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### Paper:

Ward, M. (2017). Acceptable Masculinities: Working-Class Young Men and Vocational Education and Training Courses. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 1-18.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2017.1337869>

18 month embargo.

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## ACCEPTABLE MASCULINITIES: WORKING-CLASS YOUNG MEN AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COURSES

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*ABSTRACT: Since the 1970s, the process of deindustrialisation, accompanied by social, cultural and political changes, has altered youth transitions from school to work. This paper is drawn from an ESRC-funded study that explored the diversity of white, working-class young men (aged between 16 and 18) in a post-industrial community. The study focused on how young men performed their masculinities through different post-16 educational pathways and within the limits of place and a disadvantaged social class position. In this paper, I explore the way three of these young men who were enrolled on different vocational education and training courses learned how to display acceptable masculinities within these settings. Drawing on the work of Goffman, I argue that these vocational courses can 'frame' traditional forms of working-class masculinity, but also have the potential to enable alternative performances of masculinity to come through. However, the role of a locale's industrial heritage on gendered and classed expectations is important, and the impact this has on successful futures needs to be recognised.*

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*Keywords:* masculinities, vocational education and training, class, performance, frames

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The shift to adulthood for young working-class men was once inextricably linked to labour. However, due to global industrial changes since the 1970s, working-class young men are increasingly no longer likely to leave school and enter skilled manual employment, but enter vastly different industries to what preceded them (McDowell, 2003; Roberts, 2013; Willis, 1977). The performances of masculinity which accompany these newer industries, such as the expanding service sector, are also different and require new skills and attributes (Kenway *et al.*, 2006; McDowell, 2012; Nayak, 2003). Coupled with these industrial changes, young people in the UK (and in other countries in the global north) are also now more likely to continue and engage in forms of education and training post-16 than ever before, not only to gain qualifications which will supposedly make them more employable, but because there are few other options available to them (Dolby *et al.*, 2004; Fuller and Unwin, 2013; Ward, 2015a).

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In this context of global restructuring, new ways of living-out working-class lives are formed inescapably around changing gender patterns and masculinity (McDowell, 2012; Weis, 2004). In a study of marginalised masculinities in Australian communities that had once been built around mining, fishing or farming, Kenway *et al.* (2006) suggest that many young men find it difficult to ‘unlearn’ social and cultural attitudes associated with manual employment. Therefore, while changes in the labour market have been accompanied by alterations in many young women’s occupational aspirations (Baker, 2010; Francis and Skelton, 2005), working-class boys and young men have still tended to avoid jobs and educational courses seen as stereotypically ‘feminine’ (Black and Turner, 2016). However, recent work by Roberts (2013) has suggested that some working-class young men are beginning to resist dominant or hegemonic (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) cultural ideas surrounding masculinity by embracing occupations historically seen as ‘feminine’ and finding employment in the service sector, work formally characterised as ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983). This development in the changing nature of gender identity and more specifically masculinities has been in line with other work which has sought to address and discuss contemporary forms of young masculinities within and beyond educational settings (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2012; Roberts, 2014). These authors have suggested that contemporary masculinities are much more fluid, flexible and open (especially around aspects of sexuality) than in previous generations and demonstrate that a real change in masculinity is occurring. Nonetheless, as Bridges and Pascoe (2014) have suggested rather than these changes in gender practices highlighting a real shift in how men and masculinity operate, a ‘hybridisation’ or ‘re-traditionalisation’ (Adkins, 2002; Walkerdine, 2010; Ward, 2015b) of gender is occurring, which obscures the realities of marginalisation.

With this growing debate in mind, in this paper, I contribute to this debate on changing or ‘hybridised’ masculinities. I do this by specifically comparing two ‘masculine’ courses – motor vehicle studies and a modern apprenticeship in engineering – with a more ‘feminine’ subject, equine studies. Using Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective and frame analysis, I explore how spaces of vocational education and training (VET) continue to shape traditional forms of working-class masculinity, but also provide a space to enable alternative forms of masculinity for working-class young men to be displayed. Importantly, this paper therefore contributes to recent ongoing sociological debates both in the UK and in the US around the changing and complex nature of contemporary masculinities (see Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; De Boise, 2015; Ward, 2015a) by focusing on VET courses which have been a neglected area in this recent debate. I suggest this arena allows for a more complicated picture of gender relationships to emerge.

