

Reflections On Where the Boys Are

“Our boys are in trouble!” I blurted out this statement at a session during the 2007 NACAC National Conference in Austin, TX. We had been skillfully taken through some gender issues related to young men participating in the selective admission process by Annette Cleary and Greg McCandless in a session entitled “Where Would Holden Caulfield Get In? Underachieving Boys and Selective College Admission.”

Toward the end of this crowded, standing room only session, I jumped out of my comfort zone and challenged the audience with a few brief historical observations based on my 40 years as a guidance counselor and college counselor.

- Forty years ago the ratio of college admission counseling professionals on both sides of the desk was approximately 75 percent male and 25 percent female.
- Recent publications and reports, including those derived from NACAC annual surveys, put forth statistics with just about the opposite ratio for 2007—about 75 percent female to 25 percent male counseling and admission professionals.
- Many colleges within the NACAC membership are increasingly voicing concern with the reality of a 60/40 split on their campuses with female students comprising the largest gender group of students.
- Colleges are searching for the reasons why more males are not applying to college and they are actively

recruiting them. This application gender gap is particularly true for African-American and Hispanic men who seem even more reluctant to attend college.

My message to the session audience continued by asking the current dominant core of our college counselors (females) to pay more attention to our sons and male students especially in regard to applying to college. Let me explore a bit why I feel so strongly about this.

Our young females have ‘arrived’ in regard to graduating from high school and attending and graduating from college. More females are currently earning PhD’s than their male counterparts. We have encouraged and nurtured our daughter and female students to become a confident, task-oriented, organized group of achievers who are applying to college in record numbers. Title IX, the Women’s Rights Movement and Take Your Daughter to Work Day have all in part contributed to the leveling of the playing field in the classroom and the athletic arena.

Now before a number of you rush to open your laptop and search for my email, let me qualify a few things. This is not a scientific work but instead represents the reflections of a long-time counselor. I am not naïve to the fact that I still have freshman girls who IM each other for weeks about “punching someone’s lights out” even after our best counseling interventions. Another example in what could still be a lengthy list, salary parity for women has not been reached in many sectors of the business world. I am narrowly focusing, however,

Our young females have ‘arrived’ in regard to graduating from high school and attending and graduating from college. More females are currently earning PhD’s than their male counterparts. We have encouraged and nurtured our daughter and female students to become a confident, task-oriented, organized group of achievers who are applying to college in record numbers.

on the bright, well-prepared, motivated young women applying in droves to our member institutions. The train has left the station. For now, it does not require the extra push and pull we have given it. Our sons and male students are the ones that need that now.

I characterize our 2008 males as the Peter Pan—like “lost boys.” They still like to drive muscle cars, play video games and knock each other down at high speed on the football field, but when it comes to understanding who they are and where they are going in life, they appear lost and bewildered. In secondary classrooms they are often

being overshadowed by their female counterparts who strive for the number one spot in all subjects including such “sacred” male bastions as science and math. In reference to one of his female classmates, one of my male students last year declared “why bother, I can never be as efficient and organized as she is!”

Where is all this personal disconnect driving our male students post-high school? My observations note a larger number of males opting to go the non-college route or going to a technical school, apprenticeship program or attending a community college. The increase of students in general attending community colleges continues to rise and these institutions play an important role in the educational continuum. Within two years or less, males can obtain the necessary skills to become a small business entrepreneur in a skilled trade or service industry job. Computer specialists, plumbers, masons and electronic technicians are examples of vital jobs in a high-demand market that seem to be becoming a lucrative alternative to even minimal postsecondary education for the males of today. The lure of owning and operating a business (which we know can be problematic), driving a big truck and affording a comfortable lifestyle is very attractive to the young men of today. It also takes them out of the mainstream of academic competition with their female counterparts. But are some of these young men foregoing college and other careers for the seemingly simple, practical reasons I just described, or is there more to it?

