

OPINION

THE WEEKEND INTERVIEW with Camille Paglia | By Bari Weiss

A Feminist Defense of Masculine Virtues

What you're seeing is how a civilization commits suicide," says Camille Paglia. This self-described "notorious Amazon feminist" isn't telling anyone to Lean In or asking Why Women Still Can't Have It All. No, her indictment may be as surprising as it is wide-ranging: The military is out of fashion, Americans undervalue manual labor, schools neuter male students, opinion makers deny the biological differences between men and women, and sexiness is dead. And that's just 20 minutes of our three-hour conversation.

When Ms. Paglia, now 66, burst onto the national stage in 1990 with the publishing of "Sexual Personae," she immediately established herself as a feminist who was the scourge of the movement's establishment, a heretic to its orthodoxy. Pick up the 700-page tome, subtitled "Art and Decadence From Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson," and it's easy to see why. "If civilization had been left in female hands," she wrote, "we would still be living in grass huts."

The fact that the acclaimed book—the first of six; her latest, "Glittering Images," is a survey of Western art—

niche, people are basically kind, if we're just nice and benevolent to everyone they'll be nice too. They literally don't have any sense of evil or criminality."

The results, she says, can be seen in everything from the dysfunction in Washington (where politicians "lack practical skills of analysis and construction") to what women wear. "So many women don't realize how vulnerable they are by what they're doing on the street," she says, referring to women who wear sexy clothes.

When she has made this point in the past, Ms. Paglia—who dresses in androgynous jackets and slacks—has been told that she believes "women are at fault for their own victimization." Nonsense, she says. "I believe that every person, male and female, needs to be in a protective mode at all times of alertness to potential danger. The world is full of potential attacks, potential disasters." She calls it "street-smart feminism."

Ms. Paglia argues that the softening of modern American society begins as early as kindergarten. "Primary-school education is a crock, basically. It's oppressive to anyone with physical energy, especially guys," she says, pointing to the most obvious example: the way many schools have cut recess. "They're making a toxic environment for boys. Primary education does everything in its power to turn boys into neuters."

She is not the first to make this argument, as Ms. Paglia readily notes. Fellow feminist Christina Hoff Sommers has written about the "war against boys" for more than a decade. The notion was once met with derision, but now data back it up: Almost one in five high-school-age boys has been diagnosed with ADHD, boys get worse grades than girls and are less likely to go to college.

Ms. Paglia observes this phenomenon up close with her 11-year-old son, Lucien, whom she is raising with her ex-partner, Alison Maddex, an artist and public-school teacher who lives 2 miles away. She sees the tacit elevation of "female values"—such as sensitivity, socialization and cooperation—as the main aim of teachers, rather than fostering creative energy and teaching hard geographical and historical facts.

By her lights, things only get worse in higher education. "This PC gender politics thing—the way gender is being taught in the universities—in a very anti-male way, it's all about neutralization of maleness." The result: Upper-middle-class men who are "intimidated" and "can't say anything. . . . They understand the agenda." In other words: They avoid going certain sacred cows by "never telling the truth to women" about sex, and by keeping "raunchy" thoughts and sexual fantasies to themselves and their laptops.

Politically correct, inadequate education, along with the decline of America's brawny industrial base, leaves many men with "no models of manhood," she says. "Masculinity is just becoming something that is imitated from the movies. There's nothing left. There's no room for anything manly right now." The only place you can hear what men really



Neil Davies

The cultural critic on why ignoring the biological differences between men and women risks undermining Western civilization itself.

was rejected by seven publishers and five agents before being printed by Yale University Press only added to Ms. Paglia's sense of herself as a provocateur in a class with Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern. But unlike those radio jocks, Ms. Paglia has scholarly chops: Her dissertation adviser at Yale was Harold Bloom, and she is as likely to discuss Freud, Oscar Wilde or early Native American art as to talk about Miley Cyrus.

Ms. Paglia relishes her outsider persona, having previously described herself as an egomaniac and "abrasive, strident and obnoxious." Talking to her is like a mental CrossFit workout. One moment she's praising pop star Rihanna ("a true artist"), then blasting ObamaCare ("a monstrosity," though she voted for the president), global warming ("a religious dogma"), and the idea that all gay people are born gay ("the biggest canard," yet she herself is a lesbian).

But no subject gets her going more than when I ask if she really sees a connection between society's attempts to paper over the biological distinction between men and women and the collapse of Western civilization.

She starts by pointing to the diminished status of military service. "The entire elite class now, in finance, in politics and so on, none of them have military service—hardly anyone, there are a few. But there is no prestige attached to it anymore. That is a recipe for disaster," she says. "These people don't think in military ways, so there's this illusion out there that people are basically

feel these days, she claims, is on sports radio. No surprise, she is an avid listener. The energy and enthusiasm "inspires me as a writer," she says, adding: "If we had to go to war," the callers "are the men that would save the nation."