## 2. CLASSED AND GENDERED VOCATIONAL IDENTITIES

Despite over 30 years of gender studies and numerous initiatives to address gender and class segregation within VET, differences persist when compared

with other forms of education (Niemeyer and Colley, 2015). In the UK and elsewhere (see, for example, Brown and Macdonald, 2008; Fuller and Unwin, 2013; Marusza, 1997), VET has followed a typical format, which has been linked to gender divisions within wider society. These can be summarised as those divisions between paid (masculine) labour and unpaid (feminine) domestic work and the corresponding VET subjects. As Parker (2006: 695) explains, the apprenticeship in particular was originally linked to male-dominated craft occupations such as building and printing, but ‘by the early 20th century it had become an altogether more pervasive form of training across a variety of workplace settings including both broader manufacturing locales (i.e. engineering, shipbuilding) and the domestic trades’. During the 1970s and the 1980s, economic restructuring and the increase in neo-liberal policies in the UK saw a decline in apprenticeships being replaced by youth training schemes and the modern apprenticeship.<sup>1</sup> It was here that the under-representation of women in male-dominated occupations began to be addressed to improve employment opportunities and widen educational opportunities (European Commission’s Expert Group on Gender and Employment [EGCE], 2009; Fuller and Unwin, 2013). However, it was found that these opportunities were restricted due to normative gender patterns and structural opportunities in wider society, which impacted on the career aspirations made by young people in VET settings (Fuller and Unwin, 2013; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 1997; Osgood *et al.*, 2006). So, despite continued initiatives to widen access and reduce gender barriers, VET continues to reproduce traditional class and gender divisions of labour and the option of progressing to higher educational institutions (Reay *et al.*, 2005).

Alongside these divisions, VET courses are also areas of the curriculum where specific performances of masculinity (and femininity) are on display. Therefore, young women and men are at risk of gender socialisation which helps to produce and reproduce gender in implicit and explicit way. In examining these performances of masculinity in VET settings, I draw upon ideas and issues from the research on young masculinities that has been conducted since the 1980s (Carrigan *et al.*, 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and importantly Goffman’s [1956] (1959) work on the performance of self and the formation of social identity.

Goffman (1959:32) argues that within social interaction, it is the front-stage or front region of the actor’s performance that is on display and which functions ‘to define the situation for those who observe the performance’. These performances can also be altered or dropped in the backstage. However, these performances of self (and therefore gender) occur not only within interactions between individuals but also within the wider culture of a given social setting. Goffman (1974: 10–11) develops this dramaturgical perspective further and argues that frames organise social experience (e.g. rules, acceptable behaviour, activities) and help create:

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definitions of the situation [that] are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events ... and our subjective involvement in them.

It is also these frames which govern how we talk and allow us to see how we 'do gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) through social interaction which is framed through specific contexts and within wider social, economic and cultural histories. These frames contain various levels of reality, organising actor's experiences and events, which are governed by norms and values. It is through these that we learn to present behaviour in accordance within the frame of interaction we are situated within (see also Lave and Wenger, 1991). 125

I suggest that Goffman's (1974) 'frame analysis' can be especially applied to VET subjects. Here, the forms and content of the courses, alongside the interactions between students and teachers, frame and therefore sanction and validate performances of masculinity and femininity more intensely than in other post-16 educational courses where distinct ways of being a man are valued and promoted over others (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1997). Nonetheless, there are some possibilities for subverting gender norms by parody, displacement and re-signification (Butler, 1990). It would seem possible then for gender norms to be also challenged and subverted through studying non-gender stereotypical VET subjects or for working-class young men enrolled on courses which are non traditional in terms of class and local heritage. However, what does it mean for working-class young men who try to perform 'alternative' masculinities in post-industrial communities? Do working-class young men have to learn to 'chameleonise' (Ward, 2015b) their masculinities in order to be successful on different fronts? I turn now to outline the context of this study, before moving on to discuss the continual importance of class and gender in young men's VET experiences. 130 135 140 145

