# Disrupted Selves: resistance and identity work in the managerial arena

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ABSTRACT *This article draws on recently completed research undertaken within the UK further education (FE) sector. Theoretically located within (pro)feminist methodological perspectives, the research was concerned with critically investigating the interrelationship between men managers' sense of being male and masculine and the new managerialist discourses of contemporary education. Drawing on three of the research interviews, this article considers the ambiguities within, and points of disruption to, dominant managerial discourse. It is argued that this disruption not only underlines the fragility and multiplicity of (gendered) identity, but also suggests possibilities of subjective resistance by men/managers, to their identification with the dominant masculine/managerial discourse of performativity. Within this examination, attention will be drawn to the particular discursive characteristics of the new work culture in FE, together with the contradictions and tensions which constitute the (managerial) subject at work in the organisational arena.*

## Introduction

In April 1993 the 450 further education (FE) colleges in England and Wales went independent of local education authority (LEA) control. Literally overnight some £3.2 billion per annum of public money and over 3.5 million students came under the direction of corporate management teams, many having little or no experience of a world outside education. This event, the 'incorporation' of FE, attracted little attention beyond those few journals and newspapers who focus on or who are interested in, education and related issues. This was after all yet another episode in what many commentators had come to identify as the New Right's project of revolution in UK education (see, for example, Ball, 1990; Tomlinson, 1993; Ainley, 1994). Other not-disinterested parties were of course, the actual staff employed in these colleges. While many were undoubtedly anxious for their future positions as administrators, lecturers, managers and indeed principals, few would have been able to predict the depth of change shortly to take place in FE. For, at the time of writing, numerous colleges face closure or merger (MacLeod, 1997); over 15,000 lecturing jobs have been lost; more than a third of all principals have

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left their posts (Shackleton, 1995), and the government-inspired quango, charged with the overall well-being and direction of FE the Further Education Funding Council [FEFC:CB], is having to acknowledge a mounting economic crisis in virtually every college in the country (*Guardian Education*, January 1997).

The research that informs this article was not, however, solely or indeed primarily inspired by the changes taking place in post-compulsory education, changes which are no less likely to continue in some form or another under the new Labour Government. Rather, the central focus was masculinities, more precisely the relationship between men's sense of being male and masculine, and organisational life. The FE sector provided the setting and framework in which the research was to be undertaken. Nevertheless, the random, indeed arguably chaotic, conditions that have emerged in FE since incorporation, place men/managers in a particularly interesting light, for they throw into sharp focus many of the gendered maleist assumptions of control and rationality, that abound and are replicated within contemporary organisations (see, for example, Kerfoot & Knights, 1993).

In focusing on the gendered dimensions of education, the intention is not to contribute to conventional interpretations of power and resistance in organisations (see, for example, Thompson & Ackroyd, 1996). In keeping with a post-structuralist analysis of the subject at work (see, Knights & Willmott, 1993; Jermier *et al.*, 1994), the concern here is with emphasising the (inter)subjective processes that constitute a sense of identity within organisational life (also Casey, 1995). Power/resistance is then recognised as having both oppressive and positive characteristics, being in Foucauldian terms, elementary constituent aspects of the social web. While recognising the seductive potential of managerialist discourse for many men, this article goes on to argue that this association can never be totally concrete nor assumed as given. As with all subjects, power/resistance exists as a precondition of being, and subsequently a constant possibility for the manager beyond the more obvious material limits of any organisational hierarchy. This article argues that being potentially both creative and subversive, man/managerial identity work carries with it disruptive moments within, and alternatives to, dominant organisational and gendered discourse. These possibilities emerge and are in part constructed by the subject, not necessarily as rational strategies, but as the very effects and consequences of the multiplicity and fragility of self (Kondo, 1990). As is discussed later, the discursive arena (Foucault, 1971), of education management is itself understood as no less fragile, subject as it is to the unpredictable play and counterplay of discursive subjects. This is not to discount the power effects of privileged knowledges within the organisation, nor their potentially oppressive characteristics, but rather to point to the moments when privileged knowledges shift, become unsustainable or are reconstituted by the individual within, yet also outside of, prevailing power regimes. Partly as a direct consequence of the unpredictability of intersubjectivity, the organisational arena remains exposed to subversive moments and practices, largely outside the control of any predetermined management strategy. Much of managerial labour, it is argued, is subsequently engaged in attempting to manage and control this unpredictability, a task that can never be wholly accomplished in spite of strenuous efforts by management subjects to achieve closure and determination over organisational culture (Anthony, 1994).

