Masculinities at School

Edited by
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RESEARCH ON MEN AND MASCULINITIES SERIES

Series Editor:
MICHAEL S. KIMMEL, SUNY Stony Brook

Contemporary research on men and masculinity, informed by recent feminist thought and intellectual breakthroughs of women's studies and the women's movement, treats masculinity not as a normative referent but as a problematic gender construct. This series of interdisciplinary, edited volumes attempts to understand men and masculinity through this lens, providing a comprehensive understanding of gender and gender relationships in the contemporary world. Published in cooperation with the Men's Studies Association, a Task Group of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism.

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Series Editor's Foreword

Daily we're bombarded with pop advice books that proclaim an "interplanetary theory of gender"—that we come from different planets, speak different "genderlects," apply different moral standards, and know different things in different ways. On the other hand, we sit in the same classrooms, read the same books, listen to the same teachers, and have the same criteria used when we are graded. But are we having the same experience in those classes?

From our earliest classroom experiences we are becoming gendered. We learn more than our ABCs; more than spelling, math, and science; and more than physics and literature. We learn—and teach one another—what it means to be men and women. And we see it all around us in our schools—who teaches us, what they teach us, how they teach us, and how the schools are organized as institutions. Schools are like factories, and what they produce is gendered individuals. Both in the official curriculum itself—textbooks and the like—and in the parallel, "hidden curriculum" of our informal interactions with both teachers and other students, we become gendered, and what we learn is that gender difference is the justification for gender inequality. As law professor Deborah Rhode (1997) writes,

"What schools teach and tolerate reinforces inequalities that persist well beyond childhood" (p. 56).

For more than two decades, feminist campaigns have eroded some of the most glaring inequities, from overt classroom discrimination, curricular invisibility, tracking away from science and math, to equal access to sports and sexual harassment prevention programs. And though these problems have by no means been completely resolved, legal protections and heightened awareness have made the classroom a somewhat less "chilly climate" for girls.

So much so that the voices of backlash have grown to a chorus. Some new arguments suggest that boys, not girls, are the victims of gender discrimination in schools. After all, what happens to boys in schools? They have to sit quietly, take naps, raise their hands, be obedient—all of which does extraordinary violence to their "natural" testosterone-inspired rambunctious playfulness. "Schools for the most part are run by women for girls. To take a high spirited second or third grade boy and expect him to behave like a girl in school is asking too much," comments Christina Hoff Sommers (1994), author of *Who Stole Feminism?* The effect of education is "pathologizing boyhood," she claims. While we've been paying all this attention to girls' experiences—raising their self-esteem, enabling them to take science and math, deploring and preventing harassment and bullying—we've ignored the boys. "What about the boys?"

Well, what about them? Is the classroom the feminizing influence that critics once charged at the turn of the last century, just as they do today? In my classroom, women students dress in flannel shirts, blue jeans and T-shirts, baseball hats, leather bomber jackets, and athletic shoes. They call each other "guys" constantly, even if the group is entirely composed of women. The classroom, like the workplace, is a public sphere institution, and when women enter the public sphere, they often have to dress and act "masculine" in order to be taken seriously as competent and capable. A recent advertising campaign for Polo by Ralph Lauren children's clothing pictured young girls, aged about 5 or 6, in oxford button-down shirts, blazers, and neckties. Who's being feminized and who's being masculinized?

The virtue of the research collected in this volume is that the authors take seriously the question, "What about the boys?" but they do so within a framework that promotes greater gender equality, not the nostalgic return to some earlier model in which women knew their place and boys ran the show. What's more, they observe the social and psychological consequences for boys *and girls,* for men *and women,* of persistent gender

inequality both in the classroom and outside. By tracking gender from elementary schools through secondary and postsecondary schools, these authors present a fascinating and much-needed elucidation of how the educational process reproduces gender difference and gender inequality.

This is Volume 11 in the **Sage Series on Men and Masculinities.** It is our goal in this series to gather the finest empirical research and theoretical explorations of the experience of men in contemporary society.

