

**UCLA**

**InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies**

**Title**

The Making of Violent Masculinities: Exploring the Intersections of Cultural, Structural and Direct Violence in Schools

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4sb2h2q5>

**Journal**

InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies, 8(1)

**Author**

Khoja-Moolji, Shenila S.

**Publication Date**

2012

**DOI**

10.5070/D481000811

**Copyright Information**

Copyright 2012 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

## Introduction

Constructions of masculinities and femininities are wrought with complexity—they are fluid across time and space, relational, and embody a range of components that rise and decline in significance. Girls and boys engage in a range of performances of gender, at different stages and with varying degrees (Pascoe, 2007). Gender is, thus, conceived as a plurality as opposed to a rigid, binary notion. However, even as the complexity of gender is acknowledged, the dominant cultural constructions and representations of masculinities and femininities continue to weigh heavily on individual and societal imaginations. At any particular period in time, one form of construction is considered most honored and carries immense cultural authority (Connell, 2005). It dictates and delineates practices, behaviors, attitudes, and roles appropriate for men and women in the public and private spheres. The concept of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, introduced in the 1980s, underscores the dominance of these particular constructions in the ways society organizes itself and its members. Even though such constructions may be enacted by only a small number of men and women, they are “highly visible” (Connell, 1996, p. 209) and their power lies in maintaining the facade of the *possibility* for others to achieve them. While contested and elaborated upon recently (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), the concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a useful framework for understanding the dominant scripts of masculinity.

Studies highlight that one of the culturally exalted definitions of hegemonic masculinity includes the capacity of men to be violent (see e.g., Hatty, 2000; Messner, 2002; Mills, 2001). It is assumed that violence and aggression come *naturally* to men and that the display of dominance is a way for men to express their masculinity. In this paper, I argue that schools, teachers, and students draw upon this hegemonic construction of masculinity to legitimize and willfully ignore structural and direct violence in schools and, in doing so, participate in normalizing the relationship between violence and masculinity. I employ Johan Galtung’s (1990) typology of violence—direct, structural and cultural—to analyze and understand performances and enactments of violence discussed in a range of studies focused on schooling and gender construction from industrialized nations (Ferguson, 2000; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Lopez, 2003; Messner, 2002; Mills, 2001; Pascoe, 2007; Reay, 2010; Skelton, 2001; Thorne, 1993; Walkerdine, 1998). Beginning with the assumption that hegemonic masculinity, as defined above, serves as a form of cultural violence, I highlight the specific ways in which schools, teachers, and students draw on aspects of it to establish and endorse difference between boys’ and girls’ capacities to be violent, and willfully ignore performances of violent masculinity. I focus on facets of the

school's formal culture—defined as policies and structures laid out by the school (Swain, 2005), and represented in the disciplinary structure, curricular knowledge and contact sports—as well as the informal culture, which includes student relations and teacher practices, to explore the ways in which these processes collectively make understandable the use of aggression by boys. The conclusion proposes some strategies for school administrators and educators to begin to challenge the cultural violence of hegemonic masculinity in schools.

### **Galtung's Typology of Violence**

Violence is a complex concept with various dimensions and manifestations. Johan Galtung's typology of violence has been influential in the field of Peace Studies to understand the operation of violence at multiple levels. Galtung (1990) sees violence “as avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible” (p. 292). Put differently, violence is purposeful, intentional action or threat of action that is aimed at hurting another human being or the environment. Acts of violence committed in an observable manner that cause physical harm are categorized as direct violence. These include acts of rape, torture, maiming, and killing, as well as those that hinder the acquisition of a person's basic needs for identity and freedom, such as repression, detention, desocialization from one's own culture and resocialization into a new one (Galtung, 1990). Structural violence is less obvious; it is violence committed by social structures and institutions that discriminate either in law or practice. These structures serve to exploit, marginalize or fragment “the Other” in order to maintain a status quo of unequal power, or to achieve such inequality. Examples of structural violence include policies that sustain wage discrimination on the basis of gender or race, or high stakes testing that limits access to higher education for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finally, cultural violence is any aspect of culture that is used to legitimize direct or structural violence, rendering it acceptable by society. Institutions are influenced by cultural violence and draw upon it to define values and institute policies, and individuals rely on it to interpret practices and make meaning of their experiences.

Galtung (1990) presents a useful scheme to understand the intersections of direct, structural and cultural violence. He likens the three aspects of violence to the image of strata: “At the bottom is the steady flow through time of cultural violence, a substratum from which the other two can derive their nutrients. In the next stratum rhythms of structural violence are located. Patterns of exploitation are building up ... at the top is the stratum of direct violence” (pp. 294-295). More specifically, “direct violence is an *event*; structural violence is a *process* with ups and downs; cultural violence is an *invariant*, a permanence” (p. 294). In

the context of schools, this article argues that the hegemonic construction of masculinity is the invariant that influences both school processes (institutional values and policies represented by disciplinary structures, contact sports and curricular knowledges) and events (practices of physical and sexual assault and bullying among students, and student-teacher relations).

