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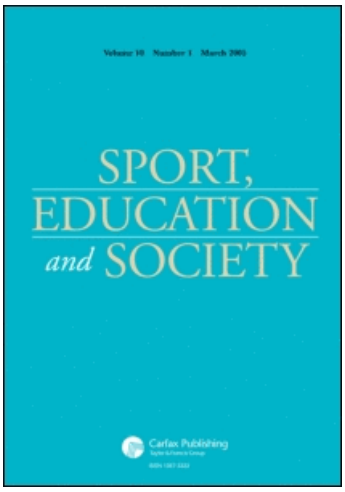

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Masculinity construction and sports in boys' education: a framework for thinking about the issue

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Current debates about the role of sports in boys' education are part of a larger discussion of men, boys and masculinities. In this paper I reflect on this debate and the research it has led to. I highlight questions of embodiment, of relations between different forms of masculinity, and questions of reproduction and change, in all of which the schools' physical education curriculum is important. I suggest how we might use the new knowledge about gender construction to understand issues about practice-oriented subjects and undertake curriculum reform.

Keywords: *Masculinity; Curriculum; Sport; Embodiment; Schools; Democracy; Physical education*

The problem of categorical thinking about boys

In the wake of the Women's Liberation movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, the social position of women was comprehensively debated around the world and the education of girls was brought under special scrutiny. But since gender is a system of social relations, the disturbance and the questioning could not be confined to women and girls. If one term in a relationship is changed, the other term is affected. So the position of men and boys, the nature of masculinity, the gender practices and ideologies that define 'manhood', have also been challenged and have been subject to change.

This questioning is now worldwide, and has been conducted from many different points of view—some supporting gender equality and some not. It has also covered a wide range of issues, from men's and boys' health to men's domestic and military violence. Educational issues have naturally been part of the questioning, and there is a wide divergence of opinion about how to understand them. Parents and teachers have been rightly concerned about how to respond to this discussion and about what to do in the education of boys.

It is a troubling feature of the debate about masculinities that the loudest voices in education recently have been those that describe the success of girls as a threat to boys. A media and political panic has been whipped up about boys' supposed 'failure'

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in schools, about the supposed 'feminization' of schools, the lack of male 'role models' and the lack of 'boy-friendly' curriculum and pedagogy. The badly biassed report of an Australian federal parliamentary committee on the education of boys is a depressing example of this approach (House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002).

The ascendancy of a boys-as-victims discourse has two important consequences for public thinking about education and gender. The first is that this discourse reproduces a drastically simplified view of men, boys and masculinity. It promotes a dichotomized and essentialist view of gender, in which men and women are 'naturally' different, not just in their reproductive systems but in their psychology, attitudes, social functions and aspirations. In this view boys are essentially all the same, marked by a 'natural' masculinity ('boy culture', 'deep masculinity', 'true manhood', etc.) that produces a distinct set of interests and personality traits and a distinct learning style.

The second important consequence is the fostering of the belief that only men can truly understand masculinity. Men have it, and women do not. Men appreciate the importance of sport, fighting, competition, emotional control, and so forth, in a way women cannot. Therefore the education of boys can only be properly undertaken by men, acting as role models, mentors and coaches. This provides a fillip for the policy of recruiting more men into primary and early childhood education, undoubtedly a good idea. But it provides an even stronger boost for the principle of boys-only classes, programmes, and schools, not necessarily a good idea. These ideas have, in fact, been taken up internationally by the managers of segregated private schools, as a heaven-sent marketing device.

Thus, the panic about boys has not only fuelled a diversion of educational resources and attention, but has also given a new lease of life to the idea of gender segregation in education. This is likely to have disastrous long-term effects on gender equity in general, as well as on gender relations in education, and will constrict and distort the education of boys.

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Social research about masculinities

During the last 20 years a considerable body of research has built up about patterns of masculinity, which has profoundly changed social-scientific understanding of the gender of men and boys. This research is now found in most parts of the world. It uses diverse research methods, from large-scale surveys to close-focus ethnographies and life histories. A recent survey of this international literature can be found in the *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (Kimmel *et al.*, 2005).

