Boys at Risk
The Boy Crisis as an Infant Mental Health Issue
Paul Golding, PhD
Santa Fe Boys Educational Foundation

Outline of Presentation
Subtitle: Why are boys differently vulnerable in today’s unstable family environments?

1. Introduction:
   • Santa Fe Boys Educational Foundation
   • Source of interest in Boys at Risk
2. Defining Boys at Risk
3. The Bio-Psycho-Social Model
4. Fathers & Sons
5. Discussion/Q&A

Two Conferences and Two Special Infant Mental Health Journals
1. The Psychology of Boys at Risk: Indicators from 0-5
2. Boys at Risk II: The Early Origins of Male Violence

Mission Statement: The Santa Fe Boys Educational Foundation supports public discourse, projects, and research through publications and a series of conferences on Boys at Risk to promote better understanding of the developmental needs of young males.

www.santafeboys.org
Boy Crisis Literature

Defining Boys at Risk & Their (Almost) Unique Vulnerabilities Early in Life
Adolescent Boys—School, Criminal Activity, & Suicide

Retained in Grade: For every 100 girls 15 to 17 years enrolled below modal grade there are 130 boys enrolled below modal grade.

Mortenson (2011, March).

Suspended from School: For every 100 girls suspended from public elementary and secondary schools 215 boys are suspended.

Mortenson (2011, March).


Suicide: CDC, Mental Health Surveillance Among Children—United States, 2005–2011, 9–18 years of age.

School Age Disabilities by Sex

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDC Mental Health Surveillance among Children, United States, 2005-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Prevalence of Mental, Behavioral, or Developmental Disorders, Age 2-8 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Among Children less than 18: “Boys were more likely than girls to have most of the disorders including ADHD, behavioral and conduct problems, ASD, anxiety, Tourette syndrome, cigarette dependence, and boys were more likely to die by suicide. Girls were more likely to have an alcohol use disorder, and adolescent girls were more likely to have depression.”

Prenatal, Perinatal, and Postpartum Associations with Male Fetus

"...male fetuses exposed to prenatal and perinatal adversities are more highly impaired than those of female fetuses."

Influence of Male Fetus on Mother

Male Fetal Neurobehavioral Indicators

Male Fetus/Infant Morbidity and Mortality


Boys’ Early Physical Vulnerability

Greater Incidence for Boys

- Diarrheal diseases
- Measles
- Tuberculosis
- Pneumonia
- Syphilis
- Respiratory disease syndrome
- Birth Injuries
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome
- Infectious diseases
- Chronic lung disease
- Malnutrition
- Immunizations
- Accidents
- Rickets
- Meningitis
- Septicemia
- Encephalitis
- Acute lower respiratory disease
- Malnutrition
- Autism
- ADHD
- ADD
- Dyslexia
- High activity levels
- Higher irritability
- Self-regulatory problems


Why Do “Boys at Risk” Predominate In Early Morbidity and Mortality Measures

- Greater Male Variability Hypothesis (GMVH)—Males display greater variability in traits than females, including low intelligence, early psychopathologies, impulsiveness, and other undesirable attributes. Why? Speculation is that the GMVH may be the result of androgens.
- The viability-vulnerability tradeoff—The male fetus’ larger size requires that more resources during gestation go into growth in males, leaving less available for other purposes. This may account for a limited male ability to adjust to adversity both before and after birth. Sandman, Glynn, and Davis (2013)
- Basic “model” of human is female theory. Males are created by the androgen bath that occurs a few weeks after conception. This extra step—when little and big things may go wrong—may be related to the greater mortality and morbidity we see in boys very early in life.
Understanding Boys Vulnerabilities: The Bio-Psycho-Social Model

The Bio-Psycho-Social Model--The Nested Environments of Relational Developmental Systems & Boys’ Almost Unique Vulnerabilities

1. Biology: Genetics, Physiology, Hormones
2. Psychology: Development of the Self, Attachment
3. Social/Political/Environmental


Psychology
Maturational delay (makes) boys more vulnerable over a longer period of time to stressors in the social environment (attachment trauma). - Allan Schore, 2017, Infant Mental Health Jrnl
MAOA Gene Low Activity Variant (Allele) + 3 Characteristics that contribute significantly to impulsive physical aggression
1. Found mostly in Males
2. History of child abuse
3. Usually suffered in the context of a disadvantaged childhood

Adrian Raine, professor of psychology, criminology, & psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania at the trial of State v Yepez, 1/29/2015: “MAOA-abuse interaction is a classic finding in the field. “Most important social science finding of the decade...it opens up a new door to understanding behavior.” This is one finding that does not happen by chance. It is beyond reasonable doubt. One obvious is that this finding is not rare.”

