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Schooling masculinities

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Introduction

In recent years we have witnessed a radical restructuring of English state schooling. This restructuring is located within the more fundamental sociopolitical changes following the breakdown of the postwar educational settlement, with its main tenet that the role of education was of central strategic importance to the development of economic growth, equality of opportunity and social justice. Currently schools are in the process of being restratified with the accompanying privatization, commercialization and commodification of institutions located within competitive local markets. This New Right agenda has served to marginalize the quest for social justice; in the process the social subject has tended to be discarded. It is against this background that studies of schooling and masculinities are starting to be produced, albeit in a rather sketchy and indirect way. The school is a social process, a set of social relations charged with formal and informal meanings. All aspects of schooling are subject to these meanings and they are deployed across a diversity of areas, including discipline and control, the formal and hidden curriculum, streaming and prefectorial systems, teaching staff appointments, and auxiliary staff. Work on masculinities has suggested that schools through these meanings offer interpretations about what it means to be 'male' or 'female'. More specifically, schooling processes can be seen to form gendered identities, marking out 'correct' or 'appropriate' styles of being (Butler 1993).

Integral to this understanding of the practice of making masculinities is the demand for theoretical and conceptual clarity of its use in the sociology of education. Second-wave feminism has provided the major contribution to our understanding of gender in the schooling arena, providing a stimulus for the theoretical and conceptual developments of 'multiple masculinities' and 'hegemonic masculinities'. We will use these conceptual and theoretical tools

to consider empirical examples of the ways that schools shape masculinities. First, we shall concentrate on the teachers' social world and their responses to the changing labour process of teaching as work. Equally important, the use of discipline in their labour process can be seen as another terrain where masculine identities are contested. Second, we shall explore the ways, through the use of language, that students among themselves police and regulate their masculinities. The curriculum has been seen as a direct producer of masculinities. Through the stratification of knowledge, the curriculum provides the resources to make and convey masculine identities. As part of this stratification, sexuality as a subject is an area which has been systematically organized, providing critical implications for legitimizing styles of male behaviour. Furthermore, we shall consider student responses to the curriculum and the ramifications of the rise of the new vocationalism.

As was pointed out earlier, work on masculinities and schooling is very sketchy and sporadic. As a result the choice of these areas is informed by previous work done in this area by others and by ourselves.

Gendering roles: (re)conceptualizing male-female relations in schooling

Prior to feminist studies highlighting the gendered nature of schooling, masculinity appeared as unproblematic. A wide range of feminist perspectives began to make visible the gendered nature of education (see Deem 1984). Recent research in education has opened up the discussion of masculinity and sought to contextualize its constitution by grounding it in the different social contingencies within which it is manifest (Connell 1987, 1989; Mac an Ghail 1991). These studies indicate that the social, ethnic, class and sexual specificities of male identities within local sites influence the range of masculinities that are inhabited. As Connell (1992: 736) claims: 'Different masculinities are constituted in relation to other masculinities and to femininities through the structure of gender relations.'

Masculinities, it is argued, should be conceptualized in terms of *relationships*. Moving away from the singular 'role' based on gender, masculinities need to be conceptualized in relation to their class, sexual and ethnic locations (Thorne 1993). This has led to the theorizing of masculinity in terms of multiple masculinities (Brittan 1989). Masculinities do not have a one-dimensional identity, rather they embody multiple dimensions. For example, there are white working-class gay masculinities alongside Asian middle-class heterosexualities. An important development in the theorization of masculinities and schooling is to see that these social locations create the conditions for relations of power. There are different masculinities with differential access to power, practices of power and differential effects of power.

