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## RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN BOYS' EDUCATION: REPOSITIONING INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY

*Boys' identities are distinctly gendered, racialized, and classed across disparate social and cultural contexts. Related intersectional identity processes are associated with boys' academic success. While intersectionality has been utilized throughout boys' education scholarship, a limited, "light touch" approach is often enacted. As a critical logic of interpretation, intersectionality theory accounts for race, class, and gender within equity-based empirical studies. The authors contend insufficient engagement with intersectionality may lead educational research on boys' social and learner identities to become static. Examining boys' identities through intersectional approaches reveals more complex insights particularly related to their school engagement. Critical of the recent "boy crisis" literature, this article strives to compel theorists of boys' education to more fully leverage the history, constructs, and epistemologies of intersectionality.*

*Keywords:* intersectionality theory, boys' education, identity

Boys' identities are distinctly gendered, racialized, and classed across disparate social and cultural contexts. Scholarship exploring these identity processes has focused on them in isolation, honoring the assumption that race, class, and gender are autonomous social categories. Omi and Winant (1994) posit that "race, class, and gender are not fixed and discrete categories.... They overlap, intersect, and infuse with others in countless ways" (p. 68). While acknowledging how boys' education scholarship has engaged analytically with class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and disability, and has identified connections across these identity categories, our concern is with what we call a "light touch" approach to intersectionality theory that stops

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short of fully engaging it. Thorough engagement of intersectionality has the capacity to complicate isolated representations of boys' schooling experiences, and unearth new or overlooked dimensions of boys' identities. Amid a so-called "crisis" in boys' education, below we spotlight what we consider underutilized analytic approaches, while asserting that a more robust engagement with intersectionality theory is essential for future scholarship.

### BOYS' INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES AT SCHOOL

Schools are mired with contingencies, confusions, and contradictions linked to the discursive and cultural production of competing forms of masculinity, and boys must continuously negotiate these strenuous environments to learn. Seminal research has illustrated how supporting boys' identities across home, neighborhood, and school contexts, may foster both positive and negative school and life outcomes (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007; Willis, 1977). Kenway and Willis (1998) already contend that: "A number of studies which show how the masculinities associated with class, ethnic, race, and sexuality groupings; and friendship, family, neighborhood, and other sub-groupings; intersect with the dominant discourses and micro politics of schooling." (p. 511). While these studies hold value, we illuminate the limited attention given to intersectionality, and that, when engaged, this is done tepidly.

Our critiques related to the use of intersectionality are threefold. First, analytic approaches often prove reductive. A focus on race or class or gender tends to operate in silos, rather than in tandem, and without theoretical frameworks addressing their intersections, significant gaps emerge in the scholarly literature on identity. Exploring intersections of class, race/ethnicity, and gender throughout boys' identities holds the potential to reveal more expansive theoretical insights than currently available. We value current efforts by scholars to employ intersectionality within scholarship on boys' schooling and identities, for instance by J.E. Davis, L. McCready, T.E. Dancy, and E. Brockenbrough. However, our reservations lie with the extent such scholarship accounts for key debates in the field of boys' education. Below we offer a balanced critique of intersectionality's use within recent scholarship on boys, and to compel boys' education scholars to more fully leverage the history, constructs, and epistemologies of intersectionality theory.

Second, intertwined with what we consider a "light touch" approach to intersectional theorizing of boys' schooling, is a tendency among intersectionality theorists to cling to theory (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Hill-Collins, 2000), with few examples of intersectional theory being rigorously applied to data capturing boys' schooling experiences (Núñez, 2014). As the "social identities of class, race, gender, and sexuality continue to rub up uncomfortably against learner identities within much educational research" (Reay, 2010, p. 281), we contend there is a need among educational research on boys to explore methods of applying intersectionality to empirical data. Close scrutiny of the trends within boys' education scholarship, and insufficient engagement of intersectionality with a rich theoretical knowledge-base, has arguably led educational research on boys' social and learner identities and schooling experiences to become static, operating too often in separate inquiry communities.

Third, we argue there is a need for interpretative tools with the multi-dimensionality necessary to explore the interplay of boys' schooling and intersectional

identity processes. Some researchers have indeed drawn attention to boys' intersectionality within studies of gender, sexuality, race, disability, nationality, and age, but these efforts can be characterized as a "tipping of the hat," or "glossing over" of intersectionality, rather than using the theoretical construct to rigorously interrogate data (compare Hill-Collins, 2015; Rollock et al., 2012). Given its dynamic theorizing of race, class, and gender (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill-Collins, 2000), intersectionality theory provides a valuable logic of interpretation for scholars concerned with boys at school. By pointing this out, we seek to inspire educational researchers of boys to both employ and extend intersectionality theory, particularly when investigating distressing school issues.

