

Boys vs Girls

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER: Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:21.8] CW: Hello. This is Dr. Char Wrighton. I have a new topic to discuss with you today; something very near and dear to my heart, something I feel I have a passion for, a concern for. I certainly have done a lot of research on this and certainly have lived it in my home, as well as teaching experiences. That is the differences between boys and girls, how to reach them in school, how to help both succeed in school.

The focus on today's discussion is definitely that the chance of boys becoming missed. It is a large concern of mine, and so I'm going to give you all different aspects of what I have seen personally, what is being discussed out in the educational fields, and also include a lot of research that certainly verifies our concerns, my concerns and the concerns in education.

One of the number one things that you'll see is that boys are always over-represented in special education. They're always more boys than girls. There is a reason for that. The concern is because of behavior, because of lack of self-regulation, whatever hookup there is in the brain that isn't working, that causes disabilities, academic disabilities, attention deficits, etc., are predominantly in boys.

I have some really strong theories that I do believe are based in research. They're certainly based in life that I'm going to share with you later. That is a big concern. Another statistic is that starting in preschool, going all the way through education, including high school, is that more boys get into trouble than girls; just the bottom line.

Another statistic is that boys do not fare as well. In fact, they're a leg behind in the reading and writing area, language arts area, anywhere up to two years. We're not talking about boys with

disabilities. We're not talking about boys from poverty level. We're talking about boys, general everyday boy is legs behind little girls. That it that is a concern. I have some really strong feelings about that. I love to share with you, because I feel these are all things that do not have to happen. We should not be having poor scores for any child in the United States, let alone 50% of the demographic.

One thing that I have seen at any time that I speak, I certainly am giving you my opinions. They can be refuted by other people certainly, but mine is with 45 years of experience, a lot of training, a lot of education, a lot of research. I feel very, very confident that what I share with you on these radio shows is indeed backed by many other people, and especially research, because – also, you have to live it. When you live it and you see it and you see it – live it and see it and you see in a consistent basis, then you have the confidence behind you. That's what I'm offering you every single time that I do a radio show. I hope you have confidence in that, because I think that's important.

Anybody can get up and spout their opinions, but they do need to be backed by a lot of experience and education. I've stated this before is that in early education, where really a child's – In fact, it even goes back to that. It goes back to the mom. I'm big on moms and dads. There's no question about it. I just feel that family structure is pivotal to a child's success, or lack of success. When you think about it, boys and girls, regardless of gender, spend more time with their moms and they do their dads, just because of the way society is. Moms, they do the shopping and they do the doctor's appointments.

You have that. I'm certainly not saying dads are not there to do that. I will discuss that in a little while. It's just a typical family, whereas mom is the one getting everyone to the dentist appointment and the doctor's appointment, etc., etc. You have that constant – if you're a male, you're with that mom, that mom figure, which again, I think is wonderful. I want you not to misunderstand me, but I'm setting up a premise here.

Then they go to preschool. I would say probably 98% of preschool teachers are females. All their early education is spent with – if you're a male, if you're a little boy, is spent with female influence. In so many ways that's great, because we're the ones that tell them how to behave and how to be gentlemen and how to be strong, as well as dads with the other aspects of being a male.

It's interesting, because a concern that I have and I talk about it with my own staff and I certainly have written about it, is that it is very difficult sometimes, or all the time, or a lot of the time for females to understand little boys. You have heard me say this several different times in these radio shows. Little boys just react to life through their bodies and through speed, through fast motion, through noise. We as females, we really didn't do that in our youth very much and we don't probably do it now, because females again, this is backed by research. From the time they're little, from the time they're babies, little females seem to have the ability to self-regulate their behavior, their emotions, etc. Their impulsivity, they are less impulsive than little boys.

Let's picture that preschool class of girls and boys. When you watch – I was out in the playground today and I'm watching little girls tear around in tricycles, just as much as little boys. They very often will pick up balls and bounce balls equally, but there's this aggression that you don't see in little girls quite like you do boys. There's this big physical, these bodies that are flying at all times and making a weapon out of anything that they can find, because it just seems to be built into the DNA.

Female teachers are feeling they must step in and change boys' behavior pretty continually. If you were to ask any female preschool teacher, who is more aggressive? Boys or girls? They would say boys. Who is more higher energy? Boys or girls? They would say boys. Who is more challenging to deal with, to regulate, to get under control? Boys.

