Broken on the Court
When the All-Boy Band Visited the All-Girl School
BY IAN EARLE

Two worlds collided today. Fortunately, only a stereotype broke during the impact. I teach at the only all-girl middle school in Oakland, California, Julia Morgan School for Girls. And today, during Monday morning assembly, the girls listened to the only all-boy choir from the only all-boy middle school in Oakland, Pacific Boychoir Academy. Boy bands of yore, from the Beatles to the Backstreet Boys, would be proud of their young progeny and of the raucous show they put on.

Before school this morning, excited groups of girls had huddled together in our hallowed halls of academia, where emphasis is placed on math and science. Much to the faculty’s chagrin, the girls were not philosophizing about Homer or discussing Euclidian geometry. Nor were they even whispering the usual fare: how cute the cast of “Survivor” is or how the Bachelorette picked the wrong hopeful. Instead, despite the faculty’s best effort to keep that day’s concert a secret, the word was out: boys were on their way.

Give Me an X!
And arrive they did, boys outfitted in matching white shoes, baggy khaki pants, green polo shirts, and oversized, floppy Santa hats. They even brought a foreign-exchange student to add that mysterious bad-boy flavor. His brooding presence helped elevate the girls’ excitement to a code-level red, which, in middle-school concert-speak, translates into “extreme risk of screaming once the boys start to sing.”

As the bandmaster readied his young charges, an audible “ahhhhhhh” echoed throughout the hall as the smallest member of the band, the requisite cute one, wearing the biggest floppy Santa hat, stepped forward and belted out the opening solo. The boys held all the eyes, ears, and hearts of the girls, as they sang and semi-gyrated their way to middle-school stardom.

After numerous encores, the boys ended their set, and the girls wanted answers: “How old are you and you and you?” and, “Where do you and you and you live?” And straight to the heart of the matter (and straight to the faculty’s goal of teaching assertive communication), “Do you or you or you have a girlfriend?”

Lunch period followed the morning assembly, and the student council received the coveted honor to dine with the boys, in a private room. In the cafeteria, on regular lunch duty, I found myself confronted by an angry female mob, which hurled a barrage of accusations and complaints (direct communication at its finest) about school favoritism toward the student council. Fortunately for me, middle-school girls seem to like food on a par with boys, and soon, despite wonderful displays of assertiveness, their lunches got their attention.

Give Me a Free Throw!
After lunch, with time to spare, the cafeteria girls went to the gym and grabbed a basketball. As if on cue, the door opened and out came the boys, to be immediately besieged. In the ensuing melee, one of the boys, without a thought to the consequences, grabbed the ball, aimed, shot, and watched it drop, with a satisfying swish, through the hoop. With his graceful shot, this poor boy unknowingly set the middle-school girl world on a collision course with his. In the blink of an eye, a nonleague, nonsanctioned, rough-and-tumble, boy-versus-girl basketball game erupted.

The boys found themselves the visiting team on a court filled with home-court advantages. To their credit, they played valiantly and with heart in a last-ditch effort to defend their crumbling world. Alas, the boy band eventually bore the brunt of this middle-school world collision. Broken on the court were stereotypes so ingrained in our society. Perhaps that is what single-sex education is all about.

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