And men aren't the only ones suffering from the decline of men. Women, particularly elite upper-middle-class women, have become "clones" condemned to "Pilates for the next 30 years," Ms. Paglia says. "Our culture doesn't allow women to know how to be womanly," adding that online pornography is increasingly the only place where men and women in our sexless culture tap into "primal energy" in a way they can't in real life.

A key part of the remedy, she believes, is a "revalorization" of traditional male trades—the ones that allow women's studies professors to drive to work (roads), take the elevator to their office (construction), read in the library (electricity), and go to gender-neutral restrooms (plumbing).

"Michelle Obama's going on: 'Everybody must have college.' Why? Why? What is the reason why everyone has to go to college? Especially when college is so utterly meaningless right now, it has no core curriculum" and "people end up saddled with huge debts," says Ms. Paglia. What's driving the push toward universal college is "social snobbery on the part of a lot of upper-middle-class families who want the sticker in the window."

Ms. Paglia, who has been a profes-

sor of humanities and media studies at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia since 1984, sees her own students as examples. "I have wood-working students who, even while they're in class, are already earning money making furniture and so on," she says. "My career has been in art schools cause I don't get along with normal academics."

To hear her tell it, getting along has never been Ms. Paglia's strong suit. As a child, she felt stifled by the expectations of girlhood in the 1950s. She fantasized about being a knight, not a princess. Discovering pioneering female figures as a teenager, most notably Amelia Earhart, transformed Ms. Paglia's understanding of what her future might hold.

These iconoclastic women of the 1930s, like Earhart and Katharine Hepburn, remain her ideal feminist role models: independent, brave, enterprising, capable of competing with men without bashing them. But since at least the late 1960s, she says, fellow feminists in the academy stopped sharing her vision of "equal-opportunity feminism" that demands a level playing field without demanding special quotas or protections for women.

She proudly recounts her battle, while a graduate student at Yale in the late 1960s and early '70s, with the New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Band over the Rolling Stones: Ms. Paglia loved "Under My Thumb," a song the others regarded as chauvinist. Then there was the time she "barely got through the dinner" with a group of women's studies professors at Bennington College, where she had her first teaching job, who

insisted that there is no hormonal difference between men and women. "I left before dessert."

In her view, these ideological excesses bear much of the blame for the current cultural decline. She calls out activists like Gloria Steinem, Naomi Wolf and Susan Faludi for pushing a version of feminism that says gender is nothing more than a social construct, and groups like the National Organization for Women for making abortion the singular women's issue.

By denying the role of nature in women's lives, she argues, leading feminists created a "denatured, anti-septic" movement that "protected their bourgeois lifestyle" and falsely promised that women could "have it all." And by impugning women who chose to forgo careers to stay at home with children, feminists turned off many who might have happily joined their ranks.

But Ms. Paglia's criticism shouldn't be mistaken for nostalgia for the socially prescribed roles for men and women before the 1960s. Quite the contrary. "I personally have disobeyed every single item of the gender code," says Ms. Paglia. But men, and especially women, need to be honest about the role biology plays and clear-eyed about the choices they are making.

Sex education, she says, simply focuses on mechanics without conveying the real "facts of life," especially for girls: "I want every 14-year-old girl . . . to be told: You better start thinking what do you want in life. If you just want a career and no children you don't have much to worry about. If, however, you are thinking you'd like to have children some day you should start thinking about when do you want to have them. Early or late? To have them early means you are going to make a career sacrifice, but you're going to have more energy and less risks. Both the pros and the cons should be presented."

For all of Ms. Paglia's barbs about the women's movement, it seems clear that feminism—at least of the equal-opportunity variety—has triumphed in its basic goals. There is surely a lack of women in the C-Suite and Congress, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a man who would admit that he believes women are less capable. To save feminism as a political movement from irrelevance, Ms. Paglia says, the women's movement should return to its roots. That means abandoning the "nanny state" mentality that led to politically correct speech codes and college disciplinary committees that have come to replace courts. The movement can win converts, she says, but it needs to become a big tent, one "open to stay-at-home moms" and "not just the career woman."

More important, Ms. Paglia says, if the women's movement wants to be taken seriously again, it should tackle serious matters, like rape in India and honor killings in the Muslim world, that are "more of an outrage than some woman going on a date on the Brown University campus."

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Living the California Nanny-State Life

The other day my family stopped for frozen yogurt in Palo Alto. Ice cream in Silicon Valley is frowned upon these days, even though froyo tends to taste more like soap than a scoop of butter pecan. Waiting to pay, I watched a young man wearing a Vampire Weekend T-shirt cut the line, go to the counter, and ask whether he should put his garbage in the compost, recycle or landfill container. "Well, any leftover



CROSS COUNTRY By Andy Kessler

toppings go into compost. The spoon and cup can be recycled. But the plastic top and bag, unfortunately, need to go to landfill," said the employee. There was a line at the trash, each a victim, it seemed, of a disorder: eco-OCD.

Not me. I left my empty cup on a table.

I'm unqualified for today's sanitation edicts. Which is why living in California has become nearly impossible.

