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Feminine men and masculine women: in/exclusion in the academy

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Abstract

Purpose

This paper draws on concepts of 'female masculinity' to interrogate how hegemonic gendering discourses, forms, and performances are inscribed in neoliberal narratives of competency in higher education in the Western Hemisphere.

Design

Drawing on individual examples, we consider how these narratives are omnipresent in the sector, and systematically act to exclude those who do not conform. In doing so, we draw extensively on bodies of literature exploring gender/ identity, and neo-liberalism. In particular, the paper draws on the work of Halberstam (1998, 2011), and of Drake (2014).

Findings

There are comparatively few women in senior positions in Higher Education and we argue that as gendering institutions they reproduce hegemonic gendering discourses. We find that hegemonic gendering discourses are instrumental in maintaining and privileging specific forms and perceptions of masculinity and femininity as inscribed within and reproduced by perceptions of professional competency.

Value

This paper examines neo-liberal practices from a more nuanced perspective than some traditional polarised critiques which regard gender as a binary. In doing so, it contributes to debates on masculinity, but more importantly, opens discussions about the implications of gendering discourses for the role of the few women in senior positions in higher education institutions globally.

Introduction

Within the academy, it could be argued that power is located within a relatively small group of people, a disproportionately small number of whom are female. If the presence within the academy of women in positions of power is attributed to and framed by discursive understandings of the operationalization of patriarchy, we, in this paper further interrogate the appropriation of particular aspects of a performative maleness as enacted in institutional life by women in power.   In particular, we think through neo-liberal forms of managerialism and suggest how those forms of managerialism, which permeate higher education across the developed world, forms repertoires of practice(s) and norms of behaviour. We draw on Queer and Feminist paradigms to dislocate hegemonic gendering discourses, forms, and performances and articulate their inscription in neoliberal narratives of competency within the academy. We illustrate these through the use of two

narratives which describe the experiences of academics from Australia and the UK who experienced marginalisation within the academy through the enactment of particular masculinities as forms of managerialism.

Concerns about particular management styles privileging and reproducing particular forms of masculinity are not new. As early as 1993, and drawing on an already well-established body of literature, Kerfoot and Knights argued that paternalism and strategic management represented two different 'techniques' of managing institutions, both of which they argued to be 'constitutive of and embedded in' discourses of masculinism. They went on to argue that 'this has the effect of privileging men vis-a-vis women, serves to rank some men above others, and maintains as dominant certain forms and practices of masculinity' (1993, p. 659). Whilst Kerfoot and Knights were writing about the finance industry, at around the same time, Randle and Brady were undertaking fieldwork in an English Further Education college, and their critique of the marketization of that sector noted that '…those who have become managers appear to have adopted a value system that reflects the new managerialism and have 'benefited' from the increased status that comes with the title 'manager' (1997, p. 137).

This argument remains pertinent today, not only in further education, but in an increasingly marketized higher education sector. Nor is it confined to the UK. The neoliberal ideals, and market driven practices are a global phenomenon, perhaps most obvious internationally in the annual THES 'top 100 universities' league tables. Particular concerns, or 'themes' associated with marketization, and first noted in the further education sector, such as loss of control, intensification of labour, increased administration, perceived marginalisation of teaching and stress on measurable performance indicators (see Avis, 2007; Bailey, 2014) now resonate with academic staff. These themes are broadly similar to those described by Pollitt (1990) as illustrative of the 'new managerialism', and continue to resonate with Kerfoot and Knight's analysis. These neo liberal cultures of performativity, now adopted across the sector internationally, continue to reflect a hegemonic form of masculinity, associated with dominant (and oppressive) forms of masculinity. These masculinities may not be identified with by all men, but, as Halberstam (1998) argues, masculinities (and femininities) can be appropriated by both males and females in different ways. Cultures of performativity, we would suggest, still lead to managers adopting a value system associated with utilitarian notions of labour which is divorced from the broad principles of equity and social justice to which most academics subscribe. Indeed, as Duckworth and Tummons (2014) have argued, whilst the *implication* of neo-liberalism is associated with individual freedom of choice, significant limitations are placed on this by 'the impact of structural and historical inequalities:

