

Male Trouble

Arlie Russell Hochschild

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Boys in crisis and the path to extremism

Reviewed:

The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It

by Warren Farrell and John Gray

BenBella, 493 pp., \$25.95

Healing from Hate: How Young Men Get Into—and Out of—Violent Extremism

by Michael Kimmel

University of California Press, 263 pp., \$29.95

White American Youth: My Descent into America's Most Violent Hate Movement—and How I Got Out

by Christian Picciolini

Hachette, 275 pp., \$15.99 (paper)

This March, in a four-part series on Fox News called “Men in America,” Tucker Carlson sat in front of the American flag and listed a set of downward trends for men in school, work, and emotional well-being. Compared to girls, Carlson told viewers, boys far more often fail in school, are diagnosed with ADHD (and take medication for it, which carries a risk of depression later in life), play video games, become overweight, lack a driver’s license, get addicted to alcohol or opioids, become mass shooters, commit other felonies, go to prison, and die of drug overdose or suicide. In 1970, 58 percent of undergraduates in four-year colleges and universities were male; by 2014, that had fallen to 43 percent. Women earn more doctoral degrees than men and are now a majority of those entering medical and law schools. Young single women are two and a half times more likely than single men to buy their own homes; single men more often live with parents.

A recent book not mentioned by Carlson, *The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It*, by Warren Farrell and John Gray, gives another set of such statistics. In high school, boys receive 70 percent of Ds and Fs, are more likely than girls to be suspended, and are less likely to graduate or be chosen as class valedictorian (70 percent of whom are girls). Other research shows that boys are less likely to enjoy school or think grades are important.¹

Carlson complained that the media have been silent about these problems. He blamed this on public figures who he thinks focus too much on women: Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, the Democrats, and the faculties of “liberal” university-based gender studies programs. (Carlson’s series ran during Women’s History Month.) In support of this view, he consulted the provocative and popular University of Toronto clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson, who insisted that any

talk of “equity, diversity, inclusivity” should be considered “indoctrination” and reason to withdraw a boy from any school with a curriculum in which such words appear. Manhood, both Carlson and Peterson have suggested, is something that liberals disparage and conservatives protect.

Carlson omitted to say that, as of 2016, women earn 80.5 cents to every dollar a man earns for year-round full-time work (a gap that increases as level of education rises), and that two thirds of minimum-wage workers are women. Men’s college enrollment is still on the rise—that is, relative to female BA-holders, males have declined since 1970, but relative to their male counterparts in 1970, a higher proportion of men hold BAs today. Carlson also largely ignored differences in class and race that exacerbate those of gender. As the MIT labor economist David Autor and his coauthors found in a study of Florida brother-sister pairs, the gender gap in school performance is wider among the poor than the rich. Boys born to mothers with lower education and income got lower grades, relative to their sisters, than boys born to more highly educated and affluent mothers.

Still, we can’t dismiss such statistics as a hyperbolic reaction to feminism. In the last three decades, the lives of men have undergone what Autor and coauthor Melanie Wasserman have called a “tectonic shift.”² Compared to women, a shrinking proportion of men are earning BAs, even though more jobs than ever require a college degree,



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1. Another book out this year that covers much of this territory is Andrew L. Yarrow's *Man Out: Men on the Sidelines of American Life* (Brookings Institution, 2018). ↩
2. David Autor and Melanie Wasserman, "Wayward Sons: The Emerging Gender Gap in Education and Labor Markets," *Third Way*, 2013. ↩
3. [Reviewed in these pages](#) by Andrew Hacker, October 21, 1999. ↩
4. For the historical precedents of extremism, see Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (Liveright, 2017). ↩
5. For a closer description of the ripped-up childhoods of American neo-Nazis, see Elinor Langer, *A Hundred Little Hitlers: The Death of a Black Man, the Trial of a White Racist, and the Rise of the Neo-Nazi Movement in America* (Metropolitan, 2003). ↩
6. Richard Misrach, "The Writing on the Wall," shown at Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, July 31–August 15, 2017. ↩