So far, 88 cities and counties in Golden State have banned plastic bags. Most stores are now required by law to charge 10 cents for a paper bag, which so annoyed an elderly man in San Carlos

this summer that he took a swing at the cashier. Maybe he was onto something.

Many shoppers have resorted to reusable bags—never mind that a 2011 study by the University of Arizona found E. coli bacteria in 8% of reusable bags, and lots of salmonella too. Perhaps California should pass ordinances requiring bag-washing; a survey of people who shop with reusable bags found that only 3% ever do. Or maybe just give us our plastic bags back.

Are you into reusable bags, recycling, fluorescent bulbs and going by the rules? I know just the place for you.

The nanny mandates just keep coming. As of October, Palo Alto requires all new homes to be wired for an electric-charging station, even if you drive a '69 Mustang. And thanks to the ominous-sounding Title 24, half of the lighting in new kitchens is required to be "high efficacy luminaires," which usually means glaring fluorescents. These

are hard-wired, since the state doesn't trust its citizens not to swap them out with old-school bulbs.

But in California, as in so many other places, the nannyish mentality extends well beyond government, seeming to reach into life's every cranny. Want a simple cup of coffee? Hard to find one



Plenty of ways to feel virtuous outside Staples Center in Los Angeles.

that doesn't come without a lecture about its being "fair trade"—as if all other coffee were obtained at gunpoint. My pound bag of Starbucks beans, for which I clearly overpaid, is labeled "Ethically Sourcing." That's not even good English, but I don't want to be accused of being unscrupulous in how I

acquire my morning buzz. Once caffeinated, I hit the streets with my dog. To be nice, I stupidly ask people I run into what kind of dog they have. The smugly self-satisfied answer 98% of the time: "rescue dog." I think that's French for mutt—and doesn't answer the question. When someone asks me what kind of dog I have, I just say "show dog." Shortens the conversation.

Then it's off for some fruits and nuts. I don't have the drab clothing or strappy footwear that seems to be the farmers-market dress code. But when I do go, I find myself entranced by the variety of kale. On one recent visit, I was told by a post-hippie vendor with that his lacinated kale could be spun, minced and fried—not to mention that it had been approved by the CCOF: California Certified Organic Farmers.

Under the next umbrella was a vendor selling similar rabbit food. I listened as a woman asked if the farmer used pesticides. "No, we use 100% organic farming techniques," he replied. Then why, she asked, didn't he display usual CCOF sign and other bureaucratic testimonials? "Because it's not worth it," he said. "Between certification and inspections, I'm easily out a couple of grand that I just can't afford as a small business." The woman paused, then walked away. I saw her fill her reusable grocery satchels at a Real Organic stand. The vendor rolled his eyes.

Continuing my stroll, I sidestepped the organic, vegan, gluten-free Soy Beanery and came upon a food truck with the longest line in the market. It was selling \$13 air-chilled, free-range rotisserie chickens. The grease from the chickens was dripping onto a bed of roasted potatoes.

There was no one to tell me I couldn't indulge. I bought a chicken and some greasy potatoes. With no reusable bags, I nearly ate them on the spot.

Mr. Kessler, a former hedge-fund manager, is the author, most recently, of "Eat People" (Portfolio, 2011).

Notable & Quotable: The Danger of Government-Managed Science

Randy W. Schekman, one of the three 2013 winners of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, at the Nobel Banquet in Stockholm, Dec. 10:

This year's Laureates in the natural sciences reflect the value of curiosity-driven inquiry, unfettered by top-down management of goals and methods. . . .

Jim Rothman and Tom Südhof discovered the molecular basis of neurotransmitter release at the junction of nerve cells and between nerve and muscle cells. The molecules they probed are the targets of a potent toxin produced by a poisonous bacterium

that causes botulism. No one could have predicted a practical application of this knowledge yet judging from the many handsome, near perfect faces here this evening, some of you may have personal experience with Botox, the commercial term for that toxin.

The uses of Botox extend well beyond the cosmetic, including the treatment of debilitating neuromuscular diseases such as afflicted the concert pianist Leon Fleischer who after 30 years of paralysis has now been restored to the concert stage.

The work in my laboratory probed the molecular basis of protein secretion

in baker's yeast. We had no notion of any practical application of this work, and yet after we learned that yeast cells use a pathway fundamentally the same as in human cells, the biotechnology industry applied this knowledge to engineer the production of commercially useful quantities of human proteins.

One-third of the world supply of recombinant human insulin is produced in yeast. Again, it is likely that some of you here tonight benefit from this discovery and technology.

Many of you can recount similar stories where an investment in basic

science has resulted in a direct application to medicine and technology. And yet we find a growing tendency for government to want to manage discovery with expansive so-called strategic science initiatives at the expense of the individual creative exercise we celebrate today.

Louis Pasteur recognized this tension long before the trend towards managed science. He wrote, "There does not exist a category of science to which one can give the name applied science. There are sciences and the application of science, bound together as the fruit of the tree which bears it."

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