Recent attention to men’s decreasing levels of participation in higher education (HE) has produced overly simplistic analyses that men are the new disadvantaged sex and the “feminization thesis” (Leathwood & Read, 2009, p. 20). Men are often homogenized as a group, posing them in a battle of the sexes and ignoring the complex ways that masculinity intersects with other social differences, including age, class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality. Despite the moral panic that has emerged in many countries about men’s HE participation rates compared to women’s, there has been a dearth of research that explores the relationship between formations of masculinity and HE pedagogies. However, some research has drawn attention to the important interconnections between formations of masculinity and other social, generational and cultural differences and inequalities, which profoundly shape men’s dispositions to and experiences of learning and teaching (Archer, 2003; Burke, 2006; HEA, 2008). This paper explores the complex formations of masculinity at play in students’ and academics’ accounts of pedagogical experiences, relations and practices, drawing on a major qualitative research project concerning gender and higher education pedagogies, funded by the UK’s Higher Education Academy. Pedagogies are conceptualised in this paper as constitutive of gendered formations through the discursive practices and regimes of truth at play in particular pedagogic and disciplinary spaces. The article shows that pedagogies do not simply reflect the gendered identities of academics and students but that pedagogies themselves are gendered, intimately bound up with historical and masculinised ways of being and doing within higher education.

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Questions over the right to higher education have been high on international policy agendas, formed in relation to competing discourses, including equity, widening participation and social inclusion, quality, standards and excellence, globalised
knowledge economies, economic growth, employability and development, financial retrenchment and, perhaps to a lesser extent, social justice. Higher education is increasingly driven by global neoliberal logic and perspectives, underpinned by economic imperatives to develop “global, entrepreneurial, corporate, commercialized universities” (Morley, 2011, p. 224). Policies of widening participation (WP) shaped by neoliberalism have contributed to the growing diversification of higher education, intensifying levels of institutional stratification, differentiation and selection, connected to the competitive (masculinised) desire to be positioned as “world-class.”

WP policy is guided by meritocratic assumptions as well as neoliberalism, often expressed through the principle that HE should be available to all who have the potential to benefit from university study, regardless of social background. Although the concept of “potential” carries multiple and contested meanings, there has been little attention to the problematic way that “potential” often serves the interests of already privileged groups in society. For example, research on admissions practices in English Art and Design courses, reveals that “potential” tends to be profoundly shaped by masculine, middle-class and White racialized values, subjectivities and judgements (Burke & McManus, 2011). Sociologists have extensively critiqued meritocratic assumptions for ignoring the complexity of the relationship between social inequalities, identities, processes of selection and exclusion, academic achievement, educational “choice” and life chances (Karabel, 2005; Morley & Lugg, 2009; Young, 1961). Additionally problematic is the way that meritocratic assumptions tend to construct the problem of access to and participation in higher education as being related to individual deficit, in which the “disadvantaged person” is seen to suffer from impoverished levels of aspiration or motivation (Morley, 2003). Within such perspectives, the “disadvantaged” individual is often derisively constructed as lacking tenacity, determination, discipline or the understanding that university education is valuable. The intersection of meritocracy with neoliberalism subjects those associated with disadvantage to processes of self-correction and self-disciplining practices, so that the focal point of a project of transformation is turned on to the individual, rather than on the social structures, practices, discourses and cultures that are entangled in the reproduction of educational inequalities and exclusions.

Yet in contrast to the hegemonic individualising discourses of neoliberalism, the problem of WP has been recently recast at the social rather than individual level but only in relation to concerns about men’s access to and participation in higher education. Such concerns are often expressed through patriarchal and misogynist discourses, with women’s apparent success in accessing higher education presented as damaging to men as a social group, and are connected to concerns to remasculinize the workforce (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2001, p. 26). The discourse of “men’s disadvantage” (HEPI, 2009) is posed as a battle of the sexes and fuelled by narratives of a crisis of masculinity and misogynist assumptions about the “feminisation of HE,” despite feminist critiques that reveal the complexities of questions of gender, sexuality, equity and higher education (Leathwood & Read, 2009; Morley, 2011; Quinn, 2003). Such complexities include attention to the effects of masculine cultural and discursive practices within different social and disciplinary contexts and attention to complex intersections of difference in which masculinity and femininity are formed and reformed in different and fluid ways across space and time. Heterosexuality is profoundly entwined in the reshaping of hegemonic
masculinities through pedagogical spaces and practices, including the increasing levels of “laddishness” across English higher education exposed in recent research, which creates a “means of reclaiming territory in the context of recession and increased competition between the sexes” (Phipps & Young, 2013, p. 9).

