



The Influence of Academia on Men And Our Understanding of Them

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A lack of attention to men's experiences and outcomes by scholarly professionals has resulted in a lack of male therapists, possible misrepresentation of men in popular press books, and few opportunities for college men to have their voices heard on campus and in the classroom. This article presents the proceedings of a three-part symposium presented at the 2014 Eastern Psychological Association annual conference in Boston, Massachusetts. Specifically, we address the questions, "What impact does a reduction of males in psychology professions implicate? How can we improve academic book reviews on boys and men? What is it like to be a young man studying at university?"

Keywords: men, university, students, education, curriculum, male studies

Panel Introduction

While a century ago psychology and research were dominated by European and North American men, in recent years the field has witnessed a substantial change in gender dynamics. In the first section of this report, Todd Bottom, a psychology instructor and researcher at DePaul University presents evidence of the impact of the growing disparity of men in psychology professions and in the classroom. This shift is likely a major factor in explaining the lack of research which reports on men's outcomes and why little of what we learn about them makes its way into the media or the classroom. A continued lack of male presence in counseling psychology professions may greatly impact the mental health services that men receive, as fewer men may seek professional help with an opposite sex service provider.

In the second section of this report, Dr. Dennis Gouws, an English Professor at Springfield College and proponent of male-positive curriculum, reports on an examination of several book reviews published in PsycINFO-indexed journals during 2012-2013. Gouws reports that reviews of academic books on male psychology are de facto arbiters of research on males and that commentaries on published findings attempt a convincing display of the reviewers' male-specific knowledge and conventionally represent the last word on the works they examine. Unlike the scholarship they assess, these book reviewers' assessments may, however, rely on both tacit assumptions and personal observations concerning males rather than methodical arguments—the brevity of the book-review genre usually ensures some degree of reader compliance with the critical framework being used to appraise the given work—resulting in a questionable use of the reviewers' assumed critical authority. He describes the most prominent assumptions and assesses whether they treat males reasonably and justly.

To conclude, Dr. Miles Groth, Psychology Professor at Wagner College, reports on the lack of male students in higher education and the student gender gap in higher education which continues to widen each year. At a time in which few academic institutions provide resources such as student groups or support services for male students, the number of men's studies programs and courses is a fraction of such resources to understand women. Dr. Groth addresses the need for centers on college and university campuses where study groups are supported that discuss issues facing boys and young men especially, but also the majority of males in contemporary culture. Also addressed is the lack of campus support of young men, the lack of courses offered which address the issues of boys and men, and difficulties faced by faculty who would like to see changes in campus life and curriculum which would foreground the experience of men at college and in life after college.

Part 1: What impact does a reduction of males in psychology professions implicate?

Psychologists and academic professionals have studied some of men's chronically poor outcomes and occasionally a few of the topics may be discussed in classrooms in higher education. However, many of men's negative outcomes, including suffering 79% of suicide completions (CDC, 2010) and 50% of domestic abuse (Hall, 2012), unjustifiably low child 'visitation' time and custody rates (Guzzo, 2009; Kruk, 2010), and unwarranted rates of false abuse allegations (Dutton, 2009) are rarely or never addressed in our college and university classrooms. Even less likely to be introduced by college pro-

fessors are findings such that for men who do seek help to improve their outcomes or their physical safety, many report being turned away or that services are not available to help them (Hoff, 2012). The lack of discussions and learning of men's outcomes in today's classrooms can be attributed to society's increasing attention to the perceived sole victimization of women, which has been presented as a higher priority than the understanding of men's equally negative experiences. This fallout has come at considerable expense for our male population, including fewer male therapists and a lack of male-positive training for mental health professionals. For example, nearly 20 years ago Holmes and Offen (1996) reported that the low number of male sexual abuse victims who seek help may be the result of clinicians' unawareness that men were abused at all. Additionally, it is likely that such ignorance is not limited to issues of sexual abuse, which leads one to wonder why these professional help providers – many of whom completed up to 10 years of formal higher education and satisfied clinical licensure requirements – are not aware of men's experiences.

