

SANTA FE BOYS

TRIENNIAL PUBLICATION ABOUT THE SITUATION OF BOYS IN SANTA FE

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Connecting with Boys' Aggression

Last spring the Santa Fe Children's Museum was the scene of a series of panel discussions about connecting with boys in the family, in the schools and in the community. The most popular of the events was the first: "Connecting with Boys in the Family." Four panelists participated in front of a packed house which consisted mostly of parents of boys. The panelists were **Zonnie Gorman**, the project coordinator for the Circle of Light Navajo Education Project, **David Denedy-Frank**, a psychologist and the Director of the Pastoral Counseling Center, **Susan Bernstein**, a psychotherapist in private practice in Santa Fe, and **Rod Kaskalla** who works for the Eight Northern Pueblos on domestic violence prevention.

Many of the questions focused on the challenge of staying connected to boys in families, handling young male aggression, fatherlessness in boys' lives, and mother/young son issues around appropriate closeness. Following is a brief summary of several of the questions and answers.

What does connecting with boys mean?

Connecting with boys means helping them to relate with themselves. Children who are unconnected with themselves are also somewhat isolated in terms of their relationships with their parents, their siblings, their peers, and people in the neighborhood. They are often angry and do not know how to relate to their world productively. One of the questions

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At the Georgia O'Keeffe Art and Leadership Program for Boys, 2005, the participants created and filled in body outlines to explore the inner self. Above painting by Andres Anaya; below by Isaac Jay.



Missing: Males on College Campuses

By Wendy McElroy

Some researchers call them the "Lost Boys." They are the students you don't see on college campuses.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) tracks the enrollment in all degree-granting institutions by sex. From 1992 to 2000, the ratio of enrolled males to females fell from 82 to 78 boys for every 100 girls. The NCES projects that in 2007 the ratio will be 75 males for every 100 females; in 2012, 74 per 100.

In short, your son is statistically more likely than your daughter to work a blue-collar job.

Thomas Mortenson, senior scholar at the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, argues that leaving a generation of boys behind hurts women as well. In a *Business Week* cover story, Mortenson observed, "My belief is that until women decide that the education of boys is a serious issue, nothing is going to happen."

He believes some women feel threatened by even admitting the problem because "it will take away from the progress of women...What everyone needs to realize is that if boys continue to slide, women will lose too."

That realization still seems distant among educational experts, who continue to downplay the NCES statistic as well as other data that indicate schools are hurting boys.

Jacqueline King – author of the influential study "Gender Equity in Higher Education: Are Male Students at a Disadvantage?" – is an example. She found that 68 percent of college enrollees from low-income families were female; only 31 percent were male.

Yet King insists there is no "boy crisis" in education despite the fact that data from Upward Bound and Talent Search show a comparable gender gap. (These college-preparation programs operate in high schools and received \$312.6 million in 2005.) Of the students who receive benefits from those college-preparation programs, approximately 61 percent are girls; 39 percent are boys.

King's quoted explanation of the gender gaps: "women make up a disproportionate share of low-income students" who go on to college. Since low-income families presumably give birth to boys in the same ratio as the general population—worldwide the ratio is between 103 to 107 boys for every 100 girls—why are so few boys applying for assistance? A higher drop-out rate might be partly responsible, or boys may have no interest in higher education. King comments on the latter explanation: "male low-income students have some ability in this strong economy to make a decent living with just a high-school diploma."

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Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey Presents Disturbing Portrait of Santa Fe Boys

By Paul Golding
SFB Editor

In many ways the picture of male students in Santa Fe high schools that emerges from the recently released 2003 NM Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey for the Santa Fe Public School District High Schools is disturbing. Boys are both engaged in and victims of physical and sexual violence to a very high percent, and their suicide ideation and suicide attempts come close to the rates traditionally associated with girls. They are significantly more obese and less physically active than girls and, perhaps most distressing, the majority of boys in local public high schools show a negative "commitment to school."

This survey of New Mexican 9 -12 graders is carried out every other year by the NM State Departments of Health and Public Education. The current results are from a survey conducted during the last school year, 2003-04. These were released in several editions, at the end of 2004; one covers the entire state, another is available for Santa Fe County (which includes both the Santa Fe and the Pojoaque School Districts), and a third focuses on the high schools of the Santa Fe Public School District only. While the state and county results are available on line (www.health.state.nm.us), results for SF Public Schools can only be obtained through the school system.