In addition to these contested discourses over the right to higher education, much of the policy and practice concerned with widening participation in higher education has failed to engage questions of participation in any developed way (Burke, 2012). This includes an absence of attention to pedagogical participation, particularly in relation to gendered power relations and social inequalities. Although there have been attempts to raise the profile of teaching in higher education across different national contexts through moves towards “modernising the university” for the 21st century, such considerations tend to reinforce neoliberal discourses of marketization, positioning teachers as service providers and students as educational consumers. The complex dynamics of pedagogical relations and experiences in relation to gendered subjectivities has been largely absent from hegemonic discourses of teaching and learning in HE.

This article draws on an in-depth participatory research project, Formations of Gender and Higher Education Pedagogies (GaP), conducted in England and funded by the UK’s Higher Education Academy (Burke, Crozier et al., 2013). Drawing on critical and feminist post-structural concepts of pedagogy, the research set out to challenge hegemonic discourses of teaching and learning, to engage the complex ways that identity formations of gender and other social differences (such as class and race) profoundly shape pedagogical experience, relations, subjectivities and practices. GaP explores the ways that inequalities, exclusions and inclusions operate at the micro-level of classroom practice, across disciplinary contexts, power relations and identity formations. Within this wider context, this article presents an analysis of the interconnections between formations of masculinity and other social, generational and cultural differences and inequalities, which profoundly shape men’s dispositions to and experiences of learning and teaching (Archer, 2003; HEA, 2008).

**Pedagogies, Diversity and Difference**

Moving away from hegemonic discourses of teaching and learning, critical and feminist pedagogies explore lived, relational and embodied practices in higher education, which are deeply interconnected with ontologies, epistemologies and politics of mis/recognition (Burke, 2012; Freire, 1972; Lather, 1991). The dynamics, relations and experiences of teaching and learning are conceptualised as intimately tied to the privileging of some forms of knowledge over others, the recognition and legitimisation of hegemonic subjectivities and the exclusion of “Others,” often problematically constructed as “undeserving” of HE participation. Reductive language that frames teaching and learning largely in terms of “styles,” “provision,” “needs” and “delivery,” operates to hide complex power relations within pedagogical spaces, which are constituted and productive of gendered interactions, performative and subjectivities. Feminist post-structural concepts of gendered subjectivity (e.g., Butler, 1993; Flax, 1990) shed light on the multiple, contradictory and shifting sense of self that unsettles hegemonic versions of the individual as a coherent, rational, knowable and stable self. Such conceptual frameworks aim to reveal the multiple layers of injustice on which processes of identity formation and subjective construction operate, in relation to embodied intersections of age, class, ethnicity, gender and race.
Power is not seen as monolithic within such theoretical perspectives of pedagogies; power is understood as re/shaping pedagogical relations and experiences in and across changing social, cultural, spatial and (micro) political contexts (Foucault, 1977). Power is not an oppositional force that predictably benefits one group above the other but rather moves fluidly across and between differently positioned subjects. The teacher is not seen to “have the power” to give to the students but rather power is generated, exercised and struggled over within lived social spaces such as classrooms and lecture theatres. Furthermore, power is not tied to one single source, but is interconnected to multiple dynamics, including space, place, time, context, identity and inequality. Power shapes pedagogical relations in profound and unexpected ways and this is inextricably tied to questions of knowledge, authority and representation. As such, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment are not separate entities but overlapping and intersecting dimensions of educational practice in which power plays out in different ways, depending on context, relations and identities. Pedagogies are thus profoundly shaped by the different power relations at play, the changing contexts in which teaching and learning take place, and the identities and relations of teachers and students. Simultaneously, pedagogies are constitutive of identity formations through the discursive practices and regimes of truth at play in particular pedagogic relations and spaces. Pedagogies both shape and are shaped by complex identity formations, epistemological frameworks and processes of recognition, as well as notions of “right” to participate in higher education. Pedagogies do not simply reflect the classed, gendered and racialized identities of teachers and students but pedagogies themselves are classed, gendered and racialized, intimately bound up with historical and masculinised ways of being and doing within higher education spaces. Pedagogical relations are thus deeply implicated in the processes and politics of identity, recognition and misrecognition (Burke & Jackson, 2007).

Research concerned with improving higher education pedagogies must take into account that HE is a diverse, complex and differentiated system, in which contested ontologies and epistemologies play out across and within different disciplinary fields (Burke & Jackson, 2007; Crozier, Reay, Clayton, & Collander, 2008). For example, research by Hockings et al. (2008) illustrates that the development of “inclusive classrooms” and pedagogies must be sensitive to the complexities of diversity, as well as draw on a range of student-centred practices. Their research focuses on the ways in which teachers’ and students’ identities might influence “academic engagement” in the classroom, and explores teachers and students’ conceptions of themselves and each other, of learning and teaching, of subject knowledge, conceptions of knowledge generation and the possible influences of social and cultural backgrounds, education and work experiences in the shaping of these.

