Boys and School: A Background Paper on the "Boy Crisis"

A Swedish version of this report is also available. The Swedish title is Pojkar och skolan: Ett bakgrundsdokument om "pojkkrisen"

Michael Kimmel

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Foreword

The overall objective of Sweden's gender equality policy is that women and men are to have the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all significant areas of life. The basic principle of gender equality efforts in schools is that all students are to be able to test and develop their abilities and interests without being restrained by traditional gender roles.

DEJA, the Delegation for gender equality in schools, is a government inquiry under the Ministry of Education and Research that began its work in November 2008. The Delegation was appointed because the Government considered that additional measures must be taken to break traditional gender patterns and the structure manifested by the gender division in the education system. The Delegation will conclude its work in autumn 2010.

Michael Kimmel is Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, as well as an active researcher and teacher of sociology. He is one of the world's leading researchers and writers in studies on masculinity constructions and the masculine ideal, and he has published more than 20 books on the topic, including GUYLAND, MANHOOD IN AMERICA, and THE GENDERED SOCIETY.

In this report, Michael Kimmel discusses how we should go about understanding the phenomenon of boys, as a group, tending to perform at a lower level than girls in school, along with ideas about what can be done about this. He identifies what he believes is the key theme that is missing from many debates around the world about the gender gap in school attendance and achievement. My hope is that the report will help bring about balanced discussion on the attitudes that boys and young men have towards school and higher education. The author is himself responsible for the content of this report.

Delegation for Gender Equality in Schools

Anna Ekström
Chairperson

Innehåll

Around the world, there is a ”crisis” of gender and education. But there is little agreement about what that crisis actually encompasses. In fact, the crisis takes very different forms in different places.

In the developing world, for example, the crisis is one of access for girls: in many cultures, girls' access to education is restricted by cultural or religious traditions. Girls' schools are closed by repressive regimes, girls are punished for seeking any life at all outside of that of wife and mother. Girls' schools are closed, female applicants to professional schools are not considered. Women who do seek higher education can, in some places, be risking their lives. Across the developing world, there is a significant ”gender gap” in school attendance and graduation rates, as well as in literacy rates – and that gender gap increases as one progresses further up the educational ladder.

In the advanced countries, the story is more mixed. Women continue to be dramatically under-represented the higher one goes on the professional ladder, especially among the ranks of university professors. Access continues to be an issue for women in science and engineering programs, vocational, training, and other tertiary educational arenas.

On the other hand, though, in North America and Europe, a new ”gender gap” has emerged that goes the other way. From the earliest ages, in Europe and North America, girls are outnumbering boys in school (especially in the tertiary and professional educational sector). There is a growing disparity in grades and educational honors: girls get consistently higher grades and far more honors in school. And boys are far more likely to be diagnosed with behavioral problems, requiring remedial intervention. In North America and Europe, these are the three dimensions of the current ”boy crisis:” *attendance, achievement, and behavior.*

This document will present the evidence for gender gap in education. But more than that, I will show *how to think* about these issues, and suggest that some of the ways we have been asked to think cannot provide remedies for the problems of boys in school. Indeed, they would only make things worse.

Instead, I argue that while there is a ”boy crisis” in schools, it is not the one we commonly think. I argue that only by addressing gender – specifically the ideology of masculinity – can we together develop adequate strategies to address it.

I. Is there a boy crisis?

Is there a boy crisis? Numerous magazines and books have suddenly appeared to describe it. And, at first glance, the statistics would suggest that there is a crisis – and that it's very serious. (I begin with data from the United States as illustrative of the various gender gaps that have been identified. I then turn to more global comparisons. However, I continue to refer to U.S. data because the *conceptual* framework I outline – that the crisis is a crisis of *gender* and not biological *sex* would hold for any advanced industrial country.)

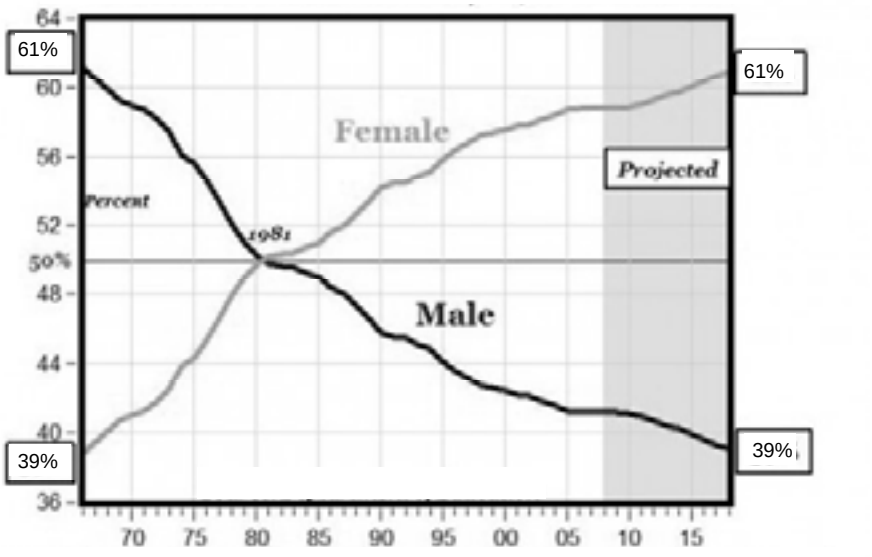
Attendance

First, there seem to be fewer and fewer males in education the higher one looks in the educational pyramid. On U.S. university campuses, women's enrollment caught up to men's enrollment in 1982, and has continued to climb; today, women earn 59% of all bachelor's degrees. Women outnumber men in the social and behavioral sciences by about three to one, and how they've invaded such traditionally male bastions as engineering, where they now make up about 20 percent of all students, and biology and business, where the genders are virtually on par. In professional schools, half of all law school, medical school and business school students are female.

Men earn fewer degrees. Among whites, females earn 61% of associates degrees (community college); 57% of bachelor's degrees, 62% of master's degrees, and 54% of doctoral degrees. Among blacks, women earn 61% of associates degrees, 66% of bachelor's degrees, 72% of master's degrees, and 64% of doctoral degrees.

Figure 1 **Percent of all college degrees, female vs. male, 1966–2018**

Includes Associate´s, Bachelor´s, Master´s, First professional and Doctor´s degrees



Source: Departement of Education.

Achievement

A significant gender gap has opened up in school achievement – from middle school through high school and university. The average grade-point average in high school is 3.09 for girls and 2.86 for boys. Among middle and high school children 55% of girls and 41% of boys report earning grades of A or B. Twenty-eight per cent of first year university women reported that their high school grade point average was A or A+, compared with 21% of males. Girls get higher grades on standardized tests of reading and writing; in national writing tests, 32% of girls are considered proficient – double the percentage (16%) of the boys. Boys have lower average class rankings, and receive fewer academic honors. In 2009, 70% of all high school valedictorians in the United States were female."Twice as many girls as boys were members of the National Honor Society. And girls are achieving about equal numbers of awards in high school science and math competitions.

More than 25% of males, compared to 11% of females, rate as ”below basic” writers on national tests.

Boys are almost twice as likely to repeat a grade. While one-fourth (25%) of girls drop out of school, nearly one-third of boys (32%) drop out. Over half of black males (52%) dropped out, compared with 39% of black females. In preschool, boys are more than four times as likely to be expelled. After that, the ratio drops to three times as likely from Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Boys also work less hard than girls. Half of all girls report ”working hard to meet standards on assignments,” while only 35% of boys do. Nearly 7 of 10 high school girls report ”trying to do their best work in school” compared to half of the boys (See Whitmire, 2010).

Behavior

Boys are diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, and commit suicide four times more often than girls; they get into fights twice as often; they murder ten times more frequently and are 15 times more likely to be the victims of a violent crime. Boys account for about two-thirds of all students receiving special education services (Tschantz and Markowitz, 2003). Boys are six times more likely to be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder. Boys are twice as likely to be suspended as girls, and three times as likely to be expelled. Boys aged 16-24 are more likely to be unemployed and incarcerated.

Twice as many parents of boys aged 4 to 17 have sought professional help for their child’s behavioral problems as have parents of girls (20% to 10%).

II. The clobal dimensions of the boy crisis

Let’s be clear: globally, males have all the advantages – at least some men in some countries! On virtually every measure – political representation, the workplace, the professions, share of wealth, you name it – males control a disproportionate share of the resources in every culture on earth. So ”normal” is this state of affairs, so universal, that everywhere measures of women’s relative status are set against the criteria of male standards – for example the wage

gap shows women's wages as a function of men's wages – that the male standard is simply seen as the national standard.

In education, this is also true. The gender gap tilts decidedly towards males on most dimensions. Among people 55 to 64, for example, males are far more likely to be educated than women. In the 30 countries ranked by OECD, older women emerge as better educated in only three. But among younger people, aged 25-34, women are better educated than men in 20 out of the 30 countries, and in the remaining 10 only two – Turkey and Switzerland – showed significant differences favoring men.

In many advanced industrial countries, the gender gap is also evident. In Britain, for example, boys predominate in behavioral problems and "conduct disorders. In a study of more than 10,000 children, ages 5-15, based on data from the British Child Mental Health Survey, boys were three times more likely to have exhibited a conduct disorder.

In Canada, girls are more likely than boys to show interest in their studies, find their classes relevant, and study hard: 46% of the high school boys surveyed in Canada spend less than three hours a week or less on homework, compared to 29% of the girls. Among 20 year-old Canadians, 15% of the men have failed to earn a high school degree, compared with 9% of the women. According to the OECD, in Canada, males comprise 42% of all college students; females 58%. At one Canadian university, the first year women are reported to be far more likely than the men to actually do their homework.

And this gender gap has become significant in Scandinavia as well. In Sweden, about 60% of all undergraduates in Swedish universities are female. While only 37% of male students move on to higher education, 47.4% of females do. And while there remains a traditional sex-stereotypic division between academic subjects (females in humanities, males in sciences and vocational training) there have been slightly greater inroads made by women into men's fields than vice-versa. The most recent study, "Women and Men in Higher Education" (2008) suggests little change in thee patterns over the previous decade (comparing data from 1996-7 to data from 2006-7).