This discursive relationship between men, masculinities and managerialism is recognised as having both material and symbolic elements (Saco, 1992; Gherardi, 1995), a complex interaction involving men as gendered subjects, masculine identities and particular ways of being a man/manager. This interrelationship is arresting the attention of an increasing number of feminist and pro-feminist scholars (see Collinson & Hearn,

1996, for elaboration; also, Kerfoot & Knights, 1993, 1995; Roper, 1994; Mills & Tancred, 1992), all of whom contribute to 'breaking the silence' (Collinson & Hearn, 1996) on men and management. In aligning with this scholarship, the aim of this article is to reveal some of the gendered ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions of what 'being a man' and 'being a manager' entails. This critical investigation is undertaken at a particular moment in the history of UK education when little appears concrete or certain. Yet ironically, while education experiences uncertainty and confusion, much of managerial rhetoric – and theory – continues to imply control, certainty, instrumentality, purposefulness and rationality. As this article argues, not only has FE undergone a significant cultural shift, but those individuals charged with 'managing' this shift are themselves constructed, in their discursivity, through a fragile and unpredictable process, one involving constant change. As a process of becoming, enabled by the complex dynamics of power/resistance that constitute all subjects (see Foucault, 1977, 1988), the notion of the rational, grounded man/manager becomes problematised. The individual is exposed as grounded only in the moments and practices of gendered discursive signification (Butler, 1990; Saco, 1992) moments which are themselves unpredictable and often unmanageable. While each of the three managers described in this research is at some pains to present himself as successful – in control, rational and purposive – their narratives reveal a more complex reality. It is a reality involving contrasting and contradictory masculinities, where resistance to a particular dominant discourse is always possible, indeed in some instances likely. Yet, in order to maintain their position and identity within the organisation as competent managers, these men must constantly police their language and movements. They are subjects working hard at trying to manage the contradictions of their own multiple subject positions within their particular public and private arenas.

The article is structured as follows. Section one details the methodological basis upon which the research was entered into and conducted; in addition, reference will be made to the research methods used. Section two provides a brief description of the FE sector post-incorporation, locating this in the wider context of conditions of post-industrialisation. Section three addresses some of the theoretical debates surrounding men and masculinities. Section four will highlight the discursive relationship between masculinities and the new managerialist work culture in further education before proceeding to section five and the narratives of the three men managers discussed here. In concluding, the article will consider the subsequent implications for understanding men and masculinities in organisational life.

## Method and Methodology

In aligning myself with a pro-feminist position, it is not my intention to reinforce what Smith (1988) describes as the 'closed circle' of men talking to men in a malecentric fashion, in the process colonising women's subjectivities and particular gendered biographies. Rather, the intention is to contribute to the critical interrogation of men's practices while both illuminating and deconstructing the gendered relationship that exists between men, masculinities and organisational life. The research methodology was then primarily informed by this personal/political position. As a standpoint (Harding, 1991; also, Hearn, 1993a), this position recognises the particular gendered political conditions of the social, together with women's and men's historical and cultural relationship to dominant gendered discourse. Debates surrounding the possibilities and tensions of standpoint theory, feminist epistemology and feminist methodology continue to be extensively

engaged in by numerous theorists (see, for example, Harding, 1991; Hammersley, 1992; Ramazanoglu, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Holmwood, 1995). Similarly, I recognise that tensions and ambiguities continue to exist for men in feminism (see Hall, 1990; Morgan, 1992; Hearn, 1993a; for discussion). As Morgan (1992) argues, there are particular issues surrounding men studying men, men writing about women, and the sharing between men and women of gendered knowledge, power relations and inequalities (see also, Hearn 1993b). Nevertheless, while these interrelationships are not unproblematical (resolvable?), there was the intention within this research to locate myself, both personally and politically, within a pro-feminist standpoint, one that recognises my gendered biography and identity as a man and as an (ex) educational manager (see Whitehead, 1997; forthcoming).

The field research was conducted between April 1994 and February 1995. In all, 20 men managers were interviewed using qualitative research methods. The interviews, all between 90 minutes' and 3 hours' duration, took place in FE colleges throughout the Midlands and north of England. For the reasons indicated above, no women managers were formally interviewed, though three women principals generously volunteered their time to discuss some of their experiences as women managers in the FE sector. In the interviews I chose not to have a structured questionaire, but what Ritchie (1986) describes as a 'flexible-module' approach, consisting of a range of pre-identified themes and topics that were to form the basis of each research interaction. In the interviewing, I was not seeking to locate myself as some privileged knowledge holder with an 'all-seeing' eye, for the intention was not to seek 'grounded truths', but to recognise my own subjective, and discursively situated, understanding and interpretation. The research 'outcomes' then, are presented from my subjective position and standpoint, wherein I can only offer myself as a 'credible witness' (Casey, 1995) engaged in the writing of a 'persuasive fiction' (Geertz, 1973), formed from 'data' which is itself largely the product of complex and diverse discourses within the arena of organisational and gendered identity processes. The self-reflexive process, facilitated by the use of such a critical ethnographic method (see, for example, Clifford & Marcus, 1986, for discussion), subsequently becomes central to both the research experience and subsequent 'data' generated. As a consequence, the following descriptions are presented not as a closed authoritative account, but a moment in time, space and discourse, wherein various and contrasting intersubjectivities emerged. These intersubjectivities were duly selected for their resonance to the researcher. They are presented here with the anticipation that they might have a similar resonance for others.

