The "Boy Turn" in Research on Gender and Education

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Although the majority of research in gender and education has rightly focused on girls, recent research in the United States and elsewhere has focused much more on the learning, social outcomes, and schooling experiences of boys. This "boy turn" has produced a large corpus of theoretically oriented and practice-oriented research alongside popular and rhetorical works and feminist and pro-feminist responses, each of which this article reviews. To answer why boys have become such a concern at this time, this article explores the origins and motivations of the boy turn, examines major critiques of the distress about boys, and suggests possible directions for debates and research.

KEYWORDS: boys, education research, gender, masculinity, theory–practice relationship.

Until recently, most policy, practice, and research on gender and education focused on girls and girls' issues. This is as it should be, for in every society women as a group relative to men are disadvantaged socially, culturally, politically, and economically. All of these realms, of course, are integral to the study of schooling. In early interventions in education, particularly by liberal feminists and some radical feminists, schools were seen as significant causes of inequality for women and, more important, as a key institution through which such inequalities could be dismantled (see Arnot, David, & Weiner, 1999, chap. 5; Weiner, 1994, chap. 4).

In the United States, such discussions of gender arguably hit their zenith in the early 1990s with the publication of a number of reports and popular books about girls and their educational disadvantages. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) garnered the largest media splash with the publication of How Schools Shortchange Girls (1992). In the report, the AAUW argues that math and science curriculum and pedagogy, biased standardized tests, and environments that do not account for girls' special concerns are educationally depriving girls. Other books of the period, such as Sadker and Sadker's Failing at Fairness (1994), Peggy Orenstein's School Girls (1994), and Mary Pipher's Reviving Ophelia (1994), presented girls as suffering tremendous psychological damage and educational neglect. According to these authors, girls, as compared with boys, evince more eating disorders, depression, self-esteem drops, and even self-mutilation; girls are called on less often by teachers, show score and enrollment gaps in math and science, and receive fewer and lower-quality comments from teachers. Widespread
attention to these issues has led to great strides in understanding the function of gender in educational contexts, from the processes that affect female entry into and success in math, science, and technology (e.g., Correll, 2001; Eisenhart & Finkel, 1998; Fennema, Carpenter, Jacobs, Franke, & Levi, 1998), to the international context of gender and education (e.g., Anderson-Levitt, Bloch, & Soumaré, 1998; Bloch & Vavrus, 1998; Stambach, 2000), to pedagogical interventions that mediate the effects of gender (AAUW, 1995; U.S. Department of Education Gender Equity Expert Panel, 2001).

As I stated at the outset, however, this was the situation "until recently." Beginning roughly in the mid-1990s, a distinct and growing shift toward examining boys' education has occurred internationally in research on gender and schooling. In many industrialized countries, particularly England and Australia, media furor, parental pressure, practitioner efforts, policy attention, and a great deal of research all have come to focus on the state of boys in schools. I call this shift in gender and education research the "boy turn." The phrase is a convenient double entendre, encapsulating two opinions—perhaps falsely dichotomous—about the shift to boys. From one perspective, the "turn" to boys is a turn away from, an endgame in, the needed focus on girls (Ailwood, 2003; Lingard, 2003), a paradigmatic shift akin to other turns in academia (such as the "social turn" in literacy documented by Gee, 2000, and the "interpretive turn" discussed by Geertz, 1983). From this point of view, the boy turn is unwelcome. The second perspective, one more often embraced by advocates for boys, antifeminist groups, and some education researchers, is that boys are finally having a "turn," a share of research and policy attention. From this perspective, the boys' "turn" is overdue. "Boy turn" is a better, more accurate term for the research corpus outlined in this article than expressions such as the oft-heard "What about the boys?" because I include research that simultaneously focuses on boys and rejects the backlash implied by "What about the boys?"

What has caused this "turn" to boys? How might we define its relative positives and negatives? In this article, after a brief explanation of my methodology, I present some of the underlying causes of the research shift. Then, tracing both academic and practitioner literature on boys, I describe some of the major contributions to the understanding of gender, education, and equity work that have emerged from it. As a prelude to suggesting future directions for research, I point out many of the disconnections between academic, theoretically oriented work and practice-oriented work on boys' issues. I then present a number of critiques of the boy turn, which provide significant qualifications on and mediations of existing research, policy, and pedagogy efforts. With these criticisms and cautions in mind, I conclude with a number of possibilities for further research in theory and practice.

A Note on Method

The art of reviewing research literature is always potentially problematic because each analysis constructs the reviewed field in certain political ways (e.g., Lather, 1999). The current review certainly will not transcend such considerations, although I have endeavored to provide a broad range of works representative of the rather young field of research on boys, masculinity, and education. I cannot claim to have included every article or book on boys' education issues, but I have tried to include all works that have made a significant impact on the field, as well as those that are representative of their particular categories (see below). Readers familiar
with the field should find the reference list thorough; those new to boys' education might regard this as a suitable place to begin. No works have been intentionally excluded for reasons of methodology or political orientation. Research on gender and education, however, is a vast field. Topics that are certainly relevant to issues of boys, such as transgender issues, are only glossed here in an effort to focus on the lines of debate that have captured the majority of attention in both public and academic debate. That other issues, such as transgender theory, have not garnered more attention is a weakness of the field in general, as I discuss later.

I base the synthesis presented here on an informal process of grouping works according to four artificial, though grounded (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), categories that I see as key divisions in the research on boys in education. Dividing the research in this way provides a heuristic to illuminate potential problems for researchers and educators. The four categories are (a) popular—rhetorical literature, (b) theoretically oriented literature, (c) practice-oriented literature, and (d) feminist and pro-feminist responses. I concentrate on the practice- and theoretically oriented traditions here, although the other two are also necessary for understanding the full complexity of the boy turn and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the practice and theory categories. Table 1 summarizes the four categories and forecasts the analysis of each as elaborated in the article. Bear in mind that the categories are fluid and overlapping (individual works may fit into more than one tradition) and that they, of course, offer only one possible approach to sorting the literature.

**Etiologies**

Many assume that the turn to boys has its roots primarily in pop psychology or media-driven moral panic (see Kimmel, 2000; Weaver-Hightower, in press); I refer to works in this category, which usually appear in newspapers, magazines, and trade books, as “popular—rhetorical” literature. Though only one of many etiologies, the popular—rhetorical literature can easily be construed as the source of the boy turn because that literature offers the loudest voices and the most visible headlines, much like the media attention for girls that emerged in the early 1990s. The sense of moral panic, or social crisis, about boy's issues can most easily be seen in a group of recent bestsellers, which Mills (2003) calls “backlash blockbusters.”