While Galtung's typology proves to be a useful framework for analyzing the ways in which school policies, student relations, and teacher practices draw upon the underlying cultural current of hegemonic masculinity, it is critical to note that the movement is not one-directional. Processes of direct and structural violence serve to further entrench cultural violence; acts of direct violence are made possible not only by the structural contexts that facilitate them but also the cultural ideologies that inform them. Each layer, therefore, serves to legitimize as well as seek legitimation from other layers. The typology, therefore, is not a clear-cut, one-directional movement—it is interrelated, complex, and fluid.

### *The Cultural Violence of Hegemonic Masculinity*

As noted earlier, one of the major components of hegemonic masculinity is men's *capacity* to dominate others—women and men—through violence. Women, too, commit violence; however, masculinity's privilege is closely associated with its ability to overpower and dominate others, while femininity is assumed to be at the receiving end of these power relations. And when women do commit violence, it is perceived as their partaking in a masculine privilege. For hegemonic masculinity to retain its cultural significance, not all men have to perform it—as long as some men perform aspects of it, the facade for others to achieve it remains intact. Men do, however, feel compelled to align their practices, attitudes and preferences with this hegemonic construction in order to demonstrate their commitment to it and participate in the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell, 1995, p. 41). Otherwise, they are marginalized, labeled as deficient and “assimilated to femininity” (Swain, 2005, p. 221), femininity being positioned lower on the gender hierarchy.

Like other institutions in society, schools too are influenced by the cultural violence of hegemonic masculinity and draw on it to structure possibilities and boundaries for students and teachers. The values that a school subscribes to, the policies it institutes, and the practices it endorses or fails to disrupt all embody and construct particular definitions of masculinities and femininities. These values, policies and practices are instructive for teachers and students and provide a framework within which they must interpret and make meaning of their daily experiences. Indeed, not only does hegemonic masculinity inform the values and processes at schools, it also “dulls us into seeing its dominance as normal, or not seeing it at all” (Galtung, 1990, p. 295). Students draw on elements of hegemonic masculinity when they engage in practices such as bullying to assert domination

over others. Similarly, teachers too play their part by failing to disrupt enactments of violent masculinities, reading them as normal. Collectively, these instances of structural and direct violence intersect to code violence in the script of masculinity.

### **Structural and Direct Violence in Schools**

#### *Establishing and Endorsing Difference—Boys as Violent; Girls as Non-Violent*

Connell (2000) notes that “gender is embedded in the institutional arrangements through which a school system functions” (p. 152). Disciplinary structures that mark boys as violent, contact sports that valorize aggression, and curricular knowledges that construct violence and assertion of physical strength as a signifier of accomplished masculinity, draw on the hegemonic construction of masculinity as violent and reinforce it.

Disciplinary structures at schools reflect the association of violence with masculinity, and construct the *male* body as a source of disruption and a target for disciplining. Consider the spatial geography of many schools in North America that are demarcated by metal detectors and the practices of bag searches and pat downs. Entering the geography of the school can be a demoralizing experience for many male students, as they are targeted daily for these surveillance procedures. Within the schools, detention rooms serve as spaces where particular kinds of students, usually boys, can be quarantined, monitored and reformed. Students often dread these spaces and some refer to them as “jailhouses” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 34). In addition, the ubiquitous presence of safety and security personnel and guards on school premises, sends a strong message to students that the environment is threatening, non-collegial and even violent. The New York Police Department’s division for school safety, for instance, employs an estimated 5,200 School Safety Agents across schools in New York (New York Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). These officers operate scanning equipment, verify visitors’ identities, intervene during student altercations, and have the authority to make arrests (New York Police Department, n.d.). The officers, who are mostly male, seek to discipline other male bodies and are allowed to “chase, manhandle, and apprehend male students” (Lopez, 2003, p. 74). These structures and practices simultaneously construct the male body as a threat to the proper functioning of the school, as well as the disciplinarian that can control that threat through violence.

While female students are also disciplined, the fragility of their bodies is highlighted, in most cases, to construct them as being less capable of participating in or tolerating violence. For instance, male security staff members are not allowed to physically engage with female students. Similarly, female students are exclusively targeted for enrollment in self-defense courses. These policies work in

paradoxical ways; while on one hand they spare female students from the daily policing practices of the security staff, on the other they construct the female body as weak and vulnerable in relation to the strong male bodies. Instead of breaking the connection between violence and masculinity, these disciplinary structures, practices and policies mark male bodies as disruptive and violent, and female bodies as the recipients of that violence.

