Research REPORT

BOYS AND SCHOOL

A Discussion Guide for School Trustees

by

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This resource was commissioned by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to explore issues related to boys in school. This resource is intended:

✓ To provide information about the achievement issue for boys and about the gender gap in achievement.
✓ To provide information about socialization as an issue in understanding the achievement gap.
✓ To introduce the work of others, particularly in Canada, who are examining the achievement gap.
✓ To prompt discussion and review of school board policy on program and program delivery.

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In August 2002 the Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association commissioned the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit to prepare a discussion paper regarding equity for boys in Saskatchewan schools. Specifically, the discussion paper was expected to include:

- Evidence of how well boys are currently achieving in school,
- Statements of rationale from diverse perspectives on why schools should take steps to improve opportunities for boys,
- Descriptions of desirable approaches from other provinces or states,
- References and links to valuable resources,
- Options of leading practice for educational leaders in Saskatchewan to consider,
- Identification of key questions to consider in changing the school experience of boys and,
- An executive summary suitable for informing and guiding discussion.

The discussion guide is organized around several themes to address the expectations of the paper. You will also find several question boxes, which contain prompts to further guide thought and discussion.

The purpose of this Discussion Guide

- to provide information about the achievement issue for boys and about the gender gap in achievement.
- to provide information about socialization as an issue in understanding the achievement gap
- to introduce the work of others, particularly in Canada, who are examining the achievement gap
- to prompt discussion and thinking about school board policy

This discussion guide is organized into four sections, each of which provides a way of looking at the boy question. The four sections are: i) information on the achievement gap; ii) the context of gender; iii) socialization, and iv) policy issues.

1. *The Achievement Gap:* School achievement provides a focus on the boy question by showing that girls are outperforming boys. In this section, the information about boys' achievement prompts a simple question: W*hy is this so?*

2. *Context of Gender:* The second section addresses the issue of socialization. In short, boys inherit their sex, but they are socialized into their gendered behavior. In other words, boys' behaviour is the result of the way society forms them and makes them behave. *Why is this important?*

3. *Socialization: Classrooms and Schools, Sports, Media, Society:* This section examines schools as gendered institutions that prompts teachers and students to develop an orientation to masculinity. The section also considers how other institutions in our society are powerful influences on how boys develop their understanding of their maleness. *What is the impact of sport and media?*

4. *Policy:* In this section the boy question is considered from the perspective of school trustees and administrators. What should be a school board's policy about gender and the boy question? What can schools and teachers do understand this question to enhance their practice?

Several important assumptions about issues of gender underlie this discussion guide. We believe

- that gender ought to be considered in developing school policy.

- that gender issues in school have been well studied, but many questions or issues have not been resolved.

- that the popular media have made an issue of gender in society.

- that the issue of gender in schools is complex.

- that understanding the gendered lives of youth can help schools achieve gender equity.

- that understanding the gendered lives of both males and females is necessary for the development of a sound policy and practice for schools.

An Issue of Gender

Gender and the Feminist Movement

This discussion guide acknowledges and supports the achievements of the feminist movement to improve the lives of girls and young women in schools and society. Further this guide affirms that schools and school boards continue to work on gender equity principles and practices to make certain that schools nurture the growth of girls and young women. In this guide, we take the position that it is also important that boys and young men to understand their gendered lives. As a result of a more complete understanding of masculinity, the ways males are socialized; educators can provide a better school experience for both boys and girls.

Discussion Question

Q   What is a school board's responsibility to know about and act upon "the boy question"?

Q   Why is this issue important?

Q   How does this issue relate to other socialization issues in schools, such as gender or ethnicity?

Q   Does a study of the "boy question" come at the expense of girls and young women in schools?

The Evidence

It is generally accepted that the current interest in boys in school -- discussion, debate, and research on the gender achievement gap -- started because of test results reported over the last decade or so. This has prompted the question -- what evidence tells us that girls are out-performing boys in school? This difference in achievement is often referred to as an "achievement gap."

