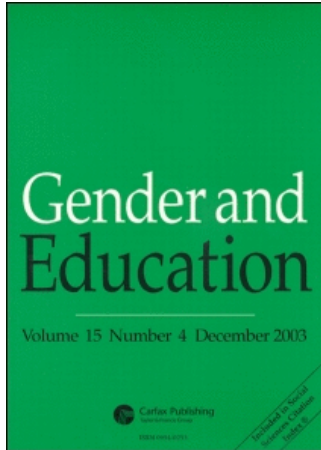


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Teaching manfully? Exploring gendered subjectivities and power via analysis of men teachers' gender performance

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The notion that teachers' classroom behaviour and interaction with pupils may be predicted on the basis of their gender underpins recent controversial campaigns to recruit more male teachers in the UK. Teachers' performances of gender are explored in this article, which draws on three cases from a larger study to analyse the ways in which teachers ascribed male produced their gendered subjectivities in the classroom and in interviews. Findings highlight the extent of diversity in male teachers' practice and in their constructions of gendered subjecthood, hence providing evidence to question assumptions that male teachers teach, or relate to pupils, in particular ways due to their identification as male. The analysis emphasizes the fluidity and complexity of gender, including the (novel) identification of 'male femininity' in male teacher performances. Yet while supportive of the argument that gender is not necessarily tied to sexed bodies, the paper illustrates how embodiment can constrain or facilitate access to, and exercise of, particular gendered discourses, with consequences for power positions. It also highlights how these processes can result in the consolidation of particularly powerful subjectivities, somewhat testing Foucauldian perceptions of power as 'never localized'. Hence the paper presents a challenge both to education policy makers and to theorists of gender and power.

Background

A facet of the 'moral panic' around boys' educational achievement in Britain (Epstein *et al.* 1998) has been the media and Government policy preoccupation with increasing the number of male teachers, particularly to primary schools (see Francis *et al.* 2008, for elaboration). This concern is predicated on the widely held notion that pupils do better when there is a 'match' between characteristics of pupils and teachers in terms of gender (and ethnicity) (Carrington & Skelton 2003). The belief in the benefits of such 'matching' rests on two, often tacit, assumptions: firstly, that men teachers behave and teach differently to their female colleagues (in ways that are more appealing to boys); and secondly that men teachers provide boys with 'role models' in order to prevent their educational disaffection and to raise their achievement (for analysis, see Skelton 2002; Ashley & Lee 2003).¹ Hence initiatives to boost male recruitment have been presented by Government officials as a solution to what ministers have termed boys' 'laddish culture' and consequent 'underachievement' (Francis 1999).

In spite of the ubiquity of this position in the media and policy literature, there is extensive research evidence to query such assumptions.² Moreover, discussion of the form of 'acceptable masculinity' that male teachers are expected to represent to boys is absent from the policy literature (Skelton 2002). It seems likely that arguments for the desirability of male pedagogues as teachers of boys rest on stereotypes of male teachers as disciplinarian and 'robust', documented by researchers such as King (2000) and Sargent (2001). Yet this is speculative deduction: the

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form of masculinity which male teachers are envisaged to represent, and the reasons that boys should apparently identify with this, are never articulated in the policy material (Francis & Skelton 2005).

The assumption that a gender ‘match’ between pupils (boys) and teachers (men) is beneficial to boys’ achievement rests upon social learning and sex role theories (on which the notion of role modeling is predicated). This reliance is intriguing given that social learning theory has been extensively critiqued as based on essentialized conceptions of identity as fixed, unitary and replicable. Social constructionist or poststructuralist theoretical lenses expose the notion of identification and emulation between pupil and teacher purely on the basis of gender as naive.

The notion of gender as foundational and fixed upon which notions of ‘gender match’ are based has been subjected to extensive critique. Since Garfinkel (1967) and Kessler and McKenna’s (1978) influential works first problematized the notion of sex as including two clear binary categories, the conception of gender as tied to essential sex difference has been radically critiqued by poststructuralist feminists such as Bronwyn Davies (1989) and Judith Butler (1990). These theorists see gender as discursively produced, rather than resulting from, or tied to, the sexed body. Butler, particularly, has extended theorization of ‘biological sex’ itself, and the dualism upon which this construction rests, as a social construction. Halberstam (1998, 2005) and other researchers have increasingly applied such theoretical approaches to analyse performances of masculinity by subjects discursively sexed as female, ‘queering’ the perception of gender as characterizing the domains of exclusively sexed physical bodies. Halberstam has been criticized for romanticizing masculinity, and for providing insufficient clarity concerning her categorization of masculinity (Paechter 2006). Certainly, the attribution of aspects of behaviour or expression as masculine or feminine is highly problematic (MacInnes 1998; Francis 2000), but is integral to Halberstam’s analysis. For if gender exists, but its categorization does not lie in the body, it must lie in the performance. Yet as Kessler and McKenna (1978) pointed out, once a ‘gender attribution’ has been made (a person identified as male or female), their behaviours will be understood with reference to that attribution (see Speer 2005, for elaboration). Hence a similar behaviour may be read as ‘aggressive’ in a man, or as ‘bitchy’ or ‘manipulative’ in a woman (Francis 2000, 2002). Nevertheless, Halberstam’s work is innovative in its application of Butler’s ideas and its radical decentering of the body in gender performance.

