REPRODUCTION, RESISTANCE AND HOPE: THE PROMISE OF SCHOOLING FOR BOYS

Extended editorial introduction to a double special issue on boys and schooling. Adopting a developmental perspective on boyhood, the editors frame these special issues on boys' education by reviewing research on their experience of schooling. In particular, they endeavor to illuminate boys' agency and opportunities they can find in schools for resistance to restrictive masculine regimes.

Keywords: boys, schooling, child development, resistance

Boys, the founding editors of *Thymos* wrote in the inaugural issue, have something to teach us about human nature. Before we can learn from them, though, we must be able to discern the boy from all that obscures him. The goal, as they wrote, is to “see a phenomenon that is by no means intuitively obvious” (Groth & Janssen, 2007, p. 4). To this end they propose the study of boyhood: “the state of being a boy; the time of life during which one is a boy” (Groth & Janssen, p. 4). At the very least, a study of boyhood quickly reveals that a primary commitment to boys' development and to the flourishing of their capacities is hardly to be found anywhere.

In this special issue, we undertake to locate boys in a particular setting—schools—and bring together diverse scholars to examine boys' education. Our aim is to ask: What is the place of boys' development and of their flourishing in the school curriculum? How might schools advance the broadest fulfillment of boys' human capacities as a goal? What specific directions must they follow to do so? In this effort, we build upon a New York University educators' summit that considered how unchallenged assumptions about boys and girls still confound schools' abilities to see students distinct from gendered stereotypes. The summit was held in the city on December 10, 2011 and a number of the authors in this special issue attended and presented at this forum.

We initiate our consideration of these questions with a brief review of the history of childhood and of the ideas, discourses and institutions built around the funda-

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mental vulnerability and dependency of young human beings: the “miserable, extended, helpless state in which we are born and remain for so long” (Gaylin, 1978, p. 3). Western childhood has evolved over the last several centuries from a state of shocking abuse and neglect to more informed efforts to care and to nurture. deMause’s psychohistory of childhood, for example, established six historical “modes of parent-child relations”: Infanticidal Mode; Abandonment Mode; Ambivalent Mode; Intrusive Mode; Socialization Mode; Helping Mode. He argued that a correlation exists between a society’s progress on this continuum and its overall evolution. Regarding the final mode in which caretakers endeavor to follow the lead of the child, deMause remained pessimistic, concluding that “few parents have yet consistently attempted this kind of child care” (1974, p. 52).

In the decades since deMause, developmental researchers have established a child’s hand in his own self-development more clearly and have described the integral way reciprocal communication between child and care-giver, the degree to which “the signals sent by the child are directly perceived, understood and responded to,” links to a child’s sense of self (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). In the case of both girls and boys, however, signals sent to caregivers must filter through gendered beliefs and preconceptions, a “forestructure of understanding” (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998, p. 4) that shapes how the child’s message is interpreted and acted upon. With respect to boys, the gendered filter produces a characteristically unhappy result: Pollack found “historically salient cultural and interpersonal models” that lead to a “traumatic abrogation of their early holding environments” common in boys’ development (1995, p. 35). More recently, Way (2011) found that a “crisis of connection” best characterizes the patterns found in over 15-years of longitudinal boys’ studies.

Though grand narratives of childhood gloss over important cultural variation, as Morrell (2009) reminds us in the case of the differentiated paths of Black and White boys in South Africa, we set our discussion of boys’ education against the broad background of childhood in order to train a developmentalist’s eye on boyhood’s particular priorities. Gilmore’s global survey of man-making (1990), for example, which found “pressured masculinity” to be the cultural norm awaiting boys almost everywhere, reminds us how widespread the core values of the “masculinizing regime” (Connell, 1995) are—and cautions us that there is in fact something grand and terribly relevant in the design of boyhood. Especially in the modern global era when the spread of normative gender codes ushers in an era of “masculine fundamentalism” (Connell, 2000, p. 53), we must consider boyhood and developmental opportunities for boys on both local as well as grand scales.