William Pollack's 1998 book *Real Boys*, for example, warns of increasing psychological harm to boys in modern society. His solution to boys' increasing depression, drug use, suicide, teen sex, academic failure, and violence—all findings supported by research—is to reinforce boys' emotional connections with parents and other adults. Similarly, Christina Hoff Sommers (2000), in her book *The War Against Boys*, caused controversy with her contention that boys are being systematically disadvantaged: They are increasingly behind girls in literacy measures, "engagement" in school, and college enrollment, and they outnumber girls in suspensions and expulsions, dropout rates, special education placements, and diagnoses of attention deficit disorder. These are robust research findings. Problematically, however, Sommers attributes such difficulties to distortions of fact by educational advocates for girls and attempts by feminists to "pathologize" the manly "nature" of boys. Michael Gurian, in *Boys and Girls Learn Differently!* (2001), also makes claims for the "nature" behind boys' issues. He contends that boys and girls, because of differences in brain construction, have differing educational needs and that schools are not meeting boys' needs. Steve Biddulph (1998),
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| Popular–rhetorical             | Biddulph (1998); Pollack (1998); Sommers (2000)           | Generally argues that boys are disadvantaged or harmed by schools and society and that schools are “feminized.” | • Accessible language  
• Widely available  
• Responsive to public concern | • Frequently essentialist  
• Prone to antifeminism and conservative politics  
• Prone to biological determinism |                                                                                                                                                      |
| literature                     |                                                             |                                                                                 |                                                                           |                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                      |
| Theoretically oriented literature | Connell (1995); Crotty (2001); Mac an Ghaill (1994); Willis (1977) | Concerned with cataloging types of masculinity and their origins and effects. Examines how schools and society produce and modify masculinities. Largely uses the tools of qualitative research. | • Nuanced understanding of gender  
• Uncovers subtle processes | • Often ignores public concern and practitioner needs  
• Less accessible language and less availability  
• Often focuses on most visible masculinities  
• Tends to neglect academic side of schooling |                                                                                                                                                      |
| Practice-oriented literature    | Bleach (1998b); Browne & Fletcher (1995); Head (1999)     | Concerned with developing and evaluating school- and classroom-based interventions in boys’ academic and social problems. | • Responsive to practitioner and public concerns  
• More accessible language  
• Addresses academic side of schooling | • Prone to “quick fixes”  
• Often atheoretical or undertheorized  
• Fails to address feminist concerns about funding and the question “Which boys?” |                                                                                                                                                      |
| Feminist and pro-feminist      | Epstein et. al. (1999); Lingard & Douglas (1999)           | Critiques the boy turn, moral panics over boys, notions of “underachievement,” and popular–rhetorical backlashes. | • Tempers heated debates  
• Maintains a focus on social justice | • Prone to economistic arguments  
• Prone to overlooking “good sense” of boys’ reforms |                                                                                                                                                      |
| responses                       |                                                             |                                                                                 |                                                                           |                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                      |
a bestselling author in Australia, makes similar biological claims about boys’ testosterone and about the “natural” development of boys. In general, claims from bestseller psychologists such as Pollack, Sommers, Gurian, and Biddulph rely heavily on arguments rooted in a “battle of the sexes” (note martial terms such as “war” against boys), biological determinism, and the notion that boys have a “toxic,” self-harming gender role to perform.

Internationally, the media have made similar claims for the educational disadvantages of boys, based mainly on various national standardized test scores in literacy, as well as indicators such as high dropout rates and disciplinary rates, disproportionate numbers in special education, and falling college enrollment. In England, for example, headlines offer to explain “Why Girls Are Beating ‘Lads’” (BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation], 2000), while Australian headlines proclaim women the “Superior Sex” (Bulletin with Newsweek, quoted in Alloway & Gilbert, 1997c, p. 22) because they “are smarter, healthier, more honest and live longer.” Similar headlines and concerns have appeared in Germany, Japan, and Scandinavia (Connell, 2000). The practical response to all of these popular concerns has been uneven at best, ranging from solely informal, classroom-based interventions in the United States to federal policy formation attempts in Australia.

Several news events have also contributed to this popular focus. In the United States alone, the “Spur Posse” incidents in the mid-1990s (as described by Faludi, 1999) in which a group of boys scored “points” for having sex with underage girls, the controversies surrounding the entrance of women to the Citadel military college and the Virginia Military Institute (see Diamond, Kimmel, & Schroeder, 2000), and a series of school shootings epitomized by the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School all have placed boys, their socialization, and questions of power, privilege, and violence at the center of public attention. These events have aided the moral panic over boys, and interventions have grown out of targeting such high-profile events.

Popular psychology books and media calls for attention to boys, however, are not the only catalyst of the boy turn that I will examine. Although such exposure certainly makes parents, teachers, and administrators aware of the issue, this alone does not explain the tremendous resources now devoted research and policymaking on boys. Instead, a constellation of other, interrelated factors has also contributed to the boy turn (see Table 2). Rather than coming “out of the blue,” as Kenway and Willis (1998, p. 49) assert, the boy turn arose from numerous identifiable factors, each making a contribution.

The second major impetus for the boy turn, somewhat ironically, has been feminist theory, along with men’s movement theorizing built on feminist theory. Work by feminists (particularly sex role theories) throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, in establishing the effects of gender on women’s lives, also opened the door for questioning of the male role (Connell, 2000). Those who examined the male role, whether educationalists (e.g., D. Sadker, 1977), mythopoetic writers of the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991; Moore & Gillette, 1990), or even antifeminist writers (e.g., Farrell, 1993), identified a number of vital social issues needing examination and intervention. These include the familial, social, economic, and physical aspects of men’s lives in connection with labor, emotional disconnection, health concerns, divorce and custody disputes, body image, and violence, among other things. Such concerns led almost seamlessly
to similar theorizing about the lives of boys, particularly in the recent spate of tomes dedicated to boys’ upbringing, such as those by Pollack and by Biddulph, discussed earlier, and by Kindlon and Thompson (2000) and Gurian (1998). The general point is that literature on boys has been made possible, in part, by feminist critiques of the gender order that preceded them.

A third contributor to the boy turn is feminists’ original formulation of indicators of gender equity in education, indicators now being used to make a case for the disadvantage of males. Kenway and Willis (1998) term these initial indicators a “strategic mistake” on the part of feminists (see also Lingard & Douglas, 1999, p. 96). By setting up equality as a matter of enrollment and test score gaps rather than, say, the economic and social outcomes of education, feminists unintentionally laid the groundwork for boy advocates to claim disadvantage at the first sign of access or test score advantage for girls. For example, although identifying girls’ disadvantages in math and science scores led to productive targeting of the pedagogy, psychology, sociology, and enrollment patterns that caused the gaps, it also left open the identification of boys’ disadvantages in test scores in reading and writing as a reason to be concerned for boys. Similarly, just as men’s numerical advantage in college enrollment before the 1980s was taken as a sign of patriarchal privilege, the more recent reverse trend whereby women now outnumber men in undergraduate and graduate degree programs has been taken to mean that males are now at an educational (and soon, outcomes) disadvantage. Such analyses present feminist reforms with a significant challenge, for, as I have argued elsewhere (Weaver-Hightower, 2003), to change equity indicators now, thus excluding boys, may seem to the general public to be self-serving and cynical, or at least “out of touch” in an international context of high-stakes testing and accountability. Such reformulations are seen in the current climate as “denial” or self-preservation (House of Representatives, 2002) rather than as an evolving realization of the nuances of gender’s effects.