Evolving from a moral panic tied to boys' underachievement (Griffin, 2000; Smith, 2003), more specifically to underachieving working-class males (Epstein et al., 1998), a so-called global "crisis" in boys' education has widely animated policy reports and social commentary. Such a "crisis" has informed up-scaled investments in research on boys' schooling (e.g. targeted strategies, programs, and interventions) from the late 1990s to present-day. Scholarly debates over "failing boys" and boys' persistent "underachievement" (Epstein et al., 1998) tend to focus heavily on a so-called "crisis of masculinity." Not only do we view such theorizing skeptically, we draw attention to its repetitive, reductive nature. Furthermore, the "crisis" discourse has a tendency to represent boys in a masculinity vacuum, without consistently accounting for the role class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality plays in masculine identity construction. While considering intersectionality theory a promising hermeneutic, and integral to the future of educational research on boys, we showcase the potential of intersectionality to garner nuanced insights related to identity and education. As social researchers, we acknowledge a responsibility to more fully engage with intersectional frameworks to understand the experience of boys' schooling.

In the following section, we explicate how the "boy crisis" in education has been theorized in academia—depicting debates and trends. To frame the discussion of intersectionality's utility for investigating critical issues in boys' education, we then examine intersectionality theory—its history, constructs, and epistemologies; how it has been operationalized and criticized; as well as its core processes and dynamics. We proceed with a brief critique of the boys-and-schooling literature, followed by case studies of seminal research on the use of intersectionality to illuminate what intersectional approaches can offer scholarship exploring boys' schooling, engagement, and identity. We conclude with implications of intersectional inquiry for educational research on, and with, boys.

#### BACKGROUND: "BOY CRISIS" IN EDUCATION

Boys' low educational outcomes globally have sparked unprecedented concern among parents, school professionals, activists, and policymakers (Francis, 1999; Harper, 2004; Sewell, 1997; Swain, 2005; Younger & Warrington, 1996). In the United States, particularly, educational researchers have identified a set of academic issues associated with what is popularly known as a *boy crisis* (Kimmel, 2010; Eckholm, 2006). In *The Problem with Boys: Beyond the Backlash* (Martino, Kehler, & Weaver-Hightower, 2009), contributors provided empirical studies of boys' education in various countries, but with a focus on the sociopolitical, economic, and

cultural context of the United States. The purpose of this seminal volume was to identify which factors impeded educational gains for boys, with careful attention to social policy. School and community-based interventions have been employed internationally.

Weaver-Hightower (cited in Martino et al., 2009) has recently interrogated why efforts to address boys' issues in U.S. schools have been less successful and far removed from public consciousness. The boys' schooling literature is fraught with debate regarding factors that contribute to a *gender gap* in education (Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2009), and boys' educational outcomes specifically. Explanatory frameworks have been rooted in either structural or cultural perspectives. Structuralists consider boys to be passive recipients of debilitating policies and practices within schools, and leave little or no room for boys' individual agency (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carnoy & Lavin, 1985). Culturalists deemphasize environmental factors and suggest that boys' behavior is emblematic of their values, beliefs, norms, and socialization, and originates in their neighborhoods and families (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963; Lewis, 1966). Synthesizing elements from both frameworks, individual agency emerges as shaped not only by structural forces, but also by values, beliefs, and norms embedded within cultural milieus (MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977). Structural and cultural forces are intertwined and facilitate choice, but neither exert the requisite power to be the sole determinant of boys' schooling, engagement, and achievement (Connell, 1995; Foster, Kimmel, & Skelton, 2001; Noguera, 2008). Our interest is with scholarship employing intersectional approaches that engage both structural and cultural perspectives, and therefore has the potential to disrupt narrow, binary conceptions of structural or cultural approaches to boys' identities, and offer critical insights into boys' schooling.