Perhaps the most important conclusion of this research is that there is *no single pattern* of masculinity which is found in all cultures and at all periods of history. On the contrary, there is very clear and extensive evidence that there are *multiple* patterns of masculinity. There are multiple definitions of what it means to be a man, and there are diverse ways for men to live in gender relations. This is well illustrated by the

studies collected in Tomsen and Donaldson's (2003) *Male Trouble*, which include vivid close-focus studies of sexuality, violence, car culture, military masculinities, ethnic minority youth, the masculinity of the very rich, and masculinities in sport.

There is diversity of masculinities not only on the large scale across a whole culture, but also in small-scale situations. A single institution will often be host to diverse constructions of masculinity. For instance, any close examination of gender relations in a school will find groups of teachers who embody different patterns of masculinity and femininity. Mac an Ghaill's (1994) ethnography of British high school life is a classic example. Such a study also finds groups of boys who are constructing their lives as boys in rather different ways—giving different meanings to what it is to be a boy and a future man. Some place enormous emphasis on toughness and sporting prowess, some on social relations with girls, some on the school curriculum and access to a career. Some are exploring unconventional identities and sexualities, others are displaying their orthodoxy.

However, it is not the case that these different versions of masculinity are equally available or equally respected. Typically, research finds that in any culture or institution there is a particular pattern of masculinity which holds the dominant position. This has been called 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which means, in any given setting, the pattern of masculinity which is most honoured, which is most associated with authority and power, and which—in the long run—guarantees the collective privilege of men.

The existence of a hegemonic masculinity is one reason for the illusion that there is only one kind of masculinity. If people focus on the dominant pattern, or the dominant definition of masculinity, they can fail to see the alternative patterns that also exist. But the fact of hegemony is tremendously important for boys growing up. As shown by a recent study of British teenagers, *Young Masculinities* (Frosh *et al.*, 2002), the presence of an admired, dominant pattern puts pressure on all boys, whether or not they match the pattern—and most, of course, do not.

Masculinities can be studied at different analytical levels. They can be defined at the level of personal life, and at this level we must recognize the importance of embodiment. Masculinities exist as patterns of body-reflexive practice, involving characteristic postures, muscular tensions and specific skills. The learnings involved in physical education are important, though not isolated, cases of body-reflexive practice.

Masculinities can also be defined at the level of interpersonal interaction, for instance in informal peer group life. A good deal of research now shows that peer group interaction is a particularly salient site for the definition of masculinities in adolescence. The group interactions in, and around, sport are an important site of this process.

Definitions and practices of masculinity are also embedded in institutions and mass culture. A familiar case is the construction of 'hard' masculinities in the organizational culture of armies. Another example is commercial sport, which through the mass media is now a very important source of images of masculinity for youth. Institutions, however large, may have a grip on intimate life and embodiment. A striking feature of commercial sport is the prevalence of injury

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among the players, which becomes a means of displaying toughness and commitment. As Sabo (2004) observes in a recent review of this problem, professional sportsmen now accept injury as part of their career strategies.

A research finding of key importance is that masculinities do change. Historians have provided evidence that cultural constructions of masculinity change over time. There is also survey evidence from contemporary sociology that men's gender attitudes and constructions of masculinity differ between generations. For instance, a national survey of men in Germany, a few years ago, classified men into four groups according to their gender attitudes: ranging from men who held a modern view of the gender roles of both men and women, called 'new', to those men who held the most conservative views about both men and women, called 'traditional'. The percentage of men holding the most 'traditional' view, in the younger genderation, is approximately *half* the percentage in the older generation (Zulehner & Volz, 1998).

The idea that *masculinity itself* might change is particularly upsetting to gender conservatives. For anyone who thinks in a rigid binary, the only alternative to their vision of masculinity is their vision of femininity. Therefore the neo-conservative rhetoric about boys' education is full of accusations—sometimes open, sometimes implied—that schools, women teachers, 'politically correct' policy makers, feminists and other villains are trying to feminize boys. And that of course will mean the end of civilization as we know it.

But masculinities are changing all the time. Men's relationships with women, men's ideologies and attitudes, the division of labour in homes and workplaces, sexual customs, family law, men's relationships with children—none of these are fixed. Indeed there is now a broad popular understanding that such things *can* change, for instance that fathers can have close emotional connections with children, and that women and men should have strictly equal rights in the workplace. Only a generation ago, neither of these ideas was generally accepted.