A fourth major prompt for the boy turn has been increasing neoliberal education reforms and the rise of the New Right—the conservative restoration since the 1980s’ ascendance of Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Reagan in the United States. Many point out the New Right’s explicit aims of backlash against women (Christian-Smith, 1990; Faludi, 1991); however, the structure of its educational reforms, particularly the interconnected processes of privatization and accountability, have accomplished more than its antifeminist rhetoric ever could. This is particularly true in England, where neoliberal reforms produced an educational choice structure in which schools compete with one another for students. Parents’
main tools for choosing schools are league tables, in which the standardized test scores of each school are published in the newspaper and on the Internet. Thus administrators and teachers are forced to overvalue test performance lest they lose students and, consequently, their schools or their jobs. The result is a method of "educational triage" (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) in which the limited resources of a school are funneled to students "on the bubble" of passing the tests. Triage of this sort has clear gender consequences (and racial consequences as well, but those are not my focus here). Because boys outnumber girls in the lower test score ranks, funding will go disproportionately to them; moreover, advances in equalizing the curriculum, particularly in language arts, may be rolled back to better suit boys. In summary, educational reforms championed by the New Right have created a "structural backlash" (Lingard & Douglas, 1999) that operates to challenge feminist victories without having to engage in explicit antifeminist rhetoric.

We should not, however, overlook explicit backlash politics, the fifth catalyst of the boy turn. This backlash takes the form of constant claims that girls have made great strides and in many ways have surpassed boys. The tenor of such claims can vary widely, from explicit, virulent attacks on feminism to more "reasoned" debate about needing to modify the "feminine" nature of schooling. Perhaps the best scholarly work on this trend has come from Australia, where Lingard and Douglas (1999) have examined the structural, policy, and media backlashes spurred on by the "What about the boys?" debate, and where Kenway and Willis (1998) have explored backlashes within schools—among teachers and gender equity coordinators and between students. In general, backlashes feed on anxieties, threatened beliefs, and self-interest. Gender issues, with high visibility in an identity politics, have been a major source of such feelings in the last 40 years.

Change in the economy and work force, the sixth cause of the boy turn, has been significantly tied to such gender politics. As many have argued, the economies of "developed" nations have made dramatic shifts toward "feminization" of the work force (e.g., Arnot et al., 1999, chaps. 6, 8; Maynard, 2002, pp. 13–14). In this formulation, industrialized economies are increasing mainly in the service sector, in jobs traditionally held largely by women. In addition, the workplace cultures of the "new capitalism" (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996) increasingly value "feminine" modes of interaction, such as working in interactive teams rather than as atomistic competitors. In general, men have been largely unequipped for these changes, and, as Arnot et al. (1999) argue, schools have failed to help boys make the transition:

Young men have been expected to adapt to an increasingly unstable set of circumstances in the work sphere, threatening the conventional basis both of masculinity and its associated ideal of the male as breadwinner. Such instability has been deepened, we suggest, not by the work of schools challenging and transforming masculinity, but rather by their failure to do so. While schools challenged girls to adapt to new circumstances, young men were not offered similar possibilities to adapt to social and economic change, even though the restructuring of the workplace and the family called for men with modern and more flexible approaches to their role in society. New sets of values, aspirations and skills were being asked of men as workers, husbands and fathers. The failure in the last two decades of government, society and schools to address the prevailing forms of, and ideas about, masculinity, particularly in relation to changing work identities and challenges to the patriarchal dominance of the male breadwinner, has had negative repercussions for boys. (pp. 125–126)
What the authors index here is the worldwide "crisis of masculinity" that drives, and is driven by, the moral panic over the schooling and rearing of boys.

Although the uses of the term have varied, "crisis of masculinity" commonly refers to perceptions that men in a society are acting in harmful ways toward themselves or others because of conditions in the culture, economy, or politics that prevent them from fulfilling a culturally specific "traditional" hegemonic masculine role. For example, Susan Faludi (1999) in her recent book Stiffed describes a crisis of masculinity in the United States in which "broken promises" of patriarchal dividends, secure futures, and civic roles have created a masculine culture of lashing out, resulting in a rise in both domestic and public violence. Similarly, Michael Kimmel (2002) suggests that large-scale male violence such as terrorism stems from perceptions of economic disenfranchisement and threats to masculine "birth rights," particularly in extremist groups like the Taliban in Afghanistan and White supremacy groups in the United States (see also Weaver-Hightower, 2002). Although the cultural and economic contexts in countries that produce crisis masculinity are diverse, many of the processes involved are the same; indeed, all masculinities, because they compete for hegemony against femininities and other masculinities, always tend toward crisis (Connell, 1995). Each context may involve different configurations of this process, but crisis masculinity across the globe has emerged among (mostly young) men who are excluded from local economies; faced with "doing worse" than previous generations; perhaps denied "full, waged citizenship in the nation-state"; and deskilled and displaced by the feminization of post-Fordist labor (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000, p. 307). Although economics has an important role, cultural and political conditions have also contributed to the global production of crisis masculinity, particularly as manifested in military and cultural incursions by the United States and other countries through processes of globalization, war, and neo-imperialism. In such unstable times, moral panics develop, and that is yet another catalyst for the turn toward research and policy on boys' education (see also Mac an Ghaill, 1996).

The crisis of masculinity and the resulting panic over boys causes concern not only among boys themselves but also among their parents. Undeniably, much of the impetus behind reform for boys comes from parents who are, with good reason, concerned about their children's futures. Parental concern, indeed, is the seventh mainspring of the boy turn. We should not overlook the fact that parental concern (at least its public face) has come largely from middle-class White parents, who, one could argue, feel threatened by the loss of dominance for their sons (Yates, 2000). We should take care, however, not to lose sight of the elements of "good sense" that lie behind some of the concern for boys (as Apple, 2001, suggests, there are elements of good sense in any political project). To ignore the good sense of some arguments for intervening on behalf of boys is to risk "pushing" parents who have valid concerns for the quality, safety, and outcomes of their sons' and daughters' educations toward rightist positions (Apple & Oliver, 1996). Rightist groups are willing to take parents seriously on this matter. One should not, however, construe rightists' willingness to take up advocacy for boys as a sign that the issue is somehow "tainted," or inherently a rightist position unavailable to more progressive groups. There are progressive ends in working with boys, such as the diminution of violence or expansion of the emotional and cultural repertoire of boys. In fact, many progressive groups—particularly good
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examples come from African-American communities—are already working with boys, seeking to mollify their disadvantages.2

The final spur to the boy turn that I will discuss is the “thrill of the new” for researchers and educators. Although at first glance seemingly an example of the frivolous self-involvement of the “ivory tower,” the allure of a “hot” field that is wide open for new and “sexy” research is strong. Lynn Yates (2000) describes the attraction nicely:

What we found when we were looking at and attempting to interpret the tapes from our first round of interviews was that the boys in our study seemed interesting and our findings there “unexpected,” whereas ... we could find little [new] to say about the girls... [W]e became aware that much of the feminist literature on schools with which we were familiar ... did treat girls in sensitive detail, while leaving boys as a more shadowy “other.” (p. 317)

This “shadowy other” has great power over the academic imagination. One should not ignore the political economy of such research decisions, however. For scholars desiring to establish themselves (myself included), finding a niche within a “new” topic or the opportunity to extend a hot debate is a powerful draw. Publisher demands for marketable products, in turn, support this impulse, a fact not lost on those who must “publish or perish.” That this circuit of production (Johnson, 1986–1987) influences which knowledge is ultimately attained, and therefore which issues are promoted or targeted in schools, should be of grave concern to social justice movements in education. For, as we have seen with the boy turn, the political economy of publishing powerfully shapes or limits research, funding, and policymaking.