Physiology: Heart Rate, Impulsivity, & Boys
• Some physiological characteristics are more common in males, such as low resting heart rate (RHR) — more likely in boys from 8 days old.
• Low RHR is strongly associated with risk taking and antisocial behavior.
• Low RHR presents one with uncomfortable mood of anhedonia, boredom, and irritability & seeking stimulation from outside, searching for high rewards, risk taking and other pro-social behavior to alleviate aversive mood states.
• In sum, under arousal leads to stimulant seeking, fearlessness, and difficulty learning from negative consequences and more conduct problems, difficulties paying attention, and more crime.


Hormones: Testosterone
• Has both organizational and activational effects.
• Creates the male brain and is long considered to have a role in ADHD and Autism.
• Creates differences in outlook and behavior. “The brain behind the eyes through which we see the world shapes our behavior.”
• Men who commit the more violent crimes such as rape and murder have higher levels of testosterone.
• One might consider this hormone as raising the developmental stakes for males, providing a challenge for how well an individual boy is able to make use of and control its benefits (such as high intensity activity) and its possible detriments (e.g. reduced empathy).

Fathers & the Widespread Frustration of an Important Psychological Need for Many Boys
Upward Trend

The percentage of births to mothers who are unmarried is twice as high for blacks as for whites, and across all groups the rate has increased dramatically over the last 50 years.


Detrimental Effects on Children of Single Parenthood

- Many of the mothers are young, poor, and uneducated
- They are more susceptible to mental Health problems from parental stress of being a single parent
- Children live in unstable, complex family arrangements of unrelated adults and partly related and unrelated children

...Especially For Boys...

Prominent economic analyses about effects of racism and inequality that conclude with particularly bad effects experienced by boys:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Findings for Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chetty, Hendren, Lin, Majerovitz, Scuderi (2015)</td>
<td>Childhood Environment and Gender Gaps in Adulthood</td>
<td>Less likely to be legally employed in 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autor &amp; Wesserman (2013)</td>
<td>Wayward Sons: The Emerging Gender Gap in Labor Markets and Education</td>
<td>Failure to adjust to market is related to low self-control — a pre-market factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chetty, Hendren, Jones, &amp; Porter (2018)</td>
<td>Race and Economic Opportunity in the US: An Intergenerational Perspective</td>
<td>Differences in poverty rates and mobility less in communities with high levels of father presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertrand &amp; Pan (2013)</td>
<td>The Trouble with Boys: Social Influences and the Gender Gap in Disruptive Behavior</td>
<td>Greater School expulsion by Grade 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Rome Question

The question posed at Rome at the World Association for Infant Mental Health by distinguished academics from around the world in May 2018:

Does the father have a unique function in addition to/apart from fulfilling the mother role?

Corollary question: What does the father uniquely do and who, if anyone, is doing it these days?

As the previous slide shows the father may do something, especially for boys, that is different from the mother.

What the Father Does: Activation Theory of Daniel Paquette

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Goal of Situation</th>
<th>Parental Role</th>
<th>Parental Behavior</th>
<th>Father - Father</th>
<th>Mother - Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>Strange Situation</td>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>Stay in close proximity (Provide secure base)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>Risky Situation</td>
<td>Disciplining</td>
<td>Discipline (limit setting, self control)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average fathers tend to:
- Be involved more in play than caring
- Play differently
- More physical and challenging games
- Encourage independence and risk taking

Does Father Absence Matter: Two Outcomes

**Benign:** The Kids Are All Right

My homeboys became my family — the older ones were father figures. Each time I shot someone, each time I put another gun on the set, each time I successfully recruited a combat soldier, I was congratulated by my older homeboys... (p. 25)

**Not Benign**
To Wrap Up

What we need:

1. More sympathetic attention to boys—more than the Dominant Gender Paradigm allows—understanding that: what we—as adults—neglect early in life will come back to haunt us.
2. More early in life focus, beginning in prenatal and infant periods; it cannot start too early.
3. More attention to the uniqueness of fathers and what they do for boys—fathers can be another (sort of) mother and a father also.