

# Shafting Boys

**B**oys (and men) have been in trouble for some time, but “progressives” have only just noticed. In “The Trouble with Boys,” Newsweek, a representative of the species, articulates the problem:

By almost every benchmark, boys across the nation and in every demographic group are falling behind. In elementary school, boys are two times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities and twice as likely to be placed in special-education classes. High-school boys are losing ground to girls on standardized writing tests. The number of boys who said they didn't like school rose 71 percent between 1980 and 2001 . . . . Nowhere is the shift more evident than on college campuses. Thirty years ago men represented 58 percent of the undergraduate student body. Now they're a minority at 44 percent.

The magazine then implicates the perennial “progressive” bugaboo: “quantifiable and narrowly defined academic success,” for which “activist parents” are responsible. The writers blame parents for ensuring that “school performance has been measured in two simple ways: how many students are enrolled in accelerated courses and whether test scores stay high.”

Other than pushy parents, Newsweek also faults “curricula [that] have become more rigid.” Too much teaching at the expense of the cult of the “whole child” has, seemingly, caused boys to stumble. The scribes, four women and one man, must be confusing America with Singapore.

Curiously, the magazine allows that boys used to do okay at school. What happened to change that is an enigma, best left to the experts. The experts—also the people who put boys in this predicament in the first place—aver that, while a considerable investment was made to empower girls, boys were neglected.

There's a problem with this reasoning. If boys used to do well at school, then an “investment in girls” would not explain their deterioration. Unless “investing in girls” is Orwellian for privileging girls at the expense of boys, which is precisely the impetus behind Title IX and other legislative loadstars. Presently, boys toil under elaborate affirmative action initiatives in secondary and tertiary schools that subordinate merit to the equal representation of girls in every field of endeavor, including sports.

“Experts” such as the National Education Association—the largest union in the country and the al-Qaida of education—will say we spend too little money and tolerate unacceptable teacher-student ratios. Oh, come off it. We shell out more per child than any other developed country, and at 1:16.5, the teacher-student ratio has never been lower. Soon there'll be more adults than children in the system.

The travails of boys, moreover, need to be put in perspective. American high-school kids, *boys and girls*, have been crowned the cretins of the developed world, as measured by every

conceivable international test. That carnivorous girls have climbed to the top of this pile is no great achievement. No, the galloping ignorance among American students is proportional to budgetary profligacy.

The problems plaguing boys are not pecuniary, but paradigmatic: the progressive, child-centered worldview and feminism.

For decades now, America's educators have insisted that learning be made as natural and as easy as possible, when it is neither. To this end, content-based, top-down teaching was replaced with pop-culture friendly, non-hierarchically delivered flimflam. But as classicists such as E. D. Hirsch Jr. have pointed out, effective, analytical and explicit instruction is very definitely not a natural but a highly artificial, often-unintuitive process.

Evidence abounds that boys thrive in the more disciplined, structured learning environment. America's loosey-goosey schools, however, shun discipline and moral instruction. Boys are also biologically predisposed to competition. But in the progressive school, cooperative experiences and groupthink are preferred to individual achievement.

And girls favored over boys.

When boys bubble over with unbridled testosterone, instead of challenging, disciplining, and harnessing their energies, as teachers once did, they are emasculated or medicated. The former means being made over in the image of woman; the latter entails being diagnosed as "learning disabled" and drugged with Ritalin. It is a consequence of the demonization of male biopsychology.

The school is a microcosm of society. Both have been thoroughly feminized. The false feminist narrative suffuses every aspect of a boy's life. Women everywhere are depicted as brawny, brainy, and beautiful; men as buffoons. On celluloid, an 80-pound waif manages to wallop a 200-pound gangster with no punctures to the silicone sacks.

When male teachers manage to infiltrate the public school system, they are of the androgynous genus—and every inch as feminist as their XX-carrying colleagues. The quintessential male role models—the Founding Fathers—are *persona non grata* in courses, as are other so-called pale, patriarchal pigs. A boy risks purgatory and worse should he mention weaponry or female anatomy.

In addition to a core-curriculum, banished too from America's feminized and foolish schools is the "archaic" idea of a literary canon. Not only do boys have to internalize feminism's lumpen jargon; they must also synchronize their male brains to Oprah's challenged synapses. English teachers expect them to study *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *The Secret Life of Bees*.

If epic literature worms its way into the school's shopping-mall assortment of flimsy courses and frivolous subject matter, then it is duly deconstructed and shred: Boys are taught to see great works of art through feminism's grim and distorting prism. Shakespeare, Tolstoy, and T. S. Eliot were members of the ruling class of oppressors; their artistry no more than a manifestation of the alleged power relationships in society.

Progressive schools—and the feminist and feminized “education” they inflict—are ultimately extremely bad for boys and girls alike. But while they favor girls, casting them as a besieged class of helots; they are hostile to boys, who are perceived as members of a ruling elite that refuses to let go of patriarchal privilege and power.

In an e-mail to me a young man described his daily grind under this mirthless and unmerciful ideology:

I cannot seem to escape the biases of feminism no matter where I turn. Every female teacher somehow manages to bring the argument around to point out that males overrun everything. If I produce any artwork with any sort of tall thin form in it, I’m immediately criticized for producing artwork that involves phallic symbolism. Thus meaning that I obviously am promoting male dominance in society.

He said he felt “worn down” by the experience. Others like him just walk away.

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