With these origins of and catalysts for the boy turn in mind, we can now turn to an examination of the major contributions of the research on boys and masculinities in education. Those contributions have come from two major streams of research on boys, masculinity, and schooling, which I have discussed elsewhere (Weaver-Hightower, 2003): theoretically oriented (concerned with the philosophical or sociological understanding of educational contexts) and practice oriented (concerned with the practices and procedures of teaching and learning).3 In the sections that follow, I outline the major findings of each stream of research, identify the disconnections and connections among them, assess their relative strengths and weaknesses, and suggest future directions for the boy turn.

The Scholarly Turn: Theoretically Oriented Literature

Rather than provide a detailed chronicle of major studies of sociocultural processes in this limited space, I would like to offer a brief outline of the significant contributions of the theoretically oriented literature on boys and masculinity to the understanding of gender and how to research it. (The major themes discussed below are adapted, in part, from those in Connell, 2000).

Multiple Masculinities

There is no single, universal, ahistorical version of masculinity to which all cultures subscribe or aspire. Rather, ideals of masculinity are historically and contextually dependent, making a nearly infinite number of masculinities possible. Ethnographic studies (e.g., Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Willis, 1977) have shown this concretely. Mac an Ghaill, for one, shows a typology of masculinities for both
teachers and students, each with distinct characteristics and relations to women, labor, schooling, and other men. The idea of multiple masculinities offers an important affirmation that masculinities are changeable.

**Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Sexuality Inflect Masculinity**

The notion of multiple masculinities suggests that masculinities coalesce around various subject positions. To phrase it more actively, individuals and social groups create and adapt versions of masculinity for their own uses within their own cultural frames. Many African-American males, for instance, create unique masculinities, such as the gangster persona adapted from Italian-American masculinities (Katz & Jhally, 1999), to cope with the realities of a racist, classist society. They occasionally develop a "cool pose" (Majors & Billson, 1993) to create and retain what power they can (see also Dance, 2002; Sewell, 1997). Willis's (1977) participants, the "lads," as an example of classed masculinity, draw on elements of troublemaking and shop floor culture, including the reverence for manual as opposed to intellectual labor, to stake out masculine identities in school, in opposition to middle-class conceptions of power and prestige. The theory that masculinities are distinct in different groups (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003) serves to remind us that research should always disaggregate the stakeholders, delineating who has and does not have an advantage. Thus the concern about boys in the theoretically oriented tradition is not about all boys but primarily about those who suffer oppressions based on subjectivities other than gender alone.

**Hegemony**

R. W. Connell's connection of masculinity with Gramscian notions of hegemony (see especially Connell, 1995) suggests that the multiple versions of masculinity constantly struggle for dominance and that some groups actually achieve dominance. Those that do not—typically but not always men of color, working-class men, gay men, and feminine men—are subject to varying degrees of oppression from the hegemonic group. Ferguson (2000), for example, shows that the masculinity created by and for African-American boys puts them in the double bind of being treated as either dangerous or endangered, with extra surveillance by dominant groups as the result of either perception. Willis (1977), too, shows that the masculinity performed by the working-class "lads" eventually serves to ensure that they gain credentials for working-class jobs only, because the middle class has established the criteria for middle-class jobs based on a different masculinity. Certain masculinities always "win out" and gain dominance. Not every boy, therefore, experiences societal relations of power in the same way. Every boy, in fact, experiences some amount of powerlessness in the face of age oppression (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997a; Denborough, 1996; Mills, 2000). Still, those who adopt the masculinities that achieve hegemony are much better off, in terms of distribution of social goods and social status, than those who do not. Thus we need to avoid assuming not only that all boys are disadvantaged because some are, but also that all boys are advantaged because some are.

**Active Construction**

Masculinities, Connell (1996) asserts, "come into existence as people act" (p. 208). Thus agency accompanies the construction of masculinity. Connell suggests that
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boys freely choose between masculinities, but one must remember that institutions and other factors restrict their choices. Nevertheless, the ability to make even restricted choices means that boys can and do choose nonoppressive forms.

Symbolization and Gender Regimes

Masculinity resides in and is produced by institutions (Connell, 1996, 2000; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Lesko, 2000a; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), primarily at the level of symbol and structure. The curriculum, division of labor, tracking, disciplinary schemes, and other school structures—all elements of the school’s “gender regime” (Browne, 1995; Connell, 1996, 2000; Lesko)—affect gender relations in subtle ways. Some schools have more explicit gender regimes than others; in the all-male military colleges in the United States that weathered controversies in the mid-1990s (Diamond et al., 2000), masculinity asserts itself in nearly every aspect of school life. Typically, however, masculinity takes more understated forms, often presenting a challenge for the researcher to tease from the context. This subtlety reminds the researcher to look at multiple locations and levels of power and discourse in an institution as complex as a school.

Efficacy of Ethnography

The much-discussed “qualitative turn” in research has played a large part in furthering the study of masculinity, boys, and schooling. In particular, researchers have widely applied the tools of ethnography to the study of gender in schools, as is the case in the vast majority of the studies mentioned here. Willis (1977), Best (1983), Foley (1990), Thorne (1993), Mac an Ghaill (1994), Sewell (1997), Gallas (1998), Ferguson (2000), Skelton (2001), Dance (2002), and many others have relied on traditional ethnography to tease out the complex relations of masculinity within school settings. Other studies, though not ethnographies per se, have used particular tools of qualitative research to good ends, such as Connell’s “life histories” (1995). The near-total shift away from quantitative techniques is partly the result and partly the cause of the abandoning of biological and sex-difference theories of masculinity formation. However, despite its ability to uncover the complexities of gender in schools, the “ethnographic moment,” as Connell (2000) calls it, may ultimately limit our ability to look beyond the local. Connell suggests that researchers begin to explore the global creation and circulation of masculinity, particularly “transnational business masculinity” (chaps. 3, 4). The very fact that the boy turn is an international phenomenon suggests the need for analyses of globalized circulations.

Macrolevel Formation of Masculinities

As Connell notes, much of the research on masculinity concerns itself with micro-level socialization: contact with media (e.g., Katz & Jhally, 1999), classroom and playground interactions (e.g., Newkirk, 2000; Thorne, 1993), conversation (e.g., S. Johnson & Meinhof, 1997), uses of texts (e.g., Evans & Davies, 2000; Young, 2000), or parent-child interaction (Gleason, 1987). Recent work, however, has shown that patterns of masculinity form around larger social processes as well. Mac an Ghaill (1994, 1996, 2000), for example, posits that economic changes in England have produced particular masculinities around vocationalism and the need for new credentials in an era of deindustrialization. Foley (1990), similarly, shows that certain masculinities form in the crucible of race relations along the
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Texas–Mexico border. Arnot et al. (1999), finally, demonstrate how policies and reforms, particularly Thatcher-era conservative and neoliberal reforms, have dramatically changed gender relations and masculinities in English schools. Such attention to macro-level formation of masculinities has pushed research to attend to large-scale processes that affect masses, not just individuals in interaction.

Overall, the theoretically oriented literature has focused mainly on the genesis and coherence of forms of masculinity, much more than on the impact of particular forms on individuals, groups, or interactions. Also, theorists have yet to develop ways to interrupt disruptive or limiting masculinities where they occur. Practice-oriented research, on the other hand, has had much more success in addressing classroom-level interventions in gender relations.