Jary and Shah (2009) argue that teaching and learning must take into account personal, as well as academic, outcomes, to acknowledge the different experiences of learning that students draw on in the formal HE learning environment (see also Crozier & Reay, 2008). Research by McLean, Ashwin and Abbas (2011) shows that good teaching is multidimensional and subtle. They found strong correlations between students’ perceptions of good teaching and the extent to which they engaged in academic knowledge. Anderson (2010) uses the metaphor of “imagination” to demonstrate how the links between learners and knowledge can be strengthened and better understood, by encouraging students to think about their own emo-
tional responses, individual experience and judgement in relation to the course materials explored. She argues that an increasingly diverse student body brings with it a range of conflicting priorities that need to be considered and managed, including the ways that “independent learning” might be experienced as isolating by some “non-traditional” students. Similarly Leathwood (2006) critiques the notion of the “independent learner” by demonstrating how it is a gendered construction and inappropriate for the majority of students, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Research by Leese (2010) emphasises the importance of students’ social and cultural background in relation to pedagogical practice. Shaw (2009) observes that enrolling a diverse student body alone is not enough to address widening participation agendas and highlights the importance of inclusive orientations to curricula, pedagogy and student services. Hockings, Cooke et al. (2009) explore how university teachers negotiate and reconcile the different or conflicting demands of subject positions, discourses and institutional pressures (e.g. managerial, cultural, personal, etc.). They observe how these socially circulating discourses influence pedagogic ideas and practices, especially attitudes towards widening participation, inclusion and diversity in teaching. Their research demonstrates how social and cultural background strongly influences how university teachers approach pedagogy and develop lesson plans and teaching and learning resources.

Mentioned studies emphasise the significance of student identity on pedagogical processes and experiences and place issues of inclusion as a key concern. However, although there has been a growing body of research focusing on the relation between student identity, inclusion and higher education pedagogy (Crozier, Reay, Clayton & Collander, 2008; David et al., 2009; Hockings et al., 2008), there has been a dearth of research that has specifically addressed the complex relationship between formations of gender, and its intersections with other social differences and inequalities, and pedagogical relations, experiences and practices. The present article considers how students engage, shape and resist HE pedagogies (Hockings et al., 2008) across different disciplinary practices with particular attention dedicated to understanding the impact of formations of masculinity on student experiences and pedagogical practices. It seeks to contest simplistic narratives of the crisis of masculinity and the feminisation of higher education.

**Gender and Higher Educational Participation**

Research has drawn attention to the important interconnections between formations of masculinity, femininity and other social, generational and cultural differences, which profoundly shape student dispositions to and experiences of learning (Archer, 2003; HEA, 2008). For example, academic practices, such as writing, speaking and communication skills, tend to privilege those traits traditionally associated with masculinity, including boldness, competitiveness and individualism (Francis, Read & Melling, 2003; Leathwood & Read, 2009, p. 144). However, research has shown that when some male students encounter challenges with academic forms of literacy and communication, they might avoid asking for support, as being seen as “needy” is often perceived to run counter to hegemonic masculinity (Leathwood & Read, 2009). Furthermore, academic literacy is detached from subject-specific pedagogies and is usually taught as an additional set of skills, separate from the epistemological and methodological frameworks underpinning the subject or dis-
cipline being studied (Burke, 2012). This is particularly problematic for students from traditionally under-represented backgrounds, who might not have access to the resources, epistemologies and capitals that facilitate the decoding of the academic literacy practices of the particular subject area they are studying (Lillis, 2001). Thus in order to make sense of the ways that HE pedagogies are experienced by different men in different ways, it is important to explore the complex intersections between different forms of masculinity and other social differences and positions such as class, ethnicity and race. Qualitative research has revealed how undergraduate experiences differ according to gender, with some male students dominating seminar discussions and space (Somners & Lawrence, 1992; Sternglanz & Lyberger-Ficek, 1977); lecturers holding distinct perceptions of undergraduate writing according to gender (Francis, Read & Melling, 2003; Martin, 1997; Read et al., 2001); and gender impacting student and lecturer identity and confidence (Acker & Piper, 1984; Burke & Jackson, 2007; Dyhouse, 2005; Leathwood & Read, 2009). However, such claims must always be nuanced in terms of the intersection of gender, class and race as well as other social identities and inequalities. Being identified as a “man” does not ensure privilege, although as Connell points out, most men do benefit in some way from the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell, 1995, p. 79). This is not to dismiss the important observation made by feminist scholars that the very culture of higher education, including its traditions, histories, epistemology and social practices, are masculinist in orientation (Acker & Piper, 1984; Harding; 1990, 1991; Leathwood & Read, 2009) but to point out that this culture is also tied to certain classed and racialised forms of masculinity and not others.

