Roundtable:
What Does “Boyhood Studies” Mean?

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EDITOR'S NOTE

For this, the sixth issue of Thymos, which will conclude its third year of publication and with a lively plan of upcoming issues already in place, I asked the members of our editorial board and all past contributors to Thymos to informally respond to this question: “As someone who has written about ‘the boy’ and ‘boyhood’, how do you conceptualize and define these terms as you begin to study and write about issues facing ‘boys’, in the cities, in rural settings, in schools, in various contemporary cultures?” I also suggested that the meaning of “the boy” and “boyhood” may, in fact, be the central issue of boyhood studies at this point. The question elicited eleven remarkably different responses, which follow.

MARTIN AHISLEY (EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY)

When I first started writing seriously about boys and boyhood, I approached it as though it were an issue of gender, situated within masculinity studies. I argued that “boy” is a social construction and I argued particularly from the point of view of vocal physiology. As a specialist in boys and singing, I would argue that “boy” cannot be defined by any biomedical criterion linked to voice change during puberty, though such
a consideration is not wholly irrelevant. I've moved on since then. I still maintain that “boy” is a social construction, but it’s constructed out of far more than gender. “Boy” only makes sense if we look at individual lives and conceptualize them through the interaction of a range of identity markers. I would include gender, social class, generation, place or geography, ethnicity and religious or spiritual belief. Whether a young male is a “boy,” a “lad,” a “youth,” a “child,” a “young man,” or any other similar term depends on a viewpoint that is uniquely constructed through a combination of each of these identity markers—both by the young person himself and by those to whom he relates and those who write about him. Of course, like masculinity itself, this concept shifts and changes constantly over place, time and context. I also write about children’s spirituality. Authors who publish on that subject devote many pages to defining what they mean by “spirituality” before reaching the substance of their argument. It seems to me that writing on “boy” and “boyhood” may need to be adopting similar conventions!

JÜRGEN BUDDE (UNIVERSITY OF HALLE)

The question “What if the notions of boyhood and even the ‘the boy’ are problematic?” seems to me to be a rhetoric one. Of course—I would say—the notion of ‘the boy’ is not only problematic, but simply wrong. Who are the “boys”? A Jewish Russian migrant son, a high-society boy in an elite high school, a sensitive three-year-old boy, who likes playing football and playing with dolls, a highly motivated and top-performing pupil or a lower class “lad,” living in a social hotspot. Talking about boys is under risk of naturalizing a social term. This is so much more the problem, as the popular discourse of “boys as losers” is growing, which produces a simple and stereotype point of view. Connell’s term of masculinities in plural is often used but rarely implemented in boyhood studies. Often, boyhood studies explain masculinity by describing “what boys are doing,” and reintroduce sex instead of analyzing gender. Boyhood studies need a new and more complex understanding of relationship between power and masculinities. If it is not possible to talk about “boys,” what consequences does this have? On a theoretical level the concept of Intersectionality plus the idea of male habitudes with specific social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital from Pierre Bourdieu can be very helpful to distinguish different forms of masculinity. These concepts also allow one to describe social positions in the field of gendered powered relations. Connell’s theory of a “patriarchal benefit” seems to be too short in the face of the worldwide changing of the relationship between power and gender and the erosion of the Western concept of the sole bread winner. Because of this the definition of youth and the phase of boyhood are under transformation as well. Boyhood is not an initiation into the male sphere of work like from the beginning up to the middle of the 20th century, but a time of opposing demands and interests. It is a social phenomena and not a fixed chronological span of time. According to the social context, the phase of boyhood may begin early and can end late in life. Because of the growing lack of identify masculin-
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ities in a modern and individualized society, individual performances of symbolic hypermasculinities—in the sense of an individual search—may become more important especially for adolescent boys. With the late works of Foucault, we can argue that the process of becoming a man tends to be a kind of self-technique. In this perspective the performance of masculinities is a strategy of governmentality, which begins in the phase of boyhood.

On an empirical level, boyhood studies should reflect their fields of research, mainly educational boyhood studies. This means analyzing the institutional framing of interactions and self-representation in a more serious way. Not only are all boys different, but also the same boy might behave in different ways, depending on the situation. We can find different ways of constructing masculinities, if the same boy is hanging out with his peers, is in school, or visiting his grandfather in hospital. Because of this, the interplay between social structures, institutional arrangements and individual presentations must be considered in future research projects.

ANDREW CALIMACH (INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR, NEW YORK)

Boy consciousness can be seen as the ground of male consciousness in general. Upon that base other, more refined layers are constructed over the years, so that play can gradually take the form of a work of art or sex as the boy matures. To the extent that these adult activities are informed by boy mind they are creative, progressive and satisfying. In its absence, they are enslaving. The fact that boy mind can be continuous throughout life provides a common ground for communication, empathy and love between boys and those men who have retained this essential sensibility. From this perspective it is not boyhood or boy mind that is problematic, but its rejection, suppression and demise in men who construct masculinity and maturity as the absence of boy mind. This mentality can be seen in the urban west in the exclusion of boys from adult activities. In Eastern countries we see a much greater mixing of the generations, with boys sharing work, entertainment and friendship with older male relatives or family friends.

HEATHER ELLIS (BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD)

I agree that the question of conceptualizing “the boy” is definitely the key question in boyhood studies at the moment. It is also a crucial question in life course studies more generally. At the moment, I am working on the way in which the language of “boyhood” and “boyishness” has been used in various historical periods to designate those whom, simply in terms of age, few would consider to be boys. In this context, I am considering the idea of whether boys are created through the language of boyhood and what role self-acceptance of the label and self-identification as a “boy” plays in understanding the way the term itself has been used historically. Right now I am focusing on the British and German university in the 19th century to see how the languages
of boyhood and boyishness functioned and were used in the liminal context of adolescence and in the interaction of teachers and students. A key question for me has become: Are we talking primarily about identity when we talk about boys and boyhood or rather a social status or category which is imposed or inscribed by others? How to conceptualize the boy was one of the themes which I engaged with at some length in the introduction to the special issue of *Thyrios* I edited. There, one of the most important issues I focused on was locating the areas where the axes of age and gender have intersected in the definition and creation of "the boy." A central question for me would be: Are age and gender the only or most important facets of identity to consider when discussing the "boy"? Surely other markers such as socio-economic class, ethnic identity and so on affect what it has meant to be a "boy" at different times. If so, though, why in the historical study of boyhood have these aspects been relatively neglected?

**PAULINE FARLEY (UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA)**

The notion of "boyhood" seems far from unproblematic. What, after all, is a "boy"? It's not mere biology, although identity is constructed partially around biology. However, with alterations in the approach to sex-change operations, it seems that even biology is now problematic. We've recently had a couple of cases in Australia that have given rise to controversy. Boundaries which seemed acceptable years ago seem now to be shifting with increased information about human psychology. It's a fair question as to when this information can be used as reliable knowledge, given the complexity of the relationship of the individual psyche with the individual physical human. I'm not surprised to find that the nature of "boyhood" itself is emerging as a central question. On a personal (but somewhat unhelpful) note, I have five adult sons and no daughters, and I find that the longer I've known my sons, the less I seem really to know about them!

**STEPHEN T. GRAEF (UNIVERSITY OF AKRON)**

Ah, boyhood!! What an interesting concept! My curiosity got the better of me and I looked up "boyhood" on dictionary.com. The definition, not too surprisingly, is "the state or period of being a boy." What is suggested by this definition is that being a boy will pass eventually and that this is a transition "state" or "period" that occurs prior to manhood. This definition certainly makes sense in a lot of ways. In boyhood you don't have to be concerned with graduate degrees, mortgages, balancing checkbooks, keeping gas in your car, and so on, so in these ways boyhood is very different from, say, manhood. However, when we look deep into boyhood and what society, at least in the United States, says about boyhood, we could easily replace boyhood with the synonym mini-manhood. In the study by my colleagues and I in *Thyrios*, we found that adolescent boys endorsed gender roles that are consistent with that of adult men (that is,
Avoidance of Femininity, Self-Reliance, Aggression, Achievement/Status, and Restrictive Emotionality. Theory and research have all pointed to very specific gender roles and ideals that are expected of men in this society. These are driven into our heads our entire lives and reinforced and punished accordingly based on our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Thus, how can we differentiate between boyhood and manhood if the matters by which these two terms are made of are so strikingly similar? From a social perspective, the ideals of being a boy and man are the same, but in a miniature version. For boys, anti-femininity is getting a cootie-shot; for men, not watching Sex and the City. For boys, emotion restrictiveness is being encouraged not to cry after scraping a knee; for men, not attending counseling for depression. For boys, aggression is rumbling and tumbling on recess; for men it's a possible bar fight. For boys, achievement is getting to be student of the month; for men a promotion. Thus, we can easily see the parallel between boyhood and manhood and the manifestation of gender roles during these times. Although the concrete examples may be different, the underlying processes are the same. One major difference is that the responsibilities are less in boyhood, hence why boyhood could be considered mini-manhood. Boyhood possesses the ingredients of manhood without all the work. It is mini. Although similar messages are passed onto boys and men in United States society, there is a huge difference between the independence and authentic glee of being a boy and the adult pressures of being a man. The authenticity, imagination, and creativity that we possess as children certainly gets drained as we enter in adulthood, and instead of occurring naturally and frequently, it needs to be fostered and manifested in adult life. In other words, it requires more effort. Being an adult is not without its independence. In fact, one nice characteristic of being an adult is the capacity for higher order abstract reasoning. Adults have the ability to question that which is imposed on them. For instance, as I grow older I can choose the societal messages about being a man or a professional, or anything for that matter that I want to adhere to. As a child, it seemed as though I had less choice because of my own naiveness. Instead I progressed through life embracing my masculinity and privilege without question. As I have grown older, I have realized that I have a choice over who I want to be as a man and how much I hold on to traditional roles associated with manhood, yet have to work harder to achieve the childish spark from my youth. I once heard that everything you need to know you learned in kindergarten. I think this holds true for the boyhood/mini-manhood vs. manhood distinction. In kindergarten you begin receiving messages about how you should act, think and feel, while simultaneously experiencing some of your most authentic and creative moments. Thus, although you are unable to question the messages you are receiving you are able to truly be yourself in that moment. As we get older we gain the ability to question what we are instructed, but are less able to be as authentic as we once were as a child. It is with this that I encourage us all to embrace our mini-manhood. Embrace being authentic and true to ourselves as men, while also being able to question that which is expected from us.
Ah, boyhood! The term invokes a genre question, and does so with a marked insistence on historicity. It seems to beckon the reader in terms of a biographic intimacy (Tolstoy, Coetzee, Charles C. Hughes, Charles Alexander Eastman, to speak from the anthropological shelves) that proves—however inviting—lost to the larger part of the social sciences. It also seems to speak from a bygone age of parochial boyologist psychology whose parlance conveyed a poetic sensibility that cared enough to locate "the" boy in terms of *weemoed en verwachting* [melancholy and expectancy]—I am looking at a 1955 Dutch book called *De Jongen [The Boy]*, written by Nijmegen University professor Petrus Calon. Its dust cover features a portrait of "the" boy, repeated on a glossy insert (following p. 96) with the caption "Laat mij worden! [Let me become]!"," followed on the next page by "the" boy seen "Wegdromen ... [Daydreaming ...]" on a pile of wood logs, shown against an urban background of workers, steel and trams. Industry versus Inferiority. I cannot but help comparing it to the cover of Michael Gurian's *The Mind of Boys* (2005), which is trying hard to be inclusive of all the chromatic distinctions we intersectionalists now embrace, even if our boyology would now have to be motivated by "neuro-biological research on how boys' brains actually work" (Gurian's blurb) and dropout percentages. We can't judge by covers. But we may acknowledge some remnant of *weemoed en verwachting*.

**Amanda Keddie (Griffith University, Brisbane)**

As a feminist researcher interested in issues of gender justice and schooling, I have tended to draw on post-structural conceptions of identity in theorizing boys and boyhood. Rejecting understandings of identity as a stable, unified and coherent essence, post-structuralists conceptualize identity as being constantly achieved through real and imagined relations with others. Identity is seen as actively taken up through social processes or discourses that, while multi-faceted, dynamic and contextual, bound and delimit what is possible. In their regulation of identity, discourses are thus positioned as inescapably political in their privileging of some ways of being and not others. These understandings of identity have been politically generative for me as a feminist researcher because they allow a problematizing of the value-laden gender "truths" that promote inequity. Such truths are exposed as social fabrications, rather than seen as inevitabilities of being born male or female. They are therefore amenable to change through reconstruction and the use of alternative language and discursive processes. In my work in schools, these understandings have framed my critical examination of (1) the inequitable structures and practices that produce restrictive discourses of masculinity and femininity, (2) my analysis of how such discourses position boys and girls as gendered beings, and (3) my attempts to make visible the ways in which these discourses are resisted and disrupted to reflect more equitable gender identities. Making visible the social production that goes into doing boy or girl, that is, highlighting the
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complex, dynamic and often contestatory ways masculinities and femininities are spoken into existence, exposes taken-for-granted ways of seeing and enables oppressive identities to be re-imagined. Theorizing along these lines, for me, is central to how I define the terms boy and boyhood within my broader gender justice agenda.