The results are reported with a confidence interval or error bar which provides a way of knowing how statistically significant the responses between male and female students are. In the following presentation, *Santa Fe Boys* focused on those areas of the survey where boys responded significantly different from girls on the local test, at times using the statewide results to amplify the discussion.

RESILIENCY FACTORS: The factors that come under "resiliency" might temper the general problems that youth face from risky behaviors described below. However, in Santa Fe these resiliencies seem to have only exacerbated the situation for boys in at least two

important areas.

Low commitment to learning by boys is perhaps the most disturbing finding to come out of the survey. According to the results, only a minority of males, 38 percent, responded positively. In contrast to this lack of interest on the boys' part, 65 percent of females showed a positive "commitment to learning." The specific questions which 184 students from Santa Fe and Capitol High Schools answered were related to:

1. whether they tried hard to do their best work
2. whether they planned to go to college or some other school after high school
3. how frequently they came to class without paper or something to write with
4. how frequently they came to class without finishing homework

The multiple choice answers provided a continuum of responses which were then tabulated into a composite index using a statistical method called "factor analysis." The Santa Fe outcome was close to the statewide results for this set of questions, though on all the questions Santa Fe male and female students were further apart than in the state as a whole, where 64 percent of females and 44 percent of males showed a "commitment to learning."

These data add another dimension to the statistical picture of Santa Fe Public Schools as not being "boy friendly." Previous issues of the *Santa Fe Boys* newsletter have presented data showing that male students are more likely to be suspended (Winter, 2004), more likely to be in Special Education Classes and also to be retained in grade (Spring/Summer 2004) and more likely to perform poorly on standardized tests in Language Arts (Winter/Spring 2005).

Santa Fe Public Schools have been reluctant to address boys' under-performance in spite of the pressures of the Federal "No Child Left Behind" law. When asked how the school system viewed its role in ameliorating the low **commitment to learning** of its

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Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey at Santa Fe High Schools, 2003		
Issue	Female	Male
	Percent responding positively	
Demonstrates a commitment to learning	65	38
Has caring and supportive relationships with peers	83	62
Had a physical fight at school in past year	13	33
Physically hurt by boy/girlfriend	17	17
Ever physically forced to have sexual intercourse	12	11
Seriously considered suicide in the past year	22	15
Overweight (based on self reported data)	0	16
Watches TV 3 or more hours on a school day	21	49
Source: New Mexico Department of Public Health, et al. (2004). <i>2003 New Mexico Youth Risk & Resiliency Survey</i> .		

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An Interview with Children's Court Judge Barbara Vigil

Judge Vigil runs The Children's Court, which addresses all child abuse and neglect cases along with juvenile delinquency cases in the First District, which covers Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Los Alamos Counties. She is also the Chairperson of the Santa Fe Regional Juvenile Justice Board. She received her Bachelors of Accounting degree from New Mexico State University and her Juris Doctorate from the UNM Law School. Judge Vigil was first elected to the court in 2000. This interview was conducted in her chambers on July 7, 2005 by Paul Golding, editor of SFB.

SFB: Among the things I notice in your courtroom are (1) that most of the children who come before you are male, (2) almost all of those who are tethered, handcuffed, wearing jump suits and under guard are boys, and (3) that there are very few fathers accompanying children. That is, most of the children in your courtroom seem to be accompanied by their mothers or grandmothers. I wonder if you could comment on this last observation.

Judge Vigil: I think that it is unfortunate that in this day and age we have a lot of broken families and broken homes and what I see in the juvenile justice system is that most of the caretakers are the mothers. So yes, you are correct, more mothers appear than fathers with their children in the court for whatever the reason and I think a lot of the reason is because there are broken homes and divorces, and the mothers raise the children in many, many cases.

In general, you've made several points (in your question). One is that there are more boys in the juvenile justice system than girls, which is correct. There are more mothers raising children within the system—that is, come to court with their children—than fathers and that reveals two things to me. When you have a breakdown in the family, there is an impact on many children's behavior. I think it is very important that young men have positive male role models at the age when puberty begins. We see that a lot of the behaviors that result in juvenile offense are a result of a child, a young man or a boy, when he is turning into a young man, all of sudden rebels against his mother whom he was very close to as a young child. That I believe is a result of that boy not having another (family member of the) same gender—an uncle, a grandfather or brother—to begin to identify with and develop healthy male perspectives on how to be healthy in relationships. I think that's a huge cause (of juvenile justice problems).

