https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/13/upshot/boys-falling-behind-data.html

The New York Times, 14 mai

It's Not Just a Feeling: Data Shows Boys and Young Men Are Falling Behind

Boys' educational achievement, mental health and transitions to adulthood indicate that many are not thriving.

Full text :

Boys and young men are struggling. Across their lives — in their educational achievement, mental health and transitions to adulthood — there are warning signs that they are falling behind, even as their female peers surge ahead.

In the United States, researchers say several economic and social changes have combined to change boys' and men's trajectories. School has changed in ways that favor girls, and work has changed in ways that favor women. Boys are often seen as troublemakers, and men have heard that masculinity is "toxic."

Young people themselves tend to agree that girls are now at least equal to — and often doing better than — boys. Many young men say they feel unmoored and undervalued, and parents and adults who work with children are worried about boys. It's not just a feeling: There's a wealth of data that shows that boys and young men are stagnating. Below, I'll explain what some of that data is.

Bas du formulaire

Some boys have been affected more than others — the outcomes for Black boys are worse, and growing up in poverty disproportionately hurts boys. And in some cases, the patterns aren't new — boys have always lagged girls in certain areas, yet there has been little focus on their issues, perhaps because men have dominated in so many spheres.

That is beginning to change, said Niobe Way, author of "Rebels With a Cause: Reimagining Boys, Ourselves and Our Culture" and a professor of developmental psychology at N.Y.U. "Boys and young men, they are starving just like everybody else to be seen as they see themselves, as good people," she said. "They want to not only survive but also have the opportunity to thrive."

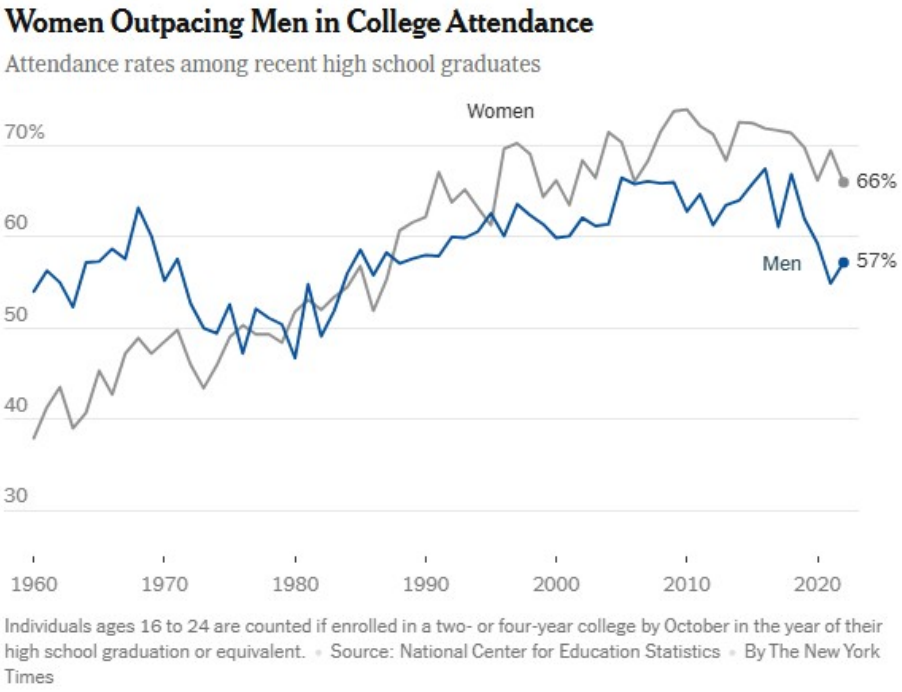
Here is an overview of some ways in which boys and young men aren't thriving.

Education

School has become more academic earlier, perhaps making it harder for boys, who generally mature later than girls, researchers say. Boys enter kindergarten behind girls, in both their academic readiness and their behavior. The gender gaps persist as they move through school. Across the United States, girls score better on reading tests than boys. Girls earn higher G.P.A.s. Boys are more likely to be suspended.

All this leads to a lower likelihood of graduating high school on time for boys than girls — 83 percent for boys compared with 89 percent for girls, according to a Brookings Institution analysis.

Women also outnumber men in college enrollment, which is linked to broader career prospects and higher earnings. Of recent male high school graduates, about 57 percent are enrolled in college, barely up from 54 percent in 1960, federal data shows. In that same period, women's college enrollment has surged past them — 66 percent are now enrolled, up from 38 percent. (For both, enrollment is down from prepandemic highs.)



Boys also have strengths in school. On math tests, they tend to outscore girls (especially white and Asian American boys in high-income suburbs), and since the pandemic, boys' academic performance has improved relative to girls'. Still, researchers say there is something about modern-day school that is not enabling boys to fulfill their potential.

"In education, this is more a story of the acceleration of girls," said Richard Reeves, president of the American Institute for Boys and Men. "But there is enough evidence to think that the educational system is not as boy-friendly as it could and should be."