BERTHA MOOK (UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA)

You are raising very interesting questions. I would think that the terms boy and boyhood are valid and significant, but only in contrast to girl and girlhood and in the wider context of child and childhood. In some cultures, the distinctions between boys and girls are stark and clear, as in most African countries and also in the Muslim world. In the postmodern West, the boundaries have been blurred and the distinctions are less clear. For example, in the 19th century, the distinction between boys and girls was sharp and clear. Today, many gender studies tend to be frowned upon and one is very careful to claim that boys or girls have differential abilities or are better at some subjects than others. Sex differences tend to be attributed to social and cultural factors. Personally I think that this topic should be seen in a historical and social cultural perspective—in a metabetic sense, if you want. Despite differences in cultures, I think the distinction remains valid and important. Boys can never be girls and *vice versa*. Men are different from women and will always be. The sexes are complementary and this complementarity is most obvious in our physiques. The minds of boys and girls are also distinct: they think and feel differently and they relate to others in different ways. The “unisex” movement of the seventies and eighties has made its point but later research, as far as I know, has again affirmed the distinctiveness between the sexes.

PETER REDMAN (THE OPEN UNIVERSITY, UK)

It seems to me that, in common with wider conceptual developments across the critical cultural and human sciences, the way in which we understand boyhood may be entering an interesting moment of transition. On the one hand, there are signs, at least in some quarters, that the emphasis on processes of cultural inscription that characterized much “social constructionist” work on boyhood in the 1990s and the early years of the current decade is now opening up to embrace bodies and non-human objects. This is less a return to essentialism or base-superstructure models than an attempt to think about the ways in which “doing boy” necessarily involves a specific and contingent ensemble of mutually constitutive registers (social, technical, physiological and so on). In parallel with this, and perhaps because of it, there also seems to be a growing willingness to look beyond some of the conceptual devices through which, in recent years, we’ve come to think about boyhood (for example, notions of a heterosexual matrix). This does not indicate an outright rejection of these concepts, rather a concern that our familiarity with them may sometimes get in the way of seeing how particular boy-
hoods are made and lived in particular contexts. With these points in mind, asked how I conceptualize the terms “boy” and “boyhood,” I would be inclined to answer “cautiously.” This is because we seem to be at a moment when it is more important to ask ourselves “How is boyhood ‘done’ in this moment and context and what does this mean?” than it is to ask, “Why is it ‘done’ this way?” This is not to deny the importance of “why” questions, but merely to suggest that, before asking them, at least some of our taken-for-granted ways of answering such questions may need rethinking.

MARIA ELENA REYES (THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PAN AMERICAN)

What an interesting question! I can see the political overtones of the term when considering the racial history in the United States. I also see how the term is used in the gay community where the loss of “boyhood” brings on the drudgery and responsibilities of manhood when all magic is lost, never to be regained. The term does denote a “less than” kind of connotation that is by its nature negative. The whole idea of manhood and masculinity is one that I used to discuss with my Mexican-American students as we reviewed works of literature such as Beowulf and Macbeth. They were all interested in defining “what is a man?” This was important since the idea of machismo was only portrayed in negative terms by the popular culture as if there was no honor in manliness. I find myself discussing this topic with my female colleagues as masculinity itself appears to be such an elusive yet desirable quality in the “men” we see.
Colloquium:
The Status of Boyhood Studies

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GARY ALAN FINE
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EDITOR'S NOTE

The following are responses to a request to the members of our editorial board and contributors to *Thymos* on the theme of the status of boyhood studies. The twelve contributions take quite different perspectives on the topic. They raise very different questions and present distinctive interests. All have trained their scholarly eye on what boyhood studies means today. Each points to an area of scholarly work that demands the attention of those of us interested in boyhood and the lives of boyhood—as we determine just what these notions mean. Suggestions for further reading offered by the contributors are given at the end (p. 147).

THE MISSING DISCOURSE ON BOYS' DEVELOPMENT
JUDY Y. CHU (STANFORD UNIVERSITY)

Recent research on boys' development has positioned us to see boys in a new way, namely by pushing us to question our assumptions about what boys are like and to broaden our expectations regarding how it is possible for boys to be. For instance, we have learned how boys, as active participants in their learning and development, can mediate the effects of their gender socialization. Rather than being passive recipients...
of boyhood culture, individual boys can influence their developmental outcomes through the ways they make meaning of cultural messages about masculinity and respond to societal pressures to conform. We also know that boys are born with a fundamental capacity and primary desire for close relationships that are evident during early childhood and carry forth through adolescence, even though boys' relational capabilities may become more difficult to detect over time.

Nevertheless, we must actively resist the pull towards more familiar and conventional norms of masculinity. If our goal is to support boys' healthy development in ways that are relevant to boys' lives, it is important that we continually strive to move beyond stereotypes and to understand what it is like for boys to grow up male in today's society. Although certain themes in boys' development have remained constant, such as the need in most cultures for boys to prove their masculinity, the specific issues and challenges that boys encounter nowadays often differ from what they were decades or even a few years ago. We must therefore make a conscientious effort to update our understanding of what boys are going through and what they feel they are up against.

Likewise, as we seek in our research to inform developmental models that reflect a range of boys' experiences, it is important that we consider and account for group and individual differences among boys. Although necessary, it is not sufficient simply to include diverse groups in our research samples. There is the risk of evaluating participants from diverse backgrounds according to models based on the dominant culture. In order to truly appreciate, represent, and learn from the diversity of human experiences, we must work to incorporate diverse perspectives during the process of theory-building and not just as an afterthought during theory-testing.

To a large extent, discourse about gender (along with race and ethnicity) is often reduced to categorical comparisons (for example, who is better or worse off, the strengths and weaknesses of each group). Seldom considered are ways in which gender as a culturally-specific lens through which individuals perceive and are perceived by others (Bern, 1993) can enhance or limit a person's possibilities for self-expression and interpersonal engagement. Moreover, there has been a tendency in the literature on boys' development to talk about boys as one monolithic, unified group. Further research is needed to explore how gender (particularly as it intersects with race and ethnicity) can influence the ways in which boys see themselves, interact with others, and navigate their social and cultural contexts.

It could be argued that more research on boys is unnecessary, given that the vast majority of past research was conducted almost exclusively on all-male samples. Past studies of human development and psychology clearly missed girls' experiences by neglecting to include females in their samples. However, despite their focus on boys, past studies may also have missed certain aspects of and variations in boys' experiences by neglecting to focus on boys' perspectives and to contextualize boys' development. Thus, whereas girls have been under-represented in developmental and psychological theory, boys may have been in some ways misrepresented.

Over two decades ago, feminist researchers responding to the absence of girls from the academic discourse began to study girls. What distinguished this work was that, rather than simply adding girls to existing theories that were based on boys' experi-
ences, feminist researchers developed methods of psychological inquiry to learn about girls’ experiences in their own words and on their own terms. Through studying girls in this way, feminist researchers revealed aspects of girls’ development that had not been represented in the literature. Most notably, this research showed how societal pressures to accommodate to feminine norms of behavior could hinder girls’ relationships and healthy development, for instance by constraining girls’ ability to voice a full range of thoughts, feelings, and desires (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). This work also emphasized girls’ healthy resistance against the imposition of gendered expectations that undermine their self-knowledge and jeopardize their ability to engage authentically in relationships (Gilligan, 1990).

These studies of girls raised questions about whether pressures to accommodate to masculine norms of behavior might similarly be detrimental to boys’ relationships and psychological well being, despite certain social advantages of being male and acting masculine in our society. Subsequently, feminist researchers adapted voice-centered research methods to learn about boys’ experiences of gender socialization from boys’ perspectives (Chu, 2004). Together with the research on girls, these studies of boys highlighted the centrality of relationships in boys’ and girls’ lives and called into question the emphasis on individuation and separation in the name of maturity and, for boys, masculinity. Nevertheless, we have only begun to explore boys’ relational development, including what boys are capable of knowing and doing in their relationships and how their particular social and cultural contexts contribute to the diversity of their experiences.

As we understand that childhood experiences serve as a foundation for adolescent development and adult life, we can appreciate the importance of studying boys’ experiences of boyhood and how these experiences may impact their emerging identities (for example, who they are) and expanding relationships (for example, where they fit in, how they get along). As we acknowledge the differences that can exist across and within groups of boys, we see that there is much more to learn about the ways in which multiple aspects of identity combine with gender to shape boys’ perceptions of how it is possible for them to be with others and in the world. Conversely, when we talk about boys without considering their perspectives, accounting for their individual agency, and contextualizing their experiences within their relationships and social and cultural realities, we do boys a disservice and we risk missing boys, again.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO BOYS’ VOICES IN RESEARCH
MURRAY DRUMMOND (UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA)

I remember growing up in era when, according to my grandparents “children should be seen and not heard.” Fortunately our society has relaxed those notions somewhat. However, there are many situations in which children’s voices should be heard to understand the complexities of children’s lives and the issues they confront during their formative years. Much of the argument about attending to children’s voices has been grounded in methodological concerns pertaining to accurately recording and
analysing children's perspectives. Indeed, a recent research grant application of mine was unsuccessful as the reviewers suggested that it is impossible to attain worthwhile data from five year-old children without the presence of an adult. There has been a misguided conception that children, particularly very young children, cannot provide worthwhile meaningful data. I find this both alarming and disturbing given that children's perspectives are seemingly disregarded and not worthy of being heard. I have published several papers using 5-6 year-old children's qualitative interview data. Children can, and do, have a voice.

While masculinities has been an emerging area of research over the past decade, empirical qualitative research on boyhood masculinities has been limited. Indeed much of the research has been about boys rather than with boys. The need to hear the voices of boys across a range of ages and perspectives is now upon us. I have just embarked upon an eight-year longitudinal research project with boys aged between 5-6 years of age. The boys have been interviewed in focus group settings of three in which they were invited to discuss issues relating to health, sport, physical activity and education. These topics were used as a means to discuss broader aspects of boys' lives and constructions of masculinities in early childhood. One of the ways in which discussion was prompted was to have the boys draw on paper specific things that related to sport, physical activity and health. Having the opportunity to draw while being interviewed simultaneously provided the boys with a "tangible" talking point. They were able to reflect upon and interpret their drawings while I was discussing issues that were then further developed by others in the focus group setting. Thirty-three boys are involved in the study. They will be interviewed each year for eight years (their primary school years). The importance of this research project is that it is entirely fluid. That is, as the boys change so to will the types of questions and the level of their complexity. The following year's questions will be based upon the themes which were generated through inductive analysis the year prior.

I watch my six-year-old son as he develops and takes on attitudes and behaviours that are both similar and dissimilar to mine as I was growing up. We exist in a culture that now offers a multitude of variables that are different to those that I experienced as a child. We cannot assume that we know or understand these complexities in the lives of contemporary boy's unless we talk with them and listen to what they have to say. Since I was a child growing up the 1970s, the disintegration of the traditional nuclear family has taken place. Typically the family then existed around a framework of traditional masculine ideologies in which the father was the breadwinner and the mother was the homemaker. This has changed. We existed in a culture where computers were scenes in science fiction movies and the television was a novelty only to be touched by an adult. Even at 7-8 years of age the expectations of our parents were based on a simple philosophy, that "wherever you go, be home before dark." Contemporary boys certainly grow up in an environment in stark contrast to this. For many of us now, as parents, we never let our children out of sight. We do not know the implications of this upon a boy's sense of adventure and subsequent construction of masculine identity.

As academics the research we do with boys should be just that—with them rather than about them or "on" them. Understanding the lived experiences of boys as they de-
velop from early childhood and beyond will be the next crucial stage in understanding the way in which masculinities are constructed. While we recognise that masculinities are socially constructed from birth, it is imperative that we develop an understanding of the meaning of masculinities in the lives of boys from their earliest years. Developing methodologies to achieve this will be crucial in moving this forward.

**COMMENTS ON THE STATUS OF BOYHOOD STUDIES**

**PETER REDMAN (THE OPEN UNIVERSITY, UK)**

As I read, my thoughts immediately turned to a recent article by Haywood (2008). The article in question is a critique of what the author identifies as the current orthodoxy in work on schooling, gender and sexuality. Indeed, it is critical of some of my own work on boys and young men, and even previous work by Haywood himself (Haywood, 1996; Redman et al., 2002). I’m sure Chris will forgive me if I say that I don’t agree with all of the interpretations he makes nor with all the conclusions he draws in this article. Nevertheless, it strikes me as making a number of important points and, since these seem to have wider relevance for boyhood studies and for our understanding of boyhood itself, in what follows I want to spend some time thinking about them.

Haywood’s main argument, as I read it, concerns the need for vigilance in relation to our taken-for-granted assumptions. As he suggests, in time, yesterday’s new insights are likely to become today’s stale orthodoxies, ones that, needless to say, may inhibit our capacity for creative engagement with our objects of study. Haywood’s contention is that much of the work on gender, sexuality and schooling— including work on boys and young men— has reached an impasse of precisely this kind. To my mind, he makes two particularly telling points in support of this argument. The first concerns a tendency to over-read the cultural worlds boys and young men inhabit through a particular set of theoretical preoccupations, broadly derived from post-structuralism and the wider “discursive turn” of the 1990s. The second, not unrelated point, concerns a tendency to ignore important aspects of the processes by which gender and sexuality are constituted.

