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Struggles to subvert the gendered field: Issues of masculinity, rurality and class

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Abstract

This article explores the complex struggles associated with intersections of class, rurality and masculinity and the ways in which such intersections work to preserve a gendered status quo within and beyond school communities in Australia. Drawing on the stories of Monica and Phoebe, two teachers who understand schooling as a site of contestation, resistance and possibility for gender justice, the article draws on the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu to make visible the struggles for power arising from the gendered distribution of capital in schools located in low socio-economic rural communities. In making sense of these struggles, we identify strategies of conservation that seek to reinscribe gender inequities and preserve the field and the taken-for-granted understandings of females and femininity as subordinate to males and masculinity within it. We also identify pedagogies of subversion employed by Phoebe and Monica and highlight the potential of these practices to disrupt the field in ways that seek to broaden and transform the gendered habitus of students.

Introduction

Central to the pursuit of gender justice in schools is recognition of the mechanisms through which the gendered distribution of capital is inequitably reinscribed in ways that constrain students' lifeworlds. Such recognition involves an awareness of the complex struggles associated with intersections of class, location, gender and schooling and more specifically, an understanding of the key ways that such intersections work to preserve a gendered status quo within and beyond school communities. Also central to pursuing gender justice goals in schooling is an acknowledgement of how the valuing of dispositions associated with valorised constructions of masculinity is compounded by broader institutionalised gender inequities in spheres such as sport, the media and the family. This article explores the complex struggles associated with intersections of class, rurality and masculinity and the ways that such intersections work to preserve a gendered status quo within school and local communities in Australia; communities that can be considered to be 'beyond the metropolis' (Kenway, Kraack & Hickey-Moody, 2006).

This article explores the stories of two teachers, Phoebe and Monica (pseudonyms are used throughout for the teachers and their schools), who understand schooling as a site of contestation, resistance and possibility for gender justice (see Giroux, 2003). Through the voices of both teachers who are committed to gender justice, we draw on Bourdieu's work to explore the struggles for power arising from the gendered distribution of capital in their rural schooling contexts. In particular, we identify the strategies of conservation that seek to reinscribe gender inequities. Such strategies which, as Bourdieu would explain, are hostile to Monica's and Phoebe's concerns for gender justice, can be theorised as struggles to preserve the field and defend the taken-for-granted understandings of females and femininity as subordinate to males and masculinity within it. We also identify, through these teachers' problematising of such strategies, practices of subversion that illustrate awareness of how symbolic violence reproduces gender hierarchies. To these ends, we

highlight the potential of these practices to disrupt the field in ways that seek to broaden and transform the gendered habitus of students.

This article draws on data from a broader study that explored issues of gender, masculinity and transformative pedagogy across a range of primary and secondary schools within Queensland, Australia (see Keddie & Mills, forthcoming). The research involved observations of classroom pedagogy and individual interviews with teachers. The two teachers who feature in this paper hold teaching and administration positions in rural and remote primary schools. Phoebe is in her mid 50s and has been teaching for about 30 years. Her experience spans a diverse range of urban and rural contexts within Australian state schooling systems. Over the past ten or so years, Phoebe has held deputy principal roles in three different schools. Her current deputy position is at a state primary school in a rural provincial city in central coastal Queensland. Monica is about 50 years old and has been teaching in the upper primary area for approximately 18-19 years. Eighteen months ago Monica was appointed to the role of teacher-principal at a small rural state primary school of only 57 students in central Queensland. Prior to this she taught for about 16 years at a state primary school of 200 students in a small low socio-economic coastal area.

The data presented in this paper were gathered primarily from four lengthy interviews (two for each teacher) over a period of several months in 2005. The interviews sought to explore philosophies and beliefs about what is important in the teaching of boys; issues and implications of masculinity within and beyond the classroom; the socially transformative capacities of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in the teaching of boys; and how broader structures within schools might enable or constrain work with boys. Interviews were conducted at the teachers' schools and were semi-structured and relatively informal in terms of organically exploring particular issues relating to the focus questions. We were particularly drawn to these two teachers' gendered engagement with their local communities.