Part of it is just – it is just the way it is. The other part is that we as females don't totally understand why boys are the way they are. It's that men are from Venus and – I think it's the other way. Men are from Mars and women are from Venus, whatever. It's that concept, it's just such stark differences in the way that they approach things.

Now my concern and the reason why I'm taking time to build to my point is that when it comes time for academics, there are some serious issues that come from this. I'm going to continue. I want to continue building my point, but it's going to be leading to academics. Then the question is how do we help these boys become successful, or be successful, or feel successful? Because that's all really important. I'm going to give you some statistics that might really, really surprise you.

Back to preschool and female teachers and little boys, these boys spend the first five and six years of their lives having very, very little contact outside of their dad and grandpa, with a male figure, because you don't see them in schools. They've been just do not teach preschool. It's a rare person, a male who teaches preschool. We don't totally understand why the need for this aggressive behavior, we really want them to have more sensitive approaches to how they deal quieter, calmer, more rational, more able to understand why we need to be quiet at this moment, or not grab a toy. We want them to be more in touch with their feelings. That is just foreign to little boys.

Every day, I have the opportunity of dealing with behavior from little girls and little boys. Boys, absolutely outnumber girls in the time spent with the directors. When you ask them, "What did you do? What got you in here? Why was your teacher unhappy with you? What rule did you break?" Whatever question you're asking, they have a tendency to say, "I don't know," because they can't really verbalize it. They can't even formulate it in their brain to be able to verbalize it. It's just difficult for them.

Then when you're trying to get them to a point where you want them to see the behavior, so that they can change it and do something about it, not do it in the future, and also to go and tell a friend, I'm sorry, it can be a real challenge for them. Let me just tell you, yesterday I had just the most wonderful experience, where I was with a very articulate little boy, who he's sitting next to me in a chair. We've had our talk. He needs to sit a few more minutes and do some thinking time, which is they're distracted. They don't sit and cogitate their behavior for any length of time, whatsoever.

He tapped me and he said, "I want to go apologize to my friend." It was wonderful, because it was – it came from him. I want you to know that I see little boys doing magnificent things all the time. It's just that they are – when you're trying to teach something, or you're trying to have some semblance of order, of some order on the playground without just non-stop chaos, kids running everywhere, which is what they do and their tricycles are running, or slightly on the slides or whatever, you just wish things could be just a little calmer. If you're trying to teach a class, a subject, like this week in Zoo-phonics at Safari Learning, it's bugs and botany. You've been planning this wonderful lesson, you want your kids to listen. If you have people falling out of their chairs and talking or poking, it interrupts what you're trying to do. Therefore, it has a tendency to be exhausting for us.

Again, this is a gender issue that we see daily. It can't be very jarring to our female sensibilities. I postulate that females have to really learn to appreciate little boys and relax a little bit. Not that we're going to change our standards of behavior, but we need to understand them and appreciate these little boys for all their wiggliness and all the noises that they make and all the things that they touch that they're not supposed to, and their aggressive behavior and their lack of self-regulation and just love them, just love them and love them.

The data from the NAEP, which is the National Assessment of Educational Progress is the state standards demonstrates that as children enter kindergarten, they're already behind little girls as I had earlier stated. By the time they're in kindergarten, first grade, they are seriously lagging academically, because language arts, obviously is critical, because that's your reading, speaking, comprehending, spelling, writing.

Little boys are already so far behind. They're frustrated, they're uncomfortable. It would be us maybe cleaning toilets. I'm always thinking of something that I have to do, but it's not my favorite thing to do. That's how little boys feel about these type of academe. They just don't enjoy the reading process. They do not for sure like the writing process. They find the writing process to be cruel and unusual punishment. They feel it's excruciating and I'm going to tell you why specifically. That is because number one, it's the handwriting. I have to pick up a pencil and I have to use fine motor coordination. It is just not my favorite thing to do.

The teacher is expecting me to stay on the line, form letters that look recognizable, have spaces in between my words. My little hand just doesn't do that, neither does my eye, or my brain. That handwriting thing is just – just puts a stop to all possibilities of getting anything on paper. The other thing is that the expectation of coming up with something creative, or expressing my thoughts, boys are highly creative. To be able to verbalize it, or to be able to write it down, or to even dictate it to a teacher, it is very, very challenging.

