

The State of American Boyhood

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ABSTRACT

The existence of a “boy crisis” in the United States is a topic of public policy debate. This study examines the state of American boyhood, using not only the commonly reviewed indicators of school achievement but also mental health, premature death, injury, delinquency, and arrests. Boys are in trouble in many areas: low rates of literacy, low grades and engagement in school, high dropout from school, and dramatically higher rates of placement in special education, suicide, premature death, injuries, and arrests. Girls, however, suffer from other problems, especially depression, suicidal ideation and attempts, and eating disorders, and are less likely to achieve at the very highest levels in mathematics and science. This study argues that both boys and girls suffer from characteristic problems, but the issues affecting boys are serious and neglected.

Whether or not a “boy crisis” actually exists or whether this “crisis” amounts to little more than overblown rhetoric, fueled by an anti-feminist agenda, is at the center of a new policy debate. On one side of this controversy are those who argue that the nation is facing a “new gender gap” with many boys falling dangerously behind in academic achievement and college graduation, and later entering a new knowledge economy for which they are woefully underprepared. On the other side of the debate are policy analysts who argue that the widely-publicized “boy crisis” is non-existent, overblown, or, at most, limited to minority boys. At stake are limited attention, time, and resources. Should schools, government agencies, and foundations now make the needs of boys a priority?

This paper briefly reviews the policy debate, dividing it into three stages: 1. The schools are shortchanging girls. 2. The schools are shortchanging boys. 3. Debunking the idea of a “boy crisis.” Each stage is described through the major publications that crystallize each position in different time periods. This paper then reviews the evidence for each position, relying on the most recent and reliable statistical sources. More detailed data analyses may be obtained from the author.

The argument of this paper is that neither girls nor boys are “in crisis.” The problems of boys center in literacy, school engagement, low grades, placement in special education, dropout rates, enrollment and graduation in postsecondary programs, such mental health problems as suicide and conduct disorders, injuries, premature death, and criminal activities. The

achievement gap in the natural sciences and mathematics for girls, however, has not closed at the highest levels of achievement. Girls also suffer from higher rates of depression, eating disorders, and suicide attempts. While boys and girls both suffer from characteristic problems, those of boys are neglected and far more serious.

The Policy Controversy

Stage I: The Schools Are Shortchanging Girls.

In the early 1990s, a plethora of popular books argued that girls were suffering psychological damage as a result of the cultural construction of the female gender role. Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1993), Mary Pipher in *Reviving Ophelia* (1994), and Peggy Orenstein in *School Girls* (1994) asserted that girls, especially at adolescence, suffered from loss of voice, lower self-esteem, and pressures to conform to female cultural expectations of compliance, and passivity. Sadker and Sadker's *Failing and Fairness* (1994) focused on gender inequities in the schools, emphasizing that the content of the curriculum and the practices of teachers advantaged boys. Teachers, for example, gave boys more attention than girls, chastized girls who didn't raise their hands while accepting the call-outs of boys, and were more apt to engage in sustained intellectual dialogue with boys, which promoted their cognitive development.

The issue of gender inequity in the schools burst into the consciousness of educators, parents and the public through a highly publicized report by the American Association of Women (AAUW), *How*

Schools Shortchange Girls (1992). This report crystallized the issue: Girls are at risk. Girls have lower test scores in mathematics and science and lower scores on high-stakes college-entry tests. Teachers tailor classroom activities to boys' interests and do not prevent boys, for example, from dominating science experiments while girls observe from the sidelines.

How Schools Shortchange Girls, together with other publications of the period, drew attention to the educational and psychological problems of American girls and exerted substantial influence on national policy. The 1994 Gender Equity in Education Act identified girls as an underserved population and directed funding toward girls' needs. Federal agencies and foundations made girls' issues a priority. The result was numerous programs devoted to increasing girls' self-esteem, the achievement of girls in mathematics and science, and girls' interest in pursuing mathematics, science, and engineering careers. A spate of publications from such organizations as the Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center, funded by the Department of Education, promoted the development of "gender-fair" instructional materials. Textbook publishers emphasized women's lives and contribution to society, and textbook adoption committees considered such coverage crucial to textbook selection. A writing section (a domain where girls excelled) was added to the SAT, in part to increase girls' scores on this high-stakes test.