Pre-eminent among the theoretical concerns Haywood identifies as preoccupying current work are the critique of desire as something that denotes a particular psychological “type” (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual) which Haywood refers to as “sex-desire” (Haywood, 2008, pp. 2-3), and linked to this, Butler’s (1990) notion of the “heterosexual matrix,” the concept that, within current formations of gender and sexuality, to be “properly” or “successfully” masculine or feminine is necessarily to be heterosexual. To be clear about this, Haywood is not suggesting that we reject these concepts. Rather, his point is that their ubiquity is now such that we risk not being able to see beyond them. Citing some of his own more recent research he suggests that, particularly for younger boys and those in early adolescence, the meanings and practices of heterosexuality may have only limited relevance. Not only were the boys more likely to orientate themselves to such things as “knowledge about cars ... the ability to use
computers and understanding of wrestling,” they also “appeared to take up homoerotic discourses” which, even if done “in a mode of institutional resistance ... or humorous performance,” nevertheless suggested that “proper” masculinity was not always strongly linked to conventional heterosexuality in this particular cultural site (Haywood, 2006). The main conclusion Haywood draws from these findings, is the need to pay careful attention to the precise means through which “boy-ness” is constituted for different individuals in different contexts and at different times. Only by re-prioritising such “how” questions, he implies, are we likely to be able to say with any confidence that we have not reduced the fluidity and range of the social world—including that of the erotic—to the limits of our own conceptual apparatus.

The second major criticism that Haywood makes of current work—is its tendency to ignore important aspects of the processes by which gender and sexuality are constituted—is perhaps even more significant. Haywood argues that current work on gender, sexuality and schooling (including my own) frequently deploys “a methodology that relies upon the centrality of the body” (Haywood, 2008, p. 5). At first glance this claim may seem questionable, since much of the work cited views gender and sexuality as being made and remade in talk and interaction, whether this is understood in terms of “performativity,” sub-cultural practices or something closer to symbolic interactionism. Indeed, this focus means that, in such work, bodies as bodies are frequently notable by their absence. However, what I understand Haywood to mean is that work of this kind tends to ignore the ways in which gender and sexuality can be viewed as emerging within (or as being “assembled by”) socio-technical arrangements that include but extend decisively beyond the boundaries of the human body. At least, this seems to be the implication of his discussion of work on sexuality in early modern Italian convents in which, if I’ve read Haywood’s account correctly, sexuality is seen as a property of the convents’ architectural arrangements (Haywood, 2008, pp. 7-8). From this perspective, talk and interaction can be viewed as only one dimension of—or register in—a wider ensemble or complex in which social practices, bodies and things exist in relations of mutual constitution, each being present in the other.

Needless to say, Haywood’s arguments echo wider developments across the social and human sciences. For instance, his emphasis on the need to return to “how” questions (“How is ‘boy-ness’ constituted in particular times and places?”) bears at least some resemblance to the “pragmatic” sociology of Hennion (2001). Equally, his emphasis on those aspects of social worlds that extend beyond the boundaries of the human body seem to point, as well as towards Hennion, to actor-network theory and science and technology studies (Latour, 2004). Indeed, developments of this kind have recently been heralded as marking a fundamental shift in intellectual debate, one whose magnitude is equivalent to that of earlier linguistic and discursive turns (Blackman et al., 2008). Whether or not this is the case, there would seem to be some merit in taking Haywood’s points seriously. Needless to say, this does not mean they should be adopted uncritically. For instance, many of the psychoanalytic arguments in which I am myself interested, seem as likely to be in tension with these points as they are with post-structuralism. Still less does it mean that we should simply abandon lessons learned from
existing approaches. However, it could well be that our thinking about boyhood will be enhanced by an engagement—critical or otherwise—with the sorts of position that Haywood is advocating.

THE STATUS OF BOYHOOD STUDIES

THE BOY IN THE (PUBLIC) SPHERE
GARY ALAN FINE (NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY)

To gaze forward demands glancing back. My research on the lifeworlds of preadolescent boys began somewhat haphazardly during in the mid-1970. When I began my research on Little League baseball teams (Fine, 1987), my primary motive was to uncover how small groups of all kinds, of all ages generate meaningful local cultures. I had no particular interest in children, although no distaste for their worlds either. As a social psychologist I was operating out of the group dynamics tradition, under the direction of my mentor Robert Freed Bales in the Department of Psychology and Social Relations at Harvard University. I had recently received my undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania, where I had studied with sociologist Erving Goffman, who emphasized the importance of fieldwork (what we today easily label ethnography). Through the rigors of engaged observation, Goffman believed that social scientists needed to understand how interaction rituals developed.

My intention was to select a social domain (any domain, in truth) in which members of a group were generating traditions and rituals that were simultaneously instrumental (task-oriented) and expressive (socio-emotional) to which group members could and would reference in the course of their ongoing relations. Further, as a pragmatic matter, I needed to find groups in situ whose gatherings were bounded in time and space. Many groups continue for lengthy periods or operate within private spaces not easily available for the ethnographer. Given temporal demands related to my dissertation research (an experimental laboratory study that was to be run in the summer), I hoped to conduct fieldwork in the spring. Although the moment of inspiration is now shrouded in the mist of mystery and haze of memory, the beginnings of major league spring training sparked the idea.

As I entered the field (the baseball field, that is), I became reassured that the study of boys did not require that I limit myself to the themes of this age group, but that youth sports teams could serve as an entry point into group dynamics generally. One feature of “boy culture” involves an emphasis on a “boy community.” It is often suggested that the social network of boys is extensive, based on acquaintances and networks, while that of girls is intensive. This claim is now several decades old, and it is possible that the reworking of gender roles has occurred at such a pace that the distinction no longer holds. However, the recognition that preadolescent and adolescent culture can involve extensive, social relations suggests that children potentially create a public, an extension of the establishment of a youth subculture.

This recognition suggests that in a specialized way we can conceptualize boys as constituting a particular sort of civil society. Much research has indicated that boys have shared interests that stem from their social position and reveal a strong linkage to
mass culture and consumption. In their decision-making they begin to model democratic processes. To suggest that boys establish a civil society (a normative space for discussion of issues of mutual, public concern) is not the same as to suggest that they reveal a deliberative politics in a narrow sense. However, in a broader sense they provide a network with shared values and with a shared recognition of trust.

During my research on Little League baseball (and subsequently with older children while observing fantasy games, high school debate, and scholastic chess), I became aware of the activation of common perspectives on both substantive issues and also of processes of deliberation. The group cultures that I began studying over thirty years ago have their idiosyncratic appeal to be sure, but they also are situated in particular corners of society and express recognizable perspectives on how social relations should be structured and resources distributed.

Pre-adolescent boys (and their adolescent friends) have access to spaces where they can gather and evaluate topics of collective interest. To define politics broadly as the consideration of social order, the discussions of boys (and girls, as well) are political. In their assessments of family, gender, finances, media, school, and religion, boys may express strongly held and vigorously argued beliefs. These claims are shared in spaces that are colonized by them, set apart so that often those who stand outside the boundary of the group are not permitted access to it.

It is not so much that Little League baseball (or any other pre-adolescent activity) constitutes a public sphere, but through gathering boys together in pursuit of sociality it makes available the possibilities of these spaces. Boys are not simply friends, but constitute a community of interest that has effects at the time and then continues to reverberate as they age together.

A challenge of the study of boyhood is to recognize that this domain is not simply limited to a particular developmental moment, but to appreciate that it is at boyhood that young males first gain the independence to recognize that they have the right to speak and to critique and to argue. Their friendship lives, however fragile and in transition, allow for a modicum of trust that encourages vibrant and pungent discussions. In the public sphere, boys evaluate those institutions to which they belong, voluntarily or because of the assignment of others. These cracking voices, a cacophonous chorus, make the study of boyhood an opening to the politics of civil society.

THE STATUS OF BOYHOOD AND BOYHOOD STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA
ROBERT MORRELL (UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL)

When I was invited to write a short review of the status of boyhood studies I immediately went to a large bibliographical file that I’ve been developing over fifteen years on men and masculinity in South Africa. I initiated a search for the word “boyhood” and, to my astonishment, came up with no hits. How to make sense of this absence?

The study of men and masculinity in South Africa has been dominated by a number of themes. The gendered nature of violence has possibly enjoyed most attention and focused the unerring beam of enquiry onto the violent doings and beings of men.
THE STATUS OF BOYHOOD STUDIES

No investigation of violence in South Africa can ignore the racialised effects of colonialism and apartheid. The primary challenge in examining violence in South Africa from a gendered perspective therefore is to avoid pathologizing and linking one race group or identity to acts of violence. It is the danger of so doing that partly explains the absence of "boyhood" from the lexicon of gender work on males in South Africa. Under colonialism, African adult men were often called "boys," a demeaning, infantilizing term that negated their maturity and destined them to subordinate positions in the raced and gendered social hierarchy. To talk of boyhood, therefore, was to run the risk of unwittingly entering a hornet’s nest.

Another reason why boyhood may not have enjoyed research attention is that the term does not fit easily into the anthropology of South Africa. Drawing on Ariès’s analysis of childhood as a specific phase of life created or invented in seventeenth-century Europe, boyhood is now generally understood as a socially constructed phase of life, the gendered complement of girlhood, and a component of childhood. Childhood, or boyhood, understood in this way, involves a particular period when one is socially not considered to be an adult and during this time certain activities are appropriate, including play, while certain other activities are not considered appropriate, including paid labour. In South Africa, the trajectories to maturity for boys have always been strongly divided and differentiated by race. As Burman and Reynolds (1986) note, children in South Africa have historically grown up in a divided society.

The historical record shows that African boys in the precolonial period were allocated a role in society that featured play as an important element but that, at a relatively early age, were expected to take on serious responsibilities, most notably looking after livestock. All the same, they enjoyed no adult privileges as compensation. They were subordinate to adults which freed them from many other responsibilities and permitted them to engage in a variety of games including sexual (non-coital) play. While many anthropological texts attest to African trajectories into adulthood perhaps one of the most observant is Hunter’s classic Reaction to Conquest (1936), in which she shows how understandings of childhood changed amongst the Mpondo as migrant labour and contact with the market began to change the region’s political economy. She underscores the point that boyhood is indeed a constructed concept and that its content is sensitive to changing social conditions. In the case of boys, a major endpoint to boyhood historically had been getting married. This involved paying bridewealth (lobola), setting up a homestead and having children. The ability to achieve the status of an adult man was and continues to be steadily eroded by limited work opportunities. Not only has this reduced the marriage rate in South Africa, undermined the self-respect of African men, but it has also undermined the relationship between father and child (Hunter, 2006).

Among Africans, being a boy did not mean being asexual, but there were strict rules about the limits of sexual play and penetrative sex was not permitted. Boys were in fact encouraged to experiment and flirt. In some cases this occurred at home and involved the educative participation of female family members (Shire, 1994), but increasingly as schooling became a part of the lives of African children it was in these contexts that sexuality was formed. As Simpson (2007) has shown, in the Zambian
context the form that sexual learning took and the way it was woven into constructions of masculinity were often not healthy and subsequently have fueled the HIV pandemic. Being sexually mature is not synonymous with being a man or of not being a boy.

The estate of manhood was (and is) much prized and the route into this estate as well as the portal which signified entrance were (and are) contested (Lindsay & Miescher, 2003). In African societies in which indigenous institutions such as circumcision schools are preserved, there remain ritual means of entering manhood. Circumcision is for many Black South Africans an important rite of passage that marks the arrival of manhood. The process is controlled by elders and historically this control was a means to secure generational hierarchies and the power of elders over juniors.

In recent times, the control of elders has been loosened by the privatization of tradition and younger males have been able to circumvent this control by enrolling themselves at a young age in circumcision schools. Circumcision schools now admit, for payment, very young boys who after the circumcision proudly claim to be men and arrogate to themselves the rights that men are supposed to have; namely, unfettered sexual access to women (Vincent, 2008). Here boys have become men before their time.

For a great many African, Black, working class boys, however, the rite of passage offered by circumcision is not available. For these boys, often living in sprawling urban environments, other institutions provide initiation. Gangs are possibly one of the best known institutions which give boys an institutional home and an identity (Glaser, 2000). Unfortunately the rite of passage is often crime and violence (Cooper & Foster, 2008) and ultimately opens the door to a life in prison rather than to the patriarchal dividend.

For many African and Black boys in South Africa, boyhood is haunted by the prospect of failing to achieve the elusive status of manhood and thus to leave the days of being a boy behind. In a Namibian study, Becker (2005) shows how this condition afflicts young men there. She writes:

None of the young men regarded himself as already a ‘man’. The general idea was conveyed that none of them had reached adulthood yet. The high school students invariably described themselves as ‘boys’, whereas the older informants, some being as old as 27, referred to themselves as ‘guys,’ or ouens in Afrikaans. (p. 28)

In a South African study in Durban, the desire for the status of being a man was also wistfully captured by a group of secondary school boys who longed to be fathers and heads of households but realized that achieving this dream was difficult in a context of poverty and limited job opportunities (Morrell, 2007).

Among White boys, boyhood has historically meant something quite different to the situation described above for African boys. There were major ethnic and class differences in the experience of boyhood, however. The boy children of English-speaking settlers, for example, could expect to enter school, play sport, learn for a life of work (as owners of farms or as professionals and businessmen) and then exit school with the prospect of adulthood, marriage and a family home (Morrell, 2001). One shouldn’t ro-
manticize this trajectory (schools could be vicious and cruel places), but there was and is little of the uncertainty around the status of manhood that so afflicts young African males.