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Connell (1987) has provided one of the most productive accounts of how to incorporate power into an analysis of masculinity. Translating Gramsci's notion of hegemony that was used in the context of class relations into the realm of gender relations, Connell has produced valuable analytic insights about the nature of masculinity. Not only are different masculinities worked out in relation to other masculinities. These relations as part of a hegemony are mediating oppression and domination. Power is differentiated so that particular styles of masculinity become ascendant or dominant in certain situations. Their ascendancy is achieved through processes of persuasion, having the power to define what is normal and 'ordinary' male behaviour. Power is linked to material practices, so that various social and cultural arenas provide the potential for the ascendancy of masculinities. In relation to the school, the ascendancy of a specific masculinity is contextually contingent. There are various spaces, such as the staffroom, classroom, the playground, or the common room, where different styles of masculinity onset 'normality'. Hegemony is a social and historical phenomenon, where the constitution of what is defined as 'normal' masculinity is a process of production. There is a need critically to examine hegemonic masculinity as an analytic tool. Such an examination might explore how fluid or unstable hegemonic masculinity is and how this structure might be linked to the spaces of empowerment. Nevertheless, hegemony remains a highly useful concept with incisive analytic scope to examine the asymmetric nature of gendered power relations, while at the same time arguing that dominance is never secure but must always be won.

In order to examine how masculinity in education has been theorized, it is necessary to turn to schooling processes themselves and to explore theoretical contributions within the context of empirical studies.

Schooling masculinities: making men

Corresponding to theoretical arguments about masculinity, schools exist as sites where styles of masculinities are produced and used. Within the school there are particular spaces where 'masculinity-making' appears both explicit and abundant. One of these spaces is the interrelations of teachers. It is that area which we will now address.

Teacher culture: relationships to the labour process and the implications for masculine styles

There are two interlinked areas that illustrate the ways in which teachers' masculinities are produced. The first concerns teacher ideologies and their relationship to the labour process. The second concerns the use of discipline

in teaching styles. Although research in this area has predominantly concentrated on students, there is evidence to suggest that relations between teachers are also part of a process of making the spaces for particular styles of gender to predominate. Work as a site of inequality has been extensively examined from a number of perspectives (see Phizacklea 1990). Teachers' work manifests and reflects the inequalities operating within other work arenas. It has been argued that teachers' institutional responses and resistances shape the forms of gender relations to the labour process.

As we have pointed out above, teaching has undergone a process of reconstruction, which has involved degrees of specialization, deskilling and increased alienation. This reconstruction has crucial implications for the way teacher masculinities are worked out. Mac an Ghaill (1994) presents a range of male teacher styles which are located around certain ideologies of teacher labour. These ideologies embody assumptions and expectations about the labour process. Attitudes to the labour process are closely worked into personal desires and fears, with major personal investments. He outlines three particular groups: the Professionals, the Old Collectivists and the New Entrepreneurs. At one level, these groups are based on their responses to the political organization of schooling. More specifically, the groups' identities are acted out in relation to their different responses to recent educational reforms. These differences created conflicts. The groups' strategic political positioning was underpinned by their collective impressions of what constitutes the labour process. At another level, sexual politics is also at work here, involving the contestation of masculine styles. These styles are not totally cohesive, but rather contain multiple and contradictory elements. Nevertheless, the Professionals tended to advocate a masculine style that revolved around authority, discipline and control. This was a masculinity that appeared to draw on themes of paternalism. The Old Collectivists attached significance to an education system which emphasized equality, meritocracy, anti-sexist and anti-racist practices. This can be seen as a masculine style that was drawing on liberal pluralist and feminist ideas. The third group, the New Entrepreneurs were in favour of recent central government interventions and welcomed a labour process which was redefining teachers' work in terms of appraisal, accountability and effective management. This type of masculinity worked with ideas of a conventional upwardly mobile industrial and business-like masculinity.

Importantly, these ideological positions and styles manifested themselves in working relations and, more specifically, in their responses and resistances to changes in the school organization. The potential for conflict becomes heightened as teachers are not only acting out their micropolitical interests in response to curriculum changes, they are simultaneously acting out their sexual politics through the deployment of masculinities. In other words it is the teachers' relationship to the labour process which mediates their masculinity.