gender, race and class and other markers of identity'. The impact of structural inequality and value systems from which values of social justice are absent is to undermine the professional paradigm (Randle and Brady 1997, p. 134), and in the context of this discussion, to effectively marginalise both women and those men who identify with different forms of masculinity, or indeed, with characteristics more closely associated with forms of femininity. This is despite the fact that there is a plethora of policy and legislation which purports to facilitate 'equality' for oppressed groups (including women) across the higher education sector in developed countries. Such policy and legislation is, in the main, developed from a centrist, normative perspective (Atkins, 2014), by individuals who 'know better than the oppressed masses about whom they theorise' (Halberstam (drawing on Spivak), 2011, p. 127) thus contributing to a status quo in which privilege and power remain located within 'dominant masculinit[ies]' (Halberstam 1998, p. 2), which can be appropriated by both males and females.

What a drag!

This paper is located within feminist and queer critical perspectives aligned with taking a conscious and deliberate position, one that assumes a particular stance in relation to reading the world from out of a particular set of beliefs, values and feelings. As situated feminist and queer educators and researchers, we are invested in, and have increasingly different relationships in and to the places in which we work. We are, by the very stances we take, attentive to *how* practices of self are constituted within 'discourses of the social and the individual' (Fox, 1997, p.42) and how some practices and bodies are given more value than others. Increasingly, working in the academy in such ways, we are cognizant of *the ways* in which being in/out of the academy is increasingly being shaped in and by neoliberal discourse and is aligned with notions that there is a *way to be* in the academy. The singularity of such a logic of practice requires, we believe, an on-going interrogation and disruption of narratives of normalcy. This can be a risky business but as we focus our sights on a closer gaze on the discursive recognition of the renegotiation of performative 'maleness', we do so with an understanding of the ways in which practices of the self are always located within wider sociocultural ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996)

Drawing from feminist and queer thinking to un/do the doing of male/female, masculine/ feminine and can, we suggest, open up an interrogative space for revisiting understanding of how gender gets 'done' in bodies across disciplinary locations. Over the last few decades, the epistemic landscape around gender has been radically altered and, despite the politicized polemic of becoming more "inclusive", there remains an essentialist, biologically constructed notion that gender can only be

considered from some external biologically determined reference point –where the authority stance is based on a preferred and unquestioned set of social and cultural practices. This, we argue, marginalises both men and women who identify more closely with non-dominant, often feminised discourses and practices which privilege conceptions of social justice. Further, for women in power in educational institutions, research in the field of gender and education habitually indicates the problematics of 'being' . Drake (2015), citing an authoritative range of sources, points out that despite women representing in excess of 40% of academics (and two thirds in Education), numbers in leadership positions remain limited in both the UK and Australia. Globally, she suggests that fewer than 10% of full professors are women, a situation which is mirrored in most senior positions.

The problem of 'being', we suggest, fundamental to both the lack of women in senior positons, and to the particular constructions of masculinity which many women in such positions appropriate. It is, we propose, in the telling interpretations of how as subjects, women in power become constituted in educational institutions. By and through the tacit dialectic of intimacy/detachment from dominant discourses, proximity to and performativity of gender is a telling relation in Higher Educational domains; and the psychological and social affect in the taking up of certain subject positions is, as Walkerdine (1997), notes all about having an 'investment in discourse'. The experience of comfort/discomfort can be a disruptive, yet productive dialectical lens in relation to making unexamined privilege visible. Interrogation of situatedness can show something of the personal in the professional in a wider educational landscape and as noted by Drake (2015, citing Fitzgerald, 2014, p.105) *the overall 'collective stories' of the reporting [is]that universities are 'hostile places' in which women leaders are required to 'manage negative emotions such as fear, stress, hurt and alienation' .* In this 'hostile place', the new mantra has become fuelled by a rhetoric of standardisation and notions of performativity which are, we suggest, key to understanding how the everyday business of Universities is progressively being situated in relation to globalised economic imperatives:

Being a professor in a 21 century university, has left me feeling over- whelmed by the lack of concern regarding quality, while all the rhetoric abounds about the 'student experience' as being characterized by 'engagement, excellence and accessibility.' Most contemporary universities that I know have more administrators than academics. Yet the nature of academic work has become focused on administering procedures with inferior support and complaints from students that they can't find anyone to help when they are on campus—which is rare, as most work a 35 hour week as well as being enrolled in a full time course. Doing research is tolerated if you are able to obtain funding, since it brings in commensurate income and kudos to the institution. Academics are 'rented out' as research consultants to produce reports that maintain the status quo or endorse the point of view of the funder. Articles have to be published in outlets that are nebulously given the 'quality' label and cited multiple times in order for them to be taken seriously. These new processes of social ontology shape epistemological debates and render the academic as left wing ideologues, as if that is

something to be avoided rather than lauded. Desire for social justice and equity in a schooling system is now viewed as being divisive and playing the class card, to cut off debate and to maintain unequal sources of educational funding. Women remain the minority in senior leadership positions. Is this progress? Having become in the halcyon days of the 1970s, and recognizing that the social processes of ontology impact and shape identities, my views of the world, and my research interests are closely aligned with my being. They are underpinned by a quest to understand the social, cognitive,

economic and emotional aspects of teaching and learning in the 21st century (Vicars and Yelland, 2014, p. 88-89).

It has been suggested that 'How we understand ourselves and others as well as how we understand educational processes and educational inequalities' (Youdell, 2006, p.29) is in the privileging of ways of doing identity. The privileges that come with the performance of normalised identities can make them virtually compulsory and they are often reified and reinforced by, and through, institutional orthodoxies and practices that are responsive to the doxa of dominant cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Betwixt and Between: Jo's Story

My story – one of working with a woman who was prepared to (mis)use femininity outside the institution, whilst buying into, and reflecting, particular constructions of masculinity within it, remains difficult to tell. I am reasonably well known in my field, confident and assertive. Theoretically, I position myself amongst concerns around social justice and inequality, including issues of gender. I moved across continents to take up a new role. The opportunity arose at a cross roads in my career, and I embraced it with enthusiasm. Home and family were left behind, and I stepped into the unknown. I recognised that there would be challenges, but mistakenly assumed these would relate to minor issues such as administrative practices. Instead, I found myself part of an organisation with an ethos and culture unlike anything I had previously experienced in either the further or higher education sectors in the UK – despite having been employed in a number of settings with strongly neo-liberal and performative approaches to governance.

In my new institution, I found that power was curiously located, and depended not only on position, but also on interpersonal relationships with key figures in the hierarchy, all of whom reflected particular dominant constructions of masculinity in their own behaviour. The identity projected by this had become part of the culture of the institution, and those who adopted it were assured of security and progression. Those who didn't were placed in increasingly difficult positions. In general, when those positions became untenable, they left. The problems I encountered were, possibly, magnified by the fact that I had moved into a small institution where individuals and their behaviour had a proportionately greater impact on those around them. In addition, relationships and micro politics were, to an extent, incestuous, further serving to reify, reinforce and normalise particular

cultures and behaviours. Thus, relationships within the institution were complex, overlaid with personal as well as professional concerns. This created a field which reflected 'the locus of a struggle to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy' (Bourdieu, 1988, p.11), strengthening and reproducing the institutional hegemony through acts of symbolic violence.

I was working with, but not responsible to, a woman named Pauline who was senior in the otherwise male hierarchy. Pauline was well connected and functioned within the social and professional hierarchy made up of the university's senior management. Thus, her position was powerful and, in common with her male colleagues, she appropriated a dominant form of masculinity which supported the status quo and which created a 'hostile space' such as that described by Drake (2015). I was possibly not the best person to enter this environment, where I was reluctant to engage with or conform to attitudes or systems within the institution which I perceived to be marginalising particular individuals in a way which was inconsistent with values of social justice and freedom of opinion. The marginalising behaviours I observed – and which were also directed at me –served to legitimate Pauline's position, and, by extension, those of other members of the university hierarchy. They included actions such as denying certain individuals membership of research groups, establishing un-achievable, performative 'targets' for individuals, and questioning individual's competence, often on a daily basis. An inability or unwillingness to conform to such requirements was identified – often publicly - as either weakness (normally in male colleagues) or incompetence (normally in female colleagues). Where individuals gave way to emotion, this was interpreted as evidence of a lack of competence or an inability to cope. In tension with this, were the university policies and structures around staff and student support which included both counselling services and a grievance procedure.

