

# Let Boys Become Men: The Need for All-Male Education

by Anthony Esolen (June 2018)



*Ashton Grammar Boy Cycling to School 1960s*, Steven Bruce

**Whenever the idealistic Left, never satisfied but ever meddling, sees some discrepancy between the performance of one group and that of another, they who find injustice**

everywhere but in their own hearts leap to the conclusion that some “system,” like an evil mage working his malignant designs out of the sight of men, has carved out the canyon. And then it is the task of those who worship an even ground to fill in the Grand Canyon, with pebbles, good wishes, reams of law and regulation, and other people’s money.

People who actually know something about cultures and their differences, and about men and women, do not *necessarily* see anything untoward about the canyon. I am not the first to note that the Left waves the idea of “culture” about when it suits them, as for instance to assert that there is a “[different kinds of work](#),” and that a young man with a family dependent upon his income is by far the most aggressive worker in the world. He takes on more overtime, he stays on the lookout for more lucrative jobs, he presses for promotions and raises, and he plays a little hardball with employers to begin with. I did that when I was young, and so did my male friends who were in the same situation. Catch a tiger by the tail, ladies.

Yet there is one case where a canyon *has opened up*, which cannot be explained by culture or, for that matter, by differences in native intelligence, family income, place of residence, quality of schools attended, sheer need, or the vicissitudes of home life. For *this case*, we are talking about two groups of people who have *exactly the same* family income, who live in the same place, attend the same schools, have the same decent or lousy home life, and roughly the same intelligence, if not that the group of people who perform more poorly are actually on average just a wee bit *more* intelligent, and more daring about it, by nature. The two groups are *boys* and *girls*.

Boys now make up only about forty percent of college students, and that is just to scratch the surface of their troubles.

They drop out far more often than their sisters do. They commit suicide more often. They break the law and are thrown into prison more often. They do every illegal thing you can name more often, except for shoplifting and prostituting themselves. But why? They are as intelligent as their sisters. They are if anything bolder than their sisters, as witness their propensity to crime; for the capacity, let us say, to build bridges never conceived before is akin to the capacity to rob banks never robbed before. The dynamism may be directed to good as well as to evil. They come from the same families as their sisters, they have gone to the same mostly lousy schools, they have lived in the same subdivisions or apartments or mansions or farm houses. What explains their colossal failure?

We are talking about *failure* here, and not about girlish success. It is not as if the world has been set afire by our college graduates, who very seldom can write three sensible and grammatical sentences in a row, who might be able to parrot the slogans of gender theory but cannot identify Garibaldi or Catherine de Medici, and whose actual performance in the arts is generally beneath embarrassment. I have not the time here to argue that the age of great women novelists is largely past, or that the greatest woman poet is still either Sappho or Emily Dickinson, those artists of the lyrical and terse. I will say that civilization seems to have gained nothing at all by feminism, if you take into account every Bernini, Bach, Schopenhauer, Goethe, Newman, and Planck burnt out in the bud; because that is what is happening to boys, *en masse*. If I hear of a boy who has failed out of high school, I can make no assumptions as to his intelligence; he may be a genius. Certainly, the capacity to do well in our high schools, such as they are, is a strong indication *against genius*, and in favor of a neat and happy willingness to please, to do what is always socially acceptable, however that

is defined from place to place and from time to time.

The reader will here challenge me to suggest why boys should be lagging behind their sisters—and I do not speak metaphorically there; they lag behind *their sisters*. Let me do so right now.

If you wanted to come up with teaching methods, school policies, and a curriculum perversely designed to bore the ordinary boy half to death, to frustrate him, to fail to engage his natural propensities, to give him no hope, to cut his heart right out, then you could hardly improve on what we have now.

Boys are natural statisticians and devisers of compendia, and if you ever meet a memorizing monster, it is sure to be male; the basketball player Jerry Lucas, I believe, memorized the Manhattan telephone directory. One summer I memorized the first four books of *Paradise Lost*; then school started and I had to set it down. My brother-in-law can tell you the winners of every major golf tournament for the last eighty years. Consider for which sex the baseball card was invented. Boys gravitate toward such things. Therefore, make sure that you de-emphasize the learning of *true things*. Make sure that you do not train the memory. Despise what from time immemorial was taken for granted as the basis of all education.

Be allergic to *all systems*: do not give your students taxonomies of truth. Linnaeus stands at one pole; finger-painting pictures of smiling dolphins stands at the other. Give your students finger-paints and a happy aquatic mammal

named Delphinia. Think of the hierarchies within hierarchies that make up Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, and consider how vast, subtle, comprehensive, and architectonically *organized* such a thing is; how masculine in its features, in its almost complete dispensing with emotion, its surgical acuity, its drawing of clean distinctions, and its never fleeing from where the logic leads. Then give students just the reverse of that. Give them a "unit" here and a "unit" there, politically chosen, and stress what the young people are supposed to *feel* about Nefertiti or the Navajos.

A lot of boys, and no girls that I have ever met, like to read about military heroes and battle campaigns: Cannae, Corregidor, Hastings, Waterloo. Make sure that you never touch upon those things. Cut those heroes down to size. Hannibal was a butcher—or, better yet, who's Hannibal? George Washington owned slaves. So much for him. If the boy bites away at a pop-tart to make the shape of a gun, send him to the principal.

Boys are map-makers. I have met plenty of men who love to do as I do, pore over a road map, look up cities in an atlas, find pictures of strange islands, chart out rivers, and plot mountain ranges. So get rid of geography entirely. While you are at it, make sure that you are not really learning history either, because that too may be charted, map-like. Do current events. Make a lot of political poses. Get out the pom-poms for the next progressive leap.

Boys don't care to read about girls. That is just a fact. I would not have read *Pride and Prejudice* when I was fifteen if my life depended on it. I happen to believe now that it is a novel of the highest quality, but when I was young it would have bored me and frustrated me. So make sure that you are not

reading *Treasure Island* when you are eight, *The Call of the Wild* when you are ten, *Huckleberry Finn* when you are twelve, and *Moby-Dick* when you are fourteen. Get rid of C. M. Forrester, Raphael Sabbatini, John Buchan, Rudyard Kipling, and Robert Louis Stevenson, all of whom wrote mainly for an audience of boys and young men. Make the boys suffer the maunderings of feminists who do not like either men or boys: Toni Morrison, for example. Make them read Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, till they are that color in the face, if they bother to open the book at all.

Boys need aggressive and rough activity. That is the boy's body speaking. His metabolism is not like his sister's. His bones *grow and harden* by rough play, and that explains what is otherwise pretty strange, that boys actually like not only to tackle but to be tackled. So make sure there is no dodgeball, no climbing trees, no pick-up games of football on the school playground, no king-of-the-hill. One way to do this is to make sure that there is *no time for it*. Check out Charlie Chaplin's movie *Modern Times*, and see if you cannot improve on the Billows Feeding Machine, for children in school. Give them ten or fifteen minutes to shove the calories down their throats, and when boys grow jittery and jumpy and won't listen in class—because who in the hell wants to listen to a lady teacher talking about women's suffrage and how rotten men used to be, anyway?—then [@NERIconoclast](#)