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"A must-read for any parent of boys."—**DR. MEHMET OZ**, Professor and Vice Chairman,  
New York Presbyterian Hospital, Columbia University

# boys adrift

**THE FIVE FACTORS DRIVING THE GROWING EPIDEMIC OF  
UNMOTIVATED BOYS AND UNDERACHIEVING YOUNG MEN**

video games • teaching methods  
prescription drugs • environmental toxins  
devaluation of masculinity

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD FROM THE AUTHOR

**Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D.**

Author of *Why Gender Matters*

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### THE FIRST FACTOR

## Changes at School

*Your son is five years old.*

*He's smart.*

*He's friendly.*

*But at your first conference with his kindergarten teacher,  
the teacher tells you that your son is fidgety and has trouble sitting still.*

*"He's not doing as well as he could be.*

*And it's very distracting to the other children," she says.*

*She suggests*

*that you may want to have him tested for ADHD.\**

*"There was a boy in my class just like your son, last year,"*

*she says reassuringly.*

*"He was bright, just like your son, but he had trouble doing what was  
expected of him.*

*We all knew he could do better.*

*He was such a smart boy.*

*Just like your son.*

*The pediatrician suggested **Adderall**.*

*I'll tell you something, going on **Adderall** made a world of difference  
for that boy.*

*It was like night and day.*

*He became a really excellent student."*

*"But I don't think my son needs to be on medication," you say.*

*"And— he's only five years old."*

*"Well, we could just put him in the play group,"  
the teacher says.*

*"Those are the kids who aren't ready to learn to read and write.*

*Every child is different, we understand that.*

*In the play group,*

- *he could run around,*
- *jump up and down,*
- *play with blocks,*

*without distracting the other children."*

*"The play group?"*

*you say.*

*"But I thought the play group was for slow learners.*

*My son is not a slow learner."*

\*ADHD = attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

*"I agree,"*

*the teacher says.*

*"That's why I think you should have him tested."*



Two decades ago, a pastor named [Robert Fulghum](#) published a slim book of essays entitled

### *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.*

[Pastor Fulghum](#)'s book stayed on the *New York Times* best-seller list for nearly two years, selling over fifteen million copies.

The title essay emphasized the key lesson he himself had learned in kindergarten, namely, to “live a balanced life,” by which he meant that every day one should

- Learn some and
- think some and
- draw and
- paint and
- sing and
- dance and
- play and
- work every day some.

Sounds nice.

[Pastor Fulghum](#) was drawing on recollections of his own kindergarten experience in 1942–43 along with the kindergarten experiences of his four children in the 1960s and early 1970s.

But even while the pastor's book was selling millions, celebrating the kindergarten he and his children had known, kindergarten was changing.

[Pastor Fulghum](#) had written about how children in kindergarten actually could

“... draw and paint and sing and dance and play. . . .”

But that's no longer true.

Today, most kids *don't* “draw and paint and sing and dance and play” in kindergarten.

They learn to read and write.

As the superintendent of my own school district wrote six years ago, the twenty-first-century kindergarten needs to be “rigorous” and “academic.”<sup>1</sup>

Traditional kindergarten activities such as finger painting and duck-duck-goose have been largely eliminated, replaced by a relentless focus on learning to read and write.

“Kindergarten” isn't kindergarten anymore, as that parent in

[Calgary](#) correctly observed in the opening of [CHAPTER 1](#).

Kindergarten has become first grade.

In 2008, the kindergarten curriculum at most North American schools, both public and private, looks very much like the first-grade curriculum of 1978.

Nowadays it's all about learning to read and write.

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## Why Is That a Problem?

In 2007, a distinguished team of twelve neuroscientists, based primarily at the [NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH \(NIMH\)](#) in [Bethesda, Maryland](#), published a remarkable account of the development of the human brain.

Since the early 1990s, these investigators have been doing MRI scans on the brains of young children.

- These scientists are watching the brain develop.
- The same children return to the laboratory every year or two to be scanned.
- This remarkable study is the only major ongoing project to document how the brain develops in a particular child over a period of many years.<sup>2</sup>
- The team's 2007 report was their most definitive account yet, providing detailed information on the brain development of children and young people three through twenty-seven years of age.
- Some of the participants have been in the study for as long as twelve years.
- Among the most striking findings in the report are the differences in the developmental [TRAJECTORIES](#) of girls compared with boys.

The researchers found that the various regions of the brain develop in a different sequence and tempo in girls compared with boys.

In some regions of the brain, such as the  
**PARIETAL gray matter**

—>

the region of the brain most involved with **integrating information from different sensory modalities**—  
girls and boys develop along similar trajectories, but **the pace of the girls' development is roughly two years ahead of the boys'**.

In other regions, such as  
**TEMPORAL gray matter**

—>

the region of the brain most involved with **spatial perception** and **object recognition**—  
girls and boys develop along similar trajectories, but **the pace of the boys' development is slightly faster than the girls'**.

In yet other regions, such as  
**occipital gray matter**

—>

visual cortex—  
the trajectories of brain development are remarkably different, with **no overlap between girls and boys**.

In this region of the brain, **girls between six and ten years of age show rapid development, while boys in the same age group do not**.

After fourteen years of age, this area begins to diminish slightly in  
girls

—>

**the amount of brain tissue in this region actually shrinks in girls over fourteen—**  
**while in boys over fourteen this area is growing at a rapid pace.**<sup>3</sup>

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It's important to remember that **brain maturation is often associated with a pruning, or reduction, in the size of brain regions**.

*The fact that one region of the brain is shrinking in teenage girls while the same region is growing in teenage boys doesn't mean that boys are smarter than girls, or that girls are smarter than boys.*

- It just means that girls and boys are different.
- Differences do not imply an order of rank.
- Oranges and apples are different, but that doesn't mean oranges are better than apples.
- Ovaries and testicles are different, but that doesn't mean that ovaries are better than testicles.



The findings of the group at NIMH were not completely unexpected.

Previous studies had already shown that the various regions of the brain develop in a different sequence and tempo in girls compared with boys.

Indeed, studies using functional rather than anatomical parameters have suggested that **sex differences in the pace of brain development may be even greater** than those suggested by the NIMH study.<sup>4</sup>

**It now appears that the language areas of the brain in many five year-old boys look like the language areas of the brain of the average three-and-a-half-year-old girl.**<sup>5</sup>

- Have you ever tried to teach a three-and-a-half-year-old girl to read?
- It's frustrating, both for the teacher and for the girl.
- It's simply not developmentally appropriate, to use the jargon of early childhood educators.
- You're asking her to do something that her brain is just not yet ready to do.

Trying to teach five-year-old boys to learn to read and write may be just as inappropriate as it would be to try to teach three-year-old girls to read and write.

*Timing is everything,  
in education  
as in many other fields.*

化學反應也需要花時間  
不只有機化學鍵，形成非有機化學鍵也需要對位

It's not enough to teach well.

- You have to teach well to kids who are ready to learn, kids who are developmentally “ripe” for learning.
- Asking five-year-old boys to learn to read
  - when they'd rather be running around or
  - playing games—may be the worst possible introduction to school, at least for some boys.

Here's why.

Imagine visiting a twenty-first-century kindergarten

—>

which is to say, a kindergarten where children are expected to do what first-graders were expected to do thirty years ago, a kindergarten where children are expected to sit for hours doing paper-and-pencil exercises.

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In the typical kindergarten you will often find that the teacher has divided the children into two groups.

- Over here, with the teacher, are the kids who are ready to learn to read and write: mostly girls, one or two boys.
- Over there, on the other side of the room, are the other kids: the kids whom the teacher has (correctly) recognized are *not* ready to learn to read and write. That group is mostly boys, with one or two girls.

There's one thing five-year-old girls and boys are equally good at: figuring out who's in Dumb Group.

悲劇啊！

- By November, the kids in Dumb Group are aware of their inferior status,
- and they don't like it.

“I hate school,”  
Brett tells Mom.

“Why, honey?”  
Mom asks.

“I just hate it. It's stupid.”

After further questioning and coaxing,  
Mom finally extracts what sounds like the real explanation.

“That teacher doesn't like me.  
That teacher hates me,”  
Brett tells Mom.

Mom gets on the job.

- She's going to figure out whether the teacher really doesn't like Brett, and if so, why.
- She gets permission to visit the kindergarten.
- But after two visits, she can't find a shred of evidence to support Brett's accusation.
- The teacher is friendly and encouraging to all the students.
- In fact she seems genuinely fond of Brett.

“Brett isn't ready to sit still for hours at a stretch,  
so we don't ask him to,”  
the teacher explains to Mom.

所以要按能力分班？  
那還是有放牛班的問題  
誰願意去教放牛班？  
付多少薪資？

“The reading drills can be awfully dull for some of the kids.  
We understand that.  
So we let Brett play in the play corner with the other boys.”

The teacher's intentions are good.

But most five-year-olds are keenly aware of their status in the eyes of the adults.

- A boy whom the teacher has relegated to the Play Group (a.k.a. the Dumb Group) may think the teacher doesn't like him.
- He's figured out that the smart kids are in the Accelerated Reading Group.
- He wasn't chosen to be in the elite group.
- He knows that the teacher was responsible for that choice.
- So he may decide that the teacher doesn't like him.
- That's unfair and illogical, but he is not a grown-up.
- He's a five-year-old child, and five-year-olds are often illogical.