Research suggests for boys generally, and even more so for boys of color and boys from low-income backgrounds, that their distressing educational outcomes mostly fall within the discrete categories of literacy, retention, special education, school discipline, and postsecondary education. Weaver-Hightower (2009) makes a number of prominent claims in a review of debates and educational research centered on boys' schooling. First, parents of boys were at the forefront of making their issues more public through formal complaints, and not overprotective middle class parents with the time, knowledge, and resources to advocate on behalf of their sons. Second, school systems, specifically teachers' inattentiveness to boys' needs, were deemed a root cause of boys' disengagement from school. Instructional strategies were considered less hands-on, failed to tap into boys' interests, and emphasized emotional intelligence rather than cognition. Teachers were labeled disciplinarians, and harshly criticized for lacking the ability to harness boys' boisterous energy. There was a public outcry among parents, which was motivated by exasperation with a general lack of urgency to address boys' academic issues, especially with recent amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (*No Child Left Behind*, 2001). Parents acknowledged efforts by teachers and administrators to help boys at school, but usually felt placated or perceived the efforts piecemeal, and thus enabled the issues to persist. Under the G.W. Bush administration, and its promotion of neoliberalism, teacher accountability, equity, and high-stakes testing, each factor contributed to further shaping debates surrounding the "boy crisis."

In light of prominent trends characteristic of the global "crisis" surrounding boys' schooling, the attention given to the adverse behavior of boys cannot be discounted

(Martino, 1999). Empirical scholarship on boys has often associated their school misconduct with various learning disabilities, whereby, for example, in the United States, boys represent two-thirds of students who receive special education services (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2005; Skiba et al., 2008).<sup>1</sup> Boys' disengagement from school can have a significant impact on life outcomes, and this trend is compounded for boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Boys in the U.S. repeat grades at a higher frequency than girls, and a larger percentage drop out of high school (Bae et al., 2000). Graduation rates are also correlated with disciplinary infractions; for instance, boys' high rates of suspension and expulsion often predict their matriculation toward a secondary diploma or postsecondary degree (Bae et al., 2000).

Although the aforementioned scholarship holds considerable value, the concern lies with the narrow focus on misconduct, and other distressing issues relating to boys' education. The future task of sociological and educational research on boys' education is to consider the multiplicity of all boys' schooling experiences. This renders intersectional approaches indispensable.<sup>2</sup>

### INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY: HISTORY, CONSTRUCTS, AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Intersectionality has its historical roots in empirical studies where identity processes were considered fragmented, discursive, hybridized, and global (Wetherall & Mohanty, 2010). More broadly, intersectionality "refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference ... social practices, institutional arrangements, cultural ideologies, and the outcomes of these interactions" (Davis, 1992, p. 223). Concerned with inequality, intersectionality explores the dynamics of power in relation to the interplay of race, class, and gender. Intersectionality thus entails the elucidation of the intertwining of these identity categories, which constitute multiple axes of intragroup and intergroup difference and elicit multilayered narratives embedded within and across critical social and cultural contexts (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill-Collins, 2000; Phoenix, 2009).

Beginning with feminist theory, specifically Crenshaw's (1991) and Hill-Collins' (2000) scholarship investigating societal oppression and women of color, intersectionality has sought to address how theorists identify *categories of difference*, or power differentials, and illustrate how these categories and differentials interact or become entangled. Intersectionality explores social structures and how power is distributed in absolute and asymmetrical terms, whereby human subjects, and the embodied categories and identities that come to pertain to them, are primarily constituted by systems of domination and marginalization (Prins, 2006). Anthias and

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<sup>1</sup> Attention deficit disorder, and medication use to moderate school behavior, disproportionality impacts boys (Gurian, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education reported women outnumber men in college enrollment at 2-4 year institutions (NCES, 2007). The gap is expected to steadily increase through 2017. Up 2% since 2000, women constitute 60% of registered students in graduate programs. Although down 2% since 2000, men still account for 51% of students enrolled in professional programs, but their overall enrollment has declined 8.5% since 1976. (Martino et al., 2009).

Yuval-Davis (1983) as well as Skeggs (2002, 2004) situate identities, and the experience of these identities, within interrelated and overlapping identity categories, where “gender is always lived in the modalities of ethnicity and class, nationality in the modalities of gender and race, and class in the modalities of gender and nationality” (Prins, 2006, p. 278). Social positions are treated as inherently relational, and their identification is aimed at making “visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it” (Phoenix, 2004 p. 187). For those social theorists who engage in intersectional analysis, critical engagement with power differentials among social categories is essential and required to fully appreciate the complexities of how these inequities not only function in the real world, but are also resisted/subverted by individuals. Such theoretical scholarship attempts to show identity processes as complex and is more compelling than persistent, reductive, and polemical arguments that would show that “boys struggle to read” or that “all boys disengage.”

Intersectionality refers to a burgeoning epistemological stance with close ties to post-structuralism, performativity, and queer theory (Wetherall & Mohanty, 2010). A noteworthy portion of critical epistemologies construct subjects as highly discursive, multiple, nonessential, and subject to change, which aligns them with post-structural approaches to theorizing identities, subjectivities, and social positions. Intersectionality, considered both a social theory of knowledge and approach to analysis, is focused on people occupying not just different social categories, but also different social positions, as well as possessing different and multiple forms of knowledge. Judged from intersectional perspectives, knowledge is always partial, dynamic, and subject to the interplay of multiple social forces. Intersectionality is an inductive, *bottom-up* concept, derived from the everyday observation and analysis of routine practices and social positioning, rather than imposed *top-down* at the cue of a single discipline or theorist (Phoenix, 2010). Intersectionality has the capacity to be employed across disciplines and fields, but historically, and in light of this capacity, it has been treated with suspicion and cynicism, and often remains underdeveloped by social scientists, including those exploring boys’ education.

### **Intersectionality: Operationalizing, Criticisms, and Dynamics**

A chief barrier that prevents more robust engagement of intersectionality is the lack of consensus regarding its definition. Whether a researcher considers intersectionality a theory, a construct, a heuristic device, or an analytic strategy (Davis, 1992), it often remains relatively vague, and “clarity about what it means, and how to use it, can be as problematic, as productive” (Ali, 2010, p. 3). Stuart Hall (1995) noted that, “When separating out the advantages and disadvantages of using intersectionality in research, it becomes apparent that its strengths and weaknesses—as with any theory or methodology [*sic*—are deeply intertwined” (p. 5). Intersectionality generally raises two prominent concerns for researchers. The first is precisely its greatest indelible strength—the lack of fixed definition, its vagueness (Davis, 1992), or *elasticity* (Phoenix, 2009). Crenshaw (1991), for instance, defines an intersection as a *crossroads*, while Yuval-Davis (2011) terms it an “axis of difference” (p. 68). A second concern is intersectionality’s blind spots, where—similar to most epistemologies and methodologies—it can conceal just as much as it reveals (Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

To expand the scope of analysis, progressive feminist scholars utilize intersec-

tionality throughout a multitude of disciplines, thus filling in gaps within their respective fields where intersectionality has value to employ, given the inquiry focus. This approach is considered duly malleable and amenable to the contingencies of rigorous empirical research (Ali, 2010; Davis, 1992). As intersectionality is a relatively recent development, Bryant and Hoon (2006) reinforce the significance of building a theoretical and empirical foundation by studying how other social theorists—who are not necessarily intersectionality scholars—engage with research, and how they investigate the embeddedness of gender, class, and ethnicity for the distinct purpose of making more nuanced and compelling claims.

Critics of intersectionality arguably express more disadvantages than advantages when operationalizing the interpretative framework, and largely attribute these disadvantages to the historically divergent logics associated with gender, class, race/ethnicity, disability, and sexuality. Furthermore, the academic market of sociological and educational research, comprised of peer-reviewed high-impact journals (McCall, 2005), has continued to maintain a narrow silo focus, thereby hindering ongoing engagement with intersectionality. For example, to date, there is no scholarly handbook of intersectionality, and few peer-reviewed journals dedicated to intersectionality. Senior scholars, while economizing use of the term, do make full use of the constructs associated with the theoretical lens (compare Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Lareau, 2008; Lyng, 2009; Nayak, 2003). Our contention is that intersectionality still harbors the potential to foreground a “richer and more complex ontology, than approaches that attempt to reduce people to one category at a time” (Phoenix, 2004, p. 232).

### Exploring Intersectional Identity Processes

Social theorists posit that identity is infused with history and shaped discursively (Hall, 1996; McLeod, 2000), and hence the concept of identity opens out onto a set of complex and deeply reflexive processes. Social divisions and positions have different organizing discourses or logics, whereby the ontological dimensions of race, class, and ethnicity, should not be treated similarly or equally (Skeggs, 2002, 2004). Stuart Hall (1996) writes:

I use “identity” to refer to the meeting point, and the point of suture between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to “interpellate” — to speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourse — and, on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be “spoken.” Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions, which discursive practices construct for us. They are the result of a successful articulation or “chaining” of the subject into the flow of the discourse. (pp. 5-6)

What we call identities and positionalities refer to “processes of becoming rather than being: “not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented, and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves, therefore it is about ‘routes’ as opposed to ‘roots’” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Thus, more specifically, while engaging with intersectionality, the fluidity of identity processes must be thoroughly considered. For example, gender, consid-

ered from within a post-structuralist framework, is not a singular or self-same entity, but processed as such, and thus infused throughout social contexts (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Context (i.e., time and place) becomes essential for interpreting and theorizing how participants narrate their positionalities and subjectivities. Each division presents “ideological and organizational principles within which the others operate ... in different historical contexts and different social arenas, their roles will differ” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983, p. 68). Michelle Fine (1997) broadly insists on social analysis not pursued as if “races and ethnicities [and class groups] were distinct, separable, and independent; [but] rather [as] produced, coupled, and ranked” (p. 64).

Intersectional analysis is pertinent to identity research, but as such it needs to remain a site of contestation (Phoenix, 2010). When intersectionality is deployed as an analytic tool, Lykke (2011) maintains it can make significant scholarly contributions by historically unearthing the specific array of power differentials, or constraining social norms, emanating from how “discursive, institutionally or structurally constructed socio-cultural categories of gender, ethnicity, race, class, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue, and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations” (p. 50). Within these sociocultural categories, intersectional analysis will, to varying extents, show how subjectivities cohere around binaries of “dominance/subordination, possession/dispossession, privilege/lack of privilege, majoritizing/minoritizing and so on” (p. 50), and define the myriad ways “people subjectively experience their daily lives in terms of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, specific aspirations and specific identities” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 198).

Categories tend to be problematic, and they must be shown to be. Their purpose typically is to establish inclusionary and exclusionary boundaries, differentiate between the self and other, determine what is *normal* and what is not, and who is entitled to certain resources (e.g., programs, interventions, etc.), and who is not. The interlinking grids of differential positions related to class, race/ethnicity, gender and sexuality, ability, stage of life cycle, and other social divisions, regularly create, in specific historical situations, hierarchies of differential access to a variety of economic, political, and cultural resources (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

In a seminal study of intersectionality, McCall (2005) distinguished three approaches to intersectional inquiry which illustrate how different methodologies produce different types of knowledge, and that a wider range of methodologies is required to fully engage with issues and topics under the heading of intersectionality: (a) *anticategorical*—which considers social life to be irreducibly complex, multiple, and fluid, and that any effort toward “fixing” categories is ultimately counterproductive; (b) *intercategorical*—which requires research to provisionally adopt existing categories to document “relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality among multiple and conflicting dimensions” (p. 1773); and (c) *intracategorical*—where the focus is on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection, “in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups” (p. 1774). These approaches sit on a continuum, allowing overlaps, which subsequently fosters complex thinking with regard to the interpellation of identities.

In current social research, should intersectionality be limited to understanding individual experience, to collective experience, or to theorizing identity (Wetherell,



2010)? Or should intersectionality be considered merely the outgrowth of larger shifts in societal structures, and the acceptance of post-structuralism? In the next section, we attempt to have the core facets of intersectionality speak to pivotal scholarship on masculinity and schooling. Connections are made using two case studies of scholarship (Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), whereby attention is drawn to how intersectionality, or its understanding, arguably does not comprise an “approach” per se, but rather the questioning of a too-narrow approach.

### THE CASES: MASCULINITY AND SCHOOLING

We argued above that a rich conceptual knowledge of intersectionality needs to be applied to research centered on boys’ schooling and identity, and this educational research is essential for the future of the field. Below, we assert that a key component of this argument is a return to seminal texts. The scholarship of Raewyn Connell and Mairtin Mac an Ghaill has contributed significantly to the foundations of gender theory, boys’ schooling, and the study of identities. In their early research, which is widely referenced, both theorists incorporate class, ethnicity and sexuality/heteronormativity in their analysis of masculinity. Through our focus on two prominent theorists we consider how certain theoretical constructions and approaches have been counterproductively degraded. The result is similar to a photocopy of a copy, where with each copy, the actual picture—or in this case—the theoretical construct—becomes unrecognizable from the original.