The struggles to conserve and transform Monica's and Phoebe's schooling contexts form the parameters for the two main sections of the article. In the first section we identify the strategies of conservation that seek to reinscribe gender inequities and preserve the field and the taken-for-granted understandings of gender within it. This is followed by an account of pedagogies of subversion employed by Phoebe and Monica in their desire for change – practices that have the potential to disrupt the field in ways that seek to broaden and transform the gendered habitus of students. We begin, however, with a brief introduction to some of the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu, particularly with respect to how these help us to make sense of struggles for gender justice.

Bourdieu and the conservation and transformation of the gendered status quo

It is well established that strategies working to conserve the gendered status quo in spheres such as sport, the media and the family amplify students' and teachers' gendered behaviours (see Connolly & Healy, 2004; Robinson, 2000). Such patterns of conservation often reinscribe the 'natural order of things' – the existing inequitable relations of gender and power in schooling contexts. Bourdieu's notion of *field* – and more specifically, the struggles to preserve the field in relation to notions of gender – illuminates the workings behind the pervasiveness of such patterns of conservation. Also referred to as 'markets' or 'games', social contexts or fields of action are arenas of competition; the sites of struggle for power and influence between those unequally endowed in the objects and the weapons of struggle: capital. Individuals bring to the competition the capital or (relative) power that is at their disposal.

Such theorising is useful for understanding the struggles for power within the context of gender relations and more specifically identifying the patterns of conduct that can reinscribe or subvert inequitable relations of masculinity and femininity. Within these struggles, as Bourdieu contends,

participants have differing aims – 'some will seek to preserve the status quo, others to change it – with differing chances of winning or losing, depending on where they are located in the structured space of positions' (Thompson, 1991, p. 14). Position in the field inclines agents toward particular patterns of conduct: 'those who occupy the dominant positions in a field tend to pursue strategies of conservation (of the existing distribution of capital) while those relegated to subordinate locations are more liable to deploy strategies of subversion' (Wacquant, 1998, p. 222). Such a framework can be used to explain inclinations towards preserving the dominant position of males and masculinity within the gendered status quo and the subordinate position of females and femininity. Here, struggles for power are theorised as arising from the gendered distribution of capital.

Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence – a term he uses to describe 'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 167) – has also been drawn on to theorise gendered relations (see, for example, Dillabough, 2004; Krais, 1993; Mottier, 2002). Such violence, rather than being explicit or overt, works to reproduce the hierarchies of the social world through the 'way in which people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them' (Connolly & Healy, 2004, p. 15). It is the taken-for-grantedness of symbolic violence that makes it central to the endorsement of gender inequities through the promotion of gendered dispositions traditionally associated with masculinity and the subordination of dispositions traditionally associated with femininity. Certainly, many of us misrecognise the symbolic violence to which we are subjected as something natural, simply 'the way of the world'. Further, as Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002, p. 92) suggest, such complicity with 'dominant vision[s] of the world [occurs] not because we necessarily agree with [them], or because [they are] in our interests, but because there does not seem to be any alternative'.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which describes our deep-seated ways of being, can, through gender lenses, denote the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress and manners associated with masculinity and femininity which are inculcated by everyday experiences within sites such as the family, the peer group and the school. Implying habit, or unthinking-ness in actions, the habitus is a 'strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Our gendered habitus, which disposes us towards particular ways of being, without strictly determining them, involves dispositions that reinscribe the inequitable dispersion of capital, for example, the valorisation of 'masculine' dispositions that are synonymous with power, control and domination (see Connell, 1995; 2000). Habitus is:

> Bourdieu's attempt to overcome the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism, to reconcile agency and structure … Bourdieu has developed the concept of habitus to demonstrate the ways in which, not only is the body in the social world, but also, the ways in which the social world is in the body (Bourdieu, 1981). (Reay, 1995, p. 354)