Schools come into the story of childhood early on, in response to the Renaissance concern that the child—a “tabula rasa”—must be more carefully molded: “Henceforth it was recognized that the child was not ready for life, and that he had to be subjected to a special treatment, a sort of quarantine, before he was allowed to join the adults” (Ariès, 1962, p. 412). It was boys, of course, who were the special targets of this molding and were the first beneficiaries of schools designed to perpetuate the aims of the social and cultural order (Mook, 2007). Favored this way, boys encountered the contradictions of boyhood, described by Kaufman as “a strange combination of power and powerlessness, privilege and pain” (1994, p. 142), at the hands their schoolmasters, in classrooms and school hallways. As deMause recognized, there has been little pretense that a school should follow the lead of the “boy-child.”

Finding there to be a tension between boys and boyhood, developing persons and the gendered design for their lives, developmentalists must conduct a “dialectical critique” of school curricula (Giroux, 1983, p. 64) to locate boys themselves within these institutions. Hardly neutral sites offering knowledge, mentoring and skills, schools must be also be understood as “long arms of the state” (Torre & Fine, 2006, p. 270), directing and attempting to control the arc of boys’ imaginations for their lives. Especially during a time of neoliberal ascendancy, when many schools narrowly attend to concerns of “efficiency, economy and competition” (Keddie, 2009, p. 122), developmental advocates must expose the formal and especially the “hidden” school curricula—“dispositions, structure and modes of knowledge, pedagogic relationships, and the informal culture that make up the daily character of the school” (Giroux, 1983, p. 46)—as these actually affect boys.

In this effort, researchers adopt methods to perceive boys’ lived experience, accepting the feminist wisdom that voice often deviates from accepted truth (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Ideally, in fact, seeking to build theories grounded in the realities of school life for boys, researchers will study *with* them instead of *about* them (Drummond, 2009, p. 114; Kuriloff et al., 2009; Reichert et al., 2009). The “ethnographic moment” (Connell, 2000, p. 9) in masculinity research that penetrated the gloss and subterfuge of masculine conventions to demonstrate the real costs of men’s ways of being must similarly ground theories of boys’ development in boys’ own perspectives. Despite their seductive rhetoric and noble claims, we should probably not simply take schools’ stated missions at face value.

Instead, we must first bring schools’ “informal cultures” to light, tracing their contours and illuminating their defined pathways. Just such scholarship has been a central focus of feminist educational research (cf. Bailey et al., 2002) for several decades and the resulting school reforms have helped to restructure educational opportunity for the present generations of girls. Recent analysis of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have validated the impact of this scholarship, closely linking girls’ educational achievement with social practices of gender equity (Guiso et al., 2008).

In terms of boys’ education, it is worth mentioning that when it comes to improving achievement and literacy the sort of curricular adjustments of what is presently understood as gender equity have little impact. In the same analysis of PISA results it was found that regardless of a country’s practice of gender equity boys’ educational outcomes remained flat (Guiso et al., 2008). In the studies they report, Barker and the Promundo team (in our second issue) point to a very different set of interventions that can free boys to invest more whole-heartedly in their own learning.

But how to advocate for boys’ educational development without playing to a reactive or backlash politic? Weaver-Hightower (2005), for one, urges educational policy-makers to base interventions and programs “on deep knowledge of the particular students and contexts” (2008) before them, avoiding generic, “boy-friendly” interventions that essentialize and reinforce dubious “neuro myths” and “brain scams” (Fischer & Immordino-Yang, 2008) on claims of biological difference. Our perspective aligns with Hightower-Weaver on the need for “deep knowledge” of the boy in school and we argue that we cannot know boys apart from an appreciation of the opportunities and developmental constraints of schools’ masculinity curricula.