Contact sports form another site where performances of aggression and violence by boys are encouraged and find institutional endorsement. Due to the feminization of the teaching profession in the twentieth century, participation in sports was seen as a way to shield boys from the excessive influence of female teachers (Sadker & Sadker, 2002). It was believed that boys needed a space where they could get “wild” and expend their excess energy. Sports, therefore, were incorporated into official school curricula precisely to develop young boys into tough, strong men. Today, several schools in the United States invest substantial resources in contact sports such as football, ice hockey and wrestling, which emphasize aggression, strength, speed, and domination. Indeed, display of aggression is sometimes included in the script of play. Consider the role of enforcers in North American ice hockey teams. The enforcer is expected to engage in physical confrontations with opposing team players if his star players are intimidated by them. The referees tolerate such fights as long as the players abide by the implicit rules of the fight. The audience rewards such confrontations by rallying behind the enforcers. Similar mechanisms can also be observed in other contact sports such as football, where the primary determinant of success is the physical capacity of the players to block, tackle and out-speed their opponents. Such forms of “contextual normalization of violence” (Messner, 2002, p. 50) not only allow the teams to assert their dominance on the field but also function as critical means of bonding for both the members of the teams as well as those who observe them. This legitimization of violence, however, is not contained to the field. Messner (2002) notes that the daily dynamics that normalize violence lead male athletes to also commit off-the-field violence, as is evidenced by the numerous cases involving bullying, sexual harassment and assault by male athletes.

Messner (2002) views such enactments of physical dominance by athletes in terms of a triad of violence: violence against women, against other men, and against their own bodies. The authority and boundaries of this form of masculinity is maintained through the use of homophobic, misogynistic and violent discourses. Spaces related to contact sports, such as locker rooms, develop special significance as places where men can prepare for physical confrontations by engaging in bodily modification through weight-lifting or strength training, and reinforce group bonds through talk that objectifies women and marginal men, and includes metaphors of war. Such discourses normalize the actual and imagined

use and subjugation of the female and the feminized male body to consolidate group identity, and make understandable the use of violence and domination by boys on as well as off the field.

Not only do schools condone participation in contact sports, and with it the accompanying direct and structural violence, they also actively encourage it by directing more funding toward it vis-à-vis other sports. Such valorization of aggression sends a strong message to boys—that it is legitimate for them to employ violence and use their bodies as tools or weapons to achieve an end and dominate others. It further stokes the belief that boys are aggressive by nature and need outlets like the playground to avoid creating disruptions elsewhere. While all athletes do not commit acts of direct violence, many boys participate in contact sports in order to align themselves with dominant versions of hegemonic masculinity and silently reap its rewards. The boys who are unable to perform this masculinity or who are consistently the targets of violence feel crushed by the sports culture (Thompson, 2002). These boys are perceived as being deficient and relegated to the bottom of the culturally dominant hierarchy of masculinities. Contact sports, therefore, can become a physical and discursive space for boys to construct their bodies as weapons, develop domination as a skill, and engage in contextually normalized violence.

Finally, knowledges constructed and represented in and by textbooks and curricular divisions privilege particular forms of masculinity over others. A range of textbooks, especially from the disciplines of history and social studies, represent violent masculinities as the preferred subject position. Textbooks abound with examples of men's conquests, men's wars, narratives of empire building, and glorification of particular men's work—soldiers, knights, kings, warriors and, more recently, the generals and heads of states who take countries into war—which make invisible the direct and structural violence of wars, racism, and colonialism. Such textbooks become a “primer on hegemonic masculinity” (Kuzmic, 2000, p. 115), and portray that men who are not afraid to dominate and overpower others are the real heroes of history. Domination, thus, becomes closely associated with masculinity, and violence is represented as a signifier of accomplished masculinity. At the same time, femininity is represented as the passive recipient of male dominance. Even though the successes of the women's liberation movement have led to the inclusion of women's voices and narratives in textbooks, women continue to be represented in stereotypical ways and are located in the culturally devalued private sphere. This serves to perpetuate traditional power imbalances between masculinity and femininity.

In addition to the knowledges constructed by the textbooks, the assumption that boys are better at tasks that require physical strength and visual-spatial skills has led to a gendered division of disciplinary knowledges. The masculinization of disciplines such as mathematics, sciences, technology and

physical education, and feminization of languages and humanities, is indicative of these assumptions. Indeed, some reports show that boys are less interested in studying the English language because they identify it as a girls' subject (Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004). Curricular divisions not only promote boys' association with disciplines that require physical strength and visual-spatial skills, but also create the oppositional image of girls as lacking these skills. Given the power imbalances between girls and boys, the disciplines selected by the latter also convey higher status and monetary rewards. Significantly, they construct physical strength, bodily movement and power as an imperative for the successful development of masculine identity.