Discipline

A second area where teacher relations reinforce 'normal' masculinity is through the legitimation of different teaching styles. Masculinities have to operate or be competent at operating some degree of power and authority (Brittan 1989). An inability to be powerful and authoritative is a code for an inability to be a 'proper man'. Signs of 'weakness' in many public arenas is associated with femininity. Masculinities in the workplace have competence as an essential feature, while incompetence is deemed as failure, weakness or 'womanly'. In Robinson's (1992) school a competent teacher could keep a class quiet. A quiet class was deemed a class that could be managed, therefore learning could be achieved. The most common way of keeping a class quiet was the use of discipline and force. It was expected that males were able to use this discipline. Although violence in terms of corporal punishment in state schools has been abolished, other forms of physical force were often used to control male pupils. Beynon's (1989) ethnography of 'Lower School', a school for 11 to 18-year-olds in South Wales, highlights the ways that coercive methods used in the classroom represented 'good' teaching. Physical coercion through shaking, cuffing and pushing were seen as acceptable everyday forms of discipline. This discipline complemented the ethos of a 'school for boys and men'. As Beynon (p. 194) points out, the headteacher believed that there was no place for women and children: 'Men and boys were expected to behave in a certain kind of way, put in a certain kind of manly performance, if they were to win the accolade of being a "good teacher" or a "good lad", whether that was a praiseworthy "rough diamond" or "playground hard".' Teachers' awareness of other teachers' pedagogical styles – informed by notions of gender – judged whether teachers were 'good' or 'bad'. As a result 'good teachers' were 'real men' and 'bad teachers' had 'problems' (Wolpe 1988).

There are pressing implications about the use of violence in Beynon's school. First, there is pressure on the teacher that in order to be competent, violence has to be issued. Second, if a competent teacher is a male who can display violence, what part do women play in the school? Third, if violence is appropriate for teaching, what does this mean for theories of child-centredness and the ability to create positive working relations (Robinson 1992)?

By presenting the teachers' labour process as embodying ideas about what it means to be a man, we have illustrated that teachers' work is a set of relations in which masculinities are worked out. Teachers' work exists as another space where gender relations are producing masculine forms. Teachers' identities, ideologies and pedagogical styles demonstrate a particular purchase on certain masculinities. It is a purchase on what kind of men they are.

Student–student relations: the use of language

Male peer group networks are one of the most oppressive arenas for the production and regulation of masculinities. Using ideas about what it means

to be male and informed by some of the school processes indicated above, students deploy techniques to legitimize and regulate those meanings. As schools create the conditions for a hegemonic masculinity, differing meanings of masculinity will compete for ascendancy. The curriculum offers male students a resource to develop their masculinity, through a range of responses to it. At the same time, relations of domination and subordination become apparent, as some groups are able to define their meaning of masculinity over others. These definitions create boundaries which serve to delineate what appropriate maleness should be within this social arena. Transgression of these boundaries activates techniques of normalization, ranging from labelling through to physical violence, that ultimately act to maintain differences embedded in the ascendant definitions of masculinity.

As indicated below in the study by Willis (1977), mental work and having girls as friends were defined by the working-class Lads as effeminate. They asserted definitions of masculinity that required men to be strong and powerful and not express any weakness. Language can express such definitions of appropriate masculinities which in effect regulate and actively police male behaviour. In his ethnography of a school unit for disruptives, Wood (1984) points out that the use of language, particularly sexual slang, is also used in a process of expelling male sexual anxieties, self-doubts and confusions. Wood helps us to conceptualize male sex talk as embodying more than a simple process of sexual harassment (see Lees 1986). The use of terms of abuse by males may also help us to understand how they draw upon certain discursive resources to consolidate masculine subjectivities. One way in which males within peer group networks normalize masculine identities is by directing terms of abuse at other males' sexuality. It should be noted that sexuality as a target for terms of abuse is not arbitrarily chosen because sexuality is systematically selected as a critical component in the constitution of masculinities (Brittan 1989).

Haywood (1993) provides an example of how male pupils use language to regulate masculinities through the policing of sexuality. The lack of heterosexual experience by the Academic Achievers, a middle-class group of hard-working A level students became a resource for other males in the school to impose legitimate definitions of masculinity. The other groups of males included the Dominant Heterosexuals, a group which believed in schooling but also believed that heterosexual relationships were as important and the Hyper-Heterosexuals, who tended to reject schooling and concentrated on developing their heterosexual career. These groups interpreted and represented the Academic Achievers' heterosexual inexperience as illustrating childlike behaviour. The use of the term 'wankers' and other terms of homophobic abuse such as 'bum bandits', 'gays' and 'poofs' mediated to Academic Achievers their position in the school as underdeveloped and abject masculinities. These terms were usually spoken outside the classroom in a public arena such as the student common room. By doing so, males

consolidated their masculine identities by making alternative/contradictory masculinities problematic. Terms of abuse here represented ways in which certain heterosexual males publicly distanced and expelled from themselves behaviours such as homosexual relations or masturbation, which they felt contradicted their ideas about what their own masculine identities consisted of.