These facts should be encouraging for educators, since they mean that educational work about gender relations has a potential for success. But it also has a potential for failure. Gender relations may change for the worse, not for the better. We have to consider trends and social forces that go against equality as well as those that support equality.

Patterns in boys' development

Categorical thinking about gender, of the kind we see in pop psychology, is often associated with a belief that there is one natural path of development that boys will follow, unless diverted by unnatural force. In fact there is no fixed pathway of development for boys, any more than there is for girls. Human development does not consist of the unfolding of a pre-determined sequence of events or stages. There are multiple trajectories through childhood and youth. Recent large-scale research on youth, from Lynch and Lodge's (2002) intensive studies of

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social difference and inequality in Irish secondary schools, to Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli's (2003) phenomenology of Australian teenage boys, very clearly document the multiple trajectories and different experiences of groups of boys.

This is important to emphasize, because many of the moves currently being recommended in boys' education are based on the assumption of a fixed pathway of development. Examples are the ideas that all boys must have conventionally masculine 'role models' in early childhood, or that all boys need plenty of physical movement, or that all boys need to be 'initiated' into manhood during adolescence.

Boys' development, like girls', involves a tremendous amount of learning through and about human relationships. Boys are not sealed capsules of genetic information, as sociobiology presumes. They are growing people who construct their lives through a dense network of relationships, with parents, siblings and other family, with neighbours, with peers, with teachers, with employers. Intimate, passionate, multi-levelled and sometimes conflictual, the human relationships through which boys develop are starting points for the patterns of relationship which men will build in adult life.

These relationships change over time, in any boy's life. This is noticeably true of peer relationships, with girls as well as with other boys. A familiar example is a shift, common though not universal, from a focus on same-gender friendships in late childhood and early adolescence to a focus on cross-gender friendships and sexual relations in later adolescence. This is not an absolute difference. Unless adults impose segregation, there is never a total separation between boys and girls even in the late primary years. Thorne's (1993) classic school ethnography, *Gender Play*, shows how primary school children move in and out of gender-separated groups, how they cross boundaries, how they play with gender relations, in the course of their social learning in everyday school life.

Boys have multiple learning styles. This is very important to recognize, as one of the most influential pseudo-scientific claims in current boys' education discourse is that boys have a different learning style from girls. (Though I am reluctant to give further circulation to the deeply misleading pop psychology about gender, I need to cite at least one example—Gurian and Henley's (2001) highly tendentious *Boys and Girls Learn Differently!*). Therefore, the argument runs, boys are disadvantaged because 'their' learning style is not supported by schools. The usual claim is that boys need a more formal pedagogy with smaller chunks of knowledge, fixed sequences and clear-cut definitions of right and wrong.

This claim is, in my view, an insult to boys. Neither boys nor girls are confined to a single learning strategy or style. On the contrary, boys (except in cases of severe impairment) learn in a variety of ways, and can usually shift from one strategy to another when they need to. The same is true for girls. Good teachers are aware of this, as part of their professional knowledge, and provide a variety of learning opportunities to allow a range of learning to occur. One of the problems with the subject curriculum, as discussed below, is that it hampers this strategy on the part of teachers.

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Like girls, boys are actively engaged in the construction of gender relations and gender identities. They are not passive recipients either of messages from the genes, or of 'role' expectations from society. Gender is actively *made* by people in relationships, and this is as true in child development as it is in adult life. Learning involves engagement with what is being learnt, and in many respects the learning and enactment of gender patterns involves high levels of interest on the part of boys. This is a topic that children—whatever their gender identities or trajectories—are often keen to learn about. Gender patterns and gender relations are a common topic of peer group conversation as well as a charged issue in relationships with adults.

An influential school of gender theory (broadly, post-structuralism) speaks of gender as 'performance'. Buchbinder's (1998) *Performance Anxieties* is an excellent example of this approach, applied to problems about masculinity in Australian culture. This approach helps to emphasize that gender is socially constructed, but there is a risk that we will take 'performance' to imply staginess, insincerity, the wearing of a mask.

Adolescent boys often do try on various identities and presentations of themselves, and this may include a variety of gender identities—drawing on femininities as well as masculinities. Much more than a stage performance is going on. The 'performances' have consequences—effects on the body, and effects on other people, feeding back on understandings of the self.