Yet, it is equally important to recognise that the privileging of (certain forms of) masculinist culture in higher education is intimately connected to different expressions of misogyny that work against women’s achievement in higher education. For example, the narrative that women pose a “danger to the men” in higher education is not new (Mirza, 2009, p. 116). Struggles over access often re-cast the gaze on women as threatening to the status quo. Yet women’s recent success in accessing higher education (in certain parts of the world) is over-represented by women from privileged class and privileged ethnic backgrounds, and again claims about women must be nuanced in relation to complex intersections of difference, inequality and identity. It is the case that it is mainly women from middle-class, White backgrounds who have benefitted from “massification” policies over the twentieth, and into the twenty-first century. It was not until the late twentieth century, that more women than men in high-income countries accessed undergraduate study and this trend has continued into recent years (Leathwood & Read, 2009).

While concern has previously centred on the lower numbers of women students gaining first class degrees, more recently debate has been over the lower numbers of male students that achieve a “good” degree (HEPI, 2009); Woodfield, 2011). For example, across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, male students were more likely to obtain a lower second class or third class honours degree than female students (ECU, 2011). However, in England and Scotland, male students are more likely to achieve a first class honours degree than female students. This highlights the importance of recognising differences across different geographical contexts. Additionally, further contextual differences must be explored in relation to subject and discipline. In the UK, for example, engineering, technology, computer science, mathematics and sciences subjects were constituted of a predominately male student body during the academic year 2009/10, with engineering/
technology being 83.7% male; computer science being 81.7% male, and math sciences being 60.4% male (ECU, 2011). Subjects allied to medicine, veterinary science, education, creative arts/design, languages and social studies subjects were constituted of a predominately female student body during the academic year 2009/10. Subjects allied to medicine were 80.6% female, veterinary science was 76.6% female, education was 75.4% female, creative arts and design was 60.9% female, languages were 67.1% female and social studies were 62.9% female (ECU, 2011). On a global scale, women represent less than a quarter of students on average in engineering, manufacturing and construction, and only about a third of students in agriculture and science (UNESCO, 2008, cited in Leathwood & Read, 2009). Furthermore, modes of study are gendered with 61.3% of all female undergraduates studying part time in the academic year 2009/10, compared with 38.7% of male undergraduates (ECU, 2011). These patterns illuminate the flawed nature of universal claims about the “feminisation of higher education,” but perhaps more important are the subtle operations of gendered inequalities that work at the level of lived experience and practice, including of pedagogies.

**Methodology**

This article draws on a two-year qualitative study designed to engage HE students and lecturers in critical and reflexive considerations about the complex relationship between social identities, pedagogical practices, relations and experiences. A multi-method, case study approach was taken, first, to collect in-depth data about pedagogical practices, experiences and relations and complex formations of identity. These included individual interviews, focus group interviews and observations of pedagogical practices. Taking a participatory methodological approach, further methods aiming to create spaces of reflexivity and dialogue with the research participants included student seminars and forums, meetings with programme teams, workshops and student film clips. Sixty-four students across 6 subject areas were individually interviewed with a smaller group of 18 Executive Student Consultants participating more intensively in the project across a range of methods and project activities. Twenty-three HE lecturers from the 6 subject areas participated in 12 focus group discussions and 20 observations of their pedagogical practices were undertaken with reflective meetings as a follow-up. Seventeen students and 22 staff from 16 additional HEIs across England participated in an intensive series of workshops and discussions.

The GaP project involved student cohorts across 6 disciplinary programmes of study, at one case study institution, “Riverside University” (pseudonym). The case study approach was specifically selected to: 1) support the aim to work intensively with the students and lecturers participating in the project to ensure there was direct benefit to their pedagogical experiences and understanding, 2) facilitate access to participants, and 3) improve the chances of sustaining participant commitment throughout the life of the project. The selected programmes involved vocational and academic subjects with diverse representation of male and female students from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, including: Classics and History, Business Studies and Management, Creative Writing, Dance, Sports Science, and Philosophy. These different disciplines were selected to represent diversity in their nature, epistemology, and pedagogical and assessment practices, as well as student representation.
Recruitment of students from lower socio-economic groups at Riverside is above the national average with 35% compared to 30.7% nationally (in 2010). Seventy-five percent of students are female although subjects still tend to be gendered, for example women dominate Dance and Education; men dominate certain aspects of Sports Science such as coaching (100% men), and women (89%) dominate Nutrition; in the Business School there is a similar pattern although some subjects are more evenly gender mixed whereas Computing (single honours) is 75% male and Computing (Combined honours) is 100% female. Ethnicity varies across subjects and programmes; white students are in the majority overall and in most subjects.

**Gendered Subjects and Participation**

The data illuminate the ways that lecturer and student subjectivities are gendered and this is enmeshed in the gendering of subject areas, practices and disciplines. However, such insights do not reinforce the wider hegemonic view that contemporary higher education has become a “feminised” space. Rather, that data show that masculinities and femininities play out in complex ways to shape pedagogical experiences, relations, subjectivities and practices, both influenced by and challenging to hegemonic discourses of gender and masculinity.