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Many five-year-olds, whether girls or boys, are likely to conclude that the teacher likes the kids in the Smart Group better than she likes the kids in the Dumb Group.

所以重點應該是要教小孩子不這樣想啊！  
應該要多些老師啊！

所以說來說去，就是需要以前師徒制，私塾式，手把手的教  
意思就是  
教育資源永遠不夠供應，提供頂級服務啊！

Professor **Deborah Stipek**, dean of the school of education at Stanford University, has found that kids form opinions about school early.

Imagine asking a boy who has just finished kindergarten two questions:

- “Do you like school?”
- Do you think the teacher likes you?”

I asked Brett those questions.

He answered:

- “I don't like school.
- I hate school.
- And that teacher hates me.”

Once that young boy has **DECIDED** that the teacher doesn't like him, Stipek and others have found, he's likely to generalize that belief to other teachers and other classrooms.<sup>6</sup>

所以需要教小孩子不這樣想啊！  
那以前西部拓荒，小學一到六年級全擠一班又怎麼上？  
臺灣山上學校全校只有十人，又要怎麼上？  
西式學校把所有的人當工廠女工來教，就已經種下劣果啦！

He is likely to go to school next year with a negative attitude.

When he's put in Dumb Group again (which is almost inevitable, because the kids in Smart Group now have a year's head start on him), he may decide that school just isn't for him.

“School is dumb,”  
he may say.  
And he means it.

Return four years later and ask him the same questions.

Brett is now nine years old.

Ask him:

- “Do you like school?”
- Do you think the teacher likes you?”

The answers you get will be the same:

- “I hate school.
- And all the teachers hate me.
- Except for Mr. Kitzmiller, the gym teacher.”

Critics of American education often point out, quite accurately, that the United States spends more money per pupil than most other developed countries and yet accomplishes less.

On the international test most widely administered around the world, the United States ranks at #25, well below countries whose per-pupil spending on education is much lower, such as

- Hungary (#23),
- Poland (#21), the
- Czech Republic (#15) and
- Finland (#1).<sup>7</sup>

Finland, incidentally, consistently scores at or near the very top of all of these international rankings.

## What's the most distinctive characteristic of public education in Finland?

Very simple:

- Children in Finland don't begin any formal school until they are seven years old.<sup>8</sup>
- Nevertheless, by the time they're teenagers, Finnish children are beating American children by large margins on the same test.
- In the latest round of testing, for example, the average fifteen-year-old in Finland scored 545 in reading; fifteen-year-old American students taking the same examination scored 490.
- In problem solving, the average Finnish teenager scored 547, while the average American teenager scored a dismal 480.<sup>9</sup>

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## How could starting kids in school two years later lead to superior performance when those children become teenagers?

Simple.

- If kids start school two years later and are taught material when they are developmentally prepared to learn, kids are less likely to hate school.
- If kids don't hate school, it's easier to get them to learn.
- If kids do hate school, as many American boys do, then the teacher is starting out with a major handicap before even stepping into the classroom.

Waiting until seven years of age to begin the formal, "rigorous," reading and writing curriculum of today's kindergarten might reduce or ameliorate a significant fraction of the problems we see with boys and school.

For many boys, there's a huge difference in readiness to learn between age five and age seven

—>

just as there's a huge difference in readiness for a girl between three and five.

## Hold Him Back So He'll Get Ahead

Many parents have figured out that the accelerated pace of today's kindergarten is not a good match for their five-year-old son.

Particularly in affluent neighborhoods, it's become common for parents to enroll their son in kindergarten one year later than the district would normally enroll that child; it's not unusual to find that half the boys, or more, are enrolled in kindergarten at age six rather than at age five.

錢少的家長想要把孩子早早塞入學校，所以自己可以騰出時間去賺錢

In low-income neighborhoods

—>

where many working parents simply can't afford to keep their children home another year—

typically fewer than 3 percent of boys will be held back.<sup>10</sup>

所以還是卡在因材施教的問題上啊！

One reason that boys from low-income neighborhoods are doing so much worse in school than boys from more affluent neighborhoods, beginning in early elementary education, may be that the boys from more affluent neighborhoods are starting school at a later age, on average, than the boys from the poor neighborhoods.

Addressing the issue of holding boys back, Dana Haddad, director of admissions for an exclusive private elementary school in Manhattan, says,

"It's become a huge epidemic."

All the parents at Ms. Haddad's school are waiting a year to start their boys in kindergarten; some are even holding their girls back, just to be on the safe side.

"The gift of a year, that's what I always say to my parents," says Betsy Newell, director of another prestigious private elementary school in Manhattan.

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“*The gift of a year is the best gift you can give a child.*”<sup>11</sup>

- I published a paper six years ago suggesting that simply starting boys in kindergarten one year later than girls might prevent many boys from deciding, very early, that school isn’t for them.<sup>12</sup>
- *Doing something earlier doesn’t necessarily mean that you will do it any better.*
- In fact, it may mean that you do it less well in the long run.
- The pace of education has accelerated, but boys’ brains don’t grow any faster now than they did thirty years ago.
- That’s one part of the first factor leading boys to disengage from school.

But schools have changed in other ways as well.

To understand how these other changes might affect boys differently from girls, you need to understand how girls’ motivation to succeed in school so often differs from that of boys.

## What Are Little Girls Made Of?

The first question we will try to answer is why the acceleration of the early elementary curriculum might affect boys differently from the way it affects most girls.

As we’ve seen,

Reason #1 is:

- different regions of the brain develop in a different sequence and tempo in girls compared with boys.
- As a result, most five-year-old girls are better able to adapt to the rigorous academic character of kindergarten than five-year-old boys are.
- Even for those girls, I don’t think that the accelerated curriculum of today’s kindergarten is best

—>

I believe it leads ultimately to a narrowing of girls’ educational horizons—

but it is less likely to alienate them from school altogether.

Many five-year-old girls are able to do what the kindergarten teacher wants them to do.

- They can sit still.
- They can be quiet for a few whole minutes without interrupting or jumping up and down.
- They are more likely to possess the fine motor skills required to write the letters of the alphabet legibly and neatly.

Reason #2

- has to do directly with the question of motivation, the huge blind spot of contemporary educational psychology
- >
- about which I’ll have more to say in just a moment.
- Girls and boys differ in terms of THEIR DESIRE TO PLEASE THE TEACHER.
  - Most girls are at least somewhat motivated to please the teacher.
  - Many boys don’t share that motivation.

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Before we consider the research on this gender difference, let me share with you a story that a middle school teacher told me.

It was the first day of school.

She was greeting her homeroom students for the first time.

“Good morning, everybody.

My name is Ms. Jackson,”

she said.

“I’d like to welcome all of you to eighth grade.

I’ll be your homeroom teacher.”

She turned to write some information on the whiteboard at the front of the room.



One of the boys,  
Jonathan,  
took the small stack of textbooks from his desk and  
dumped them on the linoleum floor, making a loud noise.

Some of the boys giggled.

Ms. Jackson turned, startled.

She saw the books scattered on the floor next to Jonathan's desk.

“Aw geez,  
I'm sorry,  
Ms. Jackson,”  
Jonathan said, slowly and insolently.  
“I had no idea whatsoever that  
those books would make such a racket.”

Three boys at the back of the room laughed.

Ms. Jackson wasn't sure what to say.

But Emily,  
the girl sitting next to Jonathan,  
was not amused.  
“Jonathan, you are such a dweeb,”  
Emily said.  
“Can't you at least wait a day or two  
to show us what a total loser you are?”  
好勇敢啊！

When I heard this story, it brought to mind a recent [study of chimpanzees](#) living in the jungles of Tanzania.

- Three anthropologists
  - [Eliza beth Lonsdorf](#),
  - [Lynn Eberly](#), and
  - [Anne Pusey](#)—
- spent four years watching chimpanzees in their natural habitat in the wild.
- These chimpanzees have their own particular way of doing things.
- For example, they like to “fish” for termites.
- Adult chimps break a branch off a tree, cut the branch to the desired length, strip the leaves off the branch, stick the branch down into a termite mound, wait a minute or two, and then carefully pull the stick back out for a yummy snack of fresh termites.
- [Lonsdorf](#), [Eberly](#), and [Pusey](#) found consistent sex differences in how young female and young male chimps learn from their elders.
- Girl chimps pay close attention to the adult (usually a parent) who is showing them the procedure.
- Girl chimps then do just what the adult showed them: she breaks off a branch, cuts it to the same length as the adult had done, strips the leaves as the adult had done, and so forth.
- But the young males ignore the grown-ups; they prefer to run off and wrestle with other young male chimps, or to swing from trees.<sup>13</sup>

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## Are gender differences primarily hardwired

—>

by which I mean that gender differences derive primarily from genetically programmed differences between girls and boys—  
or are they learned primarily from social cues?

I still encounter people who insist that most of the sex differences we observe between girls and boys are not hardwired.

- Instead, they insist that girls and boys behave differently because our society expects them to.
- We expect boys to be noisy and to throw things, while we expect girls to behave like little ladies.
- Or so the story goes.

One reason I think it's important to study our close primate relatives such as [chimpanzees](#), [gorillas](#), [bonobos](#), and [orangutans](#) is because it gives us a more complete context in which to consider such questions.

