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## Family Issues Vol 9, No 2-3 (2001)

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# Family Issues

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CURRENT RESEARCH ON FAMILY TOPICS FOR MAINE EDUCATORS

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## Understanding Gender Differences: Strategies to Support Girls and Boys

**T**his Family Issues will follow-up on *Growing Up Female* (Winter 1994-95), *Growing Up Male* (Fall 1995), and *Gender Equity* (Vol. 7, No. 2, 1998). Our focus here will be to explore ways the current research on gender development can be applied in our homes, schools and communities to support young people in growing up whole—that is, beyond the cultural limitations of gender roles.

In this issue, we will share what we've learned through the Gender Project in York County. We will include strategies suggested by researchers, as well as a sampling of activities and approaches currently being implemented in Maine homes, schools and communities.

### Background: The Gender Project

The Gender Project of University of Maine Cooperative Extension began as a local initiative, and is now expanding beyond York County. Our purpose is to explore gender socialization and equity issues and help young people get beyond the often

unhelpful messages they receive about what it means to be male and female today. We provide educational support to parents, teachers, coaches and other adults who work with young people, as they explore gender issues and develop strategies to implement in their communities. Perhaps most importantly, through these activities we provide opportunities for networking, sharing experiences and mutual support.


The Gender Project began in 1995 when my work in parenting and child development education took this new focus. I began with an informal research project, discussing gender-related concerns with parents and teachers who are raising and teaching young people today. I also talked directly with young people, in small groups, with the lead question: "How would your life be different today if you had been born the other sex?"

During our discussions, people eagerly talked about the power of gender in their lives, and how they learned about what it means to be male and female. They shared their confusion about the overwhelming and hurtful influence of media on

young people. Together, we grappled with such gender-related concerns as bullying and violence in schools, school achievement, body image, eating disorders, dangerous risk-taking, sexualized violence and more.

Throughout these hundreds of conversations, I heard the energy and desire to find new ways to create safe and empowering schools and communities that better support our young people.

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These insightful and important conversations continue and have become the heart of The Gender Project. We have learned much together.

We have learned that while maleness and femaleness are biological, masculinity and femininity are socially constructed by different cultures over time, integrating elements of race, class, ethnicity, religion, etc.

We have learned that we must all examine our deeply rooted definitions of masculinity and femininity, which give our children only half of the skills and internal resources they need to grow into happy and successful adults.

We have learned that discussions about gender issues are very complex and need to be part of larger conversations about power and privilege. Because we live in a society in which some groups of people have more socio-economic and political power than others, our differences go beyond gender and such conversations must include race, class, physical and mental ability, education, religion, sexual identity and more.

We have learned that our social constructions of gender

can leave deep emotional hurts in both boys and girls, and that these can have far-reaching effects in their own lives, on others and in the community. And, to be most helpful to young people, we as women and men must do our own work in healing our own hurts from the ways we were raised as female and male. We need to do this to become better allies to young people, each other and ourselves.

We have also learned that gender equity discussions do not need to have a "battle of the sexes" tone, implying that attention to one group has to be at the others' expense. We don't need to discount the unique needs of girls to address the unique needs of boys. Pitting boys against girls, and men against women hurts us all. Our goal is to better understand our differences and work to stay connected through these differences.

We have been inspired by people of all ages who do the courageous work of gender equity every day, as they support young people to figure out for themselves what being female and male is all about.

We have been inspired by the teachers and coaches who take girls seriously, who listen to their opinions and encourage their visible leadership, and by the teachers and coaches who support the relational development of boys by teaching skills in listening, empathy and collaboration.

We are inspired by the mothers who stay emotionally connected with their sons and teach the skills of friendship and healthy relationships, and by the fathers who support the intelligence, athletic abilities, and boldness of their daughters.

We are inspired by the strong and bold women who show confidence in what they know, and resist the urge to be silent when their words may not be pleasing. They are powerful role models for girls.

We are inspired by the men who know that gender issues are men's issues too and who step up to the work of gender equity, both as allies for girls and women, and as advocates for the emotional and relational development of boys. They are powerful role models for boys.

We are inspired by the women and men who recognize the connection between how boys are raised and the levels of violence, male isolation and depression, and suicide in our communities.

We are inspired by the loving and relational men who model for boys by asking for help, hugging each other, having a full range of emotions, supporting friends and family, and valuing the deep connections in their lives.

We are inspired by the young men who realize that happiness in life has a lot to do with the quality of our relationships, and who are exploring new ways to share their emotional lives with each other.



We are inspired by the young men who confront the dominant norms of teasing, harassment, and homophobia on the athletic fields, and in their classrooms and communities . . . by speaking up, even when it is an act of courage to do so.

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*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”\**

— Margaret Mead

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We are inspired by the girls who love being female, who feel strong in their bodies, and who are thinking clearly about cultural definitions of beauty.

We are inspired by the young women who know that they can be both collaborators and stars, who know they don't need to give up relationships in order to compete and achieve at high levels.

We are inspired by the girls and young women who know that

they don't have to be friends with anyone who doesn't treat them with total respect.

We have learned that supporting girls to be all they can be is good for boys too. And that supporting boys to be all they can be is good for girls as well. Whenever any of us becomes all of who we are, it encourages others to do the same. This is the essence of our work in gender equity, supporting all young people in developing their full humanity and growing up whole.

We offer you the ideas and strategies in this issue as a snapshot of our best thinking today about how we can better support girls and boys. We are continually growing in this work and invite you to join us as we learn together and take new action in our homes, schools and communities. We invite you to let us know what you are doing so that we can learn from you and share your ideas in future issues. Contact us at [afortune@umext.maine.edu](mailto:afortune@umext.maine.edu). We are truly all in this together. ■

**Aileen M. Fortune, M.S. C.A.S.**  
**Extension associate professor**

\*Thinking Quotes <<http://www.2think.org/quotes.html>>, retrieved from the World Wide Web December 5, 2001

*I am deeply grateful for all the support I had in writing this issue. The overall commitment to The Gender Project from so many colleagues within UMaine Cooperative Extension has been invaluable. In particular, Christine Burgess, Jon Prichard and Bob Elliott have contributed more than just content for this issue. They have been partners in the on-going program development, consultations with parents and teachers, and community workshops that are the heart of The Gender Project today. Other contributors to this issue – Sharon Barker of the UMaine Women's Resource Center; Mary Orear of Mainely Girls; and Lyn Mikel Brown of Colby College and Hardy Girls, Healthy Women – are also valued partners in this work statewide. I thank my son, John Fortune Agan for spending hours consulting with me on the boys section and for contributing some of the most insightful nuggets to that piece. His reflections on growing up male, as he gets ready to leave for college this fall, have truly been a gift.*

— Aileen



## Growing Up Whole: Skills All Young People Need

Discussions about gender equity can be informed by carefully considering what we teach young people about what it means to be male and female in our culture. Gender socialization is deeply rooted in our families and schools and is often very hard to recognize. Traditional definitions of masculine and feminine give our children only half of the skills and opportunities they need to grow into adulthood. These losses are damaging to the healthy development of both girls and boys.

As parents, teachers, coaches, family and friends, we try to help young people grow up with the skills they will need as adults. We know that someday most girls are going to work outside the home, and that most boys are going to be partners and fathers. Both girls and boys need a full repertoire of skills to develop a strong identity, to be able to achieve fully in the world, and to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

### Identity and Autonomy Skills

We all need to learn about who we are and who we are not, our likes and dislikes, our strengths and weaknesses. Identity is a strong sense of self, a set of definitive characteristics that are recognizable as “me.” It is knowing my uniqueness and my distinct personality.

Autonomy is the ability to care for myself, to be responsible and think for myself, to know what I want, what I need and to



have that information come from within. These are the skills we learn in order to take care of ourselves physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and sexually. Autonomy is not the opposite of connection.

## Achievement and Aspirations Skills

We all need to develop skills to achieve fully in the world. These are skills that help us take risks,

make mistakes and learn something new. We increase our feelings of being capable as we learn to walk and to read, ride a bike, use a computer, drive a car, make a meal. These are the skills we need to find a job and support ourselves and our families as adults. These are leadership and public speaking skills. These are skills in independence and competition. These are also skills in setting goals, dreaming dreams,

and having the courage and confidence to “go for it!”—to be all we can be in the world.

## Skills to Develop and Maintain Healthy Relationships

We all need to develop healthy relationship skills. These are skills needed for the most casual contacts to skills for our most intimate relationships. These are skills in initiating and carrying on conversations, making appointments, developing and nurturing friendships, listening and expressing empathy, cooperating and compromising, asking for and receiving help, nurturing and caring for others, and being vulnerable and intimate. These are skills in interdependence and connection.