For many White boys, the experience of school dominated (and still dominates) boyhood understood as a phase of life. Until recently, most boys could expect to be beaten at school and at home. Among Afrikaans speakers, beatings went together with a puritan and strict outlook on the world which both fed into and off the Afrikaner nationalism that entrenched apartheid from the 1950s to 1990 (le Roux, 1986). This approach to upbringing was intended as training for responsible manhood and thus rested upon a particular understanding of what an adult man should be and do. In the recent South African past this involved all young South African men in compulsory military training. And this, as much as any other process or factor, was the rite of passage into manhood. In the army, navy or air force, young males were converted into particular versions of young men. Patriotism was drummed into them along with particular gendered prescriptions for a gender order that rested on the subordination of women and legislated homophobia (Conway, 2008). A host of books are now emerging that begin to make sense of this abrupt and often traumatic ending to boyhood for generation of white boys (Andrews, 2001; Thompson, 2006).

With the ending of apartheid in 1994, a new period has dawned. Interpretations and prescriptions about masculinity are in a state of flux (Walker & Reid, 2005), and in time new understandings of boyhood and manhood will emerge which reflect the new society that South Africa is becoming.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF BOYS IN THE CONTEXT OF EQUITY AND SCHOOLING: BEYOND “POOR BOYS” AND “PROBLEM BOYS” DISCOURSES
AMANDA KEDDIE (GRIFFITH INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH)

In many Anglophone contexts, for example, Australia, the UK and the United States, the early to mid-1990s constituted a shift in gender equity and schooling debates from a focus on social justice to a construction of boys as the “new disadvantaged.” The media were particularly effective in mobilizing public concern around a “What about the boys?” backlash. Indeed, somewhat of a moral panic was generated around boys’ schooling performance through headlines that positioned boys as failing at school, as taking a “back seat” to girls, and as losing in the “gender wars.” Boys were positioned as lost, educationally disadvantaged, and in need of special attention. Often such constructions were associated with schools and teachers failing boys. This was attributed to overly feminised education environments. The prevailing view was that feminist reform had gone too far in empowering girls, was now unfair to boys, and should be rectified in favor of boys (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Hayes, 2003; Kenway, Willis, Rennie & Blackmore, 1998). Broader masculinity-in-crisis discourses, while similarly sensationalized and partial, added legitimacy to these claims. Arising from young men’s cultural and economic displacement with the global demise of manufacturing industries and the increasing feminization of labor, males were constructed as the
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weaker sex, losing out in both the labor market and in their private lives (Connell, 2002; Nayak & Kehily, 2008).

The “boy turn” in gender equity and schooling debates (Weaver-Hightower, 2003) was also a product of a reshaping of education agendas guided by global sociopolitical trends towards economic rationalism. Neo-liberal imperatives of efficiency, economy and competition produced a greater emphasis on education on standards rather than social justice objectives (Francis & Skelton, 2005). Such imperatives re-articulated equity priorities in schools to emphasize academic outcomes especially in the area of literacy, where boys have traditionally underperformed relative to girls (Lingard, 2003). Indeed, according to Taylor and Henry (2000), literacy skills came to be seen as a panacea in policy addressing issues of academic and social disadvantage. In this climate, with simplistic comparisons of girls outperforming boys on a narrow range of performance indicators, peformativity became a catalyst for a “What about the boys?” backlash (Cox, 1995; Epstein, Elwood, Hey & Maws, 1998; Francis & Skelton). Fuelled by rising anti-feminist sentiment, this backlash enabled a positioning of boys as an educationally disadvantaged group (Hayes, 2003; Lingard).

Constructions of boys as the “new disadvantaged” in education have been strongly condemned by those concerned with gender justice, particularly in their tendency to utilize the inequities experienced by some males to make a case that all males are disadvantaged (Mills, Martino & Lingard, 2009). Along these lines, such constructions are criticized about their distortion of equity issues and their tendency to deflect attention away from issues of genuine disadvantage (Francis & Skelton, 2005). The simplistic gender comparisons that undergird such constructions fail to recognize the ways in which class, race and ethnicity intersect to compound educational disadvantage for both boys and girls (Collins, Kenway & McLeod, 2000; Connolly, 2004; Lingard, Martino, Mills & Bahr, 2002). As Connolly argues, the gender gap in achievement “tends to be dwarfed by the much more considerable effects of social class and ethnicity” (p. 208). Simplistic comparisons also ignore the complex patterns of gender and disadvantage that have an impact on boys and girls in different ways. For example, while boys’ under-achievement in literacy is an international concern and certainly restricts their schooling and post-school success, boys still tend to enjoy greater access to and participation in full-time employment and further training relative to girls, this despite girls’ higher school performance and retention rates (Collins, et al. 2000; Francis & Skelton). Boys as a group, relative to girls, also enjoy greater access to positions of power and socio-economic security beyond school. As they have tended to ignore these nuances and circumscribe school priorities to focus on a narrow range of academic indicators, simplistic comparisons have sidelined schools’ emphases on social outcomes (Mahony, 1998).

Notwithstanding these issues, boys’ under-performance came to be constructed from the mid 1990s in the media, popular literature and educational policy within three dominant discourses: “poor boys,” “failing schools, failing boys,” and “boys will be boys” (Epstein, Elwood, Hey & Maw, 1998; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). The “poor boys” discourse tended to attribute blame for boys’ supposed under-achievement to exces-
sively feminized teaching environments that were seen as favoring girls, while the "failing schools, failing boys" discourse tended to assign blame to overly managerial and outcomes-focused school curricula. Within the "boys will be boys" discourse, boys' under-performance, particularly their antipathy towards school or their "laddish" behaviors, were understood along predetermined lines as natural and fixed elements of their biology. Such discourses have been strongly criticized in their construction of boys as victims of schools and feminist progress, in their promotion of conventional manifestations of "boyness," and in their abdication of responsibility for boys' behavior away from boys (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Lingard et al., 2002; Martino & Pallotta-Chiariolli, 2003, 2005). In this respect, all three discourses promoted a view of boys' under-performance "as something extrinsic to them, for example, the fault of poor teaching [or] an uninteresting or 'feminised' curriculum" (Francis & Skelton, p. 47).

These essentializing discourses, according to Francis (2006; see also Francis & Skelton, 2005), while still evident in schooling policy and practice, have shifted in recent times. Increasingly managerialist and standards-oriented cultures in schools have generated two new discourses: the "problem boy" discourse—which constructs boys as suffering from social exclusion and low self-esteem—and the "at-risk boy"—whose behavior is medicalized and individualized as "phobias," "syndromes" and "disorders." Such discourses, Francis and Skelton (2005) argue, construct boys as both threats to, and victims of, society. Where the problem boy's antisocial or anti-school behaviors are constructed as a problem and a threat, the "at risk" boy is understood to be vulnerable and in need of support. Both discourses are seen to be tied to movements towards individualist neoliberalism within education policy and the blame for boys' underachievement, unlike the earlier constructions of boys, tends to be individualized. However, while the "at risk" discourses tend to position boys sympathetically as victims in need of help, the "problem boy" tends to be demonized in public and policy discourse (Francis & Skelton).

These discourses have been highly influential in terms of shaping gender reform in schools. However, given the marked difference between the rhetoric and the reality of boys' underachievement, such reform has been problematic. As Connolly (2004) argues, the lack of attention to the complexities of gender equity and schooling achievement has led to the development of strategies based on a distorted understanding of boys' problems. For example, school reform stemming from constructions of boys as naturally "laddish" or victims of overly feminized classrooms within the "boys will be boys" or "poor boys" discourses includes increasing the number of single-sex classrooms for boys, making curriculum and teaching more "masculine," and increasing the number of male teachers in schools. These "boy-friendly" strategies, while effective in enhancing some boys' educational outcomes, have been counter-productive in terms of homogenizing all boys' interests and behaviors as similar, failing to acknowledge gender diversity, and reinforcing conventional constructions of gender based on difference and opposition. Needless to say, in their reflection of a recuperative masculinity politics, Mills, Martino and Lingard (2009) note that such strategies have not had a posi-
tive impact on the school experiences of many girls and marginalised boys (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Lingard et al., 2002). Gender reforms stemming from constructions of boys within the “at risk” or “problem boy” discourses are similarly problematic. In relation to the latter discourse, for example, assumptions of boys as threatening or dangerous have led to tighter surveillance and social control of boys in schools (Francis & Skelton). Such models of authority, however, as is well recognized, tend to further incite, rather than change, boys’ threatening behaviors (Lingard et al.; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, 2005).

A central concern with all of these discourses is the ways in which boys’ educational under-performance is dislocated from broader gendered power relations that continue to privilege “the masculine.” As those concerned with gender justice have argued for some time, the social construction of gender (and in particular boys’ investments in dominant constructions of masculinity) has a significant impact on their school (under)performance (Connolly, 2004; Francis & Skelton, 2005; Keddie & Mills, 2007; Lingard et al., 2002; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). As Connolly argues, boys’ educational under-performance, notwithstanding the intervening factors of class and ethnicity, can be attributed to how dominant constructions of masculinity are appropriated and reproduced in their lives. Moving beyond essentializing discourses that position boys as victims of schooling, their biology or society, requires challenging and reconstituting these dominant masculinities. Such an approach necessitates moving beyond restrictive discourses that attempt to construct boys as “knowable” and therefore predictable and controllable.

What is required is a critical theory of recognition (Fraser, 1997) that sees the “blind spots” and distortions in gender equity priorities created by essentializing discourses about boys and education. Such an approach necessitates a theorizing of gender identities as constructed through complex and contradictory social relations that are fluid, contingent and amenable to change. Against this backdrop, a problematizing and transforming of the gendered contexts, structures and discourses that contribute to boys’ and girls’ under-achievement can begin.

THE ORDINARINESS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY: A BRIEF
NELL KOROBOV (UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA)

Over the past few years, I’ve been curious about a trend that has crept into cultural view over the last decade or so with respect to the way young men’s identities self-consciously pivot between affiliating and disaffiliating with traditional masculine norms. Predominately heterosexual and white young men, and at increasingly younger ages, are becoming quite adept at knowing when and how to resist what is normatively expected of them, in terms of adherence to traditional masculine norms. I’ve become fascinated not with young men’s straightforward compliance with traditional masculinity norms (an area of research that has become passé at this point), but rather with their resistance and subversion of traditional masculine norms and expectations. Understanding the current socialization practices of masculinity requires, it seems, a close
and sensitive analysis of young men’s resistance—as piecemeal, ironic, and tongue-in-cheek as that resistance may be—to those canons of traditional masculine norms that have been thought to invariably constrain their identity development.

The theatre of masculinity currently (and will increasingly) requires an acute sensitivity to the dexterity and flexibility of gendered displays of identity. Working this way requires an up close ability to analyze young men’s identity performances on the fly, in real time. Critical gender research has begun to generally move in this direction. During the last decade, there has been, for instance, an increasing amount of theoretical and analytic attention to masculinity from a discursive orientation (Gough, 2001; Korobov, 2004, 2005, 2006; Korobov & Bamberg, 2004; Riley, 2003; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). In other words, research that appreciates particularity rather than broad generalities is emerging in an effort to forward the discipline at large. In seizing on rigorous analytic procedures for the close study of conversational interaction, discursive work is one of several up-close analytic lenses that have proved instrumental in revealing how oppressive forms of masculinity are not only produced and reproduced, but also how they are routinely denied, inoculated from challenge, and mitigated through irony, humor, and parody. It has been in this second vein of analysis, in exposing young men’s resistance or the plausibly deniable features of masculinity, that my own work, and the work of other psychologists, has uniquely illuminated Connell’s (1995) argument concerning the flexible, formidably resourceful, and inscrutable composition of what is hegemonic about masculinity. Whereas traditional psychological work often conflates “hegemonic masculinity” with “heroic masculinity” (breadwinner, heterosexual, tough, virile), what is needed is research that reveals that what is sometimes most hegemonic are masculine positions that are knowingly non-heroic or ordinary, that is, the self-reflexive varieties that casually and playfully parody traditional male stereotypes.

The urgency of this kind of analytic approach to boyhood and masculinity studies is written all over the current cultural landscape. It is glaringly obvious in the textual and visual construction of masculinities in popular culture magazines, television, and films. For instance, consider the interminable barrage of men’s lifestyle magazines (Maxim, Details, FHM, Stuff, Loaded, etc) that proffer, in tongue-in-cheek ways, a kind of “new laddism”—an educated, middle-class, and witty version of masculinity that eschews the whippishness of the sensitive “new man” while seeking to re-claim the conservative ethos of beer, women, and sport (Benwell, 2002). Or consider the television sitcom trend of presenting men as anti-heroes, as hapless, yet affable dinks who appear befuddled and domesticated, yet who coincidentally remain eminently likable and successful. There are also series such as MTV’s Jackass, where a hodgepodge of unassuming white working-class guys turn failure and bodily injury into a “carnival-esque sadomasochism” that relentlessly mocks heroic masculinity (Brayton, 2007). Also popular is the “white-guy-as-loser” trope that is ubiquitous in beer commercials (Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005). This “lovable loser” finds himself routinely humiliated, usually as a result of pursuing unattainably beautiful women. Yet, he is blissfully self-mocking and ironic about his loser status, for he is a loser only in contrast to
the outdated macho versions of masculinity typical of beer ads in the past. In whatever form, these various media gambits have been successful in serving up an average and ordinary "everyman", a youthful and predominately white version of masculinity that is playfully ironic and self-mocking.

Young men are soaking up these gender scripts and assimilating them into their everyday repertoires. At first blush, they may appear innocuous, playful even. But when interpreted in the wake of significant post-civil rights advances by women, sexual minorities, people of color, and immigrants, these new masculine tropes appear as a form of anxious "white male backlash," albeit an intentionally defanged backlash. Commercial forces have commodified these anxious and self-deprecating tendencies, creating a simulacrum of marginalized and victimized masculine positions and passing them off as schtick. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of micro-level research detailing how everyday ordinary boys and young men occasion such positions within mundane social contexts. As these visual and textual depictions of failed masculinity become increasingly woven into the fabric of everyday cultures, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, we are left to wonder if and how young men are adopting them in their everyday interactions, and if so, how the face of hegemonic masculinity may be slowly changing as a result.

