

Book review of *boys a drift: the five factors driving the growing epidemic of unmotivated boys and underachieving young men*

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Opinion

Book review

Boys A Drift: The Five Factors Driving The Growing Epidemic Of Unmotivated Boys And Underachieving Young Men by Leonard Sax (2007) Basic Books, New York, USA, pp. 267.

This is a much needed book well worth reading. Dr. Sax describes the undeniable phenomenon of the past three decades wherein boys are not learning how to become real men. His analysis of the causes is illuminating and accurate and should be disseminated to all interested in raising children, girls as well as boys. His recommendations are generally on point and also deserving of widespread promulgation. I encourage all to read this book.... I will make no attempt to duplicate what he has written being generally in full agreement with him. He does not, however, emphasize several aspects of development enough.

First, in his “endocrine disruption” chapter he focuses on plastics and plates (He cautions to keep those liquid containing plastic bottles away from pre-adults!), but he ignores the undeniable impact of contraceptives (almost always feminizing hormones) on development, especially in utero on subsequent pregnancies. This is disconcerting because he discredits himself by what must be, in my mind, an absolute determination not to bring this subject up. I cannot imagine he has not considered it. Indeed, the impact of contraceptives on development *in utero* is undeniable—I have seen past progesterone injections into pregnant women undeniably causing lesbian girls. Such is just the tip of the denied iceberg. The subtleties of sex hormone impact must be considered in the epidemic of attention deficit disorder, autism, learning disabilities, gender abnormalities, same sex attraction disorder, and even later development of breast cancer (Several decades ago a small epidemic of vaginal cancer occurred in girls whose mothers had taken a certain contraception prior to their pregnancy). The impact of contraceptives on the development of children born and unborn is worse than ever postulated for DDT’s impact on birds. Call it “unnatural selection.”

Second, Sax’s emphasis on video games being detrimental is incontrovertible. However he missed completely the fact that video games have become for many a psychological defense against the adulterating culture engulfing boys. Still, desperately needed are the words to use over and over about the non-beingness of all the gadgets: “These games are mental bubble gum – there is no nourishment there for mind or body – it is nothing but a bunch of flickering lights! This does not help you, your family or anybody else. This is a non-being machine.” Scripted phrases and penetrating messages are needed to be given to parents and teachers for use day in and day out to unapologetically demean interest in video games. These games basically are dangerous to kids’ health and should be labeled such or, better yet, off the market. Boys especially are vulnerable. Similar efforts should also be made about all electronic media. Related is the fact that Suggestability Education is needed so that youths do not take

Samuel A Nigro M.D

Retired, Assistant Clinical Professor Psychiatry, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, USA

Correspondence: Dr. Samuel A Nigro M.D., Retired, Assistant Clinical Professor Psychiatry, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, 2517 Guilford Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118, USA, Tel 216 932-0575, Email sam@docnigro.com

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television, movies and the internet so seriously nor imitate what is seen or heard or buy everything offered, and most importantly, so boys especially can blow off with impunity all the culturally sanctioned sexualized assaults disturbing their childhood wherein they are supposed to learn and work. The use of electronic gadgets from games to internet is not real living but the learning to live defensively as a hypnotized dead beat. Third is Sax’s failure to assist in defending against the culture of sex and disgust engulfing our youth. The squirt/moan-slime/squeal culture must be mocked derisively with firm negative put downs of those participating in it. Sex performers deserve no respect since they do not respect themselves. Dirty minded schoolboy nasty descriptions of what passes for human sexuality and pornography, et al needs widespread dissemination. Unless the boys have good defenses against premature sexualization, their latency development will be destroyed and the ability to focus on how to learn and work for themselves and others will be removed as much as giving them street drugs. The latency phase of development (when sexuality in children is naturally minimal) must be preserved, and **childhood is a right** to be without adulthood until sex hormones are fully present. Sex ed is part of the problem. It is itself a sexualization phenomena and it usually fails because pre-adults are notoriously immature and incompetent: They burn things with their cigarettes, and ashes are everywhere. They cannot handle alcohol without usually puking and falling. They drive terribly as insurance rates recognize. They cannot find their homework or get it done on time. They cannot make or keep a schedule without many reminders. Their manners are terrible. They cannot save any money spending it on junk. They play computer games thinking it is real living. They join gangs and cliques following gurus. They use pot thinking it makes them smart. They think television and movies are real information. They need to be told when to go to bed. They complain about everything from doing the dishes to carrying out the trash. They aren’t allowed to vote because they do not know what country they are in. They cry when their feelings are hurt and they still can readily be very cruel. They think they are entitled