## Gender Roles

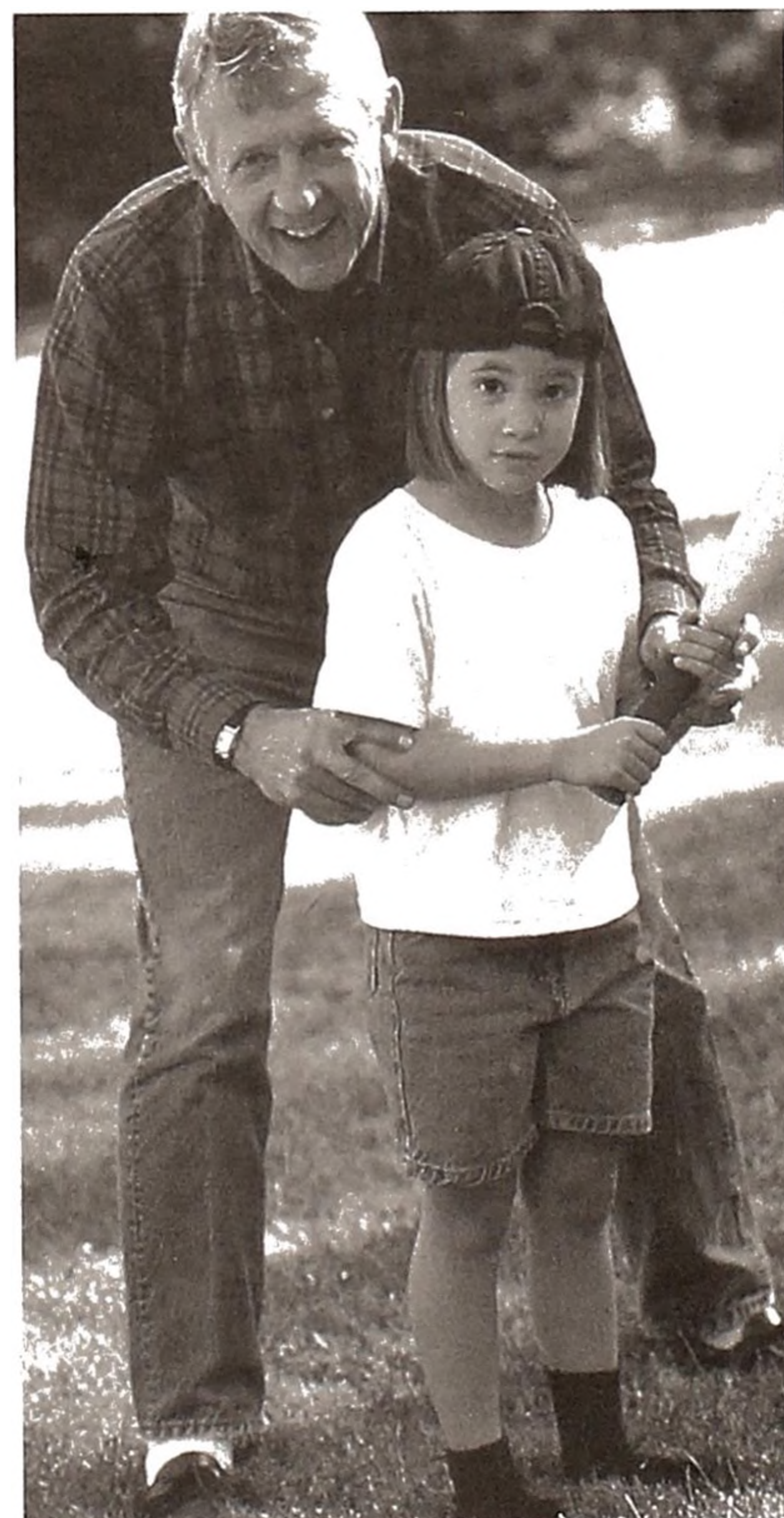
### A girl graduating from high school in the next few years will face

- the absolute certainty of encountering situations in which being aggressive and competitive are to her advantage;
- the virtual certainty of working for pay outside the home for decades of her adult life;
- the virtual certainty that she will be called upon, in the course of her working life, to exercise skills and attitudes that have been traditionally considered “masculine”;
- the strong probability of divorce;
- the virtual certainty that, if she is divorced and has children, she will be the custodial single parent with major financial responsibility for herself and her children;
- the strong probability of conflict between career and family obligations;
- the strong possibility of being sexually harassed on the job;
- the increasing possibility of earning more money than her husband.

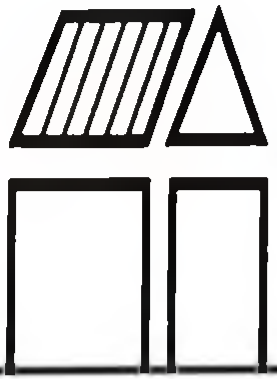
### A boy graduating from high school in the next few years will face

- the absolute certainty of encountering situations in which being aggressive and competitive are damaging to him;
- the virtual certainty of being married to a woman who works for pay outside the home during most of their married life;
- the virtual certainty of being called upon, in the course of his working life, to exercise skills and attitudes traditionally considered “feminine”;
- the strong probability of divorce;
- the strong probability, if divorced with children, of remarrying and having to contribute to the emotional, as well as financial, well-being of two sets of offspring; and the small, but increasing, probability that he will be the sole custodial single parent;
- the strong probability of conflict between career and family obligations;
- the small but not insignificant possibility of being sexually harassed on the job;
- the increasing probability of having a wife who earns more than he does.

Source: American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *Gender Gaps: Where Schools Still Fail Our Children* (Washington, DC: AAUW Educational Foundation, 1998), 86







# What Can We Do To Support Girls?

*"As girls' bodies mature they are viewed differently by the world, more superficially and sexually. Making matters worse, at the very moment when appearance takes on an inordinate importance for girls, our culture bombards them with unrealistic and dangerous images of women's beauty. Not surprisingly, girls begin not to trust the way they see the world, and as a consequence, the vast majority of girls lower their expectations about the future."*<sup>1</sup>

— Ms. Foundation for Women

**F**emininity has long been categorized around themes of cultivating beauty and sex appeal, developing a non-threatening personality and giving service.<sup>2</sup> The socialization of girls still supports a focus toward others, emphasizing values of friendship, nurturing, understanding emotions and pleasing others.

Girls are indeed improving in math and science, their SAT scores are going up, and they are graduating from colleges at a higher rate than boys. But equity is much more complex than this. Getting high test scores and attending college are not enough to ensure success and equity in the work world.

Girls need support to be fully themselves and to create their own definition about what it means to be female. They need support for being bold, confident, seen and heard, to develop strong identities, become achievers and maintain self-esteem as they grow and interact with the world.

## Here are some ways we can be helpful to girls:

### 1. Listen well and respect them.

- Focus on what is really important to them, what they think about, believe, dream,

feel. Get to know who they really are and affirm their true internal selves.

- Honor girls' choices as much as possible. Listen for their ideas, needs, wishes, and their perspectives on getting them met. Making good choices is a skill that can be taught. Valuing a girl's ideas has a great impact on her self-esteem.<sup>3</sup>
- Give her new affirmations that contradict the unhelpful messages she receives—affirmations that remind her of who she truly is and communicate your support and belief in her to grow into all she can be.

### 2. Help girls to develop a "hardy personality," and provide them with "hardiness zones" in which to grow.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Suzanne Kobasa Ouellette came up with the term *hardy personality* to describe people "who feel in control of their lives, are committed to their activities, and look forward to change as a challenge and an opportunity for growth."<sup>6</sup> Authors Mindy Bingham and Sandy Stryker believe we must teach girls these eight skills to help them develop hardy personalities:

*continued on page 6*

## Messages Girls Need to Hear:

- I'm so glad you are a girl.
- You are important.
- You can trust yourself and say what you think.
- You can express feelings to others as you choose.
- You can set limits and say "no."
- You can be sure about what you know.
- You can please yourself.
- You don't have to be pleasing to others.
- You can be true to yourself.
- You don't have to be friends with anyone who doesn't treat you with total respect.
- You don't have to like everyone and everyone doesn't have to like you.
- You are intelligent and capable.
- You can do and achieve great things.
- You can be proud of your accomplishments and take credit for what you achieve.
- Your body is perfectly fine just the way it is.
- You can be strong and powerful in your body.
- You can talk about how hard the struggle is between what you value and what you feel society wants you to value.
- You can explore and figure out who YOU are and what being female is all about for YOU.
- You can find new ways to support yourself and each other.<sup>4</sup>

— Based on and inspired by the developmental affirmations developed by Jean Illsley Clarke



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*Recognize and tolerate anxiety and act anyway; separate fantasy from reality and tackle reality; set goals and establish priorities; project into the future and understand how today's choices affect the future; discriminate and make choices consistent with goals and values; set boundaries and limits; ask assertively for what they want; trust themselves and their own perceptions.*<sup>7</sup>

Lyn Mikel Brown describes hardiness zones as places where children experience control of their worlds and have meaningful connections with mothers, friends, teachers and counselors. These relationships provide the hardiness zones that protect girls from unhealthy choices.<sup>8</sup>

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*"I have been absolutely terrified every moment of my life and I've never let it keep me from doing a single thing that I wanted to do."*<sup>9</sup>

— Georgia O'Keefe

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- Teach girls that anxiety doesn't need to immobilize them. Teach about healthy risk-taking. Teach girls to endure the uncomfortable feelings that overwhelm them when they face situations that make them afraid. Change messages from "if something makes you anxious, don't do it," to "it's okay to feel afraid. You can still do it." Confidence will soar.<sup>10</sup>

- Challenge fairy tales and happily-ever-after myths. Give facts about the future. The reality is that girls need skills to become economically independent. The reality is that there is no Prince Charming. Ask girls where they want to be in 10 years. Teach that a dream takes not only a vision but also action. Teach girls to make decisions today that help them move in the direction of their dreams.
- Teach girls that it's okay to be discriminating and choosy. This contradicts the "be nice" message girls get. Encourage them to follow through on true feelings, to be direct and honest, and to walk away from relationships that aren't good for them. Healthy relationships are freely chosen.<sup>11</sup>
- Teach girls to always consider their needs and wants, and to remain loyal to who they are and what they stand for. Teach them to respect themselves and say "no."
- Support girls in knowing themselves and what they like and dislike. Encourage them to state preferences, even when they seem inconsequential. It is difficult for many young girls to state preferences as simple as like "I don't like green beans." How, then, at age 15, will they be able to say "don't touch me like that." When girls become worried about making waves, they lose their voice.
- Teach girls that it's OK to be angry. Help them trust their feelings, intuition, judgments, and validate from within, rather than from external approval.
- Notice and intervene when language becomes less

empowered. Listen for "I don't know" and "I'm sorry" as common phrases. Intervene. Wait. Support and encourage a clear empowered response.

