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## Protect your name from theft before thieves strike

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Identity theft is a growing problem, resulting in more than 200,000 complaints to the Federal Trade Commission in 2003 alone. The term refers to any crime involving the misuse of someone's personal information, such as your name, Social Security number, bank account number or driver's license number. The identity thief can use this information to make unauthorized charges to your credit card or to open new accounts in your name. They may also obtain identification with your name on it and provide it to police when arrested for crimes. In this situation, when the ID thief fails to go to court to answer the charges, a warrant for your arrest will be issued.

As more and more consumers become aware of the risk of identity theft, the thieves have become more sophisticated in obtaining personal information. You therefore must stop and think each and every time you give out any personal information. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the person requesting the information who they claim to be? Never give information such as a credit card or Social Security number or account password over the phone unless you initiated the call. If someone calls claiming to be from your credit card company, hang up and call the company back using the customer service number. Similarly, do not answer any e-mails soliciting this type of information. Check [www.idtheftcenter.org/alerts.shtml](http://www.idtheftcenter.org/alerts.shtml) for a list of current e-mail scams.

- Can anyone overhear the information you give over the phone? If you place a call to your credit card company in a public place, someone within earshot could obtain your account number and password.

- If a legitimate company is requesting the information, what will they do with it, and how will they keep it secure? Whenever a business uses your Social Security or driver's license number as an ID, ask to use a substitute number.

You should also limit the potential damage if your wallet or purse is stolen. Don't carry your Social Security card or more credit and/or debit cards than you are likely to use.

In addition, protect your mail and your trash from theft. If your computer contains personal information and is connected to the Internet, you need to protect yourself with virus protection software, updated regularly, and a firewall.

Even if you are very careful with your personal information, you should check your credit report at least once a year. Request a copy from each of the three major credit reporting agencies: Equifax (<http://www.equifax.com>), Experian (<http://www.experian.com>) and TransUnion (<http://www.transunion.com>).

If you become a victim, you should immediately take the following steps:

1. Notify the credit reporting agencies of the problem. Each agency will send you a copy of your credit report. Review all three to determine how your information has been used.
2. Close any affected accounts, and any that have been opened fraudulently. You can obtain a fraud affidavit, which some creditors will request, at <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft/affidavit.htm>. Add passwords to all accounts.
3. File a police report and a complaint with the FTC. Report mail theft to the local postal inspector.
4. Visit <http://www.idtheftcenter.org> and <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft> for more information.
5. Do not pay any bill that is the result of fraud.
6. Contact an attorney as necessary.

Nicole Miani is an attorney with ASUO Legal Services.

## Fighting for men's rights

Over the last two centuries, American society, and moreover Western cultures as a whole, have made remarkable strides toward social equality. The Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Nineteenth amendments have paved the road to fair treatment, reforms of systems with outright or systematic bias, and the steady erasure of thusly increasingly archaic boundaries linked to skin color and gender. Now more than ever in human history, people are judged by the content of their character.

But even the most zealous optimist must admit that there's work to be done. American women on average still make somewhere between 70 and 80 cents for every dollar men make, depending on the source and mitigating factors considered. Fortunately, the public is very much aware of women's issues. We're reminded by public service announcements, shelves of books, countless articles in popular print magazines and specialist journals alike, radio and television specials, and even entire University departments of the complex challenges that modern women face. To wit, we know that in 2003, the United States led the 55 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe member nations in rape incidents per capita, with 32 reported cases per 100,000 population. And, as is oft-recalled, some 33.7 percent of single mothers live in poverty, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

But the best news for the erasure of undue bias and disadvantages, misogyny and violence against women is that the doors of dialogue about women's issues are wide open and often flooded. But herein lies a systematic and self-feeding double-standard. In our culture's mostly beneficial and successful education of women's issues, societal forces have largely neglected issues faced specifically by men, and in the process sometimes created new but often undiscussed disparities.

But what kinds of issues are men's issues?

Well, the foremost is that such a question feels so alien. While media coverage of women's issues is widespread, issues exclusive to men garner almost no attention at all. We've heard disturbing statistics about violence against women as a gender-specific problem and rightfully so: The issue demands our society's dedicated attention. But, we hear little about violence against men as an issue distinct from generic violence; this disparity is all the more disturbing after learning that men were 20.5 percent more likely than women to be victims of a violent crime in 2001-02 (that figure is down from 34.2 percent the previous biennium).

Men seem to bear the brunt on the other end of the criminal justice system, too. In each category of offense, men see longer average prison terms; when convicted of violent crimes, the average male is sentenced to 39 months more than the average female, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics bulletin "Women in

Prison." (Those figures discount life and death sentences.) Once men reach prisons, they are often grossly overrepresented, compared to their conviction rates: Some 87.0 percent of robberies in 1988 were committed by men, reported the National Crime Survey, but men accounted for 97.8 percent of prisoners serving time for that crime. (The figures are similar for aggravated assault and murder.)

