

Paul D. Slocumb, Ed.D.

HEAR
Our Cry
Boys in Crisis

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Slocumb, Paul D.

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Introduction

In my 40 years in the education profession, I have consistently worked with boys. That work also has been dominated by discipline issues. Having raised a son, I know the helplessness a parent feels when a boy is in pain — and the joy that comes when you realize you like the person in front of you, not because he's your son, but because of who he has become.

I have had the opportunity to work with many educators throughout the country on educating students from poverty and gifted students in poverty. In so doing, I have become acutely aware of the many discipline questions from teachers, with 95% of those questions regarding boys. As I have reviewed literature and reflected on my own experiences, I have become increasingly aware of how often the educational system falls short when it comes to reaching boys. In the United States, boys are in crisis.

More and more children are growing up without a dad. Family structures have changed. Affluent America is busy — and impoverished America is seeing the demise of the family unit. Sons are left alone with only the myths of a boy culture to guide them. If boys are to become the responsible fathers, husbands, businessmen, and community members they're capable of becoming, change must occur. The home and the school are where this begins.

In Chapter 11 of this book six case studies are presented. In these *true* scenarios six boys are introduced, along with significant others in their life at home and at school. You, the reader, are invited to help provide solutions for these boys, their families, and their schools. You are encouraged to first read the chapters preceding Chapter 11 in order to be better equipped to analyze the difficult situations — and the possible solutions. Perhaps in your own experience you will recognize one or more of the boys.

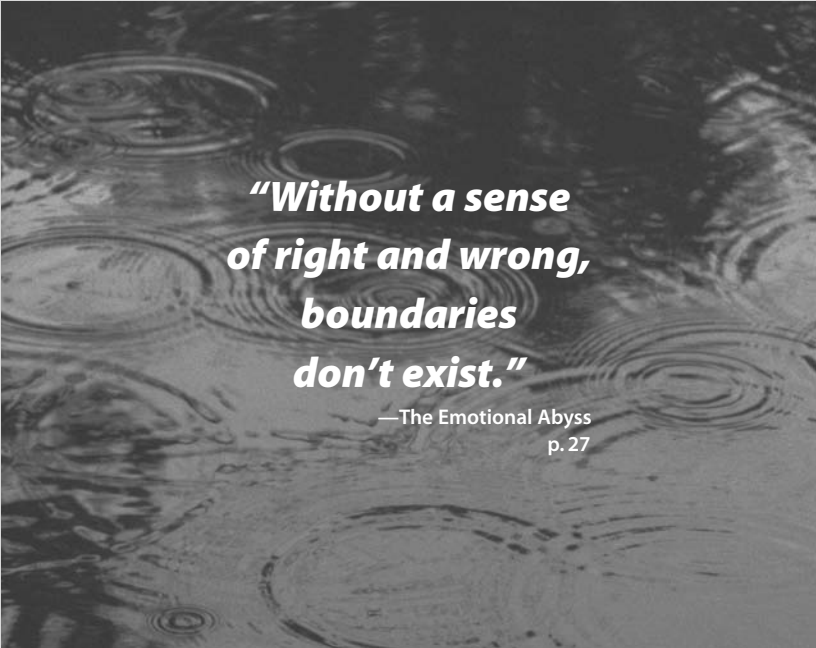
Bottom line: No boy should have to wait until his father is in his 60s to hear that he loves him. No student should have to wait until adulthood before he knows he's a person of worth, regardless of his background. No mother should have to feel that she must be both mother and father — or the translator of Dad's feelings and intentions toward the son. No boy should have to long for a relationship

with his father like the one he has with his grandfather. No father should have to feel that he has to wait until his son becomes a man before he can show his son the nurturing side of himself. If we wait that long, it is likely too late. If we do, boys and young men will be lost in their own *emotional abyss*.

It is my devout hope that this work will further, or even begin, a necessary dialogue — and that educators and parents will hear the cry of our boys.

Chapter 1

The Crisis



***“Without a sense
of right and wrong,
boundaries
don’t exist.”***

—The Emotional Abyss
p. 27

**5.6 million Americans
have experienced prison.**

—Bureau of Justice Statistics
U.S. Department of Justice, 2001

Chapter 1

The Crisis

On the surface, today's world is seemingly a man's world. Men make more money. They are taught from early in their lives that they can be anything they want to be. Compared with women, they have it made. So, what's the problem?

The issue is not what men have or don't have compared to women. Both genders have their respective challenges and issues. The issue, ironically, is that men are now faced with stereotypical myths much in the same manner women were years ago.

Remember the outcries of women in the early years of the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) movement? Women all around were saying, "Whoa! Wait a minute. We aren't just homemakers and mothers. We're equals deserving of equal pay and advancement in the workplace." The women's movement went to great lengths to dispel these myths in order to change our culture and, more importantly, our perception of the role(s) women play in society. No such liberating movement has occurred for males.

It's now time for *males* to say, "Whoa! Wait a minute. We aren't just fighters, providers, and competitors who put winning above relationships." **Statistics on boys and men reflect the results of a society that has ignored the social and emotional life of boys.** To disregard the impact of these myths on young males is to put them in a decidedly weakened position to succeed personally, professionally, and emotionally (not to mention life expectancy; U.S. women on average outlive U.S. men by about five years). The facts show these things to be true.

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To see the current trend, one need only refer to key statistics regarding the number of failed personal relationships, crimes committed by men and boys, more young males being tried as adults for adult crimes, and larger and larger numbers of males who father children but don't parent.

At year-end 2001, about one in every 112 U.S. men and one in every 1,724 U.S. women were sentenced prisoners under the jurisdiction of state and federal authorities (July 2002, National Criminal Justice [NCJ], 195189). On June 30, 2005, the total number of male and female inmates in custody in state or federal prisons or in local jails totaled 2,186,230. In 1990 the total was 1,148,702.



