

Gender - Equity, Democratization and Complexity: Beyond backlash and essentialist understandings of boys and their educational needs

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Introduction

- Frameworks for Understanding Gender Equity
- What counts as evidence and equity?
- The problem of boys' education

'Failing Boys'

- “Our schools are failing boys which is bad news for Britain”
(*The Guardian*, September 16, 2016)
- “Why are boys failing in an educational system stacked against them?”
(*The Huffington Post*, August 27, 2011)
- “Why are schools failing our boys?”
(*Washington Post*, February 19, 2015)
- “School has become too hostile to boys”
(*Time Magazine*, August 19, 2013)

‘The Truth about Boys and Girls’

“...[The] current boy crisis hype and debate around it are **based more on hopes and fears than evidence**. The debate benefits neither boys nor girls, while **distracting attention** from more serious educational problems – such as large racial and economic gaps – and practical ways to help both boys and girls succeed in schools” (Sara Mead, 2006, p. 4)

The Gender Debate

“The so-called boy crisis also feeds on a lack of solid information ... There are many things—including biological, developmental, cultural, and educational factors—that affect how boys and girls do in school. But untangling these different influences is incredibly difficult. Research on the causes of gender differences is hobbled by the twin demons of educational research: lack of data and the difficulty of drawing causal connections among multiple, complex influences” (Sarah Mead, 2006, p. 5).

The Demand for Evidence

- “Not surprisingly, the demand for evidence has opened a Pandora’s Box of arguments over the appropriate grounds for documenting and analyzing student socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic background, student performance and achievement, systemic delivery of resources, school-type and structure, and school and teacher practices. **It is axiomatic that any policy “fix” or strategic approach is contingent on how the problems, target populations, variable contexts, and factors are defined and parceled out and observed, represented and measured, and analyzed**” (Luke, Green & Kelly, 2010, What counts as evidence and equity?, *Review of Research in Education*, 34 p. viii).

Informed Evidence is Critical

“How we define and describe the contexts and impacts of difference and diversity, then, remains on the policy table. In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, European, and Asian systems, there are robust debates over **what kinds of evidence can and should be enlisted to analyze systems’ equity performance and to shape and implement innovation and reform**” (Luke, Green & Kelly, 2010, p. viii)..

How is the 'boy problem' defined and understood?

- 'Gender gap talk'
- OECD PISA results: twice as many boys (14%) than girls in Canada (6%) perform below Level 2 proficiency
- Moral panic and crisis

Other Significant Background and Systemic factors

“The relationship between socio-economic background and performance does not necessarily reflect inequalities that occur within the boundaries of the school; inequities also hinge on societal arrangements for family healthcare, income maintenance, housing and children, to name just a few factors. Indeed, some of these factors, or **their interaction with socio-economic background**, may have as much or a greater impact on performance than schools. **While PISA did not collect information about these factors**, it is worth keeping them in mind when interpreting the results reported here” (OECD. 2010. *PISA 2009 results: Overcoming social background* (Volume II). Paris: OECD, p. 43, my emphasis)

Persistence of Racial Inequalities

“There’s no doubt that some groups of boys – particularly Hispanic and Black boys and boys from low-income homes are in real trouble. But the predominant issues for them are race and class, not gender. Closing racial and economic gaps would help poor and minority boys more than closing gender gaps, and focusing on gender gaps may distract attention from bigger problems facing these youngsters” (Mead, 2006, p. 3).

'The facts about Gender Equity in Education'

“Drawing from educational indicators from fourth grade to college, this report examines gender equity trends since the 1970s. The results put to rest fears of a “boy crisis” in education, demonstrating that girls’ gains have not come at boys’ expense ... Girls have made especially rapid gains in many areas, but boys are also gaining ground on most indicators of educational achievement. Large discrepancies by race/ethnicity and family income level remain. These **long standing inequalities** could be considered a crisis ... But the crisis is not specific to boys; rather it is a crisis for African American, Hispanic, and low income children “(AAUW 2008, *Where the girls are: The facts about gender equity in Education* pp. 3-4).

Disaggregating Achievement Data

- Toronto District School Board Data:
- Low-income neighbourhoods
- English speaking Caribbean
- Central and South America/Mexico
- Eastern Africa
- Somalia
- Portuguese and Spanish Speaking

Toronto District School Board, *Research Report: The TDSB Grade 9 Cohort Study: A Five-year Analysis, 2000-2005*. (Toronto: Toronto District School Board, 2006).