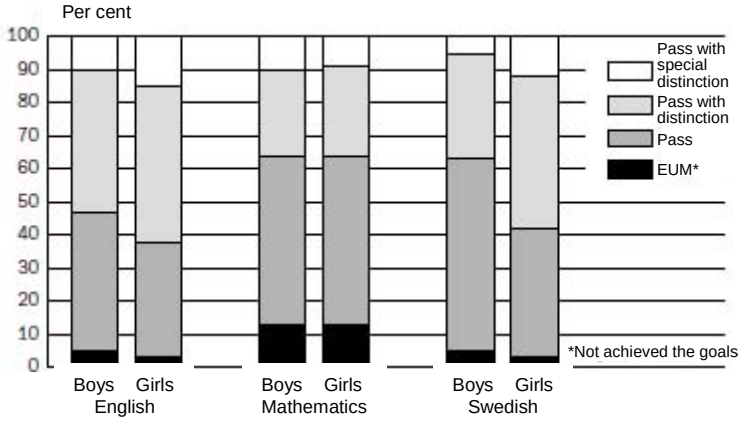
The report found that:

> Women perform better than men in upper secondary schools, and meet the basic entry requirements for university and higher education studies to a greater extent than men. Within three years of completion

of upper secondary schooling, a considerably higher proportion of women that men have moved on to higher education.

Women have slightly higher grades, although the differences are small compared to the similarities, and the gap in achievement varies among subjects and has been relatively stable over time. On the other hand, males score somewhat higher on the standardized Swedish Aptitude Test.

Figure 2 Grade distribution in subjects test



Source: National Agency for Education.

Whatever advantage females might be experiencing in attendance and achievement, this has not translated into dramatic gains at the level of educational employment. Throughout the OECD countries women are concentrated in primary education, still the majority of secondary school teachers, and entry-level lecturers and part-timers at the university level. At the top level of higher education, women comprise less than one-fifth of all professors. In Sweden, for example, only 18% of all professors and only 5% of professors in the sciences are female (”Women and Men in Higher Education,” p. 77).

There is even evidence from China that a significant gender gap is emerging in education. Despite the ”bare branches” problem of a significant surplus of male babies, compared to female babies (a result of selective abortion of female fetuses to conform to China’s

one-child policy), there is a significant gender gap in education, which is confusing parents and educators alike (www.lifeweek.com.cn, March 10, 2010).

III. Explanation for the boy crisis

The fact that this gender education gap exists in a wide range of advanced countries suggests that something ”systemic” and not merely something episodic or particular is happening. Searches for causes, then, need to be equally structural and systemic.

For example, some longer term economic restructuring lies at the origins of this current gender gap. At one time, some of these gender disparities in attendance and achievement were easily incorporated into industrial society. Large-scale manufacturing, heavy industry, and the various union-protected trades all paid high wages and required little higher education. The flip-side of the gender gap in education was the gender gap in wages: male high school graduate earnings were equivalent to the earnings of female college graduates. Male high school drop outs actually earned *more* than female high school graduates. As a result, young males believed that they didn't ”need” education, especially in the liberal arts, in order to get good, high paying jobs.

These large-scale economic changes, however, are the deeper structural background of the current boy crisis. On the one hand, economic shifts – corporate restructuring, global shifts in the geography of industrial production, and the economic changes that have resulted in an entire generation of downsizing, off-shoring, outsourcing – have dramatically reduced the number of high-paying jobs that non-college educated males could reasonably expect to get. In addition, increased immigration, the dramatic increase in women's entry into the workplace, and policies such as affirmative action have all diminished the previous advantages to which white males had grown accustomed.

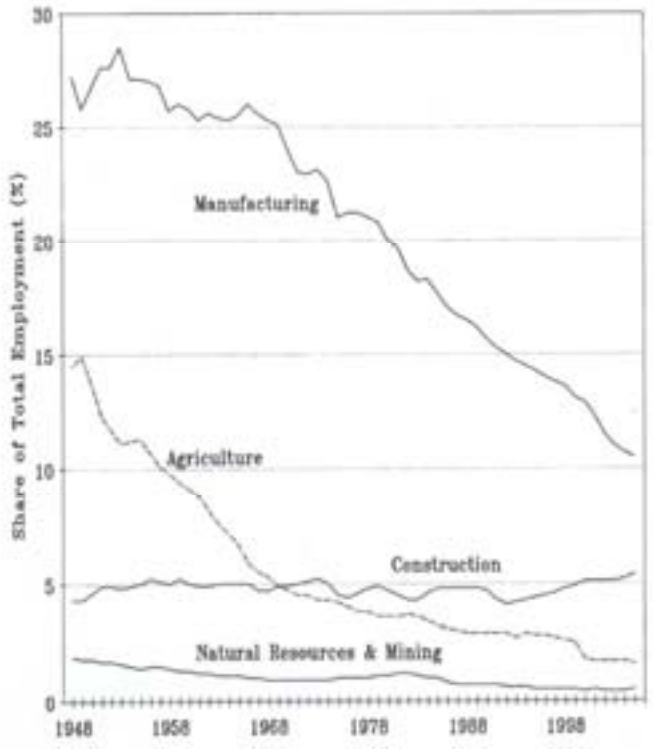
Males 25 years old or older who started but did not finish high school have seen their wages decline by 38% in real income since 1973. Those who completed high school (but went no further) saw a 26% decline, and those who went to college but didn't get a college degree saw their incomes decline by 13% (Mortenson, 2006). In addition, the shift from heavy industry and manufacturing has mirrored the shift towards the post-industrial knowledge economy,

with its concomitant premium on literacy skills. Service and sales jobs require social capital for human interaction. These skills more than mechanical or technical training; they are, as Americans like to say "people skills." As one researcher (Kleinfeld, 2009) writes:

> Young men are far less prepared that young women to succeed in the current knowledge based economy, are more likely to suffer from substantial declines in real income, and are far more vulnerable to unemployment in times of economic recession.

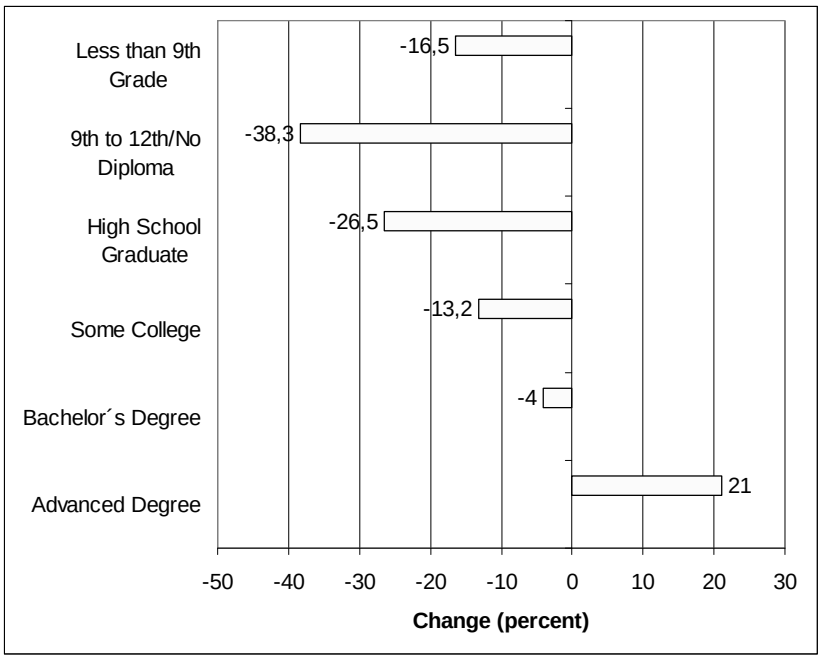
Another concludes that, "the traditional jobs are gone or dying out and unlikely to return. The flat college participation rates for males over the last 35 years is clear recognition that males are not responding to these signals to prepare for jobs in growing service industries" (Mortenson, 2006, p. 24). And, he adds, "[w]hat makes it a crisis is the loss of traditional male employment" (cited in Whitmire, 2010, p. 160).

Figure 3 Distribution of goods producing employment by industry 1948–2005



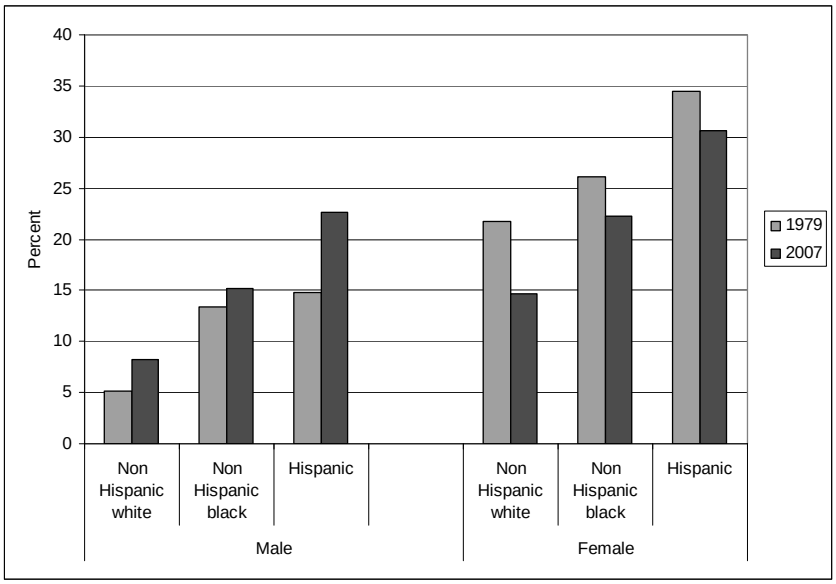
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 4 Change in Median Annual Income for Males 25 and Over by Education Attainment



Source: Census Bureau.

Figure 5 Percentage of Workers, Aged Twenty-Five to Thirty-Four, Earning less than $9 an Hour, by Gender and Race, 1979 and 2007



Source: Data are adjusted to 2007 dollars using the CPI-U-RS. Employed = worked at any time during year. CPS ORG data.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the historic gender gap in earnings – and its relationship to education – has not entirely disappeared. A six-year study in Iowa of 1,800 community college students found that women with an Associates degree in business (from a two-year community college) earned about $27,000 in 2007 (five years after graduation – compared to the $38,000 earned by men *without* a degree (Compton, et. al., 2010).

A second group of observers have argued that the gender of the teacher is a significant factor driving the boy crisis. They argue that teachers are educational role models, and the paucity of male teachers at the early ages discourages boys' engagement. More than 90% of all elementary school teachers and three-fourths of *all* U. S. teachers are female. More than 4 out of every five 8th grade reading teachers in the U.S. are female. "If half of the English teachers in sixth and seventh and eighth grades were male," one researcher predicts, "the achievement gap in reading would fall by approximately a third by the end of middle school."

One observer combines these two strains, and suggests that it's not just the number of female teachers, but the fact that "today's female teachers are schooled in a feminist dogma that leaves them resistant to the idea that boys need to be taught in different ways" (Mortenson, in Whitmire, p. 97).

In addition to these structural shifts, and problems of psychological modeling, some other observers have singled out the entry of women as a potential driver of the crisis for boys. This could be seen as beneficial – the entry of women into the public arena empowers half the population and unleashes a vital new force in all areas of public life. Ironically, though, many right-wing pundits see it exactly the reverse: they argue that greater gender equality has been a boon for girls, and a bust for boys.