The following chart shows some of international, national, and provincial test results that have reported evidence of "the achievement gap."

Sources of Information about the Achievement Gap

- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) OECD (2001)

- School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) (1993,1994)

- Saskatchewan Education Indicators (2000)

- Provincial Learning Assessment Program (Saskatchewan Education, 1996-1999)

What are these tests?

1. **PISA** (2001) is a set of three tests (literacy, mathematics, and science) involving fifteen-year-olds in 32 countries. The tests were administered in the year 2000, with the first results, for literacy, reported in December 2001. Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) produced the preliminary report, *Measuring up: The performance of Canada's youth in reading, mathematics, and science (2001).* The tests were administered under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

2. **SAIP** tests in reading/writing, mathematics, and science are achievement tests developed by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) in

cooperation with provincial/territorial ministries of education. The tests were administered to samples of 13- and 16-year old students from across Canada (mathematics, 1993; reading and writing, 1994; science, 1998). (WEBSITE)

3. **Saskatchewan Learning** has been conducting an assessment program since 1993 throughout our province. The Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP) is large-scale tests in mathematics, language arts, and science. The tests are administered to samples of students across the province, typically at grades 6, 8, and 11. The results of PLAP are also used as information for curriculum evaluation. (WEBSITES)

4. The **Saskatchewan Education Indicators Program** is an annual report produced by Saskatchewan Learning, which presents information on various dimensions of education in Saskatchewan. In general, the report provides information on content indicators, process indicators, and outcome indicators. WEBSITE

In each of these large-scale assessments the results have included information from many perspectives, including the effects of gender on those results. Following are some of comments about the differences in achievement between boys and girls on these tests.

Results of Achievement Data

- "In PISA (2001), girls performed significantly better than boys on the reading test in all countries' and all Canadian provinces."
- SAIP (1993) Mathematics. "There is essentially no difference in performance between males and females at age 13. At age 16 there are a few more males achieving at level 4 than females" (p.16).
- SAIP (1994) Reading and Writing. "The reading and writing assessments reveal clear gender differences. Girls demonstrated better reading and writing than boys. These results are consistent with other studies" (p.27).
- PLAP (1998) Mathematics. "Females outscored males in all three grades assessed. ….The achievement gap is greatest at Grade 8 but has narrowed by Grade 11." (P.41).
- Saskatchewan Indicators Report (2000). "In all subjects (shown) provincial average marks of females were higher than those of males, consistent with findings for previous years." (p. 54)

Some of the most interesting evidence on the achievement gap is the annual Grade-12 final marks, reported in the Indicator Reports. Table 53 from the *Saskatchewan Education Indicators: Kindergarten to Grade 12* (Saskatchewan Education, 2000, p.54) shows the enrolment percentages and final marks of female and male student in selected Grade-12 subjects. In all subjects shown, provincial average marks for female students were higher than those for male students, consistent with findings from previous years. These differences ranged from 2-4 percent in the mathematics and sciences, to 4-7 percent in the English and social science subjects.

Figure 53: Percentage Enrolment and Average Mark for Selected Level 30 Courses, by Gender, by Rural, Urban, and Northern School Locations, 1998-1999

