

Boys at Risk

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Books

- Rick Hawley: "Boys Will Be Men: Masculinity in Troubled Times" (1993)
- Michael Thompson and Dan Kindlon: "Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Lives of Boys" (1999)
- Bill Pollack: "Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood" (1998)
- Leonard Sax: "Why Gender Matters" (2005)

Indicators that boys are at risk

- Health
- Education
- Crime rate
- Citizenship

Learning disabilities, behavioral disorders & drugs

- Of children diagnosed with learning disabilities, 70% are boys
- Of children diagnosed with behavioral disorders, 80% are boys.
- Over 80% of schoolchildren on Ritalin or similar drugs are boys (In 2004, almost 5 million boys)
- Of high school dropouts, 80% are male

From Michael Gurian, *The Minds of Boys: Saving Our Sons From Falling Behind in School and Life*, p 22.

Bachelor's degrees earned

- Between 1975 and 2001, the number of bachelor's degrees earned by men increased by 5 percent.
- During the same period, the number of bachelor's degree earned by women increased by 70 percent.
- Of the total increase in bachelor's degrees awarded during this period, 8 percent was earned by males and 92 percent was earned by females. (National Center for Education Statistics)
- A majority of the bachelor's degrees are now awarded to females in every racial/ethnic group of the population: whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asians and American Indians. (National Center for Education Statistics)

Tom Mortenson, Senior Scholar, Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education: "What's Wrong with the Guys?"

Suicide and Incarceration

- Among 15 to 24 year olds, suicide rates were 5.8 times higher for males than for females in 2000. In 1900 male rates were 1.3 times higher for males than those for females.
- Between 1970 and 2000 male suicide rates *increased* by 29 percent while female suicide rates *decreased* by 29 percent. (National Center for Health Statistics)
- Since mid 1970s, incarceration rates have grown very rapidly. U.S. rate of 707 prisoners per 100,000 population is now highest in the world. In 1970 the U.S. incarceration rate was 175 prisoners in jails and prisons per 100,000 population. This is a 90 percent male issue. (Bureau of Justice Statistics)

Tom Mortenson, Senior Scholar, Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education: "What's Wrong with the Guys?"

African-American males

Of the 1.9 million Black males age 18-24 in U.S.

- Less than 25% were in college in 2000.
- 35% of Black females were in college.
- 36% of 18-24 population were in college

Source: American Council on Education
as reported in New York Times, December, 2003

Graduation rates of those who do attend college:

- Black males 36%
- Black females 45%
- White males 59%

"Colleges Struggle to Help Black Men Stay Enrolled"
New York Times, December 30, 2003

Male disengagement from families

- Since early 1950s fewer children are being raised in families with a father present. Decline has been from about 93 percent in early 1950s to 78 percent by 2000.
- Proportion of children in families with biological father present is about two-thirds. (Census Bureau)

Tom Mortenson, Senior Scholar, Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education: "What's Wrong with the Guys?"

1868 Taunton Commission (UK)

"Comparing girls and boys, the Assistant Commissioners found, again and again, evidence that girls outperformed boys. Assistant Commissioner Bryce, for example, found that they were better in reading, spelling, geography and history... Assessing girls' capacity to follow the same curriculum as boys, the assistant commissioners noted in particular girls' greater eagerness to learn and the female mind's tendency to develop more rapidly than the male."

Quoted by Caroline Gipps in a paper "Gender Performance and Learning Styles" a paper given at HMC Annual Conference, Oct. 2003

Grant and Hodgson Study 1913

Another study completed in 1913 declared that the boy's 'breezy attitude to life... successfully secures him from morbid concentration on the acquisition of knowledge'. By contrast the girl 'broods over her tasks and reproaches herself for her imperfections'.

Quoted by Caroline Gipps in a paper "Gender Performance and Learning Styles" a paper given at HMC Annual Conference, Oct. 2003

Lexis-Nexis articles

- Number of articles about Larry Summers' speech about why so few women hold elite professorships in the sciences: 935
- Number of articles about U.S. Department of Education 100-plus-page report weighing academic progress by gender: 5

As reported in "Boy Trouble" by Richard Whitmire in New Republic, January 23, 2006

Two Central Questions

- Why are boys doing poorly today?
- What can be done to reverse the trends without compromising the progress that has been made by girls?

Why Are Boys Doing Less Well?

- Social/cultural factors
- Economic forces
- Educational factors
 1. Changes in educational priorities
 2. Need for more effective methods to promote success for boys

A new civilization ?

- A different sense of time – faster pace, more “personalized” time; less controlled by universal schedules
- A different sense of space – use of satellites for communication
- A blurring of boundaries (definitions) re authority, gender roles, sexuality, etc.

A loss of optimism among males

The feminist movement brought much needed attention to the education of girls. One of the results of this attention (and of Title IX) has been that girls have been encouraged to believe that they can succeed in ways that did seem possible to them until the 1960's and 1970's. Their vision of the future has been enhanced and broadened and their motivation for education has been transformed.

