

# Boys Adrift

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*Please note: this handout is intended as a **supplement to** the presentation, not as a **substitute for** the presentation. It is intended to assist those who attend my workshop on May 13 2015, to spare them the distraction of taking excessive notes. These pages are NOT intended to be read separately from the presentation; they cannot “stand by themselves.” You can reach me via email at [mrcrad@verizon.net](mailto:mrcrad@verizon.net) but also please send a copy to my personal email [leonardsax@gmail.com](mailto:leonardsax@gmail.com).*

## **Introduction: Why are even we talking about gender?**

We live in the modern era, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We all agree that girls and boys deserve equal opportunity, which means equal educational preparation to pursue whatever goals each girl and each boy chooses. This isn't the era of the 1950's or the 1850's, when most trades and most professions were reserved for men. In that era, girls knew that the only careers which were readily open to them outside the home were in nursing and in education. Those were the bad old days. We don't want to go back to those bad old days. So why are we even talking about gender in the classroom?

Many of the “experts” insist that we should not even hint at the existence of gender. According to them, a single-sex classroom is harmful because such a format suggests that gender matters. Dr. Diane Halpern is a past president of the American Psychological Association. She and seven of her colleagues, all tenured professors at leading American universities, have established an organization specifically opposed to single-sex education. Go to their web site [www.coedschools.org](http://www.coedschools.org), click on “For Teachers” at the left side of the page, and take their quiz to see how enlightened you are. If you refer to your students as “boys and girls” or as “ladies and gentlemen” then you lose points! You are a bad teacher. You need to be re-trained. You shouldn't even hint at categories such as “girls” and “boys” – or so the tenured professors of psychology insist. They provide no evidence in support of their assumptions. No evidence is required. Their assumptions are self-evidently true – or are they? The screenshot below is taken from [www.coedschools.org](http://www.coedschools.org).

**For Teachers: Gender Separation versus Gender Mixing Teaching Strategies Quiz**

How often do you use the following strategies?	Never	Once or twice a school year	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	At least once a day
A. I say, "Good morning boys and girls" or "Good morning ladies and gentlemen."	1	2	3	4	5
B. I call students "boys" and "girls."	1	2	3	4	5
C. I refer to my students as "ladies" and "gentlemen."	1	2	3	4	5
D. I line children up as boy-girl-boy-girl.	1	2	3	4	5
E. I encourage boys in my class to hold the door open for girls.	1	2	3	4	5

But in reality:

**The lack of awareness of gender differences  
has the unintended consequence of *reinforcing* gender stereotypes.**

As we will see: when teachers understand gender differences, and employ gender-aware instructional strategies in single-gender classrooms, then teachers can breakdown the gender stereotypes and broaden educational horizons. But in order to be successful, teachers need to have a solid grasp of where the gender stereotypes come from. How do Americans construct their ideas of gender? How can we understand differences between female and male, as well as variations within each sex?

Segment 2:

**Deconstructing Gender /**

**Understanding Gender /**

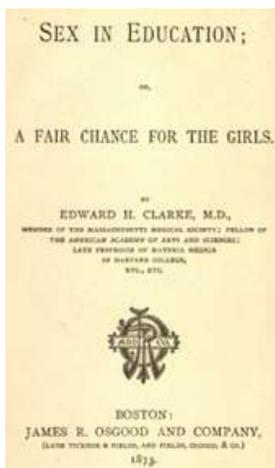
**Gender Variations Beyond the Binary**

Aristotle wrote in the *Metaphysics* that the world is divided in two:

Straight	/	Curved
Light	/	Darkness
Good	/	Evil
Dry	/	Wet
Male	/	Female

Aristotle explicitly equated “female” with “darkness, evil, curved, wet.” In most Greek city-states, the status of a married woman was comparable to that of a slave. She had no right to vote and no property: any property she owned prior to marriage became her husband’s property. Roman culture perpetuated and intensified the subordination of women.

