "Cowboys are just like a pile of rocks—everything happens to them. They get climbed on, kicked, rained and snowed on, scuffed up by wind. Their job is 'just to take it,' " one old-timer told me.

A cowboy is someone who loves his work. Since the hours are long—ten to fifteen hours a day—and the pay is \$30 he has to. What's required of him is an odd mixture of physical vigor and maternalism. His part of the beef-raising industry is to birth and nurture calves and take care of their mothers. For the most part his work is done on horseback and in a lifetime he sees and comes to know more animals than people. The iconic myth surrounding him is built on American notions of heroism: the index of a man's value as measured in physical courage. Such ideas have perverted manliness into a self-absorbed race for cheap thrills. In a rancher's world, courage has less to do with facing danger than with acting spontaneously—usually on behalf of an animal

or another rider. If a cow is stuck in a boghole he throws a loop around her neck, takes his dally (a half hitch around the saddle horn), and pulls her out with horsepower. If a calf is born sick, he may take her home, warm her in front of the kitchen fire, and massage her legs until dawn. One friend, whose favorite horse was trying to swim a lake with hobbles on, dove under water and cut her legs loose with a knife, then swam her to shore, his arm around her neck lifeguard-style, and saved her from drowning. Because these incidents are usually linked to someone or something outside himself, the westerner's courage is selfless, a form of compassion.

The physical punishment that goes with cowboying is greatly underplayed. Once fear is dispensed with, the threshold of pain rises to meet the demands of the job. When Jane Fonda asked Robert Redford (in the film *Electric Horseman*) if he was sick as he struggled to his feet one morning, he replied, "No, just bent." For once the movies had it right. The cowboys I was sitting with laughed in agreement. Cowboys are rarely complainers; they show their stoicism by laughing at themselves.

If a rancher or cowboy has been thought of as a "man's man"—laconic, hard-drinking, inscrutable—there's almost no place in which the balancing act between male and female, manliness and femininity, can be more natural. If he's gruff, handsome, and physically fit on the outside, he's androgynous at the core. Ranchers are midwives, hunters, nurturers, providers, and conservationists all at once. What we've interpreted as toughness—weathered skin, calloused hands, a squint in the eye and a growl in the voice—only masks the tenderness inside. "Now don't go telling me these lambs are cute," one rancher warned me the first day I walked into the football-field-sized lambing sheds. The next thing I knew he was holding a black lamb. "Ain't this little rat good-lookin'?"

So many of the men who came to the West were Southerners—⁵ men looking for work and a new life after the Civil War—that chivalrousness and strict codes of honor were soon thought of as Western traits. There were very few women in Wyoming during territorial days, so when they did arrive (some as mail-order brides from places like Philadelphia) there was a stand-offishness between the sexes and a for-

mality that persists now. Ranchers still tip their hats and say, "Howdy, ma'am" instead of shaking hands with me.

Even young cowboys are often evasive with women. It's not that they're Jekyll and Hyde creatures—gentle with animals and rough on women—but rather, that they don't know how to bring their tenderness into the house and lack the vocabulary to express the complexity of what they feel. Dancing wildly all night becomes a metaphor for the explosive emotions pent up inside, and when these are, on occasion, released, they're so battery-charged and potent that one caress of the face or one "I love you" will peel for a long while.

The geographical vastness and the social isolation here make emotional evolution seem impossible. Those contradictions of the heart between respectability, logic, and convention on the one hand, and impulse, passion, and intuition on the other, played out wordlessly against the paradisaical beauty of the West, give cowboys a wide-eyed but drawn look. Their lips pucker up, not with kisses but with immutability. They may want to break out, staying up all night with a lover just to talk, but they don't know how and can't imagine what the consequences will be. Those rare occasions when they do bare themselves result in confusion. "I feel as if I'd sprained my heart," one friend told me a month after such a meeting.

