Teaching the Boys: New Research on Masculinity, and Gender Strategies for Schools

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This article draws on new social-scientific research on masculinity to develop a framework for understanding gender issues in the education of boys. Gender is constructed within institutional and cultural contexts that produce multiple forms of masculinity. Normally one form is hegemonic over others. Schools are active players in the formation of masculinities. Schools' overall gender regimes typically reinforce gender dichotomy, though some practices reduce gender difference. Masculinizing practices are concentrated at certain sites: curriculum divisions, discipline systems, and sports. Pupils are also active in constructing masculinities. Pupil cultures commonly emphasize heterosexual relationships and construct gender hierarchies. Boys take up the offer of gender privilege in diverse ways, ranging from protest masculinity to anti-sexism. The goals of educational work with boys include pursuing knowledge, improving relationships, and pursuing justice. Programs may be either gender-specific or gender-relevant. Experiential methods have been most common, but are vulnerable to disruption; other methods are being explored. The main groups who shape the process of change—the pupils, their parents, their teachers, and social movements—have divided interests. Yet their interaction, plus pressure from the wider world, is likely to produce growing educational attention to issues about boys and masculinity.

I. WHAT ABOUT THE BOYS?

EDUCATIONAL QUESTIONS

In recent years, controversies about boys, men, and education have boiled up in a number of countries. In the United States, a proposal to establish boys-only public schools in Detroit was halted at the last minute in 1991 by legal action that declared them discriminatory. In Australia, after media controversy about boys' academic "failure" relative to girls, a parliamentary inquiry into boys' education was launched in 1994. In Germany, educational programs on gender issues have multiplied outside the schools, both for youth and for men. In Japan, debate has begun about the prospects for a new "men's studies."[1]

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This is not the first time such issues have been aired. At the end of the 1960s, for instance, there was a minor panic in the United States about schools' destroying "boy culture" and denying boys their "reading rights" because of the prevalence of women teachers and the "feminine, frilly content" of elementary education.[2]

The context, however, has changed. Second-wave feminism has now influenced public thinking for more than two decades, and one of its long-term consequences has been to unsettle traditional ideas about men and masculinity. A surprisingly popular therapeutic men's movement, whose best-known figure is Robert Bly, has made an issue of men's emotional troubles and boys' difficulties in acquiring a secure masculinity. In the United States, the "Promise Keepers" and the "Million Man March" show the resonance of such issues for religious conservatives and the black community. Some pop psychologists work up statistics of men's troubles (such as earlier death and higher rates of injury) into claims that men, not women, are the truly disadvantaged sex.[3]

Similar claims are increasingly heard in education. Discrimination against girls has ended, the argument runs. Indeed, thanks to feminism, girls have special treatment and special programs. Now, what about the boys? It is boys who are slower to learn to read, more likely to drop out of school, more likely to be disciplined, more likely to be in programs for children with special needs. In school it is girls who are doing better, boys who are in trouble—and special programs for boys that are needed.[4]

More heat than light has been generated by these claims. Counter-claims are made: that for girls, success in schooling does not translate into postschool equality; that boys get more attention in school than girls at present; that programs for boys would entrench privilege, not contest it.[5] The media love to turn the issue into a pro-girl versus pro-boy (or pro-feminist versus antifeminist) shootout.

But the educational issues are far more complex. How real is the formal equality provided by coeducation? Are girls benefited in some ways, boys in others? How far can we make generalizations about "boys" as a bloc? If boys are having trouble in school, which boys, and what are the sources of their trouble? How far can schools affect masculinity and its enactment? If they can affect masculinity at all, through what kind of programs, and what kind of pedagogy, should they try?

It is clear from responses to current debates about boys that many teachers and parents see these issues as urgent. Schools are launching "programs for boys" whether researchers and policymakers give them guidance or not. Some of the resulting efforts are, unfortunately, little informed by accurate knowledge or careful thinking about masculinity. Equally unfortunately, researchers have not done a great deal to help the schools. It is

time for this situation to change. It can change, because a new generation of social-scientific research on masculinity allows a fresh understanding of the issues in education.

The purpose of this article is to provide a framework for thinking about gender issues in the education of boys, focusing on the industrialized countries. The rest of Part I summarizes the main conclusions of the new masculinity research, and considers the place of the school in the broader process of masculinity formation. In the light of these results, Parts II and III examine educational research, especially ethnographies, for evidence on the making of masculinities in schools—looking first at schools as agents, then at pupils. Part IV uses the results of this analysis to explore the logic of educational work with boys. Part V returns to the public controversies about boys' education and considers the groups and interests in play, and the prospects of changing gender relations.

THE NEW RESEARCH ON MASCULINITY

In the last ten years, international social-science research on masculinity has expanded dramatically and moved in new directions. A picture is emerging that differs significantly from older ideas of the "male sex role," and even more from conceptions of "natural" masculinity.[6] Major conclusions of this research are:

1. Multiple Masculinities. Historians and anthropologists have shown that there is no one pattern of masculinity that is found everywhere. Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct masculinity differently. Some cultures make heroes of soldiers, and regard violence as the ultimate test of masculinity; others look at soldiering with disdain and regard violence as contemptible. Some cultures regard homosexual sex as incompatible with true masculinity; others think no one can be a real man without having had homosexual relationships.[7]

It follows that in multicultural societies such as the contemporary United States there are likely to be multiple definitions of masculinity. Sociological research shows this to be true. There are, for instance, differences in the expression of masculinity between Latino and Anglo men in the United States, and between Greek and Anglo boys in Australia. The meaning of masculinity in working-class life is different from the meaning in middle-class life, not to mention among the very rich and the very poor.[8]

Equally important, more than one kind of masculinity can be found *within* a given cultural setting. Within any workplace, neighborhood, or peer group, there are likely to be different understandings of masculinity and different ways of "doing" masculinity. In the urban middle class, for instance, there is a version of masculinity organized around dominance (e.g., empha-

sizing "leadership" in management) and another version organized around expertise (e.g., emphasizing "professionalism" and technical knowledge).[9]

2. *Hierarchy and Hegemony.* Different masculinities do not sit side-by-side like dishes in a smorgasbord; there are definite relations between them. Typically, some masculinities are more honored than others. Some may be actively dishonored, for example, homosexual masculinities in modern Western culture. Some are socially marginalized, for example, the masculinities of disempowered ethnic minorities. Some are exemplary, taken as symbolizing admired traits, for example, the masculinities of sporting heroes.[10]