In sum, the idea that girls were at risk, that schools were a central source of their problems, and that schools were a pivotal institution through which such gender inequities could be addressed led to numerous federal, state, school district, and foundation programs. These efforts to promote

girls' interests succeeded in creating a new public policy problem and in changing educational programs and practice.

Stage II: The schools are shortchanging boys.

The contrary position, that girls are the sex at risk and that schools actually favor girls, developed in the late 1990s. Tom Mortenson, an educational analyst who publishes highly respected reports on higher education issues in *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, was the first to draw attention to the gender gap in college attendance and graduation. In such reports as *The State of American Manhood* (2006), Mortenson argued that the problems of boys and young men were rooted in changing employment patterns. Occupational demand in areas of traditionally male high-paying employment, such as manufacturing, had dramatically declined, reducing opportunities for men with low levels of education. Men with a high school education or less were more likely to be unemployed in times of economic recession and were experiencing substantial declines in real income—a drop in median annual income by 38 percent from 1973 to 2004 among men who lacked a high school diploma and by 26 percent for men with only a high school education. Women, on the other hand, were increasing their participation in higher education and able to obtain stable, high-paying positions in the knowledge economy. Sum, Fogg, and Harrington (2003) also drew attention to the lower participation and attainment of men in higher education and argued that the weaker educational attainment of men decreased labor productivity and economic growth.

Popular books again brought the issue of boys' problems to the attention of parents and educators. Michael Gurian's books *Boys and Girls Learn Differently!* (2002) and *The Minds of Boys* (Gurian and Stevens 2005) argued that these problems were rooted in the schools. Boys, for example, matured later and were less ready for the demands of schooling. William Pollack in *Real Boys* (1998) argued that the gender construction of masculinity encouraged boys to hide their emotions and present to the world a stereotyped image of masculinity which idealized toughness and independence at serious emotional cost. In *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*, Kindlon and Thompson (2000) also urged greater attention to boys' developmental and emotional problems and suggested ways in which counselors, teachers, and families could deal with boys' issues in gender-appropriate ways. Sax (2005, 2007) argued that the central problem was low levels of boys' motivation and "failure to launch" in early adulthood. Many young men were living at home with their parents through their twenties and not assuming independent adult roles.

The publication which crystallized the view that boys, not girls, are the victims of discrimination in the schools was Christina Hoff Sommers's *The War Against Boys* (2000). The AAUW report, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Sommers charged, was riddled with errors, crucial research on which its arguments were based had oddly disappeared, and boys were, in fact, behind girls on many measures of school success. The subtitle of *The War Against Boys —How Misguided Feminist is Harming Our Young Men*—placed partial responsibility for the neglect of boys on feminist ideology and laid the groundwork for the charge that concern for boys was rooted in an anti-feminist agenda.

The second stage in this debate, the emphasis on the problems of boys rather than girls, led to minimal changes in federal policy and school programs. No federal legislation comparable to the 1994 Gender Equity in Education Act was established to address boys' problems. Laura Bush in her "Helping America's Youth" initiative did include boys' problems among youth needs, but this federal effort faded away with no federal task force charged with examining the problems of boys and no changes in agency mandates or funding. The exception is changed regulations issued in 2008 by the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education allowing, under limited conditions, single sex classrooms in public schools as well as single sex schools.

Great Britain and Australia, on the other hand, have succeeded in launching national initiatives to raise the achievement of boys (Weaver-Hightower 2003,471; Sommers, 2000). No national organizations in the United States, however, have addressed boys' problems. The exception is the National Association for Single Sex Public Schooling, organized by Leonard Sax, which advocates for single-sex classrooms and schools, but this initiative has affected only a small number of boys.