Here are a few thoughts I would like

to offer:

- Let’s not take our sons and male students for granted anymore. The strong self-reliant “hunter” of the past is now to some extent the “emotionally disabled hunter” of the 21st century.
- Young males need good role models, encouragement and nurturing just as much as our females. To our wonderful cadre of female college counselors, you have risen to a dominant position in this field, please continue to help all young men achieve their dreams. Help us, just as you sought our assistance for these past 30 years, with our young females. Spend the time and effort to help boys understand their place in the world and where their future path can take them.
- Some regions are already doing this, but let’s institute a “take your son to work day.” We need more male role models in our boy’s lives. Chauncey Veatch, in that emotional, not-a-dry-eye-in-the-place (including my own) opening conference speech in Austin, extolled us to get more males into young children’s lives. His message was both powerful and challenging as he specifically encouraged more men to become elementary teachers.
- Colleges need to become more attentive to the more sensitive young men of today, especially in the admission process. While including the new weight room and rec center as a “must see” on your tours, don’t

Young males need good role models, encouragement and nurturing just as much as our females. To our wonderful cadre of female college counselors, you have risen to a dominant position in this field, please continue to help all young men achieve their dreams.

leave off the computer labs, theater, visual arts center or the co-ed dorms by floor. These current young men have been brought up differently. They have not witnessed their boomer parents have a relationship where one was subservient to the other. Instead, many have observed equality and a shared responsibility unprecedented in recent history. These males, whose historical “hunter” role has radically changed, can be timid, geeky and frustrating. We have to accept and account for a generation of males who are much more sensitive to women thanks partly to a lot of tough boomer moms who carved out their own different relationships with their spouses, partners and significant others. So colleges, continue to look for male athletes, but ramp up your efforts to attract these unsure male dreamers who just might want to major in classical languages and

minor in family studies. Or maybe art. Or maybe major in nursing.

- High schools should promote careers for males with the same equality of message we have used for young females for many years. No career is just for men; it is for both men and women. No career is just for women; it is for both men and women. Proudful young males need to be encouraged at home and counseled in school to think of all jobs being open to them and our phraseology must support that.

What are the goals of all these suggestions?

- We need young men and young women filling our campuses in fairly equal numbers. I support the broad definition of diversity that includes gender balance.
- Encourage and counsel young males with the same zeal we have applied to young females in the last 30 years, especially in regard to their hopes and dreams.

- Support university graduate counselor education programs in soliciting more male candidates to bring the ratio of male/female admission professionals to a more equitable balance.
- Promote more males becoming primary school teachers to provide good role models for our young boys who, in addition to often experiencing absentee and drop-in fathers, need the exposure to another supportive, caring adult in their lives.

I am grateful to the women and men of this organization on both sides of the desk who have spent many years guiding the young women who are currently filling our colleges. Let's not forget them, but can we now turn our

focus to the "lost boys" of the 21st century? They need our encouragement, counsel and guidance. We have lived through too many generations of a male-oriented and dominated society. Women have made huge personal and professional strides in what seems like a long time, but in relation to history, are remarkable. As a by-product of this long overdue shift however, we have created a generation of "lost boys".

Can we begin to rebalance the scale? Yes we can, but it is going to take understanding and commitment to recreate gender balance in our nation's postsecondary institutions. Isn't this a perfect task for the members of NACAC as we constantly strive to fulfill our primary mission?



CARL "SANDY" BEHREND, recently retired from the Orchard Park Central School District (NY), where he was the department instructional leader. He has served as both the president of the New York State Association for College Admission Counseling and the National Association for College Admission Counseling, was a Common Application Board member and currently is a reader for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. Sandy continues to write, speak, conduct workshops and assist students and their families as part of his new venture, Behrend Consulting.

Journal of College Admission	7/24/09
The Journal is a NACAC member benefit sent to all members.	
Quarterly	\$65.00 USD
National Association for College Admission Counseling 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201	703/299-6820
National Association for College Admission Counseling 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201	
National Association for College Admission Counseling 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201	
Rachael Groseclose, NACAC, 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201	
Rachael Groseclose, NACAC, 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201	
National Association for College Admission Counseling 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201	
Admission Counseling	Arlington, VA 22201