Importantly, the lecturer participants demonstrate high levels of reflexivity about their approaches and are critical of the gendered power relations at play in their classrooms, although this does not necessarily translate directly into inclusive or equitable practices due to wider constraints and the complexity of gendered power relations in higher education. However, the lecturers seem to be aware of these complexities, critically reflecting on the particular issues and dilemmas they face as teachers in higher education. In the following account taken from a focus group, for example, a lecturer considers the problematic way that Business Studies has been constructed largely through masculinised perspectives and the implications of this for student experiences.

But a lot of Business language is around football, male sports, moving the goal post, team player, all this rubbish and I just wonder if you know it’s largely written by men, a lot of the Business Management literature and it’s very geared towards the systems type learning as well that maybe women, female students are excluded to a certain extent and a sort of silent lecture until the questions at the end. I thought of that word silent, the bit of research I did with students about women’s ways of knowing. Basically silence being the lowest level of engagement and you know by doing a lecture, we are imposing that silence but in the next minute, we’re saying,—let’s have a discussion about this and let’s engage but we’re controlling that as opposed to them really critically engaging. So I think there may be something wrong there in terms of imposing silence on the people. I mean I’m finding it more

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1 With the exception of aspects of Business most notably Business Computing where 100% are Black students and Human Bio Science and Bio Medical Science where 12.9% and 12% are White respectively. B&ME students are very under represented at post-graduate level.
and more—they’re just not able to engage. They don’t take the risk and my group this year, there’s only about one or two that would participate. Whereas previously it would be a really good dynamic—engaged. (Male Business Studies Lecturer)

The lecturer points to many competing concerns, some which are challenging to hegemonic discourses and some which are recuperative of assumptions about gender. He notes that the language of Business Studies is couched in discourses associated with masculinity, and that this might have implications for women students and their relationship to the subject and to their learning. He alludes to debates about “women’s ways of knowing” and suggests that this is associated with a form of “silence” that is arguably not conducive to higher education pedagogies. However, he also points to the competing ways that silence is understood in pedagogical contexts and the problematic position of the lecturer in regulating voice and silence. It is suggested that the encouragement of silence or voice at different moments in traditional forms of higher education pedagogies, associated with the lecture (silence) and the seminar (voice), will advantage female and male students differently. However, the data raise questions in relation to silence and voice and student’s gendered participation in higher education.

For example, some voices are not welcomed by teachers, particular those constructed as noisy, disruptive or unruly. Although voice is often seen as the key indicator of participation, the lecturers also talk about illegitimate forms of student voice. Voices constructed as unruly are often connected to constructions of (excessive) masculinity and this is linked to pejorative discourses of “Other” students associated with classed and racialised misrecognitions.

**MALE LECTURER 1:** I can hear blokes. Again I can usually hear their chatter let’s say more acutely more than I can hear some female chatter simply because of the difference in pitch.

**MALE LECTURER 2:** I really can’t tolerate talking. It really drives me nuts and I will stop a lecture and they know. Whereas in the old days I used to just get louder and louder and they got louder and it got out of control. But I think you learn as a lecturer how to control a group. And if they’re too quiet you...

**FEMALE LECTURER 1:** I think after 20 minutes you put a question to them. It gives them an opportunity to talk to each other otherwise I know that their attention span is not all that great so it’s best to give them a bit of a breathing space.

**MALE LECTURER 3:** Actually my experience is thinking about the power dynamics in Business Studies as well ‘cause I think we all think, I don’t think any of us would think we have to go in and manage that space because as a lecturer it’s not about allowing silences and not allowing silence and telling them when they can speak and when they can’t. But there is that dynamic about independent learning and reflective learning—probably you go into a situation and you are the manager, if you have power.

**FEMALE LECTURER 1:** The only power they have is to walk out.

(Business Studies Staff Focus Group Discussion)
The lecturers also cite examples of student voice in relation to instances of the student exercising their rights as a consumer, and as posing a specific threat to the authority of the lecturer. Again, this is implicitly tied to classed and racialised forms of masculinity, and to narratives of those “Other” students who are seen in derogatory ways and as not belonging at university. In such instances, the intersections of working class, Black, young masculinities are seen as posing a particular threat to the authoritative position of the university lecturer. Anxiety about the risk of contamination of the (pure/legitimate) HE cultural context is suggested (Morley, 2003), raising key questions about the complex dynamics of gendered pedagogical relations.