Some argue that the paucity of male teachers is indicative of a larger problem of the feminization of schools. Female teachers, a "feminized" curriculum – all serve to alienate male students. To some, this is simply demographic shifts in the teaching profession, and shifts in structural demands for a more literate citizenry. But to others, it's a deliberate attack on boyhood by feminist women.

These critics argue that feminists who advocated for girls in schools actually made life worse for boys. Girls, these feminist reformers argued, face significant gender discrimination: they are discouraged from enrolling in science and math classes; they are harassed physically and sexually; they are demeaned and dismissed as less-than serious students. Feminist reformers observed a "chilly classroom climate" for girls, in the words of a significant policy-oriented document from the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1999), and sought to develop policy initiatives to combat this.

Now, these critics argue, these feminist women have succeeded spectacularly – but only for girls. The down side is that they redounded to the detriment of the boys. "Misguided feminism" has enhanced girls' experiences has detracted from boys' experiences. In this view, girls' gains have been at boy's expense. One political pundit went so far as to say that feminism has declared "a war against boys." Elementary schools, we hear, are "anti-boy" emphasizing reading and restricting the movements of young boys. They "feminize" boys, forcing active, healthy and naturally rambunctious boys to conform to a regime of obedience, "pathologizing what is simply normal for boys," as one psychologist put it. Michael Gurian argues in *The Wonder of Boys*

(1996) with testosterone surging through their little limbs, we demand that they sit still, raise their hands, and take naps. We're giving them the message, he says, that "boyhood is defective" (cited in Zachary, 1997, p. 1). In their zeal to promote the interests of girls, these feminist reformers have re-engineered the curriculum to a more feminized curriculum, rearranged classes so as to enhance girls' learning styles at the expense of boys' styles.

It is interesting to note, as Ingrid Jonsson does, that "when girls performed less well than boys, this was mainly seen as an intellectual shortcoming, while boys' poorer performances were mainly discussed in relation to shortcomings on the part of the school" (Jonsson, cited in *Gender Differences*… 2006, p. 15)

Since these causal arguments are so different, they often lead to different sorts of remedies.

Most reformers rest their policy initiatives on two important claims:

(1) that boys and girls are so fundamentally different that their learning styles and educational needs are completely different;

(2) that the presence of the opposite sex is so much of a sexual distraction that boys are utterly unable to focus on their studies.

While these positions are not mutually exclusive, they often rely on different sorts of empirical evidence to make their claims. Proponents of position #1 rely on evidence that boys and girls learn differently because of biological differences in brain chemistry, hormone secretion or other biological and anatomical different. These biological differences have become increasingly salient because the "feminized" classroom emphasizes girls' skills and de-emphasizes boys' skills. As a result, they suggest different classroom configurations, seating arrangements, course and curriculum content and teaching styles be better focused on the different experiences of boys and girls. . "It's teachers job to create a classroom environment that accommodates both male and female energy, not just mainly female energy," explains the energetic therapist Michael Gurian (quoted in Knickerbocker, 1999, p. 2). While single-sex classrooms and schools are seen as an option, they are not the only one offered.

Proponents of #2, on the other hand, stress not the biological differences but the psychological and emotional *stress* for boys and

girls when they have to perform academically in front of the opposite sex. As a result, these proponents are more likely to advocate single-sex classrooms as the best palliative measure. In those single sex classes, suggests one, the temperature of the room can be set at 65 degrees Fahrenheit (18 C) instead of 72 degrees Fahrenheit (22 C) for girls. Teachers of boys' classes are urged to speak louder to the boys than the girls, since girls' hearing is more acute than boys'. If coeducational classrooms are necessary, one consultant suggests, perhaps the boys can be seated in front so that the teachers' voices can be better heard (Sax, 2007)

While each of these perspectives has some merit, they each depend on certain assumptions that are questionable empirically. In particular, they rely on small, and often insignificant biological differences between males and females. These differences – in brain chemistry, brain laternalization, hormonal differences, etc. – have the effect of reinforcing stereotypes about boys and girls. In that way they (1) minimize the dramatic differences among boys or girls; (2) maximize the small differences in mean scores between boys and girls; and (3) mute the salience of gender over the salience of biological sex.

This last effect – privileging sex over gender – is, in the argument of this background report, the problem, not its solution.

IV. What´s wrong with this picture?: Misframing the boy crisis

In many ways, these discussions rehearse debates we've had several times before in our history. At the turn of the century, for example, cultural critics were concerned that the rise of white collar businesses meant increasing indolence for men, and the separation of spheres. Some of these claims reflect not only bad biology but also bad history. Anmd bad biology and bad history together almost inevitably leads to bad policy recommendations.

Then, as now, the solutions were to find arenas in which boys could simply be boys, and where men could be men as well. At the turn of the century, fraternal lodges offered men a homosocial sanctuary and dude ranches and sports provided a place where these sedentary men could experience what Theodore Roosevelt called "the strenuous life". Boys, in danger of feminization by female teachers, Sunday school teachers and mothers could troop

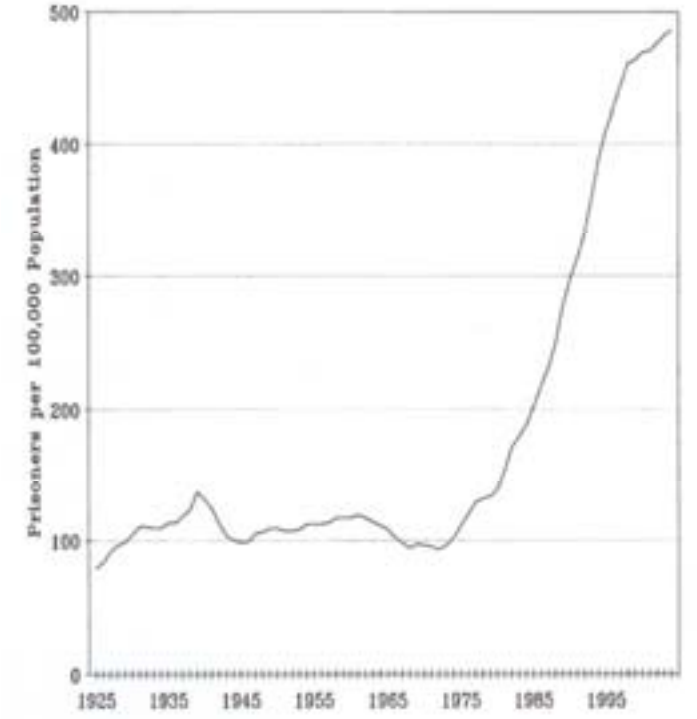
off with the Boys Scouts, designed as a fin-de-siecle ”boys' liberation movement.” Modern society, was turning hardy robust boyhood into, as the Boy Scouts' founder Ernest Thompson Seton put it, ”a lot of flat chested cigarette smokers with shaky nerves and doubtful vitality” (see Kimmel, 1996).

In Europe, as well, this ”crisis” of masculinity at the turn of the 20th century was expressed in similar ways – from blaming feminism for the ”feminization” of boys, to efforts to revirilize boys through hardy male activities, scouting, sports, and all-male activities.

The paucity of male teachers has remained relatively constant over the past century, though the ”crisis” of boys, the dramatic shifts we are today discussing are relatively new within the past two decades. In addition, most administrators have – and continue to be – male.

Secondly, despite the structural transformation of the economy, there continue to be avenues for males to transition to adulthood outside of higher education. There are three ”masculine” routes to adulthood that do not include post-secondary education. (1) The military remains one of the most important ”employers” of high school graduating males. The U.S. Army alone (not including the other branches of military service), recruits about 65,000 *more males* than females every single year. (2) While manufacturing, manual labor and heavy industry have shrunk, they remain large employers for a disproportionately male labor force of non-college attendees. (3) Prison is a significant ”option” for many young males in this age group. In 2008, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, 231,600 men between the ages of 18 and 24 in prison. (Compare this to 12,600 women in that same age group – a different of 219,000 ”potential” college students.

Figure 6 **Incarceration rates for men in the United States from 1925–2004**



Source: Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics Online.

Aside from this historical parallel and these structural shifts, , what is wrong with the argument that the reforms instituted to remediate the gender inequality that favored boys has actually swung ”too far” and now hurts boys.

First, it creates a false opposition between girls and boys, assuming that the educational reforms undertaken to enable girls to perform better actually hindered boys’ educational development. But these reforms - new initiatives, classroom configurations, teacher training, increased attentiveness to students’ processes and individual learning styles - actually enables larger numbers of boys to get a better education. Those initial policies, so successfully challenged by feminist reformers were based on stereotypes, and, as Susan McGee Bailey and Patricia Campbell point out, ”gender stereotypes, particularly those related to education, hurt both girls

and boys." Challenging those stereotypes, reducing tolerance for school violence and bullying, and increasing attention to violence at home actually enables *both* girls *and* boys to feel safer at school (Bailey and Campbell, 2000, p. 13).

When, for example, champions of boys in school lay out the experiences that boys need, they are often actually describing what *children* need. Adolescent boys, we read in one important text (Kindlon and Thompson, 1999), want to be loved, get sex, and not be hurt (p. 195-6). And girls don't? Parents are counseled to: allow boys to have their emotions (p. 241); accept of a high level of activity (p. 245); speak their language and treat them with respect (p. 247); teach that empathy is courage (p. 249); use discipline to guide and build (p. 253); model manhood as emotionally attached (p. 255); and, teach the many ways a boy can be a man (p. 256). Aside from the obvious tautologies, what they advocate is exactly what feminist women have been advocating for girls for some time. What boys need turns out to be what girls need. Psychologically, as well as biologically, boys and girls are far more similar than they are different.

Second, the structural problems of schools have little to do with feminist-inspired reforms to enhance girls' experiences. Indeed, the gradual erosion of public support for schools in the U.S. (expressed by the failure of all electoral efforts to raise taxes for schools) has only exacerbated the problems for boys – by eliminating or reducing after-school programs, recess, sports, and cutting counseling and remedial programs.

But the main argument of this paper is that the three dimension of the boy crisis – gender disparities in attendance, achievement, and attitude – are better explained by the dynamics of interaction among boys, and by ideologies of masculinity than they are by these zero-sum initiatives on behalf of boys.