### 3. CONTEXT AND METHODS 150

The South Wales Valleys were once a leading area of coal production. For nearly two centuries, they were one of the largest industrial centres in the UK employing up to a quarter of a million men (Rees and Stroud, 2004). A strong division of labour accompanied these communities where distance from anything seen as 'feminine' was essential for a strong masculine identity. Men earned respect for working arduously, and these roles were often seen as heroic with punishing physical labour that involved different degrees of manual skill and bodily toughness, creating a tough, stoic masculinity (Walkerdine, 2010; Ward, 2016). Male camaraderie, which was established through physicality and close working conditions underground, was also developed through jokes, storytelling, sexist language and banter at the work site. This was further supported through social institutions such as miners' institutes, chapels, pubs, working men's clubs and sports 155 160

During the 1980s due to economic restructuring, the region underwent rapid deindustrialisation (Day, 2002; Smith, 1999). This acute collapse coupled with the decline of the manufacturing industry led to a drastic increase in economic inactivity. The area is now characterised by high levels of social and economic deprivation and low levels of educational attainment. These industrial losses were accompanied by the erosion of traditional apprenticeships and youth training schemes, which would have supported these industries and provided a platform into adulthood and other forms of skilled manual employment.

Given this context, this paper draws on findings from an Economic and Social Research Council-funded ethnographic study which looked at the diversity of a group of white, working-class, young men aged 16–18 ( $n = 35$ ) within the former industrial town of Cwm Dyffryn<sup>2</sup> (Ward, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016). The overall aim was to investigate how masculinities were formed, articulated and negotiated by one school year group at the end of their compulsory schooling and then to subsequently follow them through their different post-16 educational pathways. Access was granted by the head teacher of the high school where much of the research was conducted. The fieldwork included participant observation, and it was supported by extensive field notes, focus-group interviews and more formally recorded one-on-one interviews over the research period. These interviews were fully transcribed and, along with the detailed field notes, coded using a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) package for key themes. At school and (as the research period progressed with some participants) college, fieldwork included observing and actively participating in different lessons, ‘hanging around’ in the sixth form common room and various canteens during break and dinner times; playing football and scrabble; and attending school events such as prize nights, parents’ evenings, school trips and sporting occasions.

In this paper, I concentrate particularly on the narratives of three young men from the main cohort who after completing their General Certificate of Secondary Educations (GCSEs) at the age of 16 and initially returning to the school’s sixth form and subsequently left to attend separate VET courses at different FE colleges. I term these colleges ‘West Side’, ‘South Side’ and ‘East Side’, and they were located a short distance away from their home town. The remainder of the participants who remained at the local community school were studying traditional A level subjects or non-exam-based qualifications such as BTEC courses in sports or public services (Ward, 2015a), other vocational subjects were not offered at the school. These three case studies therefore offer another perspective to the educational pathways and post-16 choices of the wider cohort and those available to young men in the locale. The three separate colleges allowed me access to follow these young men – Bakers, Ian and Frankie<sup>3</sup> – during their lessons, after they themselves had agreed to me shadowing them. Information leaflets about the wider study were provided to other students and teachers on these courses, and as they were not formally interviewed, consent forms were not required. I was an active participant in many of

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the lessons I attended, therefore maintaining and expanding my role as an ethnographer in the FE college workshops by helping to change car tyres, on handing equipment to students and on one occasion grooming a horse, alongside taking field notes. 210

Whilst I acknowledge that there are limitations with the size of the sample presented here, this paper is drawn from a wider body of work on young men from this community (Ward, 2014, 2015a), and the ethnographic methods applied highlight the nuanced and contradictory ways working-class young men perform their masculinities in VET settings. This adds a layer to the debate on contemporary changes to masculinity. 215