I suspect that the grip of these newer and strategically more self-conscious forms of masculine self-presentation will require a change in our gender-political conversations about how sexism and other forms of oppression live in daily social practices. As young men become more socialized to resist "old fashioned" and obvious forms of sexism, while attempting to accommodate women's increased power in heterosexual relationships, the better they may become at normalizing the "new sexism" that is subtly parasitic on contemporary, media-driven forms of lad-masculinity. To date, very few social scientists (and even fewer psychologists) have examined how this new breed of social practices are worked-up and managed, or how they become psychologically relevant in the formation of young men's masculinities.

How should we to think about what is currently "hegemonic" about masculinity? My short answer, for now, is this: for young heterosexual males, traditional masculinity may no longer have the cash value it once did. Instead, it seems to be increasingly supplanted for an "everyman" form of "ordinary masculinity" that indirectly achieves power, control, and dominance through knowing self-deprecation, ordinariness, and nonchalance. This supplanting of the traditional masculine script of the hyper-virile, seductive, tough and in-control hegemonic male is no longer a media fad reserved for beer commercials and sit-coms, but is alive in the quotidian details of boy's and young men's everyday social practices.

Boys and young men are learning that being hegemonic in a constantly changing landscape of gender relations means learning to manage a variety of social and cultural expectations within specific contexts while neither over- or under-indulging in traditional masculine norms. By examining these projects in detail, which we must, we can productively begin to identify a new species of hegemonic practices that allow men to maintain multiple ideological positions within a variety of situations. As these per-
formances become routine and normalized, they effectively and unfortunately guarantee an iterative process of dominance for men. Stymieing this kind of iterative recuperation and resuscitation of hegemony will thus require equally creative interventions that alter the resources of young men in ways that promote counter-opressive social practices.

**AFTER DEVELOPMENT, AFTER GENDER, AFTER STUDIES**

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In her recent book *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* Erica Burman poses two questions, which seem to me vital in appraising the contemporary boyhood/girlhood turn of child studies. On the one hand, she asks “What are the consequences for developmental psychology of its forgetting of gender as a structuring dimension of development, instead of talking generally about children?” (2008a, p. 7); on the other hand, “why it is that gender should function as the key axis of difference” to psychologists (2008a, p. 8). How we choose to engage with these questions, it seems inescapable, fundamentally structures attempts to extrapolate the future of both gender and maturity in pedagogical parlance.

Burman’s own engagement at this point (2008a, 2008b) is a hygienic one, cleansing the discourse of development from the “cultural masculinity” informing its operant metaphors. However there is reason to pause at the idea that critical maturity studies, if such is to be envisioned in lieu of developmental psychologies, should restrict itself to a re-gendering of theory. It is likely that the proposal for a project called boyhood studies three years ago, to some at least, may have sounded like inheriting from “men’s studies” the stigma of appreciating gender in other than strictly profeminist ways. Negotiating this stigma was indeed vital, and so it remains. We envisioned a study of boyhood as a necessarily pedagogical site, but one where pedagogical entitlement could not be exhaustively defined by the kinds of institutional politics that inform research in the “gender and education” genre. Whereas the “boy crisis” provided much of its momentum, boyhood studies differed from girlhood studies where the latter can more readily be seen to build forth on a well-defined academic call for participation, voice, and representation (for a recent historical appraisal of the girls’ studies field, see Kearney, 2009). Institutional life was a vital problem, but perhaps not as vital as intellectual fashion and concomitant macro-sociological ambitions that would animate it. Hence the proposal for an inclusive platform that could accommodate hermeneutic as well as deconstructive approaches, SAT scores as well as critical theory, and that hence could be a stage for both non-feminist and feminist demarcations of expertise—boyology “after school.” Our editorial board was to reflect this inclusiveness.

Considering Burman’s general proposal to “deconstruct developmental psychology, that is to identify and evaluate the guiding themes or discourses that structure its current dominant forms” (2008a, p. 1), I agree that gender is to be taken not just as an analytic dimension competing for familiar political sentiments but as a syntax of most
late-modern formulations of pedagogy: ordering correct analyses. Regrettably there is little in contemporary institutional pedagogy to render children critical of what goes around as correct or urgent criticism. Conversely there is a lot here that “allows them” to fit in, adjust, cope, and “survive.” These metaphors are increasingly to be traced back not to masculine scientism, but to feminist objection to such “violence.” The results of these idiomatic interventions are only now showing themselves and need continued scrutiny over the next half-century. Regardless, if there is a masculinist boyhood studies—a “boyology” that previews with sympathy and care the masculinities the boy by common definition prefigures—only an insane regime would deem it eligible to eradicate. To state the obvious, needed is balanced attention to excess gender and excess criticism.

Idiomatic proposals usually prove themselves through their potential for cross-fertilization. We might think of modeling our critical maturity studies on the myriad of formulaic approaches to masculinity that have informed the social scientific Alltag for some time—maturities; maturity as an instance of performativity; hegemonic adolescence—there is promise here, but also disjunction. Clearly, both gender and maturity (and sexualitity, which seems the semantic bridge in contemporary circum-Atlantic analyses) refer to exclusionary symbolic repertoires subject to ongoing macro- and as well micro-historical recalibrations. To study them requires a potentially radical engagement with the building blocks of domestic and public socialities, a radical engagement that may be realized only if and where the gender studies field proves hospitable for a critique of the domestic (and by extension, the educational) order itself.

In other words, here is a project that maps the programmatic motifs that underlie late-modern gender pedagogies. Questions abound, few of which are being addressed currently; for instance, which rhetorical stakes require a juxtaposition of man and boy? which cultural forces encode a contraction of the two spheres? and which theories demand a rigid consequentiality between them? (see Janssen, 2009 for some contemporary solutions). The boy, as the child, will continue to function as a projection for politicians and academics alike, an icon or emblem of some sort, to be recited or redesigned at the cue of demanding and overriding projects. There is little point to whichever lifehood studies in which we work if there is no critical attention to these interests. This situation is more complex, it seems, than the still operative juxtaposition of “men’s studies” ↔ “women’s studies” has proposed. An anthropological as well as critical question arises: To what extent and in which ways will gender allow itself to be influenced by theory, legal reform, curricula, or fashion? Viable options for being boy are flourishing, sociolinguistic research would suggest; however, the peer lingo of cute, hot, emo, gay and indeed boy seems increasingly generic and indefinite in terms of its gendering properties. (Unviable options are ostensibly evolving as well.) But gender, as theory predicted, spirals out of the orbit of sex, and whether a style question or an identity hub, it may never have been the polarizing, privileging and oppositional tool the polemic of feminism once envisioned it to be. To pose my question in a more speculative way: Should we be on the lookout of a post-feminist or post-gender time when young people routinely escape the violent symbolism of gender/sexuality/age as well as their studies and submit to new paradigms of administration?
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Self-administration is, I think, what was to lie at the heart of gender's claim to agency, voice, and participation. Yet contemporary insurrectional plots have proven themselves very different than familiar 20th-century scenarios of uprising—Zéro de Conduite (Jean Vigo, 1933), Les Quatre Cents Coups (François Truffaut, 1959), If... (Lindsay Anderson, 1968), Tomato Kechappu Kōbei (Shuji Terayama, 1971), among countless other cinematic essays on boys at war with gendered institutional temporalities. We have a growing cultural archive of boys embattling gender, curriculum, age and the criminalities of their logic, and many such battles are encoded as boyish, the stuff of boyhood, the promise of unstoppable renewal and of an ultimate justice beyond gender. But we don't want to take the canon's word for it. We are increasingly looking at an order of self-tube-ing, self-texting and self-messaging, and although they are still the syntax of privilege, here may be an important field for the cyber-anthropologist:boyhood as a hypermediated embodiment of the boyish, beyond its rich yet flatter intertextualities attested by literary scholars. The new paradigm of connectivity, that is, the new self-ing invites "expression" as much as it revitalizes that metaphor, an important dynamic in view of what would be Western boyhood's constitutive alexithymia. The name for our journal affirmatively echoes the stakes.

But it deserves arguing that we need to draw from diverse theoretical and inspirational archives. The 2002 film project, Ten Minutes Older (The Trumpet and The Cello), inspired by Herz Frank's 1978 short by that name (Par Desmit Minutem Vecaks), shows the way by exploring time's experiential properties, how its seeps down the interstitium vitae, and by reminding us that the things worth spending time on (biography, gender, studium) are worthy in ways that escape the ennui of politicization. The vital part of men's studies, moreover, never behaved as an afterbirth of baby feminism, but was driven by many various "sentiments" (class, "race," "sexuality," and so on) that only in part answer to planned insurrections. Time will have to tell whether political flatness can accommodate deconstructive or other work at its margins. As boyhood studies commences after boyhood, it may well turn out to be a tale of posteriority, post-bellum heroism or "survival." It would be worth the stigma.

THE BOYS ON THE SEXUAL BORDERS
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[I remember] developing a very strong fear. I never really got any education about it [bisexuality] ... and everything else [heterosexuality and homosexuality] you have resources for ... There was no one to talk to ... you can't be yourself, because to be an individual as opposed to part of the group is just too terrifying and traumatic at school. (Jack)

Bisexual-identifying and/or bisexual-behaving boys and young men like Jack live within, between and beyond dichotomous logics, borders and boundaries that push all relationships, identities and communities into bifurcated categories (Angelides, 2001; Garber, 1995). For bisexual young people, sexual and gender identities and community
allegiances are fluid, transitory, fragmented and episodic. They interrogate, disrupt and problematise “mainstream” hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality that frame adolescent health and educational research, policies and programmes. They “undo the logic and the clarity” (Lionnet, 1989, p. 14) of such research and resources, making visible the not-so-orderly youth identities that underlie identity, the realities of multiple masculinities and their sexual lives and cultures that are lived within “reality”, the truths of sexual desires that are concealed by “the truth.” The problem is not that there is no truth, but that there is “too much truth” that powerful dichotomous discourses conceal (Derrida, 1981, p. 105; see also Rust, 1992). Those borderzones of “too much truth,” constructed as “unreal” or negated in research with boys and young men need to be described rather than denied.

Here I draw from my own research into sexual and gender diversity in schools, specifically in relation to boys and multiple masculinities, that go beyond, within and between the hierarchical dualism of heterosexuality/homosexuality. Without discrediting or denying the importance and necessity of ongoing research into homosexual, gay and same-sex attracted masculinities, given the persistence of global heteronormative institutional and cultural injustices and homophobic violence, I propose that the field of boyhood masculinity studies requires "queerification." This differs from prevailing studies of homosexual, gay and same-sex attracted masculinities in that it allows for bisexual, pan-sexual and “queer-sexual” identifications, as well as allowing for the negation of sexual identification altogether. As Giroux writes, identity politics such as gay community politics

enabled many formerly silenced and displaced groups to emerge from the margins of power and dominant culture to reassert and reclaim suppressed identities and experiences; but in doing so, they often substituted one master narrative for another, invoked a politics of separatism, and suppressed differences within their own “liberatory” narratives. (1993, p. 3)

In my research, Benjamin, 19, provides an example of this disruption of the heteronormative “master narrative” and its subsequent “homonormative,” “liberatory” narrative. He discusses the question of negation or negotiation of sexual identity constructs according to their strategic usage within the school context:

I don’t want to give myself a label ... there is such diversity that I don’t think you need to be labelled. I feel labelling or categorising is the core of our sort of problems or prejudices. I think as human beings somehow we’ve got to classify, label, to put each other into a box and I don’t see that as beneficial. I see it as detrimental. However, because we’re in a society where I cannot exist without a label, I have to label myself, and so therefore to people, if I tell people, I would say I’m bisexual .... And I mean the bisexual construct is a construct in itself too. It implies 50/50 and I don’t agree with it at
all. But why I like 'queer' is because everyone is queer and queer as a name says you know really that you're not heterosexual. That's it.

Most of the information on bisexuality has been obtained from studies with adult samples, and it is “unclear to what extent a separate bisexual cultural identity is consolidated during adolescence” (Ryan & Rivers, 2003, p. 105). As Bryan, a 17 year-old bisexual young man in my research says:

It's simple bullshit logic! They don't have evidence of bi kids in schools because they don't want to find it and so don't write their research looking for it.

As I found (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005b, 2006, forthcoming 2010; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Martin, 2009), accessing bisexual-identifying or bisexual-behaving young people may be difficult for two reasons. First, due to the label itself being stigmatized, many young people may feel coerced to identify as either heterosexual or homosexual to researchers. Second, the figures vary depending upon whether the research has been conducted using sexual identity and/or sexual behavior as the defining criteria (Russell & Seif, 2002). An example of the machinations of these two reasons is how many heterosexual identifying young men do have one or more same-sex experiences but would tick the "heterosexual" box in a survey.