More accurately, the thing that unites *all* the explanations offered is relatively straightforward: the world has changed enormously in the past half-century, but the ideology of masculinity has not kept pace with these changes. It is in the dissynchronicity between those structural, economic and social changes and the relatively inelastic definition of masculinity that we can begin to piece together the contemporary gender gap in education. Failure to focus on *gender* – the meanings that are attributed to the biological facticity of maleness and femaleness, that is, the ideology of masculinity and femininity -- is the signal

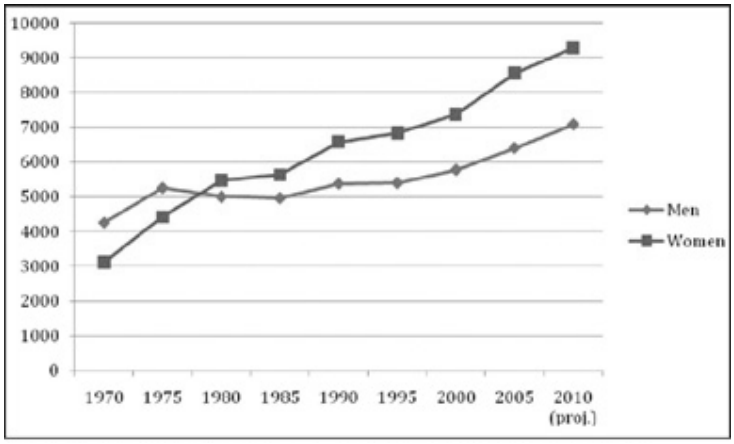
failure of most of the policy discussions about the boy crisis. That we must focus on gender – specifically the ideology of masculinity as experienced and expressed by young boys – is the central argument of this document.

The remainder of this document will address how understanding gender offers a better explanation for the gender gap in attendance, achievement and behavior. Therefore, understanding gender is the best way to develop remedial strategies and interventions that will enable both boys and girls to succeed in school.

V. The gender gap in attendance

Let's first examine the numbers. While it is true that the percent of women on college campuses today is about 58%, that does not mean that there are fewer men on campus. More *people* are going to college than ever before. In 1960, 54% of American boys and 38% of girls went directly to college; today the numbers are 64% of boys and 70% of girls. What that means is that the rate of increase among girls is faster than the rate of increase among boys – but *both* boys and girls attendance is increasing.

Figure 7 **Actual enrollments of males and females in the U.S., 1970–2010**



Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008 Condition of Education, http://nees.ed.gov/programs/coe/2009/section1/table-hep-1.asp

In Sweden, too, enrollments by males *and* females has been steadily increasing, although in Sweden, also, the rate of increase, particularly since the big educational reforms of the 1970s, has been greater for females that the rate of increase for males.

Figure 8 New entrants to higher education

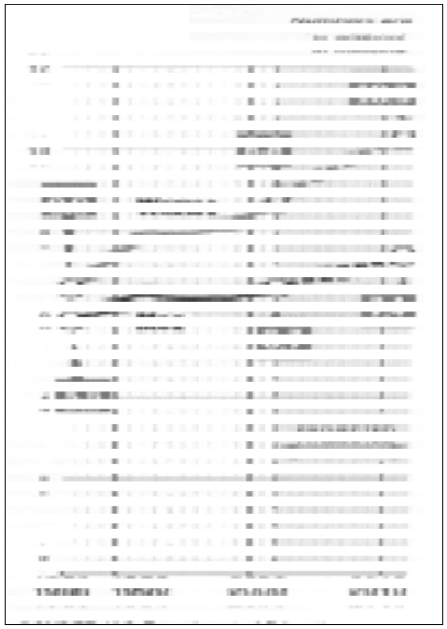
Source: Swedish National Agency for Higher Education.

That also means that the statistical flourish offered by one observer – that if present trends continue, ”the graduation line in 2068 will be all females” – is surely false. (That’s like saying that if the first female enrolled at MIT in 1970, and by 1973 there were 50, and in 1980, there were 300, that sometime in about 1986 all the males vanished. Surely the rate of increase flattens.) And, indeed, the latest information in the U.S. is that the enrolment gap has flattened out and is now holding steady at 57% (Gorski, 2010). (The gender ratio at the top-10 universities in the United States is actually quite equal.)

In fact, much of the great gender difference we hear touted is actually what sociologist Cynthia Fuchs Epstein calls a ”deceptive distinction,” a difference that appears to be about gender but is actually about something else – in this case, class or race (see Epstein, 1988). Girls’ vocational opportunities are far more restricted than boys are. Their opportunities are from the service

sector, with limited openings in manufacturing or construction. A college-educated woman earns about the same as a high-school educated man, $35,000 to $31,000.

Figure 9 U.S. College Enrollment 1986–2011



Sourse: U.S. Department of Education.

The shortage of male college students turns out to largely be a shortage of *non-white* males. Only 65% of boys graduate from high school. But les than half of all Hispanic boys (49%) or African American boys (48%) graduate from high school. Actually, the gender gap between college-age middle-class white males and white females is rather small, 51% women to 49% men. But only 37% of black college students are male, and 63% female, and 45% of Hispanic students are male, compared with 55% female.

Table 1 Percentage of Dependent Undergraduates Who Are Male, by Race/Ethnicity andIncome: 1995–96, 1999–2000 and 2003–04

	Lowest Quartile			Middle Quartiles			Highest Quartile		
	1995–1996	1999–2000	2003–2004	1995–1996	1999–2000	2003–2004	1995–1996	1999–2000	2003–2004
White	48	43	44	48	46	47	50	48	51
African American	41	40	42	45	48	44	41*	51	53
Hispanic46	46	44	43	42	52	46	47*	52	51
Asian American	46	48	48	47	49	52	54	54	54
All Students	46	44	44	47	47	47	50	49	52

*Data should be interpreted with caution due to high standard errors.

Note: income quartiles based on total U.S. families with householders aged 35 to 64 in 1994, and 2002, as collecfted by the U.S. Census Bureau in its annual Current Population Survey.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Studies: 1995–96, 1999–2000, 2003–04.

These differences among boys - by race, or class, for example - do not typically fall within the radar of the cultural critics who would rescue boys. These differences are incidental because, in their eyes, all boys are the same. A crude biologism pervades much of the dire warnings about the fate of boys in school, one that flattens all differences among boys, and exaggerates the differences between boys and girls. This class and race issue is particularly important because, of course, it has long been working class men and minorities who have sought out the military and the manufacturing sector for employment -- and who often end up swelling the prison population. to be boys.

A facile and incorrect biological determinism almost inevitably mars many of the observations about the sorry state of boyhood. For example, in his book, *The Wonder of Boys,* the writer Michael Gurian points out the nearly unbearable pressures on young boys to conform, to resort to violence to solve problems, to disrupt classroom decorum, to take risks. But not because of peer culture, media violence, or parental influence, but because, he argues, testosterone propels them towards aggression and violence.

Reliance on biological differences tends to over-estimate the differences between males and females – mostly small, often insignificant, and certainly with no attention to the shape of the distributions for which mean differences are found – while under-estimating the large, significant differences *among* males and *among*

females, where the shape of the distribution is known and explained.

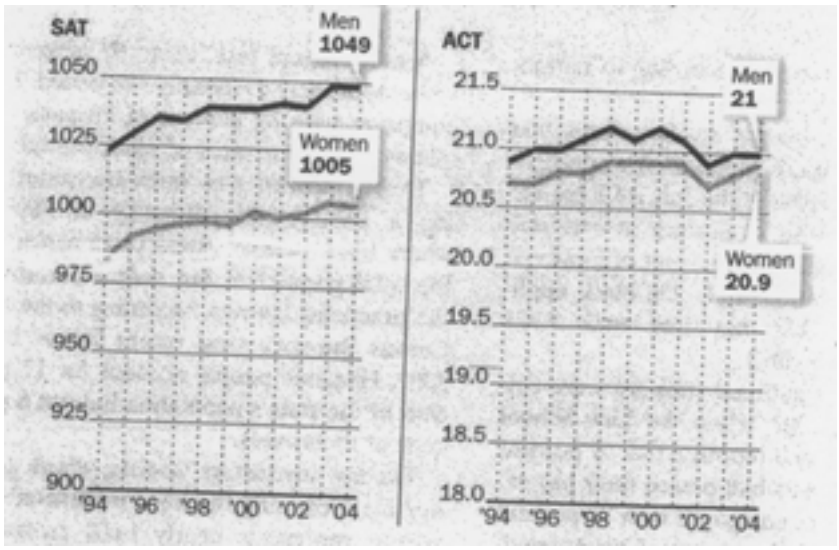
This leads, inevitably, to stereotyping – the mistaking of a mean for the entire distribution, or, more colloquially, applying characteristics found in many or most of the members of a group to all members of a group. (I will have more to say on this later.) It also leads to an unintentional sleight of hand: the substitution of the ”normal” – the most frequent case in a distribution – for the ”normative” – that which is reinforced by sanctions and rules. As a result, what social scientists understand as *normative* is here celebrated as *normal* – and therefore prescribed instead of critically analyzed.

VI. The gender gap in achievement

The gender gap in achievement also seems to be more complicated than girls doing better and boys doing worse. ”With few exceptions, American boys are scoring higher and achieving more than they ever have before” writes Sara Mead. ”But girls have just improved their performance on some measures even faster.” This it is like attendance: girls’ *rates of increase* are greater than boys’ *rates of increase*. But both boys and girls are doing better (Mead, 2006).

Figure 10 Test scores by gender

Over the past 10 years, the average scores of men and women taking the SAT have increased steadily, while the average scores of both groups on the ACT have remained relatively s teady. The highest possible combined score on the SAT is 1600; on the ACT, 36.



Source: The college board, Act Inc.

Increasingly, educators describe the problem as this: ”Boys are abandoning ship,” one told me. The director of the career counseling center at one university explained ”it’s almost as though there’s an expectation for boys not to do well in school.”

Why are boys abandoning ship? Where does that expectation come from?

It turns out that the explanation lies not in the extraordinary strides girls and women have made, but in the persistence of an ideology of masculinity – especially among working class boys, and minority boys that being serious about school contradicts the basic tenets of masculinity. By contrast, disengagement from school is actually seen as an enhancement of masculinity.

Consistently, when girls are asked questions about school success, they see high achievement, ambition and competence as ungendered – that is, as not especially related to either masculinity or femininity. And just as consistently, boys see any connection to school as ”feminine.” To be successful in school is to be seen as not

acting like a real boy. And anyone who does that risks a lot – plummeting self-esteem, losing one's friends, being targeted by bullies. It's through peer culture that students learn appropriate gender behavior. Peers establish the rules, and enforce them – constantly, relentlessly, and mercilessly.

Recent research on boys' development bears this out. In *Raising Cain* (1999), Michael Thompson and Dan Kindlon, for example, write that male peers present a young boy with a "culture of cruelty" (p. 89) in which they force him to deny emotional neediness, "routinely disguise his feelings" and end up feeling emotionally isolated. And in *Real Boys* (1998), therapist William Pollack calls it the "boy code" and the "mask of masculinity" – a kind of swaggering posture that boys embrace to hide their fears, suppress dependency and vulnerability, and present a stoic, impervious front. My own book, *Guyland* (2008) takes the story of young boys in primary and secondary school and brings that argument up to and including university and even a few years beyond.

