

Together, we will realize a future where everyone is safe, connected, and valued.

4th Annual
Healthy Men and Boys Summit

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2017 | COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS, WORCESTER, MA | www.mergeforequality.org



Dear friends,

Thank you for your help in making the 4th Annual Healthy Men and Boys Summit a huge success! Our one-day Summit, *Raising Emotionally and Socially Connected Boys: Exploring Intersections of Gender, Race and Trauma*, was dynamic and engaging, and served as a profound opportunity for 180 professionals from 10 states.

We are celebrating and reflecting on our growth – both physical and programmatic – and express our gratitude to our dedicated board, staff and consultants, generous sponsors, hard-working volunteers, expert presenters, all participants, and staff at the College of the Holy Cross, our event location.

This report offers a summary of participant demographics, program highlights, images, participant feedback, and future engagement opportunities. We hope you find this a useful resource in our collective work of raising emotionally and socially connected boys.

DEMOGRAPHICS 180 Participants attended, representing 107 organizations

Summit participants reported they work primarily in these regions:

Western MA	38.0%
Central MA	18%
Eastern MA	16%
MA statewide	5%
Connecticut	9%
Other	15%

Summit participants reported they work primarily in these fields:

Education	24%
Social Work	22%
Violence Prevention	17%
Mental Health	9%
Other	9%
Early Childhood	5%
Public Health	5%
Parenting	5%
Youth Services	4%

Summit participants reported their race as:

White or European:	57%
A person of color:	41%
Other:	2%

Summit participants reported using the pronouns:

He/Him/His	50%
She/Her/Hers	48%
They/Them/Theirs	2%

Summit participants reported their age as:

18-25	10%
26-35	29%
36-45	27%
46-55	18%
56-65	12%
66+	4%

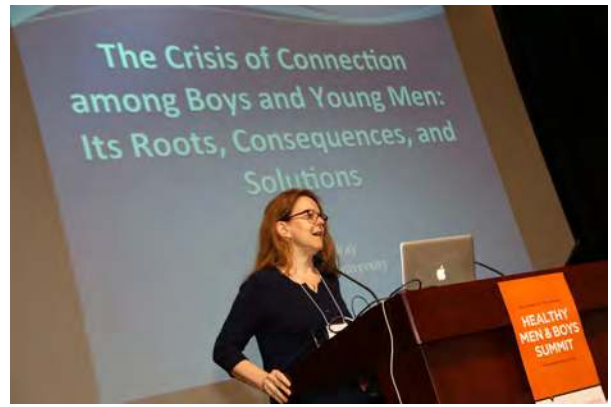
PROGRAMMING

Keynote

Niobe Way, Ph.D.

Raising Emotionally and Socially Connected Boys

Dr. Way, NYU Professor of Applied Psychology, researcher, and author of *Deep Secrets: Boys' Friendships and the Crisis of Connection*, offered an inspiring keynote address. Reflecting on decades of interviews with adolescent boys, Dr. Way shared the deep secret – that “at the edge of manhood when pressures to conform to gender expectations intensify, boys speak about their male friends with abandon, referring to them as people whom they love...and with whom they share their deepest secrets, and without whom they would feel lost.”



Dr. Way challenged us to consider: What would it mean for us to let boys be boys by fostering their natural empathetic abilities and their intimate friendships? What would it mean to value the very skills that have been stereotypically associated with girls, women and gay boys? If we were to value a full range of relationships, and that being emotionally literate and invested in relationships is not a “girl thing” or a “gay thing” or even a “childish thing”, but an inherent part of being human – we would, according to the research, have better psychological and physical health, better academic outcomes, less bullying in and out of schools, less violence, better marriages, better friendships, stronger communities and longer lives.”



And, Dr. Way inspired us with her call to create this world by
1) Normalizing the social and emotional connection of boys and
2) Noticing and nurturing resistance to harmful norms of masculinity, that are spoken and illustrated by boys. You can read more from Dr. Way in *Boys' Friendships During Adolescence: Intimacy, Desire and Loss, Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 23(2), 201-213.

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about Dr. Way's keynote, including:

“Niobe is the best conference speaker I've seen, and I love that she stayed throughout the day, sharing her thoughts and answering questions.”

“Niobe, your work is inspiring—thank you for sharing it!”

“Her content was the perfect way to begin the day, and with an inspiring tone.”

Following the keynote, a dialogue session entitled ‘Deepening the Conversation About Boys and Men’, was facilitated by James Arana and Steven Botkin, Ed.D., both Senior Trainers with MERGE for Equality. The morning dialogue is a hallmark of the Summit experience, providing a safe space for participants to engage more deeply with each other about program content and experience.



“The keynote was very informative, and the post-keynote discussion got me fully engaged.”

“This was a nice and rare opportunity to network and share our learning from the keynote.”



Case Study

Our friends Erin Saylor and Marisa Valdiserra with Child and Family Agency of Southeastern CT presented *Building Healthy Communities through Empowered Relationships*, providing a glimpse of their work with MERGE during the past year on a project initiated in the wake of the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook, CT Elementary School.

Performance

Outspoken slam poet (and medical student) Yevin Roh presented an electrifying performance, enlivening and inspiring all participants with his narratives of personal experience and commentary on race, domestic violence and masculinity. You can find his videos on YouTube.



