



# Boys Will Be Boys: How Sex Ed is Failing Young Men

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# Acknowledgements

- Binary language
- Generalizations
- Research & Experiences
- Comprehensive Sex Ed
- Snapshot

# What is Adolescence Like for Boys?

Transcript of a radio conversation between a US naval ship and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland

US Ship: “Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision”

CND Reply: “Recommend you divert *your* course 15 degrees to the south to avoid collision”

US Ship: “This is the captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert *your* course”

CND Reply: “No, I say again divert *your* course”

US Ship: “THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS CORAL SEA. WE ARE A LARGE WARSHIP OF THE US NAVY DIVERT YOUR COURSE NOW!!!”

CND Reply:

“This is a lighthouse.  
Your call.”

# So, What is Adolescence Like for Boys?

- Jumping to conclusions
- Veiled threats
- Immense stubbornness
- Miscommunications
- Competition

# To educate boys...

...we must first UNDERSTAND boys

- What is the “boy code”?
- What do they know about sexuality?  
How do they feel about it?
- How do they learn?

# “The BOY CODE”

*William Pollack, PhD*

# What Is the “Boy Code”?

- The unwritten code of boy behavior
- Are not suggestions, but strict rules about how they "must" behave
- Genuine fear of what will happen if they break them

# Gender Boxes



# What Does the Boy Code Dictate?

- Tough
- Distrusts adults
- Doesn't do anything "weak" or "sissy"
- Muscular
- Never cries
- Plays sports
- Doesn't talk much
- Doesn't "act like a girl"

# The “Boy Code”

- Boy Code: Needs to look like he knows what he's doing – “*I know, ok?*” – even if he doesn't (starts early)
- Girls: appearance important
- Boys: *appearances* important

# Typical Range of an Adolescent Boy

- May “one-up” people, especially peers
- Roughhousing
- Humiliate and be humiliated

ALL = MALE BONDING

# Boys and Masculinity

- Have limited definitions of masculinity available to them. Usually confined to such behaviors as competition, repression of fear and emotions, and strength, both physically and emotionally
- Studies: traditionally “macho” attitudes linked to greater depression; higher self-esteem in adolescence, greater problems later

# Boys and Masculinity

- Boys of color and lower SES have fewer alternatives for defining their masculinity than do white boys and those of higher economic status
- As a result, boys tend to define themselves in opposition to others: non-female, non-gay, or anti-authority (i.e. schools, parents)
- Very few acceptable emotional markers of malehood – aggression, first sex, independence – therefore emotions are threatening to masculinity

# Boys tell us that...

- NEED to be heterosexual
- NEED to have sex
- Want desperately to be good lovers  
Consumed with giving partners orgasms
- Obsessed with penis size
- Concerned about statutory rape laws
- Experience love in extremes

# Boys tell us that...

When teased or bullied they have to:

- "man up"
- "keep a stiff upper lip"
- "not show their feelings"
- "act real tough"
- "not act too nice"
- "just laugh and brush it off when someone punches you"

# From sexetc.org:

“Hi. I'm very confused. I don't know if I'm gay, bi, whatever. I need you to tell me some signs for straight and gay or even bi boys. Please. I need to know; and I need to know now.”

-- 15-year-old boy

# From sexetc.org

“Is there anything i can eat, drink or buy to enlarge my penis? Like that pump thing, does it really works? I hav difficulties since young like u know getting undress in front my friends... My first lov broke up wif me... Sometimes i just wish i wasn't born at all. Suicidal thoughts often cross my mind. i really need ur help...pls”

– 17-year-old male

# From sexetc.org

“I am considering suicide because I do not now what to do after my girlfriend left me. She is the only one I love and I cannot go on without her”

-- 14-year-old boy

# Boys Are More Likely Than Girls To...

- Have discipline/behavior problems
- Be diagnosed with a Learning Disability (2x) or Attention-Deficit Disorder (10x)
- Be placed in special education
- Drop out of school (4x)
- Score lower grades; 1 – 2 years behind in reading/writing

# Boys Are More Likely Than Girls To...

- Channel feelings (hurt, pain, grief) into anger
- Commit suicide (4x); girls more likely to attempt, boys more likely to be successful (same in adulthood)

Boys are LESS likely to be diagnosed with depression

# Boys and Emotions

Girls: process more emotions, through more senses, quicker and more completely

Boys: can take hours to process emotions

# Boys and Body Image

Girls aren't the only ones  
with poor body image

# Boys and Body Image

- Boys ages 9 to 14 who thought they were overweight were 65% more likely to try smoking
- Boys who worked out every day to lose weight 2x as likely to experiment with tobacco
- Like girls, not exercising for HEALTH, but for appearance (and performance)

# Boys and Body Image

- An alarming increase in obsessive weight training and the use of anabolic steroids
- Toy action figures' increasing muscularity setting unrealistic ideals for boys just as Barbie dolls have been accused of doing the same for girls