- If sex differences were primarily socially constructed  
—> if girls typically behave better than boys do because girls are taught to play with Barbies while boys are encouraged to play with guns—  
then we wouldn't expect to see dramatic sex differences in the behavior of juvenile female [chimpanzees](#) compared with juvenile male [chimpanzees](#).

But we do.

- Juvenile female [chimps](#) and juvenile male [chimps](#) learn and play in dramatically different ways, despite the fact that the girl [chimps](#) have never played with a Barbie, and the boy [chimps](#) have never played with toy guns.
- As a human male, I share many genes with a male [chimpanzee](#) that I do not share with any human female.<sup>14</sup>
- Recent work comparing the human genome with the [chimpanzee](#) genome suggests that I share 99.4 percent of my genes with a male chimpanzee

—> slightly more than I share with a human female.<sup>15</sup>

- That does not mean that I am in general more like a male chimpanzee than I am like a female human.
- But in certain specific ways

—> for example, in the way I see, hear, and smell

- I may actually have more in common with a male chimpanzee than I have with a human female.<sup>16</sup>

And those areas of commonality are important to understand.

- The entire order of primates is characterized by profound sex differences, and those sex differences are fairly well conserved across the order.<sup>17</sup>
- Young male monkeys, like young male [gorillas](#) and young male humans, are significantly more likely to engage in aggressive rough-and-tumble play than are young females from any of those species.<sup>18</sup>
- Likewise, young female primates are far more likely to babysit a younger sibling than a young male primate would be.\*

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That's true in our species as well:

girls are far more likely to babysit a younger sibling than their brothers are.

Girls are more likely to affiliate with the adults.

They are more likely to share common aims and values with the grown-ups.

Boys and young men, on the other hand, are less likely to be

- sympathetic to adult aims and values and
- are more inclined to engage in delinquent behaviors
  - such as smashing mailboxes,
  - street racing,
  - mooning police officers,
  - among others,

than girls are.

A boy who smashes mailboxes “just for the fun of it” will raise his status in the eyes of at least some other boys.

A girl who smashes mailboxes just for the fun of it is unlikely to raise her status in the eyes of most of the other girls.

Girls are more likely to listen to what the grown-ups are saying, and to do what the grown-ups ask, particularly if there are no boys around.

(If boys are around, some girls become more likely to misbehave, perhaps because they perceive that disrespecting the adults will raise your status in the eyes of at least some of the boys.<sup>19</sup>)

Girls are more likely to see the situation from the perspective of the grown-ups.

In one study, investigators examined twenty cases where students

were plotting a school shooting but the plan was detected and stopped before any violence occurred.

In eighteen of those twenty incidents, girls  
—not boys—  
alerted school officials or other adults to the plot.

All the potential shooters were boys.

“Boys feel like snitches if they tell on a friend,  
[while] girls [can] more openly seek out adults with their concerns,”  
said James McGee, author of the study.

Boys’ first allegiance is to other boys.

Girls are more likely to see the situation from the parents’ perspective.<sup>20</sup>

\*Primatologists don’t use the word  
*babysitting*;  
they prefer the term *allop parenting*.

When Mom needs to forage, she leaves her  
baby with her daughter, never her son.

Our primate cousins commonly engage in  
*ALLOPARENTING*, but *it’s always the daughter,*  
*not the son, who watches baby.*

See DAVID WATTS AND ANNE PUSEY,  
“*Behavior of juvenile and adolescent*  
*great apes*,”  
pp. 148–167

in MICHAEL PEREIRA and LYNN FAIRBANKS,  
*Juvenile Primates:*  
*Life History, Development, and Behavior*,  
NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2007.

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Some of these differences diminish as children grow up.

- Some don’t.
- Women are more likely to take their medication the way the doctor prescribed; men are less likely to comply, and men are less likely to go to the doctor in the first place.
- Most girls and most women are comfortable asking for directions if they get lost; many boys, and many men, would rather wander for hours than stop and ask for directions.<sup>21</sup>

Why might it be the case that among most primates  
—including humans—  
juvenile females are more likely to affiliate with the  
grown-ups than the juvenile males are?

Here’s one possible explanation.

Among primates generally,  
females are more likely to live near their parents  
after they are fully grown up,  
while the males are more likely to move away.

In the great majority of primate species,

“females reside in their natal groups for life,  
whereas males  
disperse around puberty and  
transfer to other groups,”  
say primatologists MICHAEL PEREIRA and LYNN FAIRBANKS.<sup>22</sup>

There are some exceptions.

Among the MURIQUI

—also known as the woolly spider monkey—  
many young females leave the troop at puberty, while most of the  
young males stay with the troop into which they were born, for life.

But the muriqui today are found only in a few isolated forest tracts  
along the Atlantic coast of southeastern Brazil.

The latest estimate of the total number of living muriqui is  
less than five hundred, and the number is dwindling rapidly  
as coastal Brazil is deforested.<sup>23</sup>

If you expect to live near Mom for the rest of your life, you  
might make more of an effort to get along with her.

- Most girls seem to grow up with a desire to get along with  
the grown-ups  
—>
  - and that’s true not just for human females, but  
also for females from most primate species.
- Primate females appear to have some built-in tendency to  
do what the grown-ups ask them to do, to try to please the  
grown-ups, to adapt to the grown-up culture.
- That’s also true among humans, or so the evidence seems to  
show.
- Young girls are more likely than young boys are to pay  
attention to what the grown-ups say, to follow the rules, to  
care about what the grown-ups think.
- Likewise, researchers have found that little girls are  
significantly more likely than little boys to stay close to  
Mommy and to do what Mommy says.<sup>24</sup>

It’s easy to see how these sex differences are relevant to education.

- Girls will do the homework because the teacher  
asked them to. *THE FIRST FACTOR: CHANGES AT SCHOOL*<sup>27</sup>
- Boys are more likely to do the homework only if it interests  
them.
- If it bores them, or if they think it’s “stupid,” they are more  
likely to ignore it.
- Researchers have consistently found that girls are  
significantly more likely than boys to do the assigned  
homework,<sup>25</sup> in every subject.<sup>26</sup>
- Even the highest-achieving boys are significantly less  
likely to do the homework than the comparably  
achieving girls.<sup>27</sup>
- Girls at every age get better grades in school than boys do,  
in every subject  
—>  
not because girls are smarter, researchers have  
found, but **because girls try harder**.<sup>28</sup>
- Most girls would like to please the teacher, if possible.
- Most boys don’t care much about pleasing the teacher or  
about getting straight A’s  
—>  
and **boys who do try to please the teacher  
and who do care about their grades will  
lower their status in the eyes of the other  
boys**.<sup>29</sup>
- Girls are more likely to assess their work as their teachers do.
- Boys are less likely to care what the teacher thinks of their  
work.

太恐怖啦！

這不叫天生反骨，叫什麼？

所以男人永遠是叫不動的，必須用「激將法」

THAT DIVERGENCE LEADS TO AN ENDURING PARADOX:

AT EVERY AGE, GIRLS DO BETTER IN SCHOOL, but

are LESS SATISFIED WITH THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS,

COMPARED WITH THE BOYS.<sup>30</sup>

真是太慘了！

In 2006, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania reported that girls' greater

- self-discipline and
- self-control

—>

perhaps deriving from their greater motivation to please the teacher—

appears to be a key distinguishing factor that has enabled girls to survive and thrive in the accelerated world of twenty first-century education.<sup>31</sup>

意思就是說「猛男」無用論  
意思就是說，所謂文明社會，

如果我們發明，使用器械，我們再也不需要「肌肉男」來舉重物。  
反正現在可以人工授精，只要有子宮，可以繼續造人

男人是文明社會的破壞源  
只有未經文明洗禮的原始社會適合他們的身心狀態  
他們一天的存在，就是狼吃羊般的侵害文明社會(聚居)

所以我之前說的「理論」：  
不需要男人，是為了保護地球的說法  
是成立的

女人會合作，是天性  
女人會保護，是天性

男人漠視其它人的感覺，存在，是天性，是「暴力，劣等」動物

The acceleration of the early elementary curriculum, with its emphasis on phonics and reading drills, by itself might well have created a minor gender crisis in education.

But unfortunately this acceleration is not the only major change in education over the past thirty years.

Education has changed in two other substantial ways that have exacerbated gender differences.

## The Tree of the

## Knowledge of Good and Evil

In English, the verb *to know* can have two very different meanings, reflecting two different kinds of knowledge.

Consider these two sentences:

- I know Sarah.
- I know pediatrics.

We English speakers use the same word, *know*, in both sentences.

- As a result, English speakers may *not fully appreciate* just how *different* these two meanings

are.

- My knowledge of my daughter Sarah is very different from my knowledge of pediatrics, even though Sarah is a little girl.
- My knowledge of Sarah is EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE.
- I know that Sarah likes to be rocked side-to-side but not front-to-back.
- I know that Sarah likes to be bounced on my knee like she's riding a horsie, but she generally doesn't like to be held close against the chest.

In biblical Hebrew, the word *KNOW* REFERS PRIMARILY to experiential learning.

言傳身教

When we read that "Cain knew his wife,"

- it meant that he had "carnal knowledge" of her:
- they had sex.

In English, we read about "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," but the Hebrew might be better translated as "the tree of the *experience* of good and evil."

Adam and Eve are forbidden to eat from that tree.

They are forbidden the experience of evil.

Most European languages use two different words for these two kinds of knowledge.