Qualitative work produced over the last decade or so (e.g., Martino, 1999; 2000; Kehler et al., 2005; Kehler & Martino, 2007 Reichert, 2001; Reichert & Kuriloff, 2003; Stoudt, 2006) has brought this curriculum into sharper focus. Various studies reveal how man-making is woven into virtually every aspect of schools' social relations: "Gender is made in schools and neighborhoods through peer group structure, control of school space, dating patterns, homophobic speech, and harassment" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 839). By virtue of history and culture, schools' masculinity practices may vary but at root typically reflect a high degree of hierarchy, competition and relations of domination and subordination. The dominant masculine form can be more or less formal, more or less visible, closely associated with school authority or highly resistant to that authority; it is not necessarily the most common identity but will be the most influential and is usually organized around qualities such as physical size and skill, affluence, emotional control, social dominance and always latent, sometimes overt, violence (Swain, 2005). There will be a host of other identities that revolve around this central form, contesting for resources and recognition. Research has found that this contest between dominant, subordinate and marginalized masculine identities is highly contentious; in this way, boys' peer group relations might be described as a "churning sea of competing masculine identities" (Reichert, 2000, p. 262).

However fierce the competition, these studies have also shown that the game is rigged in favor of a particular identity and those boys best able to fit themselves to it. In their recognitional practices, schools valorize certain masculine qualities, attitudes and enactments, centralizing those boys willing and able to embody them; other groups of boys may be derogated, scapegoated or simply ignored. The marginalization of the alternatives they represent is reified throughout the public life of the school community and those boys slotted to these subordinated identities find themselves confronting negative attributions. As Noguera (2008) writes regarding Black boys in the U.S.: "The stereotypes that shape the American images of Black males are so stark and extreme that even the most ordinary and unexceptional Black males find they are forced to contend with the fantasies and fears others have toward them (p. xiii)."

There is no escape from masculine dynamics; their effect is to enmesh each boy within a limited set of offers and choices. As we wrote in a recent study of boys' schooling, "From these collectively constructed representations of masculinities, boys get the message that some win and some lose, depending on their alignment with power and prescribed norms" (Stoudt et al., 2010, p. 33). Themes of hierarchy, competition and privilege—"mechanisms through which observed macro-level phenomena are produced and reproduced at the lived level on a daily basis" (Weis, 2010, p. viii)—characterize virtually all boys' school relationships.

As they win or lose, enjoy privilege or suffer exclusion, boys form masculine self-concepts (Reichert & Kuriloff, 2004). The looking glass of the school's reward and recognitional system, skewed in favor of the society's cultural and ideological investments, plays a key part in perpetuating the masculine standard across generations. No boy perfectly aligns with this standard; for all boys, there is tension and repression, performing and pretending. Boys of color and those from other marginalized groups, in particular, absorb cruel distortions from school looking glasses, reproducing broader cultural patterns. Researchers have found boys' experiences of school communities characterized by a barrage of remarks that were "homo-

phobic, misogynist, anti-Semitic or racist helped to impose the boundaries of who's in and who's out, what's acceptable and what's unacceptable, who's "normal" and who's marginalized" (Stoudt, 2010, p. 41; in the first issue).

Boyhood and its institutions, especially schools, ensure that all boys pass through this masculine crucible. Life within schools, "exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent" (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645), conditions boys to a set of rules that seem immutable. But, while many boys may reap some "patriarchal dividend" for their sacrifices (Connell, 1995), the inherent tensions in boyhood, particularly between what's permitted and what's needed, could be the basis for sweeping changes in the way we help boys to manhood. As boys—and those who care for them—contrast who they are and what they want with the opportunities available under a restrictive gender regime, imagination, resentment and resistance dependably well up. In the gap between their thirst to develop their "full capacities" (Nussbaum, 2000) and the restricted options to be found within masculine norms, boys' resistance arises. The dialectic of male development, so painful and often debilitating, may also be fertile ground for a restructuring of gender.