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*"If all you are ever told is to be a good girl, how do you ever grow up to be a great woman?"*

— Ms. Foundation for Women

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### **3. Support girls to claim their intelligence and abilities.**

When girls succeed, they often attribute it to luck. When they fail, they attribute it to lack of intelligence and ability. Barbara Kerr describes the "Imposter Phenomenon," a common barrier to achievement for girls and women. It is the belief of bright girls that they are not intelligent, despite significant successes and measureable achievements . . . and that they have fooled everyone. They believe that their success has been due to luck, mistaken test scores and being overvalued. They also live with the fear that they will soon be discovered or found out.<sup>12</sup>

- Affirm girls' intelligence, courage, imagination, self-confidence and skills. From the earliest years, resist the cultural pressures to emphasize qualities of attractiveness and successful relationships.
- Introduce girls to strong female role models in history, literature and real life. Girls need to experience "mirrors" in their education reflecting their own experiences. They



need to see strong and capable women so that they can feel important, seen, validated, relevant, worthy. Gender-fair curriculums create opportunities for girls to connect, be interested, and perceive their interests and experiences as relevant.

**4. Help girls develop their public voice and their leadership skills.** They need to be able to lead themselves, their families and communities.

- Encourage girls to express their opinions, defend them and hold on to their ideas. Support girls in sustaining their differences with others a little longer. Girls need to learn to take risks and be willing to be criticized. They don't need to immediately compromise, give in, or change their point of view. Girls need to be able to experience sustained disagreements and not crumble. Encourage girls to be able to say and believe, "I don't know if he likes me, but I *do* know he respects me."
- Teach skills in public speaking. Girls need to develop the courage to go from being in the crowd to being in front. Support them in making mistakes and moving on. Give girls opportunities to practice and fail and try again and again. Respect girls; don't rescue them and don't allow them to give up. Work with them to get the support they need to claim their public voice.
- Encourage drama, dance, music and other performance activities. There are many powerful ways for their ideas, creativity and expression to be seen and heard.

*continued on page 8*

## 25 Benefits of Playing Sports for Girls and Women

1. Sports are fun!
2. Girls and women who play sports have a more positive body image than girls and women who don't participate.
3. Girls who participate in sports have higher self-esteem and pride in themselves.
4. Research suggests that physical activity is an effective tool for reducing the symptoms of stress and depression among girls.
5. Playing sports teaches girls how to take risks and be aggressive.
6. Sport is where girls can learn goal-setting, strategic thinking and the pursuit of excellence in performance and other achievement oriented behaviors—critical skills necessary for success in the workplace.
7. Playing sports teaches math skills.
8. Sports help girls develop leadership skills.
9. Sports teach girls teamwork.
10. Regular physical activity in adolescence can reduce girls' risk for obesity.
11. Physical activity appears to decrease the initiation of cigarette smoking in adolescent girls.
12. Research suggests that girls who participate in sports are more likely to experience academic success and graduate from high school than those who do not play sports.
13. Teenage female athletes are less than half as likely to get pregnant as female non-athletes (5% and 11% respectively).
14. Teenage female athletes are more likely to report that they had never had sexual intercourse than non-athletes (54% and 41%).
15. Teenage female athletes are more likely to experience their first sexual intercourse later in adolescence than female non-athletes.
16. High school sports participation may help prevent osteoporosis.
17. Women who exercise report being happier than those who do not exercise.
18. Women who exercise believe they have more energy and felt they were in excellent health more often than non-exercising women.
19. Women who were active in sports and recreational activities as girls feel greater confidence in their physical and social selves than those who were sedentary as kids.
20. Women who exercise miss fewer days of work.
21. Research supports that regular physical activity can reduce hyperlipidemia (high levels of fat in blood).
22. Recreational physical activity may decrease a woman's chance of developing breast cancer.
23. Women who exercise weigh less than non-exercising women.
24. Women who exercise have lower levels of blood sugar, cholesterol, triglycerides and have lower blood pressure than non-exercising women.
25. Regular exercise improves the overall quality of life.<sup>13</sup>

— Women's Sports Foundation (for more information see [www.womenssportsfoundation.org](http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org))



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**5. Help girls prepare for economic independence and interesting work.** In 1999, women working full time averaged 77 percent of the earnings of men working full time.<sup>14</sup>

- Girls need to know that they face not only the virtual certainty of working for pay outside the home for decades of their adult lives, but also the increasing probability of divorce. If divorced with children, they face the probability of being the custodial single parent with major financial responsibility.
- Encourage girls to take the most challenging classes in school and develop strong skills, especially in computers and technology.

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*"Girls need to experience themselves as subjects of their own life, not as objects of someone else's gaze."*<sup>15</sup>

— Mary Pipher

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**6. Teach girls to experience their bodies as functional, strong and powerful.**

- Teach them to love their bodies and respect their uniqueness.
- Teach about health and nutrition, body image and eating disorders, sexuality, self-esteem, and sports.
- Teach stress management and coping skills like deep breathing, exercise, meditation and yoga.

- Encourage them to be physically active and involved in competitive or non-competitive sports and activities.
- Teach them about sexual harassment and date rape. Teach skills in self-defense. Teach them to scream when necessary.

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*"Within three minutes of looking at fashion magazines, 70% of women feel guilty, ashamed and depressed."*<sup>18</sup>

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**7. Don't underestimate the power of the media in girls' lives and the key role it plays in shaping attitudes about femininity.**

- Notice the bombardment of unrealistic and unhealthy messages we receive from the media about how female bodies are supposed to look. Talk about them, recognize the power they have in women's lives, and contradict them by projecting new, more helpful messages.
- Promote healthy body image. Watch television and movies together and discuss the portrayal of girls and women: how realistic they are, the messages they send, how they make you feel. Talk about what *New Moon* magazine calls real beauty, "a beauty based on good works, great hearts, and activism."<sup>17</sup>
- Talk about media images of violent masculinity and sexualized femininity. Watch and discuss educational videos like *Tough Guise*,

## Shocking Facts: Why We Need to "Turn Beauty Inside Out"

- Eighty percent of 10-year-old American girls diet.
- Girls are disproportionately affected by eating disorders and cultural demands for thinness.
- Today, fashion models weigh 23 percent less than the average female.
- More than 5 million Americans suffer from eating disorders.
- Ninety percent of those afflicted by eating disorders are adolescent and young adult women.
- Fifteen percent of young girls have substantially disordered eating attitudes.
- Between elementary and high school, the percentage of girls in the U.S. who are "happy with the way I am" drops from 60 to 29 percent.
- The number one magic wish for young girls ages 11-17 is to be thinner.
- Millions of young girls, influenced by a culture that equates success and happiness with thinness, begin dieting to be accepted.
- 400-600 advertisements bombard us everyday in magazines, on billboards, on tv, and in newspapers. One in 11 has a direct message about beauty, not even counting the indirect messages.
- Between 1996 and 1998, teenage cosmetic surgeons nearly doubled from 13,699 to 24,623, according to the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons.<sup>16</sup>

— *New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams* (for more information see [www.newmoon.org](http://www.newmoon.org))



*Reviving Ophelia* and *Killing Us Softly 3* with others and explore actions individuals can take. (See *Resources*, 22-24)

- Teach her to be discerning in what she chooses to see and read, what messages and values she decides to internalize and make her own.

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*"I felt it shelter to speak to you."*<sup>20</sup>

— Emily Dickinson

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about and submissive to men; are pretty, thin, sexy, dependent; love taking care of other people; and never think about themselves. Internalized oppression makes women believe they are not as good as or important as men. When women internalize oppression, they take their pain out on other girls and women by putting each other down, competing, fighting and excluding each other. They take it out on themselves with extreme dieting or overeating,

- Teach girls how to become allies to themselves and each other.

#### **9. Be a Role Model.**

- Challenge your own stereotypes. Examine your expectations for girls and boys. Examine your own sexism and internalized oppression. Explore, for example, your own discomfort with girls who speak up and disagree. Do you think of them as loud rather than bold? A "know it all" rather than someone who knows what she knows? Pushy rather than clear or persuasive? Would you react differently if a boy behaved in the same way? We are all products of our culture and have our own gender socialization lens through which we view our world. This is difficult work and it takes time and courage.



#### **8. Support girls and their connections with each other.**

- Sisterhood is powerful: encourage them to form support groups, to talk about what it's like to be female and how to deal with the cultural messages about what it means to be a woman today.
- Talk about internalized oppression. This is what happens when women start to believe the messages they hear over and over again, messages that tell them they're not real women unless they are wild

self-mutilation or other behaviors that lack self-respect or deny intelligence.<sup>19</sup>

- Talk about how women have been hurt, ways they have learned to hurt each other, and ways they have blamed themselves or been self-destructive.
- Talk about ways we have come together throughout history to resist mistreatment individually and as a group.
- Talk about ways we can come together to support ourselves and each other.

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*"Perhaps we should share stories in much the same spirit that explorers share maps, hoping to speed each other's journey, but knowing the journey we make will be our own."*<sup>21</sup>

— Gloria Steinem

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- Girls need strong women in their lives. Take care of yourself. Take care of your self-esteem. Celebrate your successes. Affirm your own body. Get the support for yourself that you deserve. Join a women's group to explore women's leadership issues.

*continued on page 10*



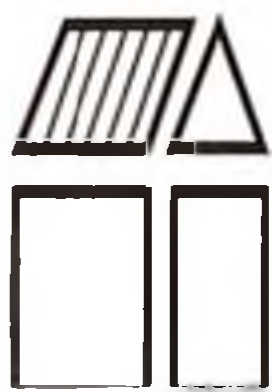
- Speak up. Be courageous. Advocate. Model leadership, boldness, strength and intelligence. Speak up even when what you have to say may not be pleasing.
- Teach girls that there are many ways to be a woman. Bring girls and women together to talk and learn from each other. Tell stories of facing fear and accomplishing big and small things.

#### 10. Girls (and boys) need safe and respectful environments.

*Create community and class-room norms about respect for all.*

Intervene when you hear sexist and homophobic comments. Talk about and take sexual harassment seriously. It is a big issue because it is often so normalized in the culture, in the media, in games. Girls will shut down and disappear themselves when they do not feel safe.

Help girls talk about gender issues with boys and appreciate the ways boys are also badly hurt by their limited socialization. Talk about how to move beyond teasing and stereotyping and support each other in new ways. Encourage girls to change their responses to boys and girls who act in stereotyped ways.



## What Can We Do to Support Boys?

**T**here are many characteristics associated with being male that we celebrate in our culture.

These include strength, independence, boldness, autonomy, loyalty, an appreciation for competition, risk-taking, leadership, hard work, achievement, athletic success, self-confidence, public speaking abilities, inventiveness, creativity and the courage to speak up for what's right.

At the same time we celebrate the positive aspects, we must also challenge the characteristics that are not helpful to the whole development of boys today.

### What boys are up against: the "Boy Code" and boy culture; implicit expectations for boys.

- Never show any feelings (except anger). Fear and vulnerability are for wimps and you will be teased or shamed for revealing them.
- Stand on your own two feet. Always be independent.
- Be first. Stay on top and in the limelight.

- Separate from Mom and all things female as quickly as possible or you'll be a "sissy" or "wuss."
- "Give 'em hell" through tough behavior, cruelty, bravado. And banter.
- Bullying and teasing are just "normal" boy talk.
- Keep the "code of silence." Don't "rat" or let anyone else know when another boy does something harmful.
- Don't back down. Never give in or really listen.
- Take pride in non-compliance and disrespect.
- Become desensitized to violence. Don't show your fear of it.
- Sex is conquest.<sup>23</sup>

The film *Good Will Hunting* offers us "a sustained gaze behind the curtain of traditional masculinity to reveal the often tragic consequences of holding too fast to destructive masculine myths."<sup>24</sup> This film is a powerful illustration of a young man's struggle to get beyond the tough-guy posturing to heal old hurts and learn to live more fully. In one poignant scene with a caring therapist, he learns that "it's not your fault." That is our message here as well.

We need to work together to remove the limits placed on boys by traditional masculine standards, and empower them to grow into men who can find satisfaction and success in all aspects of their adult lives. We need to allow boys to feel all their feelings and to appreciate deep connections. They need to be part of groups that create norms of respect and help

## The Girls' Bill of Rights

(Girls Incorporated  
[www.girlsinc.org](http://www.girlsinc.org))

- Girls have a right to be themselves—people first and females second—and to resist pressure to behave in sex-stereotyped ways.
- Girls have a right to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm.
- Girls have a right to take risks, to strive freely, and to take pride in success
- Girls have a right to accept and enjoy the bodies they were born with and not to feel pressured to compromise their health in order to satisfy the dictates of an "ideal" physical image.
- Girls have a right to be free of vulnerability and self-doubt, and to develop as mentally and emotionally sound individuals.
- Girls have a right to prepare for interesting work and economic independence.<sup>22</sup>



## Messages Boys Need to Hear:

- I love who you are.
- You are loving and lovable
- I'm glad you're a boy.
- I love you when you are active AND when you are quiet.
- You don't always have to win, excel, achieve, be the best.
- It's OK to make mistakes. You can learn from your mistakes.
- You can nurture yourself and others.
- You can feel all your feelings.
- You can think and feel at the same time.
- You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time.
- My love is always with you. I trust you to ask for my support.<sup>28</sup>

— Based on and inspired by the the developmental affirmations developed by Jean Illsley Clarke

them develop skills in listening, empathy and collaborating. Boys need opportunities to work with girls in safe and respectful environments that encourage mutual growth and understanding.

Without relational skills, boys will be left to relate in classrooms and in life with only the traditional characteristics of competition and dominance, entitlement, and feelings of superiority and power over girls. They will be left isolated when they are vulnerable, taking out their distress on others through acting out and violence. Supporting boys to develop relational skills will make schools safer places for all students to learn and grow together.

"Violence needs to be seen as a gender issue, especially as an issue caught up in how we as a

society think about masculinity and manhood. In the national conversation about violence, it's rarely referred to as a gender issue, although one gender, men, perpetrate approximately 90 percent of the violence."<sup>25</sup>

### Here are some ways we can be helpful to boys:

#### 1. No matter what they say or do, remember their full humanity.

Adults can help them stay connected to their true selves by first remembering that there is much more to boys than they will often show. Boys get heavy messages to be tough and to put people off. The "boy culture" makes it hard for boys to connect.

- *Don't be fooled. Keep reaching out to connect with them.* Don't let them get isolated. They hurt, feel sad and need connection and friends just as much as girls do. They can and do feel deeply. No matter what they say, trust the instinct that tell you to reach out to a boy in emotional pain. Look beyond the anger.
- *Express your appreciation, love and empathy openly, sincerely and generously.*<sup>26</sup> Boys need love, affection, and positive attention as much as girls do. Affirm them for being loving and lovable.
- *Stop "boys will be boys" thinking.*
  - Stop yourself when you have the urge to tell a boy to be strong or to act like a man. Examine your gender boundaries and gender fears.<sup>27</sup>
  - Notice your own stereotypes about boys. Do you value men more when they are cool and in control, and do you think

less of men who show fear or hurt or tears? Do you expect 8th grade boys to be rude and disrespectful? Are you surprised when they greet you with eye contact and a smile, and begin a conversation?

— Expect boys to be just as respectful and kind as you expect girls to be. We hurt teenage boys badly when we expect them to be rude, dangerous or violent.<sup>29</sup>

Remember that the tough-guy posing is not caused by testosterone and the propensity to violence is not innate. A boy's behavior is shaped much more by loved ones, teaching and conditioning than by nature.<sup>30</sup>

— Remember that real men know how to be fathers, how to hug and comfort and make valuable contributions to their children's development.<sup>31</sup>

— Don't be afraid of a strong mother-son bond. Boys do not need to separate from their mothers in order to grow into healthy men. Boys need healthy, close relationships with both parents and as many other adults as possible.<sup>32</sup>

#### 2. Listen and Talk.

Support boys in developing emotional literacy and the expression of a full range of emotions. Emotional literacy is the ability to read and understand our own feelings and those of others. An emotional vocabulary is necessary for boys to understand themselves and communicate more with others.<sup>33</sup>

- Teach them the words for a wide variety of feelings. Help them learn that anger isn't the only feeling a male is allowed to express.