One answer as to why today's mental health providers are unaware of men's experiences and are ill prepared to help men was addressed in a recent publication of the National Science Foundation. Specifically, 75% of today's developmental, family, clinical, and counseling doctoral students are women. With so few men receiving degrees in psychology doctoral programs, it may be of little wonder that men are reluctant to seek help, for fear of not having a safe place to have their stories heard or of not having their concerns addressed appropriately. A second reason for which our clinical and helping professionals are not prepared to help men is evident in the lack of classes and training opportunities afforded during their educational endeavors. For example, at DePaul University, no men's psychology course is currently offered, while a women's psychology course is offered at both the undergraduate and graduate level. For many psychology students the women's course is offered as a requirement to fulfill a 'diversity' requirement for degree completion. In my own program of Community Psychology, no male students were selected for admission from 2011 – 2014, and in 2012 no men among the approximately 60 applicants were invited to interview for a position. Furthermore, the Women and Gender Studies program at DePaul offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, concentrations, and certificates which include approximately 45 courses dedicated to women and feminism, 15 courses on gender in general, seven courses related to LGBT studies, and no courses dedicated to learning about men specifically. This example is certainly not unique to any one academic setting, but is pervasive in U.S. higher education.

Even when some men do seek assistance from or have contact with helping professionals, many report that the service providers are not helpful. Data from my own dissertation show that when asked how encouraging 13 sources have been of their efforts to be a good parent, divorced fathers reported mental health providers (i.e. therapists, social workers) as the third and fifth least encouraging sources. These men reported mean scores of encouragement for these helping professionals the bottom half of the possible range. Perhaps because there are so few qualified mental health professionals that are helpful for men, many are seeking support from more contemporary and easily accessible resources.

One such source is a Facebook group named The Fathers' Rights' Movement that was started by a divorced non-custodial father in Alaska in 2012 as a way to bring together other men and supporters who shared his experiences. Twelve months after conception the group had less than 200 members, but its growth has since reached 20,000 members with about 1,000 new members currently

joining the group each week with no signs of slowing down. Many other similar groups also exist on Facebook, and several comparable initiatives have been started on Twitter by individuals as well as established organizations. Most notably, with few exceptions these online sources of encouragement and information are maintained by non-professional supporters of men and fathers.

How effective these easily accessible online support systems are, or what their long-term impact on men's outcomes will be is difficult to determine. However, it is clear that they cannot stand alone, and much more work needs to be done in higher education to help the millions of men and fathers who are suffering from injustices simply because they are perceived to not have problems. It is imperative that we begin to establish male positive courses and programs in our colleges and universities. Making such changes will ensure that abuse shelters are staffed with properly skilled crisis counselors, that post-divorce service providers are able to effectively help fathers, and that mental health providers are adequately trained and empathetic to men's issues.

Writing for the American Psychological Association's magazine *Monitor*, Cynkar (2007) wrote that some academics believe the field of psychology has reached a point of extreme imbalance several years ago regarding men and women in the field, and that more should be done to bring men into the field. Until this goal begins to receive more attention and support from our academic institutions by way of increased admissions of male students and the establishment of male positive curriculum, little change is likely to occur.

Part 2: What assumptions about boys and men are evident in contemporary academic book reviews on male psychology?

Academic reviewers of books on male psychology are *de facto* arbiters of research on males: their commentaries on published findings seek to assure the reader of the reviewer's male-specific knowledge and conventionally represent the last word on the works they examine. Unlike the scholarship they evaluate, these book reviewers' assessments may, however, depend on both tacit assumptions and personal observations concerning males rather than methodical arguments—the brevity of the book-review genre usually ensures some degree of reader compliance with the critical framework being used to appraise the given work—resulting in a questionable use of the reviewers' assumed critical authority. In other words, the reviewers' authority and expertise are crucial for assessing the merit of the work being reviewed; however, the assumptions informing them are often unexplained.