Workshops

We were delighted to offer three concurrent workshops this year, each covering relevant and urgent topics around masculinity, facilitated by knowledgeable, compassionate and accessible presenters:

Intersections of Trauma and Gender for Raising Healthy Boys by James Arana and Steven Botkin, Ed.D., of MERGE for Equality

Intersections of Race and Gender for Raising Healthy Boys by Haji Shearer, LSW, of The Children’s Trust, and Albert Pless, MS, of the Cambridge Public Health Department

Intersections of Gender Identity and Expression for Raising Healthy Boys by Mason Dunn, JD, and Bobbi Taylor, MSW, of the Massachusetts Trans Political Coalition



Afternoon Dialogue

To round out the day’s programming and solidify the connections between the related Summit topics explored, *Making Connections: Raising Boys at the Intersections of Gender, Race and Trauma* capped the day’s programming. Facilitated by Craig Andrade, LATC, RN, DrPH, of the MA Department of Public Health, and John Engel, MA, of MERGE for Equality, this final group discussion session allowed for the sharing of questions, insights and actions that participants were eager to carry forward from the day.

CHILDREN’S BOOK CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

The 2017 Summit served as the launch of our new advocacy campaign centered around compassionate, gender-inclusive children’s books. Books in this campaign are selected to help children and adults learn about and appreciate healthy masculinity and gender equality, together. A copy of the first featured book, “Made by Raffi” was provided free of charge to each attendee, with a book plate encouraging attendees to read the book to a child or gift it to a family, children’s library or children’s program. Also included are discussion prompts, promoting conversations between children and adults about the book’s themes and lessons. Stay-tuned for additional books and learn more about the campaign at www.mergeforequality.org/childrens-books/

SUMMIT GALLERY WALL

This year's Summit featured a visual gallery, illustrating the personal impact of the summit program. Participants posted more than 350 colorful notes to share their thoughts under the headings Questions, Insights, and Actions.



Insight
Boys link maturity with isolation. We can counter this by normalizing connection, and doing friendship skill-building.

Insight
Nurturing friendships
is Mission
Critical

Question
How do the men at this table feel about what they heard about friendships? Did it resonate w/ you?

Questions
• How does race influence the man box?

Question
- How to stay at top of my boys / stereotypes as a parent and clinician?

IS it ok to let there be differences in gender?

It's important to foster connections between boys just as much, if not more, than connections amongst those boys + their parents/guardians.

HOW DID BOYS' FRIENDSHIP BECOME "SOMETHING GAY"?

Insight:
The need for friendship is urgent & concretely life saving



BOYS KNOW THEY ARE LOOSING EACH OTHER...

Summit photos by Lenny Underwood.
Gallery wall note photos by Zoe Engel.

Overall Survey Highlights

99% of respondents said they would recommend the Summit to a colleague/friend, many of which called the Summit a "must-attend" event, and included comments such as:

- "The focus on connection was inspiring; this is a heart and mind-opening event"
- "This event goes much deeper than others I have attended; I greatly appreciate it"
- "Cutting-edge thinking about masculinity— a compassionate community of people making a difference for boys AND girls"
- "It's heavy, it's necessary, and change starts here"
- "Time well-spent: attending this event can be transformative, if you let it!"

Other insights shared by participants:

"There is a lack of attention paid in how to develop healthy relationships and navigate challenges while young, but yet we expect healthy marriages and relationship perfection as adults!"

"...how strict gender roles can be traumatic and produce similar reactions to other traumatic events."

Feedback regarding the facilities, logistics and location of the conference were extremely positive, with a few comments requesting more outdoor signage in the future.

Summit Closing Remarks

I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to my friend and colleague Laura Penney, Director of Community Engagement for Safe Passage. This was the 4th year Laura generously served as emcee for the Summit, providing her insights and humor, all while keeping us on schedule and on message. Laura, thank you for your time, commitment and presence in support of the MERGE mission!

In my closing remarks at the event, I read excerpts from a pre-2016 election opinion piece written by New York Times op-ed columnist, David Brooks. He suggested that America needs a new national story, one in which “communities heal those who suffer from addiction, broken homes, trauma, prison and loss... a story of those who triumph over the isolation, social instability and dislocation so common today.” Brooks added, “We’ll probably need a new definition of masculinity, too... The traditional masculine ideal isn’t working anymore.” And he concluded, “We’ll need to rebuild the sense that we’re all in this together,” and that our collective “task is to build a ladder of hope.”



MERGE for Equality believes that WE are all in this together – WE are not alone – in wanting a world that reflects the benefits of healthy expressions of masculinity. Together, we can create this world, we can build and climb a ladder of hope, and achieve gender equality.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT:

- Two-day training, Developing Healthy Men and Boys, Springfield, MA – Fall 2017
- MERGE for Equality Children’s Book Campaign – Next book release, Fall 2017
- 5th Annual Healthy Men and Boys Summit – Seeking sponsors and venue, June 13, 2018

As we wrap up a year of planning for the 2017 Summit, we extend our gratitude to you for your energy and dedication to our collective work and the mission of transforming masculinity to advance gender equality. Stay tuned about upcoming opportunities by following us on Facebook and Twitter, or join our email list by emailing us at info@mergeforequality.org.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Engel". The signature is stylized and fluid.

John Engel
Executive Director

SPONSORS

A special note of thanks is owed to our generous 2017 Summit Sponsors, without whom the event would not have been possible:

