Instagram Ate My Daughter,  
And My Son Won’t Stop Playing Fortnite  

September 2019  
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Please note: this hand-out is intended as a supplement to the presentation, not as a substitute for the presentation. This handout is NOT intended to be read separately from the presentation; it cannot “stand alone.” If you would like to get a sense of the presentation but did not have the opportunity to attend, please read my second book Boys Adrift, especially chapters 3 and 8; also my third book Girls on the Edge, especially chapters 1, 2, and 3; and my most recent book The Collapse of Parenting. You can reach me via email leonardsax@gmail.com (scroll to the bottom of the document for complete contact information).

The established consensus in 1964: encourage immigrant children to assimilate as soon as possible. For the scholarship underlying this consensus, see Milton Gordon’s monograph Assimilation in American Life: the role of race, religion, and national origins, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. Because of this long-held consensus, the more recent finding that immigrant children now do better than American-born children is regarded as evidence of a “paradox.” Scroll to the bottom of this document for citations documenting the immigrant paradox. Disclaimers: I am not endorsing Dr. Gordon’s recommendations; and, 1964 was not “the good old days.”


The culture of disrespect. The opening chapter of my book The Collapse of Parenting is titled “The Culture of Disrespect” – which is a fair summary of contemporary North American popular culture, as experienced by children and teenagers. Examples of the culture of disrespect include Eminem, Nicki Minaj (I showed the cover of her Anaconda album), Miley Cyrus (I showed the cover of her Bangerz album), Justin Bieber, and Akon. Akon claims to be a convicted felon, but he isn’t. (For more about the prevalence of awful role models for boys, see my book Boys Adrift.)
The Disney Channel also exemplifies the culture of disrespect, with shows such as *Dog with a Blog* and *Jessie* and *Liv and Maddie*.

Bruno Mars won six Grammys on January 28, 2018, including the Grammy for Best Song, “That’s What I Like.” The song begins with these lyrics:

*I got a condo in Manhattan*  
*Baby girl, what’s hatnin’?*  
*You and your a— invited*  
*So gon’ and get to clappin’*  
*Go pop it for a player, pop-pop it for me*  
*Turn around and drop it for a player, drop-drop it for me*

For more about Bruno Mars and his award for Best Song, January 28, 2018, please see my essay “You and Your [Expletive] Invited,” online at https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sax-sex/201802/you-and-your-expletive-invited.

Childish Gambino a.k.a. Donald Glover won four Grammys on February 10, 2019, including the Grammy for Best Song / Best Video / Best Record for “This Is America.” Hidden meanings abound, but the straightforward message of the song is that America is about money, sex, and violence.

T-shirts: “Do I look like I care?”

“I’m not shy. I just don’t like you.”

“You looked better on Facebook.”

“I don’t need you. I have WiFi.”

“I need another drink. You’re still ugly.”

You will rarely find such T-shirts outside of North America.

**Video games**

Video games tend to shift motivation away from the real world, to the virtual world. In a large, prospective, longitudinal cohort study, Professors Craig Anderson and Doug Gentile found that boys playing violent games – particularly games which deployed a *moral inversion* –

After hearing testimony from Anderson and Gentile, The California State Assembly passed a law prohibiting the sale of video games to minor children if the games depicted “killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting an image of a human being, if those acts are depicted” in a manner that “[a] reasonable person, considering the game as a whole, would find appeals to a deviant or morbid interest.” The United States Supreme Court, in a decision written by Justice Antonin Scalia, ruled the statute unconstitutional, rendering it null and void. In his concurrence, Justice Alito shared his concerns about the implications of the research, but agreed with Justice Scalia that regulating what games a child may play is the job of the parent, not the job of the state. Justice Scalia’s opinion, and Justice Alito’s concurrence, are both online at [http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/10pdf/08-1448.pdf](http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/10pdf/08-1448.pdf).