What is astonishing about the boy code – or, by their teen years, the "guy code" or the "bro code" – is that it remains fairly firmly in place despite the massive changes in women's lives. The ideology of femininity – what women think it means to be a woman – has undergone a monumental revolution. Indeed, today, when I poll my female students and ask "what does it mean to be a woman?" they usually say "it means I can be anything I want." By contrast, when I ask the men what it means to be a man, they answer, often, impulsively in the negative: never show weakness, never cry, never be vulnerable, and, most significantly, don't be "gay."

Twenty-five years ago, psychologist Robert Brannon codified this ideology of masculinity into four basic rules (see Brannon and David, 1976).

(1) "No Sissy Stuff " – one can never do anything that even remotely hints of femininity; masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine.

(2) "Be a Big Wheel" – Wealth, power, status are markers of masculinity. We measure masculinity by the size of one's paycheck. In the words of that felicitous Reagan-era phrase, "He who has the most toys when he dies, wins."

(3) "Be a Sturdy Oak" – what makes a man a man is that he is reliable in a crisis, and what makes a man reliable in a crisis is

that he resembles an inanimate object. Rocks, pillars, trees are curious masculine icons.

(4) ”Give em Hell!” -- exude an aura of daring and aggression. Live life on the edge. Take risks.

It is, of course, important to note that these four rules are elaborated by different groups of men and boys in different circumstances. There are as sizable differences among different groups of men as there are differences between women and men. In fact, the differences among men are actually greater than any mean differences between women and men. Race, class, ethnicity religion, sexuality, age – all these modify and chape that traditional definition of masculinity. What it means to be 71 year old Pakistani gay man in Stockholm is probably radically different from what it means to a 19 year old white, heterosexual boy on a farm near Umea.

Indeed, in the social sciences, we no longer speak of masculinity in the singular, but of *masculinities,* in the plural, in recognition of the different definitions of manhood that we construct. By pluralizing the term, we acknowledge that masculinity means different things to different groups of men at different times. And yet, at the same time, we can't forget that all masculinities are not created equal. All American men must also contend with a singular vision of masculinity, a particular definition that is held up as the model against which we all measure ourselves. We thus come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of "others" -- racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women. As the sociologist Erving Goffman once wrote (1963, p. 128):

> In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. . . Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself - during moments at least - as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior.

Those last few words are especially crucial. Since no boy – or man – will ever measure up to all those criteria at all times, that means that all men, at one time or another, will see themselves as ”unworthy, incomplete and inferior.” It is from that place of

feeling one-down that many young boys and men engage in the high risk behavior to demonstrate to their peers that they are, indeed, real men and not sissies or gay.

How then does introducing the ideology of masculinity transform the debate about the gender gap in achievement? Among other things, it helps illuminate boy's struggles in school. Consider the parallel with girls. Carol Gilligan's astonishing and often moving work on adolescent girls describes how these assertive, confident and proud young girls "lose their voices" when they hit adolescence (see, for example, Gilligan, 1982; Brown and Gilligan, 1992). At the same moment, William Pollack (1997) notes, boys become *more* confident, even beyond their abilities. You might even say that boys find their voices, but it is the inauthentic voice of bravado, of constant posturing, of foolish risk-taking and gratuitous violence. The Boy Code teaches them that they are supposed to be in power, and thus begin to act like it. They "ruffle in a manly pose," as William Butler Yeats once put it, "for all their timid heart."

What's the cause of all this posturing and posing? It's a combination of gender ideologies and structural gender inequality. In adolescence, both boys and girls get their first real dose of gender inequality: girls suppress ambition, boys inflate it. Researchers have long understood that at adolescence, boys' self-esteem goes up significantly, while girls' self-esteem goes down. And the correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement is a constant in educational policy circles.

This correlation is not, however, universally true. Black males are the only group for which there is no positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement. Black males experience such a profound disconnect with school that improving self-esteem has no effect on academic achievement (Noguera, 2008).

Recent research on the gender gap in school achievement bears this out. Girls are more likely to undervalue their abilities, especially in the more traditionally "masculine" educational arenas such as math and science. Only the most able and most secure girls take such the more advanced courses in math and science. Thus, their numbers tend to be few, and their grades high. Boys, however, possessed of this false voice of bravado (and many facing strong family pressure) are likely to *over-value* their abilities, to

remain in programs though they are less qualified and capable of succeeding.

This is the reason that girls' mean test scores in math and science are now, on average, approaching that of boys. Too many boys who over-value their abilities remain in difficult math and science courses longer than they should; they pull the boys' mean scores down. By contrast, few girls, whose abilities and self-esteem are sufficient to enable them to "trespass" into a male domain, skew female data upwards. In one recent study, sociologist Shelley Correll compared thousands of eighth graders in similar academic tracks and with identical grades and test scores. Boys were much more likely – remember, their scores and grades were identical – to say "I have always done well in math" and "Mathematics is one of my best subjects" than were the girls. They were no better than the girls – they just thought they were.

Even the long-celebrated gender achievement gap in mathematics turns out not to be universally true. In large comparative studies of 4th grade and 8th grade math scores, researchers found that attributing this to brain differences may be unwarranted. In a study of several countries by Janet Hyde and her colleagues (Hyde, et. Al., 2008) boys had higher math scores in some countries, girls had higher scores in others, and in most cases boys and girls scores were virtually identical. In another study, David Baker and Deborah Jones performed a cross-national study and also found that the gender gap in math achievement varies considerably. "On average," they write, "boys do not do better than girls everywhere" (Baker and Jones, 1993, p. 99).

What accounted for the difference? This variation, the researchers argue, "correlates with cross-national variations in women's access to higher education and the labor market; in countries that approach equal opportunities for males and females, there are smaller sex differences in the mathematical performance of students." That is, those countries where girls did better in math also tended to be the countries that score higher on other measures of gender equality, like labor force participation, women in public office, and work-family balance policies. In some countries, like Japan, girls do not perform as well as the Japanese boys – but they score considerably higher than boys in the U.S. (Reliance on putative biological differences would predict otherwise; girls brains are biologically the same regardless of culture.) Let's state it most simply: the greater the degree of gender equality in a country, the

better the girls in that country do in math (Guiso, et al., 2008). And in Iceland, girls do considerably better than boys in math.

In the United States, the decline in the gender gap in math scores is ”associated with an expansion of opportunities for females” (Baker and Jones, 1993, p. 99) What such an example indicates is that policies that fail to take the social context of the gender gap (in either direction) will inevitably misdiagnose the problem, thus prescribe inadequate remedial measures. And a central element in that social context is gender ideology.

Let’s turn now to the humanities and social sciences. A parallel process is at work to that which we observed in mathematics and natural sciences. Girls’ mean test scores in English and foreign languages, for example, outpace boys significantly. But this not the result of ”reverse discrimination,” but because the boys bump up against the norms of masculinity. Boys regard literature and language as a ”feminine” subject. Pioneering research in Australia by Wayne Martino found that boys are uninterested in English literature because of what it might say about their (inauthentic) masculine pose (see, for example, Martino, 1999, 1997; see also Yates, 1997, 2000). ”Reading is lame, sitting down and looking at words is pathetic,” commented one boy. ”Most guys who like English are faggots,” The traditional liberal arts curriculum is seen as feminizing; as Catharine Stimpson recently put it sarcastically, ”real men don’t speak French.”

Boys tend to hate literature and foreign languages for the same reasons that girls love it. In literature, they observe, there are no hard and fast rules, but rather one expresses one’s opinion about the topic and everyone’s opinion is equally valued. ”The answer can be a variety of things, you’re never really wrong,” observed one boy. ”It’s not like maths and science where there is one set answer to everything.” Another boy noted:

> I find English hard. It’s because there are no set rules for reading texts. … English isn’t like maths where you have rules on ho to do things and where there are right and wrong answers. In English you have to write down how you feel and that’s what I don’t like (Martino, 1997, p. 133).

Compare this to the comments of girls in the same class in the same study:

> I feel motivated to study English because…you have freedom in English - unlike subjects such as maths and science – and your view

> isn't necessarily wrong. There is no definite right or wrong answer and you have the freedom to say what you feel is right without it being rejected as a wrong answer (Martino, 1997, p. 134).

It is not the school experience that "feminizes" boys, but rather the ideology of traditional masculinity that keeps boys from wanting to succeed. "The work you do here is girls' work," one boy commented to a researcher (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 59). "It's not real work." Added another, "[w]hen I go to my class and they [other boys] bunk off, they will say to me I'm a goody goody."

What is key here is that conformity to the ideology of masculinity is the very dynamic that keeps boys disengaged with their educations. Programs that "minister" to this disengagement in the guise of doing what boys prefer will only reproduce that disengagement. What boys "need" is not programs that take this disengagement for granted, but ones that both honor the actual diversity on boys' experiences – including those who are shy, like school, and/or who study hard – and interrupt the facile connection that is made between academic disinterest and masculinity.

One English teacher at Central High School in St. Paul, Minnesota says she sees this phenomenon all the time. "Boys don't want to look too smart and don't want to look like they're pleasing the teacher," she said. "Girls can negotiate the fine line between what peers want of them and excelling at school. Boys have a harder time balancing being socially accepted and academically focused." And sociologist Andrew Hacker notes that girls "are proving themselves better at being good students and scholars" than boys are. "It's not in the genes," he continues. "It's almost as if being a man and being a good student are contradictory" (*Stockton Record*, 2003).

Such comments echo the consistent findings of social scientists since James Coleman's path-breaking 1961 study that identified the "hidden curriculum" among adolescents in which good-looking and athletic boys were consistently more highly rated by their peers than were good students (see Coleman, 1961; see also Mac an Ghaill, 1994, Gilbourne, 1990).

VII. The gender gap in behavior

As we have seen, reports of the boy crisis are characterized by significant differences in behavior – both boys misbehaving, and also being diagnosed with specific behavioral disorders. While not gainsaying the biological etiology of some of those disorders – ADHD is certainly a medically diagnosable issue – the behavioral differences can also – at least partly – be explained by understanding boys' commitment to traditional ideologies of masculinity, ideologies that are increasingly at odds with the world in which they live.

Constant extraction of conformity to the Boy Code or the Guy Code – the traditional ideology of masculinity – is the dynamic social scientists call "gender policing." This ideology of traditional masculinity inhibits boys' development as well as girls' development. Boys eschew school work for the anti-intellectual rough and tumble; girls' achievement is inhibited by the incessant teasing and harassment of those rough and tumble boys.