Barker (2005; in the second issue) has searched in many countries for what he calls "voices of resistance" to inform anti-violence and anti-gang programs. Surveying and talking with young men especially in lower income contexts, he wrote, "The social pressure is high to be part of certain hegemonic versions of manhood—to fight for your honour, to dominate women and to suppress fear. It is an act of courage in many cases and of tremendous reflection to step away from these contests of traditional manhood and find other ways of being a man (2005, p. 148)." The courage and reflection he describes can seem scarce, particularly among those who collude with and conform to school conventions and authority. But a more careful gaze, one that peers beneath the surface glare of "ideological fetishes" and "institutional taboo" (Fine, 1991), can bring a very different picture of boys and their resistance into view. In the most persuasive formulation of masculinity theory, the dominance of the standard is seen as effective not so much by suppressing alternatives as by obscuring them: "Indeed, achieving hegemony may consist precisely in preventing alternatives from gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness" (Connell, 1989, p. 186). Perhaps the common belief in boys' willing collusion and easy cooperation by our system of masculine domination might itself be an illusion?

In Barker's and others' work (e.g., Reichert et al., in the first issue; Way, 2011 and in the second issue; Anderson, 2009 and in the second issue; Sadowski, in the first issue), the close-up lens of qualitative research lets us see how commonly boys critique, defy and opt out of mainstream masculine rewards. Boys react to their circumstances emotionally, often emphatically, but commonly, displaying what Gramsci regarded as good and bad "sense" (1971). As they react, they manifest a divided consciousness, "in which elements of accommodation and resistance exist in an unsteady state of tension" (Giroux, 1983, p. 151). Strategies of survival, rebellion, collusion and surrender all well up as boys respond with judgment that is both clouded and clear. Boyhood scholars and advocates must sort through these responses, with the hope to support those representing a healthy challenge to the current lives of boys.

In a series of interesting studies of boys in schools, Martino (2000, 2001), Kehler and Martino (2007) and Kehler et al. (2005) described boys' capacities for "interro-

gating gender normalization" and their expressed hope for lives less constricted by masculine norms. In an ethnographic study of "footballers" and other popular boys (Kehler & Martino, 2007), for example, their samples included boys who critiqued hegemonic masculine practice and even absented themselves from its conventions, attracted to alternative masculinity practices by a desire for less domination of their hearts. As the authors wrote: "Their willingness to critique the norms governing displays of hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity needs to be understood as driven by a desire to search for better alternatives of self-expression which, they believed, would lead to enhancing their lives and relationships with other people" (p. 107).

In a study of Jewish boys in a Western U.S. city (Reichert & Ravitch, 2009), where they were often distinct minorities in their high schools, we heard similar themes of a desire for freer lives, contradictory consciousness and social critique. These adolescent boys supported each other and promoted alternative ideas for being male quite at odds with the mainstream of their public high schools. Forswearing conventions of hierarchy and harshness, emotional constriction and narrow self-interest, boys drew inspiration from their Jewish families, organizations and religious schools to forge strong ties to each other and to express their struggles and emotions. In so doing, they exhibited a capacity to resist what they critiqued as a degraded status in favor of what one boy described as "the root of everything that, like, makes us human" (Reichert & Ravitch, 2010, p. 24).

Way's studies (2011) have underscored the commonplace resistance manifest in boys' friendships within a culture that actively works against male connections. Despite more stereotypic images of boys' relationships as shallow, action-oriented or troubled, she reported finding deep bonds, loyal support and expressive sharing among many boys: "Boys who have been portrayed in popular culture as more interested in shooting each other than in sharing their thoughts and feelings spoke to us about male friendships that "you feel lost without," about "deep depth" friendships, and about wanting friends with whom you "share your secrets," "tell everything" and "get inside" (2004, p. 182). Boys, she concluded, "regularly resist conventions of masculinity; and peers, particularly close male friends, often provide support for such resistance" (p. 45). Schools and the institutions of boyhood too often operate, according to Way, on the basis of thin culture explanations, representing conventional ideas, while boys themselves, especially during early adolescence, live in the "thick of it" (2011, p. 25).