My friend Ted Hoagland¹ wrote, "No one is as fragile as a woman but no one is as fragile as a man." For all the women here who use "fragileness" to avoid work or as a sexual ploy, there are men who try to hide theirs, all the while clinging to an adolescent dependency on women to cook their meals, wash their clothes, and keep the ranch house warm in winter. But there is true vulnerability in evidence here. Because these men work with animals, not machines or numbers, because they live outside in landscapes of torrential beauty, because they are confined to a place and a routine embellished with awesome variables, because calves die in the arms that pulled others into life, because they go to the mountains as if on a pilgrimage to find out what makes a herd of elk tick, their strength is also a softness, their toughness, a rare delicacy.

¹Edward Hoagland (b. 1932), American author known for his books about nature and travel.

KATHA POLLITT

*Why Boys Don't Play
with Dolls*

KATHA POLLITT (b. 1949), poet and essayist, was born in New York City and educated at Harvard University, where she earned a BA in philosophy in 1972, and at the Columbia School of the Arts, where she received an MFA in writing in 1975. Pollitt writes the award-winning column "Subject to Debate" for the *Nation*, in which she engages with cultural issues ranging from identity politics to U.S. foreign policy. Her work is collected in a number of volumes, including *Reasonable Creatures: Essays on Women and Feminism* (1994) and *Virginity or Death! And Other Social and Political Issues of Our Time* (2006). Her book of poetry, *Antarctic Traveller*, won a National Book Critics Circle Award in 1983.

In "Why Boys Don't Play with Dolls," Pollitt examines how parents raise their children to adhere to "sex role conventions." She challenges adults to be mindful of the roles they reinforce or subvert, because children will emulate and internalize them, and she argues that overblown reports of biological differences between boys and girls should not lessen our efforts to consider what messages are going out to children. As you read, consider your own upbringing: Were you encouraged to work in the kitchen? Mow the lawn? Play with dolls? Trucks? If gender roles were not emphasized in your home, what sorts of behaviors *were* encouraged—and discouraged—as you were growing up?

IT'S 28 YEARS SINCE THE founding of NOW,¹ and boys still like trucks and girls still like dolls. Increasingly, we are told that the source of these

¹The National Organization for Women, the largest feminist group in the U.S., founded in 1966.

"Why Boys Don't Play with Dolls" by Katha Pollitt. Originally published in the *New York Times Magazine*, October 8, 1995. Used by permission of the New York Times Syndication.

robust preferences must lie outside society—in prenatal hormonal influences, brain chemistry, genes—and that feminism has reached its natural limits. What else could possibly explain the love of preschool girls for party dresses or the desire of toddler boys to own more guns than Mark from Michigan?²

True, recent studies claim to show small cognitive differences between the sexes: he gets around by orienting himself in space, she does it by remembering landmarks. Time will tell if any deserve the hoopla with which each is invariably greeted, over the protests of the researchers themselves. But even if the results hold up (and the history of such research is not encouraging), we don't need studies of sex-differentiated brain activity in reading, say, to understand why boys and girls still seem so unlike.

The feminist movement has done much for some women, and something for every woman, but it has hardly turned America into a playground free of sex roles. It hasn't even got women to stop dieting or men to stop interrupting them.

Instead of looking at kids to "prove" that differences in behavior by sex are innate, we can look at the ways we raise kids as an index to how unfinished the feminist revolution really is, and how tentatively it is embraced even by adults who fully expect their daughters to enter previously male-dominated professions and their sons to change diapers.

I'm at a children's birthday party. "I'm sorry," one mom silently mouths to the mother of the birthday girl, who has just torn open her present—Tropical Splash Barbie. Now, you can love Barbie or you can hate Barbie, and there are feminists in both camps. But *apologize* for Barbie? Inflict Barbie, against your own convictions, on the child of a friend you know will be none too pleased?