Being a boy can mean the isolation and chronic anxiety of having to prove your manhood every second. Boyhood is a constant, relentless testing of manhood. And it is also freedom from manhood's responsibilities, and can also mean the exhilaration of physical challenge and athletic triumph, the blushing, tentative thrill of first sexual exploration, the carefree play.

More than that, boyhood also means the entitlement to get your way, to be heard, the often invisible privileges that come from being a man, the ability to see your reflection (at least if you are also white and heterosexual) in virtually every television show, action-hero comic book and movie, and seated at every board room in the nation. Boyhood is the entitlement to and the anticipation of power.

Gender conformity to the traditional Guy Code or Boy Code is accomplished through the threat of destabilizing that entitlement, of thwarting it. And that is accomplished by constant teasing, bullying and mocking of boys as if they were gay. In the U.S., every "tween" and teen knows that the most common put down in middle school and high school is "that's so gay." And just about every single one also knows that such a statement has less to do with presumed sexual orientation and more to do with performance of gender conformity. The fear of being tainted with

homosexuality – the fear of emasculation – has morphed into a generic put down. These days, ”that’s so gay” has far less to do with aspersions of homosexuality and far more to do with ”gender policing” – making sure that no one contravenes the rules of masculinity.

Middle Schools and High schools have become far more than academic testing grounds, they’re the central terrain on which gender identity is tested and demonstrated. And unlike the standardized tests for reading and arithmetic, the tests of adequate and appropriate gender performance are administered and graded by your peers, by grading criteria known only to them. Bullying has become a national problem in high schools, in part because of the relentlessness and the severity of the torments. Verbal teasing and physical bullying exist along a continuum stretching from hurtful language through shoving and hitting, to criminal assault and school shootings. Harmful teasing and bullying happen to more than 1 million school children a year (see Kimmel, 2008).

In one study of middle and high schools students in Midwestern towns, 88% reported having observed bullying and 77% reported being a victim of bullying at some point during their school years. In another, 70% had been sexually harassed by their peers; 40% had experienced physical dating violence, and 66% had been victimized by emotional abuse in a dating relationship and 54% had been bullied. Another national survey of 15, 686 students in grades 6-10 published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) found that 29.9% reported frequent involvement with bullying – 13% as bully, 10.9% as victim, and 6% as both. One quarter of kids in primary school, grades 4–6, admitted to bullying another student with some regularity in the 3 months before the survey. And yet another found that during one two-week period at two Los Angeles middle schools, nearly half the 192 kids interviewed reported being bullied at least once. More than that said they had seen others targeted (Nansel et. al., 2001; Limber et. al., 1997; Juvonen, 2003)

Many middle and high school students are afraid to go to school; they fear locker rooms, hallways, bathrooms, lunch rooms, playgrounds, and even their classrooms. They fear being targeted or bullied. Among young people 12–24, three in ten report that violence has increased in their schools in the past year, and nearly two-fifths have worried that a classmate was potentially violent. More than half of all teens know somebody who has brought a

weapon to school. And nearly two thirds (63%) of parents believe a school shooting is somewhat or very likely to occur in their communities (”Fear of Classmates” 1999; ”Half of Teens…” 2001).

The fear of bullying, the fears of being targeted, are among the central mechanisms of ”gender policing” – the social dynamics of coercing gender conformity. Same-sex peer gender policing reinforces stereotypic notions of masculinity and femininity. As one legal scholar put it, the ”strict adherence to maintaining clearly defined gender categories fosters intolerance that has proven to have a deleterious effect on biological boys who do not conform to American society’s conception of gender norms (Crozier, 2001).

VIII. Are single sex schools the answer?

So, are single-sex schools the answer? There are many people who think so, so it might be worth exploring this option. There is some evidence that single-sex classes or schools may be beneficial to women. There has even been some evidence that men’s achievement was improved by attending a single-sex college. Empirically, however, these findings are not persuasive, since the effects typically vanish when social class and boys’ secondary school experiences were added to the equation.

This current interest in single-sex education has a long history. At the turn of the 20th century, a movement similar to the current vogue for single-sex classes was part of a larger cultural effort to counteract the perceived ”feminization” of American boyhood. (This was also true in Britain.) Boys, the popular assumption held, were being feminized by over-dominant mothers (with fathers off at work, and mothers confined to roles of homemaker and mother), female teachers, and female Sunday School teachers. Then, as now, critics saw gender equality as a source of this perceived feminization, and offered remedies including aggressive and competitive sports – virtually all the major sports, and their institutionalization in high schools and colleges date from this period), the Boone and Crockett Club, and President Theodore Roosevelt’s trumpeting of ”the strenuous life” were all celebrations of this natural rambunctiousness. One earnest reformer, Ernest Thompson Seton, was so concerned that modern life was turning ”robust, manly, self-reliant boyhood into a lot of flat-chested cigarette smokers of shaky nerves and doubtful vitality” that he

founded the Boy Scouts in 1910 as a sort of Boys Liberation Movement, to enable boys to regain that hardy boyishness of the frontier (see Kimmel, 1996; Seton is cited in Macleod, 1983, p. 49).

And schools, too, had to be changed. A movement urged men to become elementary school teachers and for fathers to cease being ”a Sunday institution,” so as to rescue boys from the feminizing clutches of over-protective mothers and teachers. And what was taught was feminizing boys.

> Literature is becoming emasculated by being written mainly for women and largely by women. The majority of men in this country, having been co-educated by women teachers, are unaware of this. . . I call it the sissification of literature and life. The point of view of the modern ‘important’ novel like *Ulysses* is feminine in its preoccupation with the nastiness of sex.

That was written in 1927 (McFee, 1927).

Given this fear of feminization, it is no surprise that a movement for single-sex schools emerged, spearheaded by G. Stanley Hall, the psychologist who in 1904 wrote what was hailed as the definitive book on the middle-school years, *Adolescence*. Hall argued that coeducation ”virified” girls and feminized boys. This was far more serious for boys, because they were forced to ”sink to a standard purposely set low for girls.” Children’s literature, he argued, was ”flabby, nerveless, inactive” or ”light and chatty” with ”too many illustrations” in ”goody Sunday School books” – exactly what boys did not need. ”All that rot they teach to children about the little raindrop fairies with their buckets washing down the window panes must go,” he said in a speech to Chicago teachers in 1899. ”We need less sentimentality and more spanking.”

Hall also argued that educating boys and girls together would ”emasculate” the curriculum, watering it down by forcing the inclusion of subjects and temperaments better omitted, slowing down the pace, or otherwise reducing standards that would allow women to keep up. He warned against coeducation because it ”harms girls by assimilating them to boys’ ways and work and robbing them of their sense of feminine character,” while it harms boys ”by feminizing them when they need to be working off their brute animal element.” By making boys and girls more alike, he warned, coeducation would ”dilute” the mysterious attraction of the opposite sex – that is, coeducation would cause homosexuality (Hall, 1904, 1899).

Hall's idea of boyhood is also echoed by today's sex-separators. Boys, he argued, were essentially rambunctious "young barbarians," who naturally chafe against "prim pedagogue propriety of petticoat control." Instead boys should, endure fraternity hazing and practical jokes. "The practical is war, cruelty, torture reduced to the level and intensity of play," he wrote. "A good course of rough and roistering treatment" is a remedy for the "insipissation of the soul."

M. Carey Thomas, the first female president of a major college in America (Bryn Mawr) declared that she had never felt as insulted as a woman than when she read Hall's treatise. John Dewey, perhaps America's greatest theorist of education, and a fierce supporter of women's equal rights, was infuriated at the contempt for women suggested by such programs. Dewey (1911) scoffed at "'female botany,' 'female algebra,' and for all I know a 'female multiplication table'," he wrote. "Upon no subject has there been so much dogmatic assertion based on so little scientific evidence, as upon male and female types of mind."

What's more, Dewey claimed, coeducation is beneficial to men. "Boys learn gentleness, unselfishness, courtesy; their natural vigor finds helpful channels of expression instead of wasting itself in lawless boisterousness," he wrote (Dewey, 1911, p. 60). Another social and educational reformer, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, also opposed single-sex schools. "Sooner or later, I am persuaded, the human race will look upon all these separate collegiate institutions as most American travelers now look at the vast monastic establishments of Southern Europe; with respect for the pious motives of their founders, but with wonder that such a mistake should ever have been made" (Higginson, 1874, p. 1).

In the contemporary landscape, single-sex schools seem attractive, but actually offer a rather cynical view of the possibilities to alleviate the gender gap in education. Although they claim to provide a remedy for gender stereotyping, the evidence is clear that single sex schools tend to reinforce gender stereotyping. Single-sex education for women often perpetuates detrimental attitudes and stereotypes about women, that "by nature or situation girls and young women cannot become successful or learn well in coeducational institutions" (Epstein, 1997, p. 191). Even when supported by feminist women, the idea that women cannot compete equally with men in the same arena, that they need "special" treatment, signals an abandonment of hope, the inability

or unwillingness to make the creation of equal and safe schools a national priority. ”Since we cannot do that,” we seem to be telling girls, ”we’ll do the next best thing – separate you from those nasty boys who will only make your lives miserable.”

While advocates of single-sex classrooms claim that ”coed classrooms tend to reinforce gender stereotypes,” the evidence points decidedly in the other direction: *single-sex classrooms tend to reinforce gender stereotypes.* This is because single-sex classrooms tend to foster certain psychological processes that lead to such gender stereotypes. By contrast, coeducational classrooms foster interactions with the ”other” gender. And the best research by social psychologists that study stereotypes and prejudice have found that it is only through *contact* that stereotypes can be broken down. A meta-analytic review of 515 research studies (Pettigrew, 2006) found that ”intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice.”

What’s more, it gets worse over time, not better. In his comprehensive studies of American educational system, UCLA researcher Alexander Astin (1997) has consistently found that in single gender schools "virtually every gender input observed at input widens over time." That is, small differences that might be observed between boys and girls at the beginning will ramify significantly and increase over time, thus producing the very stereotypic differences that the policy was designed to reflect.

The findings of the only systematic study of a pilot program for single sex schools in California (Datnow, Hubbard and Woody, 2001) reported rather depressing results:

(1) Traditional gender stereotypes were often reinforced in single-sex academies. Boys tended to be taught in more regimented, traditional and individualistic fashion and girls in more nurturing, cooperative and open environments. Such policies exaggerate what might be modest mean differences in preferences into large differences in experience, and flatten a wide variety of learning styles into categorical, and thus stereotypical, gender differences.

(2) Students received mixed messages about gender. While both were told women could be anything they want, girls were made aware of restrictions on their behavior reinforced through expectations about clothing and appearance. Boys were led to assume that men are primary wage earners, that

they should be strong and take care of their wives who were emotionally weaker.

(3) The creation of separate academies for boys and girls on the same campus led to a dichotomous understanding of gender, in which girls were seen as "good" and boys were seen as "bad."

In the end, after three years, five of the six school districts closed their single-sex academies.

The reason that single-sex schools perpetuate gender stereotypes is that in the pursuit of acknowledging differences *between* boys and girls, the policies flatten all the differences *among* boys and *among* girls. (Recall, for example that the biggest gender gap in attendance has to do with class and race – that is, we must always pay attention to differences *among* boys and *among* girls)

But what about boys who thrive in what single-sex advocates label the ”feminized” classroom? What about boys who love poetry, are good friends with girls, and are socially adept, intellectually engaged, and are otherwise gender non-conforming? What about boys who love music, art, and foreign languages? The distribution of abilities, traits, attitudes and behaviors overlap between girls and boys – in most cases they overlap significantly.

The proposals for single-sex programs seem to be based either on a facile, and incorrect, assessment of some biologically based different educational ”needs” or learning styles, or on some well-intentioned efforts to help at-risk groups (black boys or girls). Here is a statement from the National Association for Single Sex Public Education:

> Girls and boys differ fundamentally in the learning style they feel most comfortable with. Girls tend to look on the teacher as an ally. Given a little encouragement, they will welcome the teacher’s help. A girl-friendly classroom is a safe, comfortable, welcoming place. Forget hard plastic chairs: put in a sofa and some comfortable beanbags… The teacher should never yell or shout at a girl. Avoid confrontation. Avoid the word ‘why.’. . . Girls will naturally break up in groups of three and four to work on problems. Let them. Minimize assignments that require working alone. (www.singlesexschools.org)

I assume that most female readers of this statement – whether in the United States or Sweden - will be as offended by this insulting and condescending message as the female students in my classes were. And what does it assume is a sound pedagogical philosophy

for boys: make the classroom dangerous and inhospitable, seat them on uncomfortable chairs, yell at then, confront them and always ask why? To put it as charitably as possible, I am sure that such organizations believe they have the best interests of children at heart. They base their claims, though, on the flimsiest of empirical evidence and the wildest of stereotypical assertions. Every day, real boys and real girls prove such insulting stereotypes wrong.

Such proposals also mistake consequence for cause, or, perhaps better put, emphasize form over content. Let me ask the question this way: which sort of school would you choose: a really great coeducational school or a really terrible single-sex school? Odds are you chose the coed school, because you know what some of these misguided educational reformers do not: the form of the school – coed or single-sex – is less important than its content. In the United States, most single sex schools at both the secondary and collegiate level are private, small, with no lack of resources, but with a very dedicated and well-trained faculty, and low student-teacher ratios – not to mention wealthier students, with better educational backgrounds. And it is *those* qualities – not the single-sexedness – that yields the better outcomes (See, for example, Epstein, 2001, 1999, 1997).

Another reason that we cannot say that single-sex schools offer the appropriate remedy is more methodological. It is the psychological phenomenon called *expectations states theory*. Most simply put, the expectations of the students and teachers matter perhaps more than the actual events themselves. For example, in experiments, teachers were told that a randomly assigned group of students was especially bright; by the end of the semester, their scores had improved significantly. Another group was presented to teachers as being in dire need of remediation; their scores actually dropped over the semester. Remember: both groups of students were assigned randomly: it was *only* the expectations of the teachers that bore on the outcome. In other experiments, the *students* were told they were either special or having problems. They eventually acted that way.

So, with single-sex classes: If you were to perform an experiment in which you told the students in the single-sex classes that they were being given this new, exciting privilege, to be in this ”special” class, you cannot reliably say that the single-sex classroom then *caused* the rise in scores. What if you had told the

students that they were being put in single sex classrooms because they were not doing well – academically, behaviorally, developmentally – and that this was a remedial form? How would they do then? As a social scientist, I would hypothesize that students perform to the expectations teacher have of them. The form of the classroom matters *far less* than the content of the teaching.

This is born out in one of the most famous studies in social psychology that demonstrated *the self-fulfilling prophesy*. In that study, sociologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) tested the hypothesis like this: They hypothesized that teachers had expectations of student performance and that students performed to those expectations. That is, the sociologists wanted to test their hypothesis that teachers' expectations were actually the cause of student performance, not the other way around. If the teacher thinks a student is smart, the student will do well in the class. If the teacher expects the student to do poorly, the student will do poorly.

Rosenthal and Jacobson administered an IQ test to all the children in an elementary school. Then, without looking at the results, they randomly chose a small group of students and told their teachers that the students had extremely high IQs. This, Rosenthal and Jacobson hypothesized, would raise the teachers' expectations for these randomly chosen students (the experimental group), and these expectations would be reflected in better performance by these students compared with other students (the control group).

At the end of the school year, Rosenthal and Jacobson returned to the school and administered another IQ test to all the students. The "chosen few" performed better on the test than their classmates, yet the only difference between the two groups was the teachers' expectations. It turned out that teacher expectations was the independent variable, and student performance was the dependent variable – not the other way around.

Even the few modest claims of benefits are challenged empirically by a recent study by the American Association of University Women, which found that while many girls report that they feel single-sex classrooms are more conducive to learning, they also show no significant gains in achievement in math and science. Another researcher found some significant differences between coeducational and single-sex classes – but only in Catholic

schools, not in private single-sex schools, and only for girls. A third researcher noted that the advantages of one or the other type of school are nonexistent for middle class and otherwise advantaged students, but found some positive outcomes for black or Hispanic girls from low socioeconomic homes. Kenneth Clark, the pioneering African-American educator, was unequivocal. ”I can’t believe that we’re actually regressing like this. Why are we still talking about segregating and stigmatizing black males?” he asked. He should know: His research provided the empirical argument against ”separate but equal” schools in the U. S. Supreme Courts landmark *Brown v Board of Education* Civil Rights decision in 1954. Most simply put, in matters of educational opportunity, ”separate but equal” is never equal (Haag, 1998; Lee, 1986; Leslie, 1998; Marsh, 1989).

In their landmark book, *The Academic Revolution*, sociologists David Riesman and Christopher Jencks (1977, p. 300, 298) wrote that:

> The all male-college would be relatively easy to defend if it emerged from a world in which women were established as fully equal to men. But it does not. It is therefore likely to be a witting or unwitting device for preserving tacit assumptions of male superiority… Thus while we are not against segregation of the sexes under all circumstances, we are against it when it helps preserve sexual arrogance.

In short, what women often learn at all-women’s colleges is that they can do anything that men can do. By contrast, what men learn is that they (women) cannot do what they (the men) do. In this way, women’s colleges may constitute a challenge to gender inequality, while men’s colleges reproduce that inequality. Research consistently finds that single-sex programs for boys – those that stress biological differences between males and females -- will foster, support, nurture and reinforce existing notions among male students that females are not only different, but inferior (Riseman and Jencks, 1977, p. 300; See also Riesman, 1991).

What’s more, single sex schools for women also perpetuate the idea that women can’t do it by themselves and that masculinity is so impervious to change that it would be impossible to claim an education with men around. I believe this insults both women and men.

IX. Confronting the real boy crisis in America – and in Sweden

This discussion leads to the ”real” boy crisis in America. Usually we refer to it by some other name. We call it ”teen violence,” ”youth violence,” ”gang violence,” ”suburban violence,” ”violence in the schools.” The ”gender” of the violence is invisible.

But imagine if all the killers in all the high school shootings in America – at Columbine High School in Colorado, or Paducah, Kentucky, or Pearl, Mississippi, or Jonesboro, Arkansas – had in stead been black girls from poor families who lived instead in New Haven, Newark, or Providence. What if Tim Kretschmer, the young boy who killed a number of teachers and students in Winnedon, Germany in March, 2009, or Robert Steinhaeusser, 19 year old expelled student in Elfurt, Germany, or 18-year-old Pekka-Eric Auvinen, who killed eight people and wounded twelve others before shooting himself in the head in Jokela, Finland in 2008 had instead been Muslim immigrants from Pakistan or Turkey?

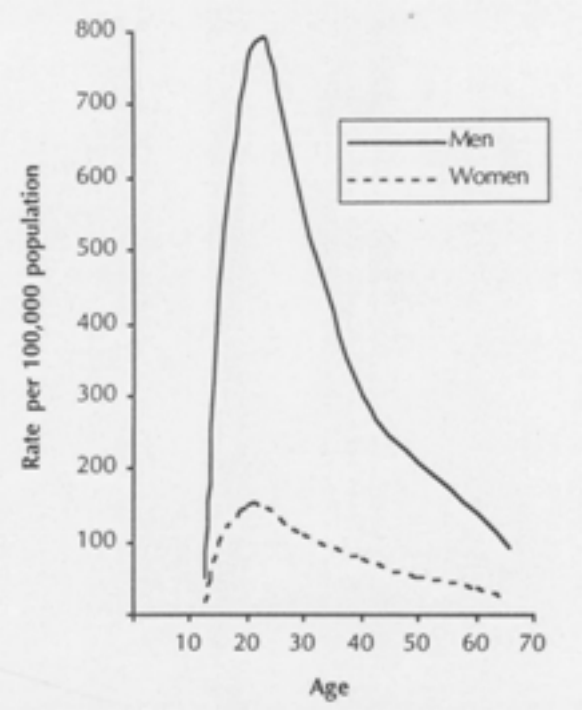
We would, of course, have had a long and painful discussion about race and class and religion, a discussion about whether ”they” we ”naturally disposed” towards violence. We would *see* race and class and gender. The media might invent a new term for their behavior, as with ”wilding” a decade ago. We’d hear about the culture of poverty; about how living in the city breeds crime and violence; about some putative natural tendency among blacks towards violence. Someone would even blame feminism for causing girls to become violent in vain imitation of boys. Yet the obvious fact that these school killers were all middle class white boys seems to have escaped most people’s notice.

The real boy crisis is a crisis of violence, about the cultural prescriptions that equate masculinity with the capacity for violence. Let’s face facts: Men and boys are responsible for 95% of all violent crimes in this country. Every day twelve boys and young men commit suicide – seven times the number of girls. Every day eighteen boys and young men die from homicide – ten times the number of girls.