This paper sets out to apply such theoretical positions to data from men teachers,³ to challenge some of the policy assumptions concerning ‘gender match’, and to extend theorization of gendered subjectivity. Drawing on cases from a large-scale qualitative study, the paper aims to illustrate and analyse diverse performances of gender on the part of male teachers. In doing so, it seeks to unpick some of the discourses on gender and teaching underpinning their performances of gendered subjectivity in the classroom and in interviews, and to apply this analysis to draw conclusions regarding the construction of gendered subjectivities and relations of power. A poststructuralist perspective is applied to the data. Following Butler (1990, 1997) and others I see sex/gender as discursively produced rather than necessarily reflecting a physical dualism. Like Halberstam (1998) and others I do not see masculinity as the exclusive province of those discursively sexed as male; nor do I see femininity as the exclusive domain of those discursively produced as female.⁴ But I remain nevertheless attuned to the theoretical tensions inherent in analysing ‘male femininity’ as well as masculinity here (see Francis 2000; Paechter 2006, for further discussion).

Research methods

The data discussed in this paper is drawn from an ESRC-funded study⁵ (RES000230624) motivated by concern at the lack of any clear explanatory framework underpinning the funded policy strategies targeting men as recruits to primary teaching. The research was conducted in 51 different

Year 3 primary school classes (involving 7- to 8-year-old children) in London (25) and North East England (26). Twenty-five classes were taught by a male teacher and 26 by a female teacher. Research methods included ethnographic classroom observation and individual interviews with pupils (307) and teachers (51) with an even gender representation.

The 51 teachers were each tracked and observed for one working day, in order to observe pupil–teacher relationships and interactions. A pro-forma was applied listing specific areas of observer focus, concentrating on procedures, classroom management practices, teacher language and pupil language, in relation to gender. At the end of the observation day a semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher involved. These asked about what teachers wish to achieve from their work with pupils; what kinds of relationships they seek to build with pupils; how they perceive themselves in the role of teacher; and issues relating to gender. All interviews were audio-recorded, and the confidentiality of interview responses guaranteed (names reported are pseudonyms). I have identified three cases by analysing for diversity from the male teachers in the southeastern sample that I observed and interviewed (fieldwork in the south east was divided between a team of three researchers). It is the interviews with these three teachers and my observation of their classes that provides the data analysed in this paper.

A social constructionist and poststructuralist discourse analytic perspective (Burman & Parker 1993) is applied to the qualitative data. The detailed reading of discursive constructions that I engage during analysis demands comment: rather than intending a realist identification of truths, and/or seeing respondents' performances of gender as fixed, my poststructuralist position reads respondents' articulations as 'situated accomplishments or *versions*' (Speer 2005, 70).

The three cases

Mr Adams (White, Other) had been a teacher at his large school in a deprived London borough for the past six years. The pupil population is ethnically diverse: of the 28 children in his class, White children are a small minority. One of three male teachers at the school, Mr Adams is coordinator of two subject areas.⁶

Mr Bentham (White, British) was enjoying his first year as an NQT, having been employed by the school following his placement there as a student. He was the only male teacher at his medium-sized primary school. The school is in a socially and ethnically diverse area of London.

Mr Castillo (White, Other) had taught for seven years at his small school in a socially and ethnically-diverse inner-London borough. He is one of two male teachers, and holds responsibility for two areas of subject coordination.

The teachers' performance of gendered, professional subjectivity in their classroom practice will be analysed case by case, to avoid confusion. We begin with Mr Adams.

Mr Adams' performance of gendered subjectivity in classroom practice

Mr Adams' construction of the classroom environment and his own embodiment evoked gendered contradictions. Mr Adams has very long, well-groomed hair, tied in a ponytail. The observer records that he plays with his hair a lot in class, at one point pulling out his hair bobble, sweeping it back and retying it. He also wears an earring.⁷ However, my observation notes also record:

The classroom has some very 'masculine' features for décor. A huge fighter plane is suspended from the ceiling. There is a big poster of Jesus as Che Guevara, with the legend 'Meek. Mild. As if'. underneath.⁸ The words 'Dare to Know' are pasted in large letters on a banner across the top of the whiteboard.

Mr Adams' performance as a teacher is also masculinized in his unwavering 'strictness' and construction as a disciplinarian. My observation notes record:

Mr Adams is very severe and ‘shushes’ continually. He has a *constant* frown, which he maintains throughout my observation (only slightly alleviated during the music session). The discipline system is pasted in clear view on the whiteboard.

‘Fun’ appears eschewed by Mr Adams. Indeed, during the first section of observation Mr Adams was in charge of two classes in the television room, watching *The Jungle Book*, which the children were watching, transfixed. Observer notes record:

Two Black boys sit facing the wall for punishment. They stay like that for the full half hour. ... Sometimes the other kids burst out laughing at funny bits of the film, and Mr Adams ‘shushes’ them severely. ... They start clapping along with Mowgli to a song, and are immediately ‘shushed’ quiet by Mr Adams.