While Kenway and McLeod (2004, p. 528), and others (Jenkins, 2002; Nash, 1990), highlight the 'contestation over the extent to which this is ultimately an account of social determination and reproduction, where the habitus is reducible to the effects of the field, or whether there is space for the improvisation of agents', Bourdieu's (1990) work insists on the generative capacities of dispositions. Along these lines, as Reay's (1997, p. 227) work demonstrates, 'much of the dynamism of habitus is the product of the interconnection of habitus with Bourdieu's related concept of field'. To these ends, practices should not be seen as simply the product of habitus, but as 'the product of the *relation between* the habitus, on the one hand, and the specific social contexts or "fields" within which individuals act, on the other' (Thompson, 1991, pp. 13-14, emphasis original). Such dynamism, as Bourdieu (1977; 1990) points out, inheres potential to generate a wide repertoire of possible actions, simultaneously enabling the individual to draw on transformative and

constraining courses of action (Reay, 2004; Mills, forthcoming *a*). However, the addendum in Bourdieu's work is always an emphasis on the constraints and demands that impose themselves on people. In this paper we acknowledge such constraints in our detailing of the many ways through which the gendered habitus *lends* itself to reproduction rather than transformation of inequitable understandings of masculinity and femininity. However, we also want to emphasise the transformative possibilities of the teachers' work considered here, and to these ends, the work of Bourdieu is also helpful.

In this paper we make use of Bourdieu in an attempt to make visible the constraints which impact on teachers' efforts to redress gender injustice in schools located in low socio-economic rural communities while also giving examples of teachers' transformative endeavours. Regarding the latter, we highlight the situations of rupture and transformation in the field that occur when there is no longer acceptance of the rules of the game. Such situations involve making visible and subverting the taken-for-granted assumptions about gender that reinscribe a game that privileges males and 'the masculine' and subordinates females and 'the feminine'. As Bourdieu (1988, p. 172) posits, situations of rupture and transformation happen when some of us:

> leave the race, that is to say, the competitive struggle implying acceptance of the rules of the game laid down and … take up a struggle which we may call revolutionary in so far as it aims to establish alternative goals and more or less completely … redefine the game and the moves which permit one to win it.

Bourdieu would argue that to pave the way for gender justice, such a revolutionary struggle is needed. The two teachers considered here undertake such struggles in their local communities.

The gendered distribution of capital: Strategies of conservation

In our interviews with Phoebe she talks about how her political agenda, and in particular her feminist principles, have sometimes been difficult to pursue. At one particular coeducational rural school, where she spent six years as a deputy head, she felt her 'feminist principles' being 'eroded' – she found herself excluded from important school decisions and effectively diminished by the male principal and other male deputy principal. Reflecting on her experience at this school, Phoebe believes that the male members of the school administration did not exclude her with any premeditated 'malice' or 'forethought' – they were simply 'blokey blokes' who socialised together on a Friday afternoon and saw her as a woman who 'didn't fit the mould'. As she explains, 'I don't think they knew how to deal with an assertive woman like me'.

Similarly, Monica talks of being female as a 'major hurdle' that she had to 'overcome' 'before [she could] be accepted as being worth anything' in her new role as teacher-principal. Monica explains that 'it's a disadvantage being female' within the 'male culture' of her school's broader farming community where women are devalued and 'men are just generally regarded as more useful'. Monica describes this small rural environment as 'very predictable in a lot of cases' in terms of the endorsing of gender stereotypes, even though 'a lot of the women work alongside the men as well as doing other work'. When Monica arrived at the school, she felt 'covert' and 'overt' resistance 'not just from the kids' – the parents in particular (both male and female) made their thoughts about her clear through what she describes as some 'very blunt' comments like: 'the kids really like to have a man as principal'.

Bourdieu's notion of field is useful for making sense of the struggles confronting these teachers in terms of efforts by others to preserve conventional and inequitable notions of gender. Such struggles illuminate the unequal endowment of capital that defines these teachers' positionings and power in the masculinised 'game' that characterises their school and its communities. Through

these lenses it can be seen that, while both Phoebe and Monica enjoy high status positions as deputy principal and principal, broader masculinist cultures shape the game and the reality that legitimate power and authority are associated with 'maleness' – a 'legitimacy' that is used to effectively undermine their authority as senior administrators. Here, the valued capital aligns with the dominant Western discourses that privilege the male body and masculinised knowledge and practice (Jones, 1993; Reid, 1999; Epstein & Johnson, 1994; Robinson, 2000). Drawing on Wacquant (1998), we can see that differing positions in the game incline agents toward particular patterns of conduct: Phoebe's male colleagues and Monica's community, who may be seen as occupying dominant positions, pursue strategies of conservation (of the existing distribution of gendered capital), while Monica and Phoebe, who in many ways are subordinate to these dominant positions, resist these strategies in their struggles for power and influence. Unfortunately, as Monica argues, the patterns of conduct that work to maintain the gendered status quo seem to be enduring in her schooling context – despite her efforts to gain the respect of her broader schooling community, she says: 'they would still be really happy if when I leave that it's a bloke that comes in'.