Every mother in that room had spent years becoming a person who had to be taken seriously, not least by herself. Even the most attractive, I'm willing to bet, had suffered over her body's failure to fit the impossible American ideal. Given all that, it seems crazy to transmit Barbie to the next generation. Yet to reject her is to say that what Barbie rep-

²Hypothetical caller to a radio talk show.

resents—being sexy, thin, stylish—is unimportant, which is obviously not true, and children know it's not true.

Women's looks matter terribly in this society, and so Barbie, however ambivalently, must be passed along. After all, there are worse toys. The Cut and Style Barbie styling head, for example, a grotesque object intended to encourage "hair play." The grown-ups who give that probably apologize, too.

How happy would most parents be to have a child who flouted sex conventions? I know a lot of women, feminists, who complain in a comical, eyeball-rolling way about their sons' passion for sports: the ruined weekends, obnoxious coaches, macho values. But they would not think of discouraging their sons from participating in this activity they find so foolish. Or do they? Their husbands are sports fans, too, and they like their husbands a lot.

Could it be that even sports-resistant moms see athletics as part of manliness? That if their sons wanted to spend the weekend writing up their diaries, or reading, or baking, they'd find it disturbing? Too anti-social? Too lonely? Too gay?

Theories of innate differences in behavior are appealing. They let parents off the hook—no small recommendation in a culture that holds moms, and sometimes even dads, responsible for their children's every misstep on the road to bliss and success.

They allow grown-ups to take the path of least resistance to the dominant culture, which always requires less psychic effort, even if it means more actual work: just ask the working mother who comes home exhausted and nonetheless finds it easier to pick up her son's socks than make him do it himself. They let families buy for their children, without *too* much guilt, the unbelievably sexist junk that the kids, who have been watching commercials since birth, understandably crave.

But the thing the theories do most of all is tell adults that the *adult* world—in which moms and dads still play by many of the old rules even as they question and fidget and chafe against them—is the way it's supposed to be. A girl with a doll and a boy with a truck "explain" why men are from Mars and women are from Venus, why wives do housework and husbands just don't understand.

The paradox is that the world of rigid and hierarchal sex roles evoked by determinist theories is already passing away. Three-year-olds may indeed insist that doctors are male and nurses female, even if their own mother is a physician. Six-year-olds know better. These days, something like half of all medical students are female, and male applications to nursing school are inching upward. When tomorrow's 3-year-olds play doctor, who's to say how they'll assign the roles?

With sex roles, as in every area of life, people aspire to what is possible, and conform to what is necessary. But these are not fixed, especially today. Biological determinism may reassure some adults about their present, but it is feminism, the ideology of flexible and converging sex roles, that fits our children's future. And the kids, somehow, know this.

That's why, if you look carefully, you'll find that for every kid who fits a stereotype, there's another who's breaking one down. Sometimes it's the same kid—the boy who skateboards *and* takes cooking in his after-school program; the girl who collects stuffed animals *and* A-pluses in science.

Feminists are often accused of imposing their "agenda" on children. Isn't that what adults always do, consciously and unconsciously? Kids aren't born religious, or polite, or kind, or able to remember where they put their sneakers. Inculcating these behaviors, and the values behind them, is a tremendous amount of work, involving many adults. We don't have a choice, really, about *whether* we should give our children messages about what it means to be male and female—they're bombarded with them from morning till night.

The question, as always, is what do we want those messages to be?

PAUL THEROUX

} *Being a Man*

PAUL THEROUX (b. 1941), novelist and travel writer, was born in Medford, Massachusetts. After graduating from the University of Massachusetts in 1963, he attended Syracuse University, where he trained for the Peace Corps. He lived and worked in Africa and Asia before moving to England in 1972. In addition to writing articles and stories for *Esquire*, *Playboy*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*, Theroux has written numerous works of nonfiction, short stories, and novels, including *The Mosquito Coast* (1982), a novel that was made into a feature film. He is probably best known for *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975), which chronicles his travels by rail from London to Japan and back.