The form of masculinity that is culturally dominant in a given setting is called *hegemonic masculinity.* "Hegemonic" signifies a position of cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist alongside. The hegemonic form need not be the most common form of masculinity. (This is familiar in school peer groups, for instance, where a small number of highly influential boys are admired by many others who cannot reproduce their performance.) Hegemonic masculinity is, however, highly visible. It is likely to be what casual commentators have noticed when they speak of "the male role."[11]

Hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic not just in relation to other masculinities, but in relation to the gender order as a whole. It is an expression of the privilege men *collectively* have over women. The hierarchy of masculinities is an expression of the unequal shares in that privilege held by different groups of men.[12]

3. *Collective Masculinities.* The gender structures of a society define particular patterns of conduct as "masculine" and others as "feminine." At one level, these patterns characterize individuals. Thus we say that a particular man (or woman) is masculine, or behaves in a masculine way. But these patterns also exist at the collective level. Masculinities are defined and sustained in institutions, such as corporations, armies, governments—or schools. Masculinities are defined collectively in the workplace, as shown in industrial research; and in informal groups like street gangs, as shown in criminological research.[13]

Masculinity also exists impersonally in culture. Video games such as Mortal Kombat, for instance, not only circulate stereotyped images of violent masculinity; they require the player to enact this masculinity (symbolically) in order to play the game at all. Sociological research on sport has shown how an aggressive masculinity is created organizationally by the structure of organized sport, by its pattern of competition, its system of training, and its steep hierarchy of levels and rewards. Images of this masculinity are circulated on an enormous scale by sports media, though most individuals fit very imperfectly into the slots thus created.[14]

4. Active Construction. Masculinities do not exist prior to social behavior, either as bodily states or as fixed personalities. Rather, masculinities come into existence as people act. They are accomplished in everyday conduct or organizational life, as configurations of social practice.

Ethnomethodological research has shown how we "do gender" in everyday life, for instance, in the way we conduct conversations. A similar insight has thrown new light on the link between masculinity and crime. This is not a product of a fixed masculine character being expressed through crime; rather, it results from a variety of people—from impoverished youth gangs on the street to white-collar criminals at the computer—using crime as a resource to construct particular masculinities. Masculinities, it appears, are far from settled. From bodybuilders in the gym, to managers in the boardroom, to boys in the elementary school playground, a whole lot of people are working very hard to produce what they believe to be appropriate masculinities.[15]

5. Layering. One of the key reasons why masculinities are not settled is that they are not simple, homogeneous patterns. Close-focus research on gender, in both psychoanalysis and ethnography, often reveals contradictory desires and logics. A man's active heterosexuality may exist as a thin emotional layer concealing a deeper homosexual desire; a boy's identification with men may coexist or struggle with identifications with women; the public enactment of an exemplary masculinity may covertly require actions that undermine it.[16]

The layering of desires, emotions, or logics may not be obvious at first glance, but the issue is important to investigate because such contradictions are sources of tension and change in gender patterns.

6. Dynamics. From the fact that different masculinities exist in different cultures and historical epochs, we can deduce that masculinities are amenable to change. In the layering of masculinities we see one of the sources of change, and in the hierarchy of masculinities we see one of the motives. Historians have traced changes in masculinity as struggles for hegemony—for instance, redefining patterns of managerial masculinity in British manufacturing industry, or capturing old forms of masculine practice (such as the duel in nineteenth-century France) for rising social groups.[17]

To speak of the "dynamics" of masculinity is to acknowledge that particular masculinities are composed, historically, and may also be decomposed, contested, and replaced. There is an active politics of gender in everyday life. Sometimes it finds spectacular public expression, as in the Million Man March; more often it is local and limited. But however muted, the dynamics of masculinity is an important issue for educators, since educational agendas flow from the possibilities of change in gender relations.

THE PLACE AND LIMITS OF SCHOOL PROCESSES

Since schools are routinely blamed for social problems of every description, from unemployment to godlessness, it is not surprising that they should also be blamed for problems about boys. It is, therefore, important to register the fact that the school is not the only institution shaping masculinities, and may not be the most important. Psychoanalysis has made us familiar with the emotional dynamics of the family as an influence on gender, an argument recently renewed—and carefully located in the history of gender relations—in Nielsen and Rudberg's developmental model of gender formation.[18] The sociology of culture makes us aware of the importance of mass communications in the contemporary gender order. Media research documents what we know intuitively, that mass media are crammed with representations of masculinities—from rock music, beer commercials, sitcoms, action movies, and war films to news programs—that circulate on a vast scale.[19]

Given these forces, why pay attention to the school? Teachers discussing problems about boys often suggest that they are confronting intractable patterns fixed outside the school. Certainly children bring conceptions of masculinity into the school with them. Jordan has wittily documented the "Warrior Narratives" brought into an Australian kindergarten, where some of the boys disrupted a carefully nonsexist regime by playing games involving guns, fighting, and fast cars. This is hardly an isolated experience; witness the Ninja Turtles and X-Men of the American second-grade classroom studied by Dyson.[20]

Such a feeling among teachers is reinforced by the two most popular explanations of masculinity in recent decades. The first is the "sociobiological" view that masculine behavior springs from the biological nature of men and boys: that it is coded in the genes, a result of testosterone, and so forth. Bodily difference is, of course, important in gender, which broadly can be understood as the structure through which reproductive relationships and differences are drawn into the historical process of human society. To say this is *not*, however, to agree that there is a "biological basis" for masculinity. The historical and ethnographic research mentioned above demonstrates that there is no standard pattern of masculinity that biology could have produced. Careful examination of the arguments about testosterone shows there is no one-way determination of behavior by hormones; indeed, there is evidence that social structure influences the production of hormones! Masculinity is not a biological entity that exists prior to society; rather, masculinities are ways that societies interpret and employ male bodies.[21]

The second popular interpretation of masculinity sees it as the internalization of a "male sex role," following broad cultural expectations for men. Sex-role theory was the intellectual framework of the liberal feminism that

launched affirmative action programs for girls in the 1970s. Role theory attributes more importance to education than sociobiology does, but treats schools essentially as conduits for society-wide norms, and children as passive recipients of socialization. The approach gives little understanding of the detail of school life, such as girls using conventions of femininity to *resist* control, or boys producing multiple masculinities. Role theory is notoriously unable to grasp issues of power, or to grasp the diversity of race and class. Though "sex-role" language remains the most common way of talking about gender in schools, it is fundamentally inadequate as a conceptual framework.[22]

That the school is an important player in the shaping of modern masculinities can be suggested, but not demonstrated, by research within schools. It is more strongly demonstrated from outside, for instance, by life-history studies of masculinity such as Messner's work on American athletes, or my research with groups of Australian men.[23] Schools figure significantly in these narratives, for instance, in the preparation and choice of an athletic career. The practical judgment of parents, reflected in the demand for "boys' programs," is also not to be ignored. Though we will never have a simple way of measuring the relative influence of different institutions, there seems to be good warrant for considering schools one of the major sites of masculinity formation.