## The Further Education Sector

Any discussion on the changes that have taken place in UK education over the last decade and a half must consider the impact of successive Conservative governments and their various, sometimes conflicting, policies for bringing about a substantive ethical and cultural shift in the management and delivery of education and training. While it is not the purpose of this article to engage this debate, it is important to recognise some of the influences on FE and the wider contestation that has arisen from the emergence of now dominant managerialist discourses across the post-compulsory sectors (Prichard, 1996). Between 1979 and 1997, successive Conservative governments sought to introduce and embed within education, a contradictory market-managed economy. Framed within a New Right ideology, this strategy privileges the market while simultaneously attempting to manage and control the content and ethos of education institutions (see Ball, 1990;

Tomlinson, 1993; Ainley, 1994, for discussion; also Cantor *et al.*, 1996). As apparent 'justification' for this strategy, the argument has been put that one of the fundamental crises facing the UK is a declining skills base. Addressing this perceived 'weakness' would, following the logic of such thinking, require a fundamental change in the way education and training was in future to be funded, delivered and made accountable. Articulated as an urgently needed 'skills revolution', the aim, ostensibly at least, was to make more coherent the historically *ad hoc* post-16 sector. This new coherence and enterprise was to be achieved primarily through a revamped 'energetic, responsive and entrepreneurial' FE sector, one released from the 'bureaucratic shackles' of the local education authorities (LEAs). April 1993 marked the moment when all FE colleges duly went 'independent'; responsible for their own accounts, financial well-being, administration, and ultimately, their own survival. Since then, the sector has witnessed the (usually crude) implementation of private sector managerialist practices; confrontation with those bodies considered to be most resistant to these changes – the teaching unions; and the emergent influence of a funding regime managed not by the LEAs but via a newly formed government quango, the FEFC (Whitehead, 1997).

While the changes imposed on FE have been profound, and some might argue damaging to the very fabric of post-compulsory education, their existence in a wider, macro context is evident. This macro influence has many dimensions but has been broadly described by some commentators as post-Fordist (Murray, 1989), within the conditions of what elsewhere has been referred to as disorganised, post-industrial capitalism (see Lash & Urry, 1987, for discussion). In sum, these conditions include globalisation, flexible specialisation (of skills), a technological revolution, the feminisation of the workforce, the emergence of 'symbolic analysts' (Reich, 1991), a relative demise in the 'power' of the nation state, rapid and often unpredictable shifts in global capital, and the decline of union influence. Some commentators have argued that these global economic and social changes are producing such conditions of uncertainty and fragmentation that they constitute a move to a postmodern time (see Bauman, 1992, for discussion; also Harvey, 1991). Following this, it has been argued that the changes ushered in by the New Right, especially in education, are powerful attempts to regain some Fordist order and control – some have argued through the introduction of neo-Taylorist methods (Shumar, 1995) – over a set of circumstances which are ultimately outside any single agency's capacity to manage totally or legislate against (see Usher & Edwards, 1995, for discussion).

Collectively then, these dynamics inevitably affect and influence all actors within this sector. The managers interviewed for this research are, of course, not themselves outside these dynamics any more than are other managers in education today. As this article argues however, there are other discursive forces at large in FE and organisational life generally. The discourses I am referring to here are those which position men and women in organisational life as different to one another, while also privileging instrumental and competitive behaviour. They are discourses which inculcate and constitute the subject yet which the subject also constitutes, through their actions , as discourse. In their gendered formation, these discourses can be described as culturally-specific ways of expressing masculinity and of being a man.

## Understanding Masculinities

In common-sense, everyday parlance, masculinity is usually considered to be something that 'men have'. It is generally seen as the natural expression of the male and can be

readily located in those gendered stereotypes which purport, as do all stereotypes, to
anchor, pin down, and make sense of difference, complexity and change with the
minimum of critical examination. More obvious examples of this include notions of 'man
the hunter', the 'male breadwinner', men's 'innate' competitiveness and aggression, and
the 'male sex urge' (see Segal, 1990, for elaboration). However, the first stage in the
deconstruction of the term masculinity from any essentialistic meaning occurs when we
examine how definitions and expressions of masculinity and manliness have shifted
historically, coming to represent wider social and cultural concerns and understandings.
As Mangan & Walvin (1987) note, the concept of manliness in the UK metamorphosed
through the Victorian and Edwardian eras, as the needs of empire became more acute,
from being closely associated with a Christian ethic of selflessness and integrity to
emerging as a 'neo-Spartan virility, hardness and endurance' (p. 1). Moving on from an
ethnocentric examination of the term, it becomes apparent that masculinity, or what is
considered culturally and socially appropriate in men, has always been somewhat
different in different cultural and geographical settings. Ethnographic research by
anthropologists again reveals the diversity of the term: its fluidity, multiplicity and
amenability to cultural norms, taboos and expectations (see, for example, Gilmore,
1990; Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994). Any attempt to pin down masculinities in
Euro/American/Australasian countries at the end of the twentieth century is similarly
problematic. It can be argued that in part at least, this is due to the pluralism of
consumption (identity) patterns and associated (gendered) signs, symbols and images
(Saco, 1992), all competing for attention in the postmodern era (Gutterman, 1994).
Consequently, masculinity is now more than ever pluralistic in expression, a contingent
term that can accommodate many contrasting identities and meanings. In the UK for
example, expressions of masculinity range from the ever-suited politician, to the androgy-
nous David Bowie or Boy George; from the leathered biker, to the company man in a
company car; from the gay athleticism of 'gym queens', to the raunchy heterosexuality
of the Chippendales; from the domestically traditional to the house-husband. These
examples are not offered as exhaustive of the possibilities now available to men in the
UK and elsewhere.