They have these magnificent brains. They certainly can be verbal. When they're now expected to be academic with their creative ideas, it becomes a real challenge. This is where the dislike of school, boring schools, boring schools, too hard, I don't want to do this, I don't want to go there. This starts way too early in our school curriculum. Again, I've got some really, really strong opinions based on education, research and my own experience.

I think things can be rectified. Certainly, we'll give you a few hints on how we do it. Back to the scores, number one, they're behind girls by almost a two-year margin in language arts, so that's reading, spelling, writing. That includes handwriting and creative writing, getting thoughts out. They lead in math and science and they always have. They've always been very, very strong in the sciences and more men have always gone into architecture, engineering, medicine. There have always been something that has been in the past, listed as gender strong avocations, or occupations.

However, that lead is diminishing greatly and it diminishes exponentially over the years. Over the last 10 or 15 years, it has been diminishing to the point where – this is also a wonderful thing in so many ways. We now have women going into medical sciences at a huge rate over the last 15 years. We have women going into engineering and architecture and computer sciences and math studies, etc., etc. Was wonderful. We were excited.

We have worked extremely hard to empower women. We've worked really, really hard to empower our girls. Even the commercials say, "I throw like a girl. I run like a girl." We used to say it wasn't good, unless you threw like a boy. Now we do it like a girl, because we're proud of our femaleness.

However, something that I – I'm not sure I've ever – I really don't think I've ever heard this before. I don't think I've ever read it before, but it's something that I believe in and I've seen is that it is really easy for a male – I mean, I guess it's not ever easy, but it's easier for a male to compete with a male and lose. If you compete against a female and lose, it's emotionally devastating. It's better not to even try. This is what we're seeing, the fact that fewer and fewer men are getting college degrees. More men drop out of high school than females do. Women usually have a very positive feeling, not all of course, about school, males do not.

Then you have to ask, why? What is it that is hindering males from enjoying the learning process? We again, have to look at it this starts way, way back in early, early education. Reading scores from the NAEP and in reading and writing in the fourth grade, girls were ahead of boys by 17%, in 8th grade 21% and in 12th grade 25%. They have discovered over the last 10 years that this is a universal problem. This is not just a problem with the United States. This is a universal problem.

I again, go back to the fact that I do believe it's because men do not want to compete against women. It's too hard if you compete against a woman and lose. You can cope if you lose against a man. That's just built in to the male being. Whereas, we want to make – We just want to empower everybody. We want all our children early in life to feel terrific about themselves. I know that is all but impossible, considering the poverty that our country and other countries face. The responsibility that from ages old, where the male carried the burden, they the family made sure that they were bringing home the food that were the economic stability. One researcher, his name is Mortensen, his study in 2005 said that in the year of 2001, so when he was doing a study and he was doing the research in that time, a 180,000 women, more women were receiving bachelor's degrees than men. That's a significant number. That's only one year.

When you look at that economically, that is a devastating economic issue, when you have men who are not getting their full education and what that means to family and to family stability and what that means to even US economy. I feel that we have to look at this really seriously and try to figure what can we do? We've empowered girls, so that they are taught, they can do anything.

We don't hold girls back from anything. We want them to grow up playing with dolls and playing with Legos and playing with Lincoln Logs and doing math and enjoying science and enjoying computers, etc., etc., so that they had the nurturing side to them, as well as the analytical and mathematical and science side to them.

Well, we have to really – and make sure that we're empowering our males in a continued way. I think that – it has become such a political issue and it's even more touchy right now than ever, because gender issues are a huge top of a conversation at any given point in our society. I think that because so many people are out there putting out their opinions and sometimes making others feel not so good about their opinions, that we're afraid to step up and voice our opinions and we're also afraid to go forward with what we know is good for children.

I personally as an educator, as a mother, as a grandparent, I am very, very concerned over the confusion I see that is going to be taking place – is taking place right now in our culture and it's going to – we're going to feel the results of it in the next 10 and 15 years. I think it's going to be devastating, because our gender roles are so blurred. Again, when you see that males are

basically beginning to – not beginning. It's been happening over the last 15, 20 years. Again internationally, if they're dropping out, they're not going forth with confidence. They don't have the confidence to go get their education.