A "site" can be understood in two ways. It can be examined as an institutional *agent* of the process. To understand this, we must explore the structures and practices by which the school forms masculinities among its pupils. Alternatively, we can examine the school as the *setting* in which other agencies are in play, especially the agency of the pupils themselves. Parts II and III of this article explore these two aspects of the school in turn.

Since almost all the discussion of gender focuses on gender difference, we should from the start be alert to gender *similarity*. Public controversies over gender differences in educational outcomes ("The girls are beating the boys!") persistently ignore the extent of overlap, focusing on small differences between means and ignoring measures of dispersion.

Many educational practices iron out gender differences. Common curriculum, shared timetable, and the experience of living daily in the same architecture and the same classroom routines are not trivial parts of boys' and girls' school experience. Teachers may deliberately set out to deemphasize gender difference, laying their emphasis on individual growth, as King noted about British infant schools in the heyday of 1970s progressivism.[24] The whole history of feminism shows that education systems can be a force for gender equity as well as inequality. This issue can lead to serious problems in the interpretation of quantitative research, of the very common kind that goes looking for statistical differences between groups

of boys and girls. Schools may be having a gender *effect* without producing gender *difference.* The school is having a gender effect, for instance, when it changes gender relations so as to produce more similarity.

II. SCHOOLS AS AGENTS IN THE MAKING OF MASCULINITIES

SCHOOLS' GENDER REGIMES

A key step in understanding gender in schools is to "think institutionally," as Hansot and Tyack argue. While their research concerned the large-scale history of segregated schooling, the point also applies to the individual school. As with corporations, workplaces, and the state, gender is embedded in the institutional arrangements through which a school functions: divisions of labor, authority patterns, and so on. The totality of these arrangements is a school's *gender regime.* Gender regimes differ between schools, though within limits set by the broader culture and the constraints of the local education system.[25]

Theoretical work on gender allows us to sort out the different components of a school's gender regime. Four types of relationships are involved:

1. Power Relations. These include supervision and authority among teachers and patterns of dominance, harassment, and control over resources among pupils. A familiar and important pattern is the association of masculinity with authority, and the concentration of men in supervisory positions in school systems. Among pupils, power relations may be equally visible. Prendergast's ethnography in a British working-class high school shows, for instance, how control over playground space for informal football games was crucial in maintaining the hegemony of an aggressive, physical masculinity in this school's peer group life.[26]

2. Division of Labor. This includes work specializations among teachers, such as concentrations of women in domestic science, language, and literature teaching, and men in science, mathematics, and industrial arts. It also includes the informal specializations among pupils, from the elementary classroom where a teacher asks for a "big strong boy" to help move a piece of furniture, to the gendered choice of electives in vocational education at secondary and postsecondary levels.

3. Patterns of Emotion. What the sociologist Hochschild has called the "feeling rules" for occupations can be found in teaching, often associated with specific roles in a school: the tough deputy principal, the drama teacher, and so forth. Among the most important feeling rules in schools are those concerned with sexuality. As research in both Britain and Canada

suggests, the prohibition on homosexuality may be particularly important in definitions of masculinity.[27]

4. Symbolization. Schools import much of the symbolization of gender from the wider culture, but they have their own symbol systems too: uniforms and dress codes, formal and informal language codes, and so forth. A particularly important symbolic structure in education is the gendering of knowledge, the defining of certain areas of the curriculum as masculine and others as feminine.

Through these intersecting structures of relationships, schools create institutional definitions of masculinity. Such definitions are impersonal; they exist as social facts. Pupils participate in these masculinities simply by entering the school and living in its structures. The terms on which they participate, however, are negotiable—whether adjusting to the patterns, rebelling against them, or trying to modify them.

Gender regimes need not be internally coherent, and they are certainly subject to change. This is vividly shown in Draper's recent account of the "re-establishment of gender relations following a school merger" in Britain, an unusual study that catches gender arrangements in the midst of change. It shows how different groups of pupils and teachers involved in the merger had conflicting agendas and interests, with sometimes startling results—from boys wearing eyeshadow to girls subverting school uniform.[28]

Teachers' autobiographies, especially those of feminist teachers, contain many narratives of encounters with oppressive gender regimes in schools and of attempts—sometimes successful—to change them.[29] Children as well as teachers work on the gender regime. In the American elementary schools studied by Thorne, the meanings of gender were constantly being debated and revised by the children, the gender boundaries both enforced and challenged on the playground and in classrooms.[30]

MASCULINIZING PRACTICES

There is no mystery about why some schools made masculinities: They were intended to. Dr. Arnold, the famous reforming headmaster of Rugby, saw the private schools of nineteenth-century Britain as moral machinery for molding Christian gentlemen. A fascinating historical study, Heward's *Making a Man of Him,* traces the effects some generations after Dr. Arnold. Using letters to and from the headmaster, Heward reconstructs the interplay between Ellesmere College, a minor private school, and the class and gender strategies of its boys' families. The school defined and enforced a suitable masculinity among its boys through

rigidly enforced conventional dress, discipline (prefects having the authority to beat younger boys), academic competition and hierarchy (emphasized by constant testing), team games, and gender segregation among the staff. In the wake of the Great Depression, Ellesmere modified its formula, increasing its academic and vocational emphasis and decreasing its emphasis on sport.[31]

The discipline, dress code, and so forth can be considered a set of *masculinizing practices* governed by the gender regime of the school. Different circumstances produce different formulas. In another illuminating historical study, Morrell traces the production of a rugged, rather than cerebral, masculinity on the colonial frontier. The white boarding schools of Natal, South Africa, in the half-century to 1930, also used the prefect system and gender segregation. But these schools laid more emphasis on toughness and physical hierarchy among the boys, through masculinizing practices such as initiation, "fagging," physical punishment, and spartan living conditions. This agenda was obviously connected with the context of colonial conquest, and the goal of maintaining racial power over colonized peoples.[32]

These vehement gender regimes show the potential of the school as a masculinity-making device, but such cases are hardly the norm in contemporary public education. Coeducation has muted the masculinizing agenda—but has it been eliminated?