Consequences of playing video games include:

- Attention problems
- Inappropriate risk-taking
- Obesity and overweight

**Attention deficit.** The most popular video games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call of Duty* offer constantly-changing challenges, scenes, and characters. Often there are multiple characters on the screen. The successful player must continually be scanning up, down, and sideways for new assailants. Sustained concentration on a single item is a recipe for defeat: you didn’t respond to that rustle on the right of the screen which was your only clue to an impending ambush. Distractibility is rewarded. Not surprisingly, researchers find that the more time you spend playing video games, the more likely you are to develop difficulties maintaining sustained concentration on a single item. Conversely, researchers find that boys who already have difficulty concentrating and focusing tend to gravitate to video games, where their distractibility is an asset rather than a liability.¹

**Breaking rules.** The world of video games is unreal. You can jump off a 20-foot ledge onto the concrete pavement below and continue chasing your enemy: no sprained ankle, no broken bones. You can race your car at high speeds, crash into a wall, and walk away unharmed from the wreck of your car. You can hijack a car in *Grand Theft Auto* – in fact you have to hijack a car in order to play the game. Not only is rule-breaking behavior allowed in games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call of Duty*, rule-breaking behavior is required and rewarded. If you jump off that high ledge to chase after your opponent, you are much more likely to succeed in killing your
opponent than if you “waste” valuable time by running down the stairs instead. Not surprisingly, researchers have found that adolescents who play these games are more likely to engage in dangerous driving behaviors such as speeding, tailgating, and weaving in traffic; they are more likely to be pulled over by the police; more likely to be in automobile accidents; and more willing to drink and drive. In another study, teens who were playing rule-breaking video games at age 17 or 18 were more than three times as likely, 5 years later, to have been involved in an actual car crash, compared with teens who did not play such games.

**Obesity.** Boys who spend lots of time playing video games are more likely to become fat compared with boys who spend less time playing video games. There seem to be two mechanisms operating here. First, playing video games burns less calories than many other activities, such as playing actual sports. Secondly, less intuitively, playing video games seems to have a direct appetite-stimulant effect, worse than watching TV. That may be why time spent playing video games is significantly more likely to be associated with obesity and other bad health outcomes, compared with time spent watching TV.

**Guidelines for video games**

1. No more than 40 minutes/night on school nights
2. No more than 1 hour/day on weekends / vacations
3. Your minutes do not roll over
4. No games in which the primary objective is killing other people (such as *Fortnite*)
5. No games with a moral inversion (such as *Grand Theft Auto*)


**Social media**

In the past ten years, the social media have displaced the diary. It is now unusual to find an American child or teen who regularly writes in their diary.

Girls post 5 times more photos on their social media page than boys do; and the girls are more likely to point the camera at themselves. Michael A. Stefanone, Derek Lackaff, and Devan Rosen, “Contingencies of self-worth and social-networking-site behavior,” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14:41-49, 2011. See also my article for *The New York Times*, “Why do girls tend to have more anxiety than boys?” [https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/why-do-girls-have-more-anxiety-than-boys/](https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/why-do-girls-have-more-anxiety-than-boys/).

Most girls present themselves in a positive light on social media. But most girls don’t realize that the other girls are doing the same. That may be one reason why girls are more likely than boys to experience toxic effects from social media.
Jacqueline Nesi and Mitchell Prinstein, Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 2015, found that the more time kids spend on social media, looking to see how many likes they got on their own posts, and looking to see what other kids were doing online, the more likely those kids were to become depressed. Full text (including that amazing graph, showing that girls were more likely to become depressed than boys were) is online at no charge at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5985443/.

I recommend that parents deploy programs such as NetNanny, MyMobileWatchdog, TeenSafe, or mSpy. “mSpy” is a terrible name, because you are NOT spying: you TELL your child that it is your job to know what they are doing online. You explain that it is the parent’s job to be aware of how much time their kids are spending online, and which sites they are visiting.

2019 update: NetNanny and MyMobileWatchdog have significantly DECREASED the power of their apps. They no longer enable monitoring of photos taken with the phone, and they do not allow monitoring of SnapChat and similar apps where photos “vanish.” MSpy does allow monitoring of photos and apps such as SnapChat. For more information, see https://www.mspy.com/.