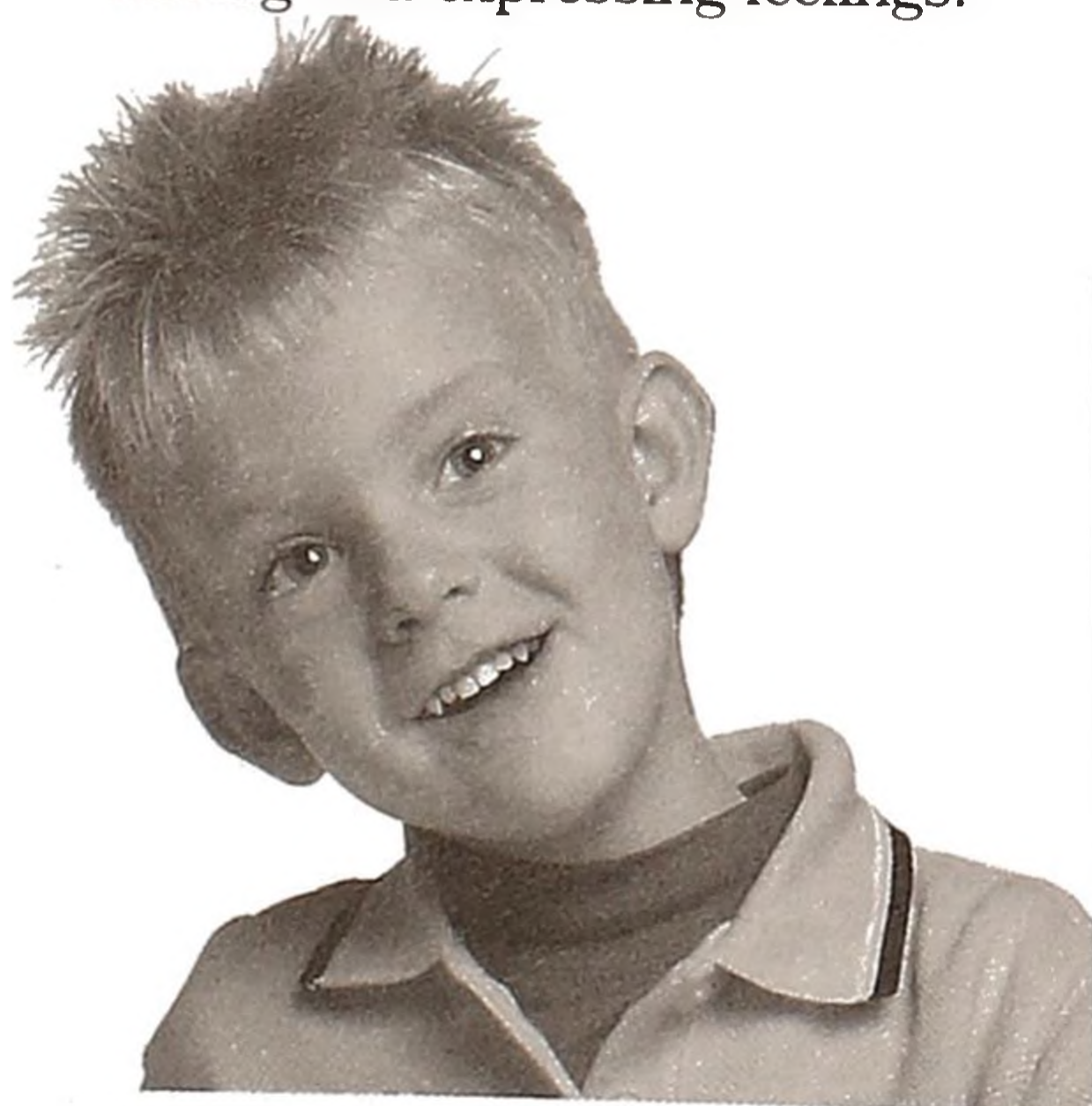
continued on page 12



*If we understand the sadness in boys, we'll deal with the sadness and not have to wait to cope with their aggression.*<sup>34</sup>

— James Garbarino

- Teach boys to take responsibility for their feelings, to take care of themselves and to ask for help. Help boys find safe places to be real about what's going on for them. Communicating with boys can be difficult but does not need to be impossible. Create "shame-free zones" for boys where they can talk and listen without judgment.<sup>35</sup>
- Connect with boys through activity or play. Be patient with silences, honoring a boy's need to choose when to talk.<sup>36</sup> Make brief statements and wait. Listen. Do not lecture. Be satisfied with short conversations.
- Don't tease or shame boys for having and expressing feelings.



*"Why boys don't talk and why we care . . . We care because when boys don't talk, we assume that they don't feel. We care because when boys don't talk, we don't get to fully know them: we end up validating only one part of them. We care because when boys don't talk, it inhibits intimacy."*<sup>38</sup>

— Susan Morris Shaffer and Linda Perlman Gordon

- Meet boys where they are. Talk to them in their language, in ways that convey your respect for their psychological defenses and honors their wish to be strong and to appear strong.<sup>37</sup>

### **3. Talk about masculinity and the gendered nature of men's lives.**

— Talk about what it means to act like a man. Talk about what boys and men give up to be in the "Act Like a Man" box, how boys are hurt by narrow gender roles. Talk about gender issues as men's issues too. Notice how being in the box affects relationships with male friends, girls, parents, etc. Notice how boys begin to measure everything they do as either strong or weak.

— Discuss masculinities that are broad and inclusive. Observe that very few boys or men are athletic, rich, physically strong, independent, successful with women and fearless. Point out men in your life who are caring friends, loving fathers,

intelligent students, gifted musicians, artistically creative, helpful neighbors, good listeners, community volunteers and social activists.

— Talk about dominance and privilege. Help boys recognize all the subtle and not-so-subtle messages they hear that teach them that boys are superior to girls. Help them notice the language they might use when they put each other down (like "girl" or "wuss" or "fag"). Notice the fear and humiliation of being seen or described as anything feminine. How does that feel? How does that hurt girls? How does that hurt boys? How does it affect their relationships with girls and women?

- *Model a manhood of emotional attachment.*

— "Boys imitate what they see. If what they see is emotional distance, guardedness, and coldness between men, they will grow up to emulate this. The loneliness of men has to be

### **The "Act Like a Man" Box: A Teaching Exercise**

Draw a box on a chalkboard. Ask students to name characteristics of a real man. Write them inside the box. When the box is full, ask for themes (for example, strength, toughness, don't show feelings). Then ask them to name characteristics of men who don't measure up, and write these outside the box. When you've gotten a sufficient number of words (wimp, wuss, fag,) ask for themes. Then talk about how boys/men are boxed in by these definitions, and punished if they don't fit in.<sup>40</sup>

— Paul Kivel and Allen Creighton



addressed in the lives of boys. Boys need to be encouraged to initiate friendships, maintain them, and experience the conflicts that arise in male friendship. Boys often lack the resources and the will to resolve conflicts and preserve friendships.”<sup>39</sup>

- **Teach relationship skills.**

— Teach boys how to make friends. Encourage close friendships with both boys and girls. Teach them to share. Teach them how to reach out when a friend gets injured in a game or his dog dies. Encourage them to call friends who are absent from school to see how they are doing.

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*“Boys do not ache for their fathers’ masculinity. They ache for their fathers’ hearts.”<sup>41</sup>*

— Terrence Real

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— Teach them to treat others with respect and to expect to be treated with respect. Talk about name calling, teasing and bullying; teach him how to interrupt the behavior and become an ally. Teach him how to ask for help.

— Teach consideration, compassion and empathy. Help boys learn to notice what might be going on for another person and offer to help.

— Teach conversation and listening skills—how to start a conversation, how to respond to a question in a way that keeps a conversation going but does not dominate it, how to

*“It’s hard to imagine how lonely and isolated growing up male can be . . . Sometimes it seems like everything is working against you: the continuous barrage of messages about all the things you’re supposed to be but are in fact incapable of being; the constant competition, teasing and taunting by your equally insecure peers, who somehow think that by putting you down it raises them up; the painful emotional distance that suddenly grows up between you and your parents.”<sup>42</sup>*

— Terrence Real

express genuine interest in the other’s topic. Teach boys how to greet each other and adults with eye contact, a few words and perhaps a handshake.

— Teach boys healthy ways to air disagreements. Teach them skills in acknowledging conflicts, listening to the other’s point of view and working through conflicts in ways that are mutually respectful and satisfying. Teach boys how to set boundaries and how to apologize. Valuing relationships requires a commitment to working through differences to stay connected.

— Teach boys that adulthood is about learning the skills of both independence and interdependence.

- **Teach that emotional courage and empathy are the sources of real strength in life.**<sup>43</sup>

**4. Use discipline to teach about making amends in relationships.**

If we discipline boys more harshly than we do girls, we are reinforcing the message that boys’

feelings are not as important as girls’ feelings. We must avoid a double standard in discipline.<sup>44</sup> Boys need discipline that is clear, consistent and not harsh or shaming. Discipline should be less about control and more about teaching, making amends and building character.

According to Stephen Bergman, “all of our muscle must be in creating connections with boys.” When boys misbehave or break a rule, talk about the violation to the relationship or to the community.<sup>45</sup>

**5. Address homophobia and acknowledge how it keeps boys in the “box.”**

Homophobia is a powerful force in the lives of males. Michael

*continued on page 14*

*“In life and in art, we need to provide boys models of male heroism that go beyond the muscular, the self-absorbed, and the simplistically heroic. Many adults display emotional courage in their work or personal lives, but rarely do we allow our children to witness our private moments of conscience or bravery. We need to speak of it, and we need to recognize out loud the emotional courage of those people around us who, in small ways daily, exhibit personal courage—to make a class speech, to be active despite handicaps, to learn a new language, to step forward to help when it would be easier to look the other way. When we give emotional courage a face and a form — our own or someone else’s — we leave an indelible impression. Boys can and will respond to the complexity of real courage.”<sup>47</sup>*

— Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson



Thompson, author of *Raising Cain*, describes it as a "force stronger than gravity for adolescent boys."<sup>46</sup>

*"Whether it's the fear of being called a 'wuss' or a 'sissy' or the threat of being identified as feminine, boys of all ages are keenly aware of the strict behavioral boundaries set by the masculine ideal and the high price that is exacted from them for playing 'out of bounds.' The prohibition is so profound that it extends to the expression of any emotion or feeling, much less a behavior or action, considered to be 'feminine.' This is a broader conceptualization of homophobia and is far more pervasive and insidious than 'fear of homosexuality' we most often associate with the term. In boys, the development of empathy and the ability to express it are acutely limited by such homophobic boundaries. The fear of being shamed that many boys feel only further disconnects them from qualities that support and sustain the intimacy and connection essential to healthy relationships."*<sup>48</sup>

If we are serious about supporting the development of the relational skills boys need, we must confront homophobia in our homes, schools and communities.