The available recent studies in the United States, Canada, the UK and Australia are pointing to higher rates of anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns among bisexual-identifying young people as compared to homosexual and heterosexual young people (D’Augelli et al., 1998; Jorm et al., 2002; King & McKeown, 2003):

I vaguely remember waking up in the mornings and I used to think, like how can I get through another day with everyone being so horrible to me all the time ... I did think I’m really depressed, everything is really awful and I thought about suicide. (Rowan, bisexual, 19. In Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 94)

The available research also shows that bisexual young people have more current adverse life events, greater childhood adversity, less positive support from family, and more negative support from friends and a higher frequency of financial problems (Jorm et al., 2002; see also Hershberger et al., 1997). In relation to homophobic harassment and violence, a few studies have pointed to various concerns. For example, an analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the United States, Russell et al. (2001) found that young people who reported attraction to both same- and other-sex persons were at greater risk of experiencing, witnessing and perpetrating violence than young people who were attracted to same-sex persons (see also Beauchamp, 2004).

In a large school-based sample, Goodenow et al. (2002) found that bisexual young people reported higher levels of sexual risk and injecting drug use than heterosexual or
gay-identified peers. They also found that bisexualy active adolescent males report especially high levels of HIV/AIDS risk behaviour. Interestingly, Goodenow et al. found that bisexual young men also reported lower rates of HIV/AIDS education, even after school absence due to fear as a variable had been controlled in the research. One plausible explanation provided by the researchers is that standard classroom instruction does not address the concerns and questions of many young men who have sex with men and is therefore dismissed, discounted as irrelevant, or entirely forgotten. Another possible explanation, however, is that HIV/AIDS education is constructed as being for straight and gay young men. In deflecting or rejecting the label of “gay,” young men who have sex with men but who identify as heterosexual may ignore or avoid HIV/AIDS education as it is “not about them.”

Given the stigma attached to nonheterosexual identities, and the promotion of nonheterosexual social and support groups as “gay groups,” it would be unrealistic to assume that adolescent boys and young men who do not identify as gay but are attracted to or having sex with other men would join gay support groups, apply for gay-related medical services or social services, or participate openly in HIV-prevention activities aimed at gay youth. Research is required into how to make mainstream classroom instruction and social and support groups more inclusive and more culturally appropriate for sexual minority adolescents who border or reject the duality or tripartite classification system of sexuality.

As Raymond, a bisexual father in my research who is also a teacher, says, there is a need for specifically bisexualy targeted health research and education:

> That means stuff about bisexual relationships, not just a one line definition saying “bisexuals are sexually and emotionaly attracted to both sexes”, which says nothing about Bi pride, Bi life choices, Bi relationships.

Four types of problematic representations of bisexual boys and bisexual masculinities in adolescent research that require much more investigation and interrogation (see Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2006):

1. **Under-representation.** Much research into same-sex attracted young people makes bisexual young people invisible (see Dodge & Sandfort, 2007). Many educational and health organisations gain funding for projects that appear to be inclusive of bisexual boys and young men by including bisexuality as a category in their project outlines and submissions, but they do not follow through with bisexualy-specific recommendations, outcomes and services for youth (Russell & Seif, 2002; Ryan & Rivers, 2003).

We need to be mindful of what Savin-Williams (2008) calls “clinical traps” wherein research recruitment and analysis flounder if they do not allow for the fact that “sexual behaviour, sexual attraction, and sexual identity questions do not always solicit similar populations” (pp. 135-136; see also Thompson & Morgan, 2008). We need to
use very broad definitions of bisexuality, and indeed work on the feminist qualitative research premise of self-identification and self-ascription by our research participants (Yip, 2008). As Butler explains,

restriction on speaking is enforced through the regulation of psychic and public identification, specifically, by the threat of having to live in a radically uninhabitable and unacceptable identification…. The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable …. (2004, p. xvii)

Thus, sexually fluid and bisexual young men experience what we call “exclusion by inclusion” (see Martin & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2009) as their specificities are excluded, rendered “unsayable”, by being included in the polarising “psychic and public indentifications” of gay and straight.

As researchers, we need to question why we may harbour some reluctance to opening up our theoretical and empirical frameworks to the knowledge that comes with the new generations of boys, increasingly sexually fluid youth cultures, and twenty-first century masculinities. For instance, is it because “today’s young people are harbingers of a time in which sexual identity will have no importance, thus thrusting past research into the garbage heap of antiquated science?” (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 221).

(2) Misrepresentation. Research into the impact on bisexual young people of media and popular culture stereotypical constructions, societal presumptions and prejudices of bisexuality is required (Bryant, 1996; McLean, 2001, 2003; Yescavage & Alexander, 2003). For example, “bisexual men as AIDS carriers” has been a dominant misrepresentation (Worth, 2003). All the bisexual adolescent boys and young men in my research are aware of this and other misrepresentations:

When I was doing my AIDS research, I came across school children aged something like thirteen to eighteen talking about AIDS and who’s to blame…. [They] said stuff like it’s the murderous bisexual males that we should kill because they’re the ones who have spread it to our innocent heterosexual community. (Benjamin, 19)

In young women’s magazines, the readers, presumed to be heterosexual young women themselves, are advised that all bisexual active young men are secretly engaging in sexual relations with other young men, that having a bisexual boyfriend is “dangerous” and “risky” since all women in relationships with bisexually active men are unaware of or have no say in their partner’s sexual identity and sexual practices, and that bisexual men are predatory and will have sex with “anything that moves” (see Elia-son, 2001). Where is the research into successfully negotiated monogamous or open or polyamorous relationships between women and their bisexual male partners (Pallotta-Chiarolli & Lubowitz, 2003; Pallotta-Chiarolli, forthcoming 2010)? Indeed, in stark contrast to mainstream representations of bisexual femininities as “hot bi babes,” usu-
ally for the “normal” titillation of heterosexual boys and men who often adopt the role of puppeteers scripting the same-sex behaviours of their female partners, there is a strong aversion and aggressive resistance to the eroticization of bisexual masculinities, as well as an absence of research into youth cultures where “hot bi boys” perform for the pleasure of girls (Atkins, 2002; Herdt, 2001; Russell & Seif, 2002). There is also a need for mainstream media, popular cultural and literary representations of healthy and happy bisexual boys and men in healthy and happy relationships with either both men and women. De Oliveira (2004) and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2008) are two examples of young adult novels with positive representations of bisexual adolescent boys and men. Likewise, the television series Dr Who has a positive bisexual male character, Captain Jack Harkness, who is adored and eroticised by both male and female fans to the degree that a more adult spin-off Torchwood was developed with Harkness as the main character. Meanwhile, male musical artists such as Mika, Antony Hegarty and Patrick Wolf are operationalising sexual ambiguity and fluidity as part of their lyrics and concert performances.

(3) Outdated Representation. There is a lack of research that engages with shifting discursive and societal constructs of bisexualities. Young people’s polyamorous and multi-sexual relationship negotiations and partnering preferences lack current scholarship (McLean, 2004; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005b; Rambukkana, 2004). Likewise, young people’s queering of bi/sexuality (Russell & Seif, 2002), the experiences and perspectives of young people growing up with bisexual parents (Arden, 1996; Garner, 2004), and culturally diverse expressions and classifications of bisexualities (Fuji Collins, 2004; Hutchins & Ka’ahumanu, 1991) are three other areas in need of substantial research.

(4) Homogenised Representation. The diversity within youth groups, youth subcultures and masculinity categories is not being adequately acknowledged or researched. For example, very rarely do we read of class, ethnicity, geographical location, gendered expectations, disability and other factors that have an impact on a bisexual young man’s decisions, negotiations and experiences (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995). For example, Goodenow et al. (2002) found in their research that bisexualy active males were more likely than others to be members of ethnic minorities and were less likely to attend urban schools. Similarly, Paul et al. (2002) found that the highest prevalence of suicide attempts among non-heterosexual males was among native American respondents and bisexual or nonidentified respondents.

Thus, much more research is required with bisexual-identifying and bisexual-behaving boys and young men which explores questions that research has been exploring with gay and lesbian young people. This includes asking:

• What impact does having access, no access or minimal access to bi-specific and bi-specifying youth groups and information have on adolescent boys and young men identifying as bisexual or behaving bisexually?
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- Given that friendships and peer group relations are of high significance to most adolescents, what are the experiences and effects on bisexual boys and young men in their interactions with heterosexual and homosexual peers at school?
- To what extent do bisexual boys and young men feel invalidated and pathologised by families, health services and educational systems, particularly health services provided within schools?
- What impact do negative and positive popular cultural, media, and literary representations of diverse bisexualities have on bisexual boys and young men?
- What strategies of passing, negotiating and resisting do bisexual boys and young men adopt in navigating their home, school, peer group and wider societal worlds?

As adult researchers, health providers and educators, we need to ask how research projects, policies and programmes reflect the dominant discourses of hierarchical sexual dualisms, and how these may be increasingly out of step with the shifting contexts and discourses of sexual diversity that today’s young people are immersed within, engaging with and negotiating:

The baby-boom generation finds itself distressed at times that youths refer to themselves as “bi”, not gay or lesbian. But that is a harbinger of things to come in the multiplicity of sexual formations and diverse sexual cultures proliferating around the world. (Herdt, 2001, p. 280)

Herdt’s (2001) historical analysis of personal and systemic sexual identification finds that today’s youth engages with notions of “queering” and “genderblending” in bodies and practices to a degree unimaginable in previous generations, the generations of educational and health policymakers, researchers, program developers and deliverers. These social changes are precipitated by the marked decline in heterosexism and homophobia in our society, which is facilitating the emergence, and I would add, visibility, of new sexual minorities, including bisexuality. Our research, which is used to inform and frame educational policies and programmes, needs to itself be informed and framed by the realities of sexually diverse youth. In this way, sexualities, relationships, and educational and health research and services may more effectively acknowledge that desire is multi-faceted, contradictory, subversive: its inevitable social organization requires that we are engaged in a continuous conversation about both its possibilities and limits. (Weeks, 1995, p.50)

We’re all different people and it [sexuality] all depends on the individual ... I would love to just storm into all the schools across Aus-
tralia and say [that] to them ... I mean, it's all about having that freedom. (Jack)

**The Boy Is Father of the Man:**
**Representations of Fatherhood and the Struggle for Adult Masculinity**
**Mary Jane Kehily (The Open University, UK)**

The trials and tribulations of growing up male form a staple of the popular culture repertoire, conjured up most successfully in contemporary examples such as Nick Hornby's novels and the subsequent film *About a Boy* (Paul and Chris Weitz). In keeping with its televisual counterpart, *Men Behaving Badly*, Hornby's novels embrace the puerile modern male as a selfish and emotionally stunted commitment-phobe who has never quite grown up. The field of popular culture exemplified in men's magazines *Loaded* and *Nuts*, draws upon popular cultural forms to serve up further representations of masculinity in which the "lad" and the boy are never far from the surface. Hopeless, chaotic, sexually opportunistic and not to be trusted, men in the popular imagination appear to enjoy a parody of adulthood that celebrates their incompetence and immaturity.

The boy-lad-immature male trajectory has been richly mined for comedic excess and common-sense explanations of why men are the-way-they-are. How can these representations of spoiled masculinity help us to understand the emergent field of boyhood studies? The way in which fatherhood is represented in pregnancy magazines as a way of exploring potential connections between fatherhood and boyhood provides some clues. Based on a content analysis of pregnancy magazines over an 18-month period, a compelling and contradictory picture of fatherhood emerges as a transitional moment that is both exhilarating and repellent. Fatherhood calls upon the boy-man to take stock, evaluate his life and finally grow up. Of course, there are things to be gained from becoming a father, the most notably being the Wordsworthian idea of the child as father of the man, a notion that acknowledges the explicit Romantic connection between boyhood and manhood. Through the child, a father is connected to his own childhood and is also prepared to learn, or possibly re-learn, some fundamental truths as they emerge from his relationship with the child.

Pregnancy magazines for the most part do not explore the father-child relationship or conjure it up as a potential relationship to be developed. Rather, the focus is upon the couple relationship and the possible displacement of the father by the new baby. The role of men in parenting and childcare remains ambiguous, connected but not fully integrated or clearly delineated. For all pregnancy magazines, men occupy a position in the background as supportive husbands and partners. Pregnancy and birth ap-

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1 This section forms part of a broader study, *The Making of Modern Motherhood*, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, UK, award no. RES 148-25-005. Pregnancy magazines (a total of 8 titles, 28 magazines) were analyzed over an 18-month period from September 2004 to April 2006.
pears to give women license to be me-centred while fathers and fathers-to-be exist on the fringes of the main show, unsure of their role as supporting actor. Despite widespread social change having an impact upon intimate relationships and constructions of masculinity usually posited as productive of new egalitarian forms of coupledom (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1992) and softer masculine styles, the magazines, in a general sense, suggest that while men may be motivated by the best of intentions, they can’t quite be trusted to do or say the right thing. Within the genre, men remain infantilised and marginalised by the reproductive process. Men, for their part, when they do appear, put forward the perspective that pregnancy and birth is a bewildering, if not scary time for them in which their partners are not quite themselves. The idea of pregnancy as an abduction by hormones and birth as a “bloody horror show” in which normally sane women become swearing and screaming monsters haunts the features on fatherhood as a truth to be supported or contested. A “dad’s-to-be survival guide” likens first time fatherhood to taking a trip on the M25, “an excursion into the darkest reaches of the unknown.” A feature article offers the following advice for coping with the birth:

The immediate lead up to the birth is likely to be your shining hour. It’s up to you to whisk your partner off to hospital, so make sure the jalopy is up to the task and memorise the route across town. Forget the ideal of a Sweeney-style car dash—most first babies arrive long after your partner’s screams of, ‘Oh my god! I’m having contractions!’... Don’t be surprised if your partner tells you to bog off or punches you in the face. If you had to pass something the size of a melon, you would turn into the Terminator too. (Pregnancy and Birth, August 2005)

The allusions to car journeys, driving, Sweeney-style car chases and the Terminator provide a brief glimpse into the blokey reference points of male communication as conjured up in media forms, drawing upon normative constructions of masculinity as alien to and separate from femininity. Some of the magazine titles run regular features on fatherhood such as “Father and Baby, the latest news for blokes and their babies” offering tips and snippets of information for fathers to be and new dads, drawing heavily on laddish language and the idea of men as fish out of water in the pregnancy and birth arena. A feature common to Prima Baby and Mother and Baby is the “Fab Dad” column in which readers nominate their partner for the award of “dad of the month.” Prima Baby promotes this as an opportunity to “seize your chance to say thank you for the love and support he’s given you.” The “dad of the month” celebrated in the magazines may not have done anything spectacular or heroic. Rather, he is more likely to be praised for being there and being a dad, making fatherhood an ordinary event to be routinely incorporated into life in contrast to the “amazing” miracle of growing a baby idea invoked by motherhood across the pages of the magazine.

