

The Continual Relevance of *The Men and the Boys*, Twenty Years on *Revisiting Raewyn Connell's Pivotal Text*

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Sebastián Madrid, and Victoria Cann, with Raewyn Connell



Following the launch of our first special issue in December 2020 (Cann et al. 2020) we are delighted to publish this second, linked issue. As evidence of the impact and dominance of Raewyn Connell's ideas and their influence on the field, we received so many high-quality abstracts in response to our call for papers that we decided to create two collections. This second special issue of *Boyhood Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal*, celebrates the twentieth anniversary of Raewyn Connell's landmark text, *The Men and the Boys* (2000), and hosts a wide range of international and interdisciplinary authors to highlight the continued global relevance of the book and Connell's work more widely. This issue continues this work by showcasing an impressive array of empirical research studies and reflection pieces by emerging and leading scholars that are guided by the original themes in *The Men and the Boys*.

Content of the Issue

In the first contribution to this second special issue, Eckstein and Sabovik focus on healthy relationship programs in U.S. high schools. The authors suggest that men and boys are commonly viewed as perpetrators and facilitators of relational violence, but this biological essentializing oversimplifies “masculinity” as “bad.” Drawing on Connell (2000) they illustrate the complex roles of bodies in shaping masculinity processes through peer perceptions of gendered identity. The authors identify that threats relate to beliefs negatively, and thus affect power relations. Their findings illustrate that unhealthy attitudes related to peer perceptions were a basis for violence



scenarios. They further discuss primary-prevention curricular implications by addressing masculinities as social relationships involved in adolescents facilitating healthy relational practices.

The next article by Pirzada draws on a collection of English-language war comics dealing with military conflicts between India and Pakistan that have become part of the comic book repertoire in both countries. Drawing upon Connell's theorization of hegemonic masculinity, the article analyzes how the masculine role models depicted in two comics, *Haider* and *Siachen*, vehemently deny the horrific emotional and physical costs of warfare. By examining hegemonic masculinity in the comics through masculinity nostalgia and a close reading of the characters' physical appearances and their shared military camaraderie, this article establishes how the comics endorse militancy and warfare for the purpose of entertainment/education, thereby serving as a form of military propaganda for boys, regardless of the creators' personal intent.

The third article, by Herrera, contributes to the discussion about how masculinity—understood as a configuration of gender practices (Connell 2000)—is reproduced through fathers' discourse about the gender of their sons and daughters. Drawing on a qualitative longitudinal study in Chile, during which 28 first-time fathers were interviewed before and after their child's birth or arrival (through adoption), the article shows that gender is reported in essentialist, dichotomous, and hierarchical terms. Herrera's findings show how these fathers expected to shape their sons' gender practices according to hegemonic masculinity (discouraging gender practices associated with femininity or homosexuality). The author argues that, despite increased awareness of gender equality, the study found no attempt to reformulate masculine gender practices but, rather, found an interest on the fathers' part in maintaining the patriarchal gender order.

In the first of four commentary pieces, which use ideas and theories developed in *The Men and the Boys*, Choak applies Connell's theorizations of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity and develops them in a new direction. Choak explores how hegemonic identities (specifically what she refers to as "bad ass femininity") are inscribed on women's bodies in inner city areas. Chock argues that this is particularly significant given the hypermasculine focus of gang culture in England.

The fifth article, by Laurie and colleagues, is another critical commentary piece which considers the significance of Connell's *The Men and the Boys* in the development of an affirmative feminist boys' studies. In particular, the article asks the critical question: How can research on boys make a specific contribution to feminist research on childhood on youth, without

either establishing a false equivalency with girls' studies or overstating the singularity of "the boy" across diverse cultural and historical contexts? The authors argue that Connell's four-tiered account of structured social relations—distinguishing the political, economic, emotional, and symbolic—provides an important corrective to reductionist approaches to both feminism and boyhood. They draw on *The Men and the Boys* to think through sharply contrasting sites of identity formation for boys.

Garlick's contribution draws on one of the least-explored aspects of Connell's work, that of body reflexive practices. In this third commentary piece, Garlick argues that body-reflexive practices, as the concept is developed in *The Men and the Boys*, points in the direction of a potentially productive convergence between masculinity studies and new materialist theories. Garlick says that in its engagement with the nature of bodies underlying the cultural construction of gender, Connell's work maintains a relevance that has been largely unappreciated. This is especially the case for boys and young men as they develop masculinities in negotiation with their corporeal capacities.

Jeff Hearn is the author of the fourth commentary piece. Hearn, a leading critical men and masculinities scholar and contemporary of Raewyn Connell, considers some appreciative links and qualified contrasts between their work. In particular, Hearn uses the example of sport—a key area in the making of boys and young men in many parts of the world which figures strongly in *The Men and the Boys*—as an inspiration to reflect on bodies and their mild brutalization, practice, theoretical and empirical conceptualizations of masculinity, and social change.

The final two contributions are personal reflections about Connell and add to those previously published in this journal by Delamont (2020), Weaver-Hightower (2020), and Nelson and colleagues (2020) to show how important Connell's work has been to different generations of scholars. In the eighth article, Richardson reflects on how important Connell's work became for him during the early stages of his career. Richardson suggests that Connell's work has helped him understand how processes of childhood socialization genders boys, and how young men become gendered further still through processes of fatherhood. The final piece, by C.J. Pascoe, reflects on how Connell's theorizing in *The Men and the Boys* has shaped her approach to and analysis of young men's engagements with masculinity and thinking about gender inequality more generally. Pascoe argues that the claims about relationships between global inequalities and gender relations in that text shifted her focus on research with young men away from types of boys—gay boys, straight boys, nerdy boys, popular boys—to a focus

on gender relations among boys themselves, processes by which boys both robbed others of precious indicators of masculinity and attempted to claim said indicators for themselves. This shift highlights the importance of interaction, practice, and institutions—not just identity—to gender inequality among American teenagers.

We would like to thank all the authors, anonymous reviewers, and the editorial board that have worked with us over these two special issues. It has been a pleasure to put this together and work with such a diverse international field. As editors, we also wish to thank Raewyn for supporting our initial idea and all those at Berghahn who made sure the issues came out on time despite the global pandemic.



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