



## Christian Perspectives in Education

Send out your light and your truth! Let them guide me. Psalm 43:3

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# The Education and Miseducation of Boys in Cultural, Political, and Christian Perspective

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## The Education and Miseducation of Boys in Cultural, Political, and Christian Perspective

Ideas about how boys and girls are “supposed to be” are planted early. The messages boys receive about what it means to be male in this society are connected to their social-emotional and academic development. If we focus on boys’ school experience early on, we will improve education for all children.

-- Merle Froschl, Co-Director, Educational Equity Center at the Academy for Educational Development

At first, teachers experienced resistance to seeing the boys as gendered because when you start seeing the boy as gendered, then you have to see yourself, the teacher, as gendered and it is difficult to do that in a school setting.

-- Miriam Raider-Roth, Assistant Professor, University at Albany, State University of New York

In Part One of this article, a case is made from educational research and current academic practice for the occurrence of discrimination against males in modern American schools. An examination of the questionable assumptions of this thinking is considered in light of cultural, political, and Christian perspectives. In Part Two, we attempt to explain the historical and social circumstances that fostered this injurious status regarding the education of boys. Part Three suggests strategies to rethink more effective and equitable means of educating boys is advanced.

### Part One:

#### The Miseducation of Boys: Strategies for Decline and Discrimination

##### *An Introductory Case Study*

At Milton High School (Massachusetts), girls outnumber boys by almost two to one on the honor roll. In Advanced Placement classes, almost 60 percent of the students are female. Thus, seventeen year-old Doug Anglin filed a lawsuit with the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights against his high school. He claims that discrimination in identification of behavior problems, assignment of punishment, and the use of instructional

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methods heightened a common fallacy in gender equity philosophy: that any identified disadvantage for girls corresponds to an unfair advantage for boys (Jan, 2006). Girls outperform boys because the school system favors them, says Anglin, who contends that his school discriminates against boys. Anglin attributes his inability to learn at the expected level to poor instruction consistently based on the learning styles and needs of girls and not boys. But he says: "I'm not here to try to lower the rights of women or interfere with the rights of minorities. We just want to fix this one problem that we think is a big deal."

Is this indeed "a big deal"? While this specific case may be worth consideration, is it a fair and sustainable charge that holds up under the scrutiny of reliable evidence? And, even if gender discrimination can be demonstrated, what does it matter? Further, why should it concern educators, including Christian educators? The intention of this article is to address these questions in light of most appropriate education of our citizens and to offer a Christian perspective on this noteworthy issue of our day.

#### *Academic Gender Inequity in Cultural, Political, and Christian Perspective*

Surprisingly, the newest form of gender discrimination is stimulating little attention. This verifiable bias, most conspicuous in Western education, including Canada, Germany, England, Australia, and the United States,<sup>1</sup> is the remarkable corrosion of the academic achievement of

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<sup>1</sup> While we could easily add an "international" descriptor in the title for this topic as well, space prevents it. Nevertheless, permit just two examples from other Western cultures on the education of boys: Australia and Britain. In a speech in Australia, Member of Parliament Brendan Nelson reviewed the report of the government commission established to study the decline in school achievement of boys. The difference, he observed, between the proportion of boys in Australia who failed to achieve basic literacy skills rose from 30 percent in 1975 to 35 percent in 1995. Girls outperformed boys by 18 points on the Victorian Certificate of Education in comparison to a tie in 1980 scores. The communities in which boys live have grave cause for concern as "boys are more likely to be assaulted, involved in drug offences, and suffer spinal cord damage. They are three times more likely than girls to be injured in a motor vehicle accident, and six times more likely than girls to take their own lives" (Nelson, 2000, 11).

The Australian government also found that boys performed lower than girls in all subjects and were less likely to graduate and participate in tertiary education. A steady decline in the positive behavior patterns and the academic achievement of boys in Australia was so drastic that administrators and teachers are spending an inordinate amount of time dealing with the issues that boys face. Problems range from truancy, behavior problem,

boys. Is it a fair accusation to claim discrimination, or might it merely be seen as a proper pendulum swing-like readjustment of one gender being historically out of balance over the other? Is it accurate to aver the charge of partiality, or even to assert an intentional and systematic plan to unduly advance females past males in the educational arena?

How persons and subgroups within any culture are apt to be regarded is largely a function of societal role assignments. These roles are determined by socializing values and rituals that are inevitable in human communities. But intentionally discriminatory assigned roles which limit the educational potential of any subgrouping with American society is unacceptable. If it can be demonstrated that males are discriminated against, then their potential to contribute to society through leadership, creativity, and influence is lessened and therefore marginalized.