Registrations			Urban		Rural		North		Province	
			Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
English A 30	10,776	% enrol.	51.5	48.5	51.8	48.2	64.8	35.2	52.0	48.0
		avg. mark	70.6	64.5	74.0	66.7	60.1	52.6	71.9	65.3
English B 30	10,767	% enrol.	51.3	48.7	51.6	48.4	60.0	40.0	51.6	48.4
		avg. mark	71.9	64.4	74.4	66.7	59.5	51.0	72.8	65.3
History 30	6,509	% enrol.	50.4	49.6	50.5	49.5	66.7	33.3	50.5	49.5
		avg. mark	70.3	65.8	72.8	68.5	61.5	44.7	71.4	67.0
Native Studies 30	384	% enrol.	50.0	50.0	57.0	43.0	50.5	49.5	52.8	47.2
		avg. mark	67.3	60.5	67.1	59.7	66.6	59.0	67.0	59.8
Social Studies 30	2,626	% enrol.	52.0	48.0	50.3	49.7	52.9	47.1	51.4	48.6
		avg. mark	70.4	65.4	73.5	67..8	64.0	60.3	71.5	66.3
Mathematics A 30	11,670	% enrol.	52.6	47.4	52.0	48.0	60.4	39.6	52.5	47.5
		avg. mark	66.3	62.5	72.3	67.2	64.6	60.9	68.9	64.6
Mathematics B 30	8,676	% enrol.	54.0	46.0	53.8	46.2	58.5	41.5	54.0	46.0
		avg. mark	70.5	68.1	74.2	70.3	70.5	68.6	72.1	69.1
Mathematics C 30	5,795	% enrol.	47.9	52.1	53.3	46.7	56.1	43.9	50.5	49.5
		avg. mark	73.6	70.6	76.1	71.9	72.3	67.0	74.9	71.1
Calculus 30	2,189	% enrol.	47.0	53.0	54.4	45.6	50.0	50.0	49.7	50.3
		avg. mark	79.5	76.0	81.4	76.7	79.2	66.0	80.3	76.1
Biology 30	9,577	% enrol.	60.7	39.3	55.0	45.0	61.7	38.3	58.4	41.9
		avg. mark	70.2	67.0	72.3	67.2	61.9	61.5	70.9	67.0
Chemistry 30	6,940	% enrol.	53.5	46.5	56.1	43.9	58.6	41.4	54.8	45.2
		avg. mark	72.8	69.9	73.5	70.5	65.0	61.5	73.0	70.1
Physics 30	5,872	% enrol.	42.3	57.7	49.2	50.8	58.2	41.8	45.9	54.1
		avg. mark	74.6	71.1	74.0	72.5	62.6	63.3	74.0	71.7

Note: Data above refer to Core (new) curricula-based subjects except for English A 30 and B 30 and Calculus. An additional 539 registrations occurred in Nature Studies 30 courses (non-Core). Provincial results include Correspondence School enrolments and marks.

Source: Saskatchewan Education. (2000). *Student Services Data*. Regina, SK.

In Grade 12, about 52 percent of the students were female and 48 percent, male. For most subjects, female and male student enrolments reflect this proportion within a few percentage points. However, females are more likely than males to enroll in Biology 30 and males are more likely than females to enroll in Physics 30 (p. 54).

In the year 2000 report, average marks were reported for twelve, level-30 courses. Females outperformed males in all twelve areas. Some of the differences were substantial.

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For example, in English 30B, females' average scores were 7.5 percentage marks higher than those for the males. The smallest difference was 2.9% in Chemistry 30.

- In Saskatchewan, students' marks are used as entrance requirements for post-secondary institutions.

- The systematic differences (across all areas) raise questions about classroom practices, curriculum, and instruction - and what these mean for boys.

What does research say about the achievement gap ?

Making sense of the evidence of the achievement gap is not easy. On one hand, the evidence is clear: females consistently out-perform males on tests of basic skills (literacy, mathematics) internationally, nationally, and provincially. On the other hand, the issue is complex because it involves gender and male socialization. In other words, forces outside the school, the classroom, the school curriculum, or teachers' methods of instruction are at work in determining males' achievement - and their performance at school (as well as the achievement of females). There is no obvious fix for the "boy problem."

These differences raise questions and concerns for educational policy makers and practitioners. In particular, the difference raises questions about the achievement gap: questions as to why these differences exist, and whether something needs to be done to reduce the achievement gap?

The question of the achievement gap has produced much research from many experts. This research may help policy-makers determine what some of the options might be with respect to addressing the achievement gap. The following section provides a very brief overview of what some of the research has said.