SFB: Would you please describe the main purposes of the recently initiated Targeted Community Action Program (TCAP)?

Judge Vigil: This is Santa Fe's response to an increase in delinquency as a result of runaway behavior, domestic violence and drug abuse. And it's a collaboration between law enforcement, the courts, the schools, protective services, (and the) juvenile justice office to work together to identify those youth whose behavior starts to manifest greater risk to the community. So it's an effort to collaborate and try to defuse the escalation of that behavior (before) it becomes a greater risk to the child, the community and the family. (What we) want to do is defuse it. We want to put programs in place and be certain that that child is hopefully monitored for a period of time to make sure we get to the root of the problem in order to defuse the escalation of criminal behavior.

SFB: What is the role of remediation in TCAP?

Judge Vigil: Part of this process is also to help us identify what we may be lacking in support in treatment. So we might need a parents' program or an anti-domestic violence program for parents whose kids are in the juve-



Judge Barbara Vigil

nile justice system. It is a way to develop a kind of global system of care for families who are exhibiting these kinds of issues.

SFB: Should gender considerations be incorporated in TCAP?

Judge Vigil: Not any more than gender considerations are considered in general juvenile justice decision making. Gender is not a specific issue for TCAP. We are not trying to target one gender or another. So that to the extent there are more boys than girls in the system generally, I would expect there will be a greater number of boys who are TCAP-identified youth than girls.

SFB: Would it be fair to say that when it comes to meeting the needs of the children, the TCAP process does not see that there is much difference to meeting the needs of the girls as opposed to the boys?

Judge Vigil: I think there is a difference. I think we need more programs for boys because we have more boys in the system. We also need different programs

for each gender because we want to try to remove the influence of the other gender's participation in therapy on the other gender.

SFB: Is there something different that boys need in the TCAP process?

Judge Vigil: Absolutely, and hopefully the TCAP process will help us identify that. As I said earlier, how to identify better role models, how can we address the needs of boys in a meaningful way so that they don't become angry young men, how can we make them feel part of the community and loved by the community so that they don't feel isolated, and alone and desperate. So yes, through this process I hope we can identify specific gender programming for both genders that we can help facilitate to bring to Santa Fe.

SFB: Some say that we are especially hard on boys. I was once in a local juvenile justice meeting where a police officer said that when the police pick up a child for a crime, they are much more likely for the same crimes to take a girl home and to bring the boy in. Do you think this is true? If so, is this an example of prejudice in the system?

Judge Vigil: I don't know if they do. It wouldn't be surprising if they do. I wouldn't designate it as prejudice, but rather as people's biases on how young men and young women might be treated for the same behavior. Prejudice is a little too hard.

SFB: You are known for your role in the area of policy making with regard to the development and well-being of children and their families and this question has to do with that. Do you think that we as a society are as likely to see boys as needing satisfying emotional relationships and protection from abuse as we are girls?

Judge Vigil: Absolutely, certainly in my work. I see boys as vulnerable and needy as girls. The system should address their needs as much as they address girls' needs. (However,) I think we as a society can do a better job at addressing the emotional needs of boys. Definitely. I think we as a society are in a disconnect because we expect boys to behave in a certain manner and not to exhibit certain behaviors or needs and we haven't given them the support and the love and the guidance that they deserve in order to get to where we want them to be.

I think in many ways society tends to be more sympathetic and understanding and tolerant of girls' emotional needs and with boys I think society tends to be a little less tolerant of their emotional needs when they are teenagers. We tend to embrace girls' needs. It's easier and although girls' behaviors can be more extreme, I think it is easier for us to accept their behavior than that of boys.

Youth Risk Survey continued from page 2

male students, Tita Gervers, the director of the school system's office of Student Wellness said, "What's been missing is building relevance into education. That means teaching the kids how their education takes them to careers, how it gets them to college, why they have to take that 'stupid' class, etc. This matters more to boys. Girls, on the other hand, can commit themselves to something through relationship; they are more into getting the approval of adults and teachers. Also, by the time they get into high school, more boys are failing in core subjects. Boys also feel more pressure to make money and they probably have an equal commitment to getting a job or doing something outside of school as they do to learning."