Stage III: Debunking the Idea of a "Boys' Crisis"

Two widely publicized reports have challenged the idea that boys are in trouble, with the exception of minority boys. Sara Mead (2008) in *The Truth About Boys and Girls* published by the think tank, the Education Sector, argued that the boys' crisis is non-existent, the gains of girls have not

come at the expense of boys, and that any boy crisis is limited to minority and low income boys. The AAUW issued another rebuttal, *Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education* (Corbett, Hill and St. Rose, 2008), which made a similar argument: Educational achievement is not a zero-sum game—more boys as well as girls are entering and graduating from college, and, for fourth graders, achievement in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has improved, with the gender gap declining for 4th graders between 2004 and 2007. A report challenging these arguments, *Taking the Boys Crisis Seriously* (Kafer 2007) was poorly publicized and ignored. Published by the Independent Women’s Forum, the report argued that boys, not girls, are in trouble in schools, that many boys did not develop the literacy crucial to success in the knowledge economy, and that federal programs have appropriated large sums of money to increase the achievement of girls, while the problems of boys are ignored.

Advocates arguing that the educational problems of girls and women still merit serious policy attention have now turned their attention to the low number of women who become mathematicians, engineers, physicists, and natural scientists (Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering 2006).

This study now reviews the evidence not only in the domain of education but also in other crucial areas.

Gender Gaps in Achievement Test Scores

Achievement at the 12th grade: Achievement gaps at the senior year of high school are important, since the 12th grade marks the end of formal schooling for many students. Since differences in average scores on these tests are difficult to interpret, I have analyzed gender gaps on the National Tests of Educational Progress at the level “below basic,” since these students are unprepared for most occupations, and among students who achieve at the “proficient and advanced levels,” who are prepared for postsecondary education and for participation in the knowledge economy.

At the 12th grade level, boys fall far behind girls in the foundational skills of reading and writing. The gender gap in writing is dramatic. More than a quarter of young men (26%) fall below basic and just 16% achieve at the proficient/ advanced levels. In contrast, just 11% of young women fall below basic in writing and 31% achieve at the proficient/advanced levels. The gender gap in writing is staggering among Black and Hispanic students. At the end of high school, almost half (42%) of Black young men fall below basic compared to less than a quarter (22%) of Black young women with only 5% of Black young men compared to 12% of Black young women achieving at the proficient/advanced levels.

Serious differences in writing achievement occur when socioeconomic status (measured by the highest level of education achieved by one parent) is taken into account. For example, among Black male 12th graders with at least one parent who is a college graduate, an astonishing 37% still fall below basic in contrast to just 17% of Black females. A gender

gap of similar magnitude occurs among Hispanic students of similar socioeconomic status.

The gender gap in reading is also an important policy concern. A third of male students at the 12th grade level fall below basic compared to 22% of female students, and less than a third of male students (29%) are reading at the proficient/ advanced levels compared to 41% of female students. Over half of Black males (53%) are reading below basic compared to 40% of Black females. A similar gender gap again occurs among Hispanic students.

In mathematics, gender gaps have almost disappeared with 38% of males achieving below basic compared to 40% of females. In mathematics, an astonishing 70% of both Black males and females are achieving below basic, and miniscule numbers (about 5%) are achieving at the proficient/ advanced levels.

In science, small gender gaps occur in favor of males at the below basic level (males, 44%; females, 48%) and at the proficient/advanced levels (males, 22%; females, 16%). Black and Hispanic males and females are achieving abysmal scores in science. Almost 80% of Black males, for example, and 82% of Black females fall below basic.

At the 12th grade level, the NAEP tests a variety of other subjects: economics, civics, geography, and U.S. history. Gender gaps are small, favoring females in civics, and favoring males in economics, geography, and U.S. history. Small gender gaps occur for both Blacks and Hispanics, but

favoring females in both civics and geography and males in economics and U.S. history.

Achievement at the 8th and 4th grade levels: In writing, at the 8th grade, substantial gender gaps also occur. Just 22% of males compared to 43% of females score at the proficient/advanced levels while 17% of males compared to just 7% of females score below basic. In reading, almost a third of male students (31%) score below basic while just 21% of females score below basic; 37% of females score at the proficient/advanced levels compared to just 26% of males. Among Black males, gender gaps in reading are especially large with an astonishing 53% scoring below basic compared to 38% of females. The gender gap in favor of females is far larger among Blacks with at least one parent who is a college graduate.