In not wholly predictable ways, people growing up become committed to certain relationships and particular ways of acting. For this reason I prefer to speak of 'projects' and 'trajectories', to capture the way young people launch themselves in certain directions in social space, with their later experiences depending, in part, on their earlier moves.

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Schools and the making of gender

Since the social arena in which much of this development occurs is the school, we need to think carefully about what schools are like as settings for the making of masculinities and femininities.

In this, we are assisted by an important development in organization studies, the growth of research and theory about *gendered organizations* (Acker, 1990; Connell, 2006). Gender is not just a property of individuals, something that people bring into a neutral organizational context. Rather, gender relations are embedded in organizations, in four dimensions: the division of labour (e.g. gendered jobs), power relations (e.g. the nature of authority), emotional relationship (e.g. patterns of antagonism and solidarity), and organizational cultures (e.g. beliefs about gender difference, equal opportunity, etc.).

The arrangement of gender relations that is characteristic of a given organization may be called its 'gender regime'. Gender regimes are multi-dimensional, embracing the four dimensions just noted (Connell, 2002). They are liable to have internal

unevennesses and tensions, and they are always subject to change, though specific features of gender arrangements may persist for a surprisingly long time.

Schools and education systems are gendered organizations in this sense. Gender patterns in their work and in their effects on children are not accidental, but are deeply embedded in their histories and current working. Consider, for instance, the current debate about the lack of male 'role models' in primary schools. There is a long-standing gender imbalance in primary teaching, and even more in early childhood teaching. This is part of a larger gender division of labour in the education system as a whole: the under-representation of men in kindergartens is matched by the under-representation of women in senior academic positions.

This in turn is embedded in a division of labour at the level of the whole economy, and in a persisting large imbalance between men and women in domestic work and child care in the family. Dempsey's (1997) detailed study of marital power and domestic labour in Australia has shown a bleak picture: men have mostly resisted demands to contribute more domestic work and equalize family relationships. The economic and cultural forces shaping teacher recruitment into primary and early childhood education overwhelm the idea—which most people agree on—that it would be an excellent thing to have gender balance in this part of the workforce. Gender balance in the care of young children *can* change, as recent Scandinavian experience proves (Holter, 2003), but it needs the right combination of social policy and public interest.

The gender regimes of schools and education systems are not homogeneous. There are often some parts of a school's life where gender is strongly marked, and other parts where gender is very muted. This is important for understanding the school's role in the construction of masculinities. In a previous essay on 'teaching the boys' (Connell, 2000) I suggested we can often identify 'masculinity vortices' in schools. This means areas of school life where processes of masculinity formation are intensely active.

One gender vortex in boys' education may be vocational courses such as woodwork, engineering and technical drawing. These are historically connected with gender-segregated occupations and often taught by men with a background in those occupations (Mealyea, 1993).

The discipline system may also be a vortex for the production of masculinity, especially given the tendency of conflictual discipline to produce hierarchies and exclusions in school life. A very perceptive school ethnography by Ferguson (2000) in the United States, shows the key role of school discipline in the development of an oppositional Black masculinity, even at elementary school level.

One of the ways we may understand school sport, especially competitive team sports that are important in the wider culture as symbols of masculinity, is to consider it as a masculinity vortex in this sense. The interplay between sports and the construction of masculinities in boyhood has long been recognized (Messner, 1990), and schools often provide an institutional scaffolding for this process.

At the same time as recognizing areas of school life that are gender-saturated, we should also recognize areas of school life that are relatively gender-neutral. Teachers

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may (as Thorne shows in *Gender Play*) deliberately play down gender in classroom management. They may arrange mixed-group seating, or deliberately treat all children in a mixed classroom in common ways, e.g. addressing the class as 'children' rather than 'boys and girls'. There are occasions when the children themselves will ignore gender boundaries and override gender solidarities.

This *de-gendering* strategy is not unique to schools. Indeed, it is now a familiar strategy in organizational life, used for instance by public sector managers as a way of implementing equal opportunity rules (Connell, 2006). Whenever teachers say 'I treat them all as individuals' or 'I don't treat boys and girls differently', they are implicitly adopting a de-gendering approach and may be creating a de-gendered zone of school life. This is not always the best thing to do from an educational point of view, since there are times when we *do* want to make gender an explicit theme of discussion and learning, as I will suggest below.