Cultures universally and consistently propagandize political agendas through their cultural values, such as faulty differentiation of people-groups. Yet those with Christian worldviews must resist overarching politico-cultural systems that offer conflicting and counterproductive practices and behaviors that belie their true values. As wrong as it has always been to twist hermeneutical leaps of theological interpretation to discriminate against females in Christian communities, it is equally injudicious to foster wrongful notions about discriminating against males in educational settings. And, we submit, that for teachers who share Christian perspectives to participate in any educational system—whether unintentionally or unconsciously

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severe acting out, and delinquency, to school failure. Suicide is the main cause of death of young males in Australia between the ages of 15 and 24 (Lillico, 2002).

Britain has no American “girl advocate” versions of Carol Gilligan, or Mary Pipher, or AAUW [formerly known as the American Association of University Women]. It is therefore unsurprising that in Britain the plain truth about male underperformance has been reaching an informed and concerned public. For almost a decade, British newspapers and journals have been reporting on the distressing scholastic deficits of British schoolboys. The *Times* of London warned the prospect of “an underclass of permanently unemployed, unskilled men.” “What’s Wrong with Boys?” asked the *Glasgow Herald*. The *Economist* referred to boys as “tomorrow’s second sex.” In Britain, the public, the government, and the education establishment are well aware of the increasing numbers of underachieving young males and they are looking for ways to help them.

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so—that shows favoritism to females over males is execrable, lamentable, and unethical. This is especially so in faith-based schools.

*Research on Gender Discrimination and the Politics of Education*

Raising and educating healthy boys is an area of increasing concern among Christian (and other) educators, child development experts, and parents across the country. The impetus comes from our longstanding concern about ensuring equity for all children beginning at the earliest levels of education.

Traditionally, males eclipse females in the mathematic and scientific fields in both student achievement and occupational pursuits. That has changed. Girls now outstrip boys in math and science classes in the United States (Hoff Sommers, 1999). Research also demonstrates that boys nationwide are increasingly falling behind girls in reading and writing, according to a report by the Educational Equity Center of the Academy for Educational Development (Froschl & Sprung, 2005). Boys perform on average worse than girls in almost every country (except Japan), and this international predicament has sparked debate in political, social and educational circles (West, 1999). In fact, Gurain and Stevens (2005) report that girls outnumber boys in all areas of school life including school extracurricular activities, except athletics. Boys appear to be chronically undermotivated both academically and socially.

Furthermore, a report by the Educational Equity Center's initiative on Raising and Educating Healthy Boys (Flood, 2001) cites these disturbing facts:

- Boys lag behind girls in reading and writing (Newkirk, 2000).
- Boys are more likely referred to a school psychologist (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999).
- Boys are more likely diagnosed with attention deficit disorder/attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity (Diller, 1998).

- Boys represent 70% of students with learning disabilities and 80% of those with social/emotional disturbances (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).
- Boys represent 70% of school suspensions, particularly minority males in urban schools (Ferguson, 2000).
- Boys commit 85% of the school violence and comprise the majority of victims of that violence (Katz, 1999).

Another report issued by the U.S. Department of Education cites findings that boys score 16 percentage points lower in reading and 24 points lower in writing than girls. The National Assessment of Educational Progress writing tests revealed that three-fourths of the gap has opened up by grade four (Newkirk, 2003). *Reading at Risk*, a study by the National Endowment of the Arts (2004), found that while overall book reading for young women is down 4 percent, the gap for males plunged 12 points in the decade between 1992 and 2002.

Stories about the widening literacy gap between boys and girls have appeared not only in educational studies but also in popular press. In 2003 and 2004, *USA Today* ran end-of-year editorials on boys' academic struggles and their lack of involvement in many aspects of school life. In them, *USA Today* stresses the need for more research into the causes of boys' achievement gap and puts out a clarion call for raising awareness. "Closing this gender gap," they state, "first requires awareness—by teachers, principals and parents. Only then can targeted solutions be developed." (*USA Today*, December 22, 2003, A3).

#### *Cultural Perceptions of Males in American Classrooms*

Insidious factors appear to contribute to turning boys off in classrooms. Sociologically, boys are at greater risk than girls. A National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health Report (2007) indicates that of the children and young persons placed outside the home,

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53% were boys and 47% were girls. The proportion accounted for by boys has steadily increased and remained higher than that for girls between 1991 and 2007. Kipnis (2000) reports that youth in such care, who already struggle to cope with and survive troubled relationships inside their families, are in particular danger of dropping out of school. Those who drop out are more likely to be male, from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in lower-status academic streams, and from single-parent families. They also score more poorly in school, experience a sense of alienation from school, and are less interested in education.

Kipnis (2000) also finds the ecology of neglect toward boys at school is evident in other arenas. For instance, when boys and girls misbehave equally, boys receive more frequent and severe penalties. Boys receive 71% of school suspensions, an even greater share of severe penalties, and are referred to special education four-to-one over girls. Boys receive more F's, have lower grade-point averages, repeat grade levels, and fail to graduate more often than girls. Boys are in fewer clubs, student governments, and school newspapers than girls. Boys now represent a minority of valedictorians, academic scholarship winners, and new college students.