The values, policies and knowledges constructed and represented by the disciplinary structures, contact sports and curricula in schools draw on the cultural violence of hegemonic masculinity to valorize a particular kind of masculine subjectivity—one that has the capacity to be violent and aggressive. These processes provide the structural scaffolding for students to perform this masculinity by engaging in acts of direct violence, and for teachers to ignore such performances.

### *Performances and Willful Ignorance*

Galtung (1990) observes that, “a casual flow from cultural via structural to direct violence can be identified” (p. 295). As noted above, school values, policies, and curricular knowledges provide the structural and cultural space within which teachers and students perform gender. These structures legitimize and normalize enactments of violent masculinities and, undoubtedly, impact the relations between students and teachers. The gendered nature of disciplinary practices and willful ignorance of performances of violent masculinity by teachers, and bullying and sexual harassment by students, are examples of direct violence that draw on hegemonic masculinity. When left undisrupted, these performances further entrench the association of violence with masculinity.

In terms of disciplining, teachers often treat boys and girls differently. Several ethnographic studies (Ferguson, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Mills, 2001) show that boys are more likely to be punished than girls; teachers adopt harsher attitudes in disciplining boys versus girls; and that while girls are often asked to reflect on their disruptive behaviors, boys are required to cease their activities immediately and seldom get similar chances for self-reflection. Even when a boy and a girl are involved in an identical infraction of the rules, the male is more likely to get the penalty (Sadker & Sadker, 2002). At times, teachers also attempt to make an example out of boys who break the rules and punish them more severely, because “boys can take it.” Punishment here serves multiple purposes—while on one hand it reestablishes the authority of the teacher and directs student behaviors to conform to the social norms deemed appropriate by the school, on



the other hand it positions boys as superior to girls, constructing them as the tougher gender capable of tolerating and surviving in high-pressure environments. Paradoxically, the same attitude also makes teachers inured to the observable performances of violent masculinity by boys. Within school contexts, boys routinely perform aspects of, and align themselves with, culturally dominant, violent, heterosexual masculinity to establish difference in power vis-à-vis girls and other boys. Such performances carry material, emotional and psychological rewards for the boys who perform it and for those who are complicit in its performance.

One such blatant way in which difference is established is through acts of bullying and sexual harassment, which are acts of direct violence undertaken by both boys and girls to intentionally hurt or cause harm. Olweus (1993) notes that while both girls and boys bully and are bullied, boys are more often the victims as well as the perpetrators of direct bullying, which includes verbal attacks and physical confrontations. So pervasive are bullying practices that they are coded as masculine. Consider Gini and Pozzoli's (2006) study of 113 Italian elementary school children in which they sought to analyze the correlation between masculinity and bullying. They administered questionnaires to students and teachers to assess self-attribution of masculine traits (such as *courageous*, *strong*, *noisy*), and their correlation with reactive or proactive aggressive behaviors (such as beating another student when hit or teased versus beating without provocation). Their study confirmed that self-attribution of masculine traits by both girls and boys led them to endorse aggressive behaviors and bullying of other children. This study points to the immense weight of the cultural representation of masculinity as aggressive.

Boys routinely fight to secure a better position within the male hierarchy, and engage in the denigration and objectification of girls and homosexual students to mark the boundaries of masculinity. Even boys who are at the bottom of the male hierarchy participate in sexist discourses in an attempt to access the rewards of hegemonic masculinity. This is evident in Diane Reay's (2010) study of primary classroom contexts in Britain in which she observes three Bengali boys compensate for their low position on the male hierarchy by demonizing girls. Girls, too, participate in masculinizing processes and entrench their positions as recipients of boys' violence by using words such as *sluts*, *bitches*, and *whores* to refer to each other. In doing so, they maintain "a hierarchy with male-oriented, tough and sexually aggressive boys at the top" (Stein, 2002, p. 417). This hegemony of heterosexual masculinity in schools is sustained by the policing of boundaries of acceptable male desire, dress and behavior. Students employ homophobic remarks to bully girls and boys who do not seem to conform to dominant sexual desires, regardless of whether or not they are gay. Indeed, "achieving a masculine identity entails the repeated repudiation of the specter of

failed masculinity” (Pascoe, 2007, p. 5). Such instances of direct violence symbolize and sustain the power imbalances between girls and boys, as well as among boys.

However, it should be noted that while hegemonic masculinity is coded as violent, violence itself is coded as masculine as well. Therefore, in particular instances, those who are placed on the margins of the “masculinist center” (Messner, 2002, p. 93) access and deploy violence as a means to negotiate power relations. This is apparent in Kimmel and Mahler’s (2003) study of 28 cases of random shooting in American high schools. The instances can be read as attempts by boys who are routinely marginalized to re-inscribe power relations through the use of violence:

All or most of the shooters had tales of being harassed—specifically, gay-baited—for inadequate gender performance; their tales are the tales of boys who did not measure up to the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, in our view, these boys are not psychopathological deviants but rather overconformists to a particular normative construction of masculinity, a construction that defines violence as a legitimate response to a perceived humiliation. (p. 1440)

The shooters contested their marginalization by enacting the response they deemed most appropriate for such forms of humiliation—violence. The shootings can, thus, be interpreted as not only a form of contestation but also a legitimate *masculine* response to humiliation, which could potentially accrue “patriarchal dividend” (Connell, 1995, p. 41) to the shooters.