#### 4. INTRODUCING BAKERS, IAN AND FRANKIE

The three young men came from similar but not identical backgrounds. They shared equivalent educational experiences and perspectives on their futures and had family biographies that indicated a history of white, working-class occupations in auto-trades and farming in or around Cwm Dyffryn. After gaining their GCSE qualifications, all returned to the local secondary school's sixth form, before leaving to begin VET training courses at separate FE colleges. Bakers told me he wanted to be a mechanic, which was an interest he shared with his father (and grandfather before him), who was employed at a car body repair chain. His mother, with whom he lived alone after his parents divorced a few years previously, was unemployed at the time of the study. Ian lived with his younger sister and parents on a small farm situated on the outskirts of the former coal-mining town and wanted to move into an engineering career. Frankie was the middle child, with an older and younger sister, and lived with his father, the manager of a small electronics company, and his mother, who worked as a secretary at a local school. Frankie aimed to work in the equine industry and owned his own horse called Gypsy. None of the young men's parents had any experience of higher education. Their positions could be seen to indicate that their working-class identities were not homogeneous or static and demonstrate the complexities, struggles and possibilities on their performances of masculinity when the dynamics of a place or locale are integrated into the analysis (Burrows and Gane, 2006; Kenway *et al.*, 2006; Morris, 2012). I turn now to look at Bakers' and Ian's course and identify how the subject delivery and interaction between instructors and students framed traditional expectations of gender and working-class masculinity, before moving on to focus on Frankie's different VET experience. 220 225 230 235 240

#### 5. BAKERS AND IAN

After completing Year 12 at Cwm Dyffryn High School, Bakers enrolled on an Institute of Motor Industry (IMI) National Certificate in Vehicle Maintenance & Repair course at Eastside FE College, around 10 miles from Cwm Dyffryn. The 245

course consisted of both practical and theoretical classes on aspects of the motor industry. The students on the course were all white young men aged between 16 and 21 and drawn from towns around the college. 250

When I asked him why he had chosen this course he told me:

Bakers: Well mainly because I love cars and want to work in a garage, but I was never gonna stay on in school, not sure why I even went back for year 12 to be honest! I hated all that writing stuff and exam crap for GCSE, I also didn't want to be like those swots studying all the time, waste of time that, get out of school init and grow up a bit init, I'm a man not a boy anymore (laughs) 255

For Bakers, the course enabled him to steer away from academic work which he deems as for the 'swots' or those boys who invest in academic labour (AUTHOR REMOVED) and fulfil a ambition of working with machinery. It also gave him the opportunity to leave school and work in an industry which made him feel more grown up and be able to be more of a 'man', as he associated school with a less acceptable form of masculinity. It also allowed him to continue in the family tradition as his father and grandfather have been mechanics before him. 260

Whilst happy with studying at school, Ian wanted to progress to a paid modern apprenticeship rather than go to university. During Year 12, he applied for different training schemes and was accepted onto a modern apprenticeship programme with NPower, a national electrical supply company. The scheme involved working at a power plant and studying for a BTEC National Diploma in Operations and Maintenance Engineering at Southside FE College which was approximately 30 miles from Cwm Dyffryn. 265

MW: So why an apprenticeship Ian?

Ian: Well I tried the sixth form for a year, and I suppose I would have stayed on for year 13, but I really wanted to get this apprenticeship and start getting paid, so when I got it, I was out of there. I know I could have stayed on, gone to uni and done it that way, but this means I don't have to end up with loads of debt and I can just get on with it, you know? 270

For Ian, whilst he acknowledges he could have stayed on in school to complete his A levels, academic work for him was seen as a waste of time and he just wanted to get out into the labour market and begin earning. The associate of university and worry about debt appear in his narrative, but what is also apparent is the importance of working an earning as soon as possible, it is not something to think about in the future, it is an urgent necessity like generations of other working-class men before him (Willis, 1977). 280

## 6. PRACTICAL PERFORMANCES

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Each course had substantial opportunities for practical work and for the 'front' performance (Goffman, 1959) of masculinity fostered through rituals and



traditions of manual workplace cultures. Here, Ian and Bakers learned not only the work-based skills but also the norms and values expected of individuals in their future workplaces. Even though each course differed in content, there were huge similarities between the subjects. As my field notes below show, as an apprentice Ian was expected to work within a small team and was set 'jobs' under timed conditions. 290