Monica and Phoebe understand their positions as female principal/teachers through lenses that recognise the sites of struggle within their rural and isolated contexts that work to endorse conventional notions of gender and circumscribe and delimit students' lifeworlds in terms of what they see as possible (see, for example, Yates & McLeod, 1994; Connolly & Healy, 2004). One of these sites of struggle for Monica – and one that illuminated the inequitable valuing of cultural capital associated with masculinity that she saw as further exacerbated by the conservatism of her rural context – related to an incident regarding the introduction of a female cheer squad at her previous school in a low socio-economic area where she was deputy head. Monica tells of her objection to her principal allowing the girls to form a cheer squad for the boys' football team:

> ... he wanted to let this particular group of girls start a cheer squad for the boys. And … he could not understand – especially in a low socio-economic area when you're struggling all of the time with all of that stereotype stuff … and he just could not understand how offensive that was. Like this was right in the middle of those – whichever football club it was – multiple rape charges – and he couldn't understand the gender issues that were involved in that ...

In Bourdieuian terms, we might theorise the patterns of conduct of Monica's principal as inclined towards a conserving of the existing gendered status quo as the 'natural order of things' – simply the way of the world. Such inclinations, as Monica suggests, seem not to dispose him to understanding 'how offensive' a cheerleading squad might be, particularly in light of the issues she raises. As with the blokey blokes at Phoebe's previous school, it seems that such inclinations presuppose a taken-for-grantedness or naturalness of the gendered status quo. In this respect, there is both a non-recognition of their complicity in perpetuating gender inequities and a failure to understand the necessity to challenge them. Conversely, Monica, who, as a female, and more specifically a feminist (but also a deputy head), occupies a subordinate position to her principal, *is*, as Bourdieu would theorise, in her struggles for power and influence, inclined towards resistant or subversive behaviour. In this respect, she tries to disrupt a gendered status quo that she sees as likely to trivialise and undermine the girls at her school and, of course, reinscribe a gendered habitus that positions females and 'the feminine' as subordinate to males and 'the masculine'.

More broadly, both Monica and Phoebe recognise how such patterns of conservation are institutionalised within such spheres as competitive sport, the media, and the family. Both teachers express concern about how these spheres shape their students' gendered behaviours in constraining ways. Monica, for instance, talks further about football culture rewarding certain behaviours in boys such as aggression, violence and anti-female attitudes that are 'not what we want to encourage in

our citizens'. More broadly, and consistent with the tenor of research in this area that understands male-dominated competitive sport as the 'last bastion of masculinity' (see Hickey & Fitzclarence, 1997), Monica criticises the adulation our society bestows on (mostly male) sporting heroes:

> The main recognition from society - well look at it. Who are our heroes? Who can we afford to put the money into to create these superstars? It's our sportsmen. It isn't our thinkers - it's sportspeople who are focused on.

Phoebe, in commenting on the valued dispositions or habitus associated with hegemonic constructions of masculinity in low socio-economic rural communities, reflects on how many of the boys she has come into contact with associate being a boy with exertions of power and displays of physicality and attention seeking behaviour. Phoebe says that there have been 'so many instances' where boys have attempted to exert their power to display their physical strength or to dominate teacher time and attention. Indeed, Phoebe says that physical assault perpetrated by male students against other students and teachers is 'more common than you think. It happens a lot'. She relayed for us a particularly disturbing incident of violence that she suffered at the hands of a physically well-developed 12 year old boy which demonstrated how her authority as a teacher could be transgressed and undermined within masculinist discourses that align legitimate power with 'maleness' (see Jones, 1993; Robinson, 2000). As the following excerpt illustrates, Phoebe locates such behaviours within broader patterns of gender conservation, institutionalised in such cultural artefacts and products as sport, the media and the family:

> ... I think it's based a lot in how boys see themselves and position themselves as a masculine identity within our society ... And the million influences on that including sport and the media and all the stereotypical ways that both boys and girls can be treated at home, in schools, things that they watch on TV, things that they see in computer games and so on. So,

> it's a complex issue ... you have to look at not only their individual family circumstances, but you also have to look at their social roles within their [socio-economic] class, within their family and within the wider environment – [as well as] the school environment.

