

Sophia Money-Coutts

Modern manners

Cads and bounders may flourish at Eton, but oddballs and eccentrics are given their opportunities, too

Perhaps Angela Rayner's dated an Old Etonian? That would both explain the level of vitriol she's directed at them and elicit my greatest sympathy, because I've known a few Old Etonian bounders in my time. They were mostly rascals, as opposed to actual scum, but, in Angela's defence, one can become choked and irrational when it comes to affairs of the heart.

The trouble is, as Angela may know, that although Etonians can be charming, handsome and generally wear excellent shoes, they're not necessarily that considerate when it comes to romance. Eh, Prime Minister?

Take Charlie, for example, an Old Etonian who I was in love with for several years from the age of 17. He was tall, dark, good at rugby and somehow knew what to say to impressionable young girls to make them swoon. Do they teach that between Latin and rowing practice? Then, one night when we were in our early 20s, Charlie and I ended up going home together, although the dream was shattered when I woke to the sound of him hissing at me. "Quick, QUICK! You have to climb out of here," he ordered, waving at his bedroom window. It turned out he had a girlfriend and didn't want his flatmate discovering me. I remember squeezing myself through the window and a brief tussle with the bins, before weeping on the bus to work, smelling faintly of rubbish.

Then came another Etonian, a former SAS commander who seemed dangerous in every way and was, therefore, irresistible. He talked like an Ian Fleming hero and even about marrying me, until I waltzed into the *Tatler* office one morning and a colleague told me I was one of several Sophias he was busy seducing.



▲ School for the scandalous: but not all Old Etonians are mad, bad and dangerous to know

I could go on, but there simply isn't room to delve too deeply into my romantic history. We'd all die of old age before I got you up to scratch.

Arrogance is an accusation often levelled at Etonians, and in various cases (see above) that's probably fair. But there's a fine line between arrogance and confidence. When my brother went to Eton, he hated his first few terms. He was unsporty, a loner and used to sit in his room playing cards by himself. Eventually, when the school worked out that what Drum loved was magic, he was encouraged to develop it. He restarted the Eton Magic Society, which became one of the school's most popular clubs (when Uri Geller visited, Drum had to write an apology to the canteen as so many boys had pinched spoons for him to bend). Around the same time, another magic-mad friend of my brother's announced that he wanted to fling himself into the school pool in handcuffs in an attempt at escapology, and Eton was fully supportive until one housemaster quietly asked whether their insurance policy would cover it.

Having possibly paid more attention to his cards than his maths lessons, Drum's gone on to become a professional TV wizard; his escapologist mate has shrugged off the straitjacket but loved Eton so much he's returned there to teach. While it undoubtedly produces playboys and controversial prime ministers, the school also gives oddballs and eccentrics the space to be themselves, and you can't say that about everywhere. Also, certain schools churn out much worse. Don't even get me started on Harrow.



Take my advice: just don't do it, unless you really want to

Daniel Craig, who seems to get more furious about being James Bond by the day, has offered some advice for wannabe actors. "Don't do it!" he's said in an interview, slamming the industry as "degrading and depressing". A few years ago, I interviewed Jeremy Paxman and he said the same about journalism. He must have friends constantly pestering him for BBC work experience for their children, I suggested,



so what does he tell them? "I tell them not to do it," he said, which made my heart sink. How sad that this titan of news wouldn't recommend others to follow him. Paxo's face flickered with a Cheshire-cat smile: "But I tell them not to do it on the basis that those who really want to will do it anyway." Solid advice for those who are determined enough, whether aiming for Hollywood or Broadcasting House.

Beware the peculiar perils of being wired for sound

Prince Harry and Meghan have been on tour in New York. A stage appearance here, a book reading there, chicken and waffles in a Harlem restaurant. They were papped on this trip wearing wires, since they're supposedly being filmed for a Netflix documentary. Word of advice, you two: in 2014, when a fly-on-the-wall documentary was being made about



Tatler, I was wired with a microphone most days. Believing that every word I said mattered was a thrilling novelty; less so for Martin the sound guy, as whenever I nipped to the loo, I forgot to turn the mic off. As the months passed, this became no less embarrassing whenever I returned from the bathroom. Give the off button a quick flick before unzipping, is my top tip.

PARENTING CONFESSIONS

Why did my son have to be such a stereotypical male?

When I found out that I was having a baby boy at my 20-week scan, I didn't really know how to feel. I didn't feel negatively about it at all, but I've always been a very female-centric person. All of my friends are female, I have a sister and two fierce little nieces, and men have never been a huge part of my life aside from my dad and husband.

My worst nightmare is also anything overtly masculine. Football, lad culture, and alpha personality types make me clench my jaw and roll my eyes. That's not to say that I don't like men because I do. I've just never really understood them in the way I do women or had that much in common with them.

So, now as a mum of a rumbunctious three-year-old, I've found myself faced with a new set of challenges. The person I love most in the world is – shock horror – a football-loving, karate-kicking, dirt-covered boy who, while caring and affectionate, has taken me well out of my comfort zone.

He's physical, energetic and usually the one at soft play that clobbers smaller children with toys and pushes them down the slide. I think I've apologised to probably 80 per cent of the parents in south-west London and been told off by about half as many – or at least it feels that way. His boyishness is innate and full-on, and I'm just not used to it.

I think it's fair to say that as parents we haven't actively encouraged this type of behaviour and we've tried hard to nurture a gentler side, too. In addition to taking him to swimming lessons and football, we enrolled our son in ballet. He started off quite well before things quickly went downhill. In one lesson, he just wouldn't stop running around roaring like a dinosaur. In another, he made it his mission to steal every little girl's wand before using it as a sword. It became apparent that as much as I tried to offer him a broad blueprint of what it means to be a boy, he was not meant to be the gentle dancing type.

Then, four weeks ago, our second son arrived into

the world, weighing a hefty 9lb 11oz. It's obviously too early to know what his personality will be like and if he'll be as full-on as his brother, but I do have my concerns. I have visions of them teaming up and chasing me around the kitchen island with Power Ranger swords and water pistols and causing double the mischief at soft play.

And, aside from the day-to-day hurdles of raising small boys, there are more long-term worries on my mind. The pressure to shape both of my sons into well-rounded, kind and empathetic men feels massive. If I had girls, I would have been clear on my role as their mother: to raise them to be strong and independent and never at the mercy of a man. But with boys? It feels more complicated.

God forbid they should end up being yobbish football hooligans who expect their future spouses to fetch and carry after them. I want them to understand their privilege while using it for the better. So, how do I teach them to be confident without being entitled? Strong yet emotionally open? Well rounded enough to not only be kind to the women in their lives but allies, too?

And how do I learn how to feel more at ease in a boy's world while making sure my sons feel equally at home in a woman's?

At ballet he made it his mission to steal every little girl's wand and use it as a sword



ILLUSTRATION: LORNA MILLIGAN

The Telegraph
Extra

SUBSCRIBER OFFERS, EVENTS & COMPETITIONS

Win a bottle of
Telegraph Extra gin



To celebrate the launch of Telegraph Extra, 500 subscribers can win a bottle of bespoke gin produced by Devon Distillery, made with autumnal flavours in collaboration with The Sunday Telegraph's drinks expert Susy Atkins.

SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE

To enter, visit telegraph.co.uk/extra-competitions