Policy Responses

1. More boy friendly curriculum

(Warrington et al, 2006, *Raising boys' achievement in primary schools: Towards an holistic approach*, Open University press)

2. More male teachers

(Neugebauer et al, 2011, Unmasking the myth of the same-sex teacher advantage, *European Sociological Review* 27:5: 669-689)

3. Support for single sex education and classrooms

(Halpern, D. et al (2011). The pseudoscience of single-sex schooling, *Science*, vol. 333, *Education Forum*, September 23)

Brain-Sex Differences

- The problem of innate biological and brain sex differences:

“Building from this analysis [of brain-sex differences], a wealth of books, articles, and training programs endeavor to teach educators how to make schools more boy friendly. Many of these suggestions – such as allowing boys to choose reading selections that appeal to their interests – are reasonable enough. But many others are based on **an inappropriate application of brain research** on sex differences. Many of these authors draw causal connections between brain research findings and stereotypical male or female personality traits without any evidence that such causality exists ...” (Mead, 2006, p. 16).

"Eye-opening . . . A masterful new book on gender and the brain." — Washington Post

How Small Differences Grow
into Troublesome Gaps —
and What We Can Do About It

PINK BRAIN BLUE BRAIN



LISE ELIOT, Ph.D.

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Lise Eliot: Pseudoscience

- As I've shown throughout this book, scientists have uncovered only small differences between boys' and girls' brains. Nor have measurements of testosterone, serotonin, or oxytocin revealed any appreciable difference between prepubescent boys and girls. So the argument that boys and girls need different educational experiences because "their brains are different" is patently absurd. The same goes for arguments based on cognitive abilities, which differ far more within groups of boys or girls than between the average boy and girl" (p. 305, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, 2009)

Dangers of Essentialism

- The truth ... is that sex differences are not nearly as large or fixed as this new of essentialism projects. The truly innate differences – in verbal ability, activity level, inhibition, aggression, and perhaps, social perception – are small, mere biases that shape children’s behavior but are not themselves deterministic. What matters more is how children spend their time, how they see themselves, and what all these experiences and interactions do to their nascent neural circuits” (Eliot, p. 303)

SO WHAT'S A BOY?

Addressing Issues of Masculinity and Schooling



Wayne Martino / Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli

Gender Complex Frameworks

- Multiple Masculinities
- Critical Feminist
- Gender Expansive

Masculinities: Connell

Power relations, Economic Relations and Sexual Desire:
“ These two types of relationship – hegemony, domination/subordination and complicity on the one hand, marginalization/ authorization on the other – provide a **framework in which we can analyse specific masculinities**... terms such as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘marginalized masculinities’ name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships. Any theory of masculinity worth having must give an account of this process of change” (Connell, 2005, p. 81).