   In one sense then, masculinities might be considered illusory — that is, having no base
in biology, they become no more and no less than what can be spoken of, about, and
by, men (and women) at any given moment in time and space. Therefore, the potential
multiplicity of masculinities is inexhaustible; what the term means to whom, here and
now, is its only fixedness. Yet there are more to masculinities than this. As feminists and
pro-feminist scholars have long argued, men's power, or at the very least their potential
to have power over women and 'others', is substantially invested and accommodated
within *dominant* notions and expressions of masculinity (see, for example, Carrigan, *et al.*
1985; Brittan, 1989; Morgan, 1992; Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Hearn, 1996). In their
seminal 1985 work, Carrigan *et al.* offer three models of masculinity which they argue
exist, usually in tension with each other, in all arenas within Euro/American/
Australasian countries (see also, Connell, 1993). These they describe as hegemonic,
subordinated and conservative. In seeking out hegemonic masculinities, one would notice
the prevailing, dominant, most acceptable expression of being a man in a particular
situation or location. Its hegemonic character would then suggest itself through the
marginalisation and subordination of other ways of being a man: for example, in gayness,
paternalism, lack of aggression/assertion, and so on. To be a man and to be a 'powerful'
man in many situations (for example, sport, politics, business) becomes then an almost
Goffmanesque display of self in which the subject engages in, partly chooses, and is

inculcated by, contesting notions of masculinity. The gendered power, or its promise, is invested in the particular practices of masculinity that are acted out in a specific arena.

While the concept of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities is a useful shorthand for identifying differences between men, the concept is itself flirting with some essentialistic notions. For example, it categorises men and tells us little about those women who might display masculine ways of being. Nor does it provide us with a means to understand or analyse the actual processes of inculcation, power and resistance that might occur in a given location or arena. While useful, it is, like most sociological typologies, too tidy.

A number of critical gender theorists have, by contrast, chosen to utilise the work of Foucault (see McNay, 1992, for elaboration), in the process adopting a post-structuralist understanding of identity formation, power/resistance dynamics and the actions of the subject within intersubjectivities occurrences (see, for example, Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1991; Sawicki, 1991; Game, 1991). In brief, Foucault understands discourses as: what can be spoken of at a given moment; privileged knowledges and 'truths effects' (Foucault, 1988), made real only through and by the dynamics of the social network and various and contesting power regimes which are its constitution. For Foucault, one of the prime effects of power is that 'certain bodies, discourses, come to be identified and constituted as individuals' (1973, p. 18). The individual should not be understand then as an elementary nucleus, but constituted and identified, through discourse (either dominant or subordinate) as a subject. 'Man' and 'woman' thus become discursive subject positions (Hollway, 1989). A similar subject position would be 'manager'. Although Foucault did not write about gender, his analysis makes possible the study of masculinities as a discursive construct, for masculinities have no existence outside the social; their existence is made 'true' and 'real' only in their inculcation of, and articulation by, the subject. Any power that men or women may exert, is only made possible through the taking up of, and being in, dominant discourses, themselves in flux. This understanding of identity formation alerts us to the very fragility of masculinity — and its illusionary characteristics. Similarly, as Foucault stresses, the power dynamics that constitute the social network and intersubjective processes are sustained in moments when resistance might materialise. There is no fixed or absolute position on which to have or to exert power (Foucault, 1977, 1982). Similarly, neither is identity concrete and consistent. Like all subjects, the managerial subject in organisational life is a subject working at identity construction, an existential project of becoming, but one constantly exposed to points of discursive disruption — and resistance.

Discourses do, however, have a material effect, an 'objective actuality' (Ranson, 1993), which signify, as practices of self, a political dimension. Thus, the subject positions of man and woman carry also a political message. As was intimated above, these labels suggest an authority (or non-authority) invested in the 'knower'; those whose knowledge is privileged or otherwise. Consequently, under the particular conditions of gender dynamics prevailing in most organisations, the discourses of masculinity speak not only a gendered language, but also privilege certain bodies — usually male. And as I will now discuss, the discourses of managerialism themselves are not gender neutral, for they also carry with them messages of gender authority with the potential to signify a particular gender validation.

