

Editorial

Diederik F. Janssen



I am pleased to introduce the Autumn 2016 issue of *Boyhood Studies*, particularly because it does an excellent job in honoring the broad scope of the journal. Contributions tap into children's literature, gender role research, sex differences research, medical history, the sociology and social history of sport, and folklore studies. Yet all contributions admirably show how any strict insistence on the boundedness of these respective fields will fail in doing full justice to the topics discussed.

In "The Nineteenth-Century Dime Western, Boyhood, and Empowered Adolescence," Martin Woodside shows how nineteenth-century US dime Westerns mediated notions of proper and improper boyhood, as well as protean ideas of adolescence, in ways that have not received much of researchers' attention (despite substantial attention to dime novels and boys' literature of this period). Woodside chronicles how Beadle & Adams Half Dime Library, catering to the boy demographic for more than 28 years between 1877 and 1905 (its Dime Library catered to an adult audience), "abandoned pastoral nostalgia for a more violent frontier mythos," thus rewriting conventional narratives of outgoing boyhood. Edward Lytton Wheeler's hit character Deadwood Dick, especially, advanced beyond the more pedagogically minded tradition of boy stories by painting to a more "potent," "invigorated" image of outlaw, open-ended adolescence (*nomen non est omen*, on that front). Woodside notes that in celebrating "eternal adolescence" at the eve of G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence*, Wheeler explored character slots beyond those occupied by more conformist male dime protagonists appearing both before (Buffalo Bill, Jesse James) and after (Burt L. Standish's [Gilbert Patten's] Frank Merriwell) Dick's literary demise in 1896.

Cormac Ó Beaglaoich and colleagues' "The Development and Validation of the Gender Role Conflict Scale for Irish Adolescent Boys" develops and tests a methodological handle on the expectations, stressors, and masculine norms associated with being an adolescent male youth living in



Ireland. Rendering psychometric scales culture-sensitive is one of the recognized challenges to quantitative approaches to gender roles. Findings suggest that as adolescent boys' experience of gender role conflict increases, their self-esteem is attenuated, underscoring the critical role, previously highlighted in gender role research, that this type of conflict plays in adolescent boys' overall sense of well-being. Further research will be needed, Beaglaioich and colleagues propose, to explore possible implications for what might be a "unique trajectory of masculinity within an Irish context"—subject as the latter is, notwithstanding, to continuous change.

In "Factors in the Development of Spatial Cognition in Boys and Girls: Assessing the Impacts of Biology and Navigational Experience," Mariah G. Schug examines the suspension of one the most robustly male-typed and boy-typed of cognitive skills—spatial reasoning—between innate (especially prenatal androgen) and social-experiential factors. Of particular interest here is cited evidence of substantive effects of intra- and cross-culturally variable navigational ranges in human childhood on dimensions of spatial thinking. These effects assume significance as one traverses a range of disciplines, from childhood geography to social history (compare Woodside's discussion of the mythopoetics of the frontier), and from movements eponymously equating gender-making and path-finding (and nation-building: Boy Scouts of America) to more recent ones with an expectably less gender-exclusive embrace of the out-there (Lenore Skenazy's "free-range kids" campaign will be familiar to some; Richard Louv's pediatric diagnosis of "nature-deficit disorder" might be to others). Other research sites for gender and spatial performance of all kinds are of course the new spatialities unlocked by the massively multiplayer online and first-person shooter varieties, which, after all, cater even—perhaps especially—to grounded kids.

In "The Biologically Vulnerable Boy: Framing Sex Differences in Childhood Infectious Disease Mortality," Heather T. Battles examines late nineteenth- and twentieth-century awareness and interpretations of sex differences in childhood mortality, especially from infectious disease, which have been variably construed as reflecting an inherent male frailty. While underlying mechanisms are yet to be fully understood even today, Battles recognizes a number of factors that help situate this etiological puzzle in its historical contexts—factors that range from changing valuations of childhood, an evolving bio-medicalization notably of home and school environments, and advancing technologies, and interests, in weighing the probability of inner-biological susceptibilities against social confounders related to pathogen exposure or to access to health care.

With “Boys, Inclusive Masculinities, and Injury,” Adam White and Stefan Robinson explore recent theoretical inroads into the myriad interfaces between sporting mentality, health consciousness, and gender constructions, particularly University of Winchester professor of masculinity, sexuality and sport Eric Anderson’s social constructionist theory of inclusive masculinity. Looking at how masculinities and sexualities in and around sport and young athletes have been operating since the nineteenth century and how they have been changing in the recent decades at least in the Anglospheric experience, show the potential, White and Robinson demonstrate, of establishing firm research and policy agendas for a range of issues that affect boys’, but also girls’, entry into sport, their risk-taking and health behaviors, and ultimately their co-constructions of athleticism, gender, and health.

In his contribution “The Erotics of Adolescent Male Altruism,” finally, Professor Emeritus of American Studies Jay Mechling draws from his three generations of experience in Boy Scouting in considering that scene’s homoerotics of male adolescent bonding, altruism, and (gender) play (camp at times becomes camp, Mechling documents). Mechling’s text is rich in ethnographic observation, and becomes even richer when considering the many planes on which its broad question can be and to some extent is being considered, from evolutionary psychological and human ethological to psychoanalytic, social historical, and queer theoretical. Mechling concludes by extending his discussion to recent disputes over gender policies in the private organization of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), one that requires reflection on how “eros” might inform pedagogy’s ethos, traditions, modalities, intended purposes, and prospects.¹

By including two book reviews, we extend our keen interest in appreciating key titles in the field. I am hereby inviting book reviews for the 2017 issues.

Note

1. Gender policy disputes in the BSA have been multiple: while allowing women in leader positions (women were recognized as Scoutmaster only as of 1988) and openly LGB-identifying Scouts (effective 1 January 2014) and leaders (as of 2015), it retains a no-girls-allowed policy for its Scouts (apart from a ban on atheists and agnostics from leader positions; unlike the Girl Scouts of the United States of America, BSA does not seem to have offered a policy statement on the contingency of transgender members). BSA’s Cub and Boy Scout programs have been cited as being designed to meet “the emotional, psychological, physical, and other needs of boys between the ages of 8 and



14,” and as guided by the consideration that “boys in this age range seek out and enjoy group activities with other boys” (BSALegal.org 2006). See Mechling in this issue on how *eros* might play into this, and how this may speak to male bonding in the military, where “group activities” have a somewhat different purview and reach.

Reference

BSALegal.org [“on behalf of the Boy Scouts of America”]. 2006. “Teaching ‘Boys to Do Things for Themselves and Others.’” Retrieved from web.archive.org/web/20080512011334/www.bsalegal.org/gender-cases-226.asp.