Kipnis (2000) contends when boys fail at verbal skills, in the presence of girls whom they often want to impress, their embarrassment can be unbearable. Bad boys in particular often feel very sensitive about their language-skill deficits. Rather than feel the shame, many boys deal with not being able to perform well in one arena by acting out in other ways that display their strength and self-confidence—particularly to the girls who are outperforming them.

Researchers attribute the higher incidence of distractibility, physical movement, aggression, and comparable sociological issues to a number of factors, such as a gender deficit perspective, broken homes, an educational model that best suits the needs of girls, a paucity of male teachers in education, and lack of male role models in general (Villegas & Lucas, 2003).

But Shaffer and Gordon (2000) find that despite boys' apparent disengagement and separation at the onset of adolescence, they want to stay connected to school and family but in a different way than girls.

Central to the varying views proposed by proponents and opponents of the gender parity issue is the push by the feminist movement to improve the education of girls. On the one hand, Hoff Sommers (1999) argues that the save-the-males reformers seek to civilize boys by rescuing them from their masculinity. To the other extreme, Gloria Steinem's advice to "raise boys more like we raise girls" (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000, p. 44) fueled the political debate. The gender plasticity of the brain mindset creates an educational model that tries to change the way the boys' brains work rather than adjust to the needs of boys. "When the boy can't fit or doesn't change, he is often diagnosed as defective and labeled with a brain disorder" (Gurain & Stevens, 2005, p. 60).

In the widely popular book, *Raising Cain*, Kindlon and Thompson (2000) argue that "as right as the concern for girls is, we are disturbed by the dialogue when it seems to pit boys against girls in the quest for fairness. The unchallenged assumption is that, if girls are suffering in school, then boys are not. Yet research, statistics, and our own experiences as school psychologists and with boys and men in private therapy contradict this" (Kindlon & Thompson (2000, p. 30)

So, how did we get here? Is it really necessary to advance the status of one group by lowering the plight of another?

#### Part Two: The Miseducation of Boys: Historical and Sociological Preconditions

In preliterate societies, the educations of boys and girls were functionally different based on the roles they played in the life of the community. The males were providers, engaging in

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either hunter-gatherer, farming, and/or leadership activities; the females were homemakers engaging in child-rearing and home care activities. Ancient Egyptian, Israelite, Greek, Roman cultures added another dynamic by providing philosophical education for males. During the Renaissance, educational opportunities for women improved slightly, especially for the upper classes. Some girls from wealthy families attended schools of the royal court or received private lessons at home. The curriculum studied by young women was still based on the belief that only certain subjects, such as art, music, needlework, dancing, and poetry, were suited for females. For working-class girls, especially rural peasants, education was still limited to training in household duties such as cooking and sewing.

Gurain and Stevens argue that the contemporary problem is not the male, but how the male is educated in contradistinction to what males need in order to learn. Pre-industrial revolutionary education for males included apprenticeships or occupational training activities (hunting, protecting families, farming, intertribal trades, military and community leadership roles) that were family- and community-oriented and in which male role models,

mentored male into manhood. . . . They imitated their elders, they practiced, they learned by doing. Not until about two hundred years ago did printing and the written work become a major part of a boys' educational life. It was at this point that the Industrial Revolution was upon on. (Gurain & Stevens, 2005, p. 47)

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, private schools sprang up to support the education of the privileged and middle classes; however, most schools were single-sex. In 1985, the education of all children was mandated; and in 1954, the ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, public education enabled equal education to all. Equality for the education of girls was championed by women's groups nationally, and with the passage of Title IX of the

Education Administration of 1973, the law of the land was again clarified, declaring that “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Gurain & Stevens, 2005, p. 163).

But Carol Gilligan announced to the world that America's adolescent girls were in crisis. In her words, "As the river of a girl's life flows into the sea of Western culture, she is in danger of drowning or disappearing" (1990, p. 29). Gilligan offered little evidence to support this alarming finding. Indeed, it is hard to imagine what sort of empirical research could establish so abstract a claim. Soon a spate of similarly themed popular books materialized with titles such as *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* (Sadner & Sadner, 1994). Within a very short time, the allegedly fragile and demoralized state of American adolescent girls achieved the status of a national emergency. The perception then was that girls were being academically shortchanged. In *Reviving Ophelia* (1995), by far the most successful of the “girls in crisis” books, Mary Pipher asserts girls undergo a remarkable demise: "Something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn" (Pipher, 1995, p. 55).

Surprisingly, however, Daniel Offer (1988), professor of psychiatry at Northwestern University, refers to a new generation of studies that find a majority of adolescents (80%) normal and well adjusted. Nevertheless, Gilligan's ideas had special resonance in women's groups already committed to the proposition that our society is unsympathetic to women. Such organizations were naturally receptive to bad news about girls.