The gender regimes of schools may be deliberately constructed to produce effects on masculinity. Such *masculinity-making agendas* are familiar in educational history. The Arnoldian reforms in ruling-class schools were intended as an agenda of moral education, forming Christian gentlemen. The later widespread introduction of formalized school sport was also intended to foster a specific pattern of manliness.

Studies of colonial education, most notably Morrell's (2001) brilliant study of settler schools in Natal, South Africa, show how a whole school system including its sports regime could be constructed around such an agenda. The specific pattern of masculinity these schools installed as hegemonic was the one necessary to sustain the dominance of an elite of white, propertied, patriarchal families in the rough and often violent context of colonialism. But the logic of masculinity-making agendas can be turned in more democratic directions, as we see in Denborough's (1996) imaginative programme for working with boys to reduce violence.

The organizational patterns of schools and education systems may also have unintended educational consequences. An important case is the different pathways that open up in secondary and post-secondary education, as electives replace the common curriculum that prevailed in primary schooling. The bundles of knowledge that constitute 'subjects' are often gendered. They have gendered histories, they are often tied to gender symbols, they are linked to gender divisions in the economy, they are taught predominantly by men or by women, etc.

Once we recognize this, we will not be surprised by the growing gender difference in subject enrolments through secondary school, and the virtual gender segregation in some areas of vocational education. We will also not make the mistake of attributing gender patterns in 'subject choice' to the magic influence of the genes. These differences too are historically produced patterns, they can change over time, and they are connected with the wider patterns in gender relations.

At an even more basic level, the school as an institution shapes patterns of masculinity by forming a social milieu in which hundreds of children or youth are thrown together over long periods. A peer forum is created in which relations between patterns of masculinity are highlighted. In such a setting the issue of hegemony—relations between the dominant pattern of masculinity and subordinate

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or marginalized patterns—is very likely to become an issue of concern in boys' lives and a source of turbulence in gender relations. For instance, boys in school may struggle for dominance in the local peer group, in the course of which bullying and exclusion can arise. Bullying of boys who are thought to be effeminate or homosexual is a very common source of tension and violence in schools.

The struggle for dominance in gender terms among boys and men can also be an important source of educational problems. For instance, especially in working-class communities, there are groups of boys who attempt to claim masculine honour, attempt to claim a leading position in gender terms, but do not have the cultural and institutional resources to do so through academic competition. Such boys are more likely to fall into conflict with the school and sometimes become violent towards other boys or towards teachers. What I have called 'protest masculinity' is a likely result. Poynting *et al.*'s (2003) important study of Lebanese youth in Sydney shows such a pattern arising, in part, as a response to being a target of racism and experiencing social exclusion. Boys following such trajectories may abruptly end their educational careers and go onto the labour market without qualifications and with very weak employment prospects.

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The curriculum and gender construction

Another way to think about physical education and masculinity is to consider its location in the gender patterning of the curriculum.

The contemporary secondary curriculum is broadly divided into a competitive academic subject curriculum, which holds the hegemonic position in the whole education system, and a variety of marginalized curricula, many of which are more practice-based. These two curriculum zones are involved in rather different ways in the formation of masculinities.

The competitive academic curriculum centres on subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, English and history, and languages. This curriculum is marked by abstraction, by a hierarchical organization of knowledge (graded sequences from elementary to advanced), by sharp boundaries between different areas of knowledge ('subjects'), and by abstract methods of assessment, traditionally the unseen written examination and now commonly standardized tests.

The immediate historical origins of this curriculum were the 'classics' as taught in ruling-class boys' boarding schools of the nineteenth century, and the 'modern' subjects, notably natural sciences and mathematics, that flourished in the grammar schools provided for the boys of the commercial, industrial and professional middle classes of the same era.

Given these origins, when the academic curriculum became the core of a mass secondary system during the twentieth century, it is not surprising that it functioned as a means of class and ethnic exclusion. Working-class youth tended to be under-prepared for it, to be unfamiliar with its techniques and styles (for instance its book-based pedagogies), and to be bored by teaching based on it. The dominance of this

form of curriculum thus became one of the forces producing the 'protest masculinity' revolt described above.