According to the *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin* (October 2005, NCJ document 210677), on December 31, 2004, the number of male prisoners compared with female prisoners under the jurisdiction of state or federal (not local) correctional authorities was significantly larger: 1,337,700 men compared with 96,100 women (see Appendix A). While the female incarceration rate is far lower than males, it is increasing. Since 1990 the number of female defendants convicted of felonies in state courts has grown at more than twice the rate of increase in male defendants. In 1998 an estimated 95,000 women were under the care, custody, or control of correctional agencies.

According to the Bureau of Justice statistics (December 1999, NCJ document 175688), the total equals a rate of about one woman involved with the criminal justice system for every 109 adult women in the U.S. population. In 1996 the average sentence and time served for women were shorter than for males with equivalent offenses. For example, in 1996 the median time served for murder was 80 months for men and 60 months for women. Women under the supervision by justice system agencies were mothers of an estimated 1.3 million minor children. Nearly 60% of women in state prisons had experienced physical or sexual abuse in the past.

These statistics are significant because:

- ◆ Male aggression contributes, at least in part, to female aggression.
- ◆ Of the 1.3 million children who have mothers under the supervision of justice system agencies, there is probably a missing father for these children.
- ◆ With mothers and fathers absent, the probability of children repeating the cycle of violence increases.

If appropriate interventions were implemented for young boys and young men, both male *and* female violence and other forms of criminal behavior would decrease.

These prison statistics are conservative figures because they are continually increasing. As of March 2003, the total number of people in state and federal prisons in the United States exceeded 2 million.

The Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics projects that by 2010 about 7.7 million adults in the United States will have served time in prison. Thirty-eight states have fewer than 7 million people. The growing numbers of ex-prisoners means more people will have difficulty finding jobs because they have felony convictions. They are also more likely to have family or emotional problems.

School statistics are a predictor of later adult behaviors. Boys are three times more likely to be enrolled in special education than girls. Of students diagnosed with learning disabilities, 73% are boys. Of students diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, 76% are boys (*BusinessWeek*, May 26, 2003). Boys are more likely to be retained in the same class and drop out of school, and they're four times more likely to be referred to a school psychologist (Kindlon and Thompson, 1999).

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In every racial and ethnic group, females now outnumber males in the acquisition of a college degree. There are 133 females getting B.A. degrees for every 100 males. By 2010, the number is projected to reach 142 females for every 100



males, and 156 females per 100 males by 2020. The female-to-male ratio at the University of North Carolina, Boston University, and New York University is currently 60:40 (*BusinessWeek*, May 26, 2003). Given current trends, school psychologist and co-author of *Raising Cain*, Dr. Michael Thompson, states: "There's going to be a cold shower when the country realizes that

women are completely dominating the numbers in professional schools. We can't have a country of women in white-collar jobs and men in blue-collar jobs. That's not going to be good for this society" (Lesley Stahl, *60 Minutes*, "The Gender Gap: Boys Lagging," May 25, 2003).

Judges commit boys to the juvenile justice system more than they commit girls, even for the same offense. African-American boys are three times more likely to receive corporal punishment in school. Six white boys are physically paddled for every one white girl, and eight ethnically Asian boys are physically paddled for every one Asian girl. There's a greater likelihood that parents will paddle their boys than their girls. According to one Canadian study, boys are 50% more likely to be physically abused by their parents than are girls (Kindlon and Thompson, 1999).

Boys commit 95% of juvenile homicides. Boys are the perpetrators in four out of five crimes that end up in juvenile court. Boys under the age of 18 are responsible for close to one-fifth of the violent crime in the United States. The suicide rate for males between the ages of 15 and 24 is significantly higher than it is for girls.

Boys dominate teachers' and administrators' time, as well as consume more of the school's time by considerably outnumbering girls in the following areas:

- ◆ Being referred to the office for discipline.
- ◆ Lagging behind in reading and writing.
- ◆ Being suspended from school.
- ◆ Qualifying for special education services.

- ◆ Not being promoted to the next grade level.
- ◆ Dropping out of school.
- ◆ Committing crimes at school.

The reasons for this collective disparity are as complex as the boys are individually. This disparity results in boys being unfulfilled as men who are disconnected emotionally and responsibly from their families, communities, and workplaces.

The factors and circumstances that increase the probability that boys will have difficulty in school include the following:

1. As boys have slipped in their academic performance, there has been little of the public outcry that went up for girls in the 1960s and 1970s years ago, especially among feminist groups.
2. More fathers attend athletic events to watch their sons play sports than attend PTA or PTO meetings. The unspoken message to boys is that physical prowess is valued more than mental prowess.
3. There is a shortage of male teachers.
4. Classrooms reward on-task behavior, sitting still, concentrating, and focusing on pencil/paper tasks. This makes for girl-friendly classrooms and boy-unfriendly classrooms.
5. High-spirited, competitive boys are generally viewed as behavior problems.
6. Boys are more likely to tease other boys who embrace academics. Boys often perceive academics as a feminine or “wimpy” pursuit, while sports are seen as manly.
7. In spite of the gains females have made academically and in the job market, they still don’t receive pay equal to that of their male co-workers. The message for young boys is that they’ll still make more money than their female counterparts, largely unrelated to academic performance.
8. Certain jobs are still stereotyped as male or female jobs. Ask a 14-year-old boy if he wants to be a nurse or a flight attendant when he grows up and note the response of his peers, as well as that of his dad.
9. Many parents, teachers, and law enforcement officials assume that when there’s trouble, the perpetrator is a boy.

