

GREGORY L. JANTZ, PhD
WITH ANN MCMURRAY

Five Keys *to* Raising Boys



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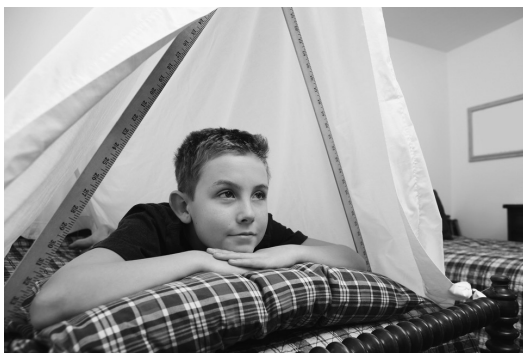
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Blue *Is* Not Pink

“They’re just so different!” I was working with a frazzled mother, who was trying to juggle home, parenting, and work responsibilities. Asked about her children, she told me she had two—an eight-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy. That’s when she blurted out the source of her frustration: the differences between them.

She went on to say that her daughter was a compliant child who listened and sought to please. Her son, however, was anything but compliant. He was in a constant state of motion and rarely stopped long enough to listen to her. Her daughter was quiet; her son was loud. Her daughter read books and spent hours playing with a large dollhouse constructed by a family member. Her son kicked balls in the house, spread out board games all over the kitchen table, and created forts with couch cushions and pillows.



Keeping up with him was exhausting. She wondered aloud, “Why isn’t my son more like my daughter? Is there something wrong with him?”

I had to smile, because at the time I had two young boys at home myself. I knew exactly what she was describing. “There’s nothing wrong with your son,” I remember assuring her. “He’s not broken; he’s a boy.”

| *The Pendulum of Preference*

Pendulums are funny things, especially when they’re part of social trends. For hundreds, if not thousands, of years, the social pendulum was permanently stuck in a position that benefited males, the standard by which both genders were judged.

About fifty years ago that pendulum of preference began to swing differently. Instead of finding a happy medium between characteristics of both genders, there is now little acknowledgment that there are differences between boys and girls. And where a difference is perceived, the female characteristic seems to be preferred.



I grew up in a time when conventional wisdom said that boys and girls were essentially the same, except for male and female plumbing. Any differences between the way girls reacted and boys reacted was said to be

nurture—how that child was raised within the family and society. *Nature* was said to be neutral, treating both boys and girls the same. Girls were said to act like girls, not because of nature, but because they were nurtured as girls by those around them. Boys acted like boys, not because maleness was their nature, but because society treated them as boys.

| Complement Not Compete

While I still believe a portion of that to be true—that we do treat boys and girls differently—I also have come to believe nurture isn't all there is to the differences

NURTURE ISN'T ALL THERE IS TO THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS



between boys and girls. Boys and girls are different, not only because society treats them differently, but also because they were *made* differently. Male and female outsides are different, as well as their insides, especially the insides of their brains. The last twenty-five years have produced brain research that shows several marked differences in the ways male and female brains develop and react.

Having grown up in a household with a sister, I intuitively understood that boys and girls are different. However, the issue became more urgent with the births of my sons. Society did treat them differently, and that difference wasn't always positive. At one point, my wife and I had a school representative suggest that one of my sons needed to be on medication because he was acting, as far as I could tell, like a normal boy. Through that personal experience, I began to do research on what was happening to boys in schools and in society.



My research led me to Michael Gurian, the founder of the Gurian Institute, which provides training and coaching services to close the gender achievement gap. For several decades, Michael has been doing his own studies of the condition of boys and how boys and girls think and act differently. He has written several excellent books on the subject. A few years ago, we

collaborated on a book together, *Raising Boys by Design*.¹ As we worked together, I came to truly appreciate his research and wisdom on the subject of gender differences.

According to Michael, the condition of boys in society has deteriorated. He said recently, “I just traveled to Washington, D.C., to brief Congress members on our boys crisis, because I have been a child advocate for thirty years and never been more worried about our

boys than I am now.”² The societal pendulum of gender issues appears to have moved toward another extreme: this time, to the detriment of boys.

As human beings,
we are created to be
equal but different.

“SO GOD CREATED
MANKIND IN HIS OWN IMAGE,
IN THE IMAGE OF GOD
HE CREATED THEM;
MALE AND FEMALE HE
CREATED THEM.”

—GENESIS 1:27

Blue and pink are not the same. Male and female are not the same. As human beings, we are created to be equal but different. Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

I, for one, am glad for the diversity of God. “If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?” (1 Corinthians 12:17). In God’s design of the body, eyes and ears and noses are not created to compete against each other but to complement each other.

In God’s design of boys and girls, male and female, I believe the same holds true.

Those of you who work with and love boys, please take heart. Those boys may not act like girls—at home, at school, at play—but they are not broken. Science is providing fascinating insights into the mysteries of human development. We are learning how very much alike we are and also how diverse the sexes are. The more we know, the more we understand the nature

**BOYS MAY NOT ACT
LIKE GIRLS BUT
THEY ARE
NOT BROKEN**



of both our boys and our girls and how to honor that nature through the ways we parent our children and interact with all children.



KEY #1:

Understanding *a* Boy's Differences

The following quotes are from women who were caught by surprise when it comes to mothering boys.

- “I certainly didn’t push my son toward trucks and my daughter toward tutus. If anything, I went out of my way to avoid giving them gender-stereotyped toys, offering glittery finger paint to my son and trains to my daughter. But it didn’t matter: My son turned his doll’s crib into a race car and my daughter was obsessed with shoes.”³
- “In my pre-mommy days, I envisioned myself like Marmee in *Little Women*: the wise, loving lead of a feminine brood. My fantasy seem[ed] poised to come true with the birth of our firstborn, Hannah,

a calm and compliant child who was snuggly, easily entertained, and loved every hairdo I concocted for her. . . . When Hannah turned 3, my *Little Women* fantasy came to an abrupt halt with the birth of Isaac, followed 16 months later by Benny. From the moment my first son was born, I was scared silly about the task at hand; I imagined wildness, loudness, adoration of trucks, and risk-taking behavior that would end in visits to the ER.”⁴

- “When you have a girl, you know that you can always fall back on your own childhood memories to guide you as a parent. But unless you grew up with a brother, there’s a good chance that parts of raising a boy can take you by surprise.”⁵
- “It seems, too, boys are always on a mission—competing in some dire, fantasy face-off. For reasons unknown, restaurant outings seem to beckon their invisible foes, as breadsticks become makeshift swords and crayons instant torpedoes. . . . Did I mention boys are fans of water pistols, pools, and puddles, yet less fond of bathing? . . . What’s more, boys will jump off anything and approach running and climbing with Olympic fervor.”⁶