In French,

*to know* in the sense of knowing a person is *connaître*; *to know* in the sense of knowing a subject in school is *savoir*.

太有趣啦!

義大利語也是 *Conoscere*; *sapere*  
To make connection; to surface

In Spanish,

*to know* as in knowing a person is *conocer*; *to know* in the sense of book learning is *saber*.

In German,

knowledge about a person or a place that you've actually experienced is *Kenntnis*, from *kennen*, "to know by experience"; knowledge learned from books is *Wissenschaft*, from *wissen*, "to know about something."

智慧；知識；知道 Wisdom

ENGLISH	GERMAN	SPANISH
I know Sarah.	<i>Ich <b>kenne</b> Sarah.</i>	<i><b>Conozco</b> a Sara.</i>
I know chemistry.	<i>Ich <b>weiss</b> um Chemie.</i>	<i><b>Sé</b> química.</i>

There is a *fundamental belief* running through all *European pedagogy* that *both Wissenschaft and Kenntnis are valuable*, and that the *two ways of knowing must be balanced*.

Seven years ago, I accompanied a class of Swiss third-graders on a field trip through the Dolder forest, high above Zürich.

- The teacher **divided the children INTO PAIRS**.
- One child in each pair **blindfolded the other**.  
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- Then the blindfolded child was
  - **led to a tree, at least ten paces away**, and
  - was instructed to **feel the tree with her hands, from the ground up**; and also
  - to **smell** it.
  - (**Some children even licked it**.)
- Next the child was **spun around and led away from the tree, at least ten paces in a different direction**.
- Then the blindfold was removed and the child was asked:
  - Which tree were you just feeling?
  - “*Ohne Augen zu sehen*,” the teacher told me:
  - **to see without your eyes**.

Such an experience would be rare for American schoolchildren today.

- American students may occasionally go on field trips, but the trips are almost invariably didactic in tone.
- Pupils learn the difference, say, between an oak leaf and a maple leaf.
- It’s all *Wissenschaft*.
- **American education, today more than ever before, is characterized by a serious lack of understanding of, and respect for, *Kenntnis***.
- It’s hard to overemphasize how much most Europeans

value *Kenntnis*.

When I smiled (**perhaps somewhat patronizingly**) at the children feeling and sniffing their trees, the teacher **frowned at me**.

- She **insisted on blindfolding me herself** and leading me to a tree, and having me touch it and smell it without being able to see it.
- Then she **led me ten paces away** from the tree, turned me around, removed the blindfold, and asked me:
  - “Where is your tree?”
  - **I looked, and immediately recognized “my” tree from the dozens of others**.
- It was an unfamiliar, **exhilarating** experience.

There is **more than fifty years** of research on the importance, for child development, of **multisensory interaction with the real world**.

- This work began with the investigations of the psychiatrist René Spitz into “hospitalism,” the syndrome of stunted emotional and cognitive development that was seen in abandoned children raised in sterile and impersonal hospitals after World War II.
- This research demonstrated that children must have a rich, interactive sensory environment
  - —touching, smelling, seeing, hearing the real world—
 in order for the child’s brain and mind to develop properly.<sup>32</sup>
- Without such real-world experiences, the child’s development will be impaired.
- Kids need to experience the real world.

跟胚胎需要被誘導，才能發展的道理是一樣的

Only in the past decade have developmental psychologists come to recognize that a curriculum that emphasizes *Wissenschaft* at the expense of *Kenntnis* may produce a syndrome analogous to the neglected child.

Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*,

has coined the term “nature-deficit disorder” to refer to *the constellation of symptoms seen in a child whose life has been spent indoors*.<sup>33</sup>

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You can easily find high school students in America today who can tell you about the importance of the environment, the carbon cycle and the nitrogen cycle, and so on, but they've never spent a night outdoors.

- They have plenty of *Wissenschaft* but not a trace of *Kenntnis*.
- For boys in particular, emphasizing *Wissenschaft* while ignoring *Kenntnis* may seriously impair development

—>

not cognitive development but **the development of a lively and passionate curiosity.**

“NATURE IS ABOUT

SMELLING, HEARING, TASTING,”

LOUV REMINDS US.<sup>34</sup>

The end result of a childhood with more time spent in front of computer screens than outdoors is what [Louv](#) calls

“CULTURAL AUTISM.

The symptoms?

- **Tunneled senses**, and
- **feelings of**
  - **isolation** and
  - **containment** . . . [and]
- a wired, **know-it-all state of mind**.

That which cannot be Googled does not count.”<sup>35</sup>

- Boys who have been deprived of time outdoors, interacting with the real world rather than with computers, sometimes have trouble grasping concepts that seem simple to us.
- [Louv](#) quotes [Frank Wilson](#), professor of neurology at Stanford, who says that parents have been deceived about the value of computer-based experience for their children.
- Dr. [Wilson](#) says that medical school instructors are having more difficulty teaching medical students how the heart works as a pump, because these students have so little real-world experience.
- They've never siphoned anything, never fixed a car, never worked on a fuel pump, may not even have hooked up a garden hose.
- *For a whole generation of kids, direct experiences in the backyard, in the tool shed, in the fields and woods, has been replaced by indirect learning, through [computers].*

These young people are smart, **they grew up with computers, they were supposed to be superior**

—>

but now we know that something's missing.<sup>36</sup>

*KENNTNIS and WISSENSCHAFT*  
are fundamentally different kinds of knowledge.

人被切開隔離自然,進入狹窄的人造空間

Each is important.

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Imagine that my baby daughter, Sarah, is crying.

- Let's suppose further that a world-renowned expert on infant and child development, perhaps Dr. [T. Berry Brazelton](#) himself, has just walked into the room.
- If I hand Sarah to [Dr. Brazelton](#), how effective will he be in calming her down?
- Probably not very effective.
- He doesn't know how Sarah likes to be rocked or bounced.
- All his knowledge about child development counts for nothing if he doesn't have some *Kenntnis* to go with his *Wissenschaft*.
- That principle generally holds true in the real world, I have found, at least as far as the practice of medicine and of psychology is concerned.

BOOK LEARNING IS ESSENTIAL.

BUT WITHOUT *KENNTNIS* YOU'LL GO FAR ASTRAY.

行萬里路,讀萬卷書



[Louv](#) provides a [COMPENDIUM](#) of research demonstrating that when there is a profound imbalance in a child's early experiences

—>

when nature has been replaced by computer screens and fancy indoor toys—

the result is an increased risk for [ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER](#).

他們沒有ADD,  
他們只是精神被剝離出來,安裝進入電腦世界

- For example, [Louv](#) cites a Swedish study in which researchers compared children in two different day-care facilities.
  - One facility was surrounded by tall buildings, with a brick pathway.
  - The other was set in an orchard surrounded by woods and was adjacent to an overgrown garden; at this facility, children were encouraged to play outdoors in all kinds of weather.
- The researchers found that “[children in the ‘green’ day care had better motor coordination and more ability to concentrate](#).”<sup>37</sup>
- Similarly, researchers at the University of Illinois have found that putting children in an outdoor environment, where they can actually put their hands in the dirt and feel and smell real stuff, as opposed to interacting with sophisticated computer simulations, is helpful in treating ADHD.<sup>38</sup>

[Ironically, the outdoor alternative is cheaper than the program with the fancy computers.](#)

- Boys are at least three times as likely to be treated for ADHD compared with girls, and the rates of diagnosis of ADHD for both girls and boys have soared over the past two decades.<sup>39</sup>
- One wonders to what extent the shift from *Wissenschaft* to *Kenntnis* may have contributed to the explosion in the numbers of children being treated for ADHD.
- [The mental-health benefit of getting your hands dirty is not a particularly new insight.](#)

As Louv observes, [Dr. Benjamin Rush, one of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence](#), declared more than two hundred years ago that “digging in the soil has a curative effect on the mentally ill.”<sup>40</sup>

We have forgotten what our grandparents knew:

- All children need a balance of *Wissenschaft and Kenntnis*,
  - a balance between *sitting* and *standing*,
  - a balance between *classroom work* and *field trips*.
- 以前(circa 1970's)有校外教學，後來因為出意外，就再也不辦了

### That's true for girls as well as for boys.

- But if girls are deprived of that balance, if girls are saddled with a curriculum like ours today, all *Wissenschaft* and no *Kenntnis*, they will still do the homework
  - because for girls, as we discussed a moment ago, pleasing the teacher is a significant reward for its own sake.
- Not so for most boys.
  - If boys are deprived of that balance between *Wissenschaft* and *Kenntnis*, they may simply disengage from school.
  - If you ask a boy to read about the life cycle of a tadpole metamorphosing into a frog, but that boy has never touched a frog, never had the experience of jumping around in a stream in his bare feet chasing after a tadpole, he may not see the point.
  - The shift in the curriculum away from *Kenntnis* toward *Wissenschaft* has had the unintended consequence of diminishing the motivation of boys to study what they're asked to learn.

因為缺乏誘因  
跟胚胎沒有被誘導，就發展畸形，不成形的道理是一樣的

### How could such a change happen?

How could the intelligent, well educated people who write school curricula push the school format into such an unhealthy imbalance?

The answer is simple:

*computers.*

## How Is a Child Different from a Programmable Computer?

Imagine a really good robot, the best robot money could buy, with the best possible “brain” and “eyes” and “ears.”