Ian and I, along with the other apprentices, entered the workshop and headed to the locker room so that they could change into their overalls and work boots. I noticed that NPower must have provided their overalls as they had the company's logo and their own names embroidered on to them. As we entered the large workshop, the smells of oil, and grease hit me. It was an open plan room, with a low ceiling, few windows and with dozens of metal workbenches, pieces of ancient machinery and equipment laid out in rows. Ian introduced me to the tutor, Ben, who was taking this session. Ben told me that this lesson was to run until about 7pm and was a practical session where the apprentices would have to complete a timed exercise or a 'job', which was to strip down a V Twin Compressor, change the paper gasket then re-assemble it. 295 300

[Field notes] 305

These notes that record my observations of the setting show that the apprentices were provided with a uniform (overalls) and that course's defining tasks or exercises as 'jobs'. These processes help maintain a direct link to the motor and engineering industries and symbolise that a specific version of working-class masculinity was being performed through skilled manual labour. During an individual interview, I asked Ian if his course attracted a certain type of person, he gave me an insightful response which demonstrated the continuities to gender roles from an older industrial era): 310

Ian: Ah yeah, you got to be able to think quickly, and be able to deal with all manner of shit people throw at you, not just the work, but the atmosphere as well. Like in the workshop we are always messing around and joking, only last week we were told off for looking at these photos on one of the boys phones in workshop time 315

MW: Oh right, um what sort of photos?

Ian: Well....um... the naughty type like (laughs) this girl, who this boy was seeing, had sent him some, and he was sharing them with us, ok maybe he shouldn't have been doing it in workshop time, but they say sharing's caring init! 320

We can see here that through the development of technology in the form of smart phones, Ian and the young men on his course could share intimate photos of young women and to objectify them together as a group in an all-male space (Willis, 1979). These objectifying, sexist practices allow for a localised version of hegemonic masculinity to be performed and offer another example of how traditional practices of working-class masculinity are being maintained this time 325

through the use of technology. These gendered expectations were further framed through the theoretical parts of their courses. 330

### 7. THEORETICAL (RE)PRODUCTION

In the classroom where the theory aspects of their course were taught, stereotypical gender values continued to be reproduced. My field notes from these lessons show the use of gendered and sexist teaching examples and coarse 'humour' by lecturers helped to reinforce the masculine, heterosexual environment of the engineering world. 335

During a discussion about car insurance and buying a new vehicle the teacher emphasised that the sales men (my emphasis) would target him with different cars than with boys. This was because he said 'you boys want different cars for cruising and pulling the chicks' which made the class laugh. 340

[*Field notes*]

A certain amount of humour is evident here which is used in this all male environment to build a level of rapport between the lecturer and the students (see also Kehily and Nayak, 1997). However, the lecturer is also maintaining a heteronormative environment and traditional 'macho' values around male domination through finance patterns and assumed heterosexuality. This ultimately validates and frames which displays of manhood are acceptable or viewed as 'normal' within this setting. One lecturer, Jack, whilst using gendered examples in his teaching, also illustrated the continued importance of 'banter' by keeping up a constant flow of jokes during his interactions with his students. 345

As Jack waited for the class to copy from the board, he talked about how he hated women drivers. He suggested that the 'girly button' on some cars (the city button which acts to make the steering lighter) were designed for women in particular because they couldn't reverse. This was then followed up with another joke to the class about how breweries have started putting female hormones into beer these days as it now means he can't drive and talks rubbish. 355

[*Field notes*].

These practices are a direct link back to a working-class occupational culture where male chauvinism, racist and sexist humour were a part of the industry and accompanied by practical jokes, coarse language and the 'piss take' (see Beynon, 1973; Weis, 1985; Willis, 1979). The 'front' performances of a traditional working-class masculinity away from the practical sessions might have been refined and relaxed from the young men's perspective (they were not carrying out physical dirty work and not wear the uniform of the workplace), but a culture of machismo was still being constructed by their lecturers. The gendered examples and sexist language served to structure and frame the interaction order Ian and Bakers found themselves in, and acceptable displays of masculinity, which they would eventually take with them into the workplace. As I showed above, 360 365

within this space, sharing private photos of girlfriends with male friends would seem just another extension of this ‘front’ behaviour. 370

We can see that these VET courses, through interaction in the classroom between peers and teachers, helped frame a traditional form of working-class masculinity for Bakers and Ian. I now move on to consider how VET subjects can also provide the opportunities to try out different gendered identities and alternative masculinities. 375