First, it should be noted that there is a large body of educational research on gender and schools. Gender and achievement, for example, have been the subject of many research studies exist on the world: Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and many others. [Note: A search of the Educational Research Information Service (ERIC) on the topic "gender and achievement" would result in several hundred entries.]

Although there are a large number of studies, not all deal with male/female difference in academic achievement. Research can be categorized into a number of themes and categories. Following is an example of some of the themes and categories that address gender and schools:

- The effects of culture and/or social class
- Family and parent effects
- Classroom/school effects
- Curriculum/instructional effects (e.g. Achievement in specific subjects)
- Single sex schools
- Teacher and role model effects

Two Examples

Here are two examples of research on issues of boys in schools. The first considers gender. curriculum and instruction and the second, single sex schools. They are typical of research in this area.

    1.   The effects of curriculum and instruction on achievement:

Achievement in Mathematics and Reading/Writing. (1999). A report by the Ontario Education Quality and Accountability Office. (EQAO Research Series 1, April)

This report reviewed literature on gender and mathematics achievement and on gender and reading/writing achievement. The report showed gender differences in reading and writing achievement, attitude and habits require careful documentation and investigation. Such research is necessary if we are to understand fully the nature of the difference and the interactive role of the home with school instructional practices in the development of this attitude and achievement, as well as the development of the habit of life-long reading. (See p. 15 of the Ontario report)

    2.   Achievement in single sex schools:

CITE

One of the responses to the differences in achievement in many countries has been to establish single sex schools. As with other research on gender and achievement, no clear generalizable explanations or conclusions emerge from these studies. Following are conclusions from a random collection of articles on single sex education/schools.

- girls in single sex schools perceive themselves as more competent
- girls and boys both do better in single gender schools
- comparative evaluation of the benefits and disadvantages for the teachers and students of this study has not provided sufficient evidence for justification of the practice of gender streaming English classes.

What can be done about the achievement gap?

Proposals to change or affect the achievement gap need to be based on several principles - some of which should be considered "non-negotiable."

Thinking about the Achievement Gap ...

- Reducing the achievement gap is not a "zero-sum game", that is, improving achievement for males does not mean reducing achievement for females.

- Understanding and improving males' achievement is the task.

- Preferential treatment or unearned advantage are not solutions. Solutions should support both males and females.

- The achievement gap is a difference in academic performance between females and males as shown in Table 53. Understanding that gap means examining principles and practices of educational testing and measurement.

Discussion Questions

- Are these achievement differences important?

- What factors (biological? classroom? school?,,,,) might cause these differences?

- How does the way we socialize boys affect their school performance? The way we socialize girls?

What is the focus of the boy question?

This section looked at the relationship between gender and achievement. Boys are not achieving in school as well as they might. A simple answer might be to provide more money for programs for boys, under the assumptions that curriculum and teaching methods are not compatible with their learning style. Because the boy question is very complex, the solution lies beyond finding the right materials, methods, or program. The issue of the achievement gap needs to be considered within the study of masculinity - and male socialization in society, which is the focus of Section 2 in this discussion guide.

The previous section looked at the question of the achievement gap on various large-scale tests between males and females. This section looks at a wider issue - at the way males are socialized in school and society. The socialization of males also has an influence on how they behave, and ultimately on their school achievement.

The effects of socialization in schools are examined from three perspectives:
- The provincial gender equity policy.
- The effects of patriarchy as an aspect of socialization.
- The concepts of a 'boy code' and 'a school code' as elements of socialization.

Gender Equity

In 1991, Saskatchewan Education published a document to help school systems achieve gender equity: *Gender Equity Policy and Guidelines for Implementation.*

This policy statement grew out of a concern for females in the school system. At that time, educators recognized that schools were biased against females. Methods, curriculum, materials, and programs - all favoured males.