...they are the same group who’s actually been making noises—so affecting the students’ hearing, and the problem, sometimes, you find it’s the same group time and time again. When you warn the first time, come the following week, and exactly the same. So the question we raised as well, before, how far you can go to say OK, enough is enough.... I mean I’ve done it, I think, twice or three times, and one of them is going and complain to the boss, you know. But I mean I have nothing to hide, you know. (Male Sports Science Lecturer)

In this way, diversity might sometimes not only be seen as a form of contamination of HE culture, but as an explicit challenge to traditional forms of (White, middle class) patriarchal authority reinforced in university spaces. Indeed, in such instances, the “ideal” student might be seen as the quiet and disciplined subject of the authoritative male professor, privileging feminine subjectivities, as women might be seen as easier to control, more obedient and docile and thus less likely to pose a threat to the authority of the lecturer. However, the accounts of both students and lecturers raise questions about the assumption that female students are quiet, docile and obedient, while male students are noisy and disruptive. For example, in the focus group interviews the extent to which men dominated class discussion was often debated:

**Female Lecturer 1:** There do tend to be a lot of girls in the group that don’t speak as much, and it’s predominantly male led, but I also think that we have more, statistically, we have more women than men anyway, so there are going to be higher numbers of silent women anyway, because there are more of them.

**Female Lecturer 2:** Yes. But in my experience, the voices I’m hearing, very often are the men.

**Female Lecturer 1:** OK, I don’t find that.

**Female Lecturer 3:** It’s [two male students are named] you know, chatty.

In a focus group with a mix of History, Philosophy and Business Studies students discussing these questions, the students suggest that gendered differences are related to disciplinary context and the kinds of ontologies and knowledge being privileged. It is perhaps notable that in the discussion, it is the male, White British, middle-class, History student (Male Student 1), amongst 3 other first generation students (1 White Italian, female, History student (Female Student 1); 1 Black Caribbean, female, Philosophy student (Female Student 2); and 1 White British,
male, Business student), who contributes “the answer” to the questions being raised. His contribution is insightful and analytical and resonates with the group of students.

Female Student 1: Yeah, when I’m in my history classes it seems that girls contribute more, but when I’m in my philosophy classes it seems that the guys are the ones that contribute more and talk more, so...

Female Student 2: Why do you think that?

Male Student 1: I think from my experience that’s because girls are more reserved in talking about unorthodox stuff. If something’s more unusual they are a little bit more afraid to speak out, that’s the impression I’ve got, because I’ve also done history, classics, philosophy and stuff.

Female Student 2: What do you mean unorthodox?

Male Student 1: Something unusual, to speak in a debate in philosophy you might be talking about some fairly whacky, crazy stuff, and I think some girls might be more reserved as in feel a bit more self-conscious about speaking out in class about things that are unusual and maybe illogical, why say that, what’s that got to do with it? Whereas in history, you know, it makes sense doesn’t it? What you are talking about is factual, you can definitely say it is, it will make more immediate sense.

Female Student 2: So girls like more concrete in this sense. More concrete then, to just stay where they can be safe.

In this exchange, the students demonstrate a deeply critical stance to questions of gendered pedagogical dynamics, although in some ways reinforcing hegemonic constructions of gender, both in the explanation offered and in the focus group dynamics. Indeed, essentialized discourses of gender identity are explored in relation to more challenging views of gendered performance.

Male Student 1: I think what it indicates to me is that maybe females, males, this is a gender difference, girls might react differently under the institutionalized nature of school might make them sort of ... dunno, behave more in class, whereas guys it’s more of a rebellious potency under that kind of pressure. So they’ll do that both in and out of the school environment, whereas out of it I think girls join it, can just as easily join in the fun and games in class, messing about if they choose. That’s the impression I’ve gained from classes here, and thinking back to school. I think girls have got it in them to mess around, the same as guys would if they wanted to, but maybe they more suppress that in school than at uni, because it comes out in university.

The student is making a complex argument that recognizes the ways that gender is performed in different social contexts differently. He challenges the stereotypical view that girls are naturally well behaved, and presents a sociological argument that it is the regulation of gendered subjectivity within schools that might produce differences in behaviour between girls and boys rather than any innate difference. He suggests that without such tight regulatory discourses, girls have more freedom to “mess around” just as boys do. Making a similar point during the same focus group, a female student compares university to “heaven,” suggesting that
higher education is uncorrupted by the unequal power relations that are present in other educational and social contexts. Different performances of the self, she suggests in her account, are not about gender at all but about the extent to which the person “cares” about their education, and this point resonates with debates about who has the right to higher education and derogatory discourses of “underserving” students from backgrounds associated with WP.

**FEMALE STUDENT 1:** And here [university] seems like heaven in this respect, no matter if you are a girl or a boy if you talk you are listened to, you are heard. So it’s so much different [than school]. We have two girls in our class, they are so loud, they are so … they don’t pay attention, seriously they couldn’t care less about what we are talking [about], and they continue to interrupt and stuff. There are guys that don’t give anything to the course, but still it’s not because they are guys or girls, because they are people like that, they don’t care.