Mr Adams had an array of complicated disciplinary methods for calling attention or gaining quiet. For example, he might clap, and children were expected to put their hands on their heads in silence. When sitting on the mat (e.g., during Literacy or Numeracy Hours), children had to take their places with their fingers on their lips. When given a task such as tidying up, he counted down loudly and sternly so that the children would complete the task within his expected time. He expected complete, or near complete, silence while the children were working. Children that called out for his attention, even with their hands raised, were pointedly ignored. These disciplinary systems demanded expression of embodied compliance signifying obedience in the children, so that power relations were clearly written in the physical practices and embodied performances he demanded. The overt manifestation of (unequal) power relations and Mr Adams’ manipulation of these through his disciplinary practices can be seen in the following observation:

2.50pm. Mr Adams tells all the kids to put their recorders away and sit on the mat. They take their places with their fingers on their lips. Once all the kids are sitting on the mat Mr Adams chooses Rachael and Elsa (again!) to sit on the big comfy chair. Then adds Barry. Then he slowly and silently gives out cuddly toys to reward certain kids for quietness. All sit silently with fingers on lips looking eager and plaintive until all toys have been distributed. Mr Adams begins reading *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*.

This application of a ‘strict’ disciplinary model was extended to Mr Adams’ dealings with individual pupils, and also to their physical needs. For example, for these 7- to 8-year-old children even toilet breaks were withheld:

Rosa asks to go to the loo. Mr Adams – ‘No Rosa you *can’t*. When it’s half past two you can ask me again’ (it’s before 2pm).

2.10pm Class silent again, working on a new handout. 2 girls have hands up, but Mr Adams ignores them. Rosa asks quietly again ‘can I go to the toilet?’, but Mr Adams snaps ‘No Rosa you *can’t*’.

Sadiq approaches him and asks him quietly if he can go to the toilet. Mr Adams murmurs ‘Can’t you wait?’, but then lets him go, in spite of having twice denied Rosa who is still waiting.

Hence Mr Adams’ dominion extends to and circumscribes all aspects of children’s physical expression and needs in the classroom. This position is discursively justified by his application of a discourse of authenticity and authority as lodged exclusively with the teacher. Observer notes repeatedly record his totalitarian practices around knowledge. For example:

2pm Mr Adams calls class to attention and says he will go through the worksheet answers. He does so, saying what each answer should be. No Q&A. Says they have 5 seconds to put papers in a pile and sit neatly with their hands on their heads. When all the kids have their hands on their heads he says ‘No table had that correct’ (despite not having explained fully whatever it was he required).

As we see in the way in which Mr Adams to some extent sets up the children’s apparent failure (by not having explained the task fully), Mr Adams frequently limited the children’s access to knowledge, hence heightening his power position as Keeper of Knowledge:

Mr Adams hands out papers – a White boy asks what it is and Mr Adams retorts ‘Shh, you only know what you need to know’.

Tells a Black girl with her hand up about the task ‘I’ve *told* you what to do’, and then ignores her.

Knowledge is constructed as being held exclusively by Mr Adams, and the children are positioned relationally as devoid of authentic knowledge. Hence in psychoanalytic terms (see Walkerdine, 1990) they are positioned as Other, as lacking. Mr Adams’ construction of himself as the authentic possessor of knowledge and the technologies of power this position facilitates, illustrates Foucault’s (1980) analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge. As writers such as Harding (1991) and others have noted, this construction as authentic knower and keeper of knowledge is a profoundly masculinized one. Mr Adams maintains his subjugation of the pupils and their (inauthentic) knowledge via frequent sarcastic and disparaging comments to pupils of both sexes. The observer notes record only a couple of positive comments to pupils throughout the entire day (in stark contrast to other teachers of this Year 3 age group), whereas examples of his frequent negative comments include:

Sadiq has his hand up. Mr Adams ignores him to start with, then approaches him, hears his point and says sarcastically ‘Yes that’s *really interesting*’.

‘Marie, I’m *not interested* in what you have to say’.

A boy asks ‘Mr Adams, what are we meant to do if we can’t to it?’ Mr Adams retorts, ‘You’re meant to *think*. It’s not *that* difficult!’

A Black boy and girl are looking at some pictures on the wall. Mr Adams comments to them, ‘Nice isn’t it, they were done by the Year 2s, I’d be surprised if *you* could achieve that’.

Hence Mr Adams draws on a historic model of the teacher as *authority*; as possessing knowledge and power, and pupils as lacking both. To some extent his performance of pedagogic identity evokes a caricature from the late nineteenth century, in both his uncompromisingly disciplinarian stance, and in his icy belittlement of pupils.

This exercise of discipline, the deliberate concentration and ‘ownership’ of power, and the distancing, abrasive approach he takes to his pupils, are all strongly masculinized characteristics. This masculine performance is also supported by his construction of himself as rational and cold rather than emotional (my observation notes record how his instructions for quiet whenever the silence is broken are ‘always stated in icy calm. His tone is always measured and severe. Very serious’). Emotionality and irrationality are projected onto the children, who are feminized in their positioning as powerless (Davies, 1989). Hence in spite of signifiers of femininity in Mr Adams’ physical expression of subjecthood (his long hair and jewellery), his performance of the teacher role in the classroom is an intensely masculinized one.

Mr Bentham’s performance of gendered subjectivity in classroom practice

Mr Bentham’s performance of teacherhood offered a strong contrast to that of Mr Adams. As I comment in the observation notes, ‘Mr Bentham tends to use respectful language with lots of pleases and thank yous, affirmation, little criticism, and rarely shouts. His rebukes are usually mild and polite’. This consistently respectful, polite approach is illustrated by the following selected examples from observer records:

‘Good morning

Please get a text book and read quietly’ is written on the whiteboard for the kids to see as they return to class from morning assembly.