In order to investigate the nature of the gendered assumptions informing such reviews, and authority, I examined twenty-one book reviews published in PsycINFO-indexed journals during 2012 and 2013. My brief overview in this paper of the qualitative textual analysis I undertook will describe the most prominent assumptions made and assess both whether they treat males reasonably and justly and whether they are authorized by theoretical or empirical positions. Before discussing my analysis and findings, I offer an apology and an *apologia*. I conduct qualitative research in the arts and the humanities; my academic interests are male positive, which means they not only celebrate men who embody different expressions of masculinity, but also critique—and suggests strategies for overcoming—systemic inhibitors of masculine affirmation. I am mindful that I approach these reviews as an outsider, so my apologies to those who share Poul Rohleder's preference for papers "from within the psychoanalytic profession, using the discourse of psychoanalysis, rather than a critique

from outside the discipline” (Rohleder, 2012). With all due respect to Rohleder’s discernment, however, I feel my outsider’s perspective, which attends more to the form the arguments take than to their content, offers an intriguing point of departure for further substantive research on gendered assumptions about males in conversations about males and psychology.

My method involved simply asking the following research questions: What assumptions, or unproved points of departure, are made about males? Are these assumptions declared or tacitly assumed? On what authority do these assumptions depend? Are these assumptions gynocentric? Are these assumptions misandric? Do they rely on empirical or theoretical arguments? What can be done to improve the integrity of academic book reviews on boys and men? The following discussion will distill the essence of the findings into a brief commentary and offer an illustrative quotation to exemplify five salient sets of assumptions evident in these reviews.

Seven of the twenty-one book reviews assumed that males are dignified and deserve appropriate accommodation.¹ Alt and Liu’s review of Brooks, *Beyond the crisis of masculinity* (2012) observes that, “therapists should be thoroughly knowledgeable about the male experience and facile with therapeutic skills consonant with male help-seeking styles....an integrative model of male-friendly psychology [should] emerge.” This review is typical in its respect and its concern for men’s needs and how to negotiate them effectively. In contrast to these male-positive reviews, five others assumed that males should defer to a gynocentric interpretation of gendered experience.² A good example of this strident, often condescending, approach is Britton’s review of Ridgeway, *Framed by Gender*, (2012) that asserts, “Feminists are fighting battles we thought we had won decades ago....Because men have greater control over power and resources than women do, both men and women accept a gender hierarchy in which men are perceived as better than women....Men must take on more of the carework in households and hence loosen the association between caring and femininity (and agency and masculinity)....There is much to like about this book....Ridgeway presents a powerful and convincing account of how gender inequality works and is reproduced in everyday actions.” Similarly gynocentric but also misandric were the assumptions, shared by four reviews, that masculinity is culturally constructed and essentially unhealthy.³ Diamond’s review of Moss, *Thirteen ways of looking at a man*, (2013) approvingly notes, “This scholarly yet incisive book addresses the unstable notion of masculinity and the ways in which both hetero-and homosexual men seek to shape themselves in relation to the precarious nature of being a man...As Moss implies, the impossible sense of manliness is bound up with an inherent *gap* or *lacking* that has ramifications in the realm of self-esteem, sexuality, and competition....” I find it troubling that no affirmative possibility for masculinity is considered here; just predictable postmodernism and pathology—both unfortunately still the main discourses for understanding males in the arts and the humanities.

Most disconcerting among the assumptions about men were those concerning gay male issues. In three of the reviews gay male identity was not assumed to be an embodied male identity.⁴ More postmodernism is evident here in the guise of a Butlerian performativity that subsumes the somatic. For example, Wheeler says of Goldberg’s *Gay dads*, (2013), “She frames the data in terms of the effects that becoming parents had on the participants’ evolving understanding of family and their sexuality and... wider contexts....guided by social constructionist and queer theories...the role of masculinity scripts....the men’s experiences of being a family in community spaces and its influence on their visibility and ‘outness’ as gay men...an important early step in the development of an

understanding of psychology of adoptive fatherhood for gay men.” One of the deficits for males whose concerns are associated with the LGBTQ coalition is its gynocentric tendency to view maleness as troubling in its potential for experiences independent of those already expressed, and approved of, by feminists. Gay males experience a somatic reality completely alien to those others in the LGBTQ panoply; this area is always possibly beyond the gynocentric pale and consequently potentially subversive of gynocentrism and its agendas. Much productive work could be done by reframing gay male experience as somatically male experience, exploring the greater commonality shared among men than among gay men in the LGBTQ gynocentric coalition.

