Who’s In Charge Here?

October 2016
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Please note: this hand-out is intended as a supplement to the presentation, not as a substitute for the presentation. This handout is NOT intended to be read separately from the presentation; it cannot “stand alone.” If you would like to get a sense of the presentation but did not have the opportunity to attend, please read my second book Boys Adrift, especially chapters 3 and 8; also my third book Girls on the Edge, especially chapters 1, 2, and 3; and my most recent book The Collapse of Parenting. You can reach me at mcrcad@verizon.net but please also send a copy to my personal email leonardsax@gmail.com.


Jean Twenge’s research on the rise in anxiety among teenagers over the past five decades is presented in an accessible format in her books Generation Me (Free Press, 2007) and The Narcissism Epidemic (Free Press, 2010).

The opinions of parents need to matter more than the opinions of same-age peers. This point, and my other references to the work of Dr. Gordon Neufeld, are from his book Hold On To Your Kids: Why parents need to matter more than peers (Gabor Maté, co-author), Toronto: Vintage Canada, second edition, 2013 – and also to our face-to-face meeting in Vancouver in 2014.

In the past ten years, the social media have displaced the diary. It is now unusual to find a child or teenager who regularly writes in their diary.

Mike Stefanone: girls post 5 times more photos on their Facebook page than boys do; and the girls are more likely to point the camera at themselves. Michael A. Stefanone, Derek Lackaff, and Devan Rosen, “Contingencies of self-worth and social-networking-site behavior,” Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 14:41-49, 2011.

The more Facebook friends you have, the more pressure you feel to post something every day. Facebook pushes kids – especially girls – to value acquaintances above close friends (Girls on the Edge, chapter 2). See also Stephen Marche, “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?” The Atlantic magazine, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/8930/. Girls are also more likely to Photoshop their photo than boys are.
Most girls present themselves in a positive light on social media. But most girls don’t realize that the other girls are doing the same. That may be one reason why girls are more likely than boys to experience toxic effects from social media.

I recommend that parents deploy programs such as NetNanny, WebRoot and CyberPatrol. Parents need to tell their kids that it is the parent’s job to be aware of how much time their kids are spending online, and which sites they are visiting.

No devices in the bedroom! – i.e. no UNSUPERVISED Internet access.

The latest guidelines on use of media from the American Academy of Pediatrics are available at http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2013/10/24/peds.2013-2656.full.pdf.

You should take the mobile devices away from kids at 9 pm (the latest) and plug them into the charger. The charger stays in the parent’s bedroom.

Girls appear to be more vulnerable than boys to the toxic effects of social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Boys are far more likely than girls to become addicted to video games and to online pornography.

Most popular video game for girls: Candy Crush.
Most popular video games for boys: Grand Theft Auto, Call of Duty, Halo, World of Warcraft
Playing video games has little effect on academic achievement below a threshold of 6 hours per week. Beyond that threshold, there is a negative and roughly linear effect.
“Displacement.”

Video games tend to shift motivation away from the real world, to the virtual world.

In a large, prospective, longitudinal cohort study, Professors Craig Anderson and Doug Gentile found that boys playing violent M-rated games – particularly games which deployed a moral inversion – exhibited changes in personality over a period of 3 or more years. They become more selfish, more hostile, and less patient. Douglas Gentile, Craig Anderson, and colleagues, “Mediators and moderators of long-term effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior,” JAMA Pediatrics, volume 168, pp. 450 – 457, 2014.
Consequences of playing video games include:

- Attention problems
- Inappropriate risk-taking
- Obesity and overweight
- Dehumanization

**Attention deficit.** The most popular video games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call of Duty* offer constantly-changing challenges, scenes, and characters. Often there are multiple characters on the screen. The successful player must continually be scanning up, down, and sideways for new assailants. Sustained concentration on a single item is a recipe for defeat: you didn’t respond to that rustle on the right of the screen which was your only clue to an impending ambush. Distractibility is rewarded. Not surprisingly, researchers find that the more time you spend playing video games, the more likely you are to develop difficulties maintaining sustained concentration on a single item. Conversely, researchers find that boys who already have difficulty concentrating and focusing tend to gravitate to video games, where their distractibility is an asset rather than a liability.\(^1\)