This process of making masculine identities is also evident in the terms of abuse used by the Academic Achievers. Such terms as 'cripple', 'cabbage', and 'spanner' were used to describe male pupils' inadequacy, representing something inanimate, inarticulate and stupid. They were commonly used when male pupils, particularly the Dominant Heterosexuals and the Hyper-Heterosexuals, answered teachers' questions incorrectly within the context of the classroom. For the Academic Achievers, these terms were a method of validating a masculinity based on academic competence, while serving to ridicule other masculine styles. Yet the Academic Achievers' language generally failed to maintain the other groups as subjects in their abuse and legitimize the Academic Achievers' masculinities. This was mainly because the terms of abuse used by the Academic Achievers corresponded to the Hyper-Heterosexuals' and the Dominant Heterosexuals' perception that the Academic Achievers were 'childlike', thus reinforcing and amplifying their own inferiority. Rather than the terms of abuse being a form of cultural resistance, as abuse was for the other males, the Academic Achievers' language colluded with a schooling system which desexualized students and emphasized students' immaturity; a schooling system which restricted their access to certain masculine subjectivities.

Curriculum: mediating masculinities

The curriculum is an area of strategic importance for the production of masculinities. The curriculum – combined with the disciplinary procedures, normalizing judgements and the examination – represents an institutionalized structure (Foucault 1982). It is the relationship between the curriculum and students that contributes to the conditions for the emergence of particular masculinities (Connell 1989). Hierarchically organized knowledges legitimize the spaces for hegemonic masculinities to exist. It is important to stress that schools proscribe and prescribe *particular* kinds of knowledges. Furthermore, the spaces available for certain masculinities to occupy are not necessarily conditional upon the acceptance of the hierarchy of knowledges, but can also be shaped through a range of responses, including resistance to those knowledges.

Resistance

Connell (1989) proposes that masculinities are produced in relation to the curriculum, through the sorting of students into academic hierarchies. As

schools actively fail students, they are deprived of a certain source of power and status. Connell argues that students, when formally proclaimed failures by the school, take up alternative resources to validate their masculine identities. One form of validating masculinity has been through resisting school demands and expectations. Willis (1977) has provided one of the early key texts dealing with masculinity and the forms of resistance it entails within the social arena of the school.

During the 1970s Marxist theorists, such as Bowles and Gintis (1976), developed theoretical frameworks suggesting that schools reproduced the social relations of the wider society. In critiquing these theories, Willis (1977) presented a more complex picture, arguing that working-class students – in actively resisting the schooling process – reproduce themselves inside social class relations. His ethnography focused on a group of anti-school working-class males. He identifies certain cultural practices of this group which transgressed the schools' expectations and normative judgements. These practices – which included 'havin' a laff', 'dossing' and 'blagging' – also represented pupils' strategies to deal with the vicissitudes of a schooling system that alienated them. Willis suggests that a process of differentiation occurs between the 'Lads' and the school. Differentiation embodies the separation of the institutional interests and that of the working class. Part of the resistance to schooling was the rejection of the legitimacy of school-sanctioned knowledges. The academic disciplines presented to the lads had no relevance for the type of jobs that they wanted/expected to get. This resistance to schooling paralleled the 'Earoles' who accepted the legitimacy of schooling. A central feature of the Lads' rejection of learning was that it was associated with mental work. According to Willis, enveloped in male working-class culture is a perception that 'real work' is physical. Significantly, the Lads' rejection of knowledges was not solely defined in terms of class but also existed along gendered lines, with mental work deemed effeminate. In other words, mental work is contrasted to manual work, with the latter representing a province of masculinity.

