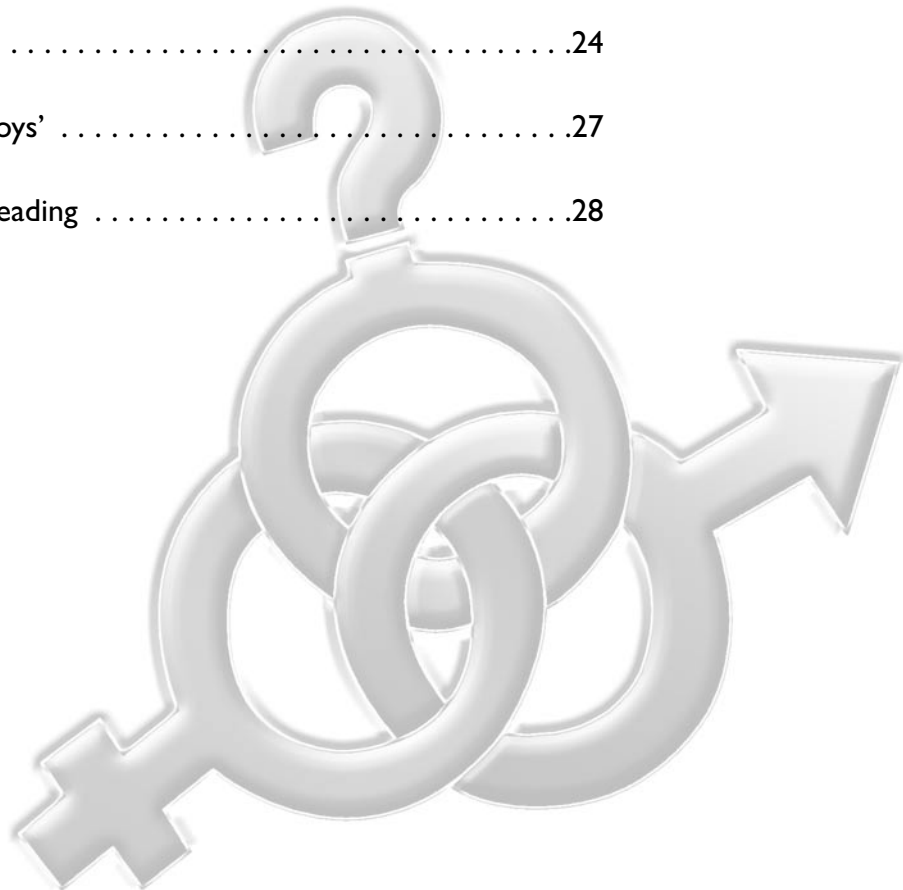




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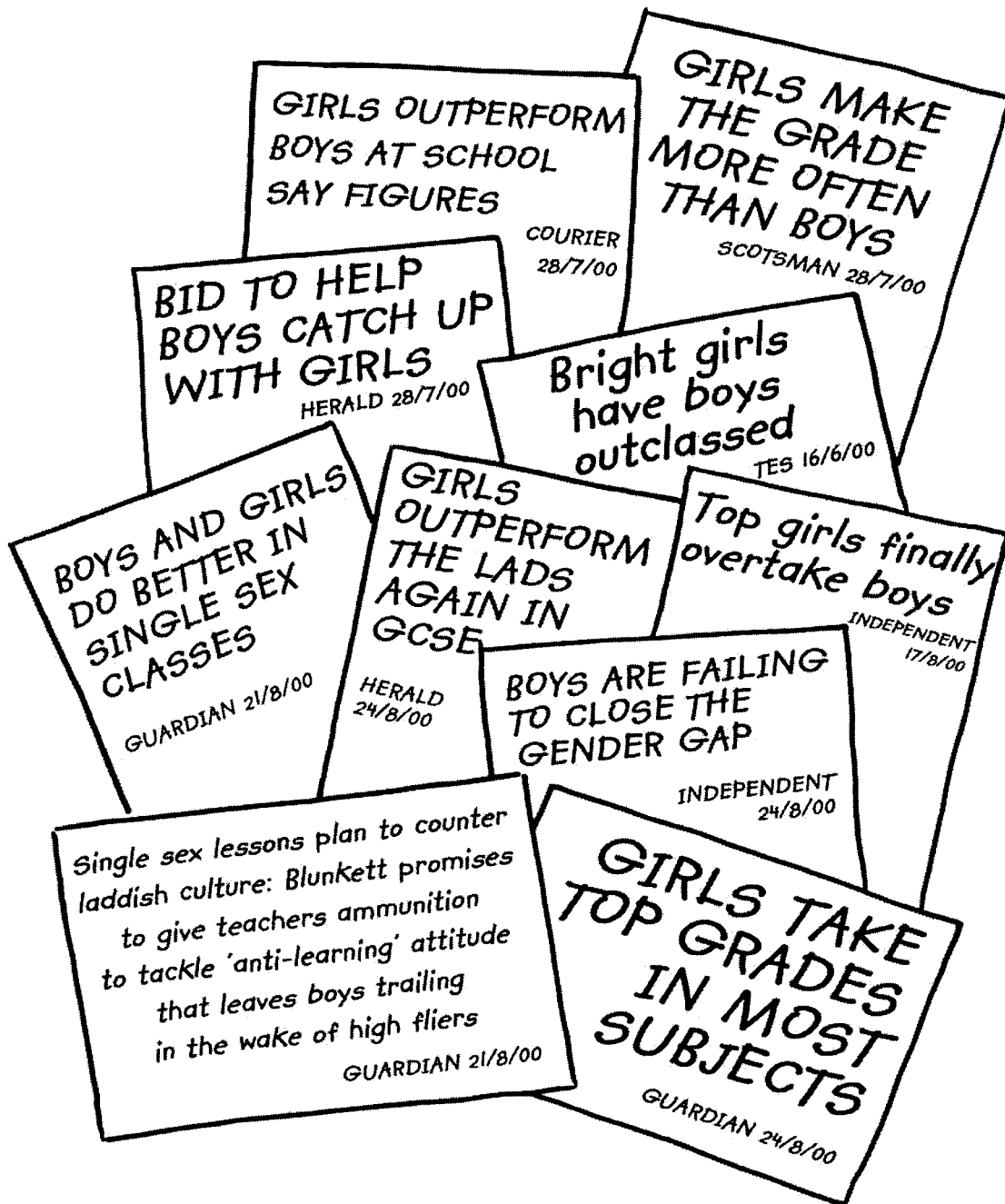
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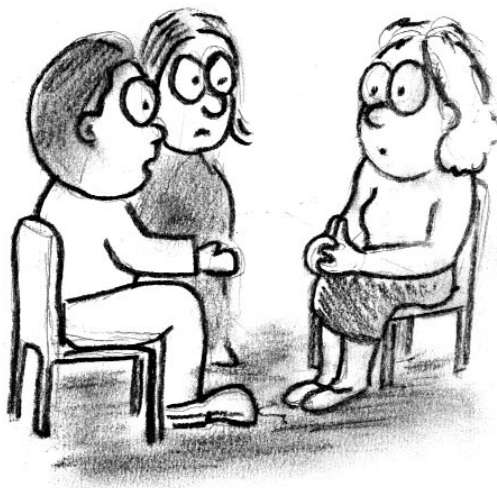
## The problem with boys

As we write this paper the exam results throughout the UK are appearing. Every year now this triggers an outcry in the press about boys' achievement and what needs to be done about it. This year was no exception. What follows is a selection of the headlines over a two month period:



## An emotive issue

Gender is a complex and emotive issue. Of course boys and girls, women and men are biologically different, but there are also psychological differences between the genders. Over the past fifty years there has been a tendency to minimise these psychological differences in the search for equal opportunities and to suggest that they are mainly as a result of nurture rather than nature. Now science, particularly neurology and evolutionary psychology, is emphasising the psychological differences between the genders and suggesting that they are more as a result of nature than we have previously thought. As the debate shifts, so the dangers of stereotyping men and women, girls and boys increases again. For this reason and because all of us, men and women, bring a lot of baggage to this debate, having an open-minded discussion about gender is very difficult. But that is what we set out to have in this paper.



*Before we start, let me say how pleased we are to be having an open and frank conversation about your total inability to improve our son's academic achievement*

We focus on boys not only because the statistics show that boys are in trouble in contemporary Western society (see page 9) but also because the current fuss about boys' underachievement in school has led to some pretty worrying knee-jerk reactions and simplistic solutions.

This paper will explore the extent, the nature and the causes of the 'problem with boys' both in school and society in general before looking at what the solutions to the problem might be. We shall address the following questions:

- How do gender differences manifest themselves in our society?
- What are our current understandings about where these differences come from?
- Do these understandings help to explain why boys are not doing well in school?
- And do they help us to do something about it?

But, given this is such an emotive issue, we want to start with a number of 'health warnings'.