Still another researcher, Judy Chu, has studied boys' relationships at different ages using similar "voice-centered" methodologies (2000; 2004). In a longitudinal study among elementary age boys, she detailed how sensitive to the peer and institutional demands of masculinity young boys are, making deliberate "compromises" in their identities to avoid going against the grain of masculine norms. In a separate study of adolescent boys, she identified two general patterns for how boys respond to these masculine pressures. Some boys "internalize" societal definitions of masculine ideals, even "to the detriment of one's own sense of self" (2004, p. 100). Such boys not only hold back in order to fit in; they can even come to evaluate themselves, sometimes mercilessly, against this unrealistic masculine standard. In the second pattern, boys are better able to "shield themselves" from these external pressures and to establish senses of self that are more confident and independent. Those exhibiting this second pattern typically enjoy relationships with

other boys with whom they can talk honestly, find validation and exchange support. She concluded that their “experiences of being validated and valued in relationships appear to be key to boys’ resistance and resilience” (2004, p. 101).

These studies afford glimpses of a naturally-arising opposition to the historic terms of boyhood and encourage us to identify the conditions which make boys’ resistance more likely, durable and substantive. New (2001), who proposed that “emancipatory interests” in gender change arise for males in their experience of “systematic mistreatment” within the standard curriculum, supports a fundamental faith in boys’ good sense. Connell (1986; 1995) detailed these interests more specifically—connection to females that inclines males to resist collusive masculinities; personal discomfort with their own lives; and, a more general commitment to social justice—encouraging the view that boys’ resistance for their own sakes as well as for the sake of those they love might become compelling. Just as Chu (2000) proposed two patterns in boys’ reactions to school masculine pressures, one internalizing and another shielding, Ward’s research on Black girls also distinguished between two kinds of resistance: actions taken “for survival”, in which laying low and avoiding the most punishing sanctions of gender policing are primary; and those that are “for liberation”, more likely when youth find sufficient community support to take more collective, organized stands (Ward, 2000). Brown and Gilligan (1992) made the original distinction, between “psychological” resistance in which adolescents give up on “what they know,” take themselves “out of relationship” and trade off having their experiences understood in return for being accepted; and “political” resistance in which conflict with others is unavoidable (1990, p. 271).

For Gilligan, the “overwhelming desire for human connection—to bring one’s own inner world of thoughts and feelings into relationship with the thoughts and feelings of others” (1990, p. 275), animates children’s struggles against restrictive gender conventions and makes their resistance to gendering pressures “indelibly political” (2011, p. 157). Way’s focus on friendships carries this model into a consideration of boys’ development and locates their resistance to a boyhood that “forces them to be figures of a masculine imagination rather than human beings with a range of beliefs, *feelings*, and thoughts about their worlds” (2011, p. 45). Yet we must be realistic about what we regard as resistance that amounts to something more than “the logic of deviance, individual pathology, learned helplessness (and of course genetic explanations) and...the logic of moral and political indignation” (Giroux, 1983, p. 107). As boys shield themselves against the losses and pressures of masculinity, many react with aggression, violence and self-defeating refusal, reactions ably met in schools and in societies with a growing arsenal of behavioral diagnoses and interventions. Even as the casualties mount in families, schools and communities, we cannot take comfort in such deviance and acting out. As common as such self-defeating behaviors are, we suggest that healthier forms of resistance are every bit as ordinary.

In our study of urban adolescent boys of color from the most impoverished, violent communities, attending some of the most under-resourced schools in the tri-state region around Philadelphia, PA, we found many boys exercising both personal integrity as well as strategic agency. These boys showed up for an after-school mentoring program, on their own and without the benefit of any particular structure or support, often for years. In interviews, boys chronicled experiences of

routine confrontation and unrelenting threat and admitted that they did whatever they determined necessary to fend for themselves against such threats. But the boys also maintained that they “don’t love no fight” and described identities that resisted both normative masculinities as well as the inductive pull of cultural images of Black and Latino males. As one boy expresses, distinguishing himself from very different stereotypes, prescriptions and images, “I care about people, and just ... stuff” (Reichert et al., 2009, p. 23).