In some ways, coeducational settings make it easier to mark difference, that is, to establish symbolic oppositions between girls and boys. School uniforms or conventions of dress, separate toilets, forms of address, practices such as lining boys and girls up separately, or creating classroom competitions of "the boys" against "the girls" all do this job. Formal texts may reinforce the lesson from popular culture that masculinity is defined by difference from femininity. As Sleeter and Grant have shown in a study of textbooks used in American schools up to grade eight, gender patterns have persisted despite a recent shift by writers and publishers to nonsexist language. Representations of men have remained more stereotyped than those of women.[33]

Broad features of coeducational schools' gender regimes thus sustain particular definitions of masculinity. Does this turn into a positive masculinizing practice? Studies of particular areas of schools' work indicate that it does. A case in point is the schools' treatment of sexuality. Sex education classes generally teach an unreflective heterosexual interpretation of students' desires, in which masculine sexuality is defined by a future of marriage and fatherhood. This can be seen in Trudell's remarkably detailed ethnography of sex education in an American high school.[34]

Since formal sex education is mostly ineffective, such classes will proba-

bly not be a major source of gender meanings for the pupils. But, as Mac an Ghaill's important British study of school sexuality and masculinity demonstrates, these ideas are backed by a much wider range of practices. A heterosexual construction of masculine and feminine as opposites (as in "the opposite sex," "opposites attract") runs through a great deal of the school's informal culture and curriculum content. Homosexual experience is generally blanked out from the official curriculum. Gay youth are liable to experience hostility from school officials and straight youth, while teachers experience heavy constraint in dealing with sexual diversity.[35]

Coeducational schools, then, typically operate with an informal but powerful ideology of gender difference, and do put pressure on boys to conform to it. In certain areas of the school's gender regime the pressure approaches that of the vehement regimes discussed above, and a regular vortex of masculinity formation can be seen.

MASCULINITY VORTICES

Boys' Subjects

The first vortex arises in the gender division of labor and symbolization. Most of the academic curriculum is common to girls and boys, and while certainly conveying gender messages, does so diffusely.

But in certain areas of study, pathways diverge and gender messages become more concentrated. Grant and Sleeter's study of "Five Bridges" junior high school in the United States found that while the school made an equal formal offer of learning to boys and girls, it allowed virtual segregation in some subject areas. These were especially practical subjects such as shop and child development. Indeed, the school cued this segregation by its own gender division of labor among teachers.[36]

This is a widespread pattern. Systemwide data on subject enrollments in New South Wales (Australia) secondary schools show a minority of subjects with marked gender differences in enrollment. They include physics and chemistry, engineering, and industrial technology, where boys predominate; and home science, textiles, and design, where girls do.[37]

This segregation does not arise by chance; these curriculum areas are culturally gendered. Industrial arts (shop) teaching, for instance, is historically connected with manual trades where there was a strong culture of workplace masculinity and where women used to be excluded. As Mealyea's case study of new industrial arts teachers demonstrates, it can be difficult for men with backgrounds in such trades to accept the new policies of gender equity and inclusiveness.[38]

Academic subjects may also have strong gender meanings. It has long

been recognized that physical sciences are culturally defined as masculine and have a concentration of men teachers. Martino's sophisticated analysis of secondary classes in Western Australia shows how subject English, by contrast, is feminized. In the eyes of many of the boys, English classes are distanced by their focus on the expression of emotions, their apparent irrelevance to men's work, the lack of set rules and unique answers, and the contrast with activities defined as properly masculine, such as sport.[39]

Discipline

The second vortex is linked to power relations. Adult control in schools is enforced by a disciplinary system that often becomes a focus of masculinity formation.

Teachers from infants to secondary level may use gender as a means of control, for instance, shaming boys by saying they are "acting like a girl." Punishment too is liable to be gendered. When corporal punishment was legal, boys were much more often beaten than girls. Nonviolent punishments still bear down more heavily on boys. For instance, a recent study of suspensions in a working-class area of Sydney found that 84 percent of the pupils suspended were boys, as were 87 percent of the pupils with repeat suspensions.[40]

Where the hegemony of the school is secure, boys may learn to wield disciplinary power themselves as part of their learning of masculine hierarchy. This was the basis of the old prefect system. Where hegemony is lacking, a "protest masculinity" may be constructed through defiance of authority, all too familiar in working-class schools.[41] With corporal punishment, defiance requires bravery in the face of pain, a masculinity test of the crudest kind. Even with nonviolent discipline, such as the "punishing room" in the African-American school studied by Ferguson, the contest with authority can become a focus of excitement, labeling, and the formation of masculine identities.[42]

Sport

The third vortex blends power, symbolization, and emotion in a particularly potent combination. Here the schools are using consumer society's key device for defining hegemonic masculinity.[43]

Foley's ethnography of a high school in a south Texas town gives a vivid description of "the great American football ritual." He shows that not only the football team but the school population as a whole use the game for celebration and reproduction of the dominant codes of gender. The game directly defines a pattern of aggressive and dominating performance as the most admired form of masculinity, and indirectly marginalizes others. The

cheerleaders become models of desirability among the girls, and their desirability further defines the hierarchy of masculinities among the boys, since only the most securely positioned boys will risk ridicule by asking them for a date.[44]

The only thing wrong with Foley's account is the suggestion that this is peculiarly American. Ice hockey in Canada, rugby in South Africa and New South Wales, soccer in Britain, are heavily masculinized contact sports that play a similar cultural role.[45]

Girls too participate in school sport, though not with the same frequency as boys. Typically the high-profile boys' sports are markedly more important in the cultural life of schools. The coaches of boys' representative teams can be important figures in a high school. Physical education teachers have an occupational culture that, on Skelton's autobiographical account, centers on a conventional masculinity that is "not only dominant, but neutralized as natural and good, part of the expected and unquestioned nature of things."[46]

SELECTION AND DIFFERENTIATION

The masculinizing practices of boys' subjects, discipline, and sport tend to produce, directly, a specific kind of masculinity. But this is not the only way that masculinities are produced in schools. Some aspects of the school's functioning shape masculinities indirectly, and may have the effect not of producing one masculinity but of emphasizing differences between masculinities. The most important case is, undoubtedly, educational selection.