Mental health

Mental health has been worsening for young people in general, and for boys in some different ways than for girls. Among boys ages 3 to 17, 28 percent have a mental, emotional, behavioral or developmental problem, compared with 23 percent of girls, according to the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative.

Boys are roughly twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with A.D.H.D. or autism, though experts caution that those may be underdiagnosed in girls, for whom symptoms can show up differently.

Mental health has also been declining for girls, who are more likelythan boys to have anxiety and depression. Researchers say that because boys still face the expectation to be stoic, their struggles more often show up in their behavior. Nearly two-thirds of teenagers say boys are more disruptive in class, while just 4 percent say girls are, Pew Research Center found in a recent survey of teens. (Other behaviors, though, like physical fighting and drug use, have decreased for boys.)

And though most teenage boys, 84 percent, told Pew they have at least one friend they can lean on for emotional support, that's not as many as the 95 percent of girls who say they do.

Overall, suicide is more prevalent among men than women, and has increased among young people. But the increases are far greater for young men. In 2023, the suicide rate for males ages 15 to 24 was 21 per 100,000, up from 11 in 1968, according to an analysis of C.D.C. data by the American Institute for Boys and Men. The suicide rate for young women was five per 100,000, up from three.

“The data is clear men aren’t super healthy,” said Matt Englar-Carlson, a professor and founder of the Center for Boys and Men at Cal State Fullerton. “I don’t know any men my age or younger who don’t know someone who died by suicide.”

Transition to adulthood

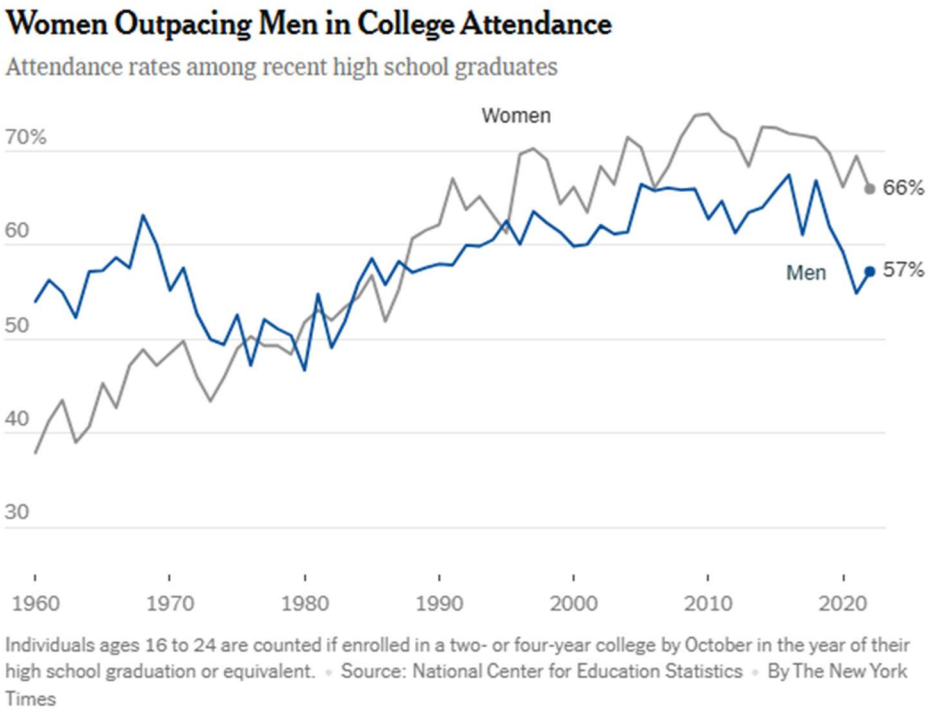
Though young people in general are taking longer to reach the traditional milestones of adulthood, it’s particularly true of young men.

Among men ages 25 to 34, 19 percent still live with their parents, up from 14 percent in 1983, according to census data. Of women that age, 13 percent live with their parents, up from 11 percent four decades ago.

While women and men used to be equally likely to be single — less than a third of those ages 25 to 54 were in 1990 — now 39 percent of men and 36 percent of women don’t have a partner, a Pew analysis of census data found (the mismatch may be because women often partner with older men, Pew researchers said).

The work trajectories of men and women have also diverged, as many of the jobs that mostly men did, like manual labor, have disappeared in the United States, while women dominate today’s service-oriented work.

The share of men working or looking for work has steadily declined, while the share of women working has rapidly climbed. Of men ages 25 to 54, 89 percent are in the labor force, down from 94 percent in 1975. Of women that age, 78 percent are in the labor force, up from 55 percent in 1975.



And while women still earn less than men, their median weekly earnings have climbed 19 percent since 2000, while men’s have increased just 7 percent in that period.

“The contemporary American economy is not rewarding a lot of the characteristics associated with men and masculinity,” said Robb Willer, a professor of sociology at Stanford, “and the sense is those trends will continue.”