Critics of the above study have suggested that Willis romanticizes the position of the working class. Also, he is seen to celebrate a coercive form of masculinity as a response to the middle-class schooling system. Furthermore, there is no indication that the Lads' sexual domination results from their privileged position in an oppressive masculine regime. At the same time Willis assumes that the processes that boys go through will also be experienced by girls. Evidence suggests that female students' oppression is reproduced in different ways (McRobbie 1991). Apart from these general criticisms, there is a sense that resistance appears to take on a particular masculine style. In overemphasizing the Lads' responses, there is a failure to conceptualize the range of masculine identities that is occupied across the school. Other forms of counterschool cultures may require a more sophisticated analysis of the production of masculinity through resistance to schooling.

Changing curriculum: changing masculinities

If we assume that the curriculum produces the spaces in which masculinities are produced, it follows that as the curriculum changes, so will masculinities. It should be added that the interplay between the curriculum and masculinity does not work in a deterministic way; students can effectively renegotiate curriculum agendas (Davies and Hunt 1994). They do, however, represent a structure, a technique or practice of power which is relatively fixed, closing off and opening up potential masculine subjectivities. At different times dominant institutional orders impose their versions of hierarchical knowledge that serve to stratify the curriculum.

The renegotiation of the hierarchy of subject areas is also present in contemporary English schools. Mac an Ghaill (1994) has argued that until recently, schools were divided along a high status/academic and low status/vocationalist binary. He suggests that currently this division is being challenged and is in the process of being reconstructed. The impetus for reconstruction has been the increased funding for vocation-directed projects, marking a shift from a liberal-humanist schooling paradigm to a technical training paradigm. New resources for the fulfilment of career aspiration emerged as students entered subjects such as business studies, technology and computer studies. He found that the emergence of the new vocationalism has signalled the change in the constitution of stratified knowledge. In turn, as a result of the restratification of knowledges, male student identities take on new dimensions. Rather than seeing male groups in terms of a simple pro-school or anti-school dichotomy, Mac an Ghaill proposes a more sophisticated approach in order to capture these new dimensions. In his study he identifies four groups of male student types, who represent the styles of masculinity that were present at the secondary school: the Macho Lads, the Academic Achievers, the New Entrepreneurs and the Real Englishmen. The groups of students were positioning their masculinities in relation to the school organization, and in particular in relation to the curriculum. The working-class Macho Lads rejected formal schooling. In contrast, the Academic Achievers legitimized and affirmed the schooling process, locating themselves within academic subjects. Meanwhile the working-class New Entrepreneurs located themselves within the newly high status technical and vocational subjects as a resource to develop their masculinities. The Real Englishmen represented a group of middle-class students who, like the Macho Lads, rejected schooling but remained ambivalent to its significance. Key elements of their masculinity included honesty, being different, individuality and autonomy, which they claimed were absent from the school's middle-class culture. Significantly, it is within these peer group networks that masculinities were collectively regulated, maintained and contested. Each group attempted to impose its own definition of masculinity, thus reinforcing their own social position. In doing so, the form and content of the students' schooling experiences became mediated.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have tried to illustrate that schools act as 'masculinity-making devices'. By theoretically examining masculinity and offering empirical examples of the way masculinities are shaped in the context of schools, an attempt has been made to address the notion of the 'schooling of masculinities'. It has to be emphasized that schools do not exist on their own as locations for the creation and contestation of masculinities; rather, they complexly interrelate with other social and cultural sites, including the family, labour markets, media representations, and the legal system. However, perhaps contemporary schooling is the most strategic site, as it offers a condensed range of experiences in a sustained and mandatory fashion. It is also necessary to emphasize that schools do not produce masculinities in a direct, overly deterministic way, but that the construction of students' identities is a process of negotiation, rejection, acceptance and ambivalence. Finally, it should be noted that studies of school masculinities have the potential to collude in the current backlash against feminism by implicitly suggesting that boys are now the 'real victims'. In response, it is intended that this chapter builds on feminist, gay and lesbian scholarship and activism, contributing to the political deconstruction of masculinities. In turn, it is hoped that this will generate fresh insights into what constitutes masculinities. More specifically, this chapter has argued for the need critically to examine heterosexual masculinities and, in the process, to destabilize the assumed naturalness and inevitability of sex/gender schooling regimes.

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