### How would a human being differ from that robot?

Or to put the question another way:

- Will we someday
  - someday soon, perhaps—  
have robots that are able to simulate humans
    - simulate human behavior, maybe even
    - feel emotions?

The entertainment industry offers us a continual diet of movies like

- *I, Robot and Bicentennial Man*, and TV shows like
- *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

that portray robots (**ALWAYS PLAYED BY HUMAN ACTORS**) that are indistinguishable from humans.

我就是因為這樣子，所以每次看 都生氣，  
太假了！

用各式各樣的「人造」七情六慾來假清高，好像自己比較高級

It's just a matter of time before reality catches up with  
science fiction, right?

呵呵  
我就說咩  
美國人的頭腦就是這樣看 star trek 看壞了  
在神的面前魯班門前弄大斧  
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Maybe not.

- Like the search for peace in the Middle East, or for a self sustaining fusion reactor, the goal that we were once assured was nearly within grasp keeps receding further into the distance.
- Today, the idea of a fully mechanical device that can actually experience human emotions
  - >  
and not merely simulate such an experience—  
seems more distant than it did thirty years ago.

I enrolled in the PhD program  
in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania  
in 1980.

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It turns out that a great deal was missing from the cognitivist perspective.

- The period from the late 1970s through the late 1990s was the era when cognitive psychology ruled supreme.
- Cognitive psychology is that branch of psychology that focuses on how we process information.<sup>41</sup>
- And the University of Pennsylvania was a haven for true believers in cognitive psychology.
- For those two decades, roughly 1977 through 1997, cognitive psychologists were optimistic that their approach was the best way to understand human learning, development, and behavior.
- Throughout that period, cognitive psychologists insisted that everything we do, everything we are, can be represented formally as a computational process and therefore could theoretically be transposed to any computational device, i.e., to a computer.
- Humans are just complex computers—or so the story went.
- The mind itself is a sort of computer program running on a very sophisticated computer made of neurons instead of microchips.

愚蠢的人  
妄想超越神的人  
抄著雞毛當令箭

This way of thinking about the human mind, and human learning, continues to be influential among educators.

- If humans are sophisticated computers, and learning is in some way equivalent to programming that computer, then teachers are in some sense merely computer programmers.
- If we give teachers the correct set of instructions, or programs, then all we should need to do is flip the “on” switch and children should learn, infallibly and efficiently.
- The 1980s and 1990s saw the widespread adoption of programs such as Direct Instruction, in which teachers were expected essentially to read from a script for an entire class, with students answering questions in unison and by rote.
- If the script is written correctly, and the teachers do as they are told, then good results are inevitable.
- Foolproof.
- Failsafe.

... provided *only* that children are pretty much the same as programmable computers.

Which they aren't.

- This is not the place for a thorough critique of the arid cognitivism of the 1980s and 1990s.
- But for our purposes the most obvious and key deficiency of the cognitivist point of view was its failure to grasp the primacy of motivation and emotion.
- Type an address in your Web browser and hit “Enter.”
- If your computer is functioning properly, it won't talk back.
- It will do what you tell it to do.
- Your computer won't say,
  - “I don't feel like it,” or
  - “Why go there?” or
  - “How about if we go outside and play instead?”
- Computers don't have to be motivated to do what you tell them to do.
- But children do.

The colossal error of 1980's cognitivism, and of the educational strategies it inspired

—many of which are still with us today—

is that both cognitivism and cognitive-based educational strategies ignore the crucial question:

What motivates kids to learn?

- The first thing that happens when you ask kids to do stuff they have no interest in doing is they stop paying attention.
- Twenty-five years ago, attention deficit disorder was a relatively rare condition, with an incidence estimated at less than one child in one hundred.
- Today it's common.
- A study published in 2006, conducted jointly under the auspices of the University of Michigan and the University of Texas at Austin, found that the likelihood of a child being diagnosed with ADHD is a function of three main factors:<sup>42</sup>
  - **Sex:** Boys are several times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls;
  - **Race:** White children are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than black or Hispanic children;<sup>43</sup>

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- **Socioeconomic status:** Affluent children are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than children from

low-income families.

For white boys in affluent suburbs, the odds of being diagnosed with ADHD at some point in childhood may be as high as one in three.

- In one suburb, more than half of the boys were being treated with medications for ADHD.<sup>44</sup>
- As we'll see in CHAPTER 4, many cases of ADD/ADHD being diagnosed today may be overdiagnosed.
- Many of those boys who are being prescribed drugs may not need drugs.

What they need first, is

- a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate; and second,
- teachers who know how to teach boys.

Again, we'll return to these points in CHAPTER 4.

The second thing that happens when you ask kids to do stuff they have no interest in doing is they get annoyed.

- They get irritable.
- They withdraw.
- "I hate school. It's stupid."
- Anything associated with school becomes uncool.
- Reading is uncool.
- Caring about school becomes uncool.
- Being interested in learning becomes uncool.

Computers don't have to care about frogs or be interested in frogs to learn about frogs.

- But children do.
- If children are not motivated to learn, they may stop paying attention.
- That's especially true for boys, for reasons we discussed EARLIER IN THIS CHAPTER.

Computers are all about *Wissenschaft*.

- They don't need *Kenntnis*.
- But real children do
  - especially boys.

The lack of respect for *Kenntnis* over the past three decades is an important part of the answer to the question,

“What’s behind the massive disengagement of so many boys from school?”

## Good News:

### *The Boys’ Crisis Is a Myth!*

On Sunday, June 25, 2006,

I received a call on my cell phone from

JAY MATHEWS,

the lead education reporter for the WASHINGTON POST.

Mr. Mathews wanted my opinion of a study that had just been released by an obscure nonprofit group calling itself Education Sector.

He explained that his story on the study would appear the next morning on the front page of the WASHINGTON POST.<sup>45</sup>

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He wanted my opinion for a follow-up column that he planned to post online.

Mr. Mathews’ front-page article announced “that widespread reports of U.S. boys being in crisis are greatly overstated and that young males in school are in many ways doing better than ever. . . . the pessimism about young males seems to derive from

- inadequate research,
- sloppy analysis and
- discomfort with the fact that

although the average boy is doing better, the average girl has gotten ahead of him.”

The article was picked up by many of the nation’s largest-circulation newspapers.

- The *Miami News*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Buffalo News*, *Detroit News*, *Seattle Times*, *San Diego Union Tribune*, and dozens of other papers ran the story verbatim.
- *New York Times* columnist Judith Warner, in a column entitled
  - “What Boy Crisis?”wrote that the study confirmed that the “boys’ crisis” is a myth, after all.
- The facts, wrote Warner
  - —echoing the *Washington Post*—are that boys are “doing better than ever on most measures of academic performance,” with the possible exception of black and Hispanic boys from low-income households.
- Within twenty-four hours of Mathews’ article in the *Post*, the story was featured on the *CBS Evening News*, with the headline
  - “It’s a Myth That Boys Are Falling Behind in School.”

## But is it true?

### Is the boys’ crisis really a myth?

- The answer is not so simple.
- Something strange has been happening with American boys over the past two decades:
- The reading and writing scores of fourth-grade American boys have improved somewhat, which has actually narrowed the gender gap separating them from girls.
- Jay Mathews’ article focused on that fact.
- But during the same period of time, the reading and writing scores of twelfth-grade American boys have dropped.
- The gender gap separating twelfth-grade girls from twelfth-grade boys has widened, not because girls are doing better
  - — they’re not—
  - but because boys are doing worse.<sup>46</sup>

You’ll sometimes hear people claim that the gender gap is confined primarily to

- black and Hispanic students, or to
- low-income girls and boys, or to
- students whose parents didn’t go to college.

We’ll talk about those issues more in a moment.

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But even among twelfth-grade white students with college-educated parents, the gender gap has become dramatic:

One in four white boys with college-educated parents today can not read at a basic level of proficiency, compared with only one in six teen white girls.<sup>47</sup>

To repeat:

- Fourth-grade boys are doing slightly better in reading and writing than they were twenty years ago.
- Twelfth-grade boys are doing worse in reading and writing than they were twenty years ago.

How could it be the case that fourth-grade boys are doing better, while twelfth-grade boys are doing worse?

- How does better become worse?
- This riddle is not hard to solve when you think about what we expect from fourth-graders compared with what we expect from twelfth graders.

When we test fourth-graders on their basic reading skills, we're trying to determine whether they have mastered the fundamentals of reading.

- Can they read what's on the page?
- Do they have some basic vocabulary?

In the past twenty years, there has been increased emphasis on mastering the basics of reading.

- Elementary school students have also been drilled in specific test-taking skills in ways that would not have been imaginable twenty or thirty years ago.
- The drilling begins at an earlier age and lasts longer.
- As a result, elementary school students
  - — both girls and boys—are doing somewhat better than they were twenty or thirty years ago, and the gender gap has narrowed somewhat.

Twelfth grade is a different story.

- Twelfth-graders are expected to be able to read for content.
- It's not enough just to be able to sound out all the words.
- If you're reading a passage about global warming, you need to be familiar with that topic; it also helps to know what the Kyoto Treaty is; and you'll write an even better essay if you can make some allusions to Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth.
- If you read widely and extensively in your spare time, that's likely to be a tremendous help.
- In other words, you'll do best if you can read that passage in the context of a whole world of knowledge about science and politics.
- You can drill third-graders on phonics and see improvements in their reading test scores, but rote drills and repetition don't work as a means of teaching high school students about how the world works.