Fast forward more than 2000 years, to 1851. In his notorious essay *Über die Weiber* (“Regarding Women”, 1851), the German philosopher Artur Schopenhauer asserted that women are by nature designed to obey men and that a woman’s intellect is different from, and properly subordinate to, the intellect of a man. The European consensus in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s was that the proper domains of women were *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*: children, kitchen, and church. Throughout the 1800’s and early 1900’s the notion prevailed that women were innately more emotional and less rational than men.



In the United States, a professor at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Edward Clarke, wrote a best-selling book in 1873 entitled *Sex in Education: or, a Fair Chance for the Girls*. Dr. Clarke asserted that the best education for girls was no education at all, after about 12 years of age, in order to give them “a fair chance” at motherhood. If girls continued their education after they began their menstrual cycles, Dr. Clarke taught, too much studying would shunt blood away from the uterus to the brain, rendering the young woman “irritable and infertile.”

Why are we spending any time on this – on the discouraging history of sexism in

Western civilization? It's important to begin here, for at least two reasons. The first reason is that some of these outdated and inaccurate notions of gender difference still persist, and we must deconstruct them. The second reason is that opponents of gender-aware instruction often refer to this sexist tradition in asserting that any suggestion of innate gender differences must be sexist.

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century (and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century) Push-Back against the Western Tradition**

Second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1960's and 1970's, explicitly repudiated the

Aristotelian binary of male/female and the notion of innate gender differences.

Andrea Dworkin wrote that *"Woman is not born: she is made. In the making, her humanity is destroyed."* Dworkin and other second-wave feminists asserted that

there are no innate gender differences between girls and boys; instead, the *construction* of gender in our society undermines a girl's humanity. Note that

Dworkin's assertion that "woman is not born: she is made" is not an empirical finding: it is a statement of primary belief, motivated by the decision to reject the Aristotelian binary. Ironically and perhaps unintentionally, the feminist rejection of traditional gender norms led to a devaluing of the feminine. For example, Susan Faludi suggested that a feminine woman is childlike to the degree that she is feminine: *"She is like the ballerina in an old-fashioned music box, her unchanging features tiny and girlish, her voice tinkly, her body stuck on a pin, rotating in a spiral that will never grow"* (from *Backlash: the undeclared war against American women*, 1991, p. 84).

Third-wave feminism today tries to compensate for this anti-feminine feature of second-wave feminism by asserting that teenage girls who participate in wet T-shirt contests are sexually empowered; also by asserting that sexual intimacy with multiple partners and without romantic relationship, is empowering. The culture of the hook-up (sexual intimacy without relationship) has replaced the dating culture. Hanna Rosin is characteristic of third-wave feminists who write that the hook-up culture empowers girls and young women, because it allows them to

enjoy sex with multiple partners without worrying about boyfriends (see Rosin's article "Boys on the Side", *The Atlantic*, September 2012).

The fundamental error here is the equation of "equal" with "same." If girls and boys are equal, then they must be the same; any suggestion of difference – e.g. the suggestion that most girls want *relationships* while some boys just want sex – must imply inequality.

But in reality, "**equal**" **does NOT mean "the same."** Apples and oranges are different; that doesn't mean that apples are better than oranges. Ovaries and testicles are different; that doesn't mean that ovaries are better than testicles. Although girls and boys do indeed differ on many parameters relevant to the classroom, those differences do NOT imply any difference in cognitive ability or political equality, nor do they imply that women should stay home while men work, or any other such nonsense.

### **The consensus, 1972 – 1997: Gender is primarily a social construct**

In 1972, Dr. John Money published the first of several reports about "the boy who was raised as a girl", which seemed to provide conclusive proof that gender is indeed merely a social construct. You can take a boy, cut off his penis and testicles, raise him as a girl, and he/she will indeed become a normal, happy, well-adjusted girl who likes to play with dolls and bake cookies. During this quarter-century, 1972 – 1997, most American scholars agreed on the following:

- 1) *There are few if any **innate** differences between girls and boys of any relevance to education; instead, kids **learn** how to "do gender", as a result of culturally-specific patterns of gender socialization*
- 2) *Notions of innate gender difference are not only wrong, they are harmful; the ideal which all teachers should strive to instill in their students is **androgyny**, an equal mix of female and male*
- 3) *Enlightened teachers minimize or ignore gender differences*

We review the story of David Reimer, "the boy who was raised as a girl". In 1997, Dr.