#### 8. FRANKIE: A TORTURED DISPLAY OF MASCULINITY?

Whilst there is some literature on the historic significance of horses and masculinities (for example, Latimer and Birke, 2009; Weil, 2006), the dominance of men in the role of breeding and showing horses at farming events (Hurn, 2008), 380 the enduring mythology of the Wild West cowboy and various pieces of research documenting the professional ‘masculine’ world of horse racing (Birke, 2007), these have not tended to focus on the actual performative aspects of masculinity in these areas. There also appears to be a distinctive gap in research on young men (and women) in what Birke and Brandt (2009) define as the more feminised 385 ‘horsey world’ of dressage and the experiences of those who are enrolled on VET courses related to the equine industry (see Salisbury and Jephcote, 2010). However, as Dashper’s (2012) insightful ethnographic research into equestrian sport illustrates, even these areas which are predominantly female and which are linked to female activity in popular association have a much older masculine 390 tradition (Birke, 2007). Dashper (2012) suggests that equestrianism as a discipline developed out of farming communities and military customs and has links to the upper classes and rural gentry; therefore, even though the sport is now more popular with women, the history of equestrianism is still strongly linked to upper-class masculinity, power and wealth. It would seem then that studying 395 equestrianism with a predominantly female cohort (Dashper also suggests that there are high numbers of openly gay men in these areas) and the upper-class underpinnings could provide an opportunity for a young working-class man like Frankie to perform an alternative masculinity to one of his peers and the traditions of his community. Yet, as the next section makes clear, these opportunities do not come without their challenges. 400

#### 9. MAKING CHOICES

At 16, Frankie was already a confident rider owning his own horse and working part-time in a local riding stable. Following this interest in horses, he had enrolled on a prestigious jockey apprenticeship course at The British Racing School at Newmarket.<sup>4</sup> Being small in stature, thin and with a passion for horses, he was ideally suited to the course. After he had gained his GCSE results, he had left for Newmarket with his sights set on becoming a professional jockey. However, things didn’t quite go to plan. Enrolled on an initial 9-week 405

introductory course, Frankie found the work and the long hours tiring and admitted to missing home; he only lasted a short time before returning to Cwm Dyffryn. In an individual interview, which was conducted almost exactly 2 years later, Frankie was quite reflexive about his decision and regretted coming home: 410

Frankie: I should have stuck it out, I say that all the time, I should have stayed there 415

MW: Yeah but at the time you weren't happy so you got to think about that

Frankie: Yeah but I think it was more about the fact that I missed...mates... home... but if I went back now I'd think stuff this, I'm not going back to Cwm Dyffryn ever again and I probably wouldn't, but it just proves what two years can do, I'd be happy now, to go to Newmarket do the four or five weeks or whatever it was come back for the weekend, then go carry on with it, cos that weekend I'd see everyone and then it'd be see you in another month like 420

[Individual Interview]

Here we can see that the pull of home was strong, and Frankie returned to the town he grew up in, but his regret at this decision is evident and he has come to realise that it was a missed opportunity. He began working again at local stables and went back to school to start Year 12, but he found returning a difficult experience as he had to keep explaining to other students and many of his teachers, why he wasn't at the racing school in Newmarket. He also struggled with his subjects and did not do as well as he'd hoped in his AS exams, so he left at the end of the year and decided to go to Westside FE College to do a BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Horse Management and Equine Studies. The class consisted of around 20 students, aged between 16–20, and were all female, apart from Frankie and one other young man, who was openly gay. 425 430 435

## 10. INTO THE ARENA

The experiences of a typical riding lesson, aimed at enhancing students' riding abilities, horse control skills and show jumping expertise, are outlined in the following notes I took whilst watching from the viewing platform. In addition, these notes also illustrate the multiple bodily acts which are required during such a performance and like the 'masculine' courses that I have outlined so far help to frame what is expected during this vocational course. In this setting, it becomes clear that Frankie is drawing on a more gentrified form of masculinity that is linked to an upper-class tradition, than his peers: 440