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There's growing evidence that the intensive reading drills that now characterize early elementary education may actually disengage many students, particularly boys.

- What's important, as neurologist JUDY WILLIS recently observed, is
  - “for students not only to learn the mechanics of reading, but also to develop a love of reading.”
- She cautions against any
  - “approach that puts phonics first at the expense of intrinsic appeal and significance to the young reader.”<sup>48</sup>
- In order for high school kids to understand many of the topics we expect them to grasp, THEY HAVE TO BE READING A WIDE RANGE OF MATERIAL.
- Kids need to be reading in their spare time.
- Kids need to read for fun.
- Boys used to read for fun.

MARK BAUERLEIN,

former director of research for the [National Endowment for the Arts](#), and his colleague [Sandra Stotsky](#) recently published an important article on *what teenagers do with their spare time*.

The [National Endowment for the Arts](#) surveyed a demographically representative sample of teenagers around the United States for twenty-five years, from 1980 through 2004:

- rich and poor kids;
- urban,
- suburban, and
- rural kids;
- white,
- black,
- Asian, and
- Hispanic kids.

[Bauerlein](#) and [Stotsky](#) found that girls have always been more likely to read for fun than boys are.

- But that gender gap widened dramatically between 1980 and 2004.
- It has grown so wide that it has now become “a marker of gender identity,” these authors found.
- “*Girls read; boys don’t*.”<sup>49</sup>
- The gender gap did not widen because girls are reading more; they’re not.
  - In fact, girls are slightly less likely to read in their spare time today than they were in 1980.
  - But roughly nine out of ten boys have stopped reading altogether.

## Why?

- When I present this research to parents and ask them that question, a few raise their hands, confident that they know the answer.

“Video games,”  
they usually say.

“Boys who might have read books twenty or thirty years ago are playing video games today.”

But the evidence suggests otherwise.

- Boys who play lots of video games are no less likely to read for fun than boys who don’t play lots of video games.<sup>50</sup>
- Video games have displaced a major activity in the lives of teenage boys, but that activity isn’t reading; it’s playing outdoors.

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In 1980, many boys spent lots of time playing outdoors.

- Today, those boys are more likely to spend that time indoors with the GameCube or the PlayStation or the Xbox.
- That may be one reason why boys today are four times more likely to be obese compared with boys a generation ago.<sup>51</sup>
- So video games aren’t the explanation.
- But there’s a more plausible explanation:
  - namely, that changes in education over the past thirty years have created a negative attitude toward education among many boys.
- Boys are less likely to read today simply because they don’t want to.
- And that change in motivation is, at least in part, a consequence of the gender-blind changes in education over the past thirty years.

Let’s return now to that cell phone call from  
Jay Mathews,

the *Washington Post* reporter who  
wanted to talk about the study that purported to disprove the idea  
that boys are having problems in school.

呵呵，他也繞一大圈才繞回來



That study, like the reporter's article, rested very heavily on test scores of nine-year olds nationwide, in fact, on scores on just one particular test, the NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP).

- The authors of the study showed that **on this test, nine-year-old boys are doing better today than they were doing thirty years ago**; on this test, the gender gap in the scores (**girls doing better than boys**) has been narrowing.
- White boys
  - particularly white boys with college-educated parents—are doing fine, according to the report.
- The real problems in American education are problems of race and social class, not gender, according to the report
  - a position echoed by the *Washington Post*.

Mr. Mathews had called to ask for my opinion of the study.

- “You don’t need my opinion, Mr. Mathews,” I told him.
- “You know how biased that study is.
- **They focused on improvements in the scores of nine year-olds, but they neglected what’s happening to seventeen-year-olds!**
- **You know very well that the gender gap in reading is getting larger among seventeen-year-olds,”** I pointed out.
- “This study emphasizes the improvements among fourth-graders but **completely ignores the decline in reading scores among twelfth-grade boys over the past twenty years.**
- You know that one in four white boys with college-educated parents can’t read proficiently.
- That means one in four white boys in high school won’t be able to read your article saying how well white boys are doing.”

正解!

短視近利，完全缺乏時間感

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Mr. Mathews thanked me and **promised to include my remarks in his online column** on Tuesday, June 27, **the day after his front-page article would appear.**

- And he was true to his word:
  - that Tuesday, he did indeed post an online column that continued his coverage of the Education Sector report.<sup>52</sup>
- **He apologized** for the one-sided coverage in the previous day’s paper.
- To give a more “balanced and comprehensive” coverage, he included not only my comments but also those of other researchers who pointed to the glaring shortcomings in the Education Sector report.
- Unfortunately, though, the readership for Mr. Mathews’ personal online column is trivial compared to the coverage afforded to a front-page above-the-fold news article in the *Washington Post*.
- Mathews’ front-page article was widely picked up by the media.
- **His online column wasn’t picked up by anybody, wasn’t featured anywhere, and hasn’t been read by anybody, as far as I can tell.**



So far, I’ve identified two ways in which education has changed in the past thirty years to make it likely that boys will disengage from school more so than girls:

- 1. **the acceleration of the early elementary curriculum**, and
- 2. **the shift from *Kenntnis* to *Wissenschaft*.**

We turn now to one other important change.

# “How Would You Feel If You Were Piggy?”

## —And Other Questions Unfriendly to Boys

Your son is now twelve years old.

His latest report card was a mess:

- an A in math,
- C's in social studies and Spanish, and
- D's in reading and English.

“You can do better than this,”

you say to your son.

“Your English teacher told me

you didn't turn in even half the homework.

Am I going to have to supervise you to

make sure you do your homework every night?”

“I'm not gonna do that homework.

It's stupid,”

your son Brett says.

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“What's stupid about it?”

you ask.

“It's TOTALLY stupid,”

Brett says.

“What do you mean by that?

Can you give an example?”

He shrugs.

“Do you want to see it?”

he asks.

“Sure,” you say.

Brett rummages in his knapsack, then produces a crumpled piece of paper.

After smoothing it out, this is what you read:

In Lord of the Flies, a group of boys finds themselves stranded on a tropical island.

One of the boys, nicknamed Piggy because he is overweight, is the victim of vicious bullying by the other boys.

Write a short essay in the first person, in Piggy's voice, describing how you feel about the other boys picking on you.

Remember to

- include lots of detail,
- describe scenes from the book, and
- mention specific boys.

“See what I mean?”

Brett says, a note of triumph in his voice.

“It's totally stupid!”

“What's stupid about it?”

you ask.

“Write an essay in Piggy's voice,”

Brett paraphrases.

“That is total stupidity!”

“Why is it stupid?”

you ask again.

“I'm not Piggy.

I'm not some fat loser who probably couldn't even pick his own nose right.

If I'd been on that island, I'd have smashed his face myself!”



This homework assignment boils down to:

How would you feel if you were Piggy?

- When I spoke with the teacher who assigned this homework, she explained that she wanted to teach the children about empathy.
- With all due respect to the teacher, I submit that this assignment didn't teach this particular boy anything about empathy.
- Instead, the message the assignment reinforced for him is that doing homework is for girls, not for real boys.
- No self-respecting boy, in this boy's frame of reference, would do such a homework assignment.

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BOYS ADrift

In *Why Gender Matters*

I reviewed research by Deborah Yurgelun Todd and her associates at Harvard Medical School demonstrating that the regions of the brain associated with negative emotion in teenage girls are closely associated with the language areas of the brain.

In boys of the same age, by contrast, brain activity associated with negative emotion is localized primarily in the amygdala, a nucleus with comparatively scant connections to the language areas of the brain.<sup>53</sup>

It's easy for most middle school and high school girls to answer a question like

"How would you feel if you were X?"

老師白癡

要是我，我就問，「扶強鋤弱是英雄，  
你有本事幫他嗎？你怎麼幫他？」

because the area of the brain where the feeling is happening is closely linked to the area of the brain where talking happens.

For boys, that's not the case.

- For boys like Brett in the example above, it's not easy to answer, in a genuine and articulate way, the question
  - "How would you feel if . . . ?"
- He may attempt to produce the answer he thinks the teacher wants to hear, but it's a chore.
- A better question for most boys would be
  - "What would you do if . . . ?"
- That question may sound similar, but it's actually a different question, and much more boy-friendly
  - —for most boys.

看吧！

## The Right Kind of Competition

I've already pointed out that using the computer metaphor to describe how brains work fails to capture the importance of motivation.

It also falls short in another important respect: it doesn't accommodate the enormous individual differences between one student and another.

終於！有個有腦子的

The differences between a PC and a Mac are trivial in comparison with the differences between Brett, who plays every kind of competitive sport, and his younger sister, Emily, who occasionally watches football games with her older brother but feels bad for the losing team, no matter who they are, because "it must hurt to lose."

呵呵，女人的代入感太強

- Some kids—both boys and girls—thrive in a competitive atmosphere, even if they often lose.
- Others wilt and collapse, or withdraw, under the stress of competition.

太有趣了，抗壓反應不同

*Is competition good or bad?*

*It depends on your child.*

*That's why*

*there may be no such thing as "a good school."*

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The best choice for Emily may be a disaster for Brett.

The school that is best for Brett  
may be the worst possible choice for Emily.

太可怕了，什麼叫做公平，  
怎樣讓孩子知道適才而教  
普通家庭不可能小孩子兩邊送啊！

Think for a moment about boys who thrive on competition (NOT ALL BOYS DO).