Other special features in the magazines suggest that fatherhood profoundly changes men, transforming them from unreconstructed lads in the men-behaving-badly mould to sensitive and caring fathers with a newly found sense of responsibility. Ben Raworth,
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former deputy editor of the men's magazine Loaded describes his experience of first time fatherhood in a feature entitled "From Lad to Dad":

There's a classic scene in the movie Jaws, where Roy Scheider becomes aware of a shark in the water. He sits up with a start, and the background whizzes away from him at speed as panic sets in. This is the feeling (mixed obviously with elation) you'll experience when you're first left at home with your newborn. Instead of a shark in the shallows you'll have a small bundle peering up at you waiting for you to do something. (Practical Parenting, November 2005)

Likening your newborn baby to a shark in the water may not appear to be the most appropriate of comparisons but it does fit with the encoded notion that men see the world differently and draw upon a different set of cultural reference points to express their uniquely gendered perspective. Ben goes on to describe the joy of a home-birth, attended by midwives who take their leave after safely delivering Florence, marking the beginning of his new life as a parent. A parallel experience is described in the "diary of a first time dad" (Pregnancy and Birth, August 2005). Andrew Holmes charts his journey from "unreconstructed bloke to doting father":

Already second in the domestic pecking order after the cat, an imminent demotion wasn't something to get enthusiastic about. No man wants to spend more time in hospitals or sit around in 'groups', bewildered and if he's honest a little bit disgusted at the biological candour of women... Someone told me that the reason babies look like their fathers is to trigger a primitive nurturing reflex in the male... sure enough Dylan's birth saw me searching for my club, thinking about hunting down a stegosaurus for lunch... I understood about my responsibilities in the world. Pre-Dylan I used to have a thing about commuters. I thought of them as mindless corporate drones. Post-Dylan the same commuters became somehow heroic in my mind. I now see them as people who make enormous daily sacrifices for their children.

Fatherhood as a turning point, however, does not necessarily signal shared parenting and equally weighted domestic responsibilities. Most features assume that women take sole care for their babies and may be assisted by their partners occasionally. Some features encourage women to involve their partners more, offering helpful tips for overcoming men's limitation in baby care:

Dressing disasters — There's something in daddy DNA that deprives men of all baby dress sense. He's sweetly offered to get your daughter ready in the morning, only to arrive downstairs with the baby clad in tartan, spots and stripes.
Sharing solution — Bite your tongue. Be thankful for the extra time you’ve had to get yourself ready — and avoid future fashion disasters by laying her clothes out the night before. *(Mother and Baby, April 2005)*

On the subject of fathers, pregnancy magazines take a conservative approach to gender relations, playing on the comedic idea that men are clueless and not to be trusted. While there is an attempt to develop a male perspective in many of the titles, these features usually revert to a style of laddish masculinity reminiscent of popular cultural representations to be found in *Loaded* and the writing of Nick Hornby.

What can we learn from this in relation to boyhood studies? An obvious point lies in the observation that fatherhood is a moment of identity change for men. Like motherhood, becoming a father signals a reconfiguration of family relations and gender practices. Connecting with a new baby involves men in an engagement with their boyhood selves and with an emergent adult self. While popular culture uses humour as a device to explore these themes in a largely retrogressive, light-hearted way, boyhood studies could provide a generative space for more sustained reflections, including reflections on the abiding conservatism of contemporary forms. Memory work, autobiography and popular culture offer access to the domain of father-child relationships that could be fruitfully investigated in future work. Exploring the connections between boyhood, fatherhood and adult masculinity is a project that deserves both time and sponsorship.

A CRITIQUE OF THE NEURODEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)
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The neurodevelopmental model of ADHD rests on bio-deterministic ideology. This bio-determinism has led to polarised views of ADHD, with advocates of this view such as Barkley et al. (2002) proclaiming "there is no such disagreement [about ADHD being a valid disorder] — at least no more so than there is over whether smoking causes cancer, or whether a virus causes HIV/AIDS" (Barkley et al.). By contrast, critics such as Baughman (1998) declare that "ADHD is total, 100% fraud ... It's as simple as this: if no physical examination, lab test, X-ray, scan or biopsy shows an abnormality in your children, your child is normal."

Support for the hypothesis that ADHD is a genetic, neurodevelopment disorder rests on two key areas of research. First, the hypothesis that ADHD is genetic relies on familial, twin, and adoption studies. Although ADHD may be familial, the fact that families share a common environment as well as common genes permits no valid conclusions in support of genetic determinism. The twin method is no less confounded by environmental factors because monozygotic (MZ) twins experience more similar environments than dizygotic (DZ) twins. In other words, being one of MZ twins causes differences to being one of DZ twins. MZ twins are more likely to report identity confusion, being dressed in the same kinds of clothes, and being confused with one another.
by friends and family. Therefore, given the greater resemblance of MZ twins to DZ twins, behavioural traits such as ADHD are also explainable on non-genetic grounds. ADHD adoption studies have many unresolved methodological issues making them inferior to the much criticized schizophrenia adoption studies that preceded them. Finally, despite concerted worldwide efforts, researchers have been unable to find any ADHD genes. This has led supporters of the genetic model of ADHD to argue that many genes acting in concert mediate ADHD. This argument is rather circular in that it is based primarily on the failure of molecular genetics studies to find such genes and replicate those findings (Joseph, 2006). Thus the null hypothesis stands: no genes exist for ADHD.

Second, support for a neurobiological underpinning of ADHD relies on neuroimaging studies. The sample sizes in these studies have usually been small. The brains of ADHD diagnosed children have not been considered to be clinically abnormal in any of the studies, nor has any specific or characteristic neuroimaging difference been convincingly demonstrated (Timimi, 2005). Researchers have yet to do a simple comparison of unmedicated children diagnosed with ADHD with an age-matched control group. The one large study that claimed to have done this suffered from numerous methodological inadequacies, such as choosing a control group whose age was on average two years older than the target group (Leo & Cohen, 2003). Most worrisome, animal studies suggest that any differences observed in these studies could well be due to the effects of medication that most children in these studies had taken (Timimi, 2005).

In addition to methodological problems, interpreting the significance of any positive finding is far from straightforward in these studies. Neurological differences could be the result of environmental factors such as psychological trauma on brain development, different maturation rates, or variations resulting from a more inclusive definition of normality. By concluding that any confirmed neuroimaging differences are due to genetic neurobiological abnormalities we risk creating a new phrenology. In addition, a biochemical imbalance model cannot be confirmed until we have established what a biochemical balance looks like and how to test for it, something that has yet to be achieved.

As well as a paucity of biological evidence supporting the genetic neurodevelopmental model, current formulations are riddled with other conceptual problems. Hyperactivity, impulsivity and short concentration spans are qualitatively common behaviours, particularly amongst boys. Who should and how should we decide where the cut-off between normal and pathological lies? Furthermore, how can we avoid variations in interpreting rating scales (which are usually required when making a diagnosis), when they are full of difficult to operationalise words such as “often”?

Other issues requiring closer examination include high rates of co-morbidity, cross-cultural variations of rates of ADHD diagnosis amongst both raters and those rated, and the gender distribution of the cases diagnosed. The predominance of boys is common to all pre-adolescent child psychiatric disorders. This fact alone should make us question the basis on which supposedly separate disorders are being categorised (Timimi, 2005).
The burden of proof lies with those who advocate neurobiological models of ADHD. Critics merely need to demonstrate that acceptable levels of evidence have not been reached.

The most obvious implication of conceptualising ADHD as a biological condition is that biological treatments, particularly the use of stimulants, have become the dominant and often only treatment provided for those diagnosed. Unfortunately, the claims for safety and effectiveness of this approach do not match the scientific evidence. Whilst efficacy in reducing ADHD symptomatology in the short term is well established, several meta-analyses conducted in the last decade conclude that long-term effectiveness cannot be assumed (Jadad et al., 1999; King et al., 2006; Klassen et al., 1999; McDonagh and Peterson, 2005; Schachter et al., 2001). The most widely quoted treatment study, the Multimodal Treatment Study of Children with ADHD (MTA), is not a double blind placebo controlled trial. It suffers from many methodological deficiencies, important conflicts of interest, and the apparently favourable outcomes for the group receiving stimulants not being maintained in the 24 and 36 months follow up studies, with those taking medication now significantly shorter and lighter than those who were not medicated. William Pelham, who is on the steering group of the MTA studies recently concluded: “No drug company in its literature mentions the fact that 40 years of research says there is no long-term benefit of medications [for ADHD]. That is something parents need to know” (quoted in Timimi, 2008).

The implications of adopting the neurodevelopmental model go well beyond the rapid increase in the use of medicines with dubious effectiveness and possible dangers. The model highlights deficiencies, turning the focus away from strengths, competencies, and children’s own sense of personal agency. Its non-specificity, lack of biological or psychological markers, and the lack of adequate methods to help differentiate ADHD from “normal” children make the concept particularly vulnerable to the medicalisation process (Timimi, 2005).

Raising and educating children is a complex, stressful and, in Western modernity, angst-ridden and confusing task. In recent times raising boys in particular has become associated with an increasing sense of panic (Timimi, 2005). In such a context locating the problem in the hardwiring of a child’s brain is an attractive approach, but risks disempowering us from our ability and responsibility to raise and educate our children. Like many aspects of free-market consumerism, it renders young peoples' mental health vulnerable to what I term “MacDonaldisation,” with its promise of quick satisfying cures that fit into our busy lifestyles. But this has the potential for creating lifelong consumers of psycho-pharmaceuticals by introducing children early on to the idea that the stressful problems that we encounter in our lives can be ameliorated by a variety of pills.

There are also implications for the division of labour in medicine. Categorising ADHD as neurodevelopmental has resulted in diagnosing and treating ADHD by paediatricians, rather than mental health professionals. Paediatricians have less training, experience and service provision to help them assess contextual factors such as family and school dynamics. They also have less training in using a variety of psycho-social treatment models.
The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is a national body set up and funded by the UK government. NICE is charged with examining the evidence base of specific healthcare topics (mainly diagnostic categories) and providing guidelines for clinical practice in the UK National Health Service. In September 2008, the NICE guidelines on ADHD were published (NICE, 2008). NICE concluded that both childhood and adulthood ADHD were valid and recommended that for “mild” and “moderate” ADHD in children and adolescents psychosocial treatments should be the “first-line” treatments, with medication (mainly stimulants) being reserved for those with more “severe” ADHD. Stimulants were recommended as the first-line treatment for adults with ADHD. These conclusions appear to be based on a “failure of nerve” as the evidence examined should have led to the conclusion that ADHD is not a neurodevelopmental disorder and as a diagnosis for adults has questionable validity. The use of medication should be a “research only” recommendation since insufficient evidence currently exists for intervention using drugs.

Cross-cultural data and the fact that ADHD is a diagnosis reserved predominantly for boys were ignored by NICE. Thus, important questions about differences in rates of diagnosis by ethnicity and differing meanings attached to ADHD symptoms in different societies were not addressed. This creates the risk of institutional racism by imposing a certain worldview about childhood and its problems onto communities who have differing beliefs and practices. It also perpetuates a cultural practice of focusing on boys and their behaviour often at the expense of understanding their emotional well-being.

Although NICE (2008) recognized that “the disorder remains one that is defined at a behavioural level, and its presence does not imply a neurological disease” (p. 17) and “the diagnosis of ADHD does not imply a medical or neurological cause” (p. 29), its guidelines refer to ADHD as a “neurodevelopmental disorder.” The evidence provided, however, does not support this view. Consider section 5.8: “Is there consistent evidence of genetic, environmental or neurobiological risk factors associated with ADHD?” NICE noted the lack of consistency found in neuroimaging studies and concluded that the following brain regions may be implicated: left prefrontal cortex, left thalamus, right paracentral lobule; frontal, temporal, and parietal lobes; the striatum; splenium of the corpus callosum; right caudate; total cerebral volume; right cerebral volume; and portions of the cerebellum. Similarly, they concluded there is a positive association with a large number of family and environmental adversity indicators. This is equivalent to putting a bet on all horses in the race and celebrating your efficacy as a pundit!

Extending the diagnosis of ADHD into adulthood does not consider that ADHD has different features in adulthood compared to childhood and that evidence for ADHD in adults cannot be reliably differentiated from presentations of personality or mood disorders in that population.