**Risk-taking.** The world of video games is unreal. You can jump off a 20-foot ledge onto the concrete pavement below and continue chasing your enemy: no sprained ankle, no broken bones. You can race your car at high speeds, crash into a wall, and walk away unharmed from the wreck of your car. You can hijack a car in *Grand Theft Auto* – in fact you have to hijack a car in order to play the game. Not only is risky behavior allowed in games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call of Duty*, risky behavior is required and rewarded. If you jump off that high ledge to chase after your opponent, you are much more likely to succeed in killing your opponent than if you “waste” valuable time by running down the stairs instead. Not surprisingly, researchers have found that adolescents who play these risk-glorifying games are more likely to engage in dangerous driving behaviors such as speeding, tailgating, and weaving in traffic; they are more likely to be pulled over by the police; more likely to be in automobile accidents; and more willing to drink and drive.\(^2\) In another study, teens who were playing risky racing video games at age 17 or 18 were more than three times as likely, 5 years later, to have been involved in an actual car crash, compared with teens who did not play such games.\(^3\)
**Obesity.** Boys who spend lots of time playing video games are more likely to become fat compared with boys who spend less time playing video games.\(^4\) There seem to be at least two mechanisms operating here. First, playing video games exercises your thumbs but burns less calories than many other activities, such as playing actual sports. Secondly, and less intuitively, playing video games seems to have a direct appetite-stimulant effect, worse than watching TV.\(^5\) That may be why time spent playing video games is significantly more likely to be associated with obesity and other bad health outcomes, compared with time spent watching TV.\(^6\)

**Dehumanization / Changes in personality.** When young people play a violent video game, they not only regard their opponent as less human; they come to regard *themselves* as less human, more of an object. The researchers who documented this effect conclude that “violent video game play diminishes our humanity.”\(^7\) In a longitudinal study conducted over four years’ time, researchers found that the more time a young person spends playing violent video games, the more likely that person is subsequently to abuse alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and engage in risky sexual behaviors.\(^8\) Playing video games in which antisocial and delinquent behavior is rewarded increases the likelihood that the gamer will subsequently actually engage in delinquent behavior.\(^9\) When high school kids were randomly assigned either to play violent video games or non-violent games, playing violent video games appeared to undermine self-control and to promote moral disengagement.\(^10\) Other researchers have suggested that young men who play violent video games may develop a “myopia for the future”, meaning that the young man prefers to continue playing the game “despite the negative long-term consequences in social or work domains of life.”\(^11\)

*Playing* a violent video game has effects on how you feel, how you think, and how physiologically aroused you are which are greater than, and different from, the effects of *watching* that game, or watching violent TV.\(^12\)

Anderson and Gentile have created the following guidelines, based on their research:

**Video games (Craig Anderson, Doug Gentile)**
1) No more than 40 minutes/night on school nights
2) No more than 1 hour/day on weekends / vacations
3) No games rated M
4) Is a moral inversion present?
5) Is violence depicted as fun, or funny?
6) Are real-world consequences of violence lacking from the game?
Sexting (rare) and Not-Quite-Sexting (common)


For parents: I recommend parents install either mymobilewatchdog.com or Net Nanny Mobile for most smartphones. This program, and others like it, can send every photo taken with a cell phone IMMEDIATELY to parent’s laptop and/or cell phone. Programs like these give your daughter an excuse to say NO.

No child under 13 years of age should have a smartphone. That doesn’t mean that all 13-year-olds should have smartphones. It depends.

I suggest getting a “dumb phone” rather than a smart phone. A dumb phone can make and receive phone calls; that’s all.

Who is responsible when kids send pictures on their cell phone? My answer: PARENTS are responsible. See my op-ed October 25 2013 for the *Wall Street Journal*, [http://on.wsj.com/1dp0OXO](http://on.wsj.com/1dp0OXO). See also my discussion of this topic on Fox News, October 29 2013, [http://video.foxnews.com/v/2781648798001](http://video.foxnews.com/v/2781648798001).


Your job is to be a parent, not a best friend. A best friend can’t tell you what to eat, or forbid you to watch violent pornography, or take away your phone at 9 pm; but a parent can, and must.

Longitudinal cohort studies demonstrating the importance of Conscientiousness:

Roberts et al. 2007 = Brent W. Roberts and colleagues, “The Power of Personality: The Comparative Validity of Personality Traits, Socioeconomic Status, and Cognitive Ability

These two graphs come from Moffitt et al. 2011:


**Teaching self-control and virtue should be among your top priorities for your daughter or son. Character matters as much or more than academic achievement**

Conscientiousness is the only trait which achieves the hat trick: more health, more wealth, and more happiness. See Angela Duckworth and colleagues, “Who does well in life? Conscientious adults excel in both objective and

For a survey of interventions to boost self-control in young children, see the review by Alex Piquero and colleagues, “Self-control interventions for children under age 10 for improving self-control and delinquency and problem behaviors,” *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 2010, #2 (117 pages). Piquero and colleagues accept Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirsch’s assertion that interventions to boost self-control are not effective for children over 10 to 12 years of age. I don’t accept that assertion. Gottredson and Hirschi are basing their assessment on their experience (pre-1990) with teenage juvenile delinquents. I concede that there is evidence that the criminal justice system is not effective in boosting self-control in incarcerated teenagers: see for example Ojmarrh Mitchell and Doris Mackenzie, “The stability and resiliency of self-control in a sample of incarcerated offenders,” *Crime and Delinquency*, volume 52, pp. 432 – 449, 2006. But data based on incarcerated juvenile offenders may not be valid for parents of children who are living in the community. More to the point: I have personally seen numerous cases in my own practice where kids of every age, under age 10 and over age 10, have reformed and become more Conscientious because parents implemented some of the strategies we have discussed. Even very simple interventions, such as repeatedly telling a child to Stop and Think! before you act, can have profound and lasting beneficial consequences, even in kids who have been diagnosed with ADHD: see for example Molly Reid and John Borkowski, “Causal attributions of hyperactive children: implications for teaching strategies and self-control,” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, volume 79, pp. 296 – 307, 1987.