Consider how changes in our schools and in our society over the past thirty years may have disengaged these boys.

#### • Traditional physical education:

Gym class used to offer many opportunities for boys to experience "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat"—even if the game was just kickball or dodgeball.

- But over the past thirty years, many school districts have eliminated sports such as dodgeball, in the belief that dodgeball and similar sports reward violence.
- Likewise, competition has been systematically eliminated from many districts' physical education programs, in the belief that competition alienates some kids from sports.

And perhaps it does.

- But your son may need the zest of competition as a motivator.
- Without competition, he's likely to say "Why bother?"

#### • "Zero Tolerance For Violence"

has changed the way that  
creative writing and language arts  
are taught.

I remember when I was a seventh-grader, thirty-some years ago, and we were assigned to write a short story.

- I wrote about an American prisoner of war breaking out of a German prison camp during World War II
  - (I was a huge fan of Steve McQueen in The Great Escape).
- I've seen boys who write similar stories today referred for psychiatric evaluation, just as if they had been caught passing notes about killing the teacher.
- "I'm sorry," the teacher says to the parents, "but your son Richie wrote a story about a man garroting the prison guard.  
We can't allow that here.  
We have a zero-tolerance policy for violence."

- When a teacher or principal tells you that the school has a zero tolerance policy for students writing violent stories, ask them whether the same policy applies to what students read.

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- If students are not allowed to read violent fiction, then the librarian will have to remove novels by Hemingway, Steinbeck, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and many others from the library shelves.
- If the school is really going to ban Hemingway and Dostoevsky, then that school has some pretty serious problems.
- But if they're not going to ban Hemingway and Dostoyevsky, then on what grounds can they reasonably prohibit boys from trying to write in the same genre that they're allowed to read?

#### • Competitive sports:

Schools have ballooned  
in size

over the past thirty years.

我就說嘛！人太多了，超出人類可以負擔的尺度

I commonly visit  
middle schools with two thousand-plus students and  
high schools with four thousand-plus students.

- One problem with a high school of four thousand-plus students is that **only the most elite athletes get to play on the school team.**
  - In most metropolitan areas, at least one boy in five would like to play football.
  - In a coed school with four thousand students,
    - i.e., about two thousand boys, there might easily be four hundred boys who would like to play on the football team.
  - But even big schools often have only one bus for the **VARSITY** and one bus for the **JV TEAM**.
  - That means **only thirty-six boys can make the varsity team, and another thirty-six on the JV.**
  - **The other three hundred-plus boys are out of luck.**
  - **Most of those boys probably won't even try out:**
    - **they know that only the best athletes can make the team, and they don't want to be embarrassed.**
- 我就說咩  
跳舞唱歌都變成只有專員「可以」做
- So **they stay home.**
  - If your son is one of those boys who thrive on competition, and he can't make the team, what should you do?
  - **In the short run, you might transfer your son to a smaller school, or you might help him transition to a different sport.**
  - **More fundamentally,** though, I think we need to **change the mindset of American sports.**

*Thank GOD!*

***I believe every kid who wants to play on a school team should have the opportunity to play.***

要像意大利一樣，人人都可參加

I know what you're thinking.

“My kid's high school enrolls 3,000 kids.  
If two hundred boys try out for the team,  
how can the coach play every boy?  
Most of the boys will just be sitting on the bench.”

That would be true if there's only one varsity team, one junior varsity, and maybe one practice squad.

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But my visits to Australian schools have taught me that there's a different way.

At large Australian schools,  
there isn't just one team, or three:  
**it's common to find five teams, or seven, or ten.**

How do they do it?

Simple:

- they practice during the school day.
  - One team practices during first period,
  - one team practices during fourth period, and
  - another team practices after school.

Even more radical

- —from the American perspective—
- is the fact that **no team practices every day.**
- **No team practices more than three days a week.**

- In Australia,

**the consensus is that school-based sports should provide decent training to a broad range of athletes, rather than focusing on the most talented few.**

- In the United States,

**we provide intensive daily training and coaching for those elite few, while leaving the great majority of boys no opportunity to play organized sports at all.**

- **Instead, those boys go home and play video games.**



I know a boy, let's call him TONY, who is competitive in absolutely every aspect of his life.

- He's only eleven years old, but he finds a way to make everything a race or some sort of competition.
  - At summer camp, he organized a contest among all the boys to see who could pee the farthest.

Boys like TONY usually will respond well to any challenge so long as:

- • there are winners and losers, and
- • the outcome is in doubt.
- Anybody might conceivably win and anybody might conceivably lose.
- Everything depends on how hard you play.
- Satisfy both criteria, and TONY will be on board.
  - If either one of the criteria is missing,
  - TONY won't see the point.
  - He'll disengage.
  - He'll lose interest.
  - He'll stare out the window.

Mater Dei School is an all-boys elementary school not far from my home in Montgomery County, Maryland, where this principle is understood very well.

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- On enrollment, every boy is assigned either to the
  - Blue Team or the
  - White Team.
- The assignment is arbitrary
  - —in other words, it's random—
- and it is permanent.\*
  - \*The only exception to random assignment is that if a boy has an older brother who attended the school, then the boy is assigned to the same team that his brother was on.
- Once you're a member of the Blue Team, you are forever a member of the Blue Team.
  - The two teams compete in every aspect of school life.
  - When the boys play soccer,
    - it's Blue against White.
  - On school examinations,
    - it's Blue against White.
    - The team that scores higher on the exams gets points.
  - The team whose members donate more food to give away at Thanksgiving gets points.
  - At the end of the year, the winning team is officially recognized and gets its name
    - —“Blue” or “White”—
    - the year of its victory,
  - and the names of the team captains, emblazoned on a plaque in the hallway.

This may seem silly to some people.

- But for many of these boys, it's highly motivating.
- Team competition has another benefit for boys who are motivated by the will to win.
- Team competition socializes boys.
- It teaches boys to value something above themselves.
- It subordinates some of the ego and the egocentricity that these boys often manifest.
- I've seen the principle of team competition engage many boys who otherwise don't care much about school.

*Individual* competition is seldom as successful and is almost guaranteed to disengage many boys.

太有趣了，  
原始社會，人必須團隊圍狩

## Why is that?

Remember the second principle we discussed a moment ago:

*the outcome must be in doubt.*

人有賭博的天性

- If you have individual competition in academics, for example, DANIEL may decide that he's unlikely to win.
- Once he's decided that he's not likely to win, he's not interested in playing.  
"YOU THINK I CARE ABOUT THIS SUBJECT?"  
HA.  
I COULDN'T CARE LESS.  
GO AHEAD AND FLUNK ME.  
YOU THINK I CARE ABOUT YOUR STUPID CONTEST?"
- But if DANIEL is a member of a large team, anything can happen.
- Either team might win.
- If the class examination is public, DANIEL's performance might determine whether his team wins or loses.

- For example, if the class assignment were to read *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* and now there's an oral quiz, Blue Team vs. White Team, DANIEL needs to be able to answer the questions.
- All the students in the class will have been warned, incidentally, that answers must be taken only from T. R. R. TOLKIEN's books, not from a movie version of the books.

- The teacher, Mrs. HOFSTADTER, says:

"It's the Blue Team's turn.

CARLOS, you're answering for the Blue Team this round.

Here's your question:

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- After Frodo is wounded by the Nazgûl and needs to be taken to Rivendell, what is the name of the Elf who takes him there?"

"Arwen?"

CARLOS guesses.

- "Wrong!"
- Mrs. HOFSTADTER says.
- "Arwen plays that role in the movie, but not in the book. DANIEL, you're answering for the White Team.

After Frodo is wounded, what is the name of the Elf who takes Frodo to Rivendell?"

DANIEL shouts

"Glorfindel!"

- "Right!" Mrs. HOFSTADTER says.
- DANIEL's teammates on the White Team give him high fives all around, because this is a high-stakes test for sixth grade boys.

就是我國中高中小老師制度很像  
但是這個加入遊戲的成份  
比較好

所以美國應該要有小老師，算積分

- Each member of the winning team in this classroom will get a coupon for free pizza and ice cream at the popular corner store.
- DANIEL may not care that much about his grade in the class or about *The Lord of the Rings*.
- He may not even care that much about pizza and ice cream.
- But he doesn't want to let his teammates down.
- He doesn't want to risk being the one who got the wrong answer, whose one wrong answer cost the whole team the prize.



## Why doesn't this approach work as well for many girls?

Here's why:

most girls value friendship ABOVE team affiliation.

- If EMILY and MELISSA are best friends, and you put EMILY and MELISSA on opposing teams, both girls may be uncomfortable.
- EMILY doesn't want to make MELISSA sad, so she may be reluctant to beat MELISSA.
- She'd rather play alongside Melissa rather than try to make her lose.

太有趣了

But if Justin and Jared are best friends, and you put them on opposing teams, Justin will happily run down the field and knock Jared down.

- In that situation I've seen Jared get up, dust himself off, and say to Justin,
  - "You think that was a good hit?"
  - That wasn't anything.
  - I'll get you better next time."
- That kind of good-natured competition actually builds their friendship.
- Boys are more likely to understand that friends don't have to be teammates, and teammates don't have to be friends.
- And boys are more likely to be invested in the success of their team regardless of whether any of their friends are on the team.
- It's easy to see how the competitive team format might engage and motivate boys who otherwise wouldn't be inspired to do their homework or read the assigned text.