10.15 – Mr Bentham taps xylophone for silence. ‘Thank you Yellow Table. I’d like you all to finish what you’re doing and come and sit on the carpet please’.

Even his calls for attention and good behaviour are couched in polite language:

'Tim, could you sit up properly please? Thank you'.

'Kiera and Marcel. Please stop doing that'.

11.43am – Mr Bentham calls them to attention with xylophone – 'Excuse me, can we stop having conversations that aren't about punctuation, please?'

Due to this approach, power differences between teacher and pupils are far less overt than was the case in Mr Adams' class. Mr Bentham did discipline his pupils (he rarely allowed the class to get out of control, although the levels of noise and playfulness/aggression between children in Mr Bentham's class would likely have been deemed completely unacceptable by Mr Adams). But he often did so using what Read (submitted) brands 'pseudo-adultification'. Examining the formative assessment aspects of classroom disciplinary practices, Read argues that rather than exercising overt forms of coercion, pseudo-adultifying disciplinary techniques draw on a discourse of 'child as responsible citizen' to morally inculcate the child into expected behaviours. This approach is evident by Mr Bentham's frequent address to his pupils as 'people' (e.g., Mr Bentham – 'Right, people who are meant to be reading books, *read* books'), hence evoking an 'equal' relationship between them and himself, and his pupils as mature citizens. Read (submitted) notes how teachers drawing on these discourses often discipline children via expression of reproachful disappointment that they have 'let themselves down', hiding the unequal power differentials between teacher (who ultimately decides what is deemed acceptable behaviour) and the pupils. Mr Bentham was observed to adopt such practices. For example:

Sean and Demola are messing about. Mr Bentham says to Sean, 'How many times do we have to talk about this? How many?'

This approach was however extended by Mr Bentham beyond disciplinary techniques. For example, during a story reading Marcel (Black boy) interrupts to ask if he is allowed to wear his stud earring in school, and Mr Bentham pauses to make a note to ask. (His approach is respectful rather than dismissive.) Although notions of citizenship are imbued in enlightenment discourses of individuality and rationality which are ostensibly masculine (see Walkerdine 1990; Harding 1991), it might be argued that such 'respectful' practices, that play down the overt power of the teacher, represent more 'feminine', 'soft' disciplinary practices.

And while Mr Adams' approach to discipline and to teaching was evidently weighted towards 'the stick' rather than 'the carrot', in Mr Bentham's practice the reverse was the case. Mr Bentham gave a daily 'Star of the Day' award (the 'Star' being treated by being given jobs of responsibility all day), as well as an array of award points (represented by stickers). The observer notes record Mr Bentham's constant affirmation and encouragement of the children, as exemplified in the following extracts:

9.35am, Numeracy Q&A, Mr Bentham asks them to hold up mini whiteboards as they finish their sum, and congratulates those finishing first (including girls and boys). Adidio (Black) asked to come and demonstrate his method, then Tim (White) is allowed to come and demonstrate his. He struggles and Mr Bentham helps him as other kids begin to chat among themselves. Farrat (Black) asked to show her 'partitioning method', and is congratulated, 'That's it, *excellent* Farrat'. 'Mm, you are good at maths Marcel, well done'. Kids are enthusiastic, all shooting up hands.

(During numeracy hour) 'Well done Fatima. Fantastic. Well done Vernon. Well done Dornel, you haven't done it the partitioning way, Tim ... Superb, fantastic, well done Havanna that's really clear. Excellent Marcel. Well done Omar, *but*, think about, 40 plus 7 is 47'.

(Note how he finds an encouraging way to support the pupil who got the answer wrong).

Again, Mr Bentham's nurturing, encouraging approach might be seen as feminized. He was clearly positioned/producing himself in a very different manner to Mr Adams, and there were

suggestions that his authority might have been questioned as a result of his less masculine construction. On one occasion during Literacy Hour Mr Bentham put up a story with incorrect punctuation for the children to identify. My observation notes record:

On [her] own initiative the teaching assistant [S. Asian] takes a copy of the text and enlarges it on the photocopier next door, returning with the larger version which Mr Bentham takes and uses. Marcel is off-task and fidgeting – the teaching assistant calls him to sit by her, but Marcel shakes his head and ignores her.

The teaching assistant appears to position Mr Bentham as slightly incompetent (using an inappropriately small copy), not disciplining Marcel, and also as inauthoritative as she is not afraid to 'correct' his resources or to exert discipline in his stead (although interestingly Marcel rejects her efforts to discipline him, repositioning her as lacking power). Hence in this sense Mr Bentham is infantilized, and arguably feminized by the teaching assistant. This interpretation is supported by Mr Bentham's somewhat self-deprecating performance – for example, the observation notes record:

At one point in the afternoon Mr Bentham comes to me and explains how he intends to extend an aspect of the lesson, regretting that he didn't prepare better for it. He seems a bit anxious and self-critical in my presence.