The more general premises here are that personality can change at any age and that increased Conscientiousness is beneficial. For evidence supporting these premises, see the study by Christopher Boyce and colleagues, “Is personality fixed? Personality changes as much as ‘variable’ economic factors and more strongly predicts changes to life satisfaction,” *Social Indicators Research*, volume 111, pp. 287 – 305, 2013; and also Christopher Magee and colleagues, “Personality trait change and life satisfaction in adults: the roles of age and hedonic balance,” *Personality and Individual Differences*, volume 55, pp. 694 – 698, 2013. The older you are, the less likely your personality is to change. I am not
asserting that it is easy for a 65-year-old to become more Conscientious. But I have seen 5-year-olds and 15-year-olds who have become more Conscientious.

There is a false dichotomy between the “Tiger Mom” and the “Irish Setter Dad.” The Tiger Mom is all about achievement. The Irish Setter Dad just wants kids to have a good time. Both are mistaken.

The search for meaning. Without meaning, life has no point. The result is anxiety, depression, and disengagement. Your job as a parent is to educate desire: to instill a longing for things higher and deeper. In the arts, in music, and in your child’s character.

Having a meal with a parent greatly decreases the risk of problems, and improves satisfaction, in a “dose-dependent” fashion from days 1 through 7 (there are 7 days in a week). See Frank Elgar, 2013, Journal of Adolescent Health. This graph is Figure 1 from their paper.
No devices allowed at the dinner table. Limit social media.

Choose vacations with no Internet access (Google search for “unplugged vacations”), or at the very least, outdoor vacations.

Prioritize family. If you have a connection to another culture, nurture and strengthen that connection.

“Ban the bedroom.” No screens in the bedroom.

Why are so many girls and boys today more likely to be anxious, depressed, and/or fragile? My answers:

- Parents have allowed relations with same-age peers to displace the family
- You can change that
- Parents have allowed social media and video games to displace real world experience
- You can change that
- Parents have failed to teach virtue and character, with authority
- You can change that

Here are some comments about my books:

**Why Gender Matters** “...is a lucid guide to male and female brain differences.”
*New York Times*

**Boys Adrift** “...is powerfully and persuasively presented...Excellent and informative references and information are provided.”
*Journal of the American Medical Association*

**Boys Adrift**: “A must-read for any parent of boys. This is real science, and Dr. Sax thoroughly uncovers the important health issues that parents of boys need to be tuned into.”
*Dr. Mehmet Oz, host of “The Dr. Oz Show”*
**Girls on the Edge:** “Packed with advice and concrete suggestions for parents, *Girls on the Edge* is a treasure trove of rarely-seen research on girls, offering families guidance on some of the most pressing issues facing girls today. Dr Sax’s commitment to girls’ success comes through on every page.”  
*Rachel Simmons*, author of *Odd Girl Out*

**Girls on the Edge:** “This is essential reading for parents and teachers, and one of the most thought-provoking books on teen development available.”  
*Library Journal*

**Girls on the Edge:** “The best book about the current state of girls and young women in America . . . offers astonishing and troubling new insight . . .”  
*The Atlantic*

**The Collapse of Parenting:** “One of the premier experts on parenting, Dr. Leonard Sax brilliantly articulates the problems parents experience with their children, then gives solutions. *The Collapse of Parenting* is academic but practical, simple but deep. If you have time to read only one book this year, read this one.”  
*Meg Meeker MD*, author of *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters* and *Strong Mothers, Strong Sons*

**The Collapse of Parenting:** “With years of experience and research working directly with parents and children, Dr. Leonard Sax provides an important glimpse into parenting in modern times, where it’s gone wrong, and how to fix it. Being a parent has never been more important and Dr. Sax explains how to avoid parenting pitfalls and raise your children well.”  
*Bill Bennett PhD*, former US Secretary of Education

**The Collapse of Parenting:** “A comprehensive breakdown of where parents have gone awry and how they can get back on track to teach virtue and character to their children. . . .Sax provides a series of easy-to-follow solutions that help bring parents and children back to the same page, working toward a healthier, more respectful, and conscientious attitude. . . .With the author’s solid advice, parents have a good shot at achieving these goals.”  
*Kirkus Reviews*

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