Both Monica and Phoebe connect broader patterns to preserve the gendered status quo – associated with structures of class and rurality, and especially the disenfranchisement associated with being from a low socio-economic background – with boys' enactments of domination, aggression and violence. Monica, for instance, while noting that in all of the contexts where she has taught, 'the boys generally try to dominate most areas', observes a 'big cultural difference' between the gendered behaviours of boys and girls in contexts characterised by high levels of rurality and high levels of poverty. Consistent with research in this area (see Connolly, 2004; Connolly & Healy, 2004; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Yates & McLeod, 1994), she notes how these contexts can at times exacerbate gender stereotypes with especially negative consequences in terms of the prevalence of boys' overbearing behaviours and girls' lack of self esteem.

Phoebe, referring to boys' disruptive behaviours, also sees poverty as tending to amplify levels of aggression in schools and talks of the lack of personal resources in such environments in terms of alternative forms of conflict resolution:

> ... for many years I've worked in low socio-economic areas and ... it seems – I'm not saying that middle class and wealthy boys can't behave aggressively, but it seems to me that there is a higher degree of it in low socio-economic areas. Whether it is because – poverty frustrates everybody, or whether it's lack of education, or whether it's poor skills ... they resort to aggression – physical and verbal ... because they have such limited resources of problem solving and dealing with conflicts and so on.

While not wanting to ascribe to the sense of poverty-as-deficit that may be drawn from Phoebe's comments, her observations, nonetheless, further allude to how issues of class can exacerbate struggles for power evident in some boys' efforts to conserve a gendered status quo that maintains a dominant position for them as male. Such struggles, as Phoebe suggests, can also be associated with a mismatch of cultural capital between the dominant values of schooling and these boys' working class home environments (see Connolly, 2004). With schools assuming middle-class culture, attitudes and values, we can see how Phoebe's students might lack the cultural capital necessary for academic success – with regard to 'the explicit and implicit values, knowledge, attitudes to and relationship with academic culture required for success in school' (Henry, Knight, Lingard & Taylor, 1988, p. 233). As Grenfell and James (1998, p. 21) point out, 'proximity to this orthodoxy at birth has a determinate effect on habitus not only in ways of thinking which more closely approximate that of schools but in terms of a whole cultural disposition'. Indeed, 'the most privileged students … owe the habits, behaviour and attitudes which help them directly in pedagogic tasks to their social origins' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964; translated by and cited in Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 21). To these ends, the background experiences of the boys in Phoebe's school as 'other', are likely to be a liability for their own education (Henry et al., 1988; Francis, 2006).

Further illuminating the implications of the mismatch between the cultural capital of schooling and that of students from home environments struggling with poverty, but talking more broadly about her experiences with particular families and issues of masculinity and violence, Phoebe mentions the time at the same school when she was 'verbally assaulted' by a male parent who 'threatened to break both my arms'. She says 'many parents will say to you – oh I've taught my kid to – if he's getting picked on to hit them back. You know and they don't see anything wrong with that'. Such observations point to some of the discrepancies in terms of the cultural resources associated with masculinity that might be drawn on in struggles for power and influence. Whereas the valued

dispositions or habitus associated with hegemonic constructions of masculinity in areas struggling with poverty may be associated with demonstrations of physical toughness and aggressive displays, the cultural capital associated with a middle class hegemonic masculinity tends to align more with the dominant values and requirements of formal schooling (Connell, 2000; Connolly, 2004). And, of course, this 'middle-classness' of schooling works in ways that ensure that this masculine hierarchy remains intact (see Connell, 1995; 2000).