Along a similar train of thought, one that wishes to reframe dominant discourses on maleness to account for individual specificity rather than pansexual collectivity, were the assumptions shared in two of the reviews: these suggested that current ways of understanding sex and gender were insufficiently complex to account for individual contingency within masculinity.⁵ Guha exemplifies this argument in a review of Blazina & Miller, *An International Psychology of Men*, (2012): “Whether the causes are cultural or innate however, it is not seriously disputed that gender differences exist... I hope [this work] represents an interim stage on the road towards an individual-based rather than gender-based mental health provision.” This inductive approach seems refreshing in the context of so many deductions stemming from cultural-relativist, and mostly gynocentric, assumptions.

The extent to which these assumptions are gynocentric and misandric correlates interestingly to whether the criticism based on them depend on empirical studies or theory. The five sets of assumptions corresponded to empirical or theoretical arguments in the following ways: first, male-positive assumptions about men tended to favor research based more on empirical rather than purely theoretical studies; second, gynocentric assumptions about maleness were just the opposite, favoring theoretical rather than empirical research—as were those works that were both gynocentric and misandric. The examinations of gay men based on gynocentric assumptions predictably also valued the theoretical over the empirical, in keeping with the denial of male somatic experience. Finally, and similarly predictably but with different consequences, those studies that valued the individual experience over collective sex and gender identity favored the empirical over the theoretical.

Given what has been gleaned from this brief examination of the research project, what might be done to improve the integrity of academic book reviews on boys and men? I offer the following three suggestions: first, clearly state male-positive assumptions and the empirical and theoretical benefits to examining male identity and experience; second, critique gynocentric and misandric assumptions and motivations for understanding male identity and experience; and third, explore embodied gay male identity as male identity. Examining the tacit assumptions made about males in the kind of book reviews discussed in this paper might unsettle some long-held gendered assumptions but will productively improve critical awareness of males and the issues they face.

Notes

1 See M. Alt & W. M. Liu, C. Bailey, D. Buchanan, R. C. Intrieri, G. C. Jackson, P. Rohleder, and C. Wrottesley.

2 See D. Britton, D. Brown, S. S. Rostosky, C. Smith & I. H. Frieze, and E. Weiss.

3 See J. Chang & W. M. Liu, M. J. Diamond, J. Gast, and E. Riska.

4 See J. Cooke & S. S. Rostosky, J. Saltzman, and E. E. Wheeler.

5 See M. Bigras and M. Guha.

Part 3: What are academic institutions doing to prepare students and the public for a better understanding of men's issues?

A lack of attention to boys' and men's experience by psychology professionals has led to fewer male therapists, misrepresentations of men in the media, and fewer opportunities for college men to have their voices heard.

The symposium of which this contribution is a part raises the general questions: "What is the impact on the discipline of psychology of the reduction of males in the psychology-based professions? How can we expand and enhance the academic literature on boys and men? What is it like currently to be a young man studying at university, especially as a psychology major?"

My contribution originated with the more specific question: What are academic institutions doing to prepare students and the public for a better understanding of young men's issues, especially those who are majoring in psychology and aspire to a career in psychology? I will also discuss the need for centers on college and university campuses where issues facing boys and young men especially, but also the majority of males in contemporary culture, can be discussed. I will question the dearth of courses currently offered to study issues of relevance and importance to boys and men, and note the difficulties facing faculty who would like to see changes in campus life and curriculum that would foreground as needed the experience of men at college and in life after graduation. Finally, I will present a synopsis of my course, Psychology of Boys and Men, which I have offered at Wagner College for nearly a decade, as an example of male-positive curriculum in psychology.

The question I was asked to address is, What are academic institutions doing to prepare students and the public for a better understanding of men's issues?

I will take up a slightly different question; namely, What are academic institutions doing to prepare students for a better understanding of men's issues? As you have heard, I omitted "the public" from the question. I did this because I firmly believe it is not part of the mandate of institutions of higher learning to attempt to directly affect society at large. That is for the professions, government, the media and activists. The merging of academic preparation—education—and activism on campuses since the 1970s has vitiated the effectiveness of our work as teachers.