In mathematics at the 8th as well as the 12th grade, no gender gap exists at the below basic levels but males do outperform females at higher levels with 42% of males and 37% of females achieving at the proficient/advanced levels. The same lack of sex differences in average mathematics scores at the elementary school level has also been found in a recent and quite large (about 2 million students) study of mathematics achievement using state tests which are more closely aligned to the curriculum (Hyde et al. 2008), but far more boys achieved at the very top.

In science, the 8th grade gender gap mirrors that of 12th graders. Among males, 39% score below basic compared to 43% of females, and 31% of males compared to 26% of females reach the proficient/advanced levels. Black male 8th graders slightly outscore Black females in science.

Gender gaps in civics, economics, geography and U.S. history slightly favor males.

At the 4th grade, the gender gap favors females in writing, but at this lower grade level, the gender gap is much smaller than in the higher grades (19% of males below basic, 9% of females below basic). In reading, the 4th grade gender gap is also smaller (36% of males below basic, 30% of females below basic). No gender gap in mathematics occurs at the 4th grade level. A small gender gap appears in science (31% of males below basic; 34% of females below basic). No gender gap appears in U.S. history; males achieve slightly better in civics and females in geography.

In sum, the policy-relevant problem is the serious gender gap in the basic skills of reading and writing, which appears at all grade levels, with the worst gender gaps occurring at the 8th and 12th grades. In mathematics and science, gender gaps are small but consistently favor males. In other subjects, gender gaps are small and inconsistent but more often favor males.

In terms of policy discussion and educational investments, the nation is addressing gender differences which barely exist but ignoring gender gaps which are substantial. Policy attention has focused on the supposed underachievement of females in mathematics and science but these gender gaps are small. In contrast, substantial gender gaps are occurring in reading and writing which place males at a serious disadvantage in the employment market and in college.

Scores on College Entrance Tests

In policy discussions of the gender gap in school achievement, supposed gender differences on high stakes college entry tests are used to rebut the position that a boy crisis exists. The problem with gender comparisons on these college entry tests, however, is that more women go to college and take these tests so women are more apt to be drawn from lower levels of the talent pool.

On the 2007 SAT, the College Board (2007) reported that females scored higher in writing (females, 500; male, 489) while males scored considerably higher in mathematics (females, 502; males, 533). Further, when SAT scores are analyzed by achievement band, far more males scored at the top. At the very highest range of the SAT composite scores on reading and mathematics (1600 to 1530), males were substantially ahead (male, 61%; females, 40%). Even when the writing test is included, an area of pronounced female advantage, the gender gap in favor of males at the very highest range (2400 to 2330) remained large (males, 55%; females, 45%). A helpful correction to the problem of larger female test-takers on the SAT is to examine sex differences in Maine, where all graduating seniors are required to take the SAT. In Maine in 2007, girls had a 32 point advantage in the writing section, a 13 point advantage in the reading section, and a 12 point disadvantage in mathematics (Corbett et al. 2008).

On the ACT (2007), however, despite the larger number of college-bound females, male and female composite scores in 2007 were virtually equal (males, 21.2; females 21.0) with a less than 1 point difference in

English, mathematics, reading, and science. Again, a helpful correction to the greater number of girls taking the ACT is to examine scores in Colorado and Illinois, where all graduating seniors are required to take the test. On the ACT in both states, the ACT reported almost identical composite scores between males and females and less than a 1 point difference in English, mathematics, reading, and science.

The gender gap strongly favors males on the SAT while gender gaps on the ACT are trivial. Those differences which do occur (only on the SAT) favor females in writing and reading and males in mathematics. The inconsistency of scores on these two college-entry tests prevents any strong conclusions about a gender gap.