The following selection was originally published in *Sunrise with Seamonsters* (1985), a collection of essays about his various adventures and insights. In "Being a Man," Theroux argues that our traditional notions of masculinity and femininity are crippling and destructive. He is especially critical of how boys are brought up to become men. Theroux's many provocative statements—for example, that "the manly attitude towards sports seems to be little more than a recipe for creating bad marriages, . . . latent rapists, and just plain louts"—are no doubt intended to cause a strong reaction in his reader. As you read, note the reasons Theroux presents for his critique, the examples he provides from his own childhood to support his position, and your own reactions to his views.

THERE IS A PATHETIC SENTENCE in the chapter "Fetishism" in Dr. Norman Cameron's book *Personality Development and Psychopathology*.

"Being A Man," from *Sunrise with Seamonsters* by Paul Theroux. Copyright © 1985 by Cape Sod Scriveners Co. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

It goes, "Fetishists are nearly always men; and their commonest fetish is a woman's shoe." I cannot read that sentence without thinking that it is just one more awful thing about being a man—and perhaps it is an important thing to know about us.

I have always disliked being a man. The whole idea of manhood in America is pitiful, in my opinion. This version of masculinity is a little like having to wear an ill-fitting coat for one's entire life (by contrast, I imagine femininity to be an oppressive sense of nakedness). Even the expression "Be a man!" strikes me as insulting and abusive. It means: Be stupid, be unfeeling, obedient, soldierly and stop thinking. Man means "manly"—how can one think about men without considering the terrible ambition of manliness? And yet it is part of every man's life. It is a hideous and crippling lie; it not only insists on difference and connives at superiority, it is also by its very nature destructive—emotionally damaging and socially harmful.

The youth who is subverted, as most are, into believing in the masculine ideal is effectively separated from women and he spends the rest of his life finding women a riddle and a nuisance. Of course, there is a female version of this male affliction. It begins with mothers encouraging little girls to say (to other adults) "Do you like my new dress?" In a sense, little girls are traditionally urged to please adults with a kind of coquettishness, while boys are enjoined to behave like monkeys toward each other. The nine-year-old coquette proceeds to become womanish in a subtle power game in which she learns to be sexually indispensable, socially decorative and always alert to a man's sense of inadequacy.

Femininity—being lady-like—implies needing a man as witness and seducer; but masculinity celebrates the exclusive company of men. That is why it is so grotesque; and that is also why there is no manliness without inadequacy—because it denies men the natural friendship of women.

It is very hard to imagine any concept of manliness that does not belittle women, and it begins very early. At an age when I wanted to meet girls—let's say the treacherous years of thirteen to sixteen—I was told to take up a sport, get more fresh air, join the Boy Scouts, and I was urged not to read so much. It was the 1950s and if you asked too many

questions about sex you were sent to camp—boy's camp, of course: the nightmare. Nothing is more unnatural or prison-like than a boy's camp, but if it were not for them we would have no Elks' Lodges, no pool rooms, no boxing matches, no Marines.

And perhaps no sports as we know them. Everyone is aware of how few in number are the athletes who behave like gentlemen. Just as high school basketball teaches you how to be a poor loser, the manly attitude toward sports seems to be little more than a recipe for creating bad marriages, social misfits, moral degenerates, sadists, latent rapists and just plain louts. I regard high school sports as a drug far worse than marijuana, and it is the reason that the average tennis champion, say, is a pathetic oaf.

Any objective study would find the quest for manliness essentially right-wing, puritanical, cowardly, neurotic and fueled largely by a fear of women. It is also certainly philistine. There is no book-hater like a Little League coach. But indeed all the creative arts are obnoxious to the manly ideal, because at their best the arts are pursued by uncompetitive and essentially solitary people. It makes it very hard for a creative youngster, for any boy who expresses the desire to be alone seems to be saying that there is something wrong with him.