Some faculty came to see their "job" as purveying an ideology, putting forward a cause, or presenting a worldview, rather than helping students learn how to read closely, think critically, and speak and write clearly—and, above all, to learn how to learn. As someone who places more value on demonstrating these practices to students than merely communicating information to them, I approach today's question with our students in mind—especially our male students.

The short answer to the question posed might be: Very little. In truth, currently academic institutions are doing nothing to prepare students, male and female, to better understand the experience of being male in contemporary society. This is the sort of topic psychologists are best prepared to discuss. It is important to repeat and emphasize that this has an impact not only on the boys, but also the girls. All students now need to have an understanding of how boys and men—especially young men, but also fathers, middle-age and elderly men—experience their bodies, their selves. It is a topic all but missing in our curricula.

Lack of attention to this, I would argue, is one reason for the recent decreasing enrollments of males at university. The national average is now less than 40%. Statistical models predict that, at the present rate of decline, in fifty years there will be no boys on campus. I doubt that will happen, because awareness of the need for increased commitment to understanding the male experience—which only a psychological perspective can provide—is now being felt. The Eastern Psychological Association's interest in today's panel is evidence of that awareness, although there are few such discussions taking place at regional and national conferences of this kind. I expect that will soon change.

Fewer applications, more frequent interruptions or withdrawals, and the resulting fewer graduates at the bachelor's level means fewer males going on to graduate study and careers in the learned professions, including psychology, in both its research, teaching, and applied clinical fields. My evidence is nearly all anecdotal. As of yet, few studies have been undertaken of the attitudes of young men and the attitudes towards young men on campus, but they are needed. Three years ago I published some preliminary material on the topic which was gathered from ten colleges and universities from across the nation. It appeared as *Engaging College Men: Understanding What Works and Why*.

Courses and programs on the experience of being female—women's studies and gender studies—are ubiquitous, although in recent years the number of programs has been decreasing because of fewer enrollments.

There is at this time, however, only one undergraduate men's studies program—at Hobart Williams Smith College—and one new graduate program due to begin in a year or two at SUNY Stony Brook, both in New York State. Both of these programs have acknowledged connections with existing women's studies (on gender studies) programs on campus. We need a fresh start, I think, with courses that leave open at the outset just what the phenomenon—male experience—is.

In the States, on college campuses there are a few men's centers for research and discussion of men's issues. There is one in the UK. One proposed for a university in Canada is being strongly opposed. Perhaps more telling is the fact that where they exist they are not welcome. Much the same can be said about males themselves—other than athletes. I have written and spoken at length here in the States, in Canada and in Australia about this increasing sense of not feeling welcome experienced by many young men at university. Today I will look specifically at what is being done and what can be done to rectify this by expanding and enriching the psychology curriculum.

Changes in the general curriculum, but also in the co-curriculum and the extra-curriculum are a large part of answer to the question, How can we make young men feel welcome once again on

campus? Doing so in part depends upon increasing awareness on campus of most men's experience. As an example of curricular change in our discipline, I will give you a brief tour of a course I have taught for ten years on "The Psychology of Boys and Men."

First, a note or two on course offerings in psychology in general that are already on the books. The developmental psychology of boys and girls has long been a staple of psychology offerings. Child psychology and adolescent psychology courses should be adequate as they stand, providing they include a unit on the alarming increase in diagnosis of so-called ADHD and other conduct disorders, a diagnosis that is made almost entirely in boys. Related to this are the consequences on boys' development of ingesting an unprecedented number of doses of amphetamines (Ritalin, Adderal)—sometimes administered by school nurses as a condition of a boy's attendance at elementary and high school—must be explored. Social psychology courses on attitude formation, prejudice, and intimate partner behavior—especially among college-age adolescents—are quite common, but they often fail to include consideration of female-on-male and male-on-male aggressive behavior in heterosexual partnerships (dating) and homosocial settings, such as violent sports (football games and ice hockey matches). Attitudes about boys and men of the "snips and snails and puppy-dog tails" variety and as potential campus rapists must be contextualized and examined critically. In particular, the recent moral panic about a so-called rape culture on university campuses must be tempered with attention to the data.