# G.I. Joe of yesterday...



**answer**  
sex ed, honestly

# G.I. Joe of today...



**answer**  
sex ed, honestly

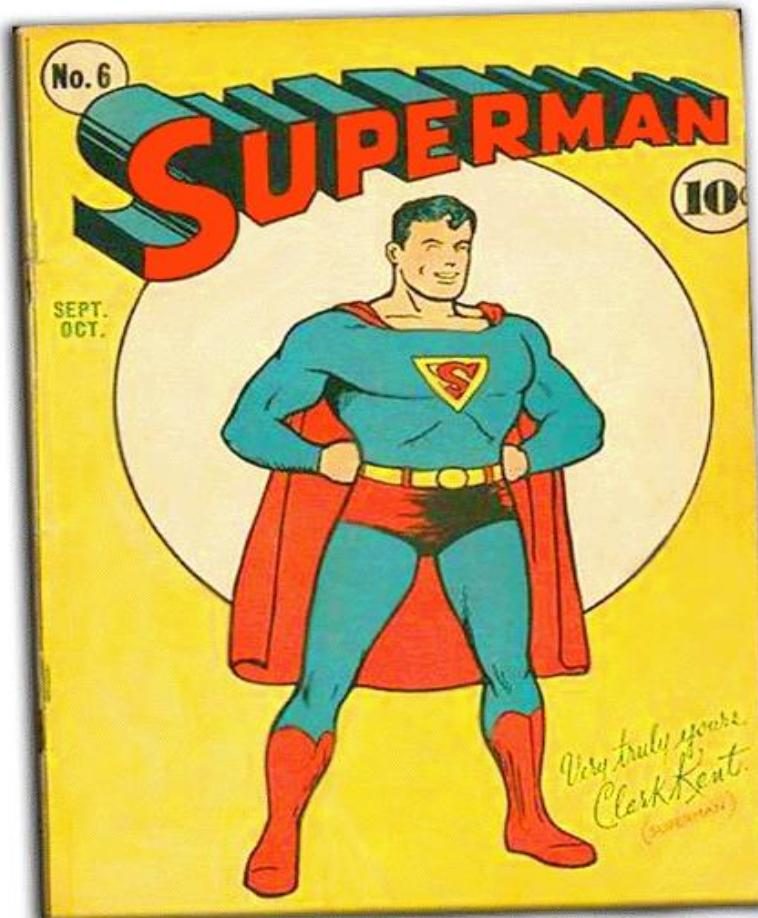
# Batman & Robin of yesterday...



# Batman of today...



# Superman of yesterday...



# Superman of today...



# Self-esteem and Sex

Girls with low self-esteem

Boys with high self esteem

# Boys and Education

All of this affects how they are in an educational setting and education in general is failing boys

**Boys have a learning style that is unique and different from girls'**

Girls: learn by watching or listening

Boys: learn by doing -- action-oriented tasks

# What Does this Mean for Us?

- Build in time to move around – good for different learning intelligences, too
- If a lot of sitting, build in energizers
- Let them fidget, within reason

# What Does this Mean for Us?

- Building a model of the reproductive system (need to know how things work)
- Actually handle contraceptive methods (need to know how they work)
- Create space between learning stations: Boys & boundaries

# Misconceptions

Boys are shut down emotionally

Culture allows only for anger/ aggression

We avoid affective lessons with boys

# Misconceptions

- Even though boys don't talk about emotions as much as girls, doesn't mean they shouldn't
- Important to help develop that part of the brain by asking boys to think about their own and others' emotional reactions

Feelings Chart  
and  
“This is How I Feel”

# I'm feeling...

<b>Calm</b>	<b>Happy</b>	<b>Silly</b>	<b>Relaxed</b>
<b>Nervous</b>	<b>Annoyed</b>	<b>Sad</b>	<b>Shy</b>
<b>Surprised</b>	<b>Hungry</b>	<b>Angry</b>	<b>Confused</b>
<b>Sleepy</b>	<b>Sick</b>	<b>Hurt</b>	<b>Hot</b>

# “This Is How I Feel”

Individual writing and then group sharing

Gives control to them; public recognition from peers

Writing is physical for boys (press down hard on pen)

# “This Is How I Feel”

Adapted from “Discovering Me: A Guide to Teaching Health and Building Adolescents' Self-Esteem” by Leslie Herod

- I feel happy when...
- I feel sad when...
- I feel strong when...
- I am proud of myself when...
- Someone who doesn't know me very well might think that I'm...
- If someone I like/think is hot talks to/texts me, I feel...

Leading source of sex ed info

PORN

# Why porn?

Porn provides:

- Direct, concrete examples
- “How to” lessons - performance is key

# Why is this important now?

- Boys are often more open to considering alternative views than men
- Styles of interaction are established and “rehearsed” during adolescence
- Boys have more free time to participate in health education than men

# What we know...

- Gender of teacher: less important than respect
- Personalize but maintain boundaries
- Speak frankly... e.g., “condoms feel different”
- Humor

# Boys and Sex Ed

To reach boys with our sexuality lessons  
(e.g., sexual initiation, healthy relationships, safer sex, etc.)

We need to spend more time with boys bridging the gender gap in sex ed

# What Strategies Should I Use?

# Things we can do

- Involve them in rule setting
- Enforce ground rules - boys negotiate through rules; girls through relationships
- Address homophobic remarks as you would any other inappropriate names
- Take disciplinary action when necessary

# Things we can do

- Allow for movement and tactile learning in your lessons
- Lots of space
- Use visual cues
- Don't avoid emotions - boys are taking your lead

# Things we can do

Consider the diversity of the boys in your class

Examine and critically assess the media messages

Incorporate topics the boys might need/want to know that are not typically in lessons

# For More Information/Reading

- “Real Boys” and “Real Boys’ Voices” by William Pollack, PhD
- “Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys” – Dan Kindlon, PhD and Michael Thompson, PhD
- “Teaching the Male Brain: How Boys Think, Feel and Learn in School” – Abigail Norfleet James

“The spirit is there in  
every boy; it has to be  
discovered and brought  
to light.”

-- *Robert Baden-Powell*

# Thanks! Let's Connect!

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