Reflecting on boys' tendencies to 'try and control what happens in the classroom' regardless of their broader environments, Monica also talks about family influence and the messages particular boys in her rural teaching context receive about 'rightful male dominance' and what is valued in terms of being male. She describes a particular boy in her current school from a 'property', or farming, background with:

> ... a family history to live up to … His father has been the naughty boy in school and so that was – even though he was a bright boy – where he saw his value was in being, you know, this badly behaved person because that's what dad had done. He would not compete with girls. He came from a family where the – the mother was seen to be – worshipped … [or] on a pedestal but no other women or girls really featured ...

While we strongly reject 'boys as disadvantaged' discourses, such observations do point to the ways in which these working class and rural boys (and of course in similar ways, working class and rural girls), can be at a disadvantage in the classroom by virtue of their reduced access to the cultural capital of the dominant (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995; Mills, forthcoming *b*). The educational underachievement experienced by many of these working class boys is closely connected to the challenges Phoebe and Monica face in their respective schooling contexts.

In the next section we foreground explicit attempts to subvert and transform the strategies of conservation that perpetuate the inequitable distribution of gendered capital in these teachers' schools. Such acts of subversion are informed by Phoebe's and Monica's understandings of how particularly the gendered, but also classed, dispositions or habitus, of their students, are reproduced through the processes of symbolic violence – a violence, as indicated earlier, 'which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 167). Significantly, in terms of pursuing gender justice, the observations and comments hitherto indicate these teachers' awareness of some of the principal ways that such violence works to insidiously reproduce the hierarchies of the social world. Many subordinated by such violence, nevertheless, accept and play a role in reproducing its effects. For example, in Phoebe's and Monica's situations, teachers, students and parents are complicit in endorsing the gendered assumptions legitimising 'masculine' authority, the aggression and misogyny of competitive male-dominated sport, or boys' disruptive behaviours in contexts struggling with poverty – assumptions that contribute to an internalisation of gender inequities. However, in their pedagogies of subversion, Monica and Phoebe try to make transparent, disrupt and transform some of the symbolic violence and patterns of conservation within and beyond their schooling communities that reinscribe such inequities. While many of the pedagogies we detail here, particularly those associated with structural considerations and critical literacy activities, are commonly drawn on by those seeking to teach in gender just ways (see Keddie & Mills, forthcoming), we seek to foreground pedagogies of subversion that have the potential to remedy the issues of masculinity associated with the cultural capital mismatches between schools and home environments struggling with poverty and isolation. We propose that it is these pedagogies that represent the most potential to transform the gendered dispositions that constrain the learning and lifeworlds of students.

The gendered distribution of capital: Pedagogies of subversion

Both teachers' understandings about issues of identity and justice frame what they see as possible. In particular, like Bourdieu (1990), Phoebe and Monica insist on the generative capacities of dispositions. That is, while habitus *lends* itself to reproduction rather than transformation, the latter possibility is not excluded. Along these lines, Phoebe expresses a desire for her students to demonstrate a greater valuing of difference, 'whether it's transcending gender or race or choice of lifestyle or whatever', and Monica aims to facilitate a broadening of her students' perspectives. To these ends, both teachers try to create in their classrooms an atmosphere that 'engenders respect' for others' differences. In this regard, Phoebe refers to the dispositions associated with traditional masculinity that she sees as important to transform – stereotypical dispositions, as she describes, associated with such things as homophobia, football, drinking alcohol and verbally abusing girls. In similar ways, Monica seeks to transform such stereotypical dispositions of masculinity. She expresses concern about how particular contextual factors at her school – like the over-representation of boys in her class; boys' tendencies to dominate; and girls' tendencies to lack confidence and self esteem – perpetuate conventional dispositions of masculinity which she describes as engendering in her male students a sense of entitlement and 'rightful male dominance'.