Within this performative culture scholarship was almost impossible since a whole range of theoretical and philosophical positions were perceived to be direct criticisms of individuals or the institution (including, for example, my observations on power relations, and even my not unreasonable assertion that we should avoid describing traditionally gendered employment as 'boys' jobs and 'girls' jobs). And yet the institution – and my colleague – located themselves in idealised discourses of leadership, development, and collegiality. The irony of this in the context of the neo-liberal, masculinised and performative management regime seemed to escape them. Within the institution, as I have said, Pauline appropriated and enacted a particular form of masculinity. Outside the institution, however, she adopted a different, feminised persona who was located in discourses of care and compassion. The juxtaposition of these identities I found curious, but it led me to regard

her adoption of particular gender displays and identities as an act that was consciously done, reflecting perhaps, different imperatives and values inside and outside the institution. Irrespective of this however, I came to realise that she represented a particularly unyielding culture which I could not become part of without sacrificing my own values and integrity in order to become 'one of the lads' and be included into the 'legitimate hierarchy' of the organisation. Ultimately, like others before me, my only option was to move on – fortunately to an institution with a very different culture and ethos.

Changing the Subject

Articulating the concept and understanding of how 'managerial drag' as the conscious performance of gender display as passing is a metaphor that we use to understand the ways in which women in power are able to negotiate the discourse. Managerial drag as a social practice is a conscious act that recognizes the taking up of specific positions and position-takings is a way of our understanding how:

> …Culture [and capital] is used to designate not merely something to which one belongs but something that one possesses and, along with that proprietary process, culture [and capital] also designates a boundary by which the concepts of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to the culture [and capital] come into forceful play. (Said, 1991, p.9)

The presence of 'maleness' in the academy, it could be argued, is a required social and cultural capital in the neoliberal university and as a narrativising discourse interpolates and invests managerial roles in with a presence and performativity. As neoliberal discourse in universities is increasingly focused on the outward and outcome driven imperatives of performance and performativity: KPI'S , high impact publications, REF , income generating activities and highly evaluated teaching and learning scores, discourses of output and efficiency have become the normalcy or practice sanctioning the ways in which affect, power and identities are constructed, performed and experienced. St Pierre (1997) has noted the ways in which the everyday habits, and ways of being, are '... formed in and by academic habitus as particular and collective, knowing and knowledge producing subjects' (p.10). As knowing subjects, being knowledgeable about the ways in which one is to account is no longer about the world of engaged scholarship and teaching. Speaking form and working within relational spaces of 'between' and 'beside', whilst a recognised and accepted way of reflexive pedagogy, and an understood way in which to think about how our ways of working as teachers and as researchers are complex, messy and are a negotiation with others, is of little 'real' value . It could be claimed that Neoliberal discourse seldom has time for such 'fancies'

as metrics cannot easily capture the nuances of practice. As the impact of neoliberal discourse on universities produces disciplined subjects, the wider sociocultural ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996), the managerialist ethos is reflective of a wider social, political and cultural dynamic. The performativity of neoliberalism, we argue, requires models of management in which binary logics frame the on-going gendering of women in power.