This reflexive, slightly anxious and unconfident subjectivity produces characteristics socially ascribed feminine rather than masculine, and is in stark contrast to Mr Adams' projection of authentic authority. Of course, it seems likely that Mr Bentham's anxious and apologetic construction may be linked to his NQT status; his position as novice constraining his ability to position himself as assertively authentic (the masculine position). But I would argue that inexperience and inauthenticity are constructed as feminine within binary gender dualisms (see Walkerdine 1990). Hence, Mr Bentham's NQT status is effeminizing and contributive to a feminine performance.

Mr Castillo's performance of gendered subjectivity in classroom practice

Mr Castillo adopts a loud, booming tone to address the class and call for attention. He frequently bellows out to the class, and these barked messages are often brashly colloquial; for example, 'Oi. Nina. Mario. If you're going to disturb me, I won't be very happy'. Hence we see immediately a masculinized embodied performance of authority exemplified by voice and tone. Yet it was highly evident that Mr Castillo's performance was as 'his bark being worse than his bite', as I reflected in my observation comments that 'he's very affirming, and in spite of the kids' [bad] behaviour he doesn't actually penalize anyone all morning'. Indeed, Mr Castillo adopts a similar approach to Mr Bentham in terms of his affirmation, encouragement, and constructive development of pupils. For example:

10.55am Mr Castillo goes from table to table chatting about the pupils' drawings and writing. Congratulates boys and girls on their work, and engages pupils of both genders. Josh (dual heritage) gets up – Mr Castillo: 'Let's have a look, my friend? *Very* good. Maybe the shepherds could be coloured'.

He does not, however, demand/achieve the same discipline levels in his class as Mr Bentham. Observer notes record:

10.05am – Mr Castillo calls out names ('Josh, *Josh*, Andrew, Josh, Martha – *Martha*') incessantly, but with apparently little effect!

Mr Castillo shouts 'There's too many people wandering about' (again, no effect).

The observation showed that the noise levels tended to be very high, with a great deal of moving around by pupils during tasks. Yet at one point after noting the high noise levels, I record

that ‘Mr Castillo says to me “I wish you were here all the time!”’, indicating that pupils are behaving better than usual (!). There were a handful of children (boys) in Mr Castillo’s class who were extremely disruptive. Their disruptive behaviours often involved the intimidation of other children, as in the following incident:

Clyde (African-Caribbean) tips his table’s crayons on the floor saying ‘*I’m not annoying!*’ [laughing]. Alice (White) picks them up and talks crossly to him. She moves away from the table to show Mr Castillo she’s finished her work. Returns to the table saying ‘When you’ve finished you have to write a Christmas story’. Clyde throws his ruler on the floor and tells Alice ‘Pick it up’. She refuses. Clyde says ‘Pick it up or I’ll *beat* you up’. She picks up the ruler and puts it on the table.

Evidently, these were challenging circumstances, yet Mr Castillo’s method of managing these pupils’ behaviour appeared both ineffective and potentially damaging to other children in the class. His approach involved constant, arguably disproportionate affirmation and reward of these particular boys whenever they were not evidently misbehaving. Examples of his actions in relation to some of the most persistently badly behaved children (Josh and Clyde) include:

11.10am Mr Castillo says to class ‘Right, pencils out, arms folded’. He calls Josh (dual heritage), who has his arms folded, to take the Merit stickers to give out ‘because you’ve been ready each time I’ve said’. He tells the class to put their equipment away – those doing so quickly and quietly will get Merits. Mr Castillo congratulates them. ‘Who would like to read Paragraph 1?’ Hands shoot up. Mr Castillo chooses Josh (again!). Josh reads, with Sam (Black) interjecting words where Josh falters. Mr Castillo congratulates Josh and tells him ‘Give yourself a Merit’. Next to read are Tina; Sam; Ronald (Sam reading along with him); Elsie; Alice; Joline, and Sapphire. N.B – Only Josh got awarded a merit for his reading.

Clyde is directed by Mr Castillo to take his picture to show Mr X as a reward. Mr X affirms ‘You’ve been working hard!’. Again, this seems to be to be a completely disproportionate reward for a boy whose behaviour has generally been poor all morning.

As the observer comments, ‘Mr Castillo is friendly, fun and engaging with the “problem boys” in the class, and gets them to engage by this attitude. But he does spend far more time and attention with a small number of boys at the expense of the other kids’. This engagement with certain children also tended to be gendered: for example:

After break, Mr Castillo talks at length with Josh about the football game at break, how many goals were scored and by whom. He chats to Josh in a very adult way while periodically shouting at other kids about their behaviour. Finally he says ‘Josh are you all right? I’m gonna go and I’m gonna come back in a minute, alright?’.

Such findings of ‘laddish’ engagement with boys on the part of male teachers has been identified in other studies (see Connolly 1998; Skelton 2001), which have also identified how such practices exclude girls and other boys in the class.

There are overlaps between Mr Castillo’s practices and Mr Bentham’s approach of addressing pupils as equal citizens and hence evoking their moral responsibility for good behaviour. This approach seemed less effective in Mr Castillo’s class as evidenced by the pupils’ bad behaviour; although it is possible this behaviour might have been worse under a different classroom management technique. Yet while Mr Bentham engaged pupils as fellow ‘people’ (mature responsible citizens) it might be argued that Mr Castillo rather engaged the difficult boys in his class as fellow ‘lads’ (based on shared interest in ‘laddish’ pastimes such as football, and Mr Castillo’s own rather laddish persona). Such an approach would be logically flawed, given the dissonance between laddish values (including rebellion, immaturity and irresponsibility) and those of the school (Francis 1999, 2000).