#### Appreciating Seminal Works

Both Connell and Mac an Ghaill clearly grapple with intersectionality and its problematics—though not explicitly—and this effort adds a new degree of complexity. In *Masculinities*, Connell (1995) offers a theory of masculinity largely focused on the social construction of gender, and, to date, this theoretical construct remains the most influential conceptualization in the field of men and masculinities, and other empirical studies of gender, boyhood, and men (Wedgewood, 2009). Different from sex-role theory, masculinity is here being deemed a discursive construct and, as such, accessible to poststructuralist, postmodernist, discursive psychological and Foucauldian (Foucault, 1966) approaches. Masculinity, for Connell (1995), is a “process toward understanding” (pp. 10-17) that involves raising concern with a pluralistic model of power relations, whereby gender, while it intersects with other forms of power, is constituted out of interaction between social structure and social actors. “Structures,” within this modernist paradigm, fail to simply determine subjects; instead “structure” involves a range of power dynamics (Beasley, 2012). Gendered power is a form of power rooted in patriarchal oppression, where it is constantly producing gendered beings, and in turn shapes wider societal structures. Intersections of power structure the analysis of Connell’s research. Class and ethnicity, and to a lesser extent sexuality, and how these operate in relation to the social construction of gender, are fully engaged.

This approach to analysis enabled Connell to open-up new “spaces” for understanding masculinity, though in recent years, Connell has been primarily considered a gender theorist. Our concern is with how this limited perception of the scholar has led to reductive interpretations throughout subsequent scholarship, which ultimately defuses Connell’s original intersectional analysis. Concerned with

the role intersectionality has played and should play in the boys' schooling discourses, is Connell's (1995) construct of hegemonic masculinity, mostly used to explore *dominant* and *subordinate* or *marginalized* masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity maintains the focus on gender relations among men, which is "necessary to keep the analysis dynamic, to prevent the acknowledgement of multiple masculinities collapsing into a character typology" (p. 76). Taking a clear intersectional approach, Connell provided multiple examples of White masculinity constructed in relation to White women, and Black men in relation to Asian women, and how significant "othering" (p. 116) is in relation to subordinated identities. Connell's focus on power is in the tradition of intersectionality, whereby power interfaces with hegemonic masculinity in myriad ways. The intersections of race, class, and ethnicity allow Connell to analyze masculinities as socially constructed in relation to ethnicity and gender, which becomes a far more elaborate and theoretically challenging task than a straight-forward analysis of problematizing the masculinities of working-class males.

Despite hegemonic masculinity's "over-utilization, or rather, overemphasis" (Wedgwood, 2009, p. 335), it remains a powerful, illustrative construct within the masculinities literature. The concept, however, has endured criticism (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hall, 2002; Wetherall & Edley, 1999). Ensuing debates, we argue, are important in that they exemplify the manner in which boys' education literature—like most scholarly literatures—is subject to trends, which can lead to theoretical gaps, and a lack of reflexivity with regard to original scholars' intent. Prominent contestations concerning hegemonic masculinity have centered on how it can appear sociologically deterministic, or become a free-floating, ambiguous concept. Another concern lies with hegemonic masculinity's lack of attention to class and ethnicity. It is often assumed that hegemonic masculinity operates similarly for all men. As a construct, hegemonic masculinity's purpose, or validity, is not questioned, but made to function within a configuration of practices steeped in ethnic identity and class background. Exploring the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity and subordinated masculinity in a single context provides minimal insight into how identity-based fluidity or mobility functions, and how the dominant-subordinate dichotomy might play out differently in other contexts. As shown in intersectional approaches, power differentials emanate from "discursive, institutionally or structurally constructed socio-cultural categories," which interact to produce societal inequalities and unjust social relations (Lykke, 2011, p. 50). We contend scholars should actively investigate how men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is socially desirable, but at other times, strategically distance themselves from dominant masculinity when it is advantageous. Intersectionality, when operationalized thoroughly, allows for "distancing" from certain masculinities, where class, race, and gender are better integrated.

Critiquing hegemonic masculinity, Hall (2002) states, "Hegemonic cultural production, in conjunction with the recurring enacted practices that it encourages (Butler, 1993), reproduces the belief that it is legitimate and natural for men to use violence as a means of oppressing women and less belligerent males" (p. 37). It is indeed essential to consider the cultural production of hegemony. Scholarship that deploys hegemonic masculinity in isolation veers far from its intent. Intersectional analysis requires engagement of how such cultural production is formed through intersections of class, ethnicity, and gender, and across contexts. Undoubtedly, it is reductive to focus exclusively on gender and its relationship to power structures.