Another important resiliency factor on which boys scored significantly lower than girls has to do with **peer relationships**. This factor included three questions about whether the student has a friend his/her own age who:

1. really cares about me
2. talks with me about my problems
3. helps me when I'm having a hard time

The students were able to respond along a continuum with "not true at all" at one end and "very much true" at the other. Using the factor analysis technique mentioned above, the boys' score was 62 and the girls' was 83, which means that boys, according to their own perception and by a significant number, report that they are less likely to have caring and supporting relationships with peers. When asked what she thought might cause such a significant difference in response, Tita Gervers said, "It would be seriously generalizing, but I think it's a natural perception that girls see themselves as being more in relationships than boys. As boys

get older, the social norm that boys can't be caring or loving, the 'Boy Code', reduces their numbers (in having significant relationships)."

RISK FACTORS: As their name implies, are those that put children at risk for mental or physical harm. These risk factors include health, safety, and behavioral issues.

Fighting—Boys are more likely to be in a physical fight at school and to carry a weapon. The data depicted here show the significant discrepancy between males and females on these questions.

Victimization of boys was reported as not significantly different than that which girls also experience. For example, both boys and girls equally report being physically hurt by a boy/girl-friend (17 percent) in the last 12 months and both reported about the same percentage of physically being forced to have sexual intercourse (11 percent).

Suicide—With regard to depression and suicide ideation, the statistics that had previously been reported, i.e. that girls are four times more likely to attempt suicide, are somewhat modified by the Santa Fe results and even more so by statewide findings on this survey question. The data here show the statewide results by grade and the Santa Fe results. Tita Gervers notes that this is a self-report and so raises the question about what kids consider suicide attempts. "The community minimizes the incidence of suicide. If you go out drunk driving and have a near miss, is that an attempted suicide? If you do something like cutting, that could be an attempted suicide depending how deep it was. The community often under reports suicide attempts." In general, she notes that most of the suicide attempts, depression and suicide ideation data for Santa Fe show a decrease over previous years.

Obesity—The data for Santa Fe Public Schools report that 15 percent of boys are likely to be obese--defined as scoring over 30 or more on the body weight index--while no girls are reported as obese. Statewide, the comparable statistics are: 15 percent of boys are obese as compared to 6 percent of girls. Dan Green of the State Department of Health feels these data for Santa Fe are "anomalous" while the data for the state probably reflect the situation fairly accurately. Tita Gervers says of the situation reported on the state-wide survey, "It's clear that we need to have physical education throughout elementary schools. Even at middle school level only one year of PE is provided. So that means that in the first nine years of school, the students get one year and for a boy that's even more critical."

Physical Activity—Boys are over twice as likely as girls (48 percent to 20 percent) to watch TV more than 3 hours a day. This is a result, Tita Gervers notes, that is consistent with the "social isolation" of the earlier question about peer relationships. "They don't have friends to hang with after school. They don't have anything else to do. It means that they are alone in a room, probably."

Conclusion—The overall picture is that boys are far more vulnerable to failure in Santa Fe than might be assumed. Referring to the case history of a boy whom Tita Gervers worked with, she concluded, "What struck me was how little people seem to have cared as he went from being an OK student to a juvenile delinquent in three years. The question that most occurred to me was whether his family understand what was happening." Perhaps the picture that emerges about boys from this data raises these questions for Santa Fe: do we understand what is happening and do we care?

The Promise and Peril of Single-Sex Public Education: Mr. Chips Meets Snoop Dogg

By Leonard Sax, PhD, MD

Can single-sex education really work in the diverse settings of American public schools, particularly in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods where academic excellence is least often found?

Single-sex education, long a fixture in the private sector, is moving into public schools. Five years ago, fewer than a dozen public schools in this country offered any kind of single-sex educational options. Today, at least 156 public schools offer single-sex classrooms, with many more planning to offer that format for the 2005-06 academic year. That's more than a tenfold increase in just five years.