The competitive academic curriculum, combined with tracking, streaming, or selective entry, is a powerful social mechanism that defines some pupils as successes and others as failures, broadly along social-class lines. There are strong reactions among the pupils to this compulsory sorting-and-sifting, whose gender dimension has been visible (though not always noticed) since the early days of school ethnographies.

The most clear-cut examples are from studies of boys' schools. The famous cases of the "lads" and the "ear'oles" in the British working-class school studied by Willis show a difference not only in conformity to school but in styles of masculinity. The "ear'oles," defined by the other group as effeminate, are using the school as a pathway to careers, while the "lads" are headed for the factory floor. A structurally similar pattern, in a very different class context, is the hostility between the sporting "Bloods" and the academic "Cyrils" in the Australian ruling-class school studied by Kessler et al.[47]

The pattern can also be traced in coeducational schools. Mac an Ghaill, for instance, distinguishes the "Academic Achievers" from the "Macho

Lads," the "New Enterprisers," and the "Real Englishmen" as subcultures of masculinity in the school he studied.[48] As Garvey puts it, streaming itself becomes a masculinizing practice. But it is a practice that produces plural masculinities, in a structured gender order among boys, not a single pattern of masculinity.[49]

III. PUPILS AS AGENTS, SCHOOL AS SETTING

PEER CULTURE

One of the most important features of school as a social setting is its informal peer group life. The peer milieu has its own gender order, distinct though not fixed. There is turbulence and uncertainty as young people try to define their own sexualities and identities. With the approach of adolescence, interactions between boys and girls are liable to be sexualized, by flirting, innuendo, and teasing. The heterosexual "romance" pattern of gender relations persists through high school into college, where it can still dominate student life, as Holland and Eisenhart's intensive study shows.[50]

The romance pattern defines masculinity in general through the masculine/feminine dichotomy, but also feeds into the hierarchy of masculinities, since heterosexual success is a formidable source of peer group prestige. Foley's study of a Texas high school gives an extended account of the parties and other social events at which masculinity is displayed and hierarchies reinforced. In this milieu the interplay of gender and ethnicity constructs several versions of masculinity: Anglo jocks, Mexican-American anti-authoritarian "vatos," and the "silent majority."[51]

Peer culture is now closely linked with mass communication. Mass culture generates images and interpretations of masculinity that flow chaotically into school life and are reworked by the pupils through everyday conversation, ethnic tensions on the playground, sexual adventures, and so on. Some are racially based, such as the image of uncontrollable, violent black masculinity that is familiar in white racism—and has now been seized by young black men (for instance in rap music) as a source of power. Some of these representations are at odds with school agendas. Others (such as interest in sports) are likely to mesh; we should not assume a constant tension between peer culture and school.

Adolescent boys' peer talk constantly uses sexuality to establish hierarchies: "fag," "slag," and so forth. Research in secondary schools in several countries has found widespread verbal harassment of girls by boys. Yet at this age sex is still being learned. Wood's study of boys' sex talk in a London secondary school annex emphasizes the element of fantasy, uncertainty, and boasting. The boys' pretensions can be punctured when a

tough girl, or group of girls, pushes back. Wood notes the different registers of boys' sex talk, for instance the greater hesitancy in a mixed group.[52]

In these observations the collective dimension of masculinity is clear. The peer groups, not individuals, are the bearers of gender definitions. This is presumably the explanation for a familiar observation by parents and teachers, that boys who create trouble in a group by aggression, disruption, and harassment, that is, an exaggerated performance of hegemonic masculinity, can be cooperative and peaceable on their own.

TAKING UP THE OFFER

As noted in Part I of this article, masculinities and femininities are actively constructed, not simply received. Society, school, and peer milieu make boys an offer of a place in the gender order; boys determine how they take it up.

Protest masculinity is a case in point. The majority of boys learn to negotiate school discipline with only a little friction. A certain number, however, take the discipline system as a challenge, especially in peer networks that make a heavy investment in ideas of toughness and confrontation. One such, in my life-history research, was Jack Harley, a young man who grew up in poverty in an Anglo family in Sydney. Jack clashed early and often with teachers: "They bring me down, I'll bring them down." Eventually he assaulted a teacher and landed in a juvenile detention center, from which he graduated to burglary, car theft, and adult prison. Expulsion from school and disrupted learning were consequences not of a passively suffered fate but of Jack's vigorous response to his situation.[53]

"Taking up the offer" is a key to understanding disciplinary problems in schools and boys' involvement in violence and sexual harassment. Groups of boys engage in these practices, not because they are driven to it by raging hormones, but in order to acquire or defend prestige, to mark difference, and to gain pleasure. As indicated by the criminological research mentioned in Part I, rule-breaking becomes central to the making of masculinity when boys lack other resources for gaining these ends.

However, the active construction of masculinity need not lead to conflict with the school. There are forms of masculinity much more compatible with the school's educational program and disciplinary needs. This is especially true of middle-class masculinities organized around careers, which emphasize competition through expertise rather than physical confrontation. It seems likely that the construction of masculinities that emphasize responsibility and group cohesion, rather than aggression and individuality, has helped in the educational success of youth from Chinese and Japanese ethnic backgrounds in North America. Boys who launch them-

selves on such trajectories are likely to have a much smoother educational passage. The schools as currently organized are a resource for them, and they are an asset for their schools.[54]

The active responses are collective as well as individual. Thorne's documentation of the gender "boundary work" done in elementary schools shows purposive group activity.[55] So does the rejection by certain boys of a key part of hegemonic masculinity, heterosexual desire. For those boys who begin to think of themselves as gay, a vital step is finding a social network in which homosexual desire seems something other than a ghastly mistake.[56]

The making of masculinities in schools, then, is far from the simple learning of norms suggested by "sex-role socialization." It is a process with multiple pathways, shaped by class and ethnicity, producing diverse outcomes. The process involves complex encounters between growing children, in groups as well as individually, and a powerful but divided and changing institution. In some areas of school life, masculinizing practices are conspicuous, even obtrusive; in other areas they are hardly visible at all. Some masculinizing effects are intended by the school, some are unintended, and some are not wanted at all—but still occur. Two implications are very clear: There is a need for educational thinking about this situation, and there are many possibilities for educational work. Let us now consider the shape this work might take.