—MICHAEL S. KIMMEL
Series Editor

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Introduction

NANCY LESKO

When CNN began its first reports from Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999, the two members of the Trenchcoat Mafia responsible for the shootings were quickly and repeatedly described as having been taunted by jocks, as alienated geeks who took revenge on their oppressors. Yet they, like the school shooters from Pearl, Mississippi, to Springfield, Oregon, were white boys, although more affluent and successful in school than some of their compatriots. Given simple analyses of race, class, gender, and power, these boys and young men would seem to occupy privileged positions in and out of schools.

If one changed channels from CNN to *Oprah,* or browsed in bookstores, another story about boys like Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris emerged in which they are at risk, disadvantaged because they do not get sufficient "proper" attention; are unable to express their emotions; and suffer disproportionately from alcoholism, heart attacks, and other crippling physical and psychological ills. According to authors like Pollack (1998) and Kindlon and Thompson (1999), boys are an endangered group and must be rescued with gender-specific interventions, primary among them receiving help in expressing their true emotions.

These complex and contradictory images of white, middle-class boys as simultaneously predators and victims, social elites yet emotionally disadvantaged, powerful yet oppressed by their inability to express their anger in nondestructive ways, are emblematic of the multilayered representations, experiences, and social relations of masculinity that the authors of this volume address. Working against the conventional search for a single

cause and a single cure, the contributors to this volume examine mascu-
linities as historically contextualized, dynamic, and collectively pro-
duced. These scholars work against another tendency in the coverage of
male violence, whether of school shootings, police profiling, or high
school jock brutality, which is to report incidents as tragic, *one-time
events,* unpredictable and inexplicable. While news reports portray male
violence as without antecedents or patterns, the collected scholarship here
inquires into the systematicity as well as the contradictory dimensions of
masculinities, whether violent, heroic, or caring.

Reports of the Trenchcoat Mafia overlapped with the trial of Justin
Volpe, a white, twentysomething New York City policeman who pleaded
guilty to torturing Abner Louima, a young black man, in a fit of rage.
Again, analyses of Volpe's behavior as dominant masculinity were absent,
and his actions were attributed to individual pathology or temporary in-
sanity. White male violence cannot be interpreted as simply isolated
events, as one-time occurrences. How is it that white male rage against
Others, which is everywhere chronicled, even sensationalized, is seldom
named and dissected? Why are gruesome, violent crimes so easily juxta-
posed and almost overshadowed by human interest stories of a disap-
pointed father and neighbors who knew the brutalizers as "nice boys"?
How does the discourse move so quickly toward empathy for the perpetra-
tors? Part of the explanation is the elision of a sense of patterned, norma-
tive masculinity. These patterns of discursive visibility and invisibility
suggest a broad and deep familiarity with and acceptance of the norm of
righteous male anger and violence because public figures like Justin
Volpe, Dylan Klebold, and Eric Harris are "our guys."[1] They are "our
guys" not only because they are similar to and defended by real males in
our families and workplaces, but because they are part of a broad and deep
social imaginary (loosely defined as a potent complex of fears, desires,
and fantasy) in which high-status guys are tough and hard, get angry and
even, and do not talk about their feelings. We are simultaneously repulsed
and thrilled by their feats, and the extensive coverage is an index of broad
cultural investment (Acland, 1995). When "our guys" are hurting, we sup-
porters and agents take care of their hurt feelings (Kenway & Willis,
1998), our mediated stories providing emotional protection for our guys
who made bad decisions. In this light, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Kenne-
dy's dissenting opinion from a recent ruling that holds schools liable for
pervasive student-to-student harassment is a protection of our guys: "A
teen-ager's romantic overtures to a classmate (even when persistent and
unwelcome) are an inescapable part of adolescence" (cited in Green-

house, 1999, p. A24). In this view, we may all partake of some emotional investments in, and a rapt attention to, narratives of violent men, and we must share the responsibility to move toward alternative interpretations.

The Columbine Massacre may be "a politicizing moment" for geeks and nerds[2] (Dark, 1999, p. 62), and the beginning of a sea change in the cozy relations between elected officials and the National Rifle Association, despite Charlton Heston's full-tilt attempt to rescue and rationalize guns-and-masculinity. But the slaying of students and a teacher in Littleton, Colorado, hasn't led to a full-blown scrutinizing of masculinities and schooling by educators and policymakers, which would include attention to the institutional culture, as well as the relationships between high-status boys and girls and other boys; as noted above, the mediated response has been a narrative of repressed emotions of individual boys, which are amenable to therapeutic remedies. Despite our common transfixion with the images of and events at Columbine High School, masculinity as a problem remains largely unspeakable, invisible, and incredibly powerful, for we cannot yet collectively imagine things to be otherwise.