The School-Based Turn: Practice-Oriented Literature

Like theoretically oriented literature, the practice-oriented literature comes in many forms and from many traditions (see Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, chap. 9). For example, a substantial amount of work focuses on antiviolence education targeting males (e.g., Davies, Davison, & Safer, 1994; Denborough, 1996; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996; Katz, 2000; Katz & Jhally, 1999; Mills, 2001) and on "therapeutic" approaches to working with men (see Lingard & Douglas, 1999, for a description of these). While drawing somewhat on these traditions, this section focuses on examining school- and classroom-based interventions in sexism and the academic "underachievement" of boys, because these issues have garnered more attention. This so-called "boyswork" merges many issues that cover nearly every aspect of schooling. Generally, the boyswork literature covers two broad, sometimes overlapping categories: (a) learning and outcomes, and (b) social and psychological consequences.

The latter category, research into social and psychological consequence, explores a number of concerns about boys. Violence, as mentioned above, has been a significant interest, particularly in the post-Columbine High School era of school shootings in the United States and moral panics over the safety of children in schools (see Mills, 2001). Bullying, identified as a primary cause of much violence and retaliation in schools, has received a great deal of attention in practice-oriented work (e.g., Davies et al., 1994; Griffiths, 1995; Rigby, 2002). Other types of antipressive education have a somewhat longer history within the literature, however. Antisexism work, particularly, has been the focus of curricular and programmatic interventions with boys since the 1970s. David Sadker (1977) and D. C. Thompson (1985), for example, wrote curriculum packages that suggest specific activities for examining the sex roles of boys (and girls) and ways to "overcome" the stereotyping of those roles. Askew and Ross (1988), similarly, detail some of the activities that they used in English single-sex schools to explore sexism and the male role. Perhaps one of the best examples of the social-psychological tradition, however, is Salisbury and Jackson's Challenging Macho Values (1996), covering in one volume the wide array of boys' issues studied by boyswork scholars, including sexuality, sexual harassment, violence and bullying, media education, language, male body image, sports, and emotional and physical well-being. The Australian collection, Boys in Schools (Browne & Fletcher, 1995), similarly covers a variety of social issues that boys experience (sexuality, bullying, and peer relations among them), giving teaching strategies, classroom organization advice, counseling
programs, and activities for teachers and administrators to use in interrupting gender problems in their schools and classrooms.

More prevalent than such social and psychological literature, particularly in the wake of neoliberal educational reforms in England (Arnot et al., 1999; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), is concern about boys' academic "underachievement." As I argued earlier, the situation of "educational triage" (Gillborn & Youdell), in which pedagogical attention shifts to the students who bring examination scores down and thereby make the entire school look bad, has shifted attention to boys. This high-stakes testing problem has been of great concern in many countries, from England (e.g., Arnot et al.; Epstein, Elwood, Hey, & Maw, 1998b) to the United States (e.g., Sommers, 2000), to Australia (e.g., Alloway & Gilbert, 1997a). In response to these concerns about test scores, among other indicators, a number of scholars and teachers have published strategies for raising the academic achievement of boys (Bleach, 1998b; Gurian, 2001; Head, 1999; Noble & Bradford, 2000).

To provide a comprehensive list of the suggestions made in the practice literature is not possible here, but in general the practice-oriented literature deals with a number of core pedagogical and programmatic issues and questions worth summarizing. These include (a) suggesting whole-school approaches rather than isolated programs; (b) considering carefully the gender of the teachers conducting programs; (c) training teachers to teach boys, despite obstacles and discouragement; (d) providing reasons for boys to change; (e) creating respectful, nonblaming approaches to working with boys; (f) attending to the gendering of textbooks and materials; and (g) using critical literacy to teach boys about gender and its construction through texts.

Although the influence of the theoretically oriented literature and its findings is apparent in the abovementioned concerns of practice-oriented literature, the two bodies of literature exist separately for the most part, in both their bibliographies and their concerns. A number of differences are apparent. First, the two speak in different registers, with differing vocabularies, each using its own jargon (with which denizens of the other may not be familiar). Second, each literature asks different questions. Theoretically oriented research focuses largely on the creation of subject positions, with a constant emphasis on masculinity typologies. Practice-oriented research, on the other hand, seeks to ameliorate the academic and social problems of boys at the classroom level. Stated simply, the difference is the unit of analysis. Theory literature looks for meso- and macro-institutional explanations; practice literature looks for individual, interactional, and pedagogical explanations and solutions.

Each literature also has unique problems. First, practice-oriented works have largely failed to address the fears of feminists and pro-feminists that focusing on boys will harm the gains made for and by girls. Second, practice-oriented literature has rarely spoken to concerns about funding, especially the degree to which funds might be taken from girls' programs to fund boys' programs. Although mostly pedagogical and organizational in its suggestions, and so not expensive to implement, practice-oriented research must give the issue of funding serious consideration. Third, practice-oriented literature relies heavily on governmental reports and test scores for its claims and is therefore vulnerable to political influence (in the case of reports) and validity questions (in the case of test scores). Fourth, some practice-oriented work relies heavily on a "tips for teachers" style (Lingard, Martino, Mills, & Bahr, 2002; Martino & Berrill, 2003) that provides simplistic strategies for
extremely complex problems, such as dimming the lights as a solution to helping boys read better. Finally, and perhaps most consequentially, practice-oriented literature has failed to address "Which boys?" (a coinage often heard in response to "What about the boys?"), for not all boys are at a disadvantage in schools. As I argued earlier, boys who inhabit subjectivities of disadvantage other than, or in addition to, gender—such as race, class, religion, and sexual orientation—are the ones most in need of study and intervention.

The theoretically oriented tradition has problems as well. First, much theoretically oriented work suffers from what Barrie Thorne (1993, pp. 97–99) calls, in a critique of anthropology, the "Big Man bias." That is, theoretically oriented research focuses myopically on the most visible males—the "bad boys" or the most wildly successful—as if they were representative of all males. The "ordinary" kids, those who are not disruptive or destructive, those who are not scholastic or athletic stars, have so far received little attention. Second, the theoretically oriented literature has largely neglected the academic aspects of schooling. Rather than examining the impact of differing masculinities on learning, this tradition focuses on social processes external to the curriculum and cognition: how students relate or dominate rather than how they learn, say, English or art. Third, just as practice-oriented literature has failed to adequately theorize the practices it advocates, theoretically oriented literature seems unwilling (e.g., see Epstein, Elwood, Hey, & Maw, 1998a, p. 14; Ferguson, 2000, pp. 234–235) or unable (e.g., Redman, 1996, p. 178) to suggest practices implied by its theories. Finally, the theoretically oriented tradition has failed to meaningfully address the concerns of parents, teachers, and boys themselves. As mentioned earlier, ignoring these stakeholders has potentially negative implications for social justice movements in other areas because stakeholders may then feel pushed into antifeminist positions.