Exploring deficiencies of hegemonic masculinity through intersectional lenses involves raising questions related to the capacity to challenge and subvert hegemonic discourses; how ethnicity and class function to foster fixity or fluidity of personhood or the self; how hybridized identities operate; the dynamics of intergroup and intragroup differences; and how the organizing logics of race, class, and gender constitute subjects.

In *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities, and Schooling* (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), which was published almost concurrently with *Masculinities* (Connell, 1995), Mac an Ghaill provides a conceptualization of masculinity grounded in Foucauldian theory. This seminal ethnography of boys' education and identity primarily explores the "processes involved in the *interplay* between schooling, masculinities, and sexualities," where "microcultures of management, teachers, and students are key infrastructural mechanisms through which masculinities and femininities are mediated and lived out" (pp. 3-4). Within the school, boys' subjectivities were greatly influenced by the "administration's regulation and reification of sex and gender boundaries, and its institutionalization of interrelated social and discursive practices of staffroom, classroom, and playground" (p. 45). Hegemonic masculinity was not at the forefront but otherwise hegemonic discourses in the school were apparent; for instance "the constitutive cultural elements of dominant modes of heterosexual subjectivity informed male students' learning to act like men" (p. 9). Mac an Ghaill established four typologies of the boys in which they perform their gendered and sexual identities amid changing family networks, labor markets, sexual patterns of consumption, leisure practices, and media representations—the *macho lads*, the *academic achievers*, the *new entrepreneurs*, and the middle-class *real Englishmen*. Relations among these researcher-constructed groupings of boys were additionally explored, as well as the range of subject positions the boys occupied.

From an intersectional perspective, Mac an Ghaill's (1994) scholarship primarily considers class, particularly with the *new entrepreneurs* and *real Englishmen*. However, there is a clear effort to engage with the intersections and overlapping of masculine identities and classed identities. Building on earlier work by Connell, hegemonic masculinity was employed to examine the *academic achievers*. The *ideal pupil* literature (Mac an Ghaill, 1996) was also consulted, and applying the concept revealed how teachers regularly identify with middle-class students, and therefore contributed to the constitution of certain boys in ideal terms. The differentiation of masculinities proved a critical learning opportunity, especially given how the four typologies of young men existed within distinct school domains, and where the elements of gendered and classed identities are validated, reinforced, and kept under surveillance by the institution. To more fully engage intersectionality, *The Making of Men* might have interrogated what occurs when there are disjunctions, whereby class subjectivities are sanctioned, but gendered subjectivities are not, and what these disjunctions mean for boys' engagement with school. Few allowances are granted for how boys may shift between certain typologies, given the eponymous hint that their masculine identities were still "in the making". As Connell's and Mac an Ghaill's scholarship ultimately provides a compelling portrait of complex male identities in social and educational arenas as they are shaped and reshaped through intersectional identity processes.

## Making Intersectionality Explicit

While the scholarship of both Connell and Mac an Ghail clearly grapples with intersectionality and its problematics, our focus now turns to two theorists who more explicitly utilize intersectionality to investigate boys' schooling experiences. Both Anne-Marie Núñez and Louise Archer analyzed boys' masculinities at school, and their approaches revealed how identity was informed by multiple overlapping logics of practice. Núñez (2014) consulted Anthias and Davis-Yuval (1983) to develop new conceptual models for educational research involving intersectional analysis. While examining Latino immigrant and migrant students' access to college, a three-pronged procedure was designed to explore how separate or integrated social categories affected educational opportunities. The first prong entailed conceptualizing the social categories and mapping their relations and interrelatedness. In using intersectionality to trace how social dynamics create inequitable outcomes and constitute multiple axes of disadvantage, lies the danger of a singular focus on individual identities, such that it "becomes all too easy to ascribe educational inequities to perceived characteristics and (in)abilities of marginalized individuals or groups, rather than the economic, social, and political practices that perpetuate these inequities" (Núñez, 2014, p. 88). A second prong explicates the multiple arenas of influence: "(a) organizational (e.g., structural positions of society such as work, family, and education); (b) representational (e.g., discursive processes); (c) intersubjective (e.g., relationships among individuals and other group members); (d) experiential (e.g., narrative sense-making)" (p. 88). A third prong is concerned with historicity, in which the broader interlocking systems of inequality and classification are thoroughly considered as they "evolve over time in specific places, as well as [instigate] social movements to challenge these systems" (p. 89). Collectively, the prongs of Núñez's (2014) approach are to illuminate *intersectionality in action*.