School Grades

The most useful source of information on sex differences in students' grade point average is the High School Transcript Study (National Center for Education Statistics 2007) which examines grades at the end of high school for a nationally representative sample of 26,000 high school graduates. This study is particularly valid since it does not rely on self-reported grades. From 1990 through 2005, young women show a consistent advantage each year in grade point average and the gender gap in grades in favor of females has increased since 1990. In 2005, females' grade point average was a B (3.09) while males' grade point average was a C+ (2.86). In 1990, females' GPA was a C (2.77) while males' grade point average was a C (2.59). Even in mathematics and science, where males achieve higher test scores, the school grades of young women were higher than the school grades of young men.

Other large, nationally representative studies, such as the 1972 National Longitudinal Survey of high school seniors and the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Survey of high school students show a female advantage in high school grades. Analyzing these surveys, Golden, Katz, and Kuziemko (2006:8) conclude that “girls achieved considerably higher grades in high school than did boys” and “in the NLS, the median girl was 17 percentile points [in class rank] above the median boy.” The Higher Education Research Institute has surveyed American college freshmen since 1966 and its standard survey question asks freshmen to report their high school grade point average (Pryor et al. 2007). The pattern of male disadvantage in grade point average is consistent across years. In 2007, for example, 28% of freshmen women reported a GPA of A or A+ in high school compared to 21% of freshmen men.

Even school districts which serve white students of high socioeconomic status, where families presumably emphasize school success, show a large gender gap in favor of females in school grades. In the Wilmette School District in Illinois (2006), for example, a report on gender differences showed that 74% of 5th grade girls received an A in reading compared to just 51% of boys. Even in mathematics, a subject of typical male advantage, 70% of 5th grade girls received an A in mathematics compared to just 54% of boys. In science, 67% of girls received an A compared to 60% of boys. In the Edina public school in Minneapolis, with a predominantly white, high income student body, almost two-thirds of students of female 6th through 12th graders on the A Honor roll were female and 35% were male (Edina Public Schools 2002).

In sum, girls achieve higher grades in school than boys across school subjects and enter college with a higher grade point average. Even in subjects such as mathematics and science, where boys typically receive higher test scores, girls receive higher school grades. These differences probably reflect girls' greater motivation to do homework and more compliance with school demands, a topic later reviewed.

Students Receiving Top Academic Honors

The National Honor Society requires a grade point average of B or above and members are chosen on the basis as well of outstanding achievement in service, leadership, character, and citizenship. According to an enrollment specialist, almost twice the proportion of females (64%) compared to males (36%) were members of the National Honor Society in 2007, and this proportion has remained constant in recent years (Felder, personal communication March 28, 2008).

Given the increased policy emphasis on closing the gender gap in science and mathematics, winners of prestigious national competitions are a visible indicator of the sex of students at the pinnacle of achievement. From 2006 through 2008, all the first place winners of the Intel Science Talent Search have been female. From 2001 through 2008, 5 females and 3 males took top place. Among the top ten winners, males and females were about equal.

The Siemens Math, Science, and Technology winners are most often males. In 2007-2008, however, young women swept the Siemens competition for the first time with one female achieving first place in the individual competition and two females achieving first place in the team competition. From 2006 to 2008, however, two-thirds of the winners were male.

Rhodes Scholars are selected from college seniors on the basis of their achievement and contributions to their fields and to socially important endeavors. Examining the sex distribution of Rhodes Scholars from 2004 through 2008, males predominated, receiving 55% of prestigious Rhodes scholarships in these five years.

In sum, females are the majority of members of the National Honor Society in high school, as well as being half of the winners of the Intel Science Competition, a third of the winners of the Siemens Math, Science, and Technology Competition, and close to half of Rhodes scholars.

Engagement in School

Boys are less likely to do homework and more likely to come to school unprepared, which aggravates teachers and reduces school grades. Of students who said they did an hour or less of homework each week, 19% were boys and 14% were girls (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). Almost three times as many high school male students said they did no homework whatsoever (males, 11%; females, 4%). Similarly, far more boys said they usually or often came to school unprepared. Over 30% of

boys said they usually or often came to school without their homework compared to 21% of girls. Twenty-two percent of boys said they usually or often came to school without paper, pen or pencils compared to just 13% of girls. Similar sex differences in high school engagement also occur among academically oriented students who enter college (Pryor et al. 2007). Males were more apt to spend no time or an hour or less in a typical week doing homework, more likely to come late to class, less apt to ask questions in class, and less apt to ask for feedback on their academic work.