Six years after the release of *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, the *New York Times* ran a story that, for the first time, questioned the validity of the reports' data and conclusions. By then,

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of course, most of the damage to the truth about boys and girls was irreparable. The reporter Tamar Lewin (2006) did reach Diane Ravitch, who told her, "The AAUW [formerly known as the American Association of University Women] report was just completely wrong. What was so bizarre is that it came out right at the time that girls had just overtaken boys in almost every area. It might have been the right story 20 years earlier, but coming out when it did it was like calling a wedding a funeral. . . . There were all these special programs put in place for girls, and no one paid any attention to boys" (Lewin, 2006, p. G15).

In 1994, the allegedly low state of America's girls moved the U.S. Congress to pass the Gender Equity in Education Act, which categorized girls as an "under-served population" on a par with other discriminated-against minorities. Millions of dollars in grants were awarded to study the plight of girls and learn how to cope with the insidious bias against them. At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, members of the American delegation presented the educational and psychological deficits of American girls as a pressing human rights issue.

There is an understandable dialectic: the more girls are portrayed as diminished, the more boys are regarded as needing to be taken down a notch and reduced in importance. This perspective on boys and girls is promoted in schools of education, and many a teacher now feels that girls need and deserve special indemnifying consideration.

At the very time the AAUW was asserting that girls were subordinates in the schools, the Department of Education published the results of a massive survey showing just the opposite:

- Girls read more books. They outperform males on tests of artistic and musical ability. More girls than boys study abroad. More join the Peace Corps. Conversely, more boys than girls are suspended from school. More are held back and more drop out. Boys are

three times as likely as girls to be enrolled in special education programs and four times as likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

- More boys than girls are involved in crime, alcohol, and drugs. Girls attempt suicide more than boys, but it is boys who actually kill themselves more often. In a typical year (1997), there were 4,493 suicides of young people between the ages of five and twenty-four: 701 females, 3,792 males.
- Boys are less committed to school than girls. Higher percentages of boys than of girls reported they "usually" or "often" come to school without supplies or without having done their homework. Surveys of fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades show girls consistently reporting that they do more homework than boys. By twelfth grade, males are four times as likely as females not to do homework.
- More females go to college than males. In 2006, 8.4 million women and only 6.7 million men enrolled in college. In 2007, 9.2 million women were in college and 6.9 million men. (Trends in Educational Equity of Girls and Women, 2004).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), started in 1969 and mandated by the U.S. Congress, offers the best and most comprehensive measure of achievement for students of all levels of ability. Under the NAEP program, a large scientific sample of nearly 100,000 students drawn from forty-four states was tested in reading, writing, math, and science at ages nine, thirteen, and seventeen. In 1996, seventeen-year-old boys outperformed girls by 5 points in math and 8 points in science, while the girls outperformed boys by 14 points in reading and 17 points in writing. Throughout the past two decades, girls have been catching up in math and science, while boys continue to lag far behind in reading and writing, a gap that is not narrowing.

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In 1995 *The Influence of School Climate on Gender Differences in the Achievement and Engagement of Young Adolescents*, by University of Michigan professor Valerie E. Lee and her associates, strongly suggests that earlier reports of a tragic demoralization and shortchanging of America's schoolgirls have been greatly exaggerated.

In a teacher/student survey entitled "The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher: Examining Gender Issues in Public Schools" was released in 1997. During a three-month period in 1997, 1,306 students and 1,035 teachers in grades seven through twelve were asked a variety of questions about gender equity. The MetLife study was not produced by an advocacy organization; it had no doctrinal or political ax to grind. What it found contradicted most of the pet "findings" of the AAUW, the Sadkers, and the Wellesley Center for Research on Women. It politely said as much: "Contrary to the commonly held view that boys are at an advantage over girls in school, girls appear to have an advantage over boys in terms of their future plans, teachers' expectations, everyday experiences at school and interactions in the classroom" ("The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher: Examining Gender Issues in Public Schools," 1997, p.15).

Here are some other conclusions from the MetLife study:

- \* Girls are more likely than boys to see themselves as college bound.
- \* Girls are more likely than boys to want a good education.
- \* More boys than girls (31 percent versus 19 percent) feel teachers do not listen to what they have to say.

The MetLife report informed a conference busily lionizing Carol Gilligan that the nation's boys needed attention more than its girls. The participants were hearing—many for the first time—that the conventional talk about studies that show "girls losing self-confidence . . . and as a result

perform[ing] less well" in school was simply untrue (Gilligan, 1990, p. 329). This should have been big news for media long inundated with findings on the tragic fate of our nation's girls. But where girls are concerned, good news is no news.