Also examining boys' masculinities at school, Archer (2001a, 2001b; see also Archer & Hutchings, 2010; Archer et al., 2010; Archer & Yamashita, 2003) makes a significant contribution to the field of intersectionality studies. In *Race, Masculinity, and Schooling: Muslim Boys and Education* (Archer, 2001a), the nature of aspiration and working-class identity is longitudinally explored in the United Kingdom, and from varied sociological angles, integrated with consideration of ethnic identity constructions. Of particular interest were Muslim boys' identities, which were shown to be embedded within the context of schooling, and related identity processes of class, race, and gender. Each dimension of intersectionality was engaged, although the use of the term itself was limited. The theoretical construct of *habitus*, for instance, was utilized to:

help explain how young people are simultaneously unique individuals with agency and subjects who are produced by their structural locations in the sense that their ways of thinking about and engaging with the world are strongly inflected by identities and inequalities or "race," social class, and gender. (Archer & Hutchings, 2010, p. 31)

Archer's theoretical inquiries of gender and aspiration (Archer & Hutchings, 2010; Archer & Yamashita, 2003), alongside class and ethnicity, pull from a robust intersectional lens that gives careful attention to youth cultural elements, and the cross-pollination of social identities and learner identities. Archer's concern is with how

masculinities constructed *through* discourse were explicated, but more importantly how these masculinities are enacted *in* discourse.

### CONCLUSION:

#### INTERSECTIONALITY INQUIRY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BOYS' EDUCATION

In this article we have set out to encounter intersectionality theory's tenuous relationship with boys' education literature. In the spirit of a strong intersectionalist focus, we encourage social theorists of education to investigate the overlapping and mutually informing identities among diverse groups of boys. Our critical review has spotlighted the use of conceptual lenses that are too gender-specific, but which may not reflect their originators' intent. In order for future research on boys' schooling and identities to remain theoretically robust, we compel scholars, from the outset, to not be selective with concepts appropriated from theorists who have pioneered the field of masculinity studies. Additionally, we urge researchers to: (a) examine the use intersectionality to develop other innovative frameworks of inquiry for both masculinity studies and educational research; (b) delineate pre-defined and emerging conceptualizations of intersectional identity processes; (c) detail operationalizations of intersectionality throughout methodological approaches, and (d) spell out practical implications for masculinity-based and educational analysis, practice, and policy.

Thus oriented, empirical explorations of boys' identities and schooling should enable researchers to begin to unearth how intersectionality facilitates in-depth understandings of key issues associated with boys' education broadly, and particularly of alarmist references to "boy crisis." Boys' conceptions of *who they are*, or *who they wish to become*, and the quality of and propensity for positive school engagement, greatly influence boys' social and learner identities. The critical edge necessary throughout educational research on, and with, boys diminishes in the absence of an investigation and an accounting for boys' intersectional identities. Researchers themselves need to consider their own reflexivity (Luttrell, 2010), such that their own intersected and intersecting identities are systematically reflected upon.

We contend intersectional analysis of boys' experiences at school allows for disrupting essentialist, archetypal constructs of boys situated within learning environments. Ramifications of race, ethnicity, and class are critical to understand boys and girls in any context (Sewell, 1997; Harper, 2004; Noguera, 2003a). Intersectionality, according to Martino et al. (2009), Kimmel (2010), Noguera (2003a; 2003b), and Way and Chu (2004), permits sociological and educational research on boys' schooling to ask at every turn, *which boys?* Intersectional approaches moreover bolster interpretations of the depth and breadth of boys' subjectivities as these relate to achievement, school engagement, and identities, and help gaining more complex insights into boys' schooling experiences overall; make explicit the nuanced interplay of boys' social and learner identities, whereby boys draw upon separate, although interrelated, discourse communities to construct their identities, which in turn influences boys' engagement with schooling; and amplify the multidimensionality of boys' *voice* and perspectives characterizing their educational experiences and academic performance.

Utilizing intersectionality to explore dynamics among school opportunity structures tied to power relations and boys' identity work, would complicate and enrich scholarship exploring boys' aspirations and social mobility. Lastly, intersectional

analysis is methodologically crucial (notably in ethnography, phenomenology, and case studies). The goal should be to enhance design and efficacy of school interventions, instructional strategies, and social programming for all boys, and to promote more expansive educational aspirations for boys, along with facilitating boys' positive identity construction.

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