Why the surge of interest in single-sex education? And should we perhaps be more

cautious, and more concerned about the possibility that single-sex education might reinforce harmful gender stereotypes? Also, most of the North American research on single-sex education has been conducted in private or parochial schools, which may evoke images from "Goodbye, Mr. Chips" and "Dead Poets Society." Can single-sex education really work in the more diverse setting of American public schools, particularly in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods where academic excellence is least often found? What happens when Mr. Chips meets Snoop Dogg?

Advocates of single-sex public education can point to several success stories. Seattle's Thurgood Marshall Elementary School used to be a failing school in one of that city's poorest

neighborhoods. Then the school's energetic principal, Benjamin Wright, reinvented the school as a dual academy: girls in all-girl classrooms, boys in all-boy classrooms. The results have been encouraging. Boys' test scores on the reading portion of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, or WASL exam have increased from the 10th percentile to the 66th percentile. Girls have benefited as well. In the year before the change, when the school was coed, not a single girl passed the math portion of the WASL. In the year after the change, 53 percent of the girls passed. And the improvement has not been limited to grades and test scores: student behavior has also improved. Discipline referrals dropped from 30 referrals per day to

fewer than two a day—“overnight,” according to Mr. Wright. All these improvements occurred without any additional funding, and without any change in class size. The program at Thurgood Marshall has now achieved consistently high results for four consecutive years.

Similar stories of improvement in neighborhood schools, with slightly less spectacular results, can be told about other public schools, such as the Africentric School in Columbus, Ohio, and Odyssey Middle School in the middle-class community of Boynton Beach, Fla.

But not all schools achieve good results when they venture into single-sex education. Newport Middle School in Newport, Ky., and Eagle Rock Junior High School in Idaho Falls, Idaho, abandoned single-sex classrooms after just one year. In each case, there was no significant improvement in grades or test scores; at Newport Middle School, discipline referrals for the boys soared. Becky Lenihan, a teacher at Newport Middle School with 14 years of teaching experience, said that she wrote up more boys for discipline problems during the one year the single-sex program was in place than in all of her previous years in education combined.

Why the difference? Why do some schools achieve good results when they begin offering single-sex classes, while other schools show no improvement or even show deterioration? Professional development appears to play a crucial role. At the schools where single-sex classrooms were not effective, teachers received no specific training in best practices for gender-specific teaching. Putting a teacher in a single-sex classroom for which she is not suited by temperament or training may be a recipe for failure.

But what are best practices for gender-specific teaching? Do girls and boys really learn differently?

Ten years ago, the fairest answer to those questions would have been: nobody knows. In the past decade, however, good research has demonstrated that there are, in fact, hard-wired differences in the ways girls and boys learn, and that there are evidence-based techniques that can exploit those differences.

One simple example derives from innate differences in the ability to hear. Baby girls have a more sensitive sense of hearing than baby boys have. Those differences get larger as kids get older. By the age of 12, the average girl has a sense of hearing at least seven times more sensitive than the average boy. We also know that girls are distracted by extraneous noise (another student tapping a pencil, for instance) at sound levels 10 times lower than those that distract boys. Most girls learn best in a quiet classroom, free of distractions. That's not true for many boys. If you've visited some

of the schools where boys' academic achievement has risen after the introduction of the single-sex format, the first thing you'll notice is how loud those classrooms are. "It was a scene of controlled chaos," said one reporter after visiting an all-boys classroom at a public school in Independence, Ky. The boys "shouted their answers and jumped up to share their work. . . . Despite the noise, it was clear the boys were learning."

Scientists now also have a better understanding of sex differences in brain development. Researchers at Virginia Tech used sophisticated electrophysiologic imaging of the brain to examine brain development in 508 normal children ranging in age from 2 months to 16 years. These researchers found that while the areas of the brain involved in language and fine-motor skills such as handwriting mature about four years earlier in girls than in boys, the areas of the brain involved in geometry and spatial relations mature about four years earlier in boys than in girls. When it comes to learning geometry, the brain of the average 12-year-old girl resembles the brain of the average 8-year-old boy. When it comes to writing poetry, the brain of the average 12-year-old boy resembles the brain of the average 8-year-old girl.

These researchers concluded that the various areas of the brain develop in "a different order, time, and rate" in girls, compared with boys. A curriculum that teaches the same subjects in the same sequence to girls and boys runs the risk of giving rise to 12-year-old girls who think they can't do geometry—and that they will never be any good at geometry—and 12-year-old boys who don't like to read or write.