- Notice your own homophobia. Find safe places to talk about your feelings, fears and anxieties. Notice your stereotypes about which activities and behaviors you associate with being gay. Encourage young people to talk about sexual orientation and how homophobia plays out during school, work and play.
- Get more information. Find resources that will support you in thinking more clearly

about sexual orientation.

- Interrupt homophobic comments. Make it clear that they are not OK. Create norms about respect.
  - Get support for yourself and others. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning adolescents need allies and safe places.
- 6. Recognize the important role sports play in boys' lives whether they like sports or not.**

Being athletic, or at least interested in sports, is an important part of how masculinity is perceived today. Boys who aren't athletic may feel a great deal of pressure, humiliation and shame. In contrast, boys don't feel a need to explain a lack of interest in music, drama or art.

*Remember that participating in sports is a choice. It is not inevitable or necessary. Boys have a broad range of interests and talents, and should feel free to pursue art, music, dance and other hobbies.*

*Recognize the positive lessons of sports. Boys can learn about physical fitness and health. They can develop their endurance, a work ethic, a sense of teamwork and mutual respect; they can gain self-confidence and self-discipline. Sports can provide many character-building opportunities*

for boys as they learn about courage, fairness, perseverance, loyalty, responsibility, caring, cooperation, justice, tolerance, interdependence, making mistakes and forgiving themselves.

#### **When boys play sports:**

- *Pay careful attention to the sports culture. Paul Kivel reminds us that because sports are also a means to train boys to become men in special ways, we must exercise caution when boys participate in sports. They may be exposed to "mistreatment or manipulation by coaches who are intent on winning at all costs, or who pressure boys to become men by playing with pain, by hurting others on the field, and by putting down girls and nonathletic boys."*<sup>50</sup> The highly competitive nature of sports can lead to name-calling, teasing, racial and ethnic slurs and fighting.

Organized sports often teach boys to be stoical. They are taught that to cry or show feelings is to risk being attacked by the coaches or teammates, or called fags, wimps or sissies. They learn to "suck it up" and not let on that anything affects them personally.

Point out any norms on sports teams of male bonding against gays and women.

*"Sports is the preeminent arena where preteen and early adolescent boys establish a respected male identity for themselves in most communities. It is the area that many families turn to when they are concerned about their son's masculinity, strength, sociability, or 'feminine interests.' It is the training or proving ground for a boy's maleness. Participating in sports is an integral part of most boys' childhoods, and few escape the pressure to be part of a team or to excel at sports. The pressure leads many boys to feel less than adequate athletically at some point in their childhood."*<sup>49</sup>

— Paul Kivel



Discuss how the banter between players can lead to an inability to relate respectfully with girls and more seriously, may lead to date rape and other violence.

- *Recognize the damage of homophobia in the sports culture.* It is not unusual to be on the sidelines at a high school game and hear boys ridiculed for playing “like a bunch of wusses” or worse. When this homophobia goes unchallenged, a culture of traditional male domination, often described as a “jockocracy” is reinforced.<sup>51</sup>
- *Don’t tolerate hazing.* The culture of sports teams often provides not only significantly more status to older and more experienced players, but particular disrespect for and mistreatment of younger and newer players. Hazing, done in the name of integrating new players onto the team, often includes physical mistreatment and humiliation. Sometimes coaches don’t know it’s happening, and sometimes they choose ignore it. The “code of silence” among the boys often makes it hard to detect.

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*Hazing is “any action taken or situation created, intentionally, . . . to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule.”<sup>52</sup>*

— StopHazing.org

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- Hazing is not uncommon on middle and high school athletic teams. High school hazing is especially disturbing. The yearning to feel accepted by peers at this developmental level makes many students this age more susceptible to peer pressure. The threat of high school hazing is exacerbated by the failure of personnel to acknowledge and control it.<sup>53</sup>
- *Resist the pressure.* Sports teams are just vehicles for boys to learn about themselves, other people and life. Teach them to be discerning about which messages they listen to and which they discard. Remember that sports should first be about fun.
- *Keep talking* with the boys in your life about what is going on and how people are treating each other, and notice if and when the pressure gets to be too much. Help him sort out what’s happening. Teach him that he can play sports and be successful without losing his heart and without hurting himself and others.
- *Make sure that boys get balance in life*, that there are places that welcome the other parts

of them to show. Make sure that they don’t carry unhealthy sports norms into other parts of life. Intervene if a boy is constantly “sucking it up,” being stoical, putting people down and getting isolated. Make sure he has a safe place to process his feelings, feel safe being vulnerable and know that he is lovable just because of who he is. Make sure he knows that his value is not dependent on his athletic success.

#### **When boys do not play sports:**

Many boys have a high activity level and need safe places and fun ways to be fully in their bodies. Our job is to help them find ways to get exercise, have fun, and learn the skills of physical fitness and health. We can support their boldness, energy and exuberance and teach them about taking risks and making choices that don’t hurt themselves or others.

Boys also deserve to have opportunities to enjoy sports and games in less competitive ways. Sports need to be available to all boys, even those who don’t “excel.” We can help boys find their own ways of being active, such as hiking, swimming, skiing, snowboarding, kayaking, golfing,

*continued on page 16*



skateboarding or rock climbing.

Some boys are not very interested in any of these activities and will choose to use their spare time playing or writing music, doing artwork, reading or any number of other things. We need to appreciate and value all of these interests fully.

**7. Don't underestimate the power of the media in boys' lives and the key role it plays in shaping attitudes about masculinity.**

The media is a primary teaching tool of our time. This includes MTV and other television, radio, movies, video games, the Internet, CDs, "spam" and easy access to pornography. Media images of masculinity show widespread and disturbing images of dominance, control, violence and sexualized violence. The media construction of the "real man" is more fantasy than real, yet is very powerful in shaping the perceptions we have of ourselves and each other.

- Explore the ways individual boys' lives reflect their involvement with the media they consume.

- Talk about media images of men and women. Talk about the levels of violent masculinity and sexualized femininity. Ask boys how they feel about the way men are represented. How does watching these images affect their relationships with their friends, girls and women?
- Watch and discuss educational videos like *Tough Guise*, *Reviving Ophelia* and *Killing Us Softly 3* with others and explore actions individuals and communities can take.
- Teach him to be discerning in what he chooses to see and what messages and values he decides to internalize and make his own.

*"The way we talk about violence shapes the way we understand it. Assuming, rather than naming explicitly, the fact that violence is primarily in the domain of boys and men both hides this basic fact and perpetuates the myth that all men and boys are inherently violent. They are not. Yet the fact is that boys and men are in fact responsible for a disproportionate amount of violence. Calling attention to this fact, as a fact, forces us to look not at the violent nature of boys and men, not at biological determinants, but at the violent 'nature' of the ideas, images and values some boys and men associate with being a man. Simply put, it forces us to look at masculinity. So that when we hear discussions of how media is making 'kids' violent, we need to pause. Girls absorb media . . . Why then so much more violence from boys?"*

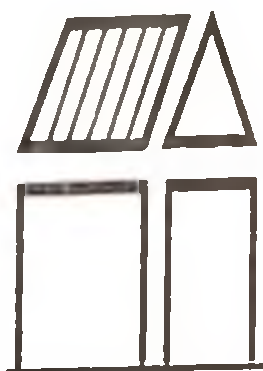
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## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> Mindy Bingham and Sandy Stryker, *Things Will Be Different for My Daughter: A Practical Guide to Building Her Self-Esteem and Self-Reliance* (NY: Penguin Books, 1995), 41.
- <sup>3</sup> Will Glennon. *200 Ways to Raise a Girl's Self-Esteem* (Berkeley CA: Conari Press, 1999), 33-35.
- <sup>4</sup> Based on and inspired by the developmental affirmations developed by Jean Illsley Clarke, described in *Growing Up Again, Parenting Ourselves and Parenting Our Children* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1989), 116-136.
- <sup>5</sup> Described by Lyn Mikel Brown in *Creating Hardiness Zones for Girls* (keynote address, Girls Health Summit, Rockland, ME, 6/1/01). For more information, write Hardy Girls, Healthy Women, PO Box 821, Waterville ME 04903-0821; or see [www.hardygirlshealthywomen.org](http://www.hardygirlshealthywomen.org).
- <sup>6</sup> Bingham and Stryker, 78.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Brown (keynote address).
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- <sup>13</sup> Women's Sports Foundation <<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/cgi-bin/iowa/sports/article.html?record=4>>, retrieved from the World Wide Web 10/2/01.
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- <sup>15</sup> *Reviving Ophelia; Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, with Mary Pipher (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation), video, 38 min.
- <sup>16</sup> Compiled by New Moon: *The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams*, from various sources, including *About Face* and *News We Can Use* for the 2001 Turn Beauty Inside Out campaign. To learn more visit [www.newmoon.org](http://www.newmoon.org).
- <sup>17</sup> New Moon Publishing <<http://www.newmoon.org>>, retrieved from the World Wide Web 11/27/01.
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- <sup>20</sup> Ms. Foundation, *Girls*, 191.
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- <sup>30</sup> Michael Kimmel, "What About the Boys?," *Women's Educational Equity Act Digest* (November 2000): 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Glennon, *Boy's Emotional Intelligence*, 11.
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- <sup>37</sup> Kindlon and Thompson, 247-249.
- <sup>38</sup> Susan Morris Shaffer and Linda Perlman Gordon, *Why Boys Don't Talk and Why We Care; A Mother's Guide to Connection* (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., 2000), 3.
- <sup>39</sup> Kindlon and Thompson, 254-258.
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- <sup>44</sup> Thompson, *Raising Cain* workshop, Portland, ME, 10/5/99.
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# What Can We Do in Our Schools?