## Discourse of the New Education Managerialism

In suggesting that new discourses now largely constitute education management, I also recognise that education is merely one of countless discursive arenas in which various

languages and practices flourish, emerge and decline. However, as Foucault (1971) and others (see also, Ball, 1990; Usher & Edwards, 1994) have noted, education sites are especially important in the distribution and selective propagation of discourses. This itself is not something new. Indeed, the broader debate concerning the power and influence of the intellectual and academe *within* the wider social network, has engaged the minds of numerous theorists from Gramsci (1979) to Bauman (1992). It is especially apposite today to consider the discursive generating capacity of education for the very centrality of education as a political validator in the social, political and economic arenas. As I have discussed earlier, there are particular reasons for this centrality relating to distinct macro configurations. Nevertheless, this contemporary repositioning of education and heightening of its political visibility does stress both the fluidity of education, its malleability, and usefulness as a fulcrum within the power/knowledge nexus.

The discursive arena of education subsequently reveals itself to have two characteristics: it is a disseminator of discourses while being simultaneously a subject of discourse. These two functions are not necessarily discrete, for the overlap and inculcation of discourses is rarely apparent. What is of particular pertinence to this article are the social (and identity) processes that have, and are, taking place in educational institutions, processes engaged in by subjects at work (men/managers), themselves (gendered) subjects; objects and exponents of discourse. As men/managers, these subjects must engage in discourse which will enable them to be heard, and which will validate them as meaningful, potent men/managers, for it is in the articulation and enaction of dominant discourse that authority is perceived and power relations become constituted (Foucault, 1982). The FE site is especially poignant and interesting for such a focus. The reasons for this include its historic lack of coherent identity within the education sector as a whole, its use by the New Right for their project of entrepreneurialism and culture shift in education, and the more paternalistic managerial codes prevailing in the sector prior to the late 1980s (Whitehead, 1997; forthcoming).

For a variety of reasons then, FE in the mid-1990s has represented something of a melting pot for New Right thinking, and the entrepreneurial culture considered by many to be the most appropriate means of satisfying the urgent demand for a much-needed skills and education revolution in the UK. Yet management in education is not something new; indeed it would be fair to say that education has always required, or had, some management dimension. What has changed is the style of managing, which itself has informed and been informed by a new work culture. Altogether there has been a marked upgrading in the very value and importance of management/managers in FE. Education managers, while subjected to the same surveillance and measurement techniques now imposed on all staff (Bush & Middlewood, 1997; see Wilkinson & Willmott, 1995, for discussion of management in general), are increasingly expected to be proponents and articulators of the competitive and entrepreneurial work culture which has come largely to define the post-compulsory sectors (see, Farnham & Horton, 1996, ch 6). The cold instrumentality of this work culture is neatly encapsulated in the notion of 'performativity', a concept utilised by Usher & Edwards (1994) in their interrogation of contemporary education and postmodernity. In their study, Usher & Edwards refer to the work of the postmodern theorist Lyotard (1984).

Drawing on Wittgenstein's philosophy of 'language games', Lyotard suggests that the knowledge sector of society has, in the postmodern era, undergone a shift of interest from concerns with human life, to pragmatic concerns interested only in the optimal performance of means: a move to performativity. Lyotard considers the grand narratives of modernity to have lost credibility in contemporary society, having largely been replaced

by the pursuit of, and belief in 'efficiency' as the single legitimising measure of value and human worth. He argues that in this endless and boundless search for efficiency, 'narrative knowledge'—the 'life of the spirit and/or the emancipation of humanity' Sarup, 1993; p. 139—has been marginalised, if not displaced, by scientific knowledge. Consequently, through the application of technical criteria, technology and scientific verifiability, the question is no longer asked: 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?' For Lyotard, performativity encapsulates the functional and instrumental in an era when the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is being displaced by the mercantilisation of knowledge; knowledge as a commercial/saleable commodity.

The concept of performativity provides us with a tool, then, for interrogating the transformation in education institutions and education discourse; that is, the increased functionality of educational life, the emphasis on skills rather than ideas, and the discursive shift from the 'human oriented' to where the only question of concern is: 'Is it efficient?' Once this question becomes the dominant, privileged question, then the task, direction and very ethos of education undergoes transformation. Management is obviously central to this movement, this privileging of new knowledge, for the manager is the key fulcrum in the articulation and reification of this discourse. The discourse of performativity in the education arena subsequently finds expression in terms which have also come to prominence across the private sector and other public sector sites such as the National Health Service, Civil Service and local government Maile, 1995; Farnham & Horton, 1996. Such terms include total quality management, human resource management, competency statements/objectives and performance indicators. As these terms and associated practices proliferate and become privileged, so too does the work culture and ethos of education shift. The shift is to a work culture primarily concerned with measurement, performance, targeting, and 'objective' assessment and appraisal. All this is embedded within a framework of competition internal and external, and a funding and financial system which requires government inspired growth together with simultaneous 'efficiency gains'. As a consequence, much of contemporary education management appears embroiled in a modernist quest for control and certainty at a time when, owing to a multiplicity of factors, little if anything is constant or certain. Yet at the same time, the staff of these institutions are faced, in a very personal and direct way, with these discursive shifts. How they will react to this cannot be predicted on a personal level. What can be assumed is that the managers themselves will have an especially poignant and ambiguous relationship to these managerialist discourses; most having a significant investment of identity in the subject position of manager, while being especially vulnerable within this new work culture. As the following research reveals, to at least maintain, if not promote, themselves as able and competent managers able to 'stand the heat' in the new atmosphere in education management, these men must take in and take on the discourses of managerialism. Only by so doing can they even begin to contemplate a future in a sector and profession many had confidently expected to remain in for their working lifetimes. Yet, at the very moment of expressing these dominant discourses, these men also reinscribe and reconstitute them in specific and subtle ways.