In 1990, Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., complained that the National Institutes of Health spent less than 14 percent of its research budget on projects specific to women's health, a figure often cited as an example of neglect toward women. If that number is insufficient, then certainly the mere 6.5 percent of the NIH budget spent on male-specific health issues is downright and dangerously paltry, as reported by Dr. Andrew Kadar in his excellent 1994 Atlantic Monthly article, "The Sex-Bias Myth in Medicine."



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Suicide, too, is a problem that disproportionately affects men: In 1995, there were 4.5 male suicides for every female suicide in the United States (the 18th-highest rate among the 76 countries for which statistics were compiled at NationMaster.com, a geographical statistics database), but resources dedicated to investigating this discrepancy seem slim. Incidentally, women attempt suicide more often than men do but tend to be less "successful."

Why, then, is there such disparity in the sheer quantity of presented information? The answer is complicated. The feminist movement of the last half-century galvanized women (and concerned men) to identify "women's issues" and organize political and social instruments to tackle them. Men, by contrast, have formed no widespread movements (there is no National Organization of Men or League of Male Voters), in part, no doubt, because most changes in men's roles in society in recent decades have been passive consequences of the active changes in women's roles. But the discrepancy runs deeper than that: Societal standards for the value of men — say, independence and the ability to solve problems without appeals for help — discourage wide-scale movements.

Moreover, the lack of societal and media attention to male issues seems to have burgeoned into a cultural consciousness not concerned with negative male images. While men are often portrayed in the

media as decisive leaders and often positive role models, they are also cast as archetypally insensitive, socially and sexually selfish or simply stupid — characterizations that would never be tolerated if applied as regularly to women.

"The business of helping men negotiate that distance is made infinitely more difficult by media-promoted lies and distortions which exaggerate men's deficiencies and play down their personal talents and achievements," the Sydney Institute's Bettina Arndt wrote in *The Weekend Australia*. "The reality is that neither sex has a monopoly on vice or virtue but men have real work to do to restore their damaged reputation."

Negative depictions of males are sometimes less subtle. While most feminists I've met have an enlightened view of gender-related issues geared toward understanding and cooperation, a few are less tolerant.

Robin Morgan, the former editor in chief of *Ms. magazine*, sees men, evidently without reasonable qualification, as shameless oppressors, asininely opining, "I feel that 'man-hating' is an honorable and viable political act, that the oppressed have a right to class-hatred against the class that is oppressing them."

American author Marilyn French was more specific, telling *People magazine* that "All men are rapists and that's all they are."

Andrea Dworkin, author of *Heartbreak: The Political Memoir of a Feminist Militant*, implicated men as misogynists, even in the context of consensual sex, incoherently arguing, "Heterosexual intercourse is the pure, formalized expression of contempt for women's bodies."

These notions, while representing the frayed, onanistic edges of radical feminism, are still culturally damaging, and at least as much as notions that women should be denied education and confined to homes.

Unfortunately, misandry has found its way — thankfully in a much more moderated tone — into public institutions. Former Rep. Barbara Jordan, D-Texas, addressed what she perceived as male incapability.

"I believe that women have a capacity for understanding and compassion which a man structurally does not have, does not have it because he cannot have it," she said. "He's just incapable of it."

These messages send a disturbingly adverse message to men of all ages about their value and their role in society.

Sexism, double standards and negative portrayal in the media plague both genders, but only by recognizing that can our society fairly address those problems in a fair and totally productive way.

Contact the editorial editor at [traviswillse@dailymerald.com](mailto:traviswillse@dailymerald.com). His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Dennis Kucinich is a welcome face in primaries

I thank Congressman Kucinich, D-Ohio, for staying in the presidential race. Kucinich has vowed to stay in the race to advocate for ending the war in Iraq, providing universal health care, promoting a full employment economy and ending the unfair trade agreements, NAFTA and WTO. Without Kucinich in the race, there

would be no need for the other candidates to even be discussing these issues on these terms.

It has been he that has stood unwavering in his convictions and has provided the voice for progressive issues, not least of which is the ending of the occupation in Iraq, that the others, including Governor Dean, would be avoiding due to the same fear of an impact on their "electability" if they stand against the war and its infinite funding. The record is clear.

Kucinich's effort is only the beginning

of a movement in this country away from militarism. His candidacy is a place for coming together of those of us who agree that our government should serve the people and be of the people. Dennis Kucinich is doing our country a great favor by subjecting himself to this rigorous exercise with grace and his usual dedication to the public good. Let's now get behind him and support him vigorously in these primaries.

Jean Robertson  
 Cleveland, Ohio