The points that the students raise are important and complex, and resonate with poststructural views that deconstruct gender discourses. However, the argument that regulation of identity formation is not present in the institutional space of universities, which is liberated from gendered hierarchies, is dangerous as it hides the privileging of certain forms of hegemonic masculine subjectivities and epistemologies and instead all women and all men are seen as free to compete on what is presented as a level playing field. This reinforces individualising, neoliberal and meritocratic discourses that work to conceal the operations of inequalities at the social level. Furthermore, underpinning this is a derisive discourse that re-categorises identity in terms of those “who care” and those who do not, which is another form of regulation over who is seen as having the right to higher education, and who is not.

**COMPETING FORMS OF MASCULINITY IN PEDAGOGICAL SPACES**

Masculinities are multiple and contested formations, challenging common sense understanding of gender that assumes masculinity is connected only to those bodies identified as male. It is important to note that a person, whether identified as male or female, can take up, cite and perform different, competing and multiple discourses of masculinity and femininity. However, subjectivities are embodied and gendered, so that a female performing masculine discursive practices risks being (mis)recognised and “Othered,” often through patriarchal and misogynist discourses that function to reposition the authority of the legitimate male masculine subject. Performatives are relational and always made sense of in relation to gendered bodies, as well as discourses and contexts, including the context of social institutions rooted in patriarchal histories, such as higher education.

Furthermore, masculinity is not only a concept that describes ways of being or acting in the social world, it can also be applied to wider social discourses, practices and cultures. In higher education, certain practices are historically associated with masculinised subjectivities, such as lecturing, professing, claiming authority, operating in ways that might be seen as competitive and so on. Furthermore, certain practices are embodied in particular kinds of persons; for example discourses of “the professor” tend to be associated with White, middle-aged, middle-classed
male bodies, subjectivities and dispositions. This is tied in with questions about gendered participation, the legitimation and exclusion of certain forms of knowledge and the politics of recognition, power and authority in pedagogical spaces. The embodiment of certain forms of masculinity in higher education is deeply connected to the politics of recognition and misrecognition. For example, the following young, female Philosophy lecturers explain that:

**Female Lecturer 1:** None of us fit the image, do we? The old White man ... you know, like whatever, elbow patches. But I think that’s good because it very immediately breaks the stereotype, and then there isn’t a problem with that at all, but it’s interesting that sometimes you get that preconception. On occasion, somebody comes to your room to see you before you’ve started teaching them, and they are like—ooh. And also the age thing, because the image is also a very old one, and if you look a bit younger as well, it’s kind of like, you know, oh, you are my professor.

**Female Lecturer 2:** Yes, one discussion I’ve heard is that women philosophers tend to stay in history of philosophy, but also in sort of philosophy of science, disproportionately. It’s thought to be that perhaps it’s because there you can really prove your point, you know, you can go back to the text and prove your point, so people can’t undermine you quite so easily, which is ... apparently there are a disproportionate men and women doing philosophy of mind and philosophy of science, where, you know, there’s an external source of evidence in some sense.

Such politics of recognition (and misrecognition) that play out across complex relations of gender and masculinity have serious implications for students as well as lecturers. Feminist scholars have argued that intersections of masculinity with class and race pose particular dilemmas for some men. This has included attention to the complex ways that forms of gendered, classed and racialized subjectivities, as well as other sets of identity formation (such as religion and sexuality, for example) profoundly shape the processes of becoming a student in higher education. This is interconnected with social practices, power relations and the emotional or affective dimensions of subjectivity. For example, Archer et al. (2001) explore the impact of formations of masculinity and religious identifications and practices on decisions not to participate in higher education. They show how some young Muslim males position HE participation as ideologically incompatible with some forms of Muslim masculinity since university is often seen to involve drugs and drinking, which are in tension with the kinds of familial and cultural dispositions signified, valued and practiced through the Muslim religion. Similarly, Archer et al. argue, drawing on their research data, that some young men from minority ethnic backgrounds view HE participation as incompatible with a “cool” identity since it often involves impoverished lifestyle and financial hardship, and therefore lacks the kind of immediate material and monetary rewards made available by going to work (see also Archer & Leathwood, 2003). In this way, participating in HE appears to interfere with practices of maintaining residual or emerging versions of masculinity for some men, since it locates them “within an arena where middle-class men exercise greater power/competency” (Archer et al., 2001, p. 441), leaving them struggling with feelings of dispossession and exclusion. However, other research has shown that many men, including those from Muslim and minority ethnic backgrounds,
perceive higher education as a potential space of transformation and social mobility (Burke, 2006, 2010).