## Excerpts from the Interviews

The three men/managers referred to in the following discussion, while individual, are representative of the wider constituency of FE managers. That is, apart from being men, they are white, middle class and university educated. Their relationship to FE, is

however, subtly different. Jim, the youngest at 32, is an ambitious manager who considers himself to be a high-flyer with senior management potential. A single man, he has a middle management position heading up a growing team of leisure and sport lecturers. Moving to a large Yorkshire college to take up this new post 4 months prior to the interview, Jim has been in FE for just 4 years. By contrast, Greg, 45 and married with four children, has 16 years' experience of FE. Previously an accountant, Greg began his career in FE as a lecturer in communications. Four years ago he moved to a junior management position in student support. At the time of interview he had just accepted a new contract - not necessarily out of choice. In this new post he is a middle manager responsible for an aspect of student services. The outcome of internal restructuring, Greg's new contract is for 1 year only in the first instance. He assured me that he 'will do enough to make it permanent'. The third member of this trio, Neville, is at 48 the eldest. He holds a senior management position in a small north-east college, a post he has held for 3 years. Neville is one of two Assistant Principals in this college, with responsibility for curriculum affairs. He has been in FE for 21 years. Having started out as an assistant lecturer, he no longer considers himself ambitious. He is married with a 1 year-old daughter.

The discourses of new managerialism in education are apparent in each of these men/managers' narratives, yet each articulates it in a slightly different way, reflecting their own unique subjectivities and histories. For example, Jim, in keeping with his presentation of self as a man who is comfortable with the entrepreneurial culture in FE, discusses his career to date as one of continuous effort combined with instrumental control:

> The thing to remember now is that the number of students equals income and income equals power. I have worked hard at setting up this new department but moving to this college was part of a clearly defined career path. There are more changes [to the structure] yet to take place here, I'm keeping my eye on things but the next rung up, Head of School, is what I'm looking for in say, 2 years.

Jim's understanding of power, that is, as a manager, one has power over others, qualified in the new work culture only in relation to entrepreneurial activity and income, was a discourse reflected by all of the men/managers interviewed. Yet his own access to this power is partly circumscribed by other factors, not least his age. At 32, Jim is one of the youngest middle managers in the college. His rapid move from lecturer to manager has meant that he has had to work at 'being the manager' in the face of his youthfulness and relative inexperience. One of the ways in which he sets about achieving this gravitas is through separation and presentation:

> Being promoted from lecturer to management means that you go from being one of the lads to being in a position of no man's land. You are a bit piggy in the middle. I have learnt not to confide in people so much, not to give too much away. It can be dangerous. I have to be more professional … I always wear a suit and tie at work now.

While Jim acknowledges that incorporation has brought stress and uncertainty to the sector, he believes that the way forward is to manage it like a business. There is no place, he says, for the 'enthusiastic amateur' involved for example, in marketing or personnel functions. He works long hours but takes the weekend off 'to recover'. Apart from active sport, his life revolves around his work. For him being a manager is very much about

managing the pressures. As he expresses it, 'those that can't stand the heat … you know the rest'.

One way in which Jim attempts to maintain this presentation of himself as the able, competent and thrusting manager, is to keep his emotions 'under wraps'. Jim spoke of the need to, at all times, be in control of himself, his feelings and emotions. In so doing, Jim, in his eyes, is acting out a quite stereotypical image of masculinity: the man/manager as the rational, controlled and logical agent.

By contrast, the second manager, Greg, has a somewhat different relationship to work. Very much a family man, changes in FE have placed him and his family under pressure. He is quite open about the consequences, for himself and for others:

> The 'flexibility' of the new contracts will damage family life. I've discussed it with the kids you know, regarding holidays and so on. It is going to mean changes for all of us.

Greg has already been witness to many changes in FE over the years, beginning with his first post in the 1970s:

> I am not a romantic, I had few illusions about FE, but I believed, I still do, in student-centred ideas and so on. I wanted to contribute.

In the interview Greg struck me as a sensitive and reflective man, who had found himself in a middle management position, not a careerist who had aimed for this. Although quite a large institution, his college had been a pleasant place to work:

> It's a college where change has happened very slowly. It's been very comfortable here — nobody leaves.