In the study of older Jewish teens already mentioned, we heard from boys whose resistance to dominant ideas for being male was not only explicit but also adamant. We asked one boy, for example, whether he saw himself as one of the “popular” ones in his high school. He answered, “Just about the furthest from it. I just don’t identify with them. Like, I see them as, kind of, the beer-drinking bozos of the school, you know.” How did these boys describe the identities they aspired to as men? Another boy explained, “Just to be, like, a good human being.” In discussing what these boys had taught us of the possibilities for being male, we wrote, “Boys are ever-creative in their efforts to build their lives and to construct a positive sense of self based upon human needs for connection, meaning and validation. They sort through the resources and opportunities of their lives and often discover ways to assert new, freer ideas for being male” (Reichert & Ravitch, 2010, p. 22).

These examples of boys’ good sense, arising even under harsh circumstances—urban poverty, violence, racism and ethno-cultural prejudice—encourage faith in the possibilities for a new boyhood. Agreeing with Giroux that social theories have tended to be preoccupied with one side or the other in a structure/agency dualism, we appreciate his insight that the personal impact of oppressive curricula are always mediated by the “complex and contradictory nature of human consciousness” (1997, p. 73). Even in schools and cultures where the curriculum is most rigid and severe, boys seem to experience themselves outside of, apart from and even independent of these prescriptions: what Gilligan (1990) has regarded as the “double vision” of youth confronting the limiting effects of gendered options. Particularly when they can perceive the existence of alternatives, or support for their own imagined alternatives, boys’ independence can be strong: “the question is not whether this is a masculine subject, but what form the masculine subject takes in the social world, what discourses will be engaged in, inculcated, taken up by the subject in its pursuit of identity validation and individualization” (Whitehead, 2002, p. 215).

Finding support for their own voices and visions, alternatives to the dominant conventions, seems key to boys’ abilities to fight for themselves. In addition to offering a broad socio-cultural and developmental perspective, authors in this special issue offer more focused suggestions. Sadowski (first issue), in the example of schools “making-space” for a “queer voice” in the life of the school, illustrates what schools can do to support boys’ sense of who they are and their critique of dominant practices, even against “heavily policed” norms for sexuality. Anderson (in the second issue) reports on research showing how cultural shifts in normative masculinity may be making even mainstream spaces like athletics more accessible. Atkinson and Kehler (in the second issue) describe a national campaign in Canada to alter the physical education and health lessons conveyed to boys—“speaking the unspeakable”. Howard (in the first issue) shows how African-American boys must cope with the additional, intersectional pressures of both race and masculin-

ity. Luttrell (in the second issue) examines boys' "careworlds", drawing from case studies of boys from wage-poor families, to shed light on an often neglected dimension of school's relationship to families.

Stoudt (first issue) draws upon research conducted in an elite boys' school to demonstrate how integral privilege is to masculinity and the part played by schools in perpetuating these privileged forms. Barker et al (in the second issue) have established a large body of international work conducted in schools from the Global south to show how schools can actively offer boys some alternative to violent and misogynistic paths.

A commitment by teachers and others in charge of schools to create spaces for possibility, where boys are not punished or otherwise coerced toward blind conformity, can affirm boys' hopes and offer strong support for their libratory instincts. Recent research with teachers reflecting on their work with boys (Raider-Roth, in the first issue) found patterns in teachers' reactions to boys' resistance in school that should help teachers to position themselves more effectively as boys' allies. Way's (in the second issue) finding about the critical importance of boys' friendships and other connections also holds many implication for school programs. Finally, in the Notes from the Field section we have included pieces by Frerichs and Kuriloff (first issue), Nelson and Vidale (second issue), Kagan (first issue) and Thornburg (second issue) that offer concrete examples of how some schools are presently engaged in offering boys glimpses of possibility.

Ultimately, from the work described in this special edition, we hope to suggest that boys in schools can be equipped "with the skills they will need to locate themselves in history, find their own voices, and provide the convictions and compassion necessary for exercising civic courage, taking risks, and furthering the habits, customs, and social relations that are essential to democratic forms" (Giroux, 1997, p. 219).

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