Milton Diamond learned that Dr. Money’s publications were fabrications, roughly opposite to what actually happened. The modern science of gender differences can be said to have begun with the 1997 publication of Dr. Diamond’s paper documenting the truth about David Reimer (see John Colapinto’s book for more on this story). Nevertheless, many American universities still teach the 1972 – 1997 consensus, as embodied in points 1, 2, and 3 above.

**Application:** When talking about single-gender education with parents or reporters, be cautious about endorsing cultural notions of “ladies” and “gentlemen.” For example, be cautious about saying “*We are teaching our students to be ladies and gentlemen.*” While that may be true, and it may even be a good thing, such statements are easily misunderstood and may be misconstrued so that some believe you are endorsing cultural stereotypes from the 1950’s or earlier.

Segment 3:

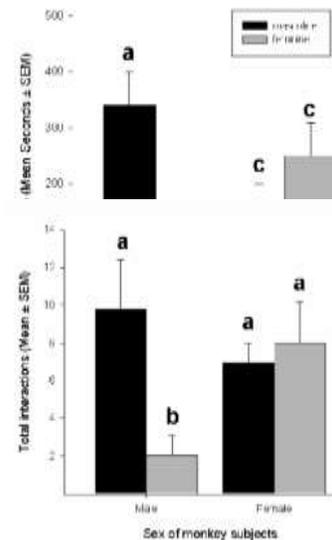
**Sex differences in vision /**

**Sex differences in hearing /**

**Sex differences in brain development**

**Sex differences in the visual system**

Researchers have long known that young boys tend to prefer playing with a truck rather than a doll. The graph at right shows the typical findings when girls and boys are given a choice of playing with a “boy toy” such as a truck (black bar) or a “girl toy” such as a colorful plush doll (grey bar). Before 2002, most scholars agreed that boys’ preference for trucks over dolls reflected the social construction of gender. Boys were taught that boys were supposed to prefer trucks over dolls; as a result, boys



preferred to play with trucks rather than dolls.

Dr. Gerianne Alexander was the first to offer monkeys the same choice: playing with a dull grey truck or a colorful plush doll. Her findings have since been replicated by Kim Wallen and colleagues with a different species of monkey, and by Sonya Kahlenberg and Richard Wrangham in their observations of monkeys. The primate data are shown above.

It's difficult to invoke the social construction of gender to explain these findings in monkeys or in chimpanzees. One *can* reasonably invoke the social construction of gender to explain the difference across species. Why is the preference of the juvenile male to play with a truck rather than a doll greater in our species than among monkeys or chimpanzees? Answer: the social construction of gender among humans exaggerates the innate preference. The preference of the juvenile male primate to play with trucks rather than dolls must be innate, because this preference is conserved across species. This preference is more pronounced in our species because of the social construction of gender in human cultures; or as Dr. Melvin Konner puts it, "Culture *stretches* biology." But what explains the main effect? Why do juvenile primate males – whether they are human or monkey – prefer to play with a dull grey truck rather than with a colorful plush doll?

Dr. Gerianne Alexander was the first to document this finding in nonhuman primates, and also the first to propose a plausible explanation. To understand her explanation, you have to recall some basic facts about the visual system in primates.