IV. EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES IN WORK WITH BOYS

GOALS

Reviewing recent German programs for boys, Kindler identifies three main goals: self-knowledge, developing the boys' capacity for relationships, and learning antisexist behavior.[57] Generalized a little, these are broadly applicable.

1. The Goal of Knowledge. This is very much underemphasized in current discussions, though "cognitive objectives" are the traditional center of educational discussion. In two senses, knowledge is a goal in work with boys.

First, current patterns of masculinity formation push many boys away from areas of knowledge with which they ought to be in contact. Subject English, discussed earlier, is a case in point; more broadly, languages and communication skills.

Second, acquiring knowledge of gender, in one's own society and others, is a goal of some importance. Learning the facts of the situation, participating in the experiences of other groups, and making a critical examination of existing culture and knowledge are general educational goals that are quite applicable to this subject matter.

This was accepted by the Australian parliamentary inquiry on boys' education mentioned above, which proposed that gender relations be included in the "core" subject matter of the public schools.[58] This is now a principle in Australian gender equity policy. A movement in the same direction can be detected in the universities, where curricula in fields from literature to law now grapple with issues of gender. One must acknowledge that the movement is uneven.

2. *The Goal of Good Human Relationships.* If school education is a preparation for later life, part of its business is developing capacities for human relationships. But in contemporary Western societies, this capacity is gender-specialized: It is widely regarded as an aspect of femininity. Some elements of masculinity formation in schools—such as the cult of competitive sport—work against the development of this capacity in boys.

Some contemporary programs for boys address this issue head-on, and make relationship capacities their center. An example is the "Personal Development Program for Boys" created by a group of teachers in Australia. ("Personal Development" is a local rubric under which health, sex education, relationships, and emotions are combined.) The program consists of a set of structured sessions on these topics: developing communication skills; domestic violence; conflict resolution; gender awareness; valuing girls and "feminine" qualities; health, fitness, and sexuality; life relationship goals. The program is intended to promote both gender equity and emotional support for boys, with an emphasis on being positive.[59]

3. *The Goal of Justice.* This involves somewhat more complicated issues, and requires a longer discussion. Gender first came onto educational agendas as an equity issue, where change was sought to redress injustice. The usual response to equity issues by governments is to set up programs for disadvantaged groups. So far, the main educational response to gender issues has been setting up programs for girls.

Some advocates now cast educational issues about boys in that mold, defining boys as a disadvantaged group. This is not a credible argument. On almost any measure of resources—whether wealth and income, cultural authority, levels of education, political influence, control of organizations—and in all parts of the world, men are the *advantaged* group in gender relations.[60] It would require an unbelievable reversal, in an unbelievably short time, for boys to have lost this advantage and become a disadvantaged group.

These advantages come with certain costs, and if one focuses only on the costs, an appearance of disadvantage can be produced. Men's social power, for instance, is partly exercised through institutions of violence, and men thus become the major targets of violence as well as the main perpetrators. In some situations these costs are concentrated on particular groups of

men; the appalling levels of imprisonment among African-American men in the United States and Aboriginal men in Australia are notable examples. This is an issue of justice, and the educational implications will be discussed shortly.

The material advantages that men in general have, and that boys in general can expect, mean they have a broad interest in the status quo in gender relations. This interest is easily mobilized in education, as in other arenas. Kenworthy recounts a lesson in an Australian high school, based on a poem about a woman stockman (equivalent, in American terms, to a woman cowboy). The lesson worked well for a class of girls, and for a mixed class. But in an all-male class it was disrupted, under the leadership of some dominant boys who introduced a misogynist discourse and resisted opening up the gender issues. The boys in the class who could or would adopt a feminine reader position were scorned by the dominant group, in a classic display of the micro-politics of hegemony.[61]

Boys are not, as boys, a disadvantaged group, and the goal of educational work is therefore not to redress a gender disadvantage from which they suffer. We should not misread the statistics of sex differences. For instance, sufficient elementary-school boys have difficulty learning to read to produce lower average scores for boys as a common outcome of "sex difference" studies on language skills. Literacy practitioners suggest that the restricted cultural interests associated with hegemonic masculinity—fathers pushing their boys to concentrate on sports, for instance—are a major reason.[62] To the extent that this is true, the gender difference in reading scores is not a measure of boys' "disadvantage," but an index of the short-term cost of maintaining a long-term privilege.

Yet the goal of justice is relevant to the education of boys, in three ways. First, some of the processes of masculinity construction explored earlier in this article do hamper or disrupt the education of *particular groups of boys,* who are disadvantaged in class or ethnic terms. For instance, the pattern of "protest masculinity," and the high levels of conflict and dropout connected with it, is a major problem in secondary schools serving communities in poverty. The attempt to achieve justice in education in relation to poverty must therefore address issues of masculinity.

The second way concerns the extent to which schools as institutions are just or unjust. In an important recent examination of the concept of justice, Young identifies two broad types of social relationships that are unjust: oppression, which restricts the capacity for self-expression; and domination, which restricts participation in social decision-making.[63] Both types of relationship can be found in schools. The gender practices of boys may perpetuate them, and some boys are victims of them. Harassment of girls, homophobic abuse, the hierarchy of masculinities, bullying, and

racial vilification are examples. Pursuing justice in schools requires addressing the gender patterns that support these practices.

The third way concerns the quality of education. Education is a moral trade, and a good education must embody social justice. If we are not pursuing gender justice in the schools, then we are offering boys a degraded education—even though society may be offering them long-term privilege.

FORMS

German workers have made a useful distinction between "gender-specific" and "gender-relevant" programs. The main form of educational work on gender, throughout the industrialized world, has been gender-specific programs for girls. As issues about masculinity have been raised, the commonest response has been to develop gender-specific programs for boys. The "Personal Development Program for Boys" outlined above is an example, and there is now considerable practical experience with such programs in the United States, Britain, Germany, and Australia.