Outside of psychology, related course offerings in sociology consider only the observed behavior of boys and men. This is its limitation, especially when it is the motivation of the individual that is crucial, and not primarily or solely his "emitted behavior" (as a former president of the EPA, Fred Skinner, would say), even when some guesses about possible underlying "reasons" for the behavior are added into the mix. Courses in psychology need are needed precisely to remind us to consider that all behavior is embodied and motivated, and that there are essential differences between male and female comportment and expression that are not exclusively the result of social conditioning. All of this becomes obvious when psychology once again becomes in the first place the study of human experience and not (only) behavior.

The development more widely of courses on the psychology of boys and men is a matter of urgent concern. They may even have the effect of drawing men back into our field, which is now dominated by women.

Let me now describe my course, "Psychology of Boys and Men." It is a 200-level (intermediate) elective in psychology I have taught for ten years at Wagner College. It is also one of the Gender Studies minor courses, the only one that focuses on the experience of boys and men in all its uniqueness.

This is a course about the experience of being male as a boy and as a man. Six books are required reading: Louann Brizendine, *The Male Brain*; David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*; Luigi Zoja, *The Father*; Eugene Monick, *Phallos*; Leonard Sax, *Boys Adrift*; and Roy Baumeister, *Is there Anything Good about Men?*. In addition, a two-part reading by Warren Farrell based on his book *The Myth of Male Power* is available online as publications of *New Male Studies: An International Journal* (which I edit): <http://newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/issue/view/9> and

<http://newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms>.

We first discuss the male body and how it affects the presence of boys and men in nature and the social world. We then turn to theories of male psychological and psychosocial development. Next, using anthropological research we examine the notion of manhood in a variety of cultures in order to see whether there are any universal features of what it means to be a man and whether there is anything like essential masculinity. We question the myth of innate male aggressiveness and examine the relation between men and power. We turn next to male sexuality, including homoeroticism, men's relationships with their mothers and other women, and their fathers, fathering, male spirituality, and psychopathology in boys and men, including learning disabilities, hyperactivity, impulsiveness, antisocial personality disorder, depression and suicide. We conclude the course by considering some of the special issues surrounding boys' experiences and look at the broad social perspective on being male in contemporary Western culture.

Students are asked to write two thematic reflections on topics negotiated between student and instructor and two reflections on films. The thematic reflections require consulting three sources from the bibliographies provided. A list of suitable films is also provided.

MASTER ONLINE BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND OTHER RESEARCH SOURCES

<http://www.xyonline.net/mensbiblio/>

<http://mensbiblio.xyonline.net/> This is currently one of the most comprehensive resources on the internet for literature on boys and men. It is the work of Michael Flood, an Australian scholar, who regularly updates it.

http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/GESUND/ARCHIV/GUS/GUS_AFS.HTM This is a huge resource of literature on growing up as a male (and female) in all cultures throughout the world. For men's studies see <http://www.menstuff.org/frameindex.html> and the journal *New Male Studies*: <http://newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms>.

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FILMS ABOUT BOYS AND MEN

Billy Elliot [Stephen Daldry; 2000]

The life of 11-year old Billy Elliot, a coal miner's son in Northern England, is forever changed one day when he stumbles upon a ballet class during his weekly boxing lesson. Before long he finds himself in a dance class, demonstrating the kind of raw talent seldom seen by the class's exacting instructor. Billy must keep his participation in the class a secret from his widowed father and overbearing brother, who are on strike from their jobs at amine and are struggling just to keep food on the table. Billy is torn between his responsibility to his family and to the gift with which he has been blessed, for his overwhelming desire to dance is more than a means of self-expression. It is his passion, and it is his destiny.

Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee: 2005)

A love story set against the sweeping vistas of Wyoming and Texas, Brokeback Mountain tells the story of two young men, a ranch-hand and a rodeo cowboy, who meet in the summer of 1963 to work as shepherds in the American West. Unexpectedly, they forge a lifelong connection. Its complications, joys and tragedy are a testament to the endurance and power of love. This is a movie about the underlying meaning of love that happens between men, whether or not that love ever is sexual. It has been called friendship and male adhesiveness.