Despite their differences, the theoretically oriented and practice-oriented traditions share a major omission: Both lack general awareness of the binaries and dualisms on which they are built. Although a significant amount of feminist theoretical work has sought to rupture masculine/feminine, masculinity/femininity, heterosexual/homosexual, and boy/girl dualisms (e.g., Butler, 1990), including those within the field of education (e.g., Lee, 1996), for the most part both the practice-oriented and theoretically oriented traditions of the boy turn still rely quite heavily on these binary categories. The conceptualization of multiple masculinities challenges these binaries to some extent, but transgender issues, intersexuality (Fausto-Sterling, 1995), and multiple sexualities have received scant attention within boy turn works (see Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, for an exception). This is, in part, a result of the politically conservative nature of much of the boy turn (Martino & Berrill, 2003), but it is nevertheless a key area to be improved upon. To fail to do so is to make research complicit in the oft-noted silencing of nonheterosexuality and multiple gendering that involves severe oppression for many students and teachers (see Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Friend, 1993; Jennings, 1994; Loutzenheiser, 1996; Mandel & Shakeshaft, 2000; Owens, 1998; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995; Sellars, 1992).

Regardless of their unique and shared failings and disconnections, the practice and theory traditions have much to offer to one another and much to offer to the study of gender. Reuniting these traditions would serve their common aims of increased equality by producing "better" masculinities, reduced status differences between theory and practice in the academy, and increased readership for both
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bodies of literature. To reconnect these corpuses would require, as I have argued in more depth elsewhere (Weaver-Hightower, 2003), the theorization of practice and the practical application of theory. Authors in each of the two traditions need to formulate research questions relevant to the other. It would be necessary to synthesize and meta-analyze the two traditions, and such work should be valued for tenure and promotion. Teacher education would need to change to make better use of research; researcher education would need to expand to include a better understanding of practice.

Critiques of the boy turn, however, do not focus exclusively on the limitations of theory and practice or their inability to work symbiotically. A number of scholars have criticized the need to focus on boys at all and have challenged the foundations of calls for attention to boys. I turn to these important criticisms of the boy turn in the following section.

The Feminist and Pro-Feminist Response: Critiques of the Boy Turn

Critiques of the boy turn (referred to in Table 1 as "feminist and pro-feminist responses") are numerous, and I can only abstract them here. These critiques are key to our understanding of the concerns surrounding the "What about the boys?" debate, and each of the following criticisms must be answered to construct research, policy, and programmatic interventions that further social justice.

Perhaps the most consistent criticism leveled at advocates for boys' education is that they fail to identify "which boys" are at stake (see Arnot et al., 1999; Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000; Epstein et al., 1998a; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996; Kenway & Willis, 1998; Maynard, 2002). This is an important question, for, in an era of fiscal crisis in education and society (Apple, 1995), scarce funding must go to the students with the greatest need, based not only on test scores but also on social outcomes. To argue that the disadvantages in boys' education pertain to the majority of White, upper-class, heterosexual boys is suspect at best. Advocates for boys' programs must work harder to disaggregate what they mean by "boys."

Another group of scholars challenges the indicators commonly used to establish boys' educational needs. Because much of the argument for the disadvantages of boys relies on test score gaps (particularly in literacy), critics use the flaws of testing itself to indicate flaws in any argument for boys' disadvantages based on tests. First, on most tests the gender gaps are small or insignificant. Second, complex factors of race, urbanity as opposed to rurality, and socioeconomic status make simple boy-versus-girl comparisons insufficient (Arnot & Gubb, 2001; Epstein et al., 1998b; Lingard & Douglas, 1999). Some scholars (e.g., Cole, 1997) point out that the apparently lower scores of boys simply reflect the larger spread of boys' scores; although more boys are at the very bottom, boys are also better represented in the top scores. Thus the academically weakest students shift scores in ways that disguise male privilege in the top echelons, particularly in high-prestige subjects such as computer science and advanced math and sciences. Third, some argue that test scores can be manipulated or misconstrued in ways that indicate false disadvantages (Yates, 2000). In general, these scholars assert, testing is a flawed measure of gender equity because the tests are not nuanced enough to reflect the complexities involved.

Many scholars have argued that other measures of educational equality should be formulated in place of test scores. Much of this criticism takes an economic
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view of equity. Collins et al. (2000), for example, show that, despite any “under-
achievement” that boys demonstrate, they continue to surpass girls in jobs after
schooling is completed. Even so, test scores and enrollment data do not adequately
capture the full range of inequalities that occur in schools. Sadker and Sadker
(1994) provide one of the more common examples of alternative equity indicators,
showing that girls receive less attention in classrooms and that the attention they
do receive is qualitatively poor compared to that received by boys. Even in liter-
acy, a field that is often cited as a subject area of disadvantage for boys (Alloway
& Gilbert, 1997a; Bleach, 1998b; Browne & Fletcher, 1995; Brozo, 2002; Cohen,
1998; Frater, 1998; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Gurian, 2001; Maynard, 2002; Millard,
1997; Newkirk, 2000; Penny, 1998; Sanderson, 1995; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002),
numerous disadvantages can be seen for girls if we consider more than test scores
(see Guzzetti, Young, Gritsavage, Fyfe, & Hardenbrook, 2002, for a comprehen-
sive overview). Higher literacy scores have not translated into superior social or
economic status for girls; and, indeed, certain extant practices that may help girls
in school, such as reading vast amounts of fiction, can ultimately be self-defeating
by, for example, inculcating an ideology of romance that subordinates girls to men
(see Christian-Smith, 1990).

Some critics charge that boys’ seeming disadvantages are really the conse-
quences of having certain other advantages. R. W. Connell (1996; 2000, chap. 9),
for instance, makes the argument that boys’ disadvantages are simply the short-term
costs of long-term privileges. Boys may devalue literacy, for example, but they usu-
ally do so in favor of more “rational” and higher-prestige subjects such as those in
 technological fields. Likewise, boys’ privileged access to sports may take time away
from academic pursuits. Michael Kimmel (2000) argues along the same lines that
boys’ general expectation of “expert” status, a masculine privilege, makes them
overconfident, and overconfidence contributes to their taking courses and exami-
nations for which they are ill-prepared. This, in turn, pulls down the scores of boys
as a group.

Beyond taking issue with the empirical question of whether boys are disadvan-
taged or in need, a number of scholars have valid concerns that programs and poli-
cies for boys will hurt girls and their gains. Taking policy attention, research
attention, and funding from girls and their advocates is an often-mentioned fear
(Epstein et al., 1998b; Kenway & Willis, 1998). This fear has largely come true in
terms of research and policy attention, and funding is likely to follow. Moreover,
there is concern that the “new” attention to boys will actually roll back the gains,
however slight, made for girls. For example, a number of practice researchers have
advocated aligning the curriculum and pedagogy of the language arts classroom
with the interests and preferences of boys as a way to increase boys’ literacy skills
and scores (Brozo, 2002; Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997; Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2000,
2002; Pirie, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Such a policy could hurt many girls,
whose preferences may be in conflict with the traditional, stereotypical preferences
of boys. Also, as some argue (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, chap. 8; Maynard, 2002,
p. 41; Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, & Lankshear, 2002, pp. 41–42), the “feminine”
nature of the English curriculum is debatable at best, for many of the authors cov-
ered in contemporary schooling (Applebee, 1990) are still from the “dead White
men” camp, and many of the themes are masculine or sexist and the protagonists
male. If we accept this argument, then increasing the “fit” of the curriculum to
boys’ concerns will only exacerbate existing inequality. We should, however, take care to avoid a kind of “zero-sum” thinking in this matter, for just as feminist scholars argue that girls have not benefited in education at the expense of boys (e.g., Kenway & Willis; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Yates, 2000), attending to boys’ concerns does not necessarily mean taking from girls. In fact, some practice-oriented researchers have been careful to state their aims explicitly to avoid harming the achievement of girls (see, e.g., articles in Bleach, 1998b).