Gender-specific programs on masculinity are commonly small-scale, and based on discussion in intimate groups. They may, however, operate on a larger scale. Chiarolli describes a whole-school program that started when principal and staff at a Catholic boys' secondary school became concerned about sexism. They launched a range of actions addressing gender stereotypes and attitudes: library displays, a parent evening, guest speakers, student projects in the community, home economics classes for the boys, scrutiny of the division of labor among adults in the school, and a broad examination of the existing curriculum.[64]

Gender-relevant programs involve both boys and girls, and attempt to thematize, that is, bring to light for examination and discussion, the gender dimension in social life and education. The lesson on the "woman stockman" discussed above is a small-scale example; a whole-school antiviolence program (assuming it grapples with issues of masculinity) is a larger-scale one.

Though gender-specific programs are more familiar, some aspects of the construction of masculinity point to the need for gender-relevant programs. The symbolic gendering of knowledge, the distinction of "boys' subjects" from "girls' subjects" and the unbalancing of curriculum that follows, requires a gender-relevant not gender-specific response—redesign of curriculum, timetable, division of labor among teachers, and so forth. The definition of masculinities in peer group life, and the creation of hierarchies of masculinity, is a process that involves girls as well as boys. It can hardly be addressed with one of these groups in isolation from the other.

The gender-relevant logic is not the same as gender-neutrality, that is, simply attempting to avoid gender distinction. Quite the contrary: Gender-relevant programs name and address gender. A much more interesting, gender-inclusive, pedagogy becomes possible, as pupils have the opportunity to see the world from standpoints they normally regard as Other. Sapon-Shevin and Goodman suggest that this process is critical in sex education, and call it "learning to be the opposite sex." Given the multiplicity of masculinities, a gender-inclusive curriculum means taking the standpoint of other masculinities, as well as femininities.[65]

METHODS

Educational work with boys "must *start* with the boys' own interests, experiences and opinions," Askew and Ross argued some time ago.[66] We cannot read off a strategy for boys by trigonometry from the needs of girls. Practitioners are unanimous about the importance of developing, as Denborough puts it, "respectful ways of working with young men" even on an issue like male violence.[67]

Accordingly, practical accounts of gender-specific programs for boys and men typically emphasize student-centered methods. Gould recommends a "tactics of engagement" for university courses. Reay describes an experiential program with boys in a British elementary school. Browne, arguing that "we all learn best from what we face in our own lives," develops a model for experiental programs in Australian secondary schools.[68]

There is, however, a general problem with this approach. The tactics of engagement presuppose willing students. This cannot be presupposed in mass education, where classes for boys are vulnerable to the tactics of disruption—as Kenworthy found.[69] Reay's perceptive account of a teaching experience at upper elementary level shows constant compromises between teacher and taught. For instance, she found herself accommodating rather than challenging peer-group hierarchies. Reay wryly concludes that at the end of the program, whatever they had learned about gender, the boys had certainly learned how to please the teacher.[70]

Experiential approaches, then, need to be supplemented with methods that allow more distancing. Nilan, for instance, uses script development both to bring out assumptions about masculinity and to allow students to debate them. Denborough, dealing with the very difficult issue of masculinity and violence, emphasizes getting boys to look for the counter-narrative to the conventional one—an approach that draws on the research analysis of subordinated and marginalized masculinities. Davies, a post-structuralist in the classroom, has children performing astonishing feats of textual deconstruction and discursive analysis about gender. (Even Davies,

however, cannot prevent the boys in her groups resisting their removal from textual authority.)[71]

There is nothing against combining experiential with text-based methods, or indeed other methods. Dealing with gender across the curriculum clearly requires a mixture of teaching methods.

Whatever methods are used, work on gender with boys and men will be successful only if it opens possibilities, if it finds ways for them to move forward. The masculinity-therapists are right about the damaging effect of a certain kind of feminist criticism, which lumps all males together and relentlessly blames them. In teaching university courses about gender, I have repeatedly seen men students discouraged by the endless facts of sexism, experiencing feminist ideas mainly through guilt, and turning away because the alternative was to be overwhelmed. A sense of agency, of goals being achievable, is vital. The more sophisticated feminist approaches to masculinity, such as Segal's *Slow Motion*, discriminate between groups of men and offer support to this process of change.[72]

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Reflecting on the encounter between women teachers and the heavily patriarchal culture of a Christian Brothers school, Angus acutely observes that change in the cultural handling of masculinity requires organizational change as well.[73] Educational work on gender with boys, if it is to be more than a flash in the pan, requires institutional change in schools and systems.

Some of these changes are technical. Gender-specific classroom programs, for instance, require timetable changes in a coeducational school. Others are more substantial. Given the institutional definition of masculinity, the whole gender regime of a school is at issue. Grappling with the production of masculinity in the "vortices" discussed above means replacing confrontational disciplinary systems, restructuring physical education to emphasize participation rather than competitive selection, and restructuring the gender-divided curriculum.

The curriculum issue, of course, goes well beyond an individual school. Curricula are partly controlled by system authorities, examination and testing boards, textbook publishers, employers' certification demands, and entry requirements of colleges. It is possible to move this aggregate, as feminist work in natural science and technology has shown, but it is not easy. Similarly, changing pedagogy and changing the gender division of labor among teachers require action at system level, and in teacher training institutions.

System-level change is more likely to happen if cued by changes already building up within schools. The current approach of developing school-level programs is, in that sense, justified. But it is important to move on from the school level. A useful way of doing so is to set up systemic standards. Organizational change is more likely to happen when the people who hold organizational power have clear criteria to meet. It would be useful, and relatively cheap, to monitor school systems' performance on such issues as gender segregation in the curriculum, levels of violence and sexual harassment, the presence of men in early childhood education and women in administration, and the presence of curriculum units focused on gender relations.

V. THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

In 1991 the Toronto School Board sponsored an innovative "retreat" in which forty high school boys and forty high school girls, together with their teachers, worked on issues of sexism and change in masculinity. They used group discussion, drama, and separate and joint meetings, then took the results back to their schools.[74]

After the Year of the Angry White Male, as the 1994 Republican election victory was called, one may doubt that many school systems in the United States would care to follow this example. Debates in Australia, where gender issues have attracted more attention at the policymaking level than in most other countries, have similarly run into an impasse with the "competing victims syndrome," as Cox aptly calls it.[75] Does the discussion of masculinity and schooling have much chance of producing major change?