Finally, NICE’s single most important recommendation is for medication to be used as a first line treatment in “severe” ADHD in children and adolescents and in adults with ADHD. Like other systematic reviews of ADHD medication treatment
THE STATUS OF BOYHOOD STUDIES

(Jadad et al., 1999; King et al., 2006; Klassen et al., 1999; McDonagh & Peterson, 2005; Schachter et al., 2001), NICE notes the inadequate reporting of methodology, likely biases, limited reliability of results, and inadequate data regarding adverse events. NICE correctly concluded that the evidence does not support using medication as a first-line treatment for mild or moderate ADHD, yet suggested that medication should be used as a first-line treatment in "severe" cases of ADHD. Only one reference was cited in support of this recommendation, a re-analysis of the data from the largest trial comparing medication and behavioural treatments which concluded that the more severe subgroup showed a larger decrease in symptoms with medication compared with behaviour therapy (Santosh et al., 2005). However, this data was gathered 14 months after the beginning of the study. Studies analyzing the same group of patients after 36 month could not find support for any beneficial long-term effects of medication over behaviour therapy, even in those with more severe symptoms, whilst finding that improvement in those exposed to medication for the longest periods were significantly less after a longer period of treatment (Jensen et al., 2007; Swanson et al., 2007).

The advice to use medication as a first-line treatment for adult ADHD was based on three studies carried out over a period of 21-45 days (Biederman et al., 2006; Kooij et al., 2004; Spencer et al., 2005). Two of the three studies were conducted by the group with psychiatrist Joseph Biederman as the lead researcher (Biederman et al., 2006; Spencer et al., 2005). Biederman and other members of his team are currently being investigated for non-disclosure of payments from the pharmaceutical industry to the tune of over a $1 million each (Harris & Carey, 2008). If we discredit these two studies on the grounds of conflict of interest, the recommendation that adults with ADHD should be treated with a stimulant as the first-line treatment rests on a single study (Kooij et al., 2004), which was carried out over a period of three weeks.

These NICE guidelines are not only likely to expose many children and adults to unnecessary harm, but given NICE's authority, it is also likely to influence cultural beliefs and attitudes. As NICE conveniently avoided engaging in a more meaningful way with the issue of validity, the bold conclusion that ADHD is a "valid" disorder will reinforce the recent trend to label boys who present with a variety of behaviours that certain adults find challenging with a medical disorder. This has implications not only for how we then try to deal and cope with these behaviours, but also for the standards of "normality" we use to assess children, especially boys. NICE has thus contributed to the social process of creating a new kind of boy, the "ADHD boy."

We are able to formulate alternative models to the "neurodevelopmental" paradigm drawing on transcultural psychiatry. This discipline can help us examine local contexts out of which different systems of meaning and therefore different practices emerge. Philosophical analysis can help us question the value systems that structure these local meanings and practices, and point the way toward more ethically satisfactory forms of practice. Clarifying our values and priorities can help us develop models based less on unproven assumptions leading to paradigms that are more ideological than scientific and more on making our ideology transparent in order for it to be openly questioned and debated (Sandler, 2005). For example, putting harm minimisation ahead of simplicity and generalization could lead to a change in focus from identifying ADHD
pathology in individual boys to advocating for greater tolerance of ADHD behaviours in them.

The neurodevelopmental model of ADHD is based more on ideology than science. Prescriptions of stimulants in England and Wales rose from around 6,000 per year in 1994 to over 450,000 by 2004, a staggering 7,000% rise in one decade (Department of Health, 2005). This increase resulted, at least in part, from adopting the neurodevelopmental model. It is not without risk. NICE’s recent guidelines on ADHD have contributed to a further reification of ADHD by accepting the neurodevelopmental model and associated drug treatments, despite the absence of convincing evidence to support such treatments. The neurodevelopmental model of ADHD should be abandoned, along with the practice of long-term prescribing of stimulants. Reserving stimulant prescriptions for short-term use would be compatible with recent drug action models that propose that some psychiatric drugs (including stimulants) create abnormal mental states rather than cure them. They may coincidentally relieve some psychiatric symptoms, but only in the short term (Moncreiff, 2007; Moncrieff & Cohen, 2006). In order to find more holistic ways to work with children with behaviors associated with ADHD (and with their families), new forms of cross-disciplinary enquiry are needed. This is likely to lead to turning over the treatment of ADHD to mental health practitioners rather than paediatricians and developing more diverse forms of research into ADHD.

A CULTURE FOR MAN-BOYS
MURRAY POMERANCE (RYERSON UNIVERSITY)

In my 2005 article on the cinematic character of the man-boy, it was my desire to show the importance of what I called a "blossoming spiritual presence inside the shell of a grown man" that seemed to be manifest in many of the films of Steven Spielberg, as well as to refute the then (and still) very popular claim made about this filmmaker that he is obsessed with, above all else, boyhood per se and its role in American family life. There was something about boys and boyishness, as understood in contemporary culture, that Spielberg needed for his dramatic purposes, I was convinced, and his constructions of character, which often put forward boys with the intelligence and capabilities of men and men with the intelligence and capabilities of boys, were framed to tell certain kinds of stories, albeit stories in which boyhood had a centrality but not necessary stories about boyhood. Certainly in a good number of his films by that time, and subsequently as well, he had centralized not only adolescents and pre-adolescents but also a physically adult male who socializes with others of his age but at the same time exhibits the innocence, energy, enthusiasm, and truculence of a much young male: a kind of amalgam of boyish virtues and manly strengths—that is, showing off the kind of man well-socialized boys in American might hope one day to be; and also the kind of boy many men living with the pressures of American experience might wish they still were. This was the “man-boy” as I discussed him, physically grown and yet characterologically innocent.

There are indeed some important few films in which Spielberg’s focal character is, technically as well as spiritually, a boy—E.T., Empire of the Sun, A.I., to name three—
that is, a boy who shares the circumstances of, and endures the challenges typically presented in fiction to, a man; but usually this filmmaker’s interest is with a man who seems like a boy, Roy Neary in Close Encounters (Richard Dreyfuss) and Ray Ferrier in War of the Worlds (Tom Cruise) being two explicit cases in point. The man-boy looks fully adult, but has a charming and somewhat ineffable taint, the boy’s optimism, innocence, and daring in the face of mortality. For Spielberg, much of this construction is a dramatistical necessity, not a social comment, since protagonists in the kinds of films he makes share the qualities that inhere in a those who are devoted to filmmaking itself: a belief that any dream can be made real; a courage in the face of everyday adversity; a nostalgia for a glorious world of the imagination that preoccupied their youngest days. What we can say about the culture that reflects and supports the man-boy is not usually something Spielberg pauses to say in his films.

The man-boy is symbolic of widespread social conditions in a modern world characterized by rapid technological change, occupational discontinuity, polymorphous gregariousness, media frenzy, and economic improbability. As adults find it harder and harder to hand over to their children the substantial bases of adult careers and social positions, young people are prevented from “growing up,” in the traditional sense. Paul Goodman wrote of “growing up absurd.” The body ages, but the conviction and philosophical attitude remain immature, there being no real social support for adults in a society where work is mere employment, sensibility mere reaction. It is hardly surprising in such circumstances that we find the man-boy in cinematic fiction more broadly, or, for that matter, in the everyday world. To speak only of films current within months of this writing: Michael Mann’s Public Enemies features an antihero (Johnny Depp) who openly avers that where you come from is unimportant by comparison with where you are going—in short, biography and social class are irrelevant in the face of energy and desire; Woody Allen’s Whatever Works features an aging theoretical physicist (Larry David) whose social critique is welded to a pre-adolescent frustration and anger; Tony Scott’s The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3 centers on a subway traffic controller (Denzel Washington) whose response to threat and danger is a stunned boyish incapacity; John Patrick Shanley’s Doubt featured a priest in charge of a boys’ school (Philip Seymour Hoffman), whose sense of oral responsibility is stunted; Gus Van Sant’s Milk displays a politician (Sean Penn) whose belief in pleasure take over a more serious agenda; Sam Raimi’s Drag Me To Hell features a young professor of psychology (Justin Long) impotent to save the girl he loves, in part because he is so captivated in watching the torments she suffers; Spielberg’s Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull is the story of an aging archaeologist (Harrison Ford) who pretends (successfully enough) that he is not aging; and Sam Mendes’s Revolutionary Road, set in the 1950s, recounts the story of a baby-faced man in a gray flannel suit (Leonardo DiCaprio) who cannot face up to the responsibilities of middle-class marriage. All of this is displayed on-screen in a world where the newly elected President of the United States is a brilliant advocate who openly confesses to adoring Conan the Barbarian and Spiderman comic books, where the popular music world is dominated (in life and in death) by a youngish adult who sang and postured with adult passion while groping himself like a nervous
teenager and behaving in private, according to many sources, with a profound "childish innocence"; and where, on all fronts, politicians and financiers maintained dignified adult profiles while simultaneously skulking away to steal billions of dollars from other adults whose innocence shaped their lives or to enjoy naughty extra-marital affairs or to get locked in one or another kind of regressive, and embarrassing, behavior.

The net effect of this penchant for boyhood and boyishness among the adult males of our still male-dominated culture is to transform public adulthood. The grace and control we see in masculine posture becomes more and more evident as a masquerade, covering a still persisting and superlatively sensitive boyish motive. The shock of public discovery that meets every new CNN revelation of a governor's infidelity, a banker's cupidity, a movie star's incendiary private life now itself becomes a typical feature of everyday life. On every side, facades are ruptured, stances are collapsed, positions are undermined, philosophies are shown to be hollow. What we can be sure of—the bedrock—is the wide-eyed hunger that Hollywood, as the major purveyor of our public imagery, has given us as our picture of boyhood: the unblemished face with eyes turned up to the stars (Jake Gyllenhaal, say, in October Sky [1999]), or the bashful blushing stare of untutored sexuality (Elijah Wood staring hotly at Liv Tyler in Lord of the Rings [2001]), or the wholly devoted but also wholly ignorant physical commitment of the boy who doesn't know what he's working for (Ralph Macchio in The Karate Kid [1984]). All these qualities are inside the men we know, eating them alive since their professional and social investments do not provide the necessary outlets for expression. Inside Harrison Ford is Shia LaBeouf; inside Tom Cruise is Justin Chatwin; inside Leonardo DiCaprio in Revolutionary Road and The Gangs of New York (2002) is Leonardo DiCaprio in What's Eating Gilbert Grape (1993) and The Basketball Diaries (1995); inside Johnny Depp's John Dillinger are Edward Scissorhands and Cap'n Jack Sparrow.

HOW TO RAISE SONS WHO WON'T CREATE SEX SCANDALS
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Sex scandals periodically burst into the media spotlight, and usually end with the conclusion that "he" (fill in the blank here: Clarence Thomas, William Kennedy Smith, Mike Tyson, Magic Johnson, Woody Allen, Bob Packwood, Hugh Grant, Dick Morris, Marv Albert, Bill Clinton, the men of "Tailhook", or of the Aberdeen Proving Ground) had a flawed character or psychological problems, and was therefore different from the rest of us men who (it is assumed) would never contemplate doing such a thing.

Au contraire!! For most of us sex is an intense interest if not an obsession. We contemplate it every day, several times a day or more. Furthermore, many of us experience sex as lust without any requirements for emotional intimacy. If the woman is attractive enough, we don't even have to like her to have sex with her. Psychologists refer to this as "nonrelational sexuality"—the tendency to separate sex from intimacy, view women as sex objects, and engage in sex for the purpose either of satisfying physical lust or of validating one's manhood.
This may be the way things are for many men, but is it the way they have to be? Recent research suggests not. This research shows that the way we have traditionally raised our sons to be strong, competitive and emotionally stoic fosters nonrelational sexuality. (It also carries some other significant downsides, such as difficulty expressing one’s own emotions in words and in being emotionally empathic with others, a tendency to transform feelings like hurt or sadness into rage, and a dread of emotional intimacy). This opens the door to the possibility that we could raise our sons differently, so that as adults they might experience sex as less looming, less of an every-minute obsession, and as simply a part of life and one best enjoyed in an intimate emotional relationship.

How have we been raising our sons? First and foremost, we have tended to put up big roadblocks to prevent boys from expressing caring and connection emotions (such as fondness and affection) in the service of “toughening them up”. Many men recall that their first experience with limitations on expressing these emotions occurred in the context of their relationships with their fathers, for, in the typical post-war family, hugs and kisses between father and son came to an end by the time the boy was ready to enter school. Pre-adolescent boys also get the message from their peers that it is not socially acceptable to be affectionate with their mothers (lest they be a “mama’s boy”), girls (for fear of being teased by friends), or boys (where anything but a cool, buddy-type relationship with another boy can give rise to the dreaded accusation of homosexuality). Childhood experiences of this type set up powerful barriers to the overt expression of caring/connection emotions, which thus get suppressed.

Later, in adolescence, when interest in sexuality suddenly accelerates due to the combined effects of hormones and culture, these caring and connection emotions are nowhere to be found. Rather, prevailing images in our society of females as sex objects encourage boys to view girls as vehicles for the release of their sexual urges. Acting on messages from peers and the culture at large, adolescent boys also develop the need to prove themselves as men by “scoring” with girls. As a result sexuality for boys becomes unconnected and nonrelational. In support of this view, recent research has found that only half as many men as women reported that affection for their partner was the reason for having sexual intercourse for the first time.

The traditional way of raising boys to be tough and stoic made more sense when social conditions were harsh, such as occurred in this country from the period of industrialization through the Great Depression and the two World Wars. However in today’s world emotional skills and the ability to balance one’s own perspective with that of others—to be relational instead of nonrelational—is vitally important. We have an opportunity to raise our sons for this new world.

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