Gender Equity Policy:

The intent of the Goals of Education in Saskatchewan is "to develop the potential of each person to the fullest extent." In recognition of this, Saskatchewan Education encourages the achievement of gender equity within the province's Kindergarten to Grade 12 system. Gender equity will be promoted as an integral part of all aspects of system including: curriculum, resource materials, instructional and assessment practices, school environment, student development, the relationship between the school and the community, and monitoring.

Gender Equity: Policy and Guidelines for Implementation - a Summary. (1991, February), p. 3

The provincial gender equity policy is desirable and it is important not to detract from advances that have been made toward gender equity for females. At the same time the discussion about males and school provides an opportunity for understanding the lives of males, and of making life better for them. It's a question, then, of understanding gender, and gender roles, for both females and males. In studying gender equity, most scholars have focused attention on the lives of females, and their place in schools. It is assumed that the males are ok – and that, they have the privilege in society from being male. How can things not go well for them? This guide extends the discussion of gender equity to

include males - for the benefit of both females and males.

Q: How can a concern for males in schools support the goal of gender equity?

Q.   How are boys and young men socialized in school and society? How do they acquire their gender role?

Patriarchy

Patriarchy refers to the way males have privilege in our society, to the social, political, and economic practices that give males an advantage over females. The feminist movement has been struggling to understand patriarchy, and to free women and men from its influence. The box at the side provides a list of words commonly associated with patriarchy that describe how men are expected to behave, what is expected of them socially. This results in an attitude that defines what it means to be male, and how males learn to define their masculinity.

The Concept of Patriarchy

Men and boys should be –

- individualistic
- competitive
- providers
- defenders
- action oriented
- unemotional
- fearless
- stoical, don't cry
- mechanical, scientific, mathematical

Discussion Questions

Q: Do you agree that patriarchy is a dominant force in our society; it governs the lives of both men and women?

Q: How are young boys inducted into this world of patriarchy? (This question is the   focus of the next section of our discussion guide.)

The Boy Code

Author William Pollack[1] has transposed this thinking about men and patriarchy to understand the lives of young boys. He has popularized the term boy code, which shows how patriarchy plays out in the lives of boys. The side box outlines Pollack's description of the boy code. Here is what Pollack says about the boy code:

Boys learn the Boy Code in sandboxes, playgrounds, schoolrooms, camps, churches, and hangouts, and are taught by peers, coaches, teachers, and just about everyone else. (p. 23).

Boys absorb *"strict rules... about how they 'must' behave, rules that most of them seem to genuinely fear breaking." (p. 23).*

Discussion Questions:

Q. What have been your experiences with patriarchy and the boy code?

Q. What are your thoughts about the impact of the boy code on the lives of boys and young men?

Q. What are the consequences of the Boy Code in the lives of boys and young men?

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[1] *William Pollack. (1998). Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood.* New York: Henry Holt and Company

The School Code

Just as there is a socially constructed boy code so too is there a school code, a code of conduct of what is typically expected of students.

Discussion Questions:

Q How does the Boy Code compare with the school Code?

Q What conflict do you see for boys between the Boy Code and the School Code?

The School Code

Overall, the schools expects male students to –

- be compliant, obedient, be still, don't make a noise

- achieve individually and be a high achiever, particularly in math and science

- enjoy "sissy subjects" - art, music, literature

- share personal feelings (write about personal reactions)

- be dependent, warm, empathetic

- engage in sports

Discussion Question:

Q What are your thoughts about the Boy Code? Does the boy code have a strong impact on boys' emotional and social lives? That the expected aggressive, competitive behaviour of males comes at the expense of their emotional and social well-being?

In the previous sections, two ways to look at the boy question have been presented. First, achievement data were reviewed -- the idea that females are outperforming males in school, and that males need extra help. Second, the boy question was examined sociologically with the idea that males' masculinity is socially constructed, that all the institutions in boys' lives contain definite messages on how to behave as males.

This section further explores male socialization, based on the viewpoint of a number of experts who have studied the question. The quotations from these experts are intended to stimulate thinking about the environmental factors in our society (classrooms, schools, the media) that may affect the socialization of young people, especially males. All these writers approach the question from a pro-feminist point of view.