Like Mr Bentham, Mr Castillo seemed far less self-assured of his power and authority in contrast to Mr Adams’ masculinized performance of pedagogy. For example, waiting with me for the children to return to class after break, he confides his trepidation about the boys’ behaviour

on their return, given how they ‘tend to fall out at breaktime, and then try to kill each other in class afterwards!’.

The analysis thus far is based on classroom observation. We turn now to these teachers’ constructions of gendered subjectivities in individual interviews.

Interviews

Self-positioning (as teacher)

Having observed Mr Adams’ distinctively ‘masculinised’ teaching environment and disciplinarian teaching style, I was surprised to find that in his interview Mr Adams positioned himself as a feminist, or as he put it, ‘a male with a feminist attitude’. His feminism was certainly borne out in his statements during the interview, where he vehemently contested the view that boys would benefit from an increase in male teachers, and reflected on gender inequalities in the wider society.

However, Mr Adams was certainly no liberal humanist. He readily articulated his impatience with various social groups. For example:

I still think if you’re born in this country, there’s no excuse coming to school when you’re 4-years-old and you don’t know your letters or you can’t count to 10 ... so there is a very important learning ethos that is lacking in this country, it’s, one thing I’ve noticed, it’s very much people want something for nothing. They’re not prepared to put in, everybody wants to kill the dragon but nobody wants to put in the hard work that’s gonna put them a position to be able to do that. I think, my view is, I can only show the children what I think is important. ... *You’re* the one who’s got to learn the maths, I’m sorry, you know. I’ll show you how to do it but then it’s your turn, you know

Narratives of self-responsibility are embedded in this data extract: a neoliberal theme of the ‘something-for-something’ model of citizenship and governance (Bauman 2005; Power 2005), and a projection of deficit onto ‘failures’ who are demonized as the authors of their underachievement (Reay & Lucey 2003; Bauman 2005). And besides constructing himself in opposition to an evoked mass of feckless educational n’er do wells, Mr Adams also positioned himself against other men teachers: ‘If I look percentage-wise, on my teaching experience, males, percentage-wise, have a lot harder time controlling classes. ... Out of three males, one of them doesn’t cut it’.

Mr Adams prides himself on his strict firmness and consistency, which he sees other male teachers as lacking: ‘there’s a side to teaching in primary school ... where you’re not just teaching a subject, you have to be a strict parent as well, if you like that, and I think that sometimes they fall short on that’.⁹

Hence Mr Adams’ presentation of self is as politically informed and opinionated (explicitly feminist, implicitly neoliberal); and as an appropriately firm, demanding teacher, with high expectations, in contrast to those pupils and teachers he distances as lazy or inadequate. His articulation is stern and cutting, in keeping with his classroom style (although as we have seen, Mr Adams embodies contradictions as well as consistencies in his production of self). Generally, this might be read as a highly masculine production of self (assertive verging on the dismissive or aggressive; self assured; intellectually invested), in spite of his feminist identification.

In contrast, Mr Bentham projected a self-deprecating and rather humble subjectivity. His answers tended to be brief in comparison with the other respondents considered here. The following exchange where the interviewer has asked whether he might consider himself an ‘inspirational figure or charismatic leader’ in the classroom is indicative:

Mr B: [Do] I think *personally*?

I: Yes.

Mr B: No.

In contrast to Mr Adams, Mr Bentham did not talk at all about the responsibilities or inadequacies of others, and has to be encouraged to discuss his own examples of good practice. He then

recalls several ways in which he challenges his pupils' gender stereotypes, either directly ('Well I do make jokes like "what century are you living in?")', or via example (he had worn a pink shirt to show boys that pink is not an exclusively female domain; an act noted enthusiastically by female teachers at his school).

Mr Bentham's construction of his professional role is equally contrasting with Mr Adams'. Mr Bentham sees himself as extending the children through his role, but rather than presenting himself as a disciplinarian Mr Bentham states in his interview 'I do regard myself, you know, as the play friend'. In sum, it would be difficult to construct Mr Bentham's interview responses as typically masculine, and although his interview was not extensive (and some could not be transcribed due to sound quality) there were aspects, such as his apparent lack of self-confidence and his self-deprecation, that could be read as feminine.

Mr Castillo's presentation of subjecthood was equally distinct. He identifies as masculine, reflecting 'I just think I've always been a "blokey bloke"'. But this 'laddish' construction of masculinity (Francis 1999, 2000) is a far cry from the intellectual, disciplinarian, professional persona evoked by Mr Adams. Mr Castillo identified strongly with 'his boys' in the classroom, often conflating his references to 'the kids' with *boys* during his interview talk. Yet their behaviours and apparent needs seemed to present him with a great deal of anxiety. For example, he explains:

Mr C: ... again I come back to this role models thing, and if young boys don't have father figures at home. And I know I have three in here who are tough, *really* tough, and I know they don't have fathers at home, and I know they die for my attention all the time, between them, and the best way to get my attention is when I am physically holding them back from killing another one! ... So all three of them, it is quite sad in a way, and when I sit with them like I am with you now, calmly, they are as good as gold, and that's tough.

I: It is interesting and in that sense, does it create, if those boys are looking to you as almost a surrogate father figure, does that create an extra burden for you?