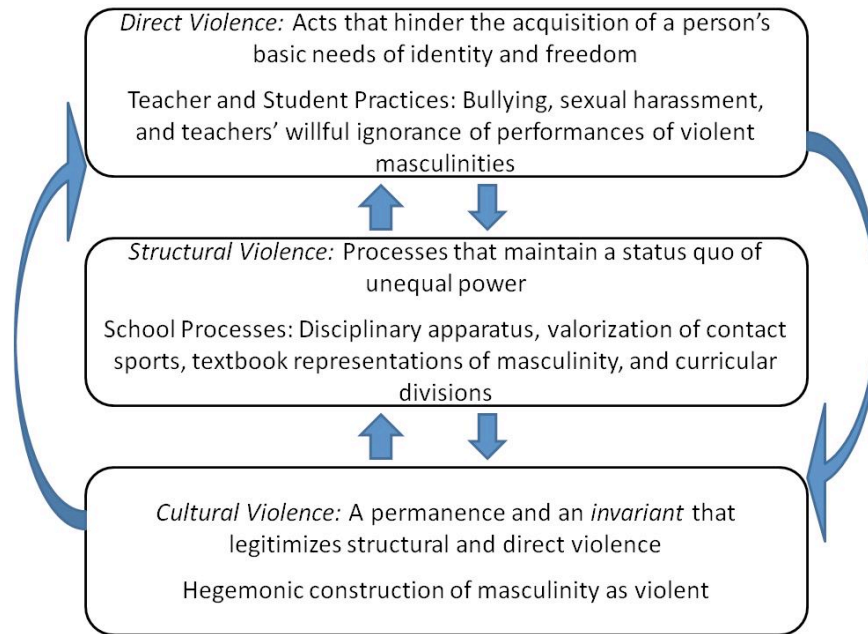
While such extreme enactments of violent masculinity receive attention, adults in schools sometimes fail to disrupt, or willfully ignore, other similar but more ambiguous enactments of violence. Pascoe (2007) provides examples of boys in a high school in California who acted out scenarios of rape and physically constrained girls in a sexual manner while the teachers remained on the sidelines and dismissed such interactions as flirtations. In another ethnographic account of a school in North Carolina, Fields and Hirshman (2007) show that teachers did not intervene when homophobic comments were made during a sex education class. And, in a yet another study, we find that teachers themselves engaged in harassment of homosexual youth (Davison, 2000). The failure of adults to interrupt such enactments of violent masculinity deserves serious attention. Several cases of bullying happen inside schools during times when students are closely supervised by adults, such as in the classrooms where teachers are present or on the playgrounds where sports supervisors or coaches may be present. Willful ignorance by adults legitimizes these acts of direct violence. It trains girls to tolerate battery and assault as a condition of life, and boys to become batterers as their assaults are not condemned by adults (Stein, 1995). In essence, it functions to maintain the dominance of heterosexual, violent masculinity.

In this vein, it is also worth considering the bullying of teachers by students, especially when the teachers are female. As alluded to earlier, while teachers have authority and power vis-à-vis students, there are times when students, especially male students, destabilize that relationship by accessing or alluding to aspects of violent masculinity. Walkerdine (1990) recounts an incident in which a female teacher's gender identity is brought to the fore by two 4-year-old male students who employed sexist discourse to resist her efforts to discipline them. The boys used phrases such as, "Miss Baxter, show your knickers your bum off ... take all your clothes off, your bra off" (p. 4) to mark difference. Instead of disrupting such behaviors, Miss Baxter dismissed their comments as "silly" and asked them to find something else to do (p. 4). She overlooked the harassment and interpreted it within the framework of progressive education, which emphasizes that students be controlled but not regimented. However, by relying on students to self-monitor their behaviors, she not only failed to observe her own victimization but also condoned this form of bullying by the boys. Such incidences of sexual harassment of teachers highlight teachers' own subjectivities; teachers imbibe dominant cultural values that represent boys as naturally aggressive and, consequently, read their performances of violence as acceptable. They also often do not view children as sexed and gendered beings, capable of deploying sexist discourses. Therefore, when the bullying and harassment escalates and is targeted toward the teachers themselves, it comes as a surprise, and leads to feelings of fear and confusion.