Other critics charge that the solutions proposed so far by boy advocates are inadequate. As recounted above, many worry that changing curriculum and pedagogy may hurt girls. Proposals for single-sex classrooms and schools, too, fall short because all-boys arrangements can be breeding grounds for virulent sexism (Askew & Ross, 1988) or can become dumping grounds for boys with discipline problems (Kenway & Willis, 1998). In general, the argument goes, the solutions proposed for boys are too close to those proposed for girls in the 1970s and 1980s, which will not work because boys’ and girls’ difficulties are qualitatively and quantitatively different and historically contingent (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, pp. 20–24; Kenway & Willis, 1998, p. 50; Yates, 2000, pp. 313–314).

Answering such critiques and, more important, changing practice, policy, and research because of them are key steps in the future of work on boys’ education. Such research, however, has more to do than simply fend off criticism. To conclude my review of the history of the boy turn in gender and education research, I now shift to the future of the turn.

**Future Directions**

Thus far, much of the debate on boys has been limited to abstract supposition and rhetoric, for little has been done in a systematic way to change the schooling of boys. Would boys’ reforms really hurt girls? What are the effects on learning for the uptake of certain masculinities? Does changing, say, the literacy curriculum to include the stereotypical interests and preferences of boys affect achievement in significant ways? How might we ensure that feminism has a central role to play in checking and balancing the boy turn? These and many other questions remain open as the research on boys moves forward. The suggestions that follow are just a few of the ways in which educationalists might progress on these and other key questions.

First, to improve the research on and practice with boys, researchers and educators must gain a better understanding of boys’ many literacies and the effects of masculinities on learning. Literacy, particularly, is often identified as an area of disadvantage for boys (Rowan et al., 2002). The claim that girls generally achieve more in reading and writing is well established (Barrs, 1994; Holbrook, 1988; Stanchfield, 1973), even cross-nationally (Wagemaker, Taube, Munck, Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, & Martin, 1996), but the causes are complex and the interconnections of the causes are poorly understood. Thus, although a small number of studies examine the literacy practices of boys (Brown, 1999, 2001; Brozo, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), a greater grasp of the uses of, beliefs about, and social context of literacy for boys—beyond research just on preferences and habits—is required so that pedagogical and curricular interventions can be constructed in ways that suit more boys without harming most girls. Similarly, the theoretically oriented research paradigm outlined earlier must move...
beyond simple typologies of masculinity to show concretely the "so what" of all of the masculinities identified. Many studies conclude with the rather standard, though important, finding that the gender regimes of schools, particularly their masculinities, make for a "chilly climate" or "reinforce the larger gender order" in society. Building on, but moving beyond, such well-rehearsed interpretations, however, might help to uncover significant but little-studied implications for learning, for emotional and physical development, and for the economic contexts that produce, and are produced by, schooling. These issues are, after all, what drives the concerns and panics over boys in the first place. A better understanding of the implications of the various types of masculinity taken up by boys (and girls!) in school will more definitively delineate whether and how we should construct reforms in the education of boys.

Another way to approach the "how" of educating boys is to conduct research on best practices and best programs. The small number of publications that describe boys' programs (e.g., Bleach, 1998b; Browne & Fletcher, 1995) have been written mostly by insiders from those programs; and other proposed programs (e.g., Gurian, 2001) have yet to be implemented on a scale large enough for testing. More systematic, impartial analyses are needed. These can take the form of scholarly analysis of theoretical implications, such as Murtadha-Watts's (2000) examination of an Afrocentric boys' program; or they can follow a more traditional "best programs" format, such as the 2001 report by the U.S. Department of Education Gender Equity Expert Panel on ten exemplary gender equity programs for girls. A prime example of what I advocate is the current effort by the Australian Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training to produce "best practices" research through the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme (see http://www.boyslighthouse.edu.au/). In its first phase, this program funded pilot projects in schools across Australia with the eventual goal of writing a synthesis of effective school-based interventions for boys. Publicizing and analyzing such programs for boys has the potential to give teachers, administrators, and policymakers options beyond the current, conservative calls for more male teachers, more "boy-friendly" practices, and so on; however, the potential is also there to simply further propagate the too-simplistic "tips for teachers" solutions discussed above, so care must be taken with such programs. Particularly important will be publicizing programs that can be shown to help both boys and girls while maintaining funding and attention to programs that seek to mollify more profound disadvantages such as poverty, violence, sexuality, or race.

Teacher training is also an important avenue for future research. As I have commented elsewhere (Weaver-Hightower, 2003), within much of the theoretically oriented research tradition, teachers are, as boys used to be, a kind of "shadowy other," peeking through only to react to or witness the acts of disruptive boys and then fading away again. Sometimes, teachers may themselves cause masculinity-based problems (e.g., Lesko, 2000b; Skelton, 2001, chaps. 6, 7), but little attention has been given to how teachers temper masculinities. Placing teachers front and center would allow researchers to deconstruct the ways in which teachers and their training create, mediate, or eliminate specific masculinities and their implications. Also, university teacher education in the United States rarely incorporates boys and their issues into formal curricula. Some international universities have done so; for example, the University of Newcastle, in Australia, currently offers a graduate certificate
in the education of boys. Examining programs such as these may provide guidance (positive or negative) for effective ways to conduct teacher training on boys’ issues, particularly for countries that have large numbers of all-male schools. Finally, a great number of boy advocates have called for increasing the number of male teachers to provide “role models” of appropriate masculinity, especially for boys who have no male role models at home. The literature that advocates increasing the number of male teachers often relies heavily on a notion of the “feminization” of primary schools (see Apple, 1986, for a deconstruction of this phenomenon) as harmful to boys. It also frequently makes questionable assumptions about male teachers’ efficacy—for not all male teachers provide “positive” role models (Bleach, 1998a; Maynard, 2002, pp. 137–138; Mills, 2000). Yet to say that hiring more male teachers may not help is not to say that they should be kept out. Greatly needed, if the number of male teachers is to grow, are examinations of the recruitment, retention, treatment, and support of men in teacher education, as well as their working conditions once they are employed in schools. Having an accurate gauge of these indicators may provide needed insight into how to attract and keep males in teaching and other “caring” roles.

An examination and rethinking of curriculum and materials may also be in order. What masculinities and femininities are “on offer” within the curriculum? Are materials still as highly gendered as they once were, and in what ways? Scholars have argued both sides, some claiming that curriculum materials are weighted toward masculinity (e.g., Kuzmic, 2000), others that the materials favor girls and their interests, particularly in literacy (Brozo, 2002; Evans & Davies, 2000; Millard, 1997). More thought should be given to this issue, and more programmatic evidence is needed before a definitive claim can be made about the need for, or the efficacy of, altering the curriculum to meet the expressed interests and habits of boys. Careful thought should also be given to constructing curriculum and materials that simultaneously meet the needs of girls and of children of differing races, religions, sexualities, and other subjectivities. Such an approach would include making masculinity a subject in the curriculum (Brozo; Connell, 1996; Kimmel, 1996a; Martino, 2001; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Young, 2000), so that students could deconstruct and interrogate it as a way to accomplish goals of social justice.