But I've also seen team competition work in other, unexpected ways: for example, to motivate scholarly boys to become better athletes.

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- When I visited Calgary, Alberta, in 2004, I heard a story involving team competition that took place at a boys' school near Edmonton.
- At this school, all the boys were assigned to one of three teams.
- It happened that this particular year, the best athletes were on one team while most of the best students were on another team.
- A twenty-kilometer snowshoe relay race was announced.
- Each team would nominate four boys to race.
- Everybody expected the team with the best athletes to win easily.
- But the scholars
  - —the "geeks"—
  - really studied up on snowshoeing.
- They learned that the key to success in snowshoeing is to run lightly over the surface of the snow.
- So they nominated their four lightest, fastest boys to represent their team.
- And those boys trained.
- The athletes didn't train for this event; they figured they didn't have to, they were already in excellent shape.
- When the day of the race arrived, the scholarly boys were ready.
- They blew the other two teams away:
  - the fourth boy on the scholarly team crossed the finish line about ten minutes ahead of either of the other teams.
- The strong football players representing the athletic team bogged down in the snow
  - —their muscular build was a liability rather than an advantage.
- That event, I was told, raised the status of the scholarly team enormously in the eyes of the whole school.
- They had beaten the jocks at an athletic event.
- And the jocks saluted them.

笑倒

The competitive format of this school in Alberta, or of the Mater Dei school in Maryland, might make those schools a poor choice for many girls

(even if the schools enrolled girls, which they don't).

- And those schools might not be the best choice for some boys.
- But if your son loves competition
  - —if you can imagine him competing to see who can pee the farthest—then you need to find your son a school like this one.
- If there is no such school nearby, then I hope you will lend your copy of this book to your school's principal and to some of your son's teachers.
- Ask whether they might make some effort to accommodate different types of boys.
- In the twenty-first century, most school formats allow little place for team competition.
- Indeed, any school competition with clearly defined winners and losers is disparaged in many schools nowadays, on the grounds that the loser's self-esteem might be in jeopardy in a competitive environment.

We need to change that, and we can.

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## What About Self-Esteem?

“What if my son loses?”  
you may be wondering.  
“What if my son gives the wrong answer and  
the team loses as a result?  
Wouldn't that damage his self-esteem?”

To understand the answer to this question, you have to understand something about gender differences with regard to self-esteem.

- 
- 

Let me tell you first about a study that was done recently at Harvard University.

- The researchers recruited Asian and Asian-American women from among Harvard undergraduates.
- The women were then randomly assigned to three groups.
- One group was simply asked to take a short written math examination and that was it.
- The second group was given a questionnaire that emphasized their Asian heritage.
- The questionnaire asked what language they spoke at home, whether they preferred traditional Asian foods over Western foods, and so on.
- The women in this second group scored significantly higher on the math exam than the women in the first group.
- The third group was given a questionnaire that emphasized the fact that they were women.
- The questionnaire asked whether they preferred to live in a single-sex dorm or a coed dorm, whether they felt that there were adequate protections for women on campus.
- The women in this third group scored significantly lower on the math exam than the women in the first group.<sup>54</sup>

Just reminding women of their membership in a category that is negatively stereotyped

—i.e., women supposedly aren't as good in math as men are—

resulted in a significant impairment of the ability of these women to test well.

- Reminding women of a different stereotype
  - —the supposed superior ability of Asians in math—significantly enhanced the women's ability to do well.
- These women weren't stupid.
- They were Harvard undergraduates.
- Similar studies of young girls and teenagers, with even larger effects, have been published.<sup>55</sup>
- For girls and for many women, if you believe you're smart, you'll actually be smarter
  - —you'll learn better and do better on tests—than if you think you're dumb.

A girl who thinks she's good in math will test better than a girl of the same ability who thinks she's bad in math.

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But that effect simply doesn't hold true for boys.

- A boy who thinks he's smart in math won't necessarily test better than his equally bright peer who thinks he's not so smart.
- The boy who thinks he's smart may actually test worse than his peer, because boys who think they're smart in a subject tend not to work as hard studying the subject
  - —just as the athletes at the school in Edmonton didn't bother to train for the snowshoe relay.
- The correlation between a boy's self-esteem in a subject and his performance in that subject is zero at best
  - —and may possibly be negative, after controlling for ability.<sup>56</sup>
- I know many parents who are uneasy with the idea that their son needs a school with a more competitive format to get motivated.
- That idea clashes with the politically correct notions of the past twenty years, according to which competition is bad because it is harmful to self-esteem.
- But those notions were not empirically based.
- We now know that self-esteem has a value for girls that it simply doesn't have for many boys, while competition
  - —particularly team competition—has a value for many boys that it doesn't have for most girls.
- Some boys need the challenge and the risk of competition to care about the results.
- Parents and teachers and school administrators who don't understand that fact may actually disengage these boys from school.

I met with a woman who has coached both girls' and boys' sports for many years.

- She has found that most girls, even athletically talented girls, need encouragement.
- Otherwise, girls are likely to decide they're not good enough, they're not fast enough, they're not strong enough.
- They give up.

"You have to build the girls up,"  
ANGIE told me.

But boys are different.

Many boys

—especially athletically talented boys—  
have a tendency to overestimate their skills and their ability.

"You have to tell that hotshot that he may have some talent,  
but he's not nearly as good as he thinks he is.  
He still has a lot to learn.  
He's going to need to put in a lot of work  
if he wants to make it to the next level,"  
Angie told me.

"You have to break the boys down."

I'm a little uneasy with this woman's motto

—"build the girls up, break the boys down"—  
but I have to admit that it captures the essence of the research on  
self-esteem.

For many boys, failure is a spur to work harder.

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The competitive format gives these boys a structured environment in which they can easily determine whether or not they're making real progress.

A noncompetitive format in which  
"everybody's a winner"

is a sure way to disengage this boy from the whole process.

呵呵

# What About Columbine —and Virginia Tech?

The zero-tolerance policies many school districts have regarding anything that looks or sounds violent didn't spring out of nowhere.

They were motivated by concerns about school violence.

Some parents ask:

“If you let boys write violent stories, and you encourage competition with winners and losers, aren't you creating conditions in which violent activity is more likely to occur?”

重點應該是團隊，而不是個人  
強調幫助他人的人才是真正的強者

Those parents

—and the district administrators who wrote the zero tolerance policies—  
usually believe that prohibiting violent play or imaginary violence  
(e.g., boys' writing violent stories)  
will decrease actual violence.

**There is no shred of evidence to support this belief.**<sup>57</sup>

We actually know a good deal about the kind of boy who is the most likely to bring a gun to school.

- That boy is more likely than other boys to be an honor student;
- he's more likely to be shy, a loner;
- he is less likely than other boys to participate in aggressive sports such as football.<sup>58</sup>

We now understand that aggressive play, such as dodgeball, does not increase the risk of truly violent activities such as a school shooting.

- Writing a story about a World War II prison break is not a violent act.
- Prohibitions on dodgeball and on writing violent stories do not in any way decrease the likelihood of school violence.
- They only accomplish one thing:
  - they send a clear message that certain types of boys are simply not welcome at school.

To do well at school, that boy must deny his true self and pretend to be someone else.

- More compliant.
- More willing to do what the teacher asks.
- More concerned about pleasing the teacher.

Consider these recent examples:

• In Arkansas,

an eight-year-old boy was punished for pointing a cooked strip of chicken at another student and saying “pow, pow, pow.”<sup>59</sup>

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• In New Jersey,

eight-year-old Hamadi Alston found an L shaped piece of paper in a schoolbook.

- When he used it in a game of
  - “cops and robbers”
- at the next recess, he was taken to the school office and then turned over to police for “threatening to kill other students”
  - —because he had said “pow pow” while playing during recess.
- He spent five hours in police custody and had to make two court appearances before charges were dropped.

• In Alabama,

nine-year-old Austin Crittenden was suspended for “possession of a weapon—replica”

- when he brought a tiny plastic G.I. Joe handgun to his elementary school.
- **The third-grader's principal “had to tape the gun to a piece of paper to keep from losing it,”**
- Austin's grand mother reported.<sup>60</sup>

These stories are so outrageous that they made the newspapers.

But I can tell you many stories from my own experience that don't make the newspapers:

a boy whose story about a white family escaping from Zimbabwe was given a C because it included the suggestion of a violent act, while a girl's story of comparable quality in response to the same assignment  
—but with no hint of violence—  
received an A+.

The end result of these episodes is the widespread belief among the children themselves that school isn't welcoming to real boys.

In *Why Gender Matters*,

I quoted a famous saying  
attributed to the [Roman poet Horace](#):

“You can try to drive out Nature with a pitchfork;  
yet she will always return.”<sup>61</sup>

YOU CAN TAKE A BOY OUT OF A COUNTRY;  
YOU CANNOT TAKE THE COUNTRY OUT OF THE BOY.

江山易改，本性難移

If your son is motivated by competition, then eliminating it from his school, throwing out his toy guns, and for bidding him to write stories with violent themes won't change him.

Those policies may disengage him from school,  
however.

The end result may be a boy who feels that the only place he is truly understood as he really is, is the world of video games.

And, as we'll see in the next chapter, that world has its own problems.