The confidence factor

- “One question we now need to ask is: Is the confidence factor shifting so that boys are losing their position as the more positive group? And is this leading to disaffection from “academic study” or even school? It is that the difference in academic performance have always been there but now (with better data/information and the huge importance put on qualifications) it is more apparent?”

Caroline Gipps: Gender Performance and Learning Styles:
Paper given at HMC Annual Conference, Oct. 2003

Economic factors have been important

- “The male role is being restructured. In particular the nature of work is changing dramatically as technology reduces the importance of physical labour.” In order for men to adapt to new this new economic climate and to maintain their status and self-esteem, the education system needs to change the way boys are educated and trained.”

Lindsay Tanner, The Australian May 5, 2001

Changes in curriculum and assessment

- The “feminization of the curriculum with literacy skills, a traditional area of weakness for many boys, being given a greater influence.”

Report on Best Practices in Boys' Education
Peter West, Univ. of Western Sydney, AUS

Changing expectations

"Increasingly, teachers ask students to keep written journals, even as early as kindergarten.... [using] writing to teach children basic skills in a host of subjects. The teachers are only doing their jobs, preparing their students for a work world that has moved rapidly away from manufacturing and agriculture and into information-based work. It's not that schools have changed their ways to favor girls; it's that they haven't changed their ways to help boys adjust to this new world."

"Boy Trouble" by Richard Whitmire

Michael Thompson about Journals

"Today, boys are asked to keep journals. But we all know what journals are. They are diaries, and most boys don't want to keep a diary."

Frustration leads to coping out

- Faced with tasks they are ill-prepared to handle, some boys early on develop a dislike of school, or a dislike of reading.
- The frustration they experience leads to their adopting a self-destructive notion that it is "cool to be a fool."
- This problem is fueled by media images of the studious boy being portrayed as the geek.

One viewpoint: Boys should be more like girls

"Why can't boys be more like girls? Boys are locked into a masculinity box Most boys stay inside that box, living by a macho boy code that precludes developing the "language of feelings" needed to express themselves or relate to teachers. Boys who break out of this box are doomed to a life of teasing and being bullied. In other words, young boys never get sufficiently acquainted with their feelings to write A-rated essays."

From "Boy Trouble" by Richard Whitmire

Read Like A Girl

"I'd like to start a campaign called 'Read Like a Girl.' Until the things that girls are good at are not denigrated, we're not going to have boys reading. "

Michelle Porche, Research Scientist, Wellesley Center for Women. Quoted in "Raising and Educating Healthy Boys: A Report on the Growing Crisis in Boys' Education. Academy for Educational Development, 2005

Australia

- "Declining Rates of Achievement and Retention: The Perceptions of Adolescent Males (2001)
- Boys: Getting It Right (2002)
- "Meeting the Challenge: Summary Report. Guiding Principles for Success from the Boys' Educational Lighthouse Schools Programme Stage One 2003"
- Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys: Strategies for Schools and Teachers" (2004)

New Zealand

- "Promoting Boys' Achievement" (Education Review Office, 2000)
- "Explaining and Addressing Gender Differences in the New Zealand Compulsory School Sector" (2003)
- The Good Man Project (2004)

U.K. Studies

- "Yes He Can --Schools Where Boys Write Well" Ofsted, 2003
- "Boys' Achievement in Secondary Schools" Ofsted, 2003
- "Impact of School Size and Single-sex Education on Performance" LGA Research Report 33, NFER, 2002

Recommendations for improving performance of boys

- More teacher-directed classes
- Regular checking of homework and testing to measure progress
- More structured environment with rules and procedures that are consistently enforced
- More single-sex classes
- Shorter tasks
- More rewards

Boys tend to respond better to:

- structured activities
- clearly defined objectives and instructions
- Short-term challenging tasks
- Visual, logical, analytical approaches to learning
- Boys do not respond as well as girls to verbal, linguistic approaches.

Boys: Getting it Right: A Report on the Inquiry into the Education of Boys

Examples

- Start lessons with a "take 5" approach: "Write down 5 things you learned yesterday about...."
- End lessons asking boys students to sum up the key idea. "Tell you partner what was the most important thing you learned..."
- Use debates, role-plays and investigations.

Perspective from England: The Characteristics of schools where boys succeed

- Schools explicitly focus on the improvement of performance by boys
- Staff training on boys' preferred learning styles
- "Modularization" of curriculum to provide short-term learning goals
- Frequent feedback re progress with advice on how work could be improved by specific steps

Ofsted Report: Boys' Achievement in Secondary Schools (2003)

- Carefully structured lessons (writing templates, discussion frames)
- Short term targets
- Emphasis on positive male role models as mentors
- Boys are told what they are going to learn
- Easy access to computers – to improve the presentation of boys' work
- Use of "real situations"

- Teachers encourage boys to reflect on their first answer (since boys often answered willingly with responses that lacked depth).
- Effective use of competition
- Boys in particular seem to value individual attention and tend to work harder when they know they are being monitored closely. They respond well when given help organizing their coursework and planning their revision. In schools where anti-learning peer pressure is a major barrier to boys' achievement, close monitoring can give boys 'an excuse to succeed'.