It ought to be clear by now that I have something of an objection to the way we turn boys into men. It does not surprise me that when the President of the United States has his customary weekend off he dresses like a cowboy¹—it is both a measure of his insecurity and his willingness to please. In many ways, American culture does little more for a man than prepare him for modeling clothes in the L. L. Bean catalog. I take this as a personal insult because for many years I found it impossible to admit to myself that I wanted to be a writer. It was my guilty secret, because being a writer was incompatible with being a man.

There are people who might deny this, but that is because the American writer, typically, has been so at pains to prove his manliness that we have come to see literariness and manliness as mingled qualities. But first there was a fear that writing was not a manly profession—

¹Ronald Reagan (1911–2004), fortieth president of the United States.

indeed, not a profession at all. (The paradox in American letters is that it has always been easier for a woman to write and for a man to be published.) Growing up, I had thought of sports as wasteful and humiliating, and the idea of manliness was a bore. My wanting to become a writer was not a flight from that oppressive roleplaying, but I quickly saw that it was at odds with it. Everything in stereotyped manliness goes against the life of the mind. The Hemingway personality² is too tedious to go into here, and in any case his exertions are well known, but certainly it was not until this aberrant behavior was examined by feminists in the 1960s that any male writer dared question the pugnacity in Hemingway's fiction. All the bullfighting and arm wrestling and elephant shooting diminished Hemingway as a writer, but it is consistent with a prevailing attitude in American writing: one cannot be a male writer without first proving that one is a man.

It is normal in America for a man to be dismissive or even somewhat apologetic about being a writer. Various factors make it easier. There is a heartiness about journalism that makes it acceptable—journalism is the manliest form of American writing and, therefore, the profession the most independent-minded women seek (yes, it is an illusion, but that is my point). Fiction-writing is equated with a kind of dispirited failure and is only manly when it produces wealth—money is masculinity. So is drinking. Being a drunkard is another assertion, if misplaced, of manliness. The American male writer is traditionally proud of his heavy drinking. But we are also a very literal-minded people. A man proves his manhood in America in old-fashioned ways. He kills lions, like Hemingway; or he hunts ducks, like Nathanael West; or he makes pronouncements like, "A man should carry enough knife to defend himself with," as James Jones once said to a *Life* interviewer. Or he says he can drink you under the table. But even tiny drunken William Faulkner loved to mount a horse and go fox hunting, and Jack Kerouac roistered up and down Manhattan in a lumberjack shirt (and spent every night of *The Subterraneans* with his mother in Queens). And we are familiar with the lengths to which Norman Mailer is pre-

²That is, the personality of American writer Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961), known for his machismo in both his writing and his life.

pared, in his endearing way, to prove that he is just as much a monster as the next man.

When the novelist John Irving was revealed as a wrestler, people took him to be a very serious writer, and even a bubble reputation like Erich (*Love Story*) Segal's was enhanced by the news that he ran the marathon in a respectable time. How surprised we would be if Joyce Carol Oates were revealed as a sumo wrestler or Joan Didion active in pumping iron. "Lives in New York City with her three children" is the typical woman writer's biographical note, for just as the male writer must prove he has achieved a sort of muscular manhood, the woman writer—or rather her publicists—must prove her motherhood.

There would be no point in saying any of this if it were not generally accepted that to be a man is somehow—even now in feminist-influenced America—a privilege. It is on the contrary an unmerciful and punishing burden. Being a man is bad enough; being manly is appalling (in this sense, women's lib has done much more for men than for women). It is the sinister silliness of men's fashions, and a clubby attitude in the arts. It is the subversion of good students. It is the so-called Dress Code of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Boston, and it is the institutionalized cheating in college sports. It is the most primitive insecurity.

And this is also why men often object to feminism but are afraid to explain why: of course women have a justified grievance, but most men believe—and with reason—that their lives are just as bad.