Mr C: Totally. Because I am torn between trying to achieve my targets as a group of children academically which is hard enough as it is, and at the same time, especially with this class, trying to be a role model or someone to talk to or someone to just sit with. And trying to balance those two is very difficult, because if I am here with *one*, there is 30 here who aren't getting anything and that is the challenge. ... I'll tell you about it, while I'm thinking about it, what might make a difference is getting more male teaching assistants, so that if I am having to deal with *one*, as the teacher, who they see me as, men to get more involved with other groups who are a lot calmer; that may be one way of doing it.

We see here both Mr Castillo's semi-acknowledgement of the phenomena observed in the classroom data whereby a few 'naughty boys' overwhelm his attention at the expense of the rest of the pupils, and the 'siege mentality' that this is provoking in Mr Castillo. He sees these boys as immensely, even *mortally* needy of his attention (they 'die' for it and are prepared to engage in physical attacks on others to ensure it). In this way, he appears to construct himself as a surrogate father, in both their needs of him and in his obligation to meet these needs. He is simultaneously aware of his duty to the rest of the class, although this is positioned as slightly secondary, as illustrated in his suggested solution – that male teaching assistants could be drafted in to look after the other pupils while he devotes his attention to these particular boys!

Indeed, his construction of himself as a lad/dad rather than a teacher emerges in other parts of his interview. He reflects:

I just think it is how, is there something that kids can relate to you about, being younger than my colleague next door, I sort of know about Simpsons so I can relate to them on that sort of level, I think they enjoy that. We talk about computer games and things where she can't. ... Little things like that do make a difference. Just having your finger on the pulse a bit.

And later:

Mr C: I think they relate me to PE and stuff. When we have PE lessons I dress like this, where another teacher might just be in their normal clothes and might change their footwear so they associate me with games and sports and stuff like that, more so than other teachers. ... Yes, when I'm on duty and that I play basket ball and things and try and get involved and referee their football matches and stuff. I know the other teachers don't do that, so I try and get a bit involved a bit like that, and they appreciate that. They really like it.

I: Is that girls and boys, or just boys?

Mr C: Mainly. It depends. Mixed at times.

(Note the example of his conflation of sporty boys with pupils generally.)

And like a loving, affectionate father, Mr Castillo's anxieties for his pupils seem to relate to his own needs, and concerns that they will appreciate and affirm him as a 'good dad/teacher':

I wake up every day and think 'I hope today they take something out of the day, whatever it is, I'd like them all to think one day they remember me and say he is alright we had a laugh and we learned something'.

So Mr Castillo, in spite of an overtly 'laddish' masculine and boy-centred subjectivity, is emotive, emotionally attached and needy of his pupils – features that might be considered stereotypically feminine rather than masculine. From a psychoanalytic perspective it might be fascinating to consider to what extent Mr Castillo may be projecting his own needs for intimacy and affirmation onto the 'needy' boys in his class, along with the powerful, socially classed, gendered and 'raced' narratives of agency, dependency and rescue that have permeated phantasies of teaching for centuries (Meiners 2002). Certainly there is a stark contrast between Mr Castillo's performance of masculinity and the austere, rationalized and distanced constructions of Mr Adams – perhaps reflecting socially classed inflections (Mac an Ghaill notes how middle class constructions of masculinity are invested in the rational and in intellectual competition rather than in the physical; Mac an Ghaill 1994).

Discussion

This analysis of the discourses and narratives underpinning three men teachers' classroom and interview performances of subjectivity has revealed the diversity in their productions of gender. It demonstrates three key points. Firstly, the absurdity in expecting that men teachers would teach, or relate to pupils, in predictable or uniform ways simply on the basis of their 'maleness'. The three case studies illuminate strongly contrasting pedagogic practices, disciplinary effectiveness, and approaches to pupils and to the teacher role. Mr Castillo, who admits he has tended to 'gravitate more' to boys (and hence might have been seen as the sort of male teacher required in the policy material) seems the least able of the three to control his class. And the case of Mr Bentham illustrates that men teachers ought not to be assumed to employ different pedagogic practices (or subjectivities) to women teachers simply on the basis of their 'sex'. These cases were drawn from the small number of teachers with whom I conducted fieldwork for the research project: the wider project sample does of course illustrate similar diversity. Hence this analysis undermines assumptions of stability and replication of gender identities which underpin the notion of a beneficial 'gender match' between pupil and teacher.

Secondly, the paper has illuminated the complex, shifting and nebulous nature of gendered subjectivity. The gender constructions presented have been riven with contradiction and fluidity, as evidenced by Mr Adams' unexpected feminism (and his somewhat 'feminine' apparel), and by Mr Castillo's emotional and apparently needy response to 'his boys'. The analysis has shown how masculinity and femininity are not the exclusive provinces of 'appropriately' sexed bodies (Halberstam 1998): Mr Bentham's performance of subjectivity in his teacher identity included

more aspects that would commonly be seen as feminine than masculine, and therefore arguably constitutes an example of a production of ‘male femininity’. Hence this finding supports social constructionist and poststructuralist work attempting to disentangle the common conflation between ‘sex’ and gender (for discussion, see Hawkesworth 1997; Hood-Williams 1998; Francis 2002). Indeed, the male teacher cases here extend Brayton’s (2007) analysis of heteroglossia whereby ‘competing dialects of masculinity and sexuality engage each other in a single text’ (67). Reading the cases as texts, the case of Mr Bentham incorporates dialects of femininity in this subjective heteroglossia.