Two visual systems:

- One visual system, the Parvocellular (P) system, is devoted to color, texture, detail
- The other visual system, the Magnocellular (M) system, is devoted to detecting speed, direction, and change in direction
- Why do juvenile males – whether human or monkey – prefer to play with a dull grey truck rather than with a colorful plush doll?
- Because the truck MOVES; it has wheels

- Katrin Amunts et al. 2007: compared M system in human occipital cortex (hOc), in women and men

**Application.** Suppose you are teaching students in early elementary grades. You give all your students a blank sheet of paper and a box of crayons and tell them to draw whatever they want. What do children draw? Studies using this paradigm have found that young **girls** tend to draw people, pets, flowers, and/or trees, facing the viewer, with lots of detail, eyes, hair, clothes, etc. →



Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to draw a dynamic scene of action, such as a rocket smashing into a planet, or soldiers shooting at each other. Faces, if visible, are often lacking features.

←

The key is to understand: **What is the picture the boy is trying to draw?** Then help him to draw it better.

Don't insist on "one right way." Most schools of education teach undergraduates that at 6 years of age, a child drawing a human figure should include eyes, hair, mouth, and clothes. If the drawn figure does not have eyes, hair, mouth, and clothes, then the child should be corrected. In other words, most schools of education teach that 6-year-olds should draw like a girl. The result of this misguided approach is not that boys try to draw like girls. The result is that many boys decide that

“drawing is for girls.” **The lack of awareness of gender differences has the unintended consequence of reinforcing gender stereotypes.** When more teachers understand these differences, the result is that they are able to break down gender stereotypes, and boys like to draw. At least, that is the experience of Margrét Pála Ólafsdóttir in Iceland. Boys at all 17 of her schools love to draw. And her teachers know all about M and P (she sent 44 teachers from Iceland to Chicago for the conference I hosted there; she sent 60 teachers from Iceland to Orlando for the conference I hosted there).

But the importance of these differences extends beyond visual arts. How we see influences how we read and how we write. Some characteristics of “boy writing” – particularly the emphasis on action – may be traced in part to these differences in the visual system.

But where do you draw the line? What’s “out of bounds” with regard to writing, or drawing? What child should be disciplined, or even referred?

- Some boys like to draw violent pictures, or tell violent stories
- The lesson from St. Andrew’s, in Aurora, Ontario
- Throwing of snowballs is permitted on the football field, but not elsewhere
- **In-bounds vs. out-of bounds**
- Generic and classic is OK; personal and threatening is **NOT OK**
- Violence in a story of Roman gladiators is *generic*: it is intrinsic to that genre. Likewise for a story about the Battle of Stalingrad, 1942.
- But if a boy tells a story about bringing in a knife to hurt another boy at school, whom he names – that’s not generic, that is personal and threatening. That’s out of bounds.
- Snowball tournament; dart-throwing tournament; light-saber tournament

It’s not about ability; it’s about motivation. The big differences between girls and boys are not in what they *can* do but in what they *want* to do.

## Segment 4:

### **Gender-Aware Instructional Strategies for English Language arts / Creative writing / Expository writing History / Social Studies**

Be skeptical of anyone who promotes the idea of “girl books” and “boy books.” You can teach ANY of the “Great Books” to girls, and to boys. But you may teach them somewhat differently.

*In medias res*: starting in the middle of the story. Teach *Jane Eyre* to boys by starting in chapter 19, then go back to the beginning. This is not a new idea. Homer knew it. Hollywood screenwriters knew it. Ben Williams at Georgetown Prep knew it. We can learn from them.

**Technical Details, and Maps** are good strategies for engaging boys in literature, even in elementary school; less often effective with girls in this age group. When teaching *The Secret Garden*: make a map of the Manor; determine the location of the secret garden by interpolating its position from the herb garden and the fountain.

**Allow transgressive responses:** *Write about your first date.*

Frank McCourt assigned his students to write an excuse about why they didn't turn in a story. Then he asked them to write an excuse to God. Both good ideas. Then he asked them to write an obituary for anybody at the school now living – NOT a good idea.

Challenging the notion of “girl books” and “boy books”.

Avoid requiring boys to answer, “*How would you feel if you were that character?*” Instead suggest, “*What would you DO if you were in that situation?*”

Encourage boys to make their writing more vivid by **restating adjectives as subordinate clauses or as participles**. Instead of “goldenrod eyes,” try “eyes the color of rotting squash” (that's from *The Hunger Games*, chapter 1).