Gerry [Gus van Sant; 2003]

Only two characters, both named Gerry, played by Matt Damon and Casey Affleck, are driving through a desert populated by imposing rock formations and bordered by miles of sky. The two Gerrys want to see an unspecified "thing" which they are unable to find. They attempt to return to their car, but cannot find the pathway back. As they wander through the increasingly challenging desert terrain, their journey strains their friendship and becomes an exploration that is about more than just finding the car.

Joe the King (Frank Whaley: 1999)

A destitute 14-year-old struggles to keep his life together despite harsh abuse at his mother's hands and even harsher abuse from his alcoholic father. Petty thefts lead on to stealing a cash box from the diner where he works. Although Joe uses the money to pay off some of his father's debts and to replace his mother's records that his father smashed in a fit of temper, Joe gets no thanks. Joe is still capable of compassion and looks after a friend who is enduring even worse conditions than he is. This is a tribute to the strength and resilience of neglected boys in America.

The Keys to the House [Gianni Amerlio; 2004]

A compassionate and rigorous exploration of fatherhood and the often surprising response to disability. This is the touching story of a young father forging a relationship with his handicapped son, whom he meets for the first time as a teenager. Having suffered a traumatic birth, Paolo is challenged

both physically and psychologically and must travel to a special hospital in Berlin for rehabilitation. His father, Gianni, who accompanies the boy to the hospital in hopes of getting to know his estranged son, meets a strong woman dedicating herself entirely to the care of her handicapped daughter. Through their conversations, Gianni come to terms with the guilt of having abandoned Paolo. This revelation results in an unexpected and fragile happiness between a father and a son discovering each other and themselves in a place far from home.

The Last Kiss [Gabriele Muccino; 2002]

This film centers on four buddies about 30 years old who are starting to think about settling into a more serious phase of their lives. It communicates the breathless anxiety of striving to hold on to the fleeting feeling of carefree youth. Particularly poignant are the repeated scenes of the four friends standing side by side in a waterfall where they gather for nighttime meetings. They pop open champagne bottles, spraying the bubbly liquid, and scream their wildest dreams into the black night sky above. These five men want nothing more than to settle down and live peacefully. They have all begun to lay down the roots of their future lives, but they hesitate to nourish them.

L.I.E. [Michael Cuesta; 2001]

The Long Island Expressway (LIE) traverses suburban Long Island. Howie Blitzer is a sensitive fifteen-year-old who runs with a rough crowd. The recent death of his mother in a car accident on exit 52 of the L.I.E. and his father's indifference to it have left him floating in a world bubbling over with sex, violence, and danger. Howie's best friend, Gary, convinces Howie to burglarize the house of their neighbor, 60-year-old Big John. Howie's father is arrested over a bad business deal and he is left dangling. Only Big John seems to care. A harrowing mixture of tenderness and sexual tension electrifies the father-son relationship that forms between Howie and Big John.

Shooting Fish [Stephan Schwartz; 1998]

Jez, a goofy British tech genius, and Dylan, a smarmy fast-talking Yank, are orphans. They're also con artists out to "shoot some big fish," that is, (trick some people out of their money. Things get complicated when a typist they hire for a "job" turns out to be sweeter than any scam. It turns out that she needs the money more than they do. When Jez and Dylan land in jail during a financial crisis, what's a woman to do with \$2,000,000?