Confrontation & challenge

In general, boys more than girls like to be challenged. If you stand in front of a male student, and say to him: "How do you *know* that, John? Prove it!" it is likely the challenge will motivate him to work harder and to be better prepared for the next class.

Taylor, Shelley: "Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight." *Psychological Review*, 107:411-429

Importance of context

- Males tend to extract information from context while females tend to pay attention to context in a study or problem.
- When considering moral reasoning, or other problem solving, males tend to take analytical rule-based approaches while females tend to take a holistic approach and emphasize empathy

Attitudes about performance

- Educational psychologists have found differences in the factors motivating girls and boys. "Girls are more concerned than boys are with pleasing adults, such as parents and teachers" Most boys, on the other hand, will be less motivated to study unless the material itself interests them.

Eva Pomerantz, Ellen Altermatt, & Jill Saxon, "Making the grade but feeling distressed: gender differences in academic performance and internal distress," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, V 94, No 2, 396-404, 2002

- "Girls generalize the meaning of their failures because they interpret them as indicating that they have disappointed adults, and thus they are of little worth. Boys, in contrast, appear to see their failures as relevant only to the specific subject area in which they have failed; this may be due to their relative lack of concern with pleasing adults."

From "Making the Grade but feeling distressed"

Differences between boys & girls

- Brain differences; structural and functional
- Physiological differences: hearing, vision
- Developmental differences
- Social differences

Brain differences: structural

"Sex differences in the brain begin in the womb. About midway through pregnancy, the testicles of a developing baby boy start churning out testosterone in substantial quantities, achieving serum testosterone concentrations comparable to those seen in young adult men. These sex hormones, transformed by enzymes within the brain, bind to brain tissue and begin to transform it. Between 18 and 26 weeks gestation, the developing brain is permanently and irreversibly transformed. "

Dr. Leonard Sax, author of [Why Gender Matters](#), 2005

Girls, Boys & Feelings

"In adolescence, brain activity associated with emotion moves up to the cerebral cortex. So, the 17-year-old is able to explain what she is feeling, and why, in great detail and without much difficulty. But that change occurs *only in girls*. In boys, the locus of emotional control remains in the amygdala."

Dr. Leonard Sax, author of [Why Gender Matters](#), 2005

Sex vs. race

"These differences are *real* -- as opposed to, say, racial or religious differences. You can't tell by looking at a slice of someone's brain whether that person was Black or White or Asian; you can't tell whether that person was a Jew or a Christian or a Hindu or a Muslim. But you can tell whether that person was female or male."

Leonard Sax, author of [Why Gender Matters](#)

Physiological: Hearing

Research shows that girls have an innate sense of hearing that is two to four times better than boys (depending on the frequency tested.) This difference is present as early as children can be reliably tested.

Physiological: vision

- Male eyes are particularly adept at seeing motion and direction (Where is it?); females eyes are adept at discerning context and color (What is it?).
- Girls draw nouns; boys draw verbs.

From Leonard Sax, [Why Gender Matters](#)

Reconsidering kindergarten

"The shift in curriculum in favor of reading preparedness has had the effect of emphasizing boys' weaknesses and girls' strengths. " Two changes are proposed.

- Alternative kindergartens emphasizing group activities and nonverbal skills for boys to enter at age 5 before entering contemporary kindergarten at age 6. Girls would continue to enter kindergarten at age 5."
- Single-gender classes

Sax, Leonard: Psychology of Men and Masculinity, Vol. 2 No. 3. (2001)

More male faculty might help

"Male teachers were more tolerant of such traits as restlessness and aggressiveness.. more inclined to give students the autonomy and freedom from control necessary for self-directed learning."

Frank W. Schneider and Larry Coutts
Journal of Educational Psychology
V. 75, No 6 (1982)

Single-gender education

Of the independent schools that moved from single-sex to coeducation between 1930 and 2000, 56% changed in a four year, between 1970 and 1974 -- a time when feminist forces were very strong, little information about learning differences between boys and girls was widely known, and there were essentially no comparative statistics showing which form of education was most effective.

Australia

The Australian Council for Educational Research released in 2001 an elaborate comparison of single-sex and coed schools. The study covered six years, considered 53 academic subjects and included more than 270,000 students. The results showed that boys and girls who attended single-sex classes averaged scores that were 15 to 22 percentile ranks higher than boys and girls who attended coed classes.

- Boys and girls tend to achieve better GCSE results in single-sex schools than in mixed schools, but research suggests that factors such as school type, reputation, history and ethos are also significant.

Ofsted Report: Boys' Achievement in Secondary Schools (2003)

Developments in U.S.

- New regulations re Title IX to allow experimentation with single-gender classes and schools in public and charter schools.
- Some public schools now experimenting with single gender classes
- Many schools becoming increasingly committed to helping teachers understand the differences in the ways boys and girls learn and develop.