

# New studies highlight needs of boys in K-12, higher education

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Boys face high rates of a variety of mental health issues, in addition to lagging behind girls in academic performance and college attendance, according to two new papers by University of Alaska Fairbanks researcher Judith Kleinfeld.

The studies, recently published in the journal *Gender Issues*, note that boys have higher rates of suicide, conduct disorders, emotional disturbance, premature death and juvenile delinquency than their female peers, as well as lower grades, test scores and college attendance rates.

The first paper, "The State of American Boyhood," offers a status report on the academic, mental and social health of boys in the United States. Her conclusion: There is neither a "girl crisis" nor a "boy crisis."

"Rather, boys and girls suffer from different types of characteristic problems," Kleinfeld wrote, noting that girls have higher rates of depression, suicide attempts and eating disorders. "Schools need to pay attention to the difficulties of both girls and boys and bring these problems to the attention of families, teachers and mental health professionals."

Still, boys are in far more serious trouble, she argues. The gender gap in reading and writing at the end of [high school](#), for example, is far wider than the gap in math and science ever was. More than a quarter of American male high school graduates can't understand a newspaper article, compared to about 10 percent of girls.

Kleinfeld's second study, "No Map to Manhood: Male and Female Mindsets Behind the College Gender Gap," drew on in-depth interviews with 99 high school seniors in the Fairbanks area, as well as national statistics on college attendance. She aimed to shed light on why boys are less likely than girls to seek postsecondary education.

"Males who do not have a college education are far more vulnerable to unemployment and the wages of men without a college education are plummeting," Kleinfeld said.

She notes that nearly 60 percent of college students are female, but that most studies don't ask graduating seniors why they are making the choices they do. Kleinfeld chose to focus her interviews on Alaska students because Alaska has one of the highest college-attendance gender gaps in the nation.

Through her interviews, she found several reasons why boys are less apt to go to college. Some mistakenly thought they could earn high wages right away without a college education, deciding they would rather get paid for working than pay for [college](#). Some had limited knowledge of the job market and little concept of how much it costs to live a middle-class lifestyle. Many simply disliked school and didn't want more of it.

Her interviews also showed that high school students, both boys and girls, are stereotyping boys. Kleinfeld notes that when she asked students about the [gender gap](#) in education, their explanations centered on three themes: young men are lazy, they don't plan ahead and they are prone to peer pressure.

"Boys are getting little respect," Kleinfeld said. "These negative stereotypes may well further depress boys' academic achievement."

Kleinfeld hopes her current work will offer more insight on the reasons

why boys are struggling. Her newest study focuses on pressures on men in American society and changing concepts of manhood. In addition to her position on the UAF faculty, Kleinfeld is director of The Boys Project, a national program that aims to promote discussion and action on the educational and cultural needs of [boys](#).

**More information:** The full text of both papers is available online at [www.boysproject.net/resources.html](http://www.boysproject.net/resources.html) .

Provided by University of Alaska Fairbanks

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