However, it also needs to be reflected that the delineation of aspects of expression as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ required in this sort of analysis remains somewhat awkward and problematic – my analysis rests on aspects of performance which are clearly stereotypically gendered (such as emotionality, rationality, ‘tough discipline’, gentleness, etc); but other expressions might be far harder to categorize. The analysis also illustrates how factors other than gender – for example, Mr Bentham’s NQT status, and arguably Mr Adams’ ethnic positioning as a White overseas teacher in his ‘othering’ of his British, multi-ethnic pupils – impact on constructions of subjectivity.

What remains interesting, and what often seems to be omitted from consideration by Halberstam’s (1998, 2005) analysis, is the way in which gendered discourses may be taken up and wielded particularly effectively by embodied subjects ascribed male, to create unassailable power positions. Mr Adams’ masculinized (and classed and ‘raced’) performance of teaching is a compelling case in point. His utilization of gendered discourses of teacher role, authority, and authentic knowledge, is facilitated by his ‘maleness’. Hence although my poststructuralist reading of the data is that ‘gender’ can be separated from ‘sex’ (cf. Mr Bentham), I also concur to some extent with Paechter’s (2006) argument that we cannot ignore the influence of embodiment – in this case in the facilitation/circumvention of particular discursive productions on the part of individual subjects.

What the case of Mr Adams’ subjectivity and power also illuminates is the way in which particular gendered, education discourses and disciplinary practices can be wielded to fashion a profoundly powerful position and render a larger group (pupils) effectively powerless. Foucault (see 1977) identifies and analyses the disciplinary techniques of institutions and the discourses on which they are predicated, but does not see power as held by particular individuals; famously arguing that power is:

Never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands ... power is exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. (Foucault 1980, 98)

Yet in the case of Mr Adams, power *is* located (or at least concentrated) ‘here or there’ – specifically, in the subjectivity of Mr Adams. This is not to argue that the pupils are entirely without power (they retain power to resist in very minor ways; and maintain power relations with one another, although the expression of these is dampened by Mr Adams’ limitation of their communication). But Mr Adams’ powerful exercise of specific discourses is sustained by his potential to call on the disciplinary practices of the school to enforce his pupils’ subjugation. This example of the way in which embodied (gendered, ‘raced’, ‘classed’) subjects may draw on particular discourses and institutional practices to fashion positions of unassailable power may be particularly indicative of the schooling environment (where power dualisms based on, for example, young/old; teacher/pupil; knower/learner and so on are overt and institutionalized). It is, moreover, only a single example. And following Speer’s (2005) analysis I would want to acknowledge that Mr Adams’ classroom subjectivity is a situated accomplishment, a particular *version* of his selfhood, rather than a stable and uniform production. Yet even this isolated example would seem to some extent to destabilize Foucault’s claim that power is ‘never localized’ (1980,

98, my emphasis). And although, as I have considered, Mr Adams' mobilization of discursive power around his embodied subjectivity as White Male Teacher may be particularly facilitated by the discursive terrain of Education, it seems likely that other institutions and sites of interaction might also lend themselves to such inequality of access to discourses with which to enable productions of power. The exploration of this hypothesis, and further investigation of cases within and without educational settings, constitutes potentially critical work in exploring inequalities in subjects' access to power positions and the manifestations of subjectivity and power.

Researchers of gender will need, then, to be attuned both to the fluidity and fragility of gender constructions, which may be performed by 'non-traditionally appropriate' bodies; and also to the way in which the gendering of the body facilitates and constrains the employment of particular discourses, with implications for (unequal) power positions.

Notes

1. Of course, the extent of 'boys' underachievement' remains controversial and contested. For further detailed analysis of issues pertaining to gender and achievement see Francis and Skelton (2005).
2. For discussion of the extensive international research evidence that most pupils reject gender as a salient factor in teacher-pupil relations, and that matching teachers and children by gender and ethnicity has little impact on attainment, see Carrington and Skelton (2003) or Francis *et al.* (2008).
3. From the theoretical perspective adopted here I feel I should refer to 'teachers discursively constructed male' rather than 'men teachers', but the former phraseology is rather confusing and difficult to read.
4. Halberstam has not been concerned with 'Male femininity' (the inverse to her 'Female masculinity' topic) to date, perhaps because she appears, as Paechter (2006) observes, so invested in the promotion of masculinity.
5. The project was led by Christine Skelton (Birmingham University); with Becky Francis (Roehampton University); Bruce Carrington (University of Glasgow); Merryn Hutchings (London Metropolitan University); Barbara Read (Roehampton University); and Ian Hall (University of Newcastle).
6. I have not specified subject areas in order to ensure anonymity. However, it was interesting to see that of the four areas of subject coordination among these teachers, three were in traditionally masculine areas such as ICT and maths.
7. The validity of considering physical/aesthetic aspects in an analysis of masculinity/femininity may be controversial, but is foregrounded as integral and even central by Halberstam (1999).
8. Apparently from a Church of England marketing campaign.
9. Interestingly, Mr Adams associates this 'parental ability' with gender, suggesting that women teachers may be better at the 'strict parent' role because they have had more practice at it.

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