At another session, "How Do the Academic Experiences of Boys and Girls Differ?" Nancy Leffert, a child psychologist at the Search Institute in Minneapolis, reported the results of a massive survey she and her colleagues had completed of more than 99,000 sixth- through twelfth-graders (cited in Hoff Sommers, 1999). These adolescents were asked about their "developmental assets." The Search Institute has identified forty critical assets ("building blocks for healthy development"). Half of these are external (for example, a supportive family, adult role models) and half internal (motivation to achieve, sense of purpose in life, interpersonal confidence). Leffert explained to the audience, somewhat apologetically, that girls were ahead of boys in thirty-four of the forty assets. On almost every significant measure of well-being, girls had the better of boys: they felt closer to their families, they had higher aspirations and a stronger connection to school—even superior assertiveness skills. Leffert concluded her talk by saying that in the past, she had referred to girls as fragile or vulnerable, "but if you look at [our survey], it tells me that girls have very powerful assets" (cited in Hoff Sommers, 1999, p. 26).

The Horatio Alger Association, a fifty-year-old organization devoted to promoting and affirming individual initiative and the American dream, released its annual back-to-school survey in 1998. It contrasted two groups of students: the highly "successful" (approximately 18 percent of American students) and the "disillusioned" (approximately 15 percent of students). The students in the successful group work hard, choose challenging classes, make schoolwork a top priority, get good grades, participate in extracurricular activities, and feel that their teachers and administrators care about them and listen to them. According to the 1998 report, the successful

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group is 63 percent female and 37 percent male. At the other extreme, the disillusioned students are pessimistic about their own futures, get low grades, have minimal contact with their teachers, and believe that "there is no one . . . they can turn to for help" (cited in Hoff Sommers, 1999, p. 31). The disillusioned group could accurately be characterized as demoralized. Nearly seven out of ten are male.

Judith Kleinfeld, a psychologist at the University of Alaska, published a thorough critique of the anti-schoolgirl research in the provocatively titled *The Myth That Schools Shortchange Girls: Social Science in the Service of Deception* (1998). Kleinfeld exposed a number of errors and concluded that the AAUW/Wellesley Center research on girls was "politics dressed up as science" (p. 67).

The association's executive director, Janice Weinman, added a more candid explanation for the persistent neglect of boys' problems: "We're the American Association of University Women," she said, "and our mission is to look at education for girls and women." That would be fair enough had the girl partisans not relentlessly promoted the idea that boys were unfairly advantaged while girls were neglected. The AAUW had not merely ignored boys' problems; it had dismissed them.

American schoolboys are lagging behind girls academically. The first step in helping them is to repudiate the partisanship that has distorted the issues surrounding sex differences in the schools. The next step is to make every effort to bring balance, fairness, and objective information into an urgently needed analysis of the nature and causes of those differences. But neither step can be taken while the divisive pro-girl campaign is allowed to go on unchecked and unchallenged.

Part Three:  
The Education of Boys: Strategies for Success and Equality

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We need to start addressing issues of gender socialization of boys and girls at the preschool level. At stake is the full potential of each individual child's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

-- Barbara Sprung, Co-Director, Educational Equity Center at the Academy for Educational Development

Gender and equity issues cross every major area in education. As an educator for over 30 years, I have sat in every seat and seen how gender issues play out in classrooms.

-- Denise Glyn Borders, Senior VP & Group Director, United States Education Workforce Development

There are stages of development toward gender equality – gender, gender parity, equity, and equality. Equity is the means to get there. Equality is the result.

-- Oralia Puente, Senior Associate, MSI - Management Systems, Inc.

*“Boys do not fit”*

The achievement gap between boys and girls is not the most apparent concern in the education of boys. Paramount is the ever-increasing problem that educators face with the behavior of boys in and out of the classroom. Root and Resnick (2003) found that boys with ADHD outnumber girls. While girls with ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) can be overly talkative and overly social and have other behavioral problems, boys are more likely to be aggressive with a ratio of 6:1 referrals for special education because of the disruptive and noncompliant aspects of their behavior. Gurain and Stevens (2005) found that in response to the seeming irresolvable and rapid increase in behavioral problems, school systems and medical professionals who work with boys in homes and in classrooms are medicating boys at a high rate. Biddulph (1998) reminisces about the British and Australian practice of ‘caning’ and other forms of punishment well in to the twentieth century, as teachers sought to diminish boy’s

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misbehavior. Presently educators are prone to deal with chronic misbehavior by getting physicians to medicate boys at an alarming rate with a variety of drugs, most notably Ritalin.

Gurain refutes decades of political and social thought that proposed that masculine/feminine behaviors are learned behaviors. Parental instinct and scientific findings now validate fundamental differences in male and female hardwiring of the brain, biochemistry, neurological development, and anatomy of boy's and girl's brains.