1.   Patriarchal society.   Nel Noddings, a feminist writer, provides a reason for studying males and masculinity - that society is based on masculine values of toughness and hardness - that we live in a patriarchal society. For her, the question of male socialization is more important than the achievement issue, or getting girls into the non-traditional subjects. She sees gender socialization as the big issue.

> I've just finished reading four books that I'm reviewing for Educational Theory. And they're all addressing questions of violence; it should be of central importance to us right now. And in one of them there is a chapter that I found very sensible and useful and the authors of that chapter say that we ought to be spending far more time on questions of gender than we have, and not just getting more women into science and mathematics, but questioning the whole notion of masculinity, and how our society and much of what we do in schools presses boys to think that they've got to be tough and hard, and the whole society is set up with that masculinity as a base. I think that's right; I think it's important that we begin to think about that. (p. 6)
>
> Nel Noddings. Division 13: Curriculum Studies Newsletter, American Educational Research Association. (2001, Fall)

2.   Pro-feminist perspective.   The next quotation from Kindlon and Thompson serves as a reminder: that the discussion of the boy question is set in a pro-feminist context. As was emphasized earlier, the study of females in schools over the past two decades has been valuable, and needed, and that much remains to be done to achieve gender equity for females.

In recent years the public discussion of fairness in schools has focused almost exclusively on girls and the way they have been short-changed in a system that favours boys. As right as the concern for girls is, it is disturbing when the dialogue seems to pit boys against girls in the quest for fairness. The unchallenged assumptions that, if girls are suffering in school, then boys are not. Yet research statistics, and our own experience as school psychologists and with boys and men in private therapy contradicts this. (p. 155)

Dan Kindlon & Michael Thompson. (2002). Thorns among roses: The struggle of young boys in early education. In Susan M. Baily (Ed.), *Gender in education* (pp. 153 - 181). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (Originally published in Dan Kindlon & Michael Thompson. [1999]. Raising Cain. Ballantine Books.)

Q   How will a study of boys in school, and boys' lives, help to improve the lives of girls in schools, and support the goal of gender equity for girls?

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3.   The classroom and the school.   Schools are gendered institutions that tell males to act one way, females to act another. Some authors suggest that everything about schools reinforces a set of masculine values, which everyone accepts: teachers, administrators, boys, girls. This quotation from Connell suggests ways that gender plays out in classrooms and the school.

Martio's [a researcher in the area of masculinity] ... sophisticated analysis of secondary classes in Western Australia shows how subject English, by contrast [to such subjects as Industrial Arts, math, science], is feminized. In the eyes of many of the boys, English classes are distanced by their focus on the expression of emotions, their apparent irrelevance to men's work, the lack of set rules and unique answers, and the contrast with activities defined as properly masculine, such as sport. (p. 58)

R.W. Connell. (2000). *The men and the boys.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

It might be more appropriate to think of "some" boys. "Some" boys are successful; "some" boys are not. In the next quotation, Gilbert and Gilbert point out the problems that arise for those males who are not part of the macho circle.

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However, not all boys do well in higher level mathematics and physics. Boys often occupy extremes of the performance range in these subjects, producing a 'saucer-shaped' distribution of results, which positions many of them as failures. And it is the boys caught in the lowest end of these distributions who are some of the losers in the schooling race. Having chosen subjects, which are vested with high masculine status and power, but within which they are unable to succeed, these boys end up not only without high school qualifications, but also with a personal sense of failure within a male domain of achievement. (p. 9)

Rob Gilbert and Pam Gilbert. (1998). *Masculinity goes to school.* New York: Routledge.

Q. What do Gilbert and Gilbert imply about "the boy question"? Is it possible to include all males within "the boy question" in the same way? What happens when we begin to think about the boy question as *some* boys?