Intersectionality

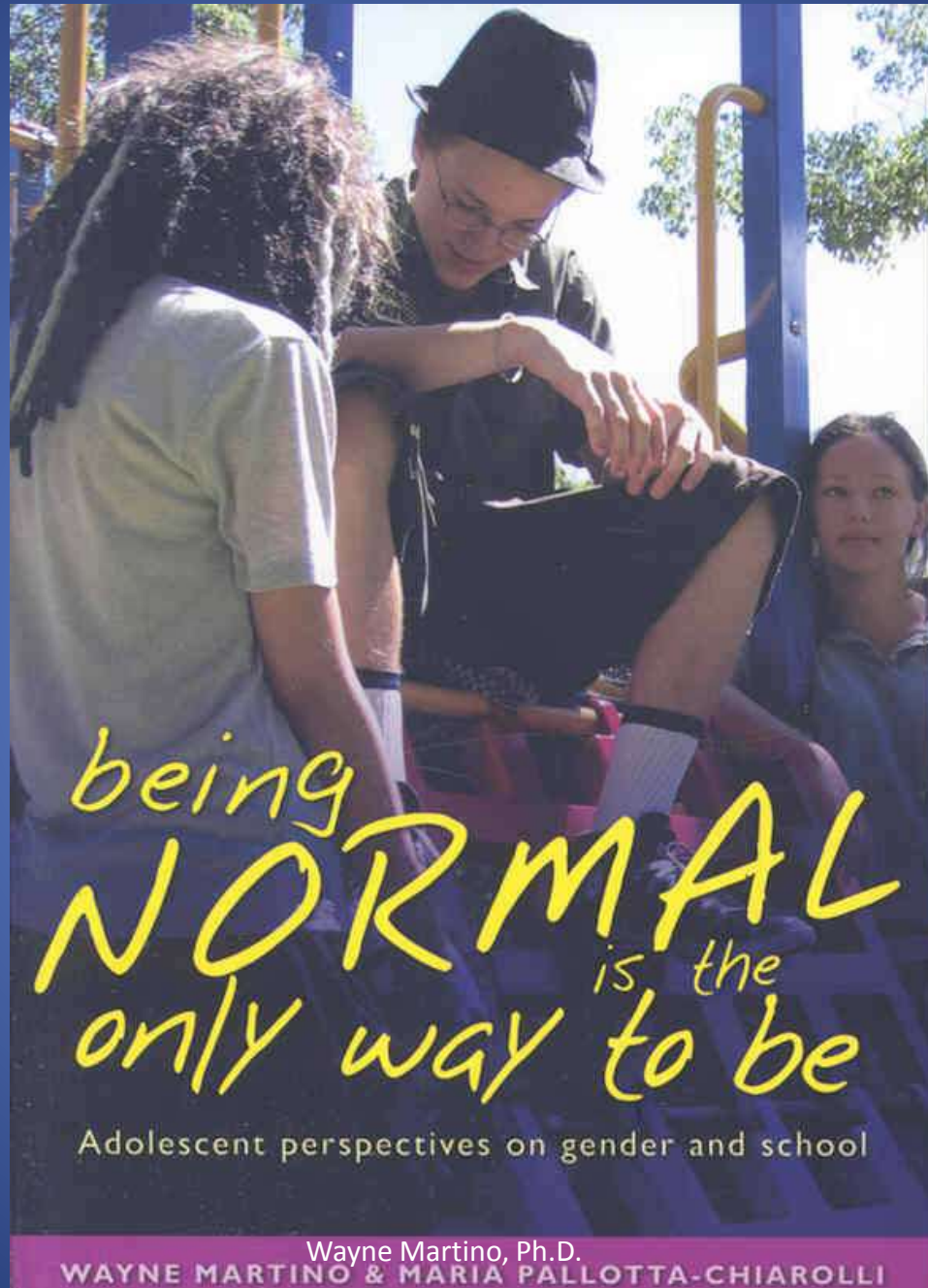
- “Because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that **gender intersects – better interacts – with race and class**. We might add that it constantly interacts with nationality or position in the world order” (Connell, 1995, p. 75).

Davies: Challenging Binary Thinking

“Current understandings of what it means to be a person require individuals to take themselves up as distinctively male or female persons ... The opposition embedded in the terms is not an opposition of equals, but one in which part of the definition of one is its dominance over the other ... the idea that a person could be other than male or female is almost unthinkable though each of us has probably experienced more than one moment in which we were aware of not correctly achieving ourselves as an appropriately gendered person”
(Davies, 1989, p. 234)

Regulating Gender

“That fear can be particularly acute for individuals who do not achieve the heterosexual element of their maleness or femaleness and who are not therefore ‘correctly’ defining themselves in relation to the other sex. Maleness and femaleness are thus defined as a constraint on each individual person’s practice” (Davies, p. 234-235)



being
NORMAL is the
only way to be

Adolescent perspectives on gender and school

Wayne Martino, Ph.D.
WAYNE MARTINO & MARIA PALLOTTA-CHIAROLLI

Gender Hierarchies: 'Fitting In'

- *What issues do boys have to face? Not looking like a fairy, not being too dumb, not being too smart, every pressure available, fitting into the right groups. No matter how hard you try, and how much effort you put in, you always end up back at the bottom - to fit in is the hardest thing of all (Boy, aged 16).*

Normalization

- *Being a boy is just normal apart from not wanting to act or look like 'a faggot'. You don't want to get crap from anyone - issues are not wanting to be the target of a group who continually gives you crap. There aren't any other issues unless you do something like cry or act gay, that can give you a reputation you can't live down (Boy aged 15).*

Rands: Gender Democratization

- More expansive understandings of gender
- Move beyond binary and stereotypical thinking about boys and girls
- Gender cannot be confined to an understanding based on birth sex

A Strategy of 'Gender Democracy'

“This strategy seeks to equalize gender orders, rather than shrink them to nothing.

Conceptually, this assumes that gender does not, in itself imply inequality ... [it] is a possible strategy for a more just society [as] indicated by many social struggles that have actually changed gender relations towards equality” (Connell, 2009, p. 146)

Gender Oppression Matrix

- **Gender category oppression** is about addressing gender privilege
- Assumption that there are only two genders – one is either a boy or a girl
- Gender categories are often viewed as rigid and invariant and as being based on genitalia
- Gender Conformity & Cisgender Privilege

Kathleen E. Rands (2009, p. 422)

Gender Transgression Oppression

- “those who do not identify within the binary gender categorization of men and boys and women and girls – who cross gender lines in their gender identity, or gender expression (those who do not follow ‘the rules’ ...) and those who reject gender categories all together are oppressed because they challenge these gender binary categories and the assumption that gender maps directly onto biology” (Rands, p. 423).