Middle-class girls were initially believed to be just as unsuited to the academic curriculum as working-class boys. That was a standard justification for excluding them from universities. Over a long period of time, however, the academic curriculum was increasingly emphasized in the education of middle-class girls, who—in the face of considerable resistance, including professional segregation and 'marriage bars'—were increasingly able to use it as a path towards employment in professions. The latest stage of this process has produced the statistics that are often misread as signs of a crisis in boys' education (Arnot *et al.* (1999) provide a superb analysis of these historical changes).

Some professions have, indeed, been colonized by middle-class women—this is, for instance, now happening in law. But important forms of social power remain substantially the preserve of men. They include military power, the top levels of the political and judicial system, and most important, the top levels of corporate management. When we look at ruling-class masculinity, some limits to the influence of the academic curriculum become clear. In past generations, the 'moral' education in elite boys' schools—through sports, conventional religion and the prefect system—was at least as important as academic curriculum in shaping ruling-class masculinities. In the contemporary era of corporate globalization, ruling-class masculinities have to be modernized. But this has not been done by an academic curriculum. It is the decidedly non-academic approach of the Harvard-style Master of Business Administration, based on case studies and problem-solving exercises, that has become the dominant model of management education.

Alongside the academic curriculum in the secondary schools are other fields of teaching and learning. They have different histories and different relations to the academic curriculum. In some, there is a continuing process of assimilation to the academic subject model, in others there is a conscious attempt to maintain a different pedagogy, and in others, both processes occur at the same time.

In physical education there is a long tradition of practice-based non-academic pedagogy, going back to military training and 'Swedish drill' as well as competitive sports. This is an area where gender divisions have been strong, since particular physical performances and particular games were culturally defined as masculine or feminine. Physical education in schools is part of the regulation and disciplining of bodies which post-structuralist research has shown to be involved in the construction of gender (Theberge, 1991).

Indeed, these physical performances have often come to be seen as emblematic of gender itself. Thus sports that involve a certain level of physical confrontation and (legal) violence are seen as tests of manhood—football codes, boxing and ice hockey being the most visible. (For an illuminating study of the social meanings of ice hockey, and how they are produced, see Gruneau & Whitson, 1993.) These sports

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often become implicated in the definition of hegemonic masculinities in schools and the subordination of other masculinities.

Being a coach or trainer in such sports is not an activity with high professional status among teachers. Despite this, the people who do it may become influential local figures in disseminating ideologies of masculinity. This is a good example of the tensions within dominant constructions of masculinity, which should warn us against assuming hegemonic masculinities are simple or smoothly reproduced.

In vocational training there are also curricula that centre on bodily practices, such as woodworking or cooking skills. These were once gender-segregated and are often still strongly gendered, in terms of who teaches them, what is presupposed, and which students take them. (For instance building studies in school, which presuppose knowing how to use a hammer and a wrench, are mostly taken by boys, while childhood studies are mostly taken by girls.) Vocational courses of this kind are obviously linked to gender divisions of labour in the economy and in families, and tend to reproduce those divisions.

This has been partly changed by curriculum reforms. Some changes in practical curricula have merged areas of knowledge, blurring gender boundaries. Other changes have linked practical learning to more academic knowledge which may be more gender-neutral. Thus the cooking skills tend to be taught alongside studies of nutrition, the craft skills alongside materials science, etc.

Creative and performing arts have a different history and a different position in the curriculum. These are sometimes very high-status activities—the consumption of classical music, live drama and visual art is a striking feature of elite culture in modern capitalism. But they are also curiously gendered. Men are the main professional producers, affluent women the main consumers, of 'the arts'. Creative and performing arts at a *non-professional* level have long been a feature of elite girls' education, being considered ladylike accomplishments, while occupying a very marginal position in elite boys' education. In working-class education, the arts were long seen as irrelevant, little more than a costly frill, though skillful teachers can do striking things with bands and with drama in working-class schools.

There is an age structuring of arts learning. Painting, singing, drama, instrumental performance, etc. in simplified forms have long been prominent in early childhood education (where most teachers are women). Their place in the school programme then shrinks through the primary years as the competitive academic curriculum cuts in. In the secondary school, creative and performing arts are practically reduced to options, and they are options mainly taken by girls.