The two variables that predict the lion’s share of violence are age and gender. Stated most simply: Young males are the most violent group in any society. Look at these two charts, from mid-18th century Britain and late 20th century United States. The shape of

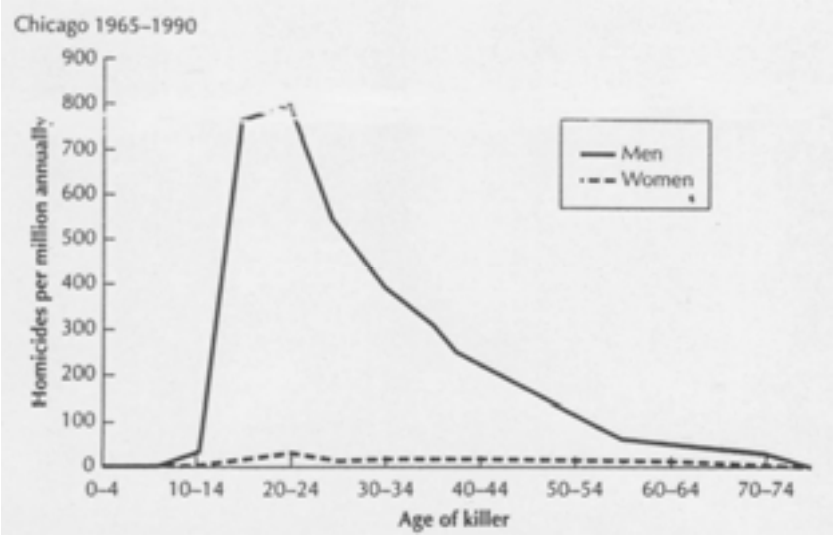
the distribution is roughly the same in each (the third chart transposes them) – as they would be in virtually every single society ever studied. This is the *real* boy crisis: the chronic, anachronistic, and potentially lethal association of masculinity with violence.

Figure 11 **Criminal offenders by age and gender, England and Wales, 1842-1844. Based on data from F.G.P. Netson, *Contributions to Vital Statistics*...3d ed. (London, 1857), 303304, as plotted by Travis Hirschi and Michael Gottfredson, "Age and the Explanation of Crime." AJS 89 (1983): 556.**



From an early age, boys learn that violence is not only an acceptable form of conflict resolution, but one that is admired. Four times more teenage boys than teenage girls think fighting is appropriate when someone cuts into the front of a line. Half of all teenage boys get into a physical fight each year.

Figure 12 **Homicide rates in Chicago, 1965–1990, by age and gender. From "Darwinism and the Roots of Machismo", *Scientific American***



And it's been that way for many years. No other culture developed such a violent "boy culture," as historian E. Anthony Rotundo (1993) calls it. Where else did young boys, as late as the 1940s, actually carry little chips of wood on their shoulders daring others to knock it off so that they might have a fight? It may be astonishing to readers that the origin of the phrase "carrying a chip on your shoulder" is based on historical truth -- a test of manhood for adolescent boys.

In what other culture did some of the reining experts of the day actually *prescribe* fighting for young boys' healthy masculine development? The celebrated psychologist, G. Stanley Hall (cited in Stearns, 1994, p. 31), believed that a non-fighting boy was a "nonentity," and that it was "better even an occasional nose dented by a fist...than stagnation, general cynicism and censoriousness, bodily and psychic cowardice."

And his disciplines vigorously took up the cause. Here is J. Adams Puffer (1912, p. 91) from his successful parental advice book:

> There are times when every boy must defend his own rights if he is not to become a coward, and lose the road to independence and true

> manhood. . . The strong willed boy needs no inspiration to combat, but often a good deal of guidance and restraint. If he fights more than, let us say, a half-dozen times a week, -- except of course, during his first week at a new school -- he is probably over-quarrelsome and needs to curb.

Did you catch that? Boys are to fight an average of once a day, except during the first week at a new school -- during which, presumably, they would have to fight more often!

From the turn of the century to the present day, violence has been part of the meaning of manhood, part of the way men have traditionally tested, demonstrated and proved their manhood. Without another cultural mechanism by which young boys can come to think of themselves as men, they've eagerly embraced violence as a way to become men.

I remember one little childhood game called "Flinch" that we played in the schoolyard. One boy would come up to another and pretend to throw a punch at his face. If the second boy flinched - as any *reasonable* person would have done – the first boy shouted "you flinched" and proceeded to punch him hard on the arm. It was his right; after all the other boy had failed the test of masculinity. Being a man meant never flinching.

In a recent study of youthful violent offenders, James Garbarino (1999) locates the origins of men's violence in the ways boys swallow anger and hurt. Among the youthful offenders he studied, "[d]eadly petulance usually hides some deep emotional wounds, a way of compensating through an exaggerated sense of grandeur for an inner sense of violation, victimization, and injustice." A Reagan-era bumper-sticker put it this way: I don't just get mad, I get even. Or, as one prisoner said, "I'd rather be wanted for murder than not wanted at all" (Garbarino, 1999, pp. 128, 132).

In another insightful study of violence, psychiatrist James Gilligan(1997) argues that violence has its origins in "the fear of shame and ridicule, and the overbearing need to prevent others from laughing at oneself by making them weep instead." The belief that violence is manly is not a trait carried on any chromosome, not soldered into the wiring of the right or left hemisphere, not juiced by testosterone. (It is still the case that half the boys don't fight, most don't carry weapons, and almost all don't kill: are they not boys?) Boys learn it. Violence, Gilligan writes, "has far more to do with the cultural construction of manhood than it does with the hormonal substratres of biology" (Gilligan, 1997, p. 71, 223).

X. Towards successful interventions

There are several ways we can confront the ”real” boy crisis – the association of violence with masculinity, the relentless gender policing by boys, and the self-defeating equation of masculinity with disengagement from school.

One strategy, of course, is to say or do nothing about it. This is most often the proposal of those who argue for single-sex classes, or to turning the clock back on girls' gains. ”Boys will be boys,” they will say. There is nothing we can do about it.

I find that phrase – boys will be boys – to be the most depressing four words in educational policy circles. When ”boy advocates” like Michael Gurian or Leonard Sax, in the U.S. or, Steve Biddulph and Peter West in Australia, say that boys will be boys, they mean, basically, that boys are biologically programmed to be wild, predatory animals. In their view, males are savage, predatory, sexually omnivorous violent creatures, who will rape, murder and pillage unless women perform their civilizing mission and constrain us. ”Every society must be wary of the unattached male, for he is universally the cause of numerous social ills,” writes David Popenoe (Popenoe, 1996, p. 12). Evolutionary psychologist Robert Wright, who recently ”explained” that women and men are hard wired by evolutionary imperatives to be so different as to come from different planets. ”Human males,” he wrote, ”are by nature oppressive, possessive, flesh-obsessed pigs” (1996, p. 22). Young males, conservative critic writes Charles Murray wrote recently, are ”essentially barbarians for whom marriage…is an indispensible civilizing force.” Now, *that's* what I call male bashing! (Indeed, had a feminist woman said these same things, we would be accused of hating men.)

Therapist Michael Gurian demands that we accept boy's ”hard wiring.” This ”hard wiring,” he informs us, is competitive and aggressive. ”Aggression and physical risk taking are hard wired into a boy” he writes (1998, p. 53). Gurian claims that he likes the kind of feminism that is, as he writes, ”is not anti-male, accepts that boys are who they are, and chooses to love them rather than change their hard wiring” (1998, p. 53–4).

But are not males also hard-wired towards compassion, nurturing and love? If we were not also ”hard wired” for that, we would never develop social policies to encourage males from being around children. Indeed, we'd develop prohibitions, to protect the

children from these biologically-predisposed violent animals called adult males.

But, of course, we know better. We develop policies to encourage men to be more active fathers, because we know that males are also fully capable of the emotional repertoire that would enable them to be loving parents. The question is not whether of not we're hard wired, but rather which hard wiring elements we choose to honor and which we choose to challenge.

But let's assume they're right. Let's assume that males are hard-wired for violence and aggression. Let's say that the propensity for violence is innate, the inevitable fruition of that prenatal testosterone cocktail. So what? That only begs the question. We still must decide whether to organize society so as to maximize boy's "natural" predisposition toward violence, or to minimize it. Biology alone cannot answer that question, and claiming that boys will be boys, helpless shrugging our national shoulders, abandons our political responsibility (see Miedzian, 1991).

Confronting the ideology that masculinity is equated with violence – which is, after all, part of the unyielding ideology of masculinity that lies at the heart of the gender gap in school attendance, achievement and behavior – requires different strategies for intervention.

British high school teachers Jonathan Salisbury and David Jackson (1997) want, as their book title shouts, to "challenge" traditional masculinity, to disrupt the facile 'boys will be boys" model, and to erode boys' sense of entitlement. Their book offers practical advice to allow adolescents to raise issues, confront fears, overcome anxieties and allow teachers to dispel myths, encourage cooperation, and discourage violent solutions to perceived problems. The most valuable material helps boys deconstruct sexuality myths and challenge sexual harassment and violence. "We believe that masculine violence is intentional, deliberate, and purposeful," say Salisbury and Jackson (1997, p. 108). "It comes from an attempt by men and boys to create and sustain a system of masculine power and control that benefits them every minute of the day."

If we really want to rescue boys, protect boys, promote boyhood, then our task must be to find ways to reveal and challenge this ideology of masculinity, to disrupt the facile boys will be boys model, and to erode boys' sense of entitlement. Because the reality is that it is this ideology of masculinity that is

the problem for *both* girls *and* boys. And seen this way, our strongest ally, it seems to me, is the women's movement.

To be sure, feminism opened the doors of opportunity to women and girls. And it's changed the rules of conduct – in the workplace, where sexual harassment is no longer business as usual, on dates, where attempted date rape is not longer "dating etiquette" and in schools, where both subtle and overt forms of discrimination against girls – from being shuffled off to Home Ec when they want to take physics, excluded from military schools and gym classes, to anatomy lectures using pornographic slides – have been successfully challenged. And let's not forget the legal cases that have confronted bullying, and sexual harassment by teachers and peers.

More than that, feminism's also offered a blueprint for a new boyhood and masculinity based on a passion for justice, a love of equality, and expression of a fuller emotional palette. I remember one pithy definition that feminism was "the radical idea that women are people." Feminists also seem to believe the outrageous proposition that, if given enough love, compassion and support, boys need not only be boys. Boys can be men. Even more, boys can be people.

In this, boys' interests and girls' interests are allied. We're neither Martians nor Venusians, but Earthlings. And here on planet Earth, we would all do well to heed the words of Olof Palme:

> A fundamental idea embraced today in Sweden is that one must aim for change which emancipates men as well as women from the restrictive effects engendered by traditional sex roles (Palme, 1972).

What held girls back from succeeding in school were both institutional and structural barriers as well as traditional ideologies of femininity. As women and girls challenged those traditional ideologies, they successfully challenged those institutional barriers. What holds boys back from succeeding at school is the persistence of those traditional ideologies of masculinity.

Understanding that ideology, it seems to me, is the best entry point for educators and parents who seek to develop remedies for the contemporary boy crisis. It is an entry point that would enable boys to fully embrace an expansive definition of manhood – one that could even encourage them to succeed in school.

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