In attempting to transform such dispositions, Phoebe and Monica try to disrupt the taken-for-granted assumptions that support such ways of being. In this respect, they scaffold situations that seek to rupture and transform the gendered rules of the game that privilege males and 'the masculine' while females and 'the feminine' are relegated to subordinate positions (Bourdieu, 1988; Alloway, 1995). Phoebe, for instance, talks about how her 'feminist inclinations' shape an 'upfront' practice that supports girls and femininity overtly and challenges the symbolic violence that marginalises on the basis of gender, as she describes in the following example:

> I've been very overt with supporting the girls, for example, and making sure that their issues of self esteem are addressed. And I make it a point of challenging the boys or anybody else I hear, who says things like 'What are you? A girl?' ... I will say to them – not only are you insulting the person that you are talking to, but you are insulting girls as well – by saying that being a girl is a bad thing. And I'll say 'I'm a girl – I think it's a pretty good thing being a girl and I won't put up with you using that sort of terminology' ... So I am upfront about where I stand with kids. I make it explicit.

Attempting to rupture and rework the gendered dispositions of their students also involves structural considerations and critical literacy activities. Phoebe, for example, ensures that her classroom organisation addresses the ways that particular boys 'dominate situations'. She arranges her classroom so that both girls and boys have equitable access to the physical space, and resources such as computers. Monica, on the other hand, mindful of the broader gendered climate of her school community and the predomination of boys in her class that she feels undermine girls' self-esteem (as she says, 'they're so used to taking the backseat'), ensures that girls in her class 'have a voice'. Despite some reluctance from the girls and great resistance from the boys, she insists on a female student to represent the girls on the school's student council. Both teachers also attempt to transform students' gendered dispositions through scaffolding critical literacy activities that problematise stereotypical assumptions about masculinity and femininity. Phoebe, for example, draws on resources such as picture books, toys and media advertising to scaffold her students' critical deconstruction of gender stereotypes.

Such pedagogies of subversion are far from uncommon and while they are significant in beginning to rupture the taken-for-granted understandings of gender that constrain students' life-worlds, they can be limited – particularly in terms of their likely abstraction from the gendered realities of these teachers' communities associated with the issues of rurality and class that both Phoebe and Monica

position as potent in endorsing conventional notions of gender and delimiting what students see as possible. Indeed, our dispositions 'enable us to recognise the possibilities for action and at the same time prevent us from recognising other possibilities' (Codd, 1990, p. 139). Pedagogies more likely to subvert and transform the insidious reproductive tendencies of the gendered habitus, we contend, require exploring generative ways to address the misalignment between the middle class cultural capital of the schooling environments wherein Monica and Phoebe teach, and the gendered and classed dispositions within these teachers' broader school communities. Addressing this misalignment is particularly important in finding ways to transform problematic constructions of masculinity. Consistent with Connolly's (2004) research, and resonating with the influential work of Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett (1982) that explores connections between family and school environments, the poor educational performance of boys from working class (and we would add, in Australia, rural) backgrounds is associated with this misalignment. As Bourdieu would argue, educational differences are frequently 'misrecognised' as resulting from 'individual giftedness' rather than from class based differences, ignoring the fact that the abilities measured by scholastic criteria often stem not from natural 'gifts' but from 'the greater or lesser affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educational system or the criteria which define success within it' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 22). Certainly, the freedom, independence and responsibility these boys have in their lives beyond school, for example, tends not to align with the high levels of structure, regulation and control of most schools. Further, Connolly (2004) illustrates how working class boys and their tendency to express their masculinity externally through physicality and strength invariably reject or rebel against the middle class values of schooling. Resonating with the work of others (Davies, 2000; Skelton, 2001), Connolly (2004, p. 217) points here to the 'fundamental mismatch between the dominant form of masculinity that some (boys) tend to subscribe to and the demands of the school' and associates this with many working class boys' poor dispositions towards education and their ability to be academically successful.

Monica's philosophy about her role as schooling children for life beyond school attempts to remedy this mismatch in ways that blur the boundaries between the fields of school and community. This is particularly important in light of Connolly and Healy's (2004) research that highlights the significance working class boys' locality plays in mediating their experiences and perspectives. To these ends, a strong emphasis on student agency and autonomy frames Monica's long term unit of work called 'Students Making it Happen at 'Warilda'' (see Keddie & Mills, forthcoming). Key elements of this unit are about ensuring that students have a greater say and responsibility in the decision-making processes within the school with the primary areas of focus tapping into the concerns of the students and their broader community. Such areas relate to health care, nutrition and fitness and environmental care and sustainability within the context of the community's prolonged drought. A participatory and inclusive focus that attempts to promote independent learning characterises the activities within these areas. In relation to the environmental care and sustainability component of the unit, for example, the children have been involved in researching and writing about issues to do with water conservation, recycling and land care within the school and broader community. Such a context can be seen as particularly productive in terms of transformative pedagogy, in that it provides real-world connectedness that centres the student voice in ways that promote a sense of community and responsibility for the welfare of others (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard, 2006).