I've just returned from Waterloo, Iowa, where I had the privilege of observing single-sex classrooms at three public schools. At Cunningham Elementary School, I watched how master teacher Jeff Ferguson led his class of 1st grade boys. The first thing that struck me on entering that class was how much it looked like a can of worms. Some of the boys were standing, some were sitting; another boy was twirling in circles. But all of them were, in their own way, paying close attention to Mr. Ferguson. When Mr. Ferguson told them to start on their assignment, they got right to work. One boy was so pleased with his work that he kissed his paper when he had finished.

Of course, later on in their schooling these boys will have to sit down and be quiet. But why should they have to do so in 1st grade? In a coed class, the boys have to sit, because boys jumping up and down will unfairly distract the girls. But in an all-boys class, the other boys seem unbothered by the boys who are jumping and twirling.

Experiences such as these have left me doubtful about the value of studies that merely compare "single-sex schools" in one category with "coed schools" in another category—studies such as the one launched last year by the U.S. Department of Education, scheduled for completion in the spring of 2006. Merely adopting the single-sex format, without appropriate professional development for teachers, is no guarantee of success. On the contrary, it often leads to failure.

The growing recognition of hard-wired gender differences in learning may explain another feature of the movement toward single-sex public education: Namely, almost all of the public schools that have launched such programs in the past five years are elementary or middle schools, not high schools. Before 2000, the most common rationale for single-sex education was to "minimize distractions." Today, educators are more likely to mention gender differences in how girls and boys learn as the principal justification for single-sex education. From that perspective, if you wait until high school, you've waited too long. You've got to catch kids at an earlier age, before they give up on school.

The growing recognition of hard-wired gender differences in learning may explain why single-sex programs are now being launched in the earlier grades.

We are a long way from having a well-established set of best practices for gender-specific education, however. One area that clearly needs further research concerns gender-atypical children. What about the shy boy who wilts in the noisy, boisterous classroom where most other boys thrive? What about the loud, rambunctious girl who disdains the quiet classroom most girls prefer? While there has been some research on pedagogical practices that work for gender-atypical children, this research is far from conclusive.

For that reason, and others, single-sex education in public schools must remain voluntary for the foreseeable future. Parents, in consultation with teachers, must make the final determination of whether the single-sex format is right for their child. In the public sector as in the private sector, allowing parents a choice between coeducation and single-sex education is likely to yield the best results for all children.

*Leonard Sax is the executive director of the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (<http://www.singlesexschools.org>) and the author of *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences* (Doubleday, 2005) (<http://www.whygendermatters.com>). This article first appeared in *Education Week*, March 2, 2005 and is reprinted here with the consent of Dr. Sax.*

is how to help these children connect. As a generalization, most boys need to relate in very active, physically direct and intense ways and this is different from the ways that most girls need to connect. So the question is: how can we help them to do this? We need to do physical things, to spend time outside, to engage in talk while walking or driving, for example. As parents it is essential that we figure out what our individual children need, and we also should be aware of how those needs change over time. For some, it is much easier to connect with younger children. As they get older, we may come to be at a loss as to how we relate to them. We have to listen more and respond more. We have to give center stage to them. It may not be easy for parents to see that teenage boys want active intense interaction as much as younger kids, but often they do.

The father of my son is not involved in his life and so I am concerned that my son does not have a male role model. Is this important and is there anything I can do to help with that?

Mothers are very important in every child's life, but male role models are important too. What we are talking about tonight is that, to some extent, boys do have a unique male energy and also have unique ways of relating to the world. Therefore it is healthier for boys if they have a male in their lives with whom they can share. But it has to happen in a way that makes sense to them and to you, the single mother. In general, boys who do not have a father in their lives will tend to gravitate to an older male—a teacher, neighbor or friend—and it's important that the parent be aware of who the older male is since not all are such good role models.

I have a six year old son who is very connected to me and very loving to me, but I am wondering if I should encourage him to be more independent; if that would be healthier.

Without knowing a lot of the personal details of the situation, a general rule is that if it feels healthy and comfortable to you, the parent, to maintain the close relationship and if that is where your son is in his own development, then time will take care of the separation naturally without your having to make a sudden break. It's important not to put children in situations they cannot handle emotionally. But it is also important that your son have other relationships with other adults and family members. Your relationship with him will change soon enough; he will want to be away from you without your having to push him away.