As the horses milled around the teacher began to set up some jumps in the centre of the football pitched sized indoor arena. Frankie was jumping last, after his jump the teacher praised him and told him 'nice line' as he pulled away. On Frankie's second jump he again drew praise from the teacher who said he had a 'good canter' and a 445

'good jump' and on his third jump he was told it was 'really nice'. A few of the other riders were having problems but Frankie seemed to be at ease with it. A second set of somewhat higher jumps was set up. This time the teacher seemed more critical with phrases being repeated to many riders such as 'rubbish line', 'rubbish turn', 'insecure length', 'sit up straight', 'watch your posture'. The teacher told/shouted at Frankie to keep the horse walking around, it wasn't 'allowed to nap', be 'brave with it, don't be afraid to show it who is boss'. At the end of the session the teacher asked the students to bring the horses back into a line across the middle of the arena and after some general talk about what went right, and what went wrong during the last hour, the session ended. The horses were then led back to the stables through the doors on the opposite side of the arena.

[Field notes]

In these notes, we can see that there was a very strict set of rules and expectations to be followed by the riders. They were very submissive to the order of the teacher in terms of what was acceptable and how the body and the horse should be handled. Differences are therefore clear between the expectations of masculinity on Ian's and Bakers' courses and what is expected here, but there is also some irony in these performances. The teacher mentions being 'brave' with the horse, because if a horse was not ridden properly, the rider could be thrown and possibly killed. Something that would not occur in the workshop. Nonetheless, wearing riding equipment and trotting around an arena and jumping over obstacles, Frankie's performance of masculinity would be defined as feminine in the former industrial community he lived. He would not be seen as particularly brave, as the notion of bravery would be linked to hegemonic forms of masculinity forged through tough physical manual work. However, there appears to be a much greater likelihood of serious injury and death here with Frankie, than with young men studying subjects defined as traditionally masculine, and deemed as more acceptable for a man in his community to study. Through his on-horse display, Frankie is actually continuing an older upper-class masculine tradition of bravery through horsemanship and one that is steeped in power and prestige.

His on-horse performance in the dressage ring was not the only way through which this alternative masculinity was being displayed; the riding uniform itself also frames specific types of masculinity or femininity. The tight-fitting jodhpurs, riding boots, helmet and colourful shirts that Frankie had to wear, meant he had to again incorporate aspects of upper-class masculinity and also femininity into his front display, which he felt brought harassment from other young men around his college. He told me:

Frankie See this college is mostly full of sporty boys all those football and rugby types, so I often get shouted at or whistled at by boys as I'm walking around in my jodhpurs, all taking the piss like, calling me gay or going 'alright love' and that, does my head in, so I had a word with my tutor and as soon as I am off my horse, I can wear tracksuit bottoms, it's much better then.

Thus, when observed by judges on the horse, and when the rider receives marks during a competition, the most successful tend to embody the highest forms of femininity, such as delicacy, elegance, style, poise, good posture and the ability to be submissive to these demands. For Frankie to be successful in the industry, or this frame of interaction (Goffman, 1974), his front performance of masculinity requires not only the incorporation of markers of femininity, but also specific upper-class displays of manhood. But this attracts negative attention from other working-class young men studying on different courses around him. Frankie therefore has to adopt different strategies to deal with this, and changing out of his riding uniform as quickly as possible is one way of doing this. This process of chameleonisation (Ward, 2015b) is continued into other parts of his VET course and life beyond his college.

## 11. THE STABLES AND BEYOND

Frankie begins to drop further aspects of this feminised upper-class performance of masculinity as soon as he leaves the arena. In the stables behind the scenes and away from the 'audience' (which is normally the general public and competition judges) in the 'backstage', Frankie and the other riders had to engage with their horses in a different way. They had to be willing to get dirty, lift heavy hay bales and use trucks, tractors, spades and brushes with cold water to clean up, whilst also running the risk of being physically hurt through interactions with horses. Here markers of femininity were much less important, and Frankie as one of only two males on his course was often called on by his (female) tutor to assist with heavier tasks, which helping him to re-establish his working-class masculine credentials and gender norms. He could also use this opportunity to flirt and laugh with his female classmates, and after one riding session, a play-fight ensued, resulting in one female student slapping him.