Educational aspiration and higher education are profoundly linked to constellations of subjectivity, formed through gendered intersections with other social identities. However, this does not play out in any predictable way due to the complexity of these intricate formations. This means that questions of men’s higher educational access and participation must engage the complexity of social identity formations across a range of differences, structured by hegemonic discourses, including patriarchy, meritocracy and neoliberalism. The interconnections of such structures themselves have no absolute predictable effects particularly because they are often in contradiction and are operating through complex modes of stratification and differentiation. For example, there are competing forms of hegemonic patriarchal masculinity, which are re-shaped by global neoliberalism and discourses of meritocracy. This is layered in relation to the demands of neoliberalism, in which the masculinized subject is compelled to produce himself in particular ways to meet the demands of neoliberal and meritocratic discourses, including through self-disciplining practices (such as involving time management, diligence and demonstrating good organizational and team-working skills). Feminist scholars have shown that some narratives of masculinity run counter to the production of a legitimate subject position as student in both schooling and higher education, including narratives of “laziness” related to discourses of “laddishness” (Jackson, 2006). This requires a delicate re-balancing between different and competing sets of perfomatives, demonstrated by the following account of a male, White British, first generation Sports Science student. When asked if he ever feels bored during formal pedagogical encounters the student explains that:

School’s always going to be uncool. There is going to be no way of making it more popular than the newest thing in. But my sleeping probably ruins me for that. I always come in tired and that’s my own fault. I drift off in my own head as well. Yeah, like it depends on what you are learning. Like you get a good choice of modules and we choose them. But sometimes it’s not going to be the most interesting of things that you are learning.

Although this student draws on hegemonic forms of “laddish” White masculinity in his disposition towards learning and his narrative of his experiences as a student, he also demonstrates the skills of neoliberalism, which call on the discursive citations of “flexibility.” However, his narrative of flexibility is arguably formed through discourses of masculinity, as this is not about the juggling of multiple tasks associated with femininity. Rather he draws on discourses of flexibility that require moving across social and pedagogical spaces with ease and confidence, whilst accessing the necessary resources and networks to operate flexibly.

My main needs are probably social reasons ‘cause if I’m comfortable with that and having fun. And I can mix and match work, as long as I’m balancing it out. I’m not the sort of person who could sit and work all day every day. I need to have a social side of it. But on the learning side all the resources are there. So my needs if I did need an academic reason the library is just there. The books are available. The journals are available online so academic wise I’m satisfied. All my needs are met.
His mobility across university spaces was strongly demonstrated during my interview with him. Our encounter happened without much planning because I suddenly had to cover for my colleague who fell ill. Due to this, I had no formal room reserved in which to conduct the interview and so I met him in the campus coffee shop, explaining the situation to him. He immediately took the lead, skillfully mobilizing his networks to find a room for the interview. He led me through a maze of corridors and soon secured the most prestigious space in the building by drawing on his well-established networks. He had already developed a positive relationship with support staff in the University through his campaign to become Student President and during our encounter he quickly negotiated with the female personal assistant our use of the Principal’s Room for the interview. Throughout our meeting, he appeared to be fully confident and comfortable in the different spaces of the University, including the exclusive space of the Principal’s room.

The concept of embodied identities emphasises the working of power and difference and the ways that these are marked and inscribed on the body, as well as resisted or subverted through “practices of the self” (Foucault, 1977). This is powerful for thinking through the ways that different bodies are positioned, mobilized and regulated in relation to complex inequalities across pedagogical spaces and relations. Embodied identity helps to think through the ways different bodies take up and use the different higher education spaces available, and the ways that higher education spaces and practices are constructed and re/shaped in relation to the different bodies that move through and are positioned within them.

**Conclusion**

The narrative of a crisis of masculinity presents an over-simplistic analysis of the increasing numbers of women accessing higher education in some parts of the world. It also rests on patriarchal and misogynist assumptions that women’s position should always be in a minority (Morley, 2010). In the context of higher education, this has reduced complex gendered inequalities to a presumed battle of the sexes, failing to engage with the intricate ways that formations of gender are produced and performed in different pedagogical spaces and disciplinary contexts, privileging particular kinds of practices, knowledge and identities whilst excluding Others. Drawing on the accounts of students and lecturers in a case study institution, I have shown how masculinities play out in complex ways across pedagogical practices, relations and spaces, both influenced by and challenging to hegemonic patriarchal discourses of gender. Detailed attention to formations of masculinity within pedagogical relations reveals the important ways that intersections of gender and masculinity with other, pathologized identities inflame problematic anxieties about “lowering of standards” and the neoliberal imperative for higher education to produce disciplined subjects, or in Foucault’s terms, “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1977). Indeed, gender is always embodied, and although masculinities can be taken up by different kinds of bodies and selves, only certain bodies can be positioned as legitimate and authoritative in relation to hegemonic patriarchal discourses of masculinity (which play out differently across different pedagogical contexts). This poses a challenge for the inclusion of men from “Other” kinds of social backgrounds, in terms of the often derisive constructions of working-class and Black masculinities, which reinforce inequalities in pedagogical spaces and problematic subjective positions of both students and lecturers. Higher
education pedagogies thus require reformation to address such complex issues and concerns but in ways that reject the highly problematic claim that masculinity is in crisis due to the feminisation of higher education.

References


