

Day 2: Explaining Gendered Achievement

TOBAGO WORKSHOP 2014

Jerome De Lisle

School of Education, The University of the West Indies

- There is both international theory and theory from the Caribbean.
- It is important to understand from first what perspective and what context people are theorizing and what influences their views.
- A universal theory of gender and achievement is as unlikely as pigs flying through the sky.

Theory

- In recent years, some Western societies have reported notable gender differences favouring females and there has been what feminist and pro-feminist researchers have termed a moral panic by public agencies
- The matter has reached the Parliament and notable reports have been published.

Theorizing in the UK and Australia

Boys:

Getting it right

Report on the inquiry into the education of boys

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Education and Training

- The work in Canada parallels that of the UK and in the US, the concern has quickly filtered into the public domain-where significant theorizing has occurred. Some ideas are more popular than evidence-based, however.

Theorizing in North America

- Much of the theorizing in the UK and Australia are filtered through a lens questioning whether the issue is a legitimate one in light of the traditional male privilege.
- A central theme is socialization theory and the way males enact the male identity.
- Although the original work on masculinities focus on dynamic, fluid variants, in writing on academic underachievement, theorists emphasize a dominant variant reflecting anti-school attitudes and behaviour.

Masculinities

- Failing Boys is a 1998 edited book by Debbie Epstein. Professor Epstein is now the Professor of Cultural Studies in Education at The University of Roehampton.

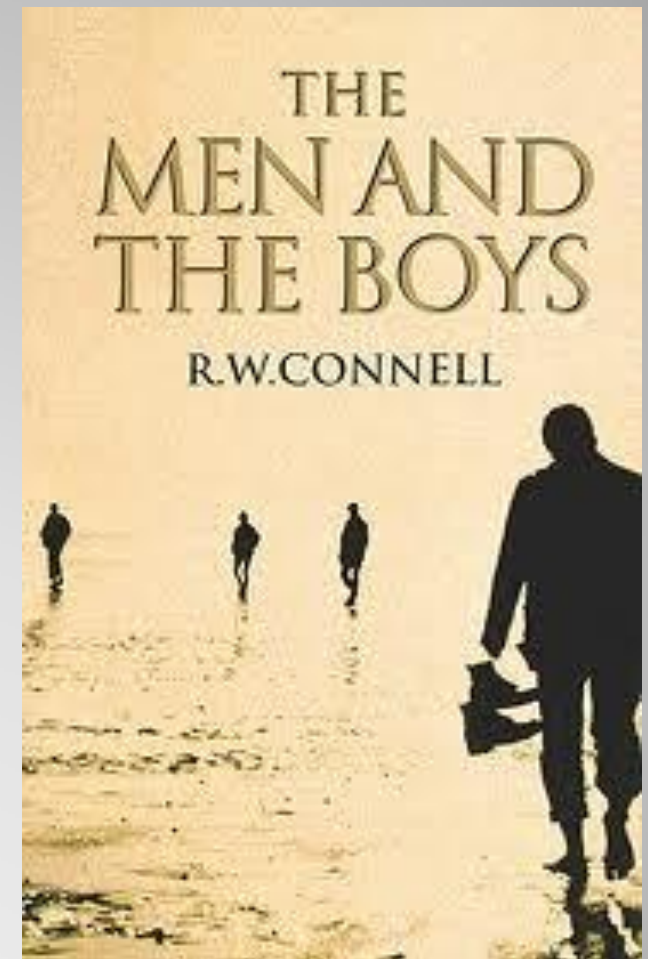


Notable International Publications

- 'Masculinities' are not the same as 'men'. To speak of masculinities is to speak about gender relations.
- Masculinities concern the *position* of men in a gender order. They can be defined as the patterns of practice by which people (both men and women, though predominantly men) engage that position.

Connell on Masculinities

http://www.raewynconnell.net/p/masculinities_20.html



Books by Connell

- The 1990-2000 work by Christine Skelton and Becky Francis essentially build and expand on the ideas of masculinities' role in underachievement; however, the dynamic nature of masculinity and the concept of multiple masculinities are not always emphasized.



Anti-school masculinities?