Y tu Mama Tambien [Alfonso Cuaron; 2002]

The lives of Julio and Tenoch, like those of seventeen-year old boys everywhere, are ruled by raging hormones, intense friendship, and a headlong rush into adulthood. Over the course of a summer, the two best friends make new connection with each other, themselves and the world around them. Just days after the boys trade heartfelt good-byes with their sexy, young girlfriends who are headed to Italy for summer vacation, their attention is diverted by Luisa, a stunning twenty-eight year old Spaniard. At a family wedding in Mexico City, the boys awkwardly flirt with Luisa, who is married to a distant cousin of Tenoch's. Fueled by alcohol and her beauty, the boys invite Luisa to accompany them on a road trip to a remote beach with the romantic name of Boca del Cielo -- Heaven's Mouth

-- neglecting to mention that they wouldn't know where to find it, even if it actually did exist. Luisa humors the boys, but not without first fueling their vivid imaginations. A few days later, Luisa, receives some heartbreaking news and, needing a change of scenery, tracks down the boys and accepts their offer. The unlikely trio hits the road, their destination not so much Boca del Cielo as that seductive and mysterious place where innocence, sexuality, and friendship collide. As the saying goes, you never really know someone until you travel with him. With the car closing in upon them, Julio and Tenoch are forced to reveal to each other sides of their personalities they had never before even dared to explore. Though best friends for years, the boys realize they had often taken each other for granted, not seeing the person in front of them. Luisa is the catalyst of their self-discovery. Her presence brings out the best – and the worst – in the two friends. At times a sexy seductress, at other times the maternal figure each of the friends is lacking, Luisa, too, finds out what is important to her. As the road leading to the elusive Boca del Cielo becomes more desolate and inhospitable, the protagonists find there is no escape from a confrontation with their innermost demons and desires.

Yossi & Jagger [Eytan Fox; 2003]

Based on a true story, Yossi & Jagger portrays the relationship between two Israeli officers in an IDF position on the Israeli-Lebanese border. They are commanders, they are in love, and they try to find a place of their own in an oppressing and rigid system, which sends them to defend a cause they do not necessarily believe in. The film portrays in a courageous, genuine, amusing and sometimes painful fashion the complicated and sensitive topic of "gays in the military". It also see portrays the tragic structure of life of young Israelis today. In Yossi & Jagger you can also two young women who try to survive in a men's world. The film's creators emphasize the distorted situation in which these men and women are forced to live and die.

OTHER FILMS FROM WHICH TO CHOOSE

Adventures of Sebastian Cole, The (Williams 1998)
Another Day in Paradise (Clark 1998)
Basketball Diaries, The (Kalvert 1995)
Beautiful Thing (MacDonald 1995)
Borstal Boy (Sheridan 2000)
Breaking Away (Yates 1979)
Bully (Clark 2001)
Butcher Boy, The (Jordan 1997)
Choristes, Les (Barratier 2004)
Cider House Rules, The (Hallström 1999)
Cinema Paradiso (Tornatore 1989)
Crazy in Alabama (Banderas 1999)
Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys, The (Care 2002)
Dead Poets Society (Weir 1989)
Donnie Darko (Kelly 2001)
Dream Catcher, The (Radtke 1999)
Elephant (Van Sant 2003)
Emperor's Club (Hoffman 2002)

Equus (Lumet 1977)
Europa Europa (Holland 1990)
Garçon Stupide (Baier 2004)
Great Santini, The (Carlino 1979)
Gummo (Korine 1997)
Harold and Maude (Ashby 1971)
Heathers (Lehman 1989)
Home at the End of the World, A (Mayer 2004)
King of the Hill (Soderbergh 1993)
Last Picture Show, The (Bogdanovich 1971)
Le Clan [aka Three Dancing Slaves] (Morel 2004)
Lord of the Flies (Hook 1990)
Lords of Dogtown (Hardwicke 2005)
Ma Vie en Rose (Berliner 1997)
Mickybo and Me (Loane 2005)
Mudge Boy, The (Burke 2003)
My Life as a Dog (Hallström 1985)
My Own Private Idaho (Van Sant 1999)
October Sky (Johnston 1999)
Our Lady of the Assassins (Schroeder 2000)
Outsiders, The (Coppola 1983)
Saint Ralph (McGowan 2004)
Separate Peace, A (Peerce 1972)
Shooting Fish (Schwartz 1998)
Sleepers (Levinson 1996)
Small Faces (MacKinnon 1996)
Stand by Me (Reiner 1986)
Sum of Us, The (Burton/Dowling 1994)
Tadpole (Winick 2002)
Thumbsucker (Mills 2005)
What's Eating Gilbert Grape? (Hallström 1993)

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