Most of these apps are NOT stable on the iPhone. They can be uninstalled without the parent knowing – then reinstalled, so the parent doesn’t know what happened while the app was off the phone. Apple last year launched an app, built into iOS 12, called Screen Time, which allows parents to monitor and limit some of their kids’ activities online. Here’s a review: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/technology/personaltech/apple-iphone-screen-time.html.

Another option, as discussed in the presentation, is to give your child a "basic phone" - a phone that can make and receive phone calls and texts, but not surf the Internet or take photos.

No devices in the bedroom! – i.e. phones, and no UNSUPERVISED Internet access. Here’s a link: https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/pages/media-and-children.aspx. The full text of the AAP guidelines, as published in the journal Pediatrics, is available at no charge at this link: http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/138/5/e20162592.full.pdf. Here’s a link from the AAP to create a “family contract” for kids’ use of media: https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx.
You should take the mobile devices away from kids at 9 pm (the latest) and plug them into the charger. The charger stays in the parent's bedroom. Girls appear to be more vulnerable than boys to the toxic effects of social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Boys are more likely than girls to become addicted to video games and to online pornography.

**Sexting (rare) and Not-Quite-Sexting (common)**


No child under 13 years of age should have a smartphone. That doesn’t mean that all 13-year-olds should have smartphones. It depends.

I suggest getting a “dumb phone” rather than a smart phone. A dumb phone can make and receive phone calls; that’s all.

Who is responsible when kids send pictures on their cell phone? My answer: PARENTS are responsible. See my op-ed October 25 2013 for the *Wall Street Journal*, [http://on.wsj.com/1dp0OXO](http://on.wsj.com/1dp0OXO). See also my discussion of this topic on Fox News, October 29 2013, [http://video.foxnews.com/v/2781648798001](http://video.foxnews.com/v/2781648798001).


Your job is to be a parent, not a best friend. A best friend can’t tell you what to eat, or forbid you to watch pornography, or take away your phone at 9 pm; but a parent can, and must.
Longitudinal cohort studies demonstrating the importance of Conscientiousness:


These two graphs come from Moffitt et al. 2011:

Teaching virtue should be your top priority for your daughter or son. That’s not a sermon; it’s a robust empirical finding.


Conscientiousness is the only trait which achieves the hat trick: more health, more wealth, and more happiness. See Angela Duckworth and colleagues, “Who does well in life?

Bottom line: *personality can change at any age and increased Conscientiousness is beneficial.*


Having a meal with a parent greatly decreases the risk of problems, and improves satisfaction, in a “dose-dependent” fashion from days 1 through 7 (there are 7 days in a week). See Frank Elgar, 2013, *Journal of Adolescent Health*. This graph is Figure 1 from their paper. [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(12)00317-5/abstract](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(12)00317-5/abstract)

No devices allowed at the dinner table. Limit social media.

Prioritize family.

   Limit, govern, and guide your child’s exposure to American popular culture.

   No earbuds, no headsets in the car or anytime you are with your child.

   Choose “unplugged” vacations.

There is a false dichotomy between the “Tiger Mom” and the “Irish Setter Dad.” The Tiger Mom is all about achievement. The Irish Setter Dad just wants kids to have a good time. Both are mistaken.

The search for meaning. Without meaning, life has no point. The result is anxiety, depression, and disengagement. Your job as a parent is to educate desire: to instill a longing for things higher and deeper. In the arts, in music, and in your child’s character.
When I met with Dr. Wright, head of school at Shore (Sydney, Australia), I asked him: What is school for? He answered: *preparation for life*. I asked him: what is life for? He answered:

1) *Meaningful work*

2) *Someone to love*

3) *A cause to embrace*

I’m not saying that Dr. Wright has all the answers or that you must accept his answer. But it is an answer.