Those fundamental differences may explain cultural and ethnic variances as well. Villegas and Lucas (2003) cite well established educational research, theory, national reports, and programs that indicate that there is no intelligence gap between the races. However, Root and Resnick (2003) and Kipnis (2000) note the overrepresentation of African-American and Hispanic males in special education who have significantly higher referrals for discipline problems, are significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled at all grade levels than Asian, white, or Latino students, and have a high rate of ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) diagnosis in spite of comparable symptomatic rates with their peers in other ethnic groups.

Gurain and Stevens (2005) document lowered achievement amongst white males of high economic status as well as African-American males who are more likely than other males (1) to be identified as learning disabled and to end up in special education classes, (2) not to participate in advanced placement courses, (3) not to perform as well as other boys in math and science, and (4) to perform below grade level on standardized tests. (p. 36)

With a fragile self-esteem, a higher rate of disciplinary problems, lack of motivation for tertiary education, and a sense that they "do not fit," boys are turned off by education. The long-term effects are a cycle of generational educational disenfranchisement amongst males.

Another contributing factor to behavioral problems is the heightened vulnerability of boys to traumatic brain injury in comparison to girls. Gurain and Stevens (2005) quote a University of California at Berkley study which showed that "daughters of mothers who had problems forming secure attachments to their children as infants did not test out significantly lower in intellectual functioning during adolescence than daughters of securely attached mothers (though these girls did have other emotional and relational problems). In contrast, sons of insecurely attached mothers tested out significantly lower in high school intellectual markers."

The greatest indicator of school failure in males is poverty. Gurain and Stevens address the impact of poverty on male, success especially that of African-American males with 25% in jail or under court supervision. They attribute much of this to the inadequacies of school systems to educate these boys. While Gagnon, Tremblay, Zhou, and Vitaro (1995) reported the results of a study that indicated that teachers who completed a behavioral questionnaire were able to predict social maladjustment at a very high rate in six year-old boys, yet King and Gartell (2003) suggest that teacher competency in managing boys is a significant determinant. King and Gartell chronicle the story of how a pre-kindergarten teacher, who has difficulty managing her class of fourteen with ten boys, progresses from being a "teacher-technician who endures the class she is dealt until her patience runs out, to a teacher-professional who commits herself to change in the educational program and her own response styles." Kipnis (2000) attributes the tendency of teachers to perceive boys as having more personality and behavior problems than girls because

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they regard spirited boys as disruptive, defiant, or deviant, whereas a male teacher would generally see them as full of energy that needs firm direction.

*Inside the Male Mind*

Integral to teaching all students, and boys in particular, is knowing and understanding how they think and work. There is a vast body of research on how boys' brains work. Boys develop auditory processing later than girls. Buckingham (2003) reports that "boys' capacity for hearing and processing verbal instructions is, in general, less than girls', from the early years of schooling on" (Buckingham, 2003, p. 6). Boys are less verbal than girls and produce fewer words in writing assignments and talk less. Boys do not create as many words as girls and do not "use as many verbal centers with as many neural pathways from the sensory centers to the verbal" (Gurain & Stevens, 2005, p. 251).

Yet few staff receive "teacher training in college or graduate school on the differences that gender makes in how children learn" (Gurain & Stevens, 2005). To compound the problem, pre-schools are largely female dominated, with ninety-nine percent of the caretakers of pre-school children female. Boys and their largely female caretakers are different biologically, and therefore there is a major disconnect between the attitudes, practices, and perceptions of teachers and the pedagogical skills necessary to support the growth and development of boys (Rohrman 2004). "Grade school is largely a largely feminine environment, populated predominately by women teachers and authority figures, that seems rigged against boys, against the higher activity level and lower level of impulse control that is normal for boys" (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000, p. 264).

Ideas of masculinity are often at variance with behaviors that support school success. West (1998) provides an intense view into the world of boys:

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In the world of most mainstream Hollywood movies, masculinity is still seen in simple terms. The best men win: they win women, they win prizes, they defend the USA against numberless threats and invaders. Other men lose: they are ridiculed, unattractive, and rejected by women. The huge gulf between academic and popular ideas of masculinity is well worth emphasizing. (West, 1998, p. 175)

In Australia, class and race are also significant determinants for school achievement with the “bottom rung in most subjects . . . occupied by white working-class boys (especially in country areas), Pacific Islanders, and Aboriginal boys” (West, 1998, p. 54). It is interesting to note the similarities between Australian sub-cultures and that of the US. Girls of comparative ethnic and class groupings fair better than boys. “It is a rare young man that can maintain his position as a heterosexual male, appreciate sport, and perform outstandingly in English. . . . For the rest, English is the enemy territory” (West, 1999, p. 39). School culture rewards male-oriented activities such as sports differently than academic pursuits with a giant trophy for sports and a cardboard plaque or poster for academics. West recommends changing in the school cultural view of masculinity, providing teachers with strategies to accommodate the high level of mobility boys need in order to learn.