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4.   Sports.   Sport holds an unusual place in the lives of boys and men. It is at the same time both a positive and negative force. It's a positive force because males like the activity, they learn to cooperate, they learn skills of value in adult life. But, as organized sport is played out in society, it reinforces macho values, the values of the boy code.

Messner and Sabo, in the following quotation, question what is happening in society. We seem to think that providing females with equal access to sport as males is a sound practice. But Messner and Sabo suggest that there are certain values associated with organized sport, and they wonder whether these are the values that should govern females' sport? As these authors ask, "Equal opportunity to do what?"

Granting boys and girls equal opportunity to play sports will help undermine the sexist ideology that reinforces gender inequities in society. But recreation supervisors, teachers, coaches, and parents should realize that simply giving girls the opportunity with boys may ultimately do neither girls nor boys a great favour. It is crucial that we also examine the underlying value system of organized sports. Otherwise, we may simply be attempting to hammer females into an institution that does not work all that well even for most males. Equal opportunity is a lofty and reasonable goal, but we should ask ourselves, equal opportunity to do what? (p. 201)

Messner, M.A., and Sabo, D. F. (1994). *Sex violence and power in sports: Rethinking masculinity.* Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

Gilbert and Gilbert show how the values associated with sport often run counter to those associated with school and learning: the conflict between boy code and school code.

> Sport is such an important dimension of boys' lives that it is a constant touchstone for many of their interpretations and judgments about other aspects of their experience. For instance, sport figure strongly in what it means to be cool, and it is crucial to their need to be part of a social group. Unfortunately, this image of the cool sociable sportsman is constantly set against the picture of the boy whose interests might be to read a book, a practice most often associated with girls. In this respect, sport is one of a number of masculine pursuits, which run counter to a commitment to school learning. (p. 63)
>
> Rob Gilbert and Pam Gilbert. (1998). *Masculinity goes to school.* New York: Routledge.

Much of our sport culture is played out through professional sport, and television. Most certainly television contributes to males' understanding of masculinity. In fact, the culture of sport is associated with those values that make males most anti-social, aggressive, prone to violence.

Gilbert and Gilbert sum up the situation this way:

> The difficulty with sport and [video games], as with other aspects of boys' culture, is that they frequently compound understandings of masculinity and gender with violence and pressure. And this is the challenge for those who would like to offer boys other ways of being men and doing masculinity. (p. 80)
>
> Rob Gilbert and Pam Gilbert. (1998). *Masculinity goes to school.* New York: Routledge.

5.   Media and Society**.** As Nel Noddings suggested, in a quote on a previous page, schools do not act in isolation in the formation of masculinity. The media have a large role to play. Twenty years ago, we were accustomed to seeing young women in bikinis used to sell cars. Think about TV ads and the way young men's bodies are used to sell beer…….?

> Media research documents what we know intuitively, that mass media are crammed with representations of masculinities – from rock music, beer commercials, sitcoms, action movies and war films to news programs – which circulate on a vast scale.
>
> R.W. Connell. (2000). *The mean and the boys. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.*

> Q How will a study of boys in school, and boys' lives, help to improve the lives of girls in schools, and support the goal of gender equity for girls?

Summary

The boy question is complex. Because it is complex, answers are not simple, not straight forward. There is no quick fix, or even a slow fix. One won't be able to find the right book, or curriculum, or program to deal with "the boy question."

Much of this complexity comes from considering the boy problem in the context of social equality. It is much easier to look for someone or something to blame -- and deal with it. The boy problem, however, is embedded in considerations of equity, and often runs counter to the norms of our wider society.

Gilbert and Gilbert highlight an approach to the boy question, which seems to make a sense. The boy question is not an isolated phenomenon. It is not something that can be picked out of school life, examined, and fixed in isolation. It is bigger than the issue of males' achievement on test scores. Rather, the boy question needs to be thought of in terms of equity, of understanding how gender roles affect the lives of both males and females: How "doing gender" (acting out the male role into which boys are socialized) affects the lives of males and females, and doing gender has as much impact on achievement scores as the right curriculum, the right textbook, the right method of instruction- or of single sex schools.