Females also show higher participation rates in most school activities (Freeman 2004). Females participated more in student council and student government (females, 13%; males, 8%); more in music and the performing arts (females, 31%; males, 19%), more in academic clubs (females, 19%, males, 12%), and more in other school clubs and activities (females, 44%; males, 26%). Only in athletics were boys more engaged than girls (females, 32%; males, 44%).

Grade Repetition, Special Education, Gifted and Talented Programs, and Advanced Placement

Boys are more apt to repeat a grade (Freeman, 2004). While 8% of males repeated a grade, just 5% of females did. The preponderance of males repeating a grade was especially high among Blacks. Among Black males, for example, more than one in ten repeated a grade in school.

Students enrolled in special education classes are far more likely to be males. In 2001-2002, of secondary students with disabilities, 69% were male

(Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services 2005). Among students with emotional disturbance, 76% were male. Of students with learning disabilities, 73% were male. Of students with multiple disabilities, 65% were male.

No gender gaps, however, appear in Gifted and Talented Programs (Digest of Educational Statistics 2007) with the exception of Black males (Schott Foundation 2008). While Black males comprise 9% of the school population, less than 4% of students in gifted and talented programs are Black males.

A well-accepted measure of the difficulty of the high school curriculum is the “New Basics” curriculum consisting of four years of English, three years of social science, three years of mathematics and science, two years of a foreign language, and one semester of computer science. In 2000, 33% of female high school graduates completed these courses compared to 29% of males (King 2006). Similarly, 54% of female sophomores compared to 48% of males were enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum, while males were more apt to have taken remedial courses in both mathematics and English (National Center for Education Statistics 2006).

The Advanced Placement Program offers coursework for especially able talented high students. Among female students, 43% had taken 1 to 4 AP tests, and 43% had taken 5 to 9 tests (College Board 2007). Among male students, 39% had taken 1 to 4 tests, and 41% had taken 5 to 9 tests. Test-taking followed traditional gendered patterns with more females taking

AP tests in such subjects as English literature and composition (64%), psychology (64%), and world history (56%). Males were more likely to have taken AP tests in such subjects as computer science (84%) and physics (65%).

Dropout

The calculation of high school dropout rates is controversial, with different researchers using different statistical techniques, examining different numbers of states, and thus different populations of students (Chaplin and Klasnik 2006; Greene and Winters 2006; Orfield, 2006). Whatever the method of analysis, the fundamental story is the same: Far more males compared to females drop out of high school with a dramatic gender gap among Black and Hispanic males and females.

Among all students in 2004-2005, 32% of males dropped out of school compared to 25% of female students (Education Week 2008). While 52% of Black males dropped out of school, just 39% of Black females did. While 48% of Hispanic males dropped out of schools, just 37% of females did. Furthermore, minority boys are more likely to be “idle,” neither in school nor working (Edelman, Holzer, and Offner 2006). Examining in 1999 the numbers of idle young men, 17% of Black young men ages 16 to 24 were idle, as were 12% of Hispanic males, and just 4% of white males.

Boys are far more apt to be suspended and expelled, especially Black males. Of kindergarten through 12th grade students, 9% of males had been suspended during their school years compared to 4% of female students, and

three times as many males had been expelled (Freeman and Fox 2005). Boys were far more likely to be expelled even from preschool programs—boys were expelled 4.5 times more than girls (Gilliam 2005).