Encourage hyperbole: *His feet smelled so awful, the flowers wilted and DIED when he walked past* (that's an example from Denise Scott, who teaches 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at

Clemmie Ross James Elementary School in Tampa, Florida).

Creative writing storyboarding: start with a picture, perhaps *in medias res*. Ask the boy what's going on in the picture. What happened right before? Right after? Make a series of captions. Now remove the pictures and string the captions together.

**Expository writing:** girls are equally comfortable with critical approach and personal approach. Most boys in elementary school and middle school are more comfortable with the critical approach.

- Personal: *How did Dr. King's speech make you feel? How might you have felt in that situation?*
- Critical: *What was Dr. King's objective in writing this speech? How well did he achieve his objective?*

Your **instructional objective** is to teach the elements of a persuasive essay: topic sentence, evidence, chain of argument etc. There are multiple ways to achieve that objective.

Here's a common question from teachers and administrators:

The state test, or the district assessment, *requires* that all students answer questions such as "*How would you feel if . . . ?*"

Many schools therefore drill students in writing about "*How would you feel if . . . ?*" But this strategy is often ineffective. For many students, especially boys, a more effective strategy is to offer many opportunities for free writing (creative writing) and critical essays. **Develop the student's fluency and skills as a writer.** Help him to find his voice. Once he finds his voice, and he is a fluent writer, he can write even on topics which make him uncomfortable – such as "*How would you feel if . . . ?*" But if he has never developed that fluency, he is less likely to be successful.

◆ Best practices for teaching **social studies and history** to boys

- Use narrative history as a vehicle to engage boys, and then make the pivot into social studies.
- Why is historical fiction less reliably effective with elementary- and middle-

school boys – even though adult *men* love it?

- *In medias res*: why it sometimes makes sense to start “in the middle of things”
- Emphasize technical elements, and maps: What was the difference between a Confederate rifle and a Union Army rifle? Why did it matter?

Bottom line: there are no significant differences in *curriculum* between the girls’ classroom and the boys’ classroom; but there are evidence-based differences in *pedagogy*. In other words: The differences between the girls’ classroom and the boys’ classroom are not in WHAT you teach, but in HOW you teach.

**Bullying prevention.** The traditional approach – some variation on “*How would you feel if someone did that to you?*” – doesn’t work very well in preventing boy-on-boy bullying. What *does* work? Answer: deploy the team-competitive format. Any bullying causes the TEAM to lose 1,000 points.

**Ladies and Gentlemen.** It’s not sufficient for a boy to become a man; we want him to become a *gentleman*, i.e. a man who is courteous, responsible, and genuine. How to create a classroom in which it’s “cool” to be a gentleman? See my essay “Ladies and Gentlemen, Skanks and Pimps” for *Psychology Today*, [www.psychologytoday.com/node/121388](http://www.psychologytoday.com/node/121388).

The anomalous male is most likely to be the victim in boy-on-boy bullying

Characteristics of the anomalous male (see *Why Gender Matters* chapter 9)

- Draws people, pets, flowers, and trees
- More articulate than the average boy
- Doesn’t like to hit or be hit
- More likely to have allergies, asthma, eczema
- NOT more likely to be homosexual
- Width of the face less than 54% the height of the face (i.e. narrow face)

Lunch is a great opportunity to build relationships between teachers and students. No mobile phones or other devices should be allowed in the lunch room.

### **What are the characteristics of a great teacher of boys?**

Today it's common to hear people say "Great teaching is great teaching." But that's demonstrably untrue. The teacher who is most effective in the girls' classroom is sometimes a complete failure in the boys' classroom, and vice versa. What are the characteristics of a great teacher of girls? And how is that teacher different from a great teacher of boys? Is it possible to be both? Are women more effective with girls, and men with boys? Over the past decade, substantial research has been conducted on these topics. The good news is that almost every teacher can become more effective with boys, and with girls, if they incorporate the findings of this new research.

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