- Several pro-feminist males such as Wayne Martino and Bob Lingard have also contributed to theory building in this area.
- Lingard (1998) argued that the *"'What about the boys?' refrain in contemporary educational discourse is one element of a broader masculinity politics which attempts to argue that men are the new disadvantaged and that masculinity is under siege and in crisis in the face of the putative success of the feminist reform project"*

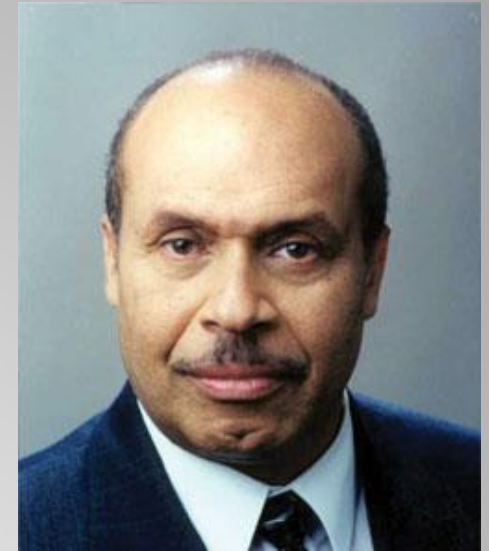


The pro-feminists

- What are some versions of masculinities that exist in Tobago?
- Which ones are anti-school/anti-learning?
- Which ones are pro-school and pro-learning?
- How well does masculinity theory explain boys underachievement in school?

**Reflecting on the International
Work**

- In 1986 Errol Miller wrote a treatise called "Men at Risk". He followed this up with a 1996 work on Marginalization of the Black Male. He proposed a marginalization theory centering his ideas on the relations between the core metropole and the periphery.



Meanwhile in the Caribbean

- By the 1990s, the strong sociology work in the Mona Campus at UWI had turned attention to the issue. Mark Figueroa proposed “male privileging” from his observation of Jamaican parenting of boys. Barry Chevannes focus is somewhat similar but more nuanced in his work, Learning to be a Man.



The emergence of the sociologists

- Both internationally and in the region many of the theories developed were built by researchers in the disciplines of sociology and feminism (They were not school teachers and they used observational methods).
- Work by educators like Errol Miller emerged early. Some as in the case of Hyacinth Evans was focused more broadly in describing school life, but “discovered’ school as a gendered reality, with that gendering unique to Caribbean postcolonial culture.

The arrival of the educationists



Caribbean Theorists

- Where do you think the problem of male academic underachievement is located?
- Why is one explanation likely?
- Is masculinity theory blaming the victim?

Time to reflect

- Evans (2001) is swayed from the seductive arguments of her pro-feminist colleagues who suggest that the community and family are dominant influences and admits that differential skills and dispositions may be attributable to differential experiences at school.
- She observes, for example, the differential experiences of lower stream students and the more frequent negative evaluations received from teachers.
- Lower stream classes consisted mostly of boys (p. 139) and the A classes of girls (p. 140).

- These classrooms were also conducive to the creation of fearful and passive femininities in which the female was made to feel ashamed because of her physical appearance.
- *6c-Teacher [to girl]: “See yu, yu just big and fat and lazy. Don’t come here tomorrow with those haristyle[s]. Plait your hair and put in your clips . . . You come here with hairstyle and don’t put anything in your head”.*

- **For Kutnick, Jules, & Layne, far from being a passive agent, the school was an active creator of specific masculinities and femininities -**
- *"Teacher - Let's talk about discipline. Shoes, socks, no tight skirts. We have more problems with the female students and the uniform. Girls with tight skirts. Now girls, it's a mating game going on with you. You feel by having your skirts tight you can out do the other girls. But boys in the school would not be looking at you because they are at a different level. The older men outside would be looking and then you would be in danger. (p. 22)*

- **Even the way the classroom was organized and managed was important, as the observation noted -**
- *"Most classrooms were run in a traditional fashion, with the teacher at the front of the room. The traditional teaching style, combined with few examples of assigned seating for the students, allowed low attaining and disinterested students to gravitate towards the back of the room (away from teacher attention) and for sex segregation. Seating boys next to girls was used as a 'punishment' for misbehaving boys. (p. 35)*