Into this miasma of learning is the dichotomy between the machismo maleness and other males whom Gurain and Stevens (2005) call ‘underboys’. These sensitive boys are often smart, nonathletic and physically underdeveloped. They chafe in a culture of machismo in which their apparent physical deficit makes them generally more successful in school, but still puts them at odds with the dominant male culture. Masculinity is positively or negatively reinforced and glorified in school along with community sports, bullying, the myth of male stoicism, masculinized and feminized areas of curriculum (science, math and technology for boys in

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contrast to humanities and art for girl). Boys adopt a ‘protest masculinity’ (Connell 2005), where challenge to authority becomes the test of personal worth, feeding the hegemonic influence of the media’s machismo.

*Stemming the Decline of Boys’ Education*

*Single sex classrooms and schools.* No Child Left Behind (2001) requires gender annual yearly progress accountability measures. In an effort to stem the decline in school achievement for boys, alternative school structures have been attempted including single sex classrooms and schools. Varying outcomes in Australia, Britain, Russia and the US are generally in favor of single sex options. Here boys appear “more settled, disruptions by both boys and girls are down, tests scores are up” . . . and have “greater freedom to be themselves in single-gender environments without the constraints of gender stereotypes that prevail in coed settings” (Gurain & Stevens, 2005, p. 211).

In the United States, a significant reversal of previous policy of the Bush administration earmarking federal money for districts that provide funding for single sex schools without the former conditions of ensuring a comparable alternative to the both sexes precipitated a heated debate about the efficacy of single sex schooling.

However, whether there are single sex classrooms and schools, or not, the issues of teacher competency in instructional methodologies, routines and procedures and school structure that are boy-friendly are very important. Too many districts fail to provide researched, gender-based training in male development, socialization processes, conflict resolution, situations of boys and caretakers, and the impact of the media and public perception of roles was provided to caretakers—all of which have proven effective (Rohrman 2004).

*Gender based brain research in professional development.* Gender-based professional development would include training in substantial research about how male minds work. Given the technological advances in modern medicine, much has been learned about the differences in the male brain from that of the female brain. Teachers, who are largely female, generally teach to their strengths and teach the way they learn. In order to teach males effectively, they must re-tool their pedagogical practices to meet the learning needs of both boys and girls.

Biddulph (1998) asserts that boys' brains are slower growing and do not catch up with girls' until about 17. He debunks centuries of practice in trying to train boys' fingers and brains, which are not ready to handle fine motor tasks such as pencil-and-paper work or cutting out; boys are also not ready to sit still for long periods. Lillico (2002) found that boys are less able to negotiate print when they are between the ages of 8 and 14.

Gurain and Stevens (2005) cull much of the brain research to explain how boys learn. The male brain relies more heavily than does the female on spatial-mechanical stimulation and thus is inherently more stimulated by diagrams, pictures, and objects moving through space than by the monotony of words. Boys have more dopamine, which increases potential for risky behaviors and more blood flow in the cerebellum, which controls action. The female corpus callosum supports multitasking by allowing more cross-talk between hemispheres than does that of the male. Girls have stronger neural connectors; therefore boys need more stimulus in order for their brains to light up with learning: "The male hippocampus favors lists making and memorization. . . . The female brain utilizes more neural pathways and brain centers for word production and expression of experience, emotion, and cognition though words . . . [and] more estrogen and oxytocin than boys . . . which have a direct impact on the use of words. . . . Boys have higher levels of testosterone . . . [which] is closely associated with aggression and sex"

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(Gurain & Stevens, 2005, 100). Boys' brains have 15% less blood flow with reduced ability to multitask. Most notably "the male brain is set to renew, recharge, and reorient itself between tasks by moving to what neurologist Rueben Guhr has called a "rest state"—ergo the boy who nods off sleeps in class.

Gurain and Stevens (2005) cite researchers in the fields of genetics, endocrinology, and psychosocial behavior who indicate that the gender plasticity of the brain is a myth. Gender develops in three stages in the brain. In Stage 1 chromosome markers for gender are present at conception. During Stage 2, "chromosome markers compel surges of male and female hormones in the womb that format XX brains to be female and XY brains to be male" (Gurain & Stevens, 2005, 211). In Stage 3 gender is cemented post birth by interactions with family members who respond differently based on appearance, physical features and "male and female signals, cues, and characteristics' of the child" (Gurain & Stevens, 2005, p. 328).

Though boys give the impression of being tough, they are hurting inside, but the "boy code" precludes them being able to express how they really feel.

### *Strategies to Support the Learning of Boys*

Given the body of knowledge about how boys learn, researchers have proffered a wide range of strategies for parents, teachers, and school districts to use in supporting the learning of boys. The Gurain Institute, a leader in an emerging gender education studies, provides professional development for teachers and educators to support boys' learning. Gurain & Stevens (2005) suggests a strong interplay between "three formative powers: nature, nurture, and culture. . . . Boys . . . have a certain kind of learning energy, their own 'male' oath to successful education, and it beings in them before they are born. When we fully understand this "boy

energy," we discover new ways of teaching the minds of boys" (Gurain & Stevens, 2005, p. 312).