Why are so many girls and boys today more likely to be anxious, depressed, and/or fragile? My answers:

- Parents have allowed relations with same-age peers to displace the family

- **You can change that**

- Parents have allowed social media and video games to displace real world experience

- **You can change that**

- American culture now prioritizes fame and wealth over virtue and character

- **You must challenge that**
Here are some comments about my books:

**Why Gender Matters** “. . . is a lucid guide to male and female brain differences.”
*New York Times*

**Boys Adrift** “. . . is powerfully and persuasively presented. . . Excellent and informative references and information are provided.”
*Journal of the American Medical Association*

**Boys Adrift:** “A must-read for any parent of boys. This is real science, and Dr. Sax thoroughly uncovers the important health issues that parents of boys need to be tuned into.”
*Dr. Mehmet Oz, host of “The Dr. Oz Show”*

**Girls on the Edge:** “Packed with advice and concrete suggestions for parents, Girls on the Edge is a treasure trove of rarely-seen research on girls, offering families guidance on some of the most pressing issues facing girls today. Dr Sax’s commitment to girls’ success comes through on every page.”
*Rachel Simmons, author of Odd Girl Out*

**Girls on the Edge:** “This is essential reading for parents and teachers, and one of the most thought-provoking books on teen development available.”
*Library Journal*

**Girls on the Edge:** “The best book about the current state of girls and young women in America . . . offers astonishing and troubling new insight . . .”
*The Atlantic*

**The Collapse of Parenting:** “One of the premier experts on parenting, Dr. Leonard Sax brilliantly articulates the problems parents experience with their children, then gives solutions. The Collapse of Parenting is academic but practical, simple but deep. If you have time to read only one book this year, read this one.”
*Meg Meeker MD, author of Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters and Strong Mothers, Strong Sons*

**The Collapse of Parenting:** “With years of experience and research working directly with parents and children, Dr. Leonard Sax provides an important glimpse into parenting in modern times, where it’s gone wrong, and how to fix it. Being a parent has never been more important and Dr. Sax explains how to avoid parenting pitfalls and raise your children well.”
*Bill Bennett PhD, former US Secretary of Education*
The Collapse of Parenting: “A comprehensive breakdown of where parents have gone awry and how they can get back on track to teach virtue and character to their children. . . .Sax provides a series of easy-to-follow solutions that help bring parents and children back to the same page, working toward a healthier, more respectful, and conscientious attitude. . . .With the author’s solid advice, parents have a good shot at achieving these goals.”
*Kirkus Reviews*

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Documentation of the immigrant paradox:
Here are some citations demonstrating that girls and boys whose families have recently immigrated to North America are less likely to be anxious, or depressed, compared with girls and boys born and raised in North America:


• David Takeuchi and colleagues, “Immigration and mental health: diverse findings in Asian, Black, and Latino populations,” *American Journal of Public Health*, volume 97, pp. 11 – 12, 2007. This article is an introduction to a special issue of the *American Journal of Public Health* (AJPH) devoted to documenting and understanding the interaction between immigration status and mental health in the United States. Full text online at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1716240/. From that special issue of AJPH, see for example “Immigration-related factors and mental disorders among Asian Americans,” *American Journal of Public Health*, volume 97, pp. 84 – 90, full text at http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2006.088401. This article documents a peculiar gender quirk in the immigrant paradox: while the immigrant-paradox effect was generally stronger for females than for males (i.e. being born outside the U.S. was more protective for females than for males), English-language proficiency was a greater risk factor for males than for females. If you are male, and you were born in Asia, and you move to the United States, then mastering English puts you at greater risk of mental disorder; but that’s not true if you are female. Go figure.

Here is some of the evidence that girls and boys whose families have recently immigrated to the United States are less likely to engage in binge drinking or other forms of alcohol abuse, and/or substance abuse:


• Guillermo Prado and colleagues, “What accounts for differences in substance use among U.S.-born and immigrant Hispanic adolescents? Results from a longitudinal prospective cohort study.” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, volume 45, pp. 118 – 125, 2009. Prado and his colleagues document that foreign-born Hispanic adolescents are significantly less likely to engage in drug abuse, compared with similarly-situated U.S.-born Hispanic adolescents. They conclude that the key difference is that the U.S.-born Hispanic teens are looking to their same-age peers for guidance, while the foreign-born Hispanic teens are looking to their parents and to other adults for guidance.


North American popular culture in 1964 was a culture which endorsed respect for parents. North American popular culture in 2019 is a culture of disrespect (see chapter 1 of my book *The Collapse of Parenting*, “the culture of disrespect”).

*Further references regarding video games:*