**H**ow can both boys and girls be empowered in schools to get their needs met and to support one another's growth? Here are some suggestions:

## 1. Talk about gender differences.

Gender affects everything we do, but we rarely talk about it. Make gender visible. Have conversations and structured dialogues about how our gender affects our lives, so that students can understand more about their differences and explore ways to support each other.

- Talk about how boys hurt each other. Talk about bullying, hazing, homophobia.

- Talk about how girls hurt each other. Talk about gossip, exclusion and internalized oppression.
- Talk about how boys and girls hurt each other.
- Talk about how we might develop new norms to create change.
- It is important for boys and girls to develop friendships between genders, and to learn how to truly collaborate on work teams together. Support friendships between boys and girls.
- Keep them together as much as possible for instruction and

recreation. Don't separate girls and boys, or group them to compete against each other. Use creative ways to divide a class into groups.

- Consider separating classes into gender groups only when the goal is to discuss gender issues or form support groups. (Examples are described in the community section.) The intent of these groups is never to pit one gender against the other, but rather to gain self awareness and enhance understanding and relationship.

## 2. Develop community norms about respect, safety, and opportunities for all.

- Talk about classes, athletic teams and other groups at school as communities. Develop community norms and ground rules about respect and responsibility so that everyone feels that they belong, can be heard and can learn and contribute in a safe and comfortable space.
- Interrupt comments that are sexist and homophobic. Take teasing, bullying, hazing and sexual harassment seriously as well. Create rules about all name-calling and put downs. Enforce them. When we don't stop these comments, we sanction them with our silence.
- Support gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth. They need allies and safety.
- Create system-wide policies and develop educational awareness programs for students, staff, parents and the community.



*"Never underestimate the power of a role model. Studies have shown that girls' self-esteem deteriorates as they grow up. They seldom hear of women doing anything important or even interesting. Betsy Ross sews. Amelia dies. History becomes a sea of dates and wars. Boys don't hear much about women either. This kind of early, inadvertent education sends ripples through too many lives. A few great examples can begin to turn things around!"*

— National Women's History Project

For more information on the National Women's History Project, go to [www.nwhp.org](http://www.nwhp.org).



- Make use of resources, such as  
— *Quit It! A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying for Use With Students in Grades K-3*, by Merle Froschi, Barbara Sprung, and Nancy Mullin-Rindler, 1998.

— *Bully Proof: A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying for Use With Fourth and Fifth Grade Students*, by Nan Stein, Emily Gaberman and Lisa Sjostrom, 1996.

— *Flirting or Hurting, A Teacher's Guide on Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment in Schools* (grades 6-12), by Nan Stein and Lisa Sjostrom, 1994.

All three are published by and available from the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women Web site at [www.wellesley.edu/WCW](http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW).

### **3. Remember that we all need "mirrors and windows" when we learn.**

This is not only about gender. It is about race, religion, physical abilities and all the other ways we differ from each other. When we have mirrors in our learning environment, we see people like ourselves and we feel validated and affirmed. When we have "windows" to see through, we see the humanity of others who are different from us and can validate and affirm them as well.

- *Integrate gender into your curriculum.* As long as women's history and gender issues remain a separate topic or sidebar in textbooks, the implication will be that these topics are not part of, or are less important than, the cultural mainstream. When reading literature or history, ask, Whose point of view is

## **The Gender Dialogue\*** **An Activity to Raise Awareness of Gender Differences**

The gender dialogue is a tool to help groups move toward gender mutuality: to make visible the invisibilities of gender; to break through the mysteries the other gender holds for them; and to move beyond antagonism and "battle of the sexes" thinking. It invites people to be authentic and open, respectful and empathic.

The gender dialogue can be modified for all ages, from elementary school students to adults. It can be done briefly in an hour and more completely in several hours. The more time available, the richer the experience is likely to be.

It is important to have a balanced number of girls and boys, a facilitator and discussion ground rules (such as good listening and respect)

The activity begins with small same-gender groups generating responses to the three questions.

- 1) Name three strengths the other gender group brings to relationships.
- 2) What do you most want to understand about the other gender group?
- 3) What do you most want the other gender group to understand about you?

Create your own process to share responses to each question in the reconvened larger group, allowing time for discussion. Encourage participants to be open to one another's experience, understand one another's point of view and validate each other. Understanding our differences can help us move toward what we have in common—our desire for better connection.

\*The gender dialogue is an outgrowth of the relational model developed by Stephen Bergman and Janet Surrey, researchers at the Stone Center at Wellesley College (Sources. see sources for Gender Mutuality, p 18 )

being presented here? How might this be told from another perspective? Talk about gender roles and how definitions of masculinity and femininity change over time and between cultures.

- *Examine curriculum topics, textbooks, examples used in classes.* Are they relevant to girls' experiences, interests, etc. Are bold, strong women visible and validated? Do we present men as more than generals, presidents, success stories? Do we show their humanity, their vulnerabilities?

### **4. Media literacy: foster critical thinking about the mass media**

Media literacy enhances our abilities to view advertising, television, movies and magazines with greater awareness and skepticism, so that we might more easily recognize persuasion techniques that advertisers and producers use to sell products and ideas. When we view with a critical eye, we can identify lies, omissions and stereotypes, and decide for ourselves what makes sense.

Don't underestimate the power of the media. Mass media is all-pervasive in young people's lives.

- *Teach critical thinking about mass media.* Discuss television, magazines and movies. How are femininity and masculinity constructed in the media? Is

*continued on page 20*



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this what real life is like? How do you feel about yourself after seeing these images and messages? How do you feel about your friends?

- *Integrate media literacy into the curriculum.* As educators, we must provide opportunities for adults and young people to be exposed to critical responses and educational resources that counter commercial

## Gender Equity

"Gender equity is a set of actions, attitudes and assumptions that provide opportunities and create expectations about individuals," regardless of gender. Gender equity is an equal chance for females and males at

- learning any subject;
- educational, occupational and civic involvement;
- setting and achieving goals;
- developing fully as member of families, the workforce and society;
- equitable treatment and results in school and elsewhere.

Gender equity is integrated with race, ethnicity, economic status, disabilities and other human differences.

### Questions to consider:

- In what areas are girls and boys are uniquely vulnerable to not getting what they need because of gender socialization?
- What can we do to support them to get what they need?

Source: Equity Online, Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Equity Resource Center, <<http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity/about/define.htm>>, retrieved from the World Wide Web 10/3/01.

media culture's social impact. One excellent resource is the Media Education Foundation ([www.mediaed.org](http://www.mediaed.org)). Their videos, *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity* with Jackson Katz, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* with Mary Pipher, and *Killing Us Softly 3* with Jean Kilbourne are extremely helpful in raising awareness and beginning discussions.

The Gender Project has a complete library of print and video resources on gender equity and women's history available to schools. E-mail us for more information: [afortune@umext.maine.edu](mailto:afortune@umext.maine.edu).

## Gender Mutuality

Bergman and Surrey describe *gender mutuality* as the appreciation of our connection across gender differences. It grows out of dialogue, and is characterized by authenticity, respect and empathy. It challenges us to stay connected across differences.

Why talk about gender differences in groups, workplaces and classrooms? Because whatever our individual characteristics, we are all affected by cultural attitudes toward men and women. Our conditioning as women and men may be influencing our interaction. Simply put, gender has an impact on our connection. So it is important to understand the different relational worlds of both groups.

Paradoxically, it is only by looking carefully at these group differences that we can erode stereotypes and encourage the full expression of individual qualities.

The underlying beliefs of gender mutuality are as follows:

- Healthy connection is the context within which all growth, all development, and all learning takes place, so fostering relationships between boys and girls in our classrooms is critical. Authenticity, engagement and empowerment characterize connected classrooms and connected relationships.
- When we can bring boys and girls, men and women together with respect and empathy for each other, both genders will flourish.

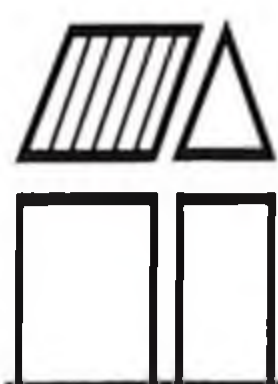
Gender mutuality is about recognizing that there is "me," "you" and "the relationship." It is also an understanding of and commitment to the group as a community.

### Questions to consider:

- How can both genders be empowered in classrooms and other groups to get their needs met and to support each other's growth?
- How can we create environments and opportunities, for both girls and boys, to assure an equal opportunity to learn all their developmental tasks and to achieve all the learning results?

