McCreary Journal

HUMAN

from A4

ly out of reach. And even now, some public offices are seen as more "acceptable" for women. In Kentucky, roughly 70% of circuit and county clerks are women, but only seven counties have female judge-executives. Women make up less than 8% of county magistrates and commissioners.

That's why I've never taken issue with efforts to encourage girls to

fields. Organizations like Girls Who Code, Step Up, and Girls Develop It have sparked interest and confidence in STEM over the past decade. And it's working. Since 2016, the share of American women in the STEM workforce has risen by 8%, now standing at 29%.

The progress isn't limited to STEM. In 1976, women made up 47% of college students. Today, they account for 58%. Their numbers have more than doubled-

explore male-dominated from 5 million to 11 million. That's a story worth celebrating.

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But what about the boys?

In the same period, male college enrollment rose only from 6 million to 8 million. Let me be clear—this isn't about resenting the success of young women. I'm thrilled to see it and want it to continue. But I do wonder if, in our push to lift up girls, we've inadvertently overlooked the struggles of our young men.

Recent data shows

that of Kentucky's 2017 high school seniors, 35% of the girls earned an associate's or bachelor's degree within seven years. That may sound underwhelming-until you learn that only 23%

of the boys did the same. And it goes beyond degrees. Boys are underperforming in school, enrolling in college at lower rates, and entering the workforce more slowly. They're more likely to still be living at home a decade later. Rates of clinical depression and suicide among young men are climbing at alarming rates.

Despite all this, the national conversation remains quiet. There's little discussion and even less action.

Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts, once said, "The spirit is there in every boy; it has to be discovered and brought to light." That spirit still exists. But somewhere along the line, many boys are losing their way-and we're not doing enough to help them find it again.

I know my greatgrandfather would be proud of the opportunities my daughter has today-the very ones he once dreamed of for his girls. But I suspect he'd also want to ensure those same doors remain open for his great-grandsons.

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Empowering girls and supporting boys aren't mutually exclusive. We can—and must—do both. The next chapter of American progress shouldn't be exclusive to one gender; it should be co-authored.



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