But inevitably change had come. New management structures had been imposed and staff like Greg had to reapply for positions, many of which were for a year in the first instance. Greg had to 'get on the bus', but in so doing, had gone onto a new contract; more money, but longer hours, shorter holidays, and it was for 12 months only. It was a big risk and he knew it, but the alternative, as he saw it, was to be left behind:

> I felt it right to apply. I can hack it. I'll do something in the next 12 months to get it made permanent.

The new managerialist discourse of performativity in FE has impacted on all staff and as Greg notes, the risks for everyone are now that much greater. It appears that many who contributed to the sector in the past will now be marginalised as the pace of work intensifies.

> In the old days you could tolerate people's weaknesses: you could make space for those not coping but who contributed in different ways. Now you can't do that. The new culture doesn't allow that support or space. It's much more rigorous and stressful. If I'd been a younger man I'd have resigned. I couldn't have faced the years of insecurity and uncertainty. It's much more threatening now.

Greg's comments typify those made by all the research respondents regarding changes in the work patterns of FE. Yet each has a slightly different relationship to these cultural shifts, for while there are dominant patterns, there are also likely to be other influences at work. This was revealed in the interview with Neville.

As an Assistant Principal, Neville is one of those senior managers, referred to by Greg and Jim, who are pivotal in bringing about local institutional change in the FE sector. Yet, as with the others, Neville's relationship to the new discourses of management has

an aspect of ambiguity about it. At the beginning of the interview he presents himself as the senior manager, charged with ushering in the new work culture, and 'making things happen':

> Yes, there is a change in the work culture, but we need more flexibility from the staff if we are to survive. The new structure we are introducing will require some staff to retrain. There may be some redundancies … We see ourselves as entrepreneurial, progressive and growing.

When the interview moves to staff responses to all this change, Neville's comments indicate that staff resistance is firming up.

> No, we are not going to introduce the new contracts. We are taking a fairly relaxed view of this. We don't want to lose goodwill … there used to be a lot of staff goodwill.

A number of managers discussed this particular aspect of the changing work culture of FE: the decline in goodwill of most staff and a hardening of attitudes towards management. These responses by staff, while localised, represent a collective resistance, one born maybe out of frustration and despair, but potent nevertheless (see Jermier *et al.*, 1994, for elaboration of organisational resistance). Some of the management in the bigger colleges tended to have a 'take it or leave it' response to this, but smaller colleges appeared more vulnerable to negative staff attitudes. Neville's college is a minor player in the region it serves, and as such will have to be forever on its guard against 'predatory' colleges, intent on moving into its 'patch':

> We must grow to survive, we can never rest, it's a bit like sharks moving forward, to survive … consolidation is not an option. I do recognise that the college is under threat.

The interview with Neville progressed to talk about his family life, in particular his relationship with his 1 year-old daughter. At this point, the contradictions in Neville's narrative emerge. From presenting himself as the ambitious, progressive manager, he goes into an alternative discourse of 'family man':

> Since Joanna was born my attitude to work has changed. I am much less ambitous. We weren't expecting a child, it all came as a tremendous shock. Work is of much less importance now.

From being a mouthpiece for the new masculine/managerialist discourse, Neville actually moves to position himself in opposition to it:

> There is an an unhealthy work culture in FE now. It is somehow macho to be here until 7.30/8.00 pm, but I won't join in. My wife works full-time and I collect Joanna from the crèche. I leave at 5.30 pm, sometimes in the middle of meetings. I don't find it a problem, in fact I find it a tremendous discipline … . Having Joanna has caused me to reflect on things, especially as an older father. Also, I feel I have become more secure in myself I suppose, much more serene.

From this point in the interview, Neville went on to describe the emotional experience of having a daughter and how this unexpected but welcome event had caused him to reflect upon and reconsider his position in work and management. Practical outcomes of this re-evaluation included taking his full holiday entitlement, spending less time at work,

and less time at home on work-related activities. As an 'older' father, Neville appeared anxious to invest time and effort in this role, his work role now seeming less important to him.

## Conclusion

These three men/managers share areas of commonality in their relationship to work. Each acknowledged the stress and increased pressure they experience as a result of the particular competitive, market-driven culture now abroad in FE. Nevertheless, each was also at pains to demonstrate that they could 'hack it'. For all three men, there is a significant investment of gendered, masculine identity in their work as managers. Their belief that they can control the potentially threatening circumstances in which they find themselves, and can manipulate their way through the uncertainty and insecurity of contemporary managerial life, these are extremely important self-determinants, gender signifiers (Kerfoot & Whitehead, 1996). Located in the subject position of manager, the narrative that is articulated reflects, not surprisingly, the dominant discourses of the new managerialism; competition, growth, survival of the fittest, instrumentality, measurement against objectives, winning against the odds. As managers, men who wish to continue being in some position of power, authority, control over their work situation, Neville, Greg and Jim must display and act out, indeed believe in, their innate ability to survive if not prosper, for managerial discourse indicates nothing less of its articulators.