Sources: Based on the work of Stephen Bergman, presented in *Is True Coeducation Possible? Creating Mutually Empowering Relationships in the Classroom* (workshop), Gender Equity Conference, Wellesley College, January 1998. This work is represented in *We Have To Talk*, by Samuel Shem (Stephen Bergman) and Janet Surrey (NY: Basic Books, 1998); and *The Woman-Man Relationship: Impasses and Possibilities*, Bergman and Surrey (WIP #55, Wellesley: The Stone Center, 1992)





# What Can We Do in Our Communities?

*"Cultural change is a million acts of courage and kindness."\**

— Margaret Mead

**G**et involved in local organizations in your area whose goal is to support gender equity. Develop or get involved in a mentoring program. Organize a community education program with your school parent-teacher organization, your adult education program, church or other group to discuss gender issues or show a video. Support opportunities for girls and boys to come together at conferences and groups. Here are a few:

- *Where The Girls Are*, Portland (YWCA)
- *Reel Girls—Real Lives Film Festival*, Camden (*Mainely Girls*)
- *The Beautiful Project*, Orono (Women's Resource Center, UMaine)
- *Expanding Your Horizons*, Orono (Women's Resource Center, UMaine)
- *A Company of Girls* theater group, Portland (East End Children's Workshop)
- *Annie's Forum*, Kittery (New Heights, Portsmouth)
- *Hardy Girls Healthy Women*, Waterville
- *Boys to Men*, Portland (city of Portland)
- *Guys Night Out*, Eliot (York County Extension office)

\*Quoted in *Reviving Ophelia, Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, with Mary Pipher

## Guys' Night Out

*Guys' Night Out* provides a format for bringing together adult men and young men in a safe environment for the purpose of mentoring each other. The program, piloted in Eliot, Maine, creates a structure for boys and men to spend time together through a blending of recreational activities, discussions and mentoring.

The pilot demonstrated that such a program needs a "hook" to attract male participants: activities in which they may be physically active or engaged with one another in a manner that is more directly physical than relational. The physical and traditional "male" activities then serve as springboards to higher discussions on what it means to be male in our society and what it means to be male to us as individuals.

During the eight-week program, the group participated in a variety of recreational activities that generated discussion relating to growing up and growing old as a male. Each activity inspired a relevant discussion topic. These included attending a college basketball game and discussing men and competition; playing at a rock-climbing gym and discussing trust-building and teamwork; watching the movie *Good Will Hunting* and then discussing men and emotions.

The intergenerational aspect of the group was one of its greatest strengths. Boys crave the wisdom and experience of older men, who in turn often treasure the experience of interacting with and learning from the young. Mentoring occurs in both directions.

A sure sign of the success of the program occurred when the planned activities began to take a back seat to the unplanned relational interactions. This sometimes occurred dramatically as the group decided to forego a planned activity, choosing rather to spend time discussing an issue that had arisen in one member's life. Another sign was that the group decided it would like to continue to meet informally after the scheduled series had run its course.

— Jonathan Prichard, The Gender Project







## Resources

### Books

*Gender Gaps: Where Schools Still Fail our Children.* Washington, DC: American Association of University Women (AAUW) Educational Foundation, 1998.

*Things Will Be Different for my Daughter, A Practical Guide to Building Her Self-Esteem and Self-Reliance,* by Mindy Bingham and Sandy Stryker. NY: Penguin Books, 1995.

*Growing Up Again, Parenting Ourselves and Parenting Our Children,* by Jean Illsley Clark and Connie Dawson. Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1989.

*Connections: The Threads that Strengthen Families,* by Jean Illsley Clarke. Hazelden Information Education, 1999.

*Beyond Dolls & Guns: 101 Ways to Help Children Avoid Gender Bias,* by Susan Hoy Crawford. Portsmouth N. H.: Heinemann, 1996.

"Boy Culture: Implicit Expectations for Boys," by Cate Dooley and Nicki Fedele, *The Mother-Son Project* (Stone Center, Wellesley College, 1997).

"Safe Boys, Safe Schools," by Craig P. Flood, *Women's Educational Equity Act Digest* (November 2000).

*Quit It: A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying (Grades K-3),* by Merle Froschl, Barbara Sprung and Nancy Mullin-Rindler. NY: Educational Equity Concepts, Inc., 1998.

*Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Protect Them,* by James Garbarino. NY: The Free Press, 1999.

## Working With Girls

*Mainely Girls* in Camden is starting its sixth year working exclusively with and on behalf of adolescent girls and young women. During these years we've initiated and sponsored a wide variety of clubs, programs and conferences, and from these we've gleaned four probably universal truths about working with girls:

- #1 It's all about relationship. Nothing with girls will be successful unless it's founded on each participating girl feeling welcome, seen, heard, respected and valued by the adults and the other girls. Each girl has to feel personally cared about and connected. The program itself is of secondary importance.
- #2 A few girls should be part of the planning and organizing, and their ideas should be taken seriously, discussed, and implemented when appropriate. Feedback should be solicited throughout the duration of a program, as well as at the end, and necessary changes made.
- #3 You must have food. Girls are growing fast, and they need the physical nourishment as much as they need the social and emotional nourishment that food symbolizes in girl-centered programs.
- #4 Listen to the girls. Girls need to be encouraged and allowed to speak about what is really important to them, what is really relevant to their lives, without being censored. Some of what they say may be disturbing, but you may be providing the only safe place they have to express themselves honestly. Don't shut them down.

Many girls have never been in an all-girl environment before and quickly come to cherish it. They feel less concerned about impressing others and more free to be who they really are; I usually see greater self-acceptance. "Girl-fighting," as Lyn Mikel Brown names it, is sometimes a concern, but can be used to explain the negative dynamics society sets up among girls and how to avoid them.

— Mary Orear, *Mainely Girls*



*A Toolbox for our Daughters: Building Strength, Confidence and Integrity*, by Annette Geffert and Dianne Brown. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000.

*200 Ways to Raise a Boy's Emotional Intelligence*, by Will Glennon. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 2000.

*200 Ways to Raise a Girl's Self-Esteem*, by Will Glennon. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1999.

"We Want to be Known," *Learning from Adolescent Girls*, Ruth Shagoury Hubbard, Maureen Barbieri and Brenda Miller Power, editors. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998.

*Smart Girls Two, A New Psychology of Girls, Women and Giftedness*, by Barbara A. Kerr. Dayton, OH: Ohio Psychology Press, 1994.

"What About the Boys?" by Michael Kimmel, *Women's Educational Equity Act Digest* (November 2000).

*Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*, by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson. NY: Ballantine Books, 1999.

*Boys Will Be Men: Raising our Sons for Courage, Caring and Community*, by Paul Kivel. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1999.

*Making The Peace, A 15 Session Violence Prevention Curriculum For Young People*, by Paul Kivel and Allan Creighton with the Oakland Men's Project. Alameda CA: Hunter House Publishers, 1997.

*Girls Seen and Heard; 52 Life Lessons for Our daughters*, The Ms. Foundation for Women, Sondra Forsyth, preface by Carol Gilligan. NY: The Putnam Publishing Group, 1998.

*New Moon, The Magazine for Girls and their Dreams*, New Moon Publishing, Inc., Duluth, MN.

*New Moon Network: For Adults Who Care About Girls*, New Moon Publishing, Inc., Duluth, MN.

*Reviving Ophelia, Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, by Mary Pipher. NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1994.

*Real Boys: Rescuing our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, by William Pollack. NY: Random House, Inc., 1998.

*Real Boys Workbook: The Definitive Guide to Understanding and Interacting with Boys of All Ages*, by Kathleen Cushman and William Pollack. NY: Random House, Inc., 2001.

*I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression*, by Terrence Real. NY: Scribner, 1997.

*Why Boys Don't Talk and Why We Care, A Mother's Guide to Connection*, by Susan Morris Shaffer and Linda Perlman Gordon. Chevy Chase, MD: Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., 2000.

*The Courage to Raise Good Men*, by Olga Silverstein and Beth Rashburn. NY: Penguin Books, 1994.

*We Have To Talk: Healing Dialogues Between Women and Men*, by Samuel Shem and Janet Surrey. NY: Basic books, 1998.

*Bully Proof: A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying (Fourth & Fifth Grades)*, by Nan Stein and Emily Gaberman. A joint publication of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women and the NEA Professional Library, 1996.

*Flirting or Hurting? A Teacher's Guide on Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment in Schools (Grades 6 Through 12)*, by Nan Stein and Lisa Sjostrom. A joint publication of the NEA Women and Girls Center for Change and the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1994.

*Raising Their Voices: the Politics of Girls' Anger*, by Lyn Mikel Brown. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

*Meeting at the Crossroads*, by Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan. NY: Ballantine Books, 1992.

*See Jane Win*, by Sylvia Rimm. NY: Crown Publishers, 1999.

*Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, by Michael Kimmel. NY: The Free Press, 1996.

*Men's Lives*, 5th ed., by Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001.

*Speaking of Boys*, by Michael Thompson. NY: Ballantine, 2000.

*All That She Can Be*, by Carol Eagle and Carol Coleman. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993.

## Videos

*Tough Guise; Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity*, with Jackson Katz. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation.

*Reviving Ophelia; Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* with Mary Pipher. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation.

*Killing us Softly 3* with Jean Kilbourne. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation.

## Web Sites

American Association of University Women; <http://www.aauw.org>

*Dads and Daughters*; <http://www.dadsanddaughters.org>

*Educating to Eliminate Hazing*; <http://www.StopHazing.org>

*Expect the Best from a Girl*; <http://www.academic.org/>

*Girls Count . . . in a Technological Age*; <http://www.girlscount.org>

*Maine Project Against Bullying*; <http://www.lincoln.midcoast.com/~wps/against/bullying.html>



Mainely Men against Violence and Sexism; <http://www.mmavs.org>

National Women's History Project;  
<http://www.nwhp.org>

New Moon Publishing;  
<http://www.newmoon.org>

Media Education Foundation;  
<http://www.mediaed.org>

Women's Equity Resource Center;  
<http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity/>

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