For Monica, exploring these topics has provided a backdrop for teaching about issues concerning equity and democratic process as these are associated with access to power and agency. The unit's activities which have involved substantial multi-age peer mentoring and collaboration have, according to Monica, worked to build a sense of group cohesion, identity and agency amongst students. For boys, she sees these collaborative processes as particularly important because they disrupt and provide alternatives to the masculine stereotypes dominant in the area. She talks about how these processes of rupture have helped to legitimise, for example, boys' interest in and care for

the younger children in the school. Monica mentions here several ‘cool’ boys who, despite regularly ‘playing with the preps’ – something that would generally be seen as ‘uncool’ or ‘what girls do’ – have managed to maintain their peer status and ‘coolness’ with the older children. Monica says, in this respect, that the small size of the school can be very positive in terms of its potential to offer genuine opportunities for student leadership and responsibility.

In terms of transforming the gendered rules within her schooling community in ways that broaden boys’ horizons, Monica finds the integrated and communities focussed approach most useful. Alongside engendering a sense of responsibility towards the community in the form of active citizenship, she says that it encourages student awareness of different and diverse perspectives, through their social interaction with others in their community, as she explains:

> … the kids are actually doing things that have an importance for the society and the community as well as the environment and they’re relating with people from various age groups and various backgrounds … So trying to get them to act outside of the school environment broadens their minds and brings them into contact with lots of different types of issues and people and attitudes.

Monica sees that the capacities of this approach – which she suggests provides students with legitimate social pathways for action and agency – also serve to promote alternative and less gender stereotypical behaviours in her students, and especially those boys in her class who tend to want to dominate and control what happens. This kind of process, she claims, also teaches boys how to negotiate, how to work with girls and each other in equitable ways, and how to make a difference to their and others’ lives. This is also a good example of the way that schools, instead of being sites of ‘disjunction and dislocation’ (Comber & Hill, 2000), can relate curricula to students’ worlds, and in doing so, make the classroom more inclusive by legitimating locally produced knowledge and

ensuring that students can see their everyday lives and experiences as relevant to their learning and success at school (see also Mills, forthcoming *b*). Monica acknowledges, however, that the masculinised capital associated with the rurality and poverty of her broader gendered schooling community means that she has to 'tread cautiously' because she is trying to change familiar, comfortable and very deep-seated ways of being – indeed, as she says, 'you can be challenging things without even knowing you're challenging them!'

Conclusion

While the taken-for-grantedness of the masculinising structures and practices within Monica's and Phoebe's schooling contexts may be conceptualised as all-pervasive, in this article we have foregrounded the ways in which both teachers demonstrate concerted resistance and find spaces for enabling gender justice. Of particular importance, given our focus on issues of rurality and poverty, we have looked at the potential of pedagogies to problematise particular notions of masculinity that are harmful to others and thus broaden boys' understandings of masculinity to be more inclusive of difference and diversity (see Lingard & Douglas, 1999). We have also foregrounded pedagogies that seek to bridge the gap between the cultural capital of middle class schooling environments and dominant working class masculinities where such gendered dispositions likely pose a liability.

Teachers like Monica and Phoebe, who seek to broaden students' horizons and challenge limited notions of masculinity and femininity, are central to these struggles for gender justice and transformation of the field. While habitus can be replicated through encountering a field that reproduces its dispositions, Monica and Phoebe work in ways so that their students encounter 'moments of disalignment and tension between habitus and field' (McNay, 2001, p. 146). The resulting disjunctures cause self-questioning and can generate transformation and the development of new facets of the self. It is these struggles to redress gender injustice through problematising restrictive gender identities that may lead to the transformation of inequitable gender relations.

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