I have a five and half year old who cries a lot over things that seem very trivial to me. I find myself often saying to him to stop crying like a baby. I want him to toughen up a little bit and learn that some things are worth crying over and some things are not.

If only we knew which things were worth it and which were not! He's telling you that these things are worth crying over from his point of view. He is shedding whatever emotions he needs to shed by crying and so probably his crying is all right.

How can we, as parents, relate to the aggressive energy we so often experience from our sons? What can we do to embrace healthy aggression in boys?

Aggression and how it is addressed is very important. One way to deal with it is to engage it with exuberance, joy, fun and high energy. Fathers and grandfathers who wrestle with boys are a good example of this. Another is playing hero games on the computer or with action figures on the playground or simply by playing sports. It is also important that parents be aware of their own negative reactions to boys' aggressions. When boys are in a high energy active mode, watch for when you, the adult, experience your own negative reaction such as disdain, resentment, or any impulse to avoid this boy energy. Distinguish between what you feel and what is needed. It's important that we accept legitimate aggressive energy.

Can you give some examples of healthy aggression in a boy and aggression which is not healthy?

We should start by recognizing that boys are inherently aggressive; that expressing aggression is an essential part of development. Whether it is good or bad should not be based wholly on whether it presents difficulties for the adults and others around, though that must always be considered. It should also be assessed in terms of whether it is being used in order to promote growth, and whether its intensity and focus seem productive for the child.

For an example of healthy aggression which turns out to be not so healthy: a three year old who loudly protests the wrong kind of ice cream being offered when he expected something else is appropriately practicing asserting his will (ego development). However, if it goes on for ten minutes, it should be contained, as his aggressive energy by then probably has overwhelmed him, and he needs an adult to intervene and set a limit. Also, by then he has irritated everyone around him and the adults, having waited too long, are more likely to overwhelm and possibly shame the child in

their exasperation.

Here is another example of healthy aggression that may present problems for parents, especially dads. One dad of a two year old boy wanted to know if he should allow his son to hit him when he is angry at the dad's response to something or even when the boy is just angry at something else at the moment. The child was apparently inclined to kind of pummel the father with his fists, something many one and two year old boys seem to readily do with their dads. The behavior seems to have a natural ending point; however, in the moment it can be quite strong and requires focus by the father to catch, guide and protect the son's fists for his own and his son's safety, while at the same time allowing the boy to use all his power. This might also include a father talking to the child, reflecting back to him his feeling and the force of his energy and, if the child is too rough, perhaps saying, "oh, that hurts," leading toward a lowering of the aggression. Many dads can do this quite easily, not only without anger, but without smiling at the intensity and seriousness of this little being letting loose with his mightiest blows. For this the dad needs to be very focused and engaged in order not to make fun of his son and to allow this form of aggression to run its course. If the adult is not very present in this situation, boys can readily lose control. Admittedly, abetting this behavior may fly in the face of rules about "not hitting," and can be impossible for some adults to accept.

Here are some other examples of aggression that may need some fine tuning.

- A nine year old boy who likes helping others in reading because he is ahead is successfully being assertive through his help to others. However, when it carries over into demanding to be in charge of recess soccer and bossing others in the classroom, he needs an adult to intervene to help him define limits so he can integrate his experience of successful aggression.
- Likewise, a very competent, aggressive ten year old soccer player needs to be allowed to be who he is, within the rules of the game enforced by a referee, and under the watchful eye of a vigilant coach who carries the balance between the need for team cohesion and enhancing individual talents.

As a last thought on aggression: "good" aggression feels like high energy exuberance that has something of a life of its own in the minute. It invigorates and often infects others with a sense of possibility as well as wellbeing and doesn't leave others feeling spent, irritable and overwhelmed.

No Child Left Behind Tests Show Boys Increasingly Behind in Reading/Language Arts, and the Majority of Students Performing Poorly in Math & Science

The recently released results for the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment Tests (SBA) show Santa Fe boys continue to trail girls in reading and language arts as measured by the percent of each gender's reaching state levels of proficiency. The difference in test performance is fairly small in the elementary school years, growing to over 15 percent by the eighth grade.

