

The Masculinity Learning Curve:

Why Many Young Men Aren't Committing to
Education & How We Can Turn This Around

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The Great Guy Slide

Contributing Factors:

- Wiring
- How we talk (don't talk) to boys
- Traditional masculine norms
- Mental health struggles
- College isn't always a welcoming place
- Conclusion – tips for helping young men

Part 1: The Problem in Present

- Many male students are quick to let young women take charge of class discussions and group projects; less likely to complete work in class and outside of it; less likely to ask for help
- 33% of girls say they get excited almost every day about something they learned in class versus 21% of boys
- Many colleges and universities – 60% female and 40% male
- Young women are far more likely to stay in college and graduate, unlike young men
- More women are entering and graduating from graduate programs overall, as well as law school and medical school than are male peers

Part II: The Problem Beyond

- More women than men and without college degrees are employed
- 13% of college-graduate males and 25% of high-school graduate males are living at home with parents
- *Men ages 21-30 are working between 38% and 79% less than female peers*
- LinkedIn report: When women do apply to a job, they are 16% more likely than men to get hired; if the role is more senior than their current position, that number goes up to 18%
- When guys are employed they are more likely to constantly jump from job to job, trying to maximize their income – regardless of whether they work is personally fulfilling or not

Contributing Factors:

Are men from mars?

- Human brains are largely a genderless “mosaic”
- Role of testosterone:
 - The great right brain stunter
 - Affects cognitive maturity
 - Impacts long-term ‘horizon’ thinking

Contributing Factors:

How we talk – and don't talk – to boys

- Boys are born with far more emotional reactivity and needs for 'scaffolding'
- This need is often met with hesitancy, reservations that begin the 'manning up'
- Both mothers and fathers use much more emotive language with daughters than with sons
- Study: Fathers' brains responded with equal pleasure to toddler daughters smiling & sons betraying stoic/neutral countenance

The prevailing narrative that only hypermasculine men teach boys to become men with 'toxic' qualities is half-baked. Many of us who consider ourselves 'gender enlightened' unwittingly contribute to this problem, as well.

Contributing Factors:

Traditional masculine script

- Boys/young men who cling to more traditional notions about masculinity had a considerable decline in GPA
- Falling in line with teachers' demands and expectations is a disconfirmation of traditional masculine identity
- Many young men don't commit to their education because so much of it seems a waste of time & don't believe they should have to perform tasks that don't 'serve a purpose' in their minds

Contributing Factors:

Boredom

- By high school **40% of students** are curious and optimistic about being in school. Less than a third of grade 11 students feel engaged. This doesn't alter that much by college.
- Top two words students use to describe how they feel in school: **"stressed"** and **"bored"**
- Especially true for young men – lack the 'horizon' mindset young women have to push beyond boredom and to work for goals
- Boys and young men far more likely than females to binge on entertainment & social currency through gaming than to do work they feel is pointless: **"boring"**

Contributing Factors:

Disconnect begins with emotions (shame)

- 2017 study: Male students whose high school study habits proved inadequate for college course – far less likely to turn to advisors, parents, or staff in academic services for help
- They resorted to behaviors that preserve their masculine image, such as social isolation and substance abuse, instead of asking for help
- “The male students in this study appeared to lack, researchers observed, the resilience needed to recover from academic difficulties because they did not want to appear weak.”
- At root: emotional woundedness/shame when young men believe they aren’t being independent

Contributing Factors:

Mental health struggles

- This generation is suffering from chronic stress, depression & anxiety (as are we) that will perpetuate long beyond the pandemic
- Males in the 15-24 age range are 3x more likely to commit suicide than females
- Boys and men are at the fore of the emotional disconnect and isolation epidemics
- Older boys and men are grossly mis- and under-diagnosed for depression (anxiety, too)

Contributing Factors:

Some educational spheres don't feel like welcoming spaces to young men

- This becomes apparent as early as middle school and by high school
- Male privilege is employed as a change agent and contributes to disaffection in many older boys and young men
- “When we wholly discount another person’s *very real experiences* and emotional reactions to them, we lose our capacity for empathy and veer into *dehumanization*”

Some Tips for Keeping Male Students Engaged

- Create learning spaces with ground rules early in the semester that encourage respect, tolerance and empathy for everyone during class discussions – tow this line throughout the semester
- Consider calling on students who don't get involved in conversations; encourage them to share thoughts/feelings about topics discussed (include male students)
- Email students who miss two classes in a row to make sure that they're okay. Boys and young men feel more invested when adults care about them and their success
- Wellness Center: Start men's circles where young men can have spaces to discuss the struggles they're having both in and out of school in a safe, supportive environment
- Advising male students: Create a relationship with these students where they feel that *you* have skin in the game with their success. Let them know that it's normal to feel overwhelmed, confused, and try to be patient with them as a means of earning their trust
- Many ascending men believe they need permission to accept help from us
- Research: Older boys are more invested when they feel relational connection

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