Postsecondary Education Enrollment and Graduation

The alarm about a “boy crisis” is most often justified by the increasing proportion of females who enter and graduate from college (Buchmann and Diprete 2006,515). A large gender gap has developed in postsecondary education enrollment with the percentage of women who are female reaching 57% (Digest of Education Statistics 2007). A large gender gap has also developed in the attainment of most postsecondary degrees, with the problem especially serious among Black and Hispanic males (Knapp et al. 2007). Among whites, women obtained 61% of associate degrees, 57% of bachelor’s degrees, 62% of master’s degrees, 54% of doctoral degrees, and 53% of first -professional degrees. Among Blacks, women obtained 61% of associate degrees, 66% of bachelor’s degrees, 72% of master’s degrees, 64% of doctoral degrees, and 64% of first-professional degrees. Among Hispanics, women obtained 62% of associate degrees, 61% of bachelor’s degrees, 65% of master’s degrees, 56% of doctoral degrees, and 48% of first-professional degrees.

The enrollment and graduation rates of women in the prestigious, high income fields of law and medicine has just about reached parity with that of men. In medical school, 49% of both first-year students and graduates were women in 2005-2006 (Association of American Medical Colleges 2008). In

law schools, 47% of both first-year students and graduates were women in 2007-2008 (American Bar Association 2008).

The gender gap in obtaining postsecondary degrees is apt to be due in part to the greater gains in income (“the wage premium”) of a college education for women (Perna 2004). With the rise in divorce rates since the 1960s, women see a far greater need to be able to support themselves and their children (Golden et al. 2006).

Mental Health and Suicide

Boys suffer from far more emotional and behavioral problems than girls. Among students ages 4 to 17, almost 1 in 5 parents had talked to a health care provider or school staff about their sons’ emotional and behavioral problems, compared to just over 1 in 10 who had talked about their daughter’s problems (Simpson et al. 2008).

Suicide: The most compelling evidence of a “boy crisis” is the overwhelming gender gap in suicides. To take one’s own life signifies profound pessimism and psychological disturbance. The most recent information on suicide by sex and age group is available from the National Center for Health Statistics Vital Health Statistics System. The author analyzed suicide rates from 1995 to 2005. Males outnumbered females in completed suicides by astonishing rates, especially young men from ages 20 to 24, when they are beginning adult life.

- Among 20 to 24 year-olds, 20.7 suicides per 100,000 occurred among males compared to 3.5 per 100,000 among females.
- Among 15 to 19 year-olds, 12.5 suicides per 100,000 occurred among males compared to 2.8 among females.
- Among 10 to 14 year-olds, 1.9 suicides per 100,000 occurred among males compared to .7 among females.

Suicide Attempts: While completed suicides are far more common among males, ranging from 6 to 2 times as often in different age groups, suicide attempts, gestures, and ideation are more common among females (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System 2007). Female students in 2007 were more likely to make a plan about how they would commit suicide (females, 13%; males, 9%) and actually attempt suicide (females, 9%; males, 5%). Suicide ideation and plans are a common sign of depression, a serious psychological disorder where females predominate.

Depression: A psychiatric diagnosis of depression differs substantially from the common usage of the term—feeling miserable. The psychiatric diagnosis is “major depressive disorder” and includes such symptoms as loss of interest in pleasurable activities, crying, self-hatred, inability to make decisions, isolating one’s self, extremely low energy, and suicidal thoughts. Depression among adolescents is often a precursor or severe and debilitating depression in adulthood.

A recent review of the literature on depression concludes that girls experience depressive symptoms far more frequently than boys (Bailey 2007, 86). Twice as many teenage girls compared to boys are estimated to suffer from depression (Cicchetti and Toth 1998, 221).

Eating disorders are also far more common among girls, particularly perfectionist girls from middle-class families. The Risk Behavior Surveillance System (2007) found that vomiting and taking laxatives to control weight, for example, were three times as frequent among girls (females, 6%; males, 2%).

Conduct Disorders: The diagnosis of conduct disorder is based on antisocial behavior which includes physical aggression, extensive lying, stealing, destruction of property, and conflicts with authority. (Nationally representative studies of conduct disorders among American children could not be located, but sophisticated studies of conduct disorders among British and Australian children have been conducted.)