### *The Violence Strata in Schools*

Applying Galtung's (1990) violence strata to school contexts reveals the variety of ways in which schools, teachers and students are influenced by the cultural violence of hegemonic masculinity and draw on it to establish difference between boys' and girls' capacities for violence. This difference operates through the structuring of school values, policies and knowledges that reinforce the link between violence and masculinity, teachers' willful ignorance of boys' performances of violent masculinity, and students' employment of hegemonic masculinity to interpret, validate and police their own and each others' actions and behaviors. The figure below attempts to summarize the discussion thus far:

Figure 1. **The Violence Strata in Schools**



Typologies, however, decrease our ability to observe the underlying processes, interconnections, and consequences. Acts of direct violence draw on both a culture that legitimizes domination of a particular group as well as structural factors that make it possible for one to perform violence. Said differently, it can be argued that sexual harassment of a homosexual student during a game of football draws on both an environment that valorizes aggression in sports as well as the cultural violence of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity that constructs aggression as a signifier of accomplished manhood. In addition, factors such as race and social class interact with gender and sexuality to variously position boys and girls on the gender hierarchy. The reality of social relations is, thus, much more complicated and interdependent.

Finally, the consequences of the cultural dominance of hegemonic masculinity are complex. While boys employ violence to assert dominance, they also form the majority of those who become victims of violence; boys are more likely to be punished by teachers, be suspended, and follow anti-social paths (see e.g., Ferguson, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Olweus, 1993, 1997). Those who cannot access aspects of hegemonic masculinity due to their race, social class, sexuality and physique can find living up to the norms of hegemonic masculinity to be an oppressive experience (see e.g., Kimmel, 2008; Lance, 2010). They then seek out other ways, such as denigrating women or employing homophobic language, to assert power and avoid marginalization. Viewed from this perspective, the

construct of violent masculinity commits direct violence against both boys and girls by limiting their possibilities for emotional, mental, and material well-being.

What can be done to disrupt this model? How can schools, teachers, and students unsettle the gender regimes of schools? How can schools educate for peaceful gender relations?

### **Re-envisioning Schools; Re-thinking Schooling**

Destabilizing the relationship between masculinity and violence is a complex process and cannot be achieved through simplistic alterations in teaching practices or school arrangements. Indeed, it would entail interrupting the hegemony of dominant versions of masculinity, which would require promoting alternate and varied performances of gender. At the level of schools, some of the ways in which this effort can be initiated are: reforming the formal curricula to include a range of representations of masculinities and femininities; employing the lens of gender to inquire into social relations and structures; providing training to teachers and staff to interrogate and interrupt performances of violent masculinity; strictly enforcing sexual harassment policies; and building an alliance among relevant stakeholders to effect school change.

While curricular reforms during the past few decades have increased the visibility of women's perspectives, voices and narratives in textbooks, women are generally presented in stereotypical ways. Kuzmic's (2000) study of American high school history textbooks demonstrates that while men are represented as rational, women are characterized as gendered beings whose "actions and motivations are always reduced to a narrowly defined essentialized femininity always connected to the private sphere" (p. 120). Therefore, in order to destabilize gender stereotypes, formal curricula should be revised to include varied representations of femininities and masculinities. In addition, students should be encouraged to engage with these varied constructions by exploring knowledge from the point of these subjects. In doing so, they can develop an appreciation of the situatedness and fluidity of social identities. The National Council for Teachers of English in the United States, for instance, seeks to promote the use of books that enable boys and girls to cross gender boundaries. In their mission statement, the organization urges teachers to "search for books which will initiate conversations and questions about gender roles and the perceptions of appropriate behavior and activities. Through these conversations and questions, teachers and other caring adults can be instrumental in helping the students reflect on gender expectations, reflection that can lead to appreciation and implementation of gender fairness and equity" (<http://www.ncte.org>).

While efforts continue to be made to include women's voices in curricula, the voices of LGBT and gender non-conforming youth remain on the margins.

Some successes have been observed through sex education curricula; however, the inclusion of sex education does not mean that students' understanding of sexual identities will be expanded as well. In contrast, some sex education curricula reinforce the hegemony of heterosexuality and continue to portray male dominance. Counter-narratives presented by nonprofit organizations, such as the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, are significant but their reach is limited. The most effective way to enhance awareness about sexualities, therefore, seems to be through state-sponsored curricula and textbooks that are inclusive of LGBT voices, political and social histories, and contain examples of non-heterosexual families. Clearly, it is critical to unsettle the dominant binaries of gender and sexuality in formal curricula.

Texts in and of themselves, however, cannot lead to transformative learning if students are not given the space to explore, debate, contest and understand gender in all its complexity. Deeper engagements with issues of gender and sexuality are thus required to achieve this. An approach that expressly employs the critical lens of gender and sexualities to inquire into social relations and structures would enable students to appreciate the regimes within which they are situated, and become more attuned to the social processes that influence their behaviors and practices. Students usually first encounter courses on gender when, and if, they reach college, by which time gender studies is perceived to be a feminine arena of inquiry, causing male students to avoid taking courses in the department. This trend can be disrupted by interrogating gender at the primary and secondary school levels. Teachers can encourage students to employ the analytical lens of gender in their exploration of social relations and structures. Students can engage in inquiries about: What does it mean for a boy to be a boy, and for a girl to be a girl? Who are the people in their lives that model these gender roles? How are their experiences and understandings of gender roles similar or different, and why? Such dialogues can direct students to begin discovering the basis of their assumptions about masculinities and femininities.