Recent events have a history, of course. Beginning in colonial New England, U.S. schools emphasized boys' education and significant opposition to the serious education of girls, to coeducation, and to women as teachers continued through the late 1800s (Bissell Brown, 1990; Kimmel, 1996; Tyack & Hansot, 1992). The creation of mass compulsory schooling in the United States occurred in the context of "nervous masculinity" and widespread worries about the emasculation of boys by women teachers (Filene, 1986; Macleod, 1983). Girls' presence in classrooms was met with substantial trivialization of academics and increasing emphasis on status through male-dominated extracurriculars.

Despite female students' and teachers' presence and sometimes numerical dominance, feminist philosophers of education have demonstrated how educational concepts are male centered; for example, how the "ideal of the educated person" relies upon masculinized traits of rationality and detachment (Martin, 1994). Classroom observers, such as Myra and David Sadker (1994), have documented that American schools cheat girls, for example, in allocating more classroom attention and probing questions to boys.[3] Examinations of the curriculum have identified how boys' interests, say in studying dinosaurs, are overly represented in elementary school practices (Clarricoates, 1987). Although feminist perspectives have been brought to bear on understanding historical, philosophical, curricular, and social dimensions of schooling, the expansion of feminist perspectives to examine masculinities as central to the process of being educated has oc-

curred slowly. In addition, a problem with some gendered analyses of schooling is that the girls are declared deficient or deviant; for example, they lack sufficient self-esteem or achievement orientation (Bryson & de Castell, 1995), without companioning a critique of male-centeredness and dominance.

British and Australian researchers have led in studying masculinities and education.[4] R. W. Connell's (1989, 1995, 1996) studies of masculinities in and out of Australian schools have empirically investigated and theorized masculinities as collective social practices and as "body-reflexive practices." Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (1994) has proclaimed schools to be "intricate masculinizing agencies" (p. 31), and his empirical work examines intertwined conceptions of masculinity and sexuality among teachers and students in British schools. In Lois Weis's (1993) study of white male working-class youth, she linked U.S. school-based masculinity with economics, sexism, and racism. However, only in recent, dramatic scholarship on school violence have boys in the United States come out of the shadows.

The recent spotlight on U.S. masculinity seems to have begun in the streets with a focus, not surprisingly, on urban black boys, dubbed "teenage time bombs" (Gest & Pope, 1996; Males & Docuyanan, 1996). The examination of violence moved inside schools, with Nan Stein's (1995) persuasive demonstration of the ubiquitousness of public verbal and physical teasing, bullying, and harassment of lower-status students, namely girls and not-sufficiently masculine boys, and Jackson Katz's (1995) work on violence prevention among athletes.[5] Bernard Lefkowitz (1997) traced the roots of a high-profile rape of a developmentally disabled young woman in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, and his portrait illustrates the dominance of the white jock culture and their affluent parents in the schools. When administrators are former athletes and coaches themselves, no one questions that boys will be boys and destroy school equipment, buy themselves out of criminal charges, and assault other students. Lefkowitz followed the trail of forgiving and forgetting attractive, wealthy, athletic, white boys' rampages, from elementary playgrounds to the justice system. Less than a year after Lefkowitz's book was released and prominently reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review,* a *Newsweek* cover story on the "crisis points" in boys' development announced that boys have been left behind in the recent educational and psychological focus on girls (Kantrowitz & Kolb, 1998). Alongside the analyses of boys and young men as bullyers and harassers, the boy as underdog is simultaneously being reinvented.[6]

Such multiple and contradictory representations of boys, men, masculinity, and schools are taken up by the contributors to this anthology.