Whatever curriculums, policies, programs, or practices develop from the continuing advance of the boy turn in research, the most imperative need is for independent research “on the ground” in schools and other educational environments. Like Kenway and Willis (1998), we must constantly monitor the progress and consequences of work on gender in schools. Left unchecked, such programs and policies could create tensions and backlashes, even racial hostilities (Gillborn & Kirton, 2000), that would negatively affect the schooling of both boys and girls. Not only should scholars and educators conduct such research, but institutions should reward it for tenure, promotion, and pay. Without institutional support, researchers, teachers, and analysts will lack the foundations and incentives to monitor the impact of any policies and practices that may emerge.

I want to emphasize, finally, the need for simultaneity mentioned above. Finding ways to create curriculum and pedagogy that suit many different students is partly a pragmatic concern, because boys and girls are most commonly schooled together. The very fact that I can speak of a “turn” in the literature, however, indicates that educationalists have thus far been unable to envision gender in its relational
interdependencies; instead, first it was girls, and now it is boys. What is needed, rather, is curriculum, pedagogy, structures, and research programs that understand and explore gender (male, female, and "other") in complexly interrelated ways and that avoid "girls then, boys now." How might we research and write about boys and girls within the same article or book?

Concluding Remarks

Although distressing to many people, particularly feminist and pro-feminist researchers who have seen an alarming trend away from concern about girls, the boy turn in research has had some positive impact on our understanding of gender and schooling. Such work has produced the necessary complement to the research on girls, increasing our recognition that gender inequity is not a deficiency in girls but rather is caused by problematic masculinities and femininities. The boy turn, however, still has many other contributions to make, including sometimes identifying problems that might place boys at a disadvantage—not overall, but in particular ways. Part of the responsibility of researchers, especially those whose goal is a more equitable society in terms of gender, is to gauge the true impact of such disadvantages and then, rather than weighing them against a hierarchy of disadvantage, find ways to fix them without hurting people who have other problems. This is not to cede the floor entirely to boys' issues; it is to recognize that failing to take those issues seriously merely strengthens the backlash, whereas attending to them potentially creates allies. The boy turn can indeed have progressive ends, but it requires vigilant steering. Because the boy turn shows no sign of running out of steam, such piloting is even more necessary now.

Notes

1 Both interpretations, of course, grossly simplify some very complex and overlapping positions in the debate on boys' education. To use the term "boy advocates," for example, is not to imply that people who oppose the boy turn are not advocates for boys, nor do I wish to suggest that boy advocates and other educationalists who favor the shift of attention toward boys necessarily share an ideological outlook with "antifeminists." A great many people fall between these poles.

2 I personally have worked with one such group, the D.R.E.A.M.S. program in Madison, Wisconsin. This group and others like it around the country (for another example see Dance, 2002, on the Paul Robeson Institute in Boston) provide African-American and other ethnic minority boys with tutoring, mentoring, recreational and educational activities, and sometimes spiritual guidance to help them overcome the severe disadvantages that they face in schools and other aspects of life. For good discussions of such disadvantages, see Sewell (1997), Ferguson (2000), and Dance. It should be noted, however, that not all programs of this kind can be termed "progressive." Even those with progressive intent can exhibit regressive tendencies. For an example, see Murtadha-Watts (2000).

3 Christine Skelton (2001, especially chaps. 1, 2, 8), in her ethnography of an urban area in the northeast of England, also observes a sharp divide between what she calls "masculinities and schooling" literature and "boys' underachievement" literature (corresponding to my categories, "theoretically oriented" and "practice-oriented," respectively). Although Skelton and I make a number of similar points, my view of the practice-oriented tradition is somewhat less pessimistic. Skelton credits boys'
underachievement literature only with offering "practical strategies for teachers to try out with their pupils" (p. 79), whereas I see the practice-oriented literature as offering a great deal to researchers and policymakers as well.

4 A similar process holds for girls from the working class. As McRobbie (1978) argues, the "cult of femininity," although useful for resisting school authority, ultimately leaves working-class girls with skills and attitudes suitable only for accepting low-status, working-class jobs or the duties of wife and mother.

5 A number of representative works discuss these core issues of boys' work. See Alloway and Gilbert (1997b, 1997c); Askew and Ross (1988); Bleach (1998b); Browne and Fletcher (1995); Brozo (2002); Brozo and Schmelzer (1997); Connell (1996); Davies et al. (1994); Denborough (1996); Evans and Davies (2000); Gard (2003); Gilbert and Gilbert (1998); Gurian (2001); Head (1999); Jackson and Salisbury (1996); Katz and Jhally (1999); Martino (2001); Maynard (2002); McLean (1996); Millard (1997); Mills (2000); Noble and Bradford (2000); Pirie (2002); Salisbury and Jackson (1996); Sewell (1997); Smith and Wilhelm (2002); Stein and Sjostrom (1994); and Young (2000).

6 Although true that boys, despite lower literacy and numeracy levels, get higher-paying jobs out of school, Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, p. 12) rightly point out that those jobs are often more dangerous (therefore restricted for females) and less secure than the white- and pink-collar jobs available to females and males with better literacy and numeracy skills.

7 In actuality, concerns about boys have a long history. Michèle Cohen (1998), for example, found that boys' underachievement had been remarked upon in education circles as far back as 1693, the date of Locke's treatise Some Thoughts Concerning Education, which complains of boys' failure to learn both Latin and their mother tongue, English. Other crisis theories, such as concern about the feminization of boys under female teachers at the turn of the 20th century (Kimmel, 1996b) and indeed in the middle part of that century (Connell, 1996; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), have led not only to rhetoric about boys' being imperiled but also to programs to manufacture manhood (see Crotty, 2001, for a discussion of Australia's similar history). As Kimmel shows, organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America were embraced as a way to protect the manly socialization of boys from women both at home and at school. Gail Bederman (1995) describes a similarly motivated effort at the turn of the 20th century by G. Stanley Hall, the famed professor of pedagogy and psychology, who urged teachers to let boys act like savages in the classroom. According to Hall, this approach would ward off the physically debilitating effects of civilization through "feminized" schooling. The popular resurgence of the debate in the United States today carries vestiges of these past concerns. See also Skelton (2001) for an overview of the history of boys' place in educational policy in England; and see Lingard (2003) on the same subject in Australia.

8 Concentrated effort is not absent everywhere, although no large-scale projects have been conducted. To date most educational interventions for boys have been limited to individual schools or local educational authorities. See the articles in Bleach (1998b), Browne and Fletcher (1995), and Maynard (2002) for representative examples of local projects. Australia's federal government, however, has recently completed a parliamentary Inquiry into the Education of Boys, which has spawned a number of federal interventions on the issue of boys' education. The committee report, Boys: Getting It Right (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002), is available online at http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/EoB/. Analyzing
this policy process and its eventual effects could indicate broader implications of conducting large-scale interventions on boys’ issues.

The Boys’ Education Lighthouse Schools Programme has grown out of the Inquiry into the Education of Boys (see note 8). Whether the Lighthouse Programme meets my second criterion, that boys’ programs show that they do not harm or diminish girls’ programs, remains to be seen. The report is scheduled for release near the end of 2003.

A number of works speak to certain negative working conditions encountered by men in education. See, for example, Ayers (1986), Johnson (2000), and King (1998, 2000).

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