- **The situation was not different in the primary school, with pedagogy strongly influenced by the SEA. The observers noted that teaching was often very rapid, as coverage was the main goal –**
- *Observer Field notes . . . the speed of the question and answer sessions, the lack of praise for correct work and lack of help offered to pupils who have trouble with their work. Speed of questioning and need to provide the correct answer dominated the classrooms. While observing in School 3 at one point, the researcher reported: "This man is teaching so fast that I can barely get anything down!"*

- As in the case of Nancy Cole, new Caribbean Researchers grounded in the field of measurement of emerged.
- These studies have used large scale databases; however, new techniques which allow multiple factors to be evaluated such as multilevel modelling have not been used sufficiently.
- Multilevel modelling allows us to see many factors interacting across different institutions at different levels.

Achievement & Assessment

- **There are no simple answers or cookbook solutions.**
- The theories are not mutually exclusive. For example, Mark Figueroa applies his theory to teaching-learning contexts.
- Similarly, if males are allowed to run free at home and face restricted teaching-learning environments in the classroom, they are likely to have difficulty.

What should practitioners do with all this theory?

- To be useful in our context, the theory must explain why some boys do less well. These are Rural boys, Tobago boys, some urban boys.
- The theories must also accommodate the multicultural nature of Trinidad and Tobago society and the recognition of plantation pedagogy.
- Theories must recognize that students face a number of overlapping sub-systems that influence achievement.

Theory must be applicable

Errol Miller
Male Marginalization

Odette Parry
Anti-School Masculinities

Sociologists----Feminist Sociology--Educationists----Equity Theorists

Hyacinth Evans
School Organization

Peter Kutnick, Anthony Layne, Vena Jules
Teacher Differential Behaviour & Expectations

Selwyn Figueroa
Male Privileging in Parenting & Socialization

SOCIETAL: Male marginalization (Miller, 1991, 1997), Absence of male role models, absentee fathers.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: Changing Assessments, feminization of teaching and schooling

COMMUNITY LEVEL-Aspirations/expectations for students and view of schooling (Chevannes, 2001)

FAMILY LEVEL Socialization and parenting practices (Figueroa, 2004)

SCHOOL ORGANIZATION: Streaming (Evans, 2001, 2006)

CLASSROOM: Teacher beliefs & practices (Kutnick, Jules, & Layne, 1997)

Differential Achievement of Males

INDIVIDUAL: Anti-school behaviours among males/Peer effects (Parry, 2004)
Masculinities/Development of Male Identity (Figueroa, 1997, 2002)

Whole School Approaches

DAY 2-AFTERNOON

- Whole school approaches are institutional or organizational in nature. The idea is similar to systematic change-you change several sub-systems at the same time and the intervention is conducted in several or all classes.

What is a whole school approach?

- The burden isn't on one teacher or one classroom; it is on several and teachers can ease that burden by collaborating.
- Moreover, other things in the school are changing to support the required change, including resources.

Why do whole school approaches work?

- A good idea is to introduce boy friendly pedagogies throughout the school. Support this initiative by providing training and resource. For example, you can build a library with useful textbooks and teachers can work in study circles and professional learning communities to share their actions and experiences

Whole school gender approaches

- This is not necessarily focused on boys, but considers all gender issues, including those that affect girls.
- Issues that affect girls should not be neglected and may be significant considering the culture and context.

A gender responsive school

- Several interventions are focused on social competencies. These might be regarded as strongly linked with pro-school attitudes and learning.
- Such approaches work well especially in disadvantaged communities.

**Resilience & Emotional Literacy
Building at School Level**

- When you plan whole school change, get everyone involved and develop an action plan which identified which areas you plan to alter.
- If you already have a School Development Plan, use this to capture the whole school focus.
- You can have a whole school focus on instructional targets as well-such as writing and reading.

Planning whole school change

- The most elements are professional learning communities and collaboration. Teachers learn well formally and informally in groups and can support each other in the change process. This is a strong Trinidad and Tobago finding from funded studies.
- In the UK, this collaboration is extended to other schools in a network or cluster arrangement.

The most important elements of whole school change