Just as there is nothing natural or inevitable about particular forms of dominant masculinity, there is nothing natural or inevitable about studying masculinities, even for feminists. My own interest in masculinities in schooling formed gradually across 8 years of teaching at a Big Ten University, the designation of which is synonymous with intercollegiate athletics and Greek organizations. I naively imagined that athletics and fraternities would have little to do with my undergraduate and graduate teaching. This fantasy was regularly challenged by the rows of visored fraternity guys who lined the edges of the classroom and glared at me in clear disapproval when discussion topics questioned the white, male underpinnings of school histories, values, and bureaucracies. Questioning the gender order of a Big Ten University was treacherous, both for female and male instructors and for students.[7] And fraternity members' disapproval had power over me and my curriculum—this was clear in my reactions to their silent stares, in their articulate defenses of "traditional" approaches to teaching U.S. history, and in their course evaluations. But the necessity of examining masculinities within educational theories and practices became clear during a research project with undergraduate teacher education students. One participant was a 20-year-old white student whose life had revolved around football and who was preparing to coach in high school and, eventually, in college. His narratives embodied athletic privilege and rage against suggestions of sexism and racism in schools and in other social settings. His metaphor of schools as "level playing fields" made a critical view impossible. I began to consider the shapes and effects of masculinities in the formal and informal curricula of schools.

Similar to mutable media constructions of boys, administrative, policy, and curricular emphases in schools are also fluid at all levels. Davies (1992) and Mac an Ghaill (1994) report processes of "remasculinization" of secondary schools; their analyses do not imply that schools haven't been dominated by men and male perspectives in the past, but emphasize, rather, the *nonstatic* quality of institutional gender relations; for example, technological innovations in education are a locale where men's expertise and predominance are accepted as natural, and male students are likely to be seen as rightful and inevitable leaders in this curricular area. Thus, the concept of remasculinizing pushes us to pay attention to the gender relations of economic and technological initiatives, new relations between white men and men of color, as well as with multiracial and ethnic women,

and all children.[8] Davies's and Mac an Ghaill's work reminds us that masculinities are always under revision, in and out of schools.

Starting Points

A starting point for this volume is the understanding that gender is relational; "masculinity" must always be understood in relation to "femininity"; heterosexuality in relation to homosexuality; hypermasculinity in relation to effeminacy.[9] From this perspective, it is delusional to imagine changing the gender order of schooling by attending only to the girls (Kenway & Willis, 1998). Educators must examine girls' experiences and systems of meaning-making in relation to those of boys. But these relations are always in play and multidimensional, as Walkerdine (1990) demonstrated in her portrait of two young boys who escaped the power of a disciplining woman teacher by switching to a discourse that objectified her female body.

Furthermore, understanding masculinities involves conceptualizing them as "collective social practices" (Connell, 1995): Masculinities are not individualized psychologies but socially organized and meaningful actions in historical contexts. These collective social practices involve many different kinds of language, physical, sexual, and material actions. Feminist historian Joan Scott (1988) elaborates four levels of socially organized gender practices, which I find very helpful in thinking about how schools are masculinizing institutions:

1. *The level of divisions of labor and "kinship" networks.* At this level we would pay attention to who does different kinds of work (among students and among faculty and staff), with differentiated wages and support; what kinds of informal networks exist, for example, "old boys' networks" and/or "new boys drinking groups"; and the relations between both formal and informal affinities and resources.

2. *The level of symbols.* At this level we would examine how traits of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities (as well as femininities) were invoked in curriculum decision making, program planning, teacher-room discussions, or informal banter with students (Davies, 1989). The cartoon in Figure I.1 illustrates the gendered symbolic level of educational practice with one curricular approach portrayed as virile and macho and the competing approach as effeminate and ineffectual. The race and class dimensions are also significant. Similarly, symbols from school academic tracking, athletics, and competitive dimensions of school life are likely to

be widely invoked, and educators could trace which symbols are invoked in particular contexts.

3. *The level of normative concepts.* Normative concepts such as rationality, rigor, proper emotional display, being a team player, being a strict disciplinarian, or being a hard grader circulate endlessly and potently across many domains of school life. Norms often operate on the refusal or suppression of alternative possibilities; for example, the belief that school subjects must be constituted in traditional categories of math, science, and English, or that good teaching requires objective measures of achievement (Martin, 1994).

