Introduction

Cinemas of Boyhood, Part I

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These are ripe times to study boyhood in cinema. Even though male characters have undoubtedly dominated cinema roles from the start, boys' stories have not been consistently produced or appreciated. Since the publication of *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*, a collection edited by Murray Pomerance and Frances Gateward in 2005, there has been increasing academic interest in boyhood representation through movies, as demonstrated by the articles collected here. This interest follows the expansive concerns of pop psychology texts at the turn of the century that took up the political and emotional consequences of boys' behavior, such as *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* by William Pollack (1999), *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson (2000), and *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men* by Christina Hoff Sommers (2001). As is evident in their titles, this research joined the chorus of a prevailing *masculinity in crisis* theme that has permeated gender studies in recent years: boys have been troubled by the pressures of patriarchy, the demands of feminism, and the culture of capitalism, and thus are in need of rescue and protection from these influences.

This supposed crisis has nonetheless been much less worrisome on screen, where the diverse representations of boyhood concerns are considerably multidimensional. Some boys are clearly challenging gender expectations and confronting masculine roles, while others are trying to age into manhood with less forceful flair. The best example of this latter style has been the recently heralded film *Boyhood* (2014), which primarily follows a single child through elementary school to high school graduation, tracing the subtle and even mundane development of a young man who arrives at adulthood with many of the same perplexing questions and nascent (and

still unfulfilled) ambitions he had as a six-year-old. The title may be a bit sweeping or assumptive—after all, it is the story of only one white, working-class, heterosexual, Texan boy—but its method and message are universal. Boyhood is a process, not a product; it is amorphous and ambiguous despite being codified through schooling, psychology, and the law.

In soliciting articles for this two-part focus on cinemas of boyhood, we anticipated a diversity of perspectives on the subject that would reflect the ongoing questioning of how boys have been constructed by movies, particularly within an era that is fraught with confusions and concerns about just who boys are. We were enthused by the number of manuscripts we received, which ranged across historical periods and national cinemas, and offered an exciting dialogue on the complex and multidisciplinary nature of boyhood studies. While we received some articles examining classical Hollywood texts, we also appreciated the global breadth that many articles provided. Further, as we began the selection process, it became clear that many articles offered potentially paradigm-shifting perspectives on the very definitions of boyhood itself, across time and across cultures.

The current issue contains Part I of our themed section on Cinemas of Boyhood; Part II will be published in the Spring 2016 issue of *Boyhood Studies*. The essays included in this issue move beyond the Butlerian thesis of gender as performance (1990) and such crisis narratives as those promoted by Faludi (1999) and Edwards (2006), taking on representations of boyhood in the now postfeminist context identified by Tasker and Negra (2007) and Hamad (2014). Boys in the films examined in these articles confront their sexual desires and upheavals, question the prevailing politics of their milieu, and negotiate the policies of educational and medical systems that privilege not only heteronormativity and gender dogmatism, but often deny the variable and evolving nature of boyhood itself. The study of boys today has entered what is being thought of as the postnormal range, as recently illustrated by the work of Halberstam (2013) and Spade (2015), and as recognized by the articles offered here.

In this context, genre-bending Hollywood fare such as *Superbad* (2007), examined by Victoria Cann and Erica Horton, generates provocative questions about teenage boys' sexual torments. Katie Barnett engages with broader existential issues about the very survival of boys in American features of the 1990s such as *My Girl* (1991) and *The Mighty* (1998). The two other articles here take on more aggressively argumentative evaluations of gender politics among boys in international films, with Hannah Mueller's analysis of two recent Brazilian films, *Hoje Eu Quero Voltar Sozinho* (2014) and *Do Começo*

ao *Fim* (2009), and a new appreciation of the contemporary Belgian classic *Ma Vie en Rose* (1997) by Gust Yep, Sage Russo, and Ryan Lescure.

The cinematic roles of boys sampled here just begin to suggest the changing nature of boyhood representation in the past few decades. The shallow depiction of sex-starved hetero youths so dominant in the 1980s has long since been replaced by more nuanced depictions of (still often confused) boys who are trying to find their way to whatever manhood now means. We see this in recent American films such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012), *The Kings of Summer* (2013), and *Whiplash* (2014) as well as international fare such as the French *In the House* (2012), *The Notebook* (2013) from Hungary, the Canadian film *Mommy* (2014), and *Trash* (2015) from Brazil. We can still see where the boys are, but who they are continues to evolve with increasing curiosity and sensitivity.

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