

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President Emeritus

Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska

12 October 2013

Boys and Education: We Have Lost Our Way

Over the years, one of the major themes of *Issues in Perspective* has been that God created the human race in two grand streams—male and female—and that each stream is totally different. Any attempt at a unisex movement or any attempts to make boys behave like girls or girls like boys are doomed to failure. God’s design for the human race is clear; we ignore this design to our peril as a civilization.

Currently, there is a growing body of evidence indicating the tragedy of what is occurring to boys and men in American culture. The implications of this tragedy are becoming more apparent. Several comments:

- First, Christina Hoff Sommers, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, writes that “American boys across the ability spectrum are struggling in the nation’s schools, with teachers and administrators failing to engage their specific interests and needs. This neglect has ominous implications not only for the boy’s social and intellectual development but for the national economy, as policy analysts are just beginning to calculate.” We live in a knowledge-based economy and school achievement is a cornerstone for success in this economy. Sommers demonstrates that women are adapting; men are not. In the federal government and in much of education, there is little concern about this fact. For example, women now earn 62% of all associate’s degrees, 57% of all bachelor’s degrees, 60% of all master’s degrees and 52% of all doctorates. Sommers observes that “boys of all ethnic groups and social classes are far less likely than their sisters to feel connected to school, to earn good grades, or to have high academic aspirations. . . In the 1980s, nearly the same number of top male and female high school students said they planned to pursue a postgraduate degree (13% of boys and 15% of girls). By the 2000s, 27% of girls expressed that ambition, compared with 16% of boys. During the same period, the gap between girls and boys earning mostly A’s doubled—from three to five percentage points.” Sommers also demonstrates the direct economic consequences of this gap in “education engagement:”
 1. For men ages 25 to 64 with no high school diploma, median annual earnings have declined 66% since 1969.
 2. For men with only a high school diploma, wages declined 47%.
 3. Millions of male workers have been “unhitched from the engine of growth.”
 4. The College Board delivered this message in 2011: “Nearly half of young men of color age 15 to 24 who graduate from high school will end up unemployed, incarcerated or dead.”
 5. In the Boston Public Schools, the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University found for the class of 2007, among blacks and Hispanics, there were 186

females for every 100 males attending a four-year college or university. For white students—153 females for every 100 males.

- Second, what then should we do? At bottom, we must acknowledge what God declared from the beginning—boys and girls are different! In much of the federal government and certainly in much of public education, it is nearly impossible to discuss the topic of sex differences. Sommers writes “Many gender scholars insist that the sexes are cognitively interchangeable and argue that any talk of difference only encourages sexism and stereotyping. In the current environment, to speak of difference invites opprobrium, and to advocate for male-specific interventions invites passionate and organized opposition. Meanwhile, one gender difference refuses to go away: Boys are languishing academically, while girls are soaring.” While the US remains at best indifferent to the academic plight of boys, Great Britain, Australia and Canada have not: They see this disparity as a national threat. A nation with too many languishing males risks losing its economic edge. Hence, these nations have established dozens of boy-focused commissions, task forces, and working groups. “Using evidence and not ideology as their guide, officials in these countries don’t hesitate to recommend sex-specific solutions.” To illustrate the absurdity of ideology trumping evidence, recent research demonstrates that enrollment in high school vocational programs has dramatic effects on students’ likelihood of graduating from high school—especially boys. But the effort to engage more boys in career and technical programs faces a formidable challenge. In a series of scathing reports, the National Council of Women and Girls Education (NCWGE—a 38-year old consortium that today includes the AAUW, the National Women’s Law Center, the ACLU, NOW, the Ms. Foundation and the NEA) has condemned high school vocational training schools as hotbeds of “sex segregation.” The reality today is that due to successful lobbying by NCWGE groups, high school and college career technical training programs face government sanctions and loss of funds if they fail to recruit and graduate sufficient numbers of female students into “non-traditional” fields. Sommers writes, that “over the years, untold millions of state and federal dollars have been devoted to recruiting and retaining young women into fields like pipefitting, automotive repair, construction, drywall installing, manufacturing, and refrigeration mechanics. But according to *Statchat*, a University of Virginia workforce blog, these efforts at vocational equity ‘haven’t had much of an impact.’ Despite an unfathomable number of girl-focused programs and interventions, ‘technical and manual occupations tend to be dominated by men, patterns that have held steady for many years.’” In March 2013, NCWGE continued this absurdity by releasing a report urging Congress and other political agencies to provide more funding and challenge grants to help states close “the gender gaps in career and technical education (CTE); mandate that every state install a CTE gender equity coordinator; and impose harsher punishments on states that fail to meet ‘performance measures’—i.e., gender quotas.”

The more I study developments such as this in American culture, the more convinced I am of the truthfulness of the bedrock propositions of genuine, biblical Christianity: God has revealed quite clearly His actions as the Creator, His values and morals as a holy, righteous God, and His ethical standards by which we are to live. As humans, we have the freedom to ignore or even flaunt those propositions, but then we must accept the consequences. God created the human race male and female; and men and women are completely different, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. That is why imaginative play among little boys and girls is so radically

different. That is why boys enjoy rough sports and girls do not. That is why women excel in some fields and men in others. But American culture is now driven by an ideology that seemingly ignores, indeed even mocks, gender differences. The result today is that boys and men are suffering the consequences of this ideology. Nations such as Great Britain, Canada and Australia, to some extent even more secular than America, are waking up to how serious this gender inequity really is—and are doing something about it. America is caught in the ideological morass of NCWGE and our nation is hurting because of it. We remain blinded to the obvious, believing a lie and calling it wise!

See two important articles by Christina Hoff Somers: “How to Make School Better for Boys” in www.theatlantic.com (16 September 2013) and “School Has Become Too Hostile to Boys” in www.time.com (20 August 2013).