This relationship between the need to display power/control, purposefulness and managerial self-belief can be considered generic for managers/managements across both the public and private sectors. In this respect, as other studies have shown, the experiences of men/managers in FE are little different to men/managers in say, manufacturing (Roper, 1994) or the financial services (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993). Yet educational discourses and education institutions have a somewhat different tradition to that which has prevailed in most other organisational arenas. It is one which has sought to privilege and expound what has been described above as 'narrative knowledge'. That is, across all educational sectors and institutions, to be an *educator* has been seen as the locus of 'professionalism; of self-esteem and self-worth'. This concept of educator is underpinned by a belief in the transformatory and emancipatory powers of knowledge. In particular, those knowledges which claim to guide and reflect the 'great progressive odyssey' (Lyotard, 1984, p. 37) of modernity. Within this tradition, the educator is seen to occupy a privileged social and cultural space by virtue of their perceived ability to impart the cognitive, the moral, and the aesthetic. This tradition has not disappeared completely. As with 'modernity' and 'postmodernity', there is no fine ending or beginning, but only blurring. For despite the pressures of performativity, there are many teachers and lecturers in education, including FE, who continue to try to maintain their work identity amid such discursive formations. For the FE manager, however, the pressures against this are now acute. Elsewhere (Whitehead, 1997) I have documented the transformation of FE culture since incorporation, noting a marked rise in the managerial, the entrepreneurial and the bureaucratic. Managers/managements now occupy a privileged space, but one discursively and politically framed and reinforced by a combination of moral technology (Ball, 1990), and scientific knowledge. For those managers such as Neville and Greg, who formed work identities in the 'old era', this tension represents a conflict of discourse and a conflict of identity, one not resolved simply by recourse to the latest management-speak. As Greg recounted:

> For me, working in FE was about putting something back … I wanted to contribute. I still do.

These three managers' inculcation in the discourse of performativity is, however, further substantiated by the gendered dimension of this discourse. For performativity, the quest for efficiency and instrumental achievement, carries the added message of masculinity; the common-sense expectations of men's behaviour. That is, the competition, aggression, the functionality of performance measurement, all framed within notions of emotional control, rationality and endurance, have a distinctly maleist, male-oriented dimension. Like many men managers, these three men are simultaneously inculcated by and expressive of, these masculine/managerialist discourses.

Yet their individually different and fragile relationship to masculine/managerial identity is also evident, underlining the potential each subject has for subverting and reconstituting discourse. For Jim, the potential disruption to this identity, this certainty of self, is revealed by his desire to appear 'managerial'; his youthfulness and inexperience being, he feels, disadvantageous in a work environment where most managers are over 40. He has to labour at acquiring the power that, he believes, is inherent in the symbiotic subject positions of man/manager. Greg, likewise, has an ambiguous relationship to the masculine/managerial discourses of the new work culture. While he appears aware of the contradictions and consequences for him in this culture, he remains anxious to display commitment to it. Yet throughout the interview he was scathing and critical of the changes taking place in FE and at times bitter about the effects on himself and his family. While being a manager, Greg remains significantly personally removed from this position. His is an almost schizophrenic-like state of being in, yet outside of, this particular subject position. Only just in post, Greg already has a relationship of resistance to the dominant discourses of the new FE. A similar state has emerged for Neville, though the work and family histories of Greg and Neville are quite dissimilar. The almost traumatic experience of being a father again, at what he considers to be an 'old' age, has ushered into Neville's life a new set of unexpected circumstances. This event carries with it new discourses of identity, discourses which do not fit so easily with the subject position of manager as currently practised in the new entrepreneurial work culture. As Neville's narrative suggests, there is a firm resistance to being the man/manager before all else, a resistance which emphasises the power he exercises as a subject in the organisational arena. The alternative masculinities now available to Neville in the postmodern era, include overt practices and displays of fatherhood; as a consequence his sense of being 'manly' is not lessened even though his identity association with managerial labour is.

To summarise, through the utilisation of a post-structuralist understanding of identity and self, this article has suggested that the organisation can be best understood as an arena of multiple subjectivities, a site for the propagation and dissemination of contesting discourses and the creation of diverse identities; also, that there is the constant potential for some identities to come to exist in a *state of resistance* to conventional ways of being a man/manager. This state of resistance is not necessarily a collective or individual act of rationality or outcome of strategic planning. Rather, it is the consequence and effects of disruption and subversion, effects which can unexpectedly materialise in any subject as they attempt their own project of becoming while confronting moments and situations which require them to reconsider, reconstitute and subtly shift dominant gendered and organisational ways of being. It is within these moments that the fragility and contingency of masculinity becomes apparent. Nevertheless, in keeping with similar research which has sought to make more visible the symbiotic relationship between men,

masculinities and management, I also suggest that the dominant discourse of performativity, now abroad in FE, has distinctly oppressive masculine characteristics. Consequently, it is a discourse which structures for men/managers an arena in which to exhibit dominant, dominating, ways of being a man; indeed, which privileges this way of being and its associated knowledges and practices.

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