4. *The level of subjective identities.* At this level, we need to investigate how persons understand their own masculinity in relation to other masculinities and femininities and in fluid contexts. Obviously, subjectivities will utilize available concepts and representations from these other three levels, but we must also pay attention to the "feeling rules" of various masculinities, that is, the emotional investments of boys and young men in adopting and adhering to particular politics and identities, such as the antigovernment Rambo or the heterosexist Don Juan.

These four levels of the operation of gender categories are useful to understand how masculinity works as an unspoken standard, as a style, as well as a division of labor, process of resource allotment, and informal networking. The chapters in this volume utilize and develop analyses on all four of Scott's levels.

Masculinities must also be understood as profoundly intertextual: That is, masculinities are constructed, performed, and revised across knowledges, symbols, styles, subjectivities, and norms including distinctive racial, ethnic, and sexuality components. Masculinities are composed as much by knowledge as by willed ignorances (Sedgwick, 1990). In addition, particular masculinities may draw from popular cultural texts or political movements, and position themselves in relation to current controversies or crises. To understand the multiple political and social aspects of masculinities, it is important to interpret them within particular historical, gender, sexuality, and political contexts (Davies, 1992; Kimmel, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Uebel, 1997).

Finally, a critical pedagogical and policy perspective informs this edited collection. If educators are to intervene in masculinities in ethical and counterhegemonic ways, we need to understand students' and faculty members' prior semiotic processes regarding masculinities (Whitson, 1991). That is, we need a familiarity with the structuring symbols, norms, subjectivities, divisions of labor, and kinship networks of different mascu-

line modes if we are to work to reshape masculinities (and femininities) in school. And we need an ethical perspective on masculinities: Following Harpham (1992), I propose a dynamic ethical perspective that connects that which is to that which will be in the future. The authors of this volume are concerned with examining what is, in order to imagine and elaborate on what ought to be.

Studying Masculinities at School

Although there may be agreement that schools are key social arenas for the normalization, surveillance, and control of sex/gender identities, there are not universal gender representations and relations. Kessler, Ashenden, Connell, and Dowsett (1985) argue that each school has a particular "gender regime":

> This may be defined as the pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power, and constructs a sexual division of labor within the institution. The gender regime is a state of play rather than a permanent condition. It can be changed deliberately or otherwise, but it is no less powerful in its effects on pupils for that. It confronts them as a social fact, which they have to come to terms with somehow. (p. 42)

Among the various masculinities and femininities of a particular gender regime, there will be a dominant, or hegemonic, masculinity and an emphasized femininity. In U.S. public schools, the hegemonic masculinity will likely be that of the jocks—young men skilled in athletics, especially high-status athletics, usually football and basketball, at least in many public schools. In addition to sports, the "boys' subjects," (i.e., informal gender segregation in courses) and discipline are two additional schooling dimensions with high salience for masculinity-making (Connell, 1996).

If we acknowledge, as Lynne Segal (1990) does, that it may be difficult "to grasp the institutional dimensions of 'masculinity' " (p. 295), how and where do we locate and interrogate masculinities (i.e., the divisions of labor, symbols, norms, and subjectivities) in schools? The groundbreaking work from Australia and England provides some approaches. Mac an Ghaill (1994), for one, has investigated "the transmission of official sex/gender codes through *systems of management, instruments of discipline, and institutional values and rituals*" (emphasis added; p. 16). His

Figure I.1. A cartoonist's view of the competition between the liberal, classical tradition and emerging egalitarian utilitarianism in education.
SOURCE: Reprinted from Joncich, 1968, p. 247.

study of Parnell School investigated three teacher subgroups and educational ideologies, with distinctive masculinities and emphases on particular curricular domains, school discipline, and views of the purpose of education. According to Connell (1989), schools exert their strongest effects on the construction of masculinities through the *indirect effects of tracking and failure, patterns of authority, the academic curriculum, and definitions of knowledge* (emphasis added; p. 297). Paul Willis's (1977) heralded study, *Learning to Labour,* demonstrated the relationship among curricular tracks, class backgrounds, and styles of masculinity. The "lads" dueled with the teachers and the "ear'oles" largely on the terrain of style—clothing, smoking, drinking, and sexual exploits—and demeaned academic success as feminine.