When normal boy activity levels and developmental patterns are accommodated in the design of school, curricula, classrooms, and instructional styles, an entire stratum of "boy problems" drops from sight. When a boy's experience of belonging at school is greater than his sense of differentness, then the burden of shame, inadequacy, and anger drops away and he is free to learn (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000).

Teachers who are trained in "the boy code" will not misinterpret behaviors as deliberately negative. Boys and girls generally exhibit three levels of mistaken behavior: Level One: Experimentation Mistaken Behavior; Level Two: Socially Influenced Mistaken Behavior; and Level Three: Strong Needs Mistaken Behavior.

Proponents of the single sex schools indicate that girls profit from same sex schools in science and math achievement, high levels of confidence, and development of leadership skills. Similarly boys, particularly adolescent males, fare better in single sex schools when they focus on school work, art and literature. Teachers should ensure that boys and girls to participate at a rigorous level in experiences that are outside of their areas of strength.

Gurain and Stevens suggest nonverbal communication about feelings to help boys express themselves. They provide strategies for parents to help sensitive boys become more comfortable in the following areas: (1) teaching them to be both tough and tender; (2) steering sensitive boys to athletics pursuits; (3) helping overweight boys manage their weight through a nutritional diet, mandatory exercise, family dialogue, and medical assistance; and (4) training in how to deal with bullying.

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The Gurain Institute supports parents thought parent workshops in school districts nationally. Parents can stimulate word production by visibly and verbally labeling items in the boys' environment and talking through activities. Elementary school boys benefit from lists in the natural environment, visual dictionaries, trips to the library, word games, infusion of art and music in the use of language, supervision to help them get through the arduous literacy homework tasks, boy-friendly reading materials, and the knowledge that reading is important in the lives of the family.

Limiting TV viewing and providing stimulating alternatives have been found to decrease verbal and physical aggression. Healthy nutrition, adequate amounts of fresh water, protein, and reduction in sugar intake support brain function. Practicing healthy family rituals that support nutrition and physical activity are effective ways of sustained appropriate levels of attachment.

Strategies that parents can use to help boys with ADD/ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) include attention to nutritional diet; reduction of exposure to the passive stimulus of TV video games and computer time; a highly structured and more discipline home environment; and a careful sensory approach to the physical environment.

Rather than punish boys, teachers and parents need to recognize that aggressive physical play is the male child's way of bonding and making long-term attachments. Biddulph (1998) suggests "teaching boys long before school starts to love words and books, restricting TV watching, helping them control aggression and be loving and safe. . . ." (p. 85).

Employing best practices in instructional design such as critical thinking skills, cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, effective classroom management by learning, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, heterogeneous groupings, questioning techniques,

interdisciplinary activities, multicultural and diversity activities, gradual release of responsibility and thematic instruction of student interest (Lesko, 2000).

Teachers must support boys educationally by changing the education of boys and not the boys themselves. The boy becomes the educational unit, not the content he is to learn. Special purpose programs which are gender-specific or relevant programs rather than just programs for boys are sound classroom teaching; whole school reforms and systemic societal and political action should be encouraged (Connell, 2005).

Boys can develop mathematically and scientifically by exploration, counting, building, sports, making charts, calendars, using music, figuring out games, managing money and connecting math to real life situations, playing chess and other logic games, using manipulatives to represent abstractions in math, working collaboratively, participating in movement and recess as a part of learning, participating in math and science competitions, and engaging in pre-occupational activities. Allowing boys to get dirty with science and to explore local ecologies, with the tools of the scientific trade, to engage in scientific apprenticeships, and to learn about the science of puberty are ways to stimulate their interest.

Single sex classrooms and schools and the homeschooling alternative will not make the difference if the minds of boys are not catered to in these venues. An important piece is the bonding an attachment essential for children at birth and in early infancy. Strong bonds between adult males and boys can be structured around healthy male rituals that are multi-generational.

Changing the culture of educating boys so that they become interested in schooling and learning is an uphill battle that educators cannot afford to continue losing:

When normal boy activity levels and developmental patterns are accommodated in the design of school, curricula, classrooms, and instructional styles, an entire stratum of 'boy

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problems' drops from sight. When a boy's experience of belonging at school is greater than his sense of differentness, then the burden of shame, inadequacy, and anger drops away and he is free to learn. (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000, p. 237)

In sum, education must be devised to insure equality for both genders. Christian educators, with added theological insight, must be more intentional regarding its educational methods in this regard. Sound strategies for rectifying this inequity are now well-known; likewise, impetus for change must be matched with expediency and robust will.

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