to everything and do not know what gratitude is. Being “monkey see, monkey do” jellyfish, they believe and imitate fake celebrities and each other. They cannot even keep their rooms clean nor do their own laundry. And pick up after themselves, forget it. Actually, they are supposed to learn how to do all that during latency, but sex ed, as if they can be competent with contraception when they are incompetent with everything else, muddles it all. Sex ed prematurely invites participation in a sex culture distracting from what they should really be learning. Finally, sex ed is not just information...for youths, it is a forced unnatural imposed stimulation and therefore a form of rape by perverted adult voyeurs and vicarious molesters themselves gratuitously excited about sexualizing children. Boys especially are injured by all this, and thus, without latency, they become poor students, poor workers, and selfishly overly aggressive including sex, i.e. they become semi-rapists modeling themselves after their sex ed teachers; and since sex for them began as boys, they naturally will see boys as targets therefore being prone to continue such as NAMBLA members or porno addicts when adults (Anyone confused about that is a fool. Sex ed leads to child sex and pornography). Unprotected prematurely sexualized boys will likely be forever adrift.

Fourth is music! I am mystified that Sax mentions music only in passing. He does not focus on the impact of music on neurobiological development and the quality of thinking. Many years ago, a teenage boy arriving for his appointment changed my waiting room radio from classical music to a rap station. When I came out of my office ready for him to come in, he, the only one in the waiting room, admitted that he had changed the station and was chuckling about it. So I turned the station back to classical and it was Beethoven – and I asked what did he hear? “Melody,” he said after a short pause. I switched the dial to another station and they were playing, fortunately, Dvorak. “What do you hear?” He paused for a minute and said “Harmony.” Then I switched it back to his station and asked “What do you hear?” And he is jumping up and down and I am jumping up and down, and he smiles broadly as he yelled “Rhythm!” I put it back to my classical station and said “Yes, melody is for the mind. Harmony is for the heart. Rhythm is for the butt. You are always better off with melody and harmony which your rhythm guys could not begin to play well.” He laughed and we proceeded with our session. Regardless, good classical music must be played whenever possible and with any sort of sponsorship by schools, organizations, etc. School dances are an exception – but sports events should have classical music alternating with classical band. Good music helps development. The repetitive response to “My music is better” is “Oh yeah...Could those guys even play 5 minutes of Beethoven? I doubt it. Real musicians who know their stuff play classical! All the others are just loud fakers with stuff you can enjoy, but do not call it good music.” Overstatement, but needed to get the message across that good brains listen to good music.

Fifth is military service – which he mentions several times: “Norway requires military service of all young men ... Denmark, like Norway requires a brief stint of military service for all young men” (Pg. 65). Consistent with probably never being in the military himself, Sax completely overlooks the masculinizing modeling impact of military service. Every male virtue that he praises and wants to instill in boys is available and modeled in all military services. Basically, I think the nearest military base of whatever nature should make available a two week live-in educational stint for all 7th grade boys; a four week stint for all 8th grade boys; and a three month stint for all 10th graders (boys and girls—separate, of course). The youths will have to live on the base and operate in a military setting with emphasis on self-care, academics, cleanliness, responsibility, understanding and following orders; and learning a little of what it takes to be an independent reliable adult and a touch of being, what the hell, Army Strong. Which brings up “real fathers”—I called for paternal training programs in *Psychiatric Annals* 2:9, page 6 September 1972—to provide the basics of effective fatherhood.

Finally, I believe his negative comments about medications, especially for the use by boys with attention deficit disorder, are way overstated. No doubt he is responding to his sample – and as a child psychiatrist, my sample is not comparable to his. In my experience the beneficial effects of appropriately used medications are incontrovertible.

Other than these remarks, I find his book informative and important. All educators and parents would be well served by reading and implementing his recommendations. To that I would add an exhortation I have given to all my patients for decades, especially children, with parents saying it should be on my office wall: “Every day, do something good, no matter how small, for yourself, your family and somebody else.”

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.