Teachers can play an instrumental role in interrupting the dominance of particular forms of masculinities by validating and legitimizing alternate forms. For instance, teachers can use incidences of performances of violent masculinity as teaching tools. When students deploy homophobic or sexist epithets, instead of dismissing them, teachers can take the opportunity to interrogate the use of the terms, the meanings they carry and how hurtful they can be. Next, teachers can welcome varied performances of masculinities and femininities in their classroom and problematize the assumed binary construction of gender. Indeed, as Anoop Nayak (2009) notes, "If young men are to transform their subjectivities, appropriate alternatives must be found toward which they can feel a genuine cultural affinity" (p. 165). One of the ways in which some schools have tried to do so is by increasing the number of male teachers. This has been the policy stance in

some western countries, such as Australia, where policymakers believe that boys have been marginalized by school systems due to the feminization of the teaching profession. It is assumed that the employment of more male teachers will lead to a re-masculinization of schools and improve the academic performance of boys (see Australian education policy documents in Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004). However, increasing the number of male teachers without simultaneously paying attention to the wider cultural representations of violent masculinity will not resolve the issues of structural and direct violence in schools. In fact, it will only reinforce the dominant images of masculinities—that male teachers due to their gender are more capable of tolerating and harnessing boys' energies—and further establish the “complicities between boys and male teachers in relation to boys' gendered performances” (Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004, p. 361). What is needed, therefore, is to encourage teachers—male and female—to explore their own understandings of gender roles and sexual identities so that they can create classroom environments that are more accepting of multiple masculine identities.

Finally, teachers and school administrators must adopt a critical eye toward practices of bullying and sexual harassment, and enforce policies that address such behaviors. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 in the United States, “prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment, in education programs and activities” ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)) and the United States Department of Education provides pamphlets that lay out examples of what constitutes sexual harassment. However, many ethnographic studies considered for this article (such as Pascoe, 2007; Stein, 2007; Thorne, 1993) present evidence of widespread sexual harassment in schools. Significantly, the studies also show that sexual harassment laws are not enforced in schools. Peer-to-peer harassment is often ignored by teachers and school administrators and, unless of a physically violent nature, framed as flirtation or friendly teasing. Such stances toward bullying must be reconsidered; if left unchecked, such behaviors can have long-term negative consequences for the wellbeing of the harassed as well as the harassers. It becomes the responsibility of adults—teachers and school administrators—to intervene and discuss the effects of such behaviors in an age-appropriate manner in classrooms (Stein, 1995).

While teachers can play a critical role, appropriate pre- and in-service teacher training is crucial for increasing their understanding of gender and sexuality, as well as equipping them with the knowledge and tools necessary to address bullying and harassment in schools. Trainings would allow teachers to appreciate that gender identities are inextricably linked to racial, ethnic and class identities; that a range of different approaches are required to address performances of violent masculinity by boys and girls; and that gender must be incorporated across the curriculum using a combination of teaching techniques (Connell, 2000). Overall, such trainings can enhance teachers' consciousness

about issues of gender and violence, and enable them to identify and engage with structural and direct violence that serves to entrench the hegemony of violent masculinity.

Reforming school processes, policies and practices requires the buy-in of a range of stakeholders besides school administrators, teachers and students. These constituents, which include textbook publishers, teacher educators and parents, form the authorizing environment of the schools and may have conflicting viewpoints. Thus, advocates who seek to interrupt the hegemony of violent masculinity would have to build alliances across divergent interests. Critical to such an alliance is an understanding of the ways in which certain political or religious groups seek to keep critical conversations about gender and sexuality at bay by emphasizing its private nature, or promoting a narrow and particular version of masculinity and sexuality in schools. Therefore, in addition to modifications at the school level, large-scale collective efforts would be required to break the cycle of structural and direct violence in schools.

### **Conclusion**

This article employs Galtung's typology of violence to examine the ways in which schools, teachers and students draw on the cultural violence of hegemonic masculinity to structure spaces, institute policies, and endorse practices that legitimize structural and direct violence in schools. While hegemonic masculinity exercises immense power, it is a social construct and therefore subject to interrogation and change. Thoughtful interventions at the classroom and school levels can play a critical role in developing a deeper understanding of the ways in which schools, teachers and students structure and establish *difference*, and participate in the production and (re)production of particular gender and sexual identities. This awareness can, hopefully, provide the impetus for destabilizing the permanence of hegemonic masculinity.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author thanks Dr. Nancy Lesko and Dr. Monisha Bajaj at Teachers College, Columbia University for their comments on earlier drafts of the article.