The need then is to make it right for both males and females!

The boy question has been addressed from three perspectives: academic achievement, gender equity, and socialization.

> Q How will a study of males in school, and males' lives, help to improve the lives of females in schools, and support the goal of gender equity for females?

What do trustees, parents, teachers, and school official need to watch out for?. What do they need to keep in mind?

- The popular press has made this issue a central focus, and often set their reports up as opposition and blame.

- The statistical data about males' achievement attempts to provide a black and white picture of the boy problem -- and by inference, a simple solution in boy-friendly programs.

- Reports from social surveys noted problems with males' health -- with their involvement in crime, high accident rates and death, and the suicide rates.

- Reports from teachers, female students, and some male students mention the amount of time and energy that goes into curbing the behaviours of some males.

- Reports tell of aggression and bullying among males.

- In the past, Saskatchewan was an agrarian society, and the agrarian culture fitted boys - their toughness and aggression served them well in the Saskatchewan society that was.

- Saskatchewan culture is quickly changing, to a knowledge-based economy. This has changed the playing field for boys. Education has taken on an increasing importance in their lives. The boy code and the school code are now in conflict.

Should There Be a Policy on Males and Schools?

With this question, we want to address the Saskatchewan context: what should school boards do about the boy question as short-term and long-term planning and policy?

School board policies express the beliefs, principles, and practices that guide a school division's decisions. Policies are often developed to help clarify an issue or problem that a board has experienced or is hoping to avoid. Policies also enact a board's mission and vision and they are formal, legal statements -- not generally accepted practice. If you, as a board, are considering a policy on boys and schools, you may find the following guiding questions helpful in the decision making process.

1. What ought to be a Board's belief statement about issues related to males and schools. Are there concerns about the achievement gap, classroom practices, masculinity studies, current practices (e.g. sports and extracurricular activities)?

2. Is there now a policy that expresses the board's expectations with respect to gender in schools? E.g. Does the Board have a gender equity policy? Are gender issues cited in other Board policies?

3. Does the Board have adequate information on the topic of males and schools? Good policies are not only statements of belief but they are supported with evidence (e.g. research). What do parents, staff, and students know about gender issues?

4. Will a policy result in desirable action? How will the effects of the policy be assessed? How often should it be reviewed? Policies ought to be living documents, which are built upon consensus of stakeholders.

5. Is there a process in place that facilitates broad-based communication, consultation, and collaboration for the development of policy?

6. How can a Board use Saskatchewan Learning's policy on gender equity to consider the boy question for its school division?

Boys and School: A Discussion Guide for School Trustees

We began this exploration with a look at achievement scores that show that in many instances males are not performing as well as females on achievement tests. The discussion guide then points to the Saskatchewan Learning policy on gender equity, and on the 1991 policy and guidelines for its implementation. Throughout this discussion guide we have considered that policy as foundational to thinking about and acting upon the boy question. As the policy states, "The intent of the Goals of Education in Saskatchewan is to develop the potential of each person to the fullest extent."

The discussion paper moved to consider the socialization of males, where it was noted how many institutions in society, not just schools, are instrumental in the socialization of males. For the most part, these institutions re-enforce a role for males based on macho values. It was also noted, that often these values that are inculcated by males are often in conflict with the way schools operate, and the way males are expected to behave and perform in schools.

It was pointed out that there are males who are not successful in accepting the macho front, and accepting the values of aggression, competitiveness, stoicism and that these boys may experience difficulty in finding their identity.

Finally, it was emphasized that the boy question is a gender question and in this respect, this question is linked to issues of equality for both females and males. This discussion guide was based on the assumption that consideration of gender for males did not come at the expense of gender equity for females. In fact, our basic understanding is that 'fixing' the boy problem will serve only to help move the cause of gender equity along.

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