

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Boys: Victims of the Feminist Revolution

That young men and even young boys are confused about who they are, what is acceptable behavior for them and what exactly it means to be an adult male is now a given in American culture. This confusion is an unintended consequence of the feminist revolution in our culture, and two authors have been documenting this crisis for several years now. They are making a compelling case that American culture is failing its boys and that the impact of this failure is devastating. Let me explain.

- First is Christina Hoff Sommers. In a recent article, Sommers documents what is happening to boys in our educational system. Citing an article in *The Journal of Human Resources*, she demonstrates that teachers of early classes as early as kindergarten factor good behavior into grades—and girls, as a rule, comport themselves far better than boys. In fact, this study also shows that boys across all racial groups and in all major subject areas (from kindergarten through fifth grade) received lower grades than their test scores would have predicted. Sommers summarizes: “The scholars attributed this ‘mismanagement’ to differences in ‘noncognitive skills’: attentiveness, persistence, eagerness to learn, the ability to sit still and work independently. As most parents know, girls tend to develop these skills earlier and more naturally than boys.” Since no study has demonstrated so persuasively that the well-known gender gap in school grades begins so early and is almost entirely attributable to differences in behavior, I believe it is worthwhile for me to summarize other salient findings from this study and from Sommers’s work:
 1. The researchers found that teachers rated boys as less proficient even when the boys did just as well as girls on tests of reading, math and science. If the teachers had not accounted for classroom behavior, the boys’ grades, like the girls’, would have matched their test scores.
 2. As the cultural biases against women began to evaporate over the last several decades, the educational and occupational playing fields have leveled in American culture. Women now account for roughly 60% of associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees, and have begun to outpace men in obtaining Ph.D.'s.
 3. Sommers argues that boy-averse trends like the decline of recess, zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, the tendency to criminalize minor juvenile misconduct and the turn away from single-sex schooling have harmed boys and their development as men. Further, she maintains, as our schools have become more feelings-centered, risk-averse, collaboration-oriented and sedentary, they have moved further and further from boys’ characteristic sensibilities.

4. Sommers quotes Christopher M. Cornwell of the University of Georgia: “If grade disparities emerge this early on, it’s not surprising that by the time these children are ready to go to college, girls will be better positioned.”
 5. Improving the performance of black, Latino and lower-income kids requires particular attention to the boys. Black women are nearly twice as likely to earn a college degree as black men. At some historically black colleges, the gap is astounding: Fisk is now 64% female; Howard 67%; Clark Atlanta 75%. An examination of the Boston public schools recently showed that for the graduating class of 2007, there were 197 black girls for every 100 boys planning to attend college; among Hispanics, the ratio was 175 girls for every 100 boys; and among whites, 153 girls for every 100 boys.
 6. Sommers suggests the following initiatives to help improve boys’ educational achievement: More boy-friendly assignments, more recess, campaigns to encourage male literacy, more single-sex classes, and more male teachers.
 7. Sommers concludes her article with this wise counsel: “I became a feminist in the 1970s because I did not appreciate male chauvinism. I still don’t. But the proper corrective to chauvinism is not to reverse it and practice it against males, but rather basic fairness. And fairness today requires us to address the serious educational deficits of boys and young men. The rise of women, however long overdue, does not require the fall of men.”
- Second is Kay M. Hymowitz. She uses the term “pre-adult” to define a new cultural development or even a new stage in human development between the teen years and adulthood. [Other sociologists, such as Christian Smith, have called this stage emerging adulthood.] Here are some of Hymowitz’s observations about pre-adulthood, based on her new book, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has turned Men into Boys*.
 1. Among pre-adults, women are the first sex. They graduate from college in greater numbers (among Americans, ages 25-34) and 34% of women now have a bachelor’s degree compared with 27% of men. They also have higher GPAs.
 2. Pre-adults do not know what is to come next. For them, marriage and parenthood come in many forms, or can be skipped altogether. In 1970, just 16% of Americans age 25 to 29 had never been married; today an astonishing 55% have never been married in this age group. In America, the mean age for the first marriage is now 30.
 3. “Pre-adulthood has also confounded the primordial search for a mate. It has delayed a stable sense of identity, dramatically expanded the pool of possible spouses, mystified courtship routines and helped to throw into doubt the very meaning of marriage.”
 4. Meanwhile, men go on struggling with an acceptable adult identity. Women are moving ahead in an advanced economy where husbands and fathers are now optional. The qualities of men that are needed for them to fulfill their role—fortitude, stoicism, courage

and fidelity—are obsolete, even a little embarrassing. This healthy role has now been substituted with the likes of Hollywood characters such as Jim Carrey, Will Farrell, Adam Sandler and Owen Wilson: Frat boys who have never grown up and are enthralled with sex, NASCAR and beer.

5. The number of single men is therefore growing in our culture. They are “more troubled and less successful than men who deliberately choose to become husbands and fathers. So we can be disgusted if some of them continue to live in rooms decorated with ‘Star Wars’ posters and crushed beer cans and to treat women like disposable estrogen toys, but we should not be surprised.”

God has given humanity clear teaching on the respective differences between a man and a woman. The “feminization” of American culture has produced disastrous results for boys and therefore for men. Few would doubt that correctives within culture were needed to foster greater equality and equality of opportunity for women—but not at the expense of men (and boys). In God’s eyes, men and women are equal (see Genesis 1:26ff; Galatians 3:28 and 1 Peter 3:17). But He created them differently. As Sommers and Hymovitz have demonstrated (unintentionally I suspect), our educational system is ignoring those created differences. When that teaching is ignored, dysfunction and catastrophe follow—a perfect description of much of American culture in 2013.

See Christian Hoff Sommers in the *New York Times* “Review” section (3 February 2103) and Hymowitz’s essay in the *Wall Street Journal* (19-20 February 2011).