### **References**

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.



- Connell, R. W. (1996). Teaching the boys: New research on masculinity and gender strategies for schools. *Teachers College Record*, 98, 206-235.
- Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and the boys*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2009). *Gender: In world perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society*, 19(6), 829-859.
- Davison, K. G. (2000). Boys' bodies in school: Physical education. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 8, 255-266.
- Ferguson, A. A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Fields, J., & Hirschman, C. (2007). Citizenship lessons in abstinence-only sexuality education. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 2(2), 3-25.
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27, 291-305.
- Gini, S., & Pozzoli, T. (2006). The role of masculinity in children's bullying. *Sex Roles*, 54, 585-588.
- Hatty, S. (2000). *Masculinities, violence and culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kimmel, M. (2008). *Guyland: The perilous world where boys become men*. New York: Harper.
- Kimmel, M., & Mahler, M. (2003). Adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence random school shootings, 1982-2001. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46, 1439-1458.
- Kuzmic, J. J. (2000). Textbooks, knowledge, and masculinity: Examining Patriarchy from Within. In Nancy Lesko (Ed.), *Masculinities at school* (pp. 105-126). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lance, M. (2010). *Making space for diverse masculinities*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Lopez, N. (2003). *Hopeful girls, troubled boys: Race and gender disparity in urban education*. New York: Routledge.
- Messner, M. A. (2002). *Taking the field: Women, men, and sports*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mills, M. (2001). *Challenging violence in schools: An issue of masculinities*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Mills, M., Martino, W., & Lingard, B. (2004). Attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers: Policy issues in the male teacher debate. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(3), 355-369.
- National Council for Teachers of English. (1994). Guidelines for a gender-balanced curriculum in English language arts pre-K to grade 6. Retrieved December, 2010, from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderbalancedprek6>

- Nayak, A. (2009). The beer and the boyz: Masculine traditions in a post-industrial economy. In W. Martino, M. Kehler, & M. B. Weaver-Hightower (Eds.), *The problem with boys' education: Beyond the backlash*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- New York Civil Liberties Union. (n.d.). School to prison pipeline: A look at New York City schools. Retrieved September, 2011, from [http://www.nyclu.org/files/number\\_of\\_police\\_officers\\_in\\_major\\_cities\\_vs\\_ssas\\_in\\_nyc\\_schools.pdf](http://www.nyclu.org/files/number_of_police_officers_in_major_cities_vs_ssas_in_nyc_schools.pdf)
- New York Police Department. (n.d.). School safety agent. Retrieved from [http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/careers/school\\_safety.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/careers/school_safety.shtml)
- New York State Education Department. (2012, January 4). School safety. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/ssae/schoolsafety/save/>
- New York State Education Department. (2008). New sexual harassment: It's not academic. Retrieved October 15, 2011, from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocrshpam.html>
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Olweus, D. (1997). Bully/victim problems in school: Facts and intervention. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 12*(4), 495-510.
- Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Reay, D. (2010). Spice girls, nice girls, girlies and tomboys: Gender discourses, girls' cultures and femininities in the primary classroom. In M. Kimmel, & A. Arson (Eds.), *The gendered society reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (2002). The miseducation of boys. In S. Bailey (Ed.), *The Jossey-Bass reader on gender in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Skelton, C. (2001). *Schooling the boys: Masculinities and primary education*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Stein, N. (1995, Summer). Sexual harassment in school: The public performance of gendered violence. *Harvard Educational Review, 65*(2), 145-162.
- Stein, N. (2002). Bullying as sexual harassment in elementary schools. In S. Bailey (Ed.), *The Jossey-Bass reader on gender in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Stein, N. (2007). Bullying, harassment and violence among students. *Radical Teacher, 80*, 31-35.
- Swain, J. (2005). Masculinities in education. In M. Kimmel, J. Hearn, & R. W. Connell (Eds.), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Thompson, M. (2002). Boys to men: Questions of violence. Harvard education letter. In S. Bailey (Ed.), *The Jossey-Bass reader on gender in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Walkerdine, V. (1990). *Schoolgirl fictions*. London; New York: Verso.
- Walkerdine, V. (1998). *Counting girls out: Girls and mathematics*. London: Falmer Press.

### **Author**

Shenila Khoja-Moolji is a graduate student at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she investigates the ways in which differences of gender, sexuality and race are established and managed in formal and informal educational contexts. She serves as the Senior Co-Editor for the seventh volume of the Society for International Education journal, published out of Teachers College. Prior to Columbia, Shenila attended the Divinity School at Harvard University where she graduated with a Master of Theological Studies degree focusing on Islamic studies and gender.