This is deeply regrettable, because the arts are an important vehicle for emotional education, and emotional patterns are a key dimension of gender. Boys grappling with problems of gender relations and identities will find drama, for instance, an important resource—but boys are mostly absent from drama classes. The splits in the secondary and post-secondary curriculum that result in boys and young men being mostly absent from the arenas where emotions and human

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relations are being considered are, to my mind, one of the greatest contemporary educational problems created by gender relations.

Principles for curriculum change

Reflection on boys' educational needs suggests three broad principles about curriculum reform. The first is that, in general, curricula should be designed for gender inclusiveness.

One of the most telling critiques of old-style patriarchal education was that its content was drawn from the lives of men and boys and excluded the experience of women and girls. This has been partly rectified, but not completely. A glance at History curricula, for instance, will still find a mass of stories about elite men, punctuated with an occasional special section about women, rather than a genuinely inclusive history.

The crucial point is that boys need to learn about the experiences of women as much as they need to learn about the experiences of men. We do not live in a world of 'separate spheres'. Gender is relational, and women are as much involved in the formation of masculinities as men are. It is important that the experience of men and boys should also be treated inclusively. The varieties of masculinities define a richness of masculine experience that is an important curriculum resource.

Second, we should value gender explicitness in content. Gender is itself an important curriculum theme, simply because gender relations are such an important aspect of human social life. This is a topic of considerable interest, sometimes burning interest, to boys as well as girls.

Boys need occasions for learning about, debating, and reflecting on gender relations both in their own lives and in the wider society. The occasions go far beyond 'personal development' lessons, because gender relations themselves are so pervasive. This is a relevant theme in vocational studies, in literature and language, in drama, music and visual arts—and also in biology, in mathematics, in technology studies, indeed across the curriculum as a whole.

Third, we should consider the values and goals that are embedded in curriculum related to gender. Perhaps the most useful framework for this is the idea of *education for democracy*. Gender relations are not problematic in themselves—any culture needs a way of dealing socially with reproductive distinctions among human bodies. But gender relations are problematic when they are undemocratic—that is, marked by power imbalances, exclusions, exploitation, violence, oppression or inequality.

The central goal of gender education, I would argue, is to equip boys and girls with the resources, skills, knowledges and values they will need to create democratic gender relations in their own lives and in the culture at large. This is certainly a large task. It requires substantial information from natural and social sciences, it requires the development of skills (including personal reflection, relationship skills, capacities for arguing from evidence, etc.), it requires the development of creative capacities.

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These principles highlight both problems and possibilities in education through sports. Sports are one of the most gender-segregated areas of school life. A huge task is involved in making this area gender-inclusive. A range of possibilities exist, from encouraging gender-crossing in existing sporting codes (e.g. Wedgwood, 2003), to the design of sporting activities that are gender-inclusive from the start.

Sports education, to the extent it moves beyond simple skills training, can also be a vehicle for education about gender. Here one can draw on children's and adolescents' keen interest in issues about their own bodies, and the social meanings that bodies attract. Even skills training can be involved, for instance by encouraging students to reflect on differences in sports-related skills and the reasons for these differences.

Education for democracy is the crux of the whole matter, and here there is a central difficulty. Sports, as they have developed in contemporary Western societies, have become profoundly anti-democratic. Increasingly they are a commercial spectacle dominated by capitalist media interests, with a steeply hierarchical infrastructure designed to select elite performers, not to encourage popular participation. The way sports franchises roll over local community interests is familiar. This commercial spectacle, as Messner (2007) shows in illuminating studies of sports media, is not only heavily masculinized; it embeds and protects some of the most toxic features of contemporary Western masculinities. And it has enormous institutional power.

There is a risk, therefore, that sports education will be dominated by the dominant form of contemporary sport, will become little more than the recruitment machinery for commercial competitive sport. This is a role that few teachers would find satisfying, as educators. To avoid this fate, it will be crucial to highlight and develop the participatory and collaborative possibilities in young people's games and physical learning. There are many such possibilities, as experienced teachers know. There may be many struggles ahead to realize these possibilities.

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