

Captured becomings: An assemblage of sexual difference, neoliberal capitalism and bodies in the boys' education debate.

MEd (Research) thesis by Brad Gobby

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institutions.

Brad Gobby - June 2006.

Abstract

This study investigates the current influence of conservative political, social and economic forces in structuring the perspectives of five pre-service teachers on the education of boys. I argue that these perspectives are constituted by a conservative assemblage of essentialist discourses of sexuality and neoliberal capitalism and these largely extend the indomitable power of conservative forces increasingly shaping social relations inside and outside the field of education.

The interviews reveal that conservative discourses of sexual difference dominate the perspectives on boys and their schooling and this reliance on essentialist notions of sexuality effectively gives rise to a conflicting roles discourse that informs a recuperative masculinity politics and feminist backlash. I argue the social transformation effected by neoliberal economics is largely silenced when discussing boys and education and this allows participants to largely ‘blame’ feminism for the transformation of labour markets, work patterns, family relationships and gendered subjectivities, silencing its powerful influence. I contend personal insecurity and anxiety generated by neoliberal economic transformation have proliferated conservative discourses of sexuality, producing a defence of rigid sexual boundaries that proscribe the potential of male and female bodies by capturing their ‘becoming’, and to this extent I argue that conservative discourses of sexual difference are coextensive with the aims of neoliberal capitalism. However, rather than position men as victims, I argue the conservative assemblage including the boys’ debate make available diverse ways for many individuals to experience their body powerfully, with the attributes and capacities of hegemonic masculinity being proliferated. The boys’ debate is one resource for producing powerful subjectivities while extending the territory of the conservative assemblage increasingly constituting our world.

Methodologically this is a qualitative inquiry that utilizes discourse analysis extensively informed by poststructural theories of knowledge, power and the subject. I also make connections with the work of Deleuze and Guattari and the theories of corporeal feminism, including a theory of the body as a machinic assemblage in order to interrogate the conservative territorialisation of subjectivity and social relations. Finally, I argue the need to consider the alignment of discourses of sexual difference, neoliberal capitalism and the body in order to create a future beyond the limits currently defined by our culture.

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