The discussion has certainly raised major issues. Recent public debates have addressed three important questions: violence and harassment in schools, gender differences in academic outcomes, and the alienation of boys from schooling. The research surveyed in this article identifies two further issues of comparable importance: gender-divided curriculum pathways, and the organizational patterns that construct masculinities in schools.

These are long-standing issues, which do not come and go with a change in political climate. Whether they are turned into a reform program, however, depends a great deal on the interests and consciousness of the groups concerned. We must, therefore, appraise the groups and interests involved.

The Boys

The broad gender privilege of men gives boys an interest in the current gender order. What might lead them to participate in educational work that must call that interest into question, and may require them to decline the offer of gender privilege?

Actual programs for boys, as Kindler reports, have found a range of motives. They include curiosity, personal crisis, a sense of lack, a sense of justice, a desire for sharing and personal growth, and a desire for space for nontraditional conduct.[76]

There are three underlying interests that might support these motives. First is the emotional and physical costs of patriarchy for boys and men. As Kaufman's discussion of violence emphasizes, these costs are far from trivial.[77] Second is the interest boys and men have in personal relationships with women and girls. Boys have relationships, often close, with mothers, sisters, classmates, lovers, neighbors. They have relational interests, we might say, that cut across gender boundaries. Third are the general interests boys share with the women and girls in their lives because they are collective human interests. The shared interest in a healthy environment, for instance, can support study of the role of dominant masculinities in environmental destruction.

Parents and Communities

The role of parents in relation to school programs about masculinity has yet to come into focus. There is a long-standing discussion about the new masculinity and fathering, but this is usually understood to concern the family, not the school. Parents and parent groups have recently expressed public concern about boys' education, and there are indications that this is not a shallow interest. I know of schools that have been surprised by the extent of parent involvement when they announced an initiative on the subject.

Parents are easily represented as a force for conservatism in such matters. There is some basis for this view. For instance, religious Right mobilizations, using parent representation, have severely limited the capacity of American schools to deliver realistic sex education—a major problem in AIDS prevention.[78]

Yet many parents are aware of changes in gender relations, and are deeply concerned about issues like AIDS and sexual violence. Many parents want the schools to address these issues for boys in a realistic and timely way. Parents of boys are often also parents of girls, and have an interest in a better future for their daughters. There are parent organizations that have committed themselves to deal with boys' issues in a gender equity framework.[79] Parent involvement is not a synonym for gender conservatism.

Social Movements

The feminist movement was the first to place gender issues on educational agendas. For a long time its main practical concern in education has been

programs for girls. To some extent, therefore, feminists have been outflanked by the recent upsurge of interest in programs for boys. A key response has been to develop comprehensive "gender-equity" policies, which are gender-relevant rather than gender-specific. Feminists face a continuing dilemma about resources. In an era of cuts to public-sector budgets, any expansion of gender programs for boys—even those intended to produce less patriarchal masculinities—is likely to compete for funds with programs for girls.

The contemporary "men's movement" is deeply divided. There is a gender-justice current (e.g., the National Organization for Men Against Sexism), a masculinity-therapy current (e.g., the "mythopoetic" men's retreats), a restore-patriarchy current (e.g., the Promise Keepers), and others. No unified educational program will come out of this. However, the arguments between these currents will certainly affect the balance between gender equity and boys' troubles as themes of programs for boys.

Teachers

Teachers are the work force of educational reform; if anything large is to happen in schools, teachers must be engaged in making it happen. As Angus observes in the study cited above, to the extent that conventional masculinity "works" in the current educational environment, a lot of male teachers have little motive to change.[80] Yet some men do become involved in counter-sexist work with boys. The teaching profession too contains a diversity of masculinities.

Further, teachers and administrators experience the occupational stress caused by violence and resistance among boys. Teachers have an interest in meeting challenges in their work: teaching well, reducing disruptions to learning, and achieving educational justice in the face of difficulties. There are, then, industrial and professional reasons for educators to concern themselves with issues about masculinity.

I think it virtually certain that, in the industrialized countries, the interplay of these groups and interests will drive an expansion of current educational work on masculinity and programs for boys. This is unlikely to grow to the scale of programs for girls, because different locations in the gender order produce a different dynamic of social mobilization. But a need has been articulated and a response is developing around it. What form the expansion will take is still an open question.

It is clear that schools have a considerable capacity to make and remake gender. They are not the engine of gender revolution that liberal feminism, focused on the task of changing attitudes and norms, once believed. Nevertheless, the school system is a weighty institution, a major employer, a key means of transmitting culture between generations. It has direct con-

trol over its own gender regimes, which have a considerable impact on the experience of children growing up; and it can set standards, pose questions, and supply knowledge for other spheres of life.

For the most part, these capacities impact on the making of masculinities in an unreflective, inchoate way. The planned masculinizing regimes of the old boarding schools have been replaced, in mass public education, with a hodgepodge of practices impacting on the lives of boys, which are rarely thought through in gender terms. Such practices as school sport, discipline, and curriculum division may have strong masculinizing effects—but may be at odds with each other, or in conflict with other purposes of the school. The tendency of masculinity formation, in certain situations, to undermine or completely disrupt the teaching function of the school is particularly worrying.

A key task at present, then, is simply bringing these issues to light, asking educators to reflect on what the schools are currently doing. As this article has indicated, there is a good deal of research available that can help with this thinking. The research forcibly shows—in contrast to much popular thinking—that "boys" are not a homogeneous bloc, that masculinities vary and change, and that in gender, institutions (as well as bodies) matter. All these are important conditions for educational work.

Another condition is awareness of the possibility of change. This awareness is being forced on the schools by developments in the world around them. The Anglo-Saxon world generally regards Japan as a bastion of patriarchy, and in some areas (e.g., politics and corporate management) this is true. Nevertheless, a recent book by Ito describes changes in Japanese media images of men, the emergence of companionate marriages and shared child care, renegotiations of sexuality, and explicit critiques (by men as well as women) of traditional Japanese ideals of masculinity.[81] With such challenges emerging all over the industrialized world, no contemporary education system is going to escape these issues. Addressing them thoughtfully, schools can make a real contribution to a future of more civilized, and more just, gender relations.

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Notes

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