The huge issue with not having a male role model in the home, because of such – our divorce, our divorces in America, the statistics are enormous. You don't have that consistent role model in the home, because children usually stay with the mother predominantly. Then again, going back to that, we have the females taking care of males in early childhood. Boys' concept of what it is to be a male is getting lost. If they lose that concept, they will not know who they are, or what is expected of them, or what is needed of them.

We had a horrific issue. A shooting took place in in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was a male, 21-year-old male who made the decision to tackle the shooter and end the shooting. He's probably most likely saved who knows how many from getting injured. We need males like that, we need females like that, but we need males like that. We need males that are strong and courageous and are not afraid to act and not afraid to step up and take responsibility and do the right thing.

If they lose sight of who they are as men, as even as early as little boys, they're not going to be the strong man that is going to tackle a shooter, or to jump on a grenade during wartime, or to run into a burning building to rescue people inside, or to run towards danger, not away, because they're not going to be ready that. They're not going to be able emotionally. Big, big concern. Again, it has to start early.

I'm going to give you some suggestions. That is we need to start changing boys' attitudes towards school. The way that I believe we need to do it is that we need to teach boys the way they need to be taught and that's up, out of their seats, with movement and drama and music and fun and novelty and sometimes aggressive play, where they can race around hard and still learn at the same time.

You've heard me say this is what Zoo-phonics does. We're up and out of our seats tossing a ball, or tossing bean bags, or doing relay races while we're learning the alphabet, or we're learning how to spell words, or read words. We need teachers who are willing to fully understand little boys and just stretch themselves with compassion and understanding, rather than the rigidity of saying no too quickly, sit down, be quiet, too quickly.

We need to be able to understand that these boys who stand on top of rocks and pretend they're kings of the world, they need to do that and it's okay. Or if they're racing around and pretend ambulances and cars and doing car chases. They need to do that. They need to have that conquering spirit.

Topics; when we teach subjects as females, we teach it through the lens, our own lens, our female lens. We're a lot of times imparting information, even the sciences and math through a female lens where we're not reaching how a boy perceives things. It gives them a sense of discomfort and it does not help them be intrigued with a topic for one thing. Then number two, it alienates and isolates them.

We have to make sure that we are giving all sides of things as we're teaching all our children. We need to make sure that our little boys are having that rugged roughhousing that they so need on the playground, so that they are catching and throwing, that they actually learn skills. If they're not learning skills early, like how to step into a throw, how to step in with your left foot, throw with your right, or vice versa, they're not going to be able to learn how to play baseball, or catch, or it's that athleticism that basically is required all the way through school. They're going to be one of those kids that is going to be last to be chosen on that team and how humiliating is that.

We have to get them to be up and utilizing all their senses as they learn. We have to understand them. If they can't express themselves, we have to learn to be patient and not express for them, to pull it out of them, to accept what they have to say and even to accept their perspective. A lot of times, they just don't see what they did that was incorrect, so we have to tell them how and why and we have to take the time to talk with them.

Something little known to people who are not in the educational fields is that boys use – I'll start with the girls. Girls use both sides of their hemisphere. The hemispheres of their brain, they go back and forth from birth. Little boys don't. They stay in the realm of their right – the right hemispheres. Because of the testosterone pouring through their bodies from very young, it actually enhances the right side of the brain, keeping them there.

We have to understand that their brains are actually different, absolutely different than girls. They don't use their prefrontal lobe, which is where their executive function is, where their amygdala is. They even hear differently than girls do. You might think about this as a wife, or as a teacher, or as a mother, males hear things differently than girls do. We have to look at these magnificent, wonderful, amazing men, males in our classrooms, in our homes and say they're different from girls, they respond differently from girls, they learn differently from girls, their brains are different, their emotional centers are different, their chemical systems are different.

We have to allow for that and we just have to love them and appreciate them. Certainly, have to make sure that we're not over emphasizing as females our particular way of thinking and doing. We definitely have to give them a room to be who they are, and love them and love them and love them.

[OUTRO]

[0:29:56.2] ANNOUNCER: That was Ed. Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio, live on 103.5 FM, or streaming online at kaad-lp.org. If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please e-mail your question to dr_char@zoophonics.com. Thanks for listening and stay tuned for what's next on KAAD-LP Radio.

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