Conclusion

- The need for Gender complex frameworks
- Implications for reflecting on the ‘constructs’ that are used in researching gender and inequality in the education system
- What constructs of ‘boy’ are being employed?

Conclusion

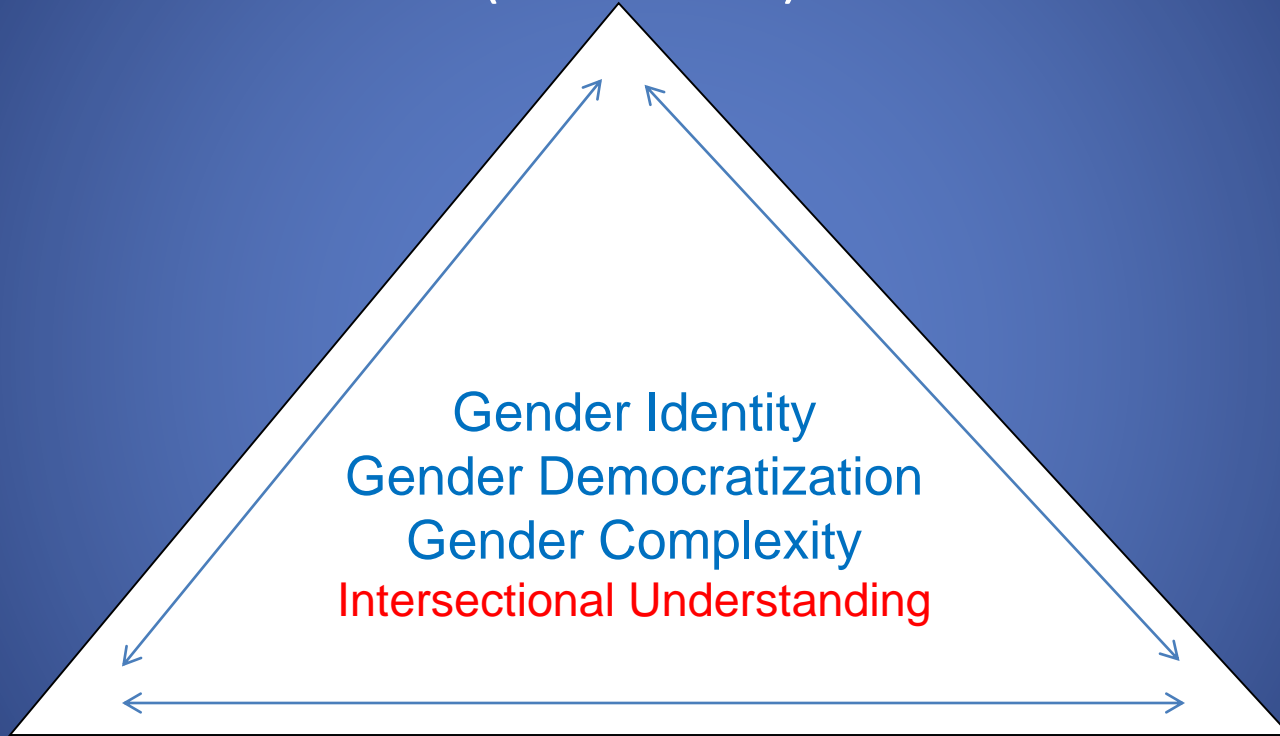
- The failure of numbers per se to capture the complexity of lived experiences of inequality
- The failure of achievement data to address important questions for intersectionality
- The need for evidence formed policy that addresses 'productive pedagogies' and supportive school communities

Measuring Inequality – Moving from Theory to Evidence

- ... the very measurement of educational inequality itself is also not a given ... by itself, empirical research offers little to social analysts and policy makers; theory is essential for drawing proper inferences from the research ... [in order] to bridge the divide between social science research on the one hand and policy construction on the other ... empirical analyses need [to] become more theory laden ... if any progress on informing policy is to be realized” (Lucas & Beresford, 2010, p. 25-26)

Evidence Informed Policy

Productive Pedagogies
(Classroom)



Equitable schooling
(Outcomes)

Supportive School Community
(Strategic Action Plan)

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