Boys predominate in conduct disorders by wide margins. In a study of 10,438 children, ages 5 to 15, drawn from the 1999 British Child Mental Health Survey, conduct disorders were found to be almost three times as frequent in boys compared to girls (Maughan et al. 2004,45). The most comprehensive and sophisticated study of sex differences in antisocial behavior followed a sample of 1,000 children from age 3 to 21 (Moffitt et al. 2001). Almost all girls who engaged in antisocial behavior fit the “adolescence limited” type, where the sex ration was 1.5 males to 1 female. Far more males fit the more serious “life-course-persistent type of antisocial

behavior where the sex ratio was 10 males to 1 female. Thus, the female form of conduct disorder was primarily a phenomenon of adolescence, while the male type was a harbinger of serious antisocial behavior such as adult criminality.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: This diagnosis is far more common among males with studies finding a gender gap ranging from 8 to 1 to 3 to 1 (Simpson et al. 2008, Scituito et.al. 247, James and Taylor 1990, 31). Boys are more than twice as likely to receive a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and be placed on medication (Center for Disease Control 2005). Such high rates of ADHD may be due to greater numbers of teacher referrals which reflect low tolerance for active males.

Premature deaths and injuries: Among children and young people from ages 5 to 24 in 1995 to 2005, males are far more likely to die from violence and virtually every other type of risky behavior—firearms, drowning, motor vehicles, motorcycles and bicycle deaths (National Center for Health Statistics 1995-2005, author's analysis). Among 20 to 24 year-olds, for example, 48.2 per 100,000 males compared to just 8.1 per 100,000 females died from violence. Among 15 to 19 year-olds, 28.6 per 100,000 males died from violence compared to 5.7 per 100,000 females.

Males of every age group also have higher rates of injury in every category except for self-harm (National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, 2006, author's analysis). The rate of nonfatal firearm injuries among 20 to 24 year-olds, for example, was 154.7 per 100,000 injuries among

young men compared to 16.8 among young women. Among 15 to 19 year-olds, the rate of such injuries was 126.2 per 100,000 among males compared to just 11.3 per 100,000 among females.

Delinquency and Arrests

In juvenile delinquency and in arrest rates for every type of offense with the exception of runaways, males predominate by wide margins (National Center for Juvenile Justice, author's analysis). Among males, the delinquency rate in 2004 was almost three times the rate for males compared to females.

Turning to specific offenses, arrests for violent crimes (including murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault) were 486.2 cases per 100,000 among males compared to 108.7 cases per 100,000 among females. Arrests for property crimes (including burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) were 1605.5 cases per 100,000 males compared to 87.1 per 100,00 among females. Arrests for drug abuse violations were 968.5 cases per 100,000 among males compared to 191.3 cases among females. Only in rates of runaways did females exceed males.

Conclusion

American boys are suffering serious problems. In education, these center in the areas of far lower literacy, lower school grades, lower engagement in school, higher dropout from school, higher rates of repeating

a grade, higher rates of emotional disturbance and learning disabilities and placement in special education, higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, and lower rates of postsecondary enrollment and graduation. In these domains, Black males are doing far worse than Black females.

Young men are far less prepared than 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.

At the top, girls are succeeding at about the same or higher rates than boys. Boys and girls take Advanced Placement tests in about the same numbers, although in traditionally gendered fields. Young women are far more likely than young men to be members of the National Honor Society in high school. Males and females are equal among Intel science winners, about equal in Rhodes scholarship winners, and represent a third of Siemens math, science and technology winners in recent years.

While some analysts argue that the fundamental issues are race and class, rather than sex, this is not the case. It is boys who are performing at strikingly lower levels in literacy. It is boys who have substantially higher dropout rates, placement in special education classes, disciplinary problems leading to suspension and expulsion, lower levels of school engagement, lower participation and graduation in postsecondary education, higher suicide rates, and higher rates of delinquency and arrests. Class and race amplify the levels of these problems. Black boys are particularly at risk.

Advocacy groups who proclaim either a “boy crisis” or a “girl crisis” are misguided. Neither sex is in crisis with the exception of Black boys and young men. The characteristic difficulties of girls, however, have been and are still being addressed. The difficulties of boys, however, which span far more areas and are far more serious, have been neglected. Both boys and girls face gendered problems which need policy attention.

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