Away from the arena and stables, Frankie continued to contradict his on-horse performance. One evening, when discussing college life with him and his friends in The Harp pub in Cwm Dyffryn, Bakers told me that he would much prefer to be on Frankie's course as he had lots of female students, as he put it '*he's got the pussy, we've just got the nuts*'. Frankie went on to inform us that as the only straight guy on his course, he therefore received a considerable amount of female attention (something I had witnessed when at the college with him). He used his heterosexual identity to his advantage and slept with a few different girls, boasting about this to his male friends and telling them in detail what sexual practices he had engaged in and appeared to be interested only in his own image and sexual pleasure.

Through these tales, he could emphasise his heterosexual prowess to his friends and display an acceptable form of masculinity. However, it was also clear that Frankie was adopting and compensate for the feminised, upper-class form of masculinity on the horse, by engaging in these objectifying practices. This chameleonisation process illustrates the complex work Frankie was engaged in

to keep two different parts of his identity together and to juggle multiple front displays across frames of interaction. 535

## 12. CONCLUSION

Even though several studies over the past decade have explored the changing nature of girls and young women's occupational aspirations and educational choices (e.g. Baker, 2010), young men are still more likely to study gender stereotypical courses than their female counterparts (Black and Turner, 2016). Nevertheless, other studies have begun to suggest that a change has occurred in acceptable forms of labour for young working-class men (Roberts, 2013) and that there has been an interruption in traditional gender practices and performances of masculinity. Given the backdrop of industrial changes across the globe and its impact on young working-class men (Kenway *et al.*, 2006; McDowell, 2012; Nayak, 2003), this paper sought to add to the literature on changing masculinities, by exploring the narratives of a small group of young men living in a post-industrial community. The specific focus has been on these performances of masculinity within different post-16 VET courses, which I suggest has been an under-represented area in this contemporary debate. 540  
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AQ8 By drawing on Goffman's [1956] (1959) dramaturgical perspective, I have argued that despite these industrial changes, the 'masculine' VET courses that two of my participants (Ian and Bakers) were enrolled on continued to promote the rituals and traditions of a working-class culture of industrial workplaces. The subject frames (e.g. interaction order, course material, spaces of learning) reaffirmed and shaped a localised hegemonic version of working-class masculinity, which is performed within and beyond the practical learning space. 555

As an alternative to traditional gendered practices, Frankie's narrative highlights the opportunities and the conflicts that accompany being a young working-class man studying a VET course which is predominately marked as feminine. I highlighted the strategies he underwent to decrease the risk of becoming bullied at college and alienated from his friends outside it. I therefore argue that while some working-class young men might be beginning to explore alternative masculine positions by adopting 'feminine' forms of employment, or enrolling on 'feminine' VET courses, these do not come without risks, and for young men like Frankie, and it can be a difficult time. 560  
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The VET sector needs to begin to acknowledge and open-up the frames of gender, providing an environment where young men and women can be more able and confident to experiment by adopting nontraditional gender courses. Lecturers and tutors should also recognise gender in their teaching practices and how their actions and behaviours shape their student's perspectives of that discipline. Furthermore, it is important to identify the pressures a locale's industrial history places on young peoples gendered and classed expectations and futures life chances. In times of economic uncertainty, the skills young people are learning in VET environments might have to be transferred to other 570  
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industries to gain meaningful employment; however, the gendered practices they take with them might not. For the three young working-class men in this paper, rather than highlight a real change in contemporary masculinities (Anderson, 2009; Roberts, 2013), ultimately these courses seem to highlight a continuation of older gendered practices (Tristan and Pascoe, 2014), which could impact on their future life chances. 580

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## 13. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

AQ10 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## 14. FUNDING

585

AQ11 This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council;

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Ryan and Unwin (2001) for a list of their shortcomings.

<sup>2</sup> A pseudonym.

<sup>3</sup> All names used in this paper have been changed. 590

<sup>4</sup> The British Racing School is based at Newmarket in Suffolk in the South-East of England. It is the principal centre for training in the horse racing industry, providing a large range of courses and training opportunities ranging from jockey apprenticeships to equine management programmes (see <http://www.brs.org.uk> <Accessed 2 March 2017>).

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