In the SBA math test the difference between the two genders' ability to achieve the statewide standard of proficiency never exceeds 50 percent and

does not vary by more than five percent with the lead fluctuating between males and females.

In the science exam, boys exceed girls' performance. However, boy's overall performance declined markedly between the third grade and the eighth grade with a slight improvement by the ninth grade.

The state's SBA tests are used by the NM Public Education Department to comply with the requirement of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation to determine if schools are able to achieve "Annual Yearly Progress."

NM Standards Based Assessments: Percent of Santa Fe Students Meeting/Exceeding NM State Proficiency Levels in Grades 3 - 9, 2004-2005							
Reading & Language Arts	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
MALE	53	50	56	43	39	44	33
FEMALE	60	53	59	53	43	59	47
Math							
MALE	40	37	24	25	13	18	22
FEMALE	35	36	25	24	9	15	23
Science							
MALE	79	54	43	35	20	20	32
FEMALE	78	48	33	28	14	13	27

Source: Santa Fe Public Schools, Office of Research, Data, Accountability and Testing

Santa Fe Advanced Placement Science Classes Not Like Harvard in Gender Divide

When Harvard President Lawrence Summers suggested, in December 2004, that women's lagging progress in science and math might be due to the inherent differences in the sexes, he did not have local public high schools in mind. Here the school year 2004-2005 statistics

indicate that girls outnumber boys 10 to 2 in advanced placement chemistry and 17 to 9 in AP physics. The only AP subject where boys outnumber girls in Santa Fe and Capitol High Schools is calculus, with 7 boys to 6 girls.

Santa Fe High Schools Advanced Placement Enrollment, by Gender, 2004-2005		
Subject	Male	Female
Chemistry	2	10
Physics	9	17
Calculus	7	6
US History	15	29
European History	2	5
US Government	11	22
World Culture	18	21
Spanish	4	4
English 3	23	28
English 4	26	39

Source: Santa Fe Public Schools, Office of Public Information

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Missing Males, continued from page 1

In particular, she points to the construction industry.

King may be correct. The fact that low-income boys gravitate toward manual labor may account for some of the educational gender disparity. What is striking, however, is her apparent dismissal of that disparity as important. She seems to accept the reality that far fewer men than women enroll in college and that poor boys enter “the trades” while poor girls become professionals.

Imagine the gender ratio being reversed, with 78 girls for every 100 boys entering college. Imagine a generation of poor girls being relegated to low social status labor while tax funding assists poor boys. It is difficult to believe King would be similarly unconcerned.

Nevertheless, merely by acknowledging the situation, King shows far more balance than prominent voices, like the American Association of University Women, which still maintains there is a “girl crisis.”

Fortunately, researchers like Judith Kleinfeld of the University of Alaska see that boys are in distress. Kleinfeld—author of “The Myth That Schools Shortchange Girls”—states, “In my own college classes, I see a sea change in the behavior of young men. In the 1980s, the young men talked in my classes about the same as young women. I know because each semester I measured male and female talk. Now so many young men are disengaged that the more articulate, ambitious women dominate the classroom...and my office hours.”

Kleinfeld tried to trace the problem backward by interviewing high school students on plans for their future. She states, “The young women almost always have a clear, realistic plan – go to college, have a career, often directed

toward an idealistic goal about improving the environment.” This clarity of vision was generally absent in young men.

Among those who acknowledge the “boy crisis,” explanations vary and may all be true. Some point to the “feminization” of education over the last decade, which occurred largely in response to a perceived need to encourage girls. But, if boys and girls learn differently, then the changes may be placing boys at a disadvantage.

Others point to explicitly anti-male attitudes—that is, political correctness—within education. The website Illinois Loop lists “22 School Practices That May Harm Boys.” One of them: “Modern textbooks and recommended literature often go to extremes to remove male role models as lead characters and examples.”

Kleinfeld points speculatively to the impact of increased divorce and fatherless homes on the self-image of boys who lack a positive male role-model.

Approximately 40 percent of American children now live in homes without their own biological father.

Ultimately, explanations of and solutions to the “boy crisis” will come from exploring a combination of factors. My solution: privatize education and place it under the control of parents or adult students.

The first step to any solution, however, is to acknowledge there is a problem. We are not quite there yet.

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