Discussion

In this paper about women in power in the academy, we have sought to interrogate the ways in which the narrative of neoliberal change has situated the imperative of gender drag of senior female academic workers. Increasingly we have been confronted to question in a relation to the how senior female colleagues and managers enact their 'role' and are invested in managerial discourse. This leads us to ask 'What voice is being used? Who is doing the talking? It appears to us that Universities are reflecting the changing orientations and values of society as they increasingly become subjected to external evaluations; metrics of efficacy are used to position those who work within along newly created storylines of relevance and profitability. It also appears that an imperative arising form this that women in power should have to enact particular form of masculinity. This is illustrated by Drake (2015) in her account of women in leadership roles which draws on her personal experience:

I was flown over from the UK. I joined the institution in March 2012 as Dean and Head of School in a faculty structure in which Education was one of several schools under the overall direction of an Executive Dean. This journey makes me one of 14% of people leaving academic posts in the UK for an overseas destination (ECU 2012). Shortly after I took up my post, in April 2012 the university announced a restructure. Various indicators suggested that the university was trailing competitor universities in the investment it made in administration; there were significant cuts in government funding; and there was a local crisis for the university financial management process in the shape of a significant and unexpected deficit. Thus the university was positioned in the neo-liberal space of needing to acquire new sources of funding and reduce expenditure, with performance indicators highlighting areas in which economies were to be made…The restructure resulted in the dissolution of both the faculty and school structures, the aspiration for establishing a 'shared service' model of administration, and the establishment of seven academic higher education units, Colleges, in the university, each of which is headed by a College Dean. Education became a free-standing unit on 1 January 2013 that comprised a research institute, a higher education component, and a vocational education component. I was appointed as Dean of the new College of Education after a selection process that included an interview and aptitude tests aimed at assessing soft skills such as entrepreneurship; continuous improvement; collegiality and team work; creativity; problem solving and so forth (Drake, 2015, pp.148-149) Concepts of leadership idealise personal qualities such as resilience and professional attributes of being able to inspire, generate improvement, or generate new business. Scholarliness largely does not feature in these discourses, nor does reflexivity. Increasingly, in spheres such as teacher education, health and social care, are women who, operating at full stretch, are not only expected to be research active but also to exemplify innovative, evidence-informed and research-driven practice; and to make such practice look desirable. (Drake, 2015, pp.148-149)

As the existing social and material relations of the business of teaching and research changes, the practices by and through which we are expected to produce the work are becoming more scrutinised. As new understandings of contemporary tertiary institutions, in neoliberal contexts, make way for narratives assigned and aligned with notions of value, the concept of value has been extended and incorporated in to the realm of the corporeal and invested with capital: the student body is assigned with an economic value, academic bodies are biddable and increasingly disposable; and managerial bodies, increasingly, have the most power. As cultural and social capital and doxic masculinity confers on subjects identities of privilege, Segal (1994, pp.228-229), has commented how:

If we look at how male bodies appear…, it is clear that they encode culturally significant, understandings of physical organs and their functioning …

Becoming aligned within the practices of masculinity is to be inside the realm of the culturally intelligible and is a reliance on a cultural code (Barthes, 1974) that refers to a shared body of knowledge about how maleness in the world works. If, through the dialogic, repetitive exchanges between the self and social environment that meanings around women in power are formed, then being immersed in a logic of practice, in the ritualistic activities of everyday life, is how the performativity of 'maleness' comes to generate meanings of itself. Carbado (2005, p.192), has remarked how:

… One must learn to be a man…because manhood is a socially produced category. Manhood is a performance. A script. It is accomplished and re-enacted in everyday social relationships.

Maleness as effective as opposed to affective is, as Drake (2015) has noted, an underscored understanding of managerial discourse:

…emotion plays with concepts of leadership as spoken in a university, seeking distinctiveness in teacher education practice… in ways that draw attention to the interplays amongst gender, emotional labour, rapid organisational change… Paying explicit attention to emotion may add richness of understanding about how women educational leaders become recognised in their institutions… to direct a gender-derived lens on experience, and to open up a space for discussion of women leaders operating within neo-liberal discourses [Is a] taking account of considerations such as domination of the higher education space by the global north [And] what effect the extraction of labour power and surplus value, that is, being at work, has on the bodies of those through whom it circulates (Drake, 2015, pp.148-149).

As an intertextual social process, managerial drag can be thought of as an on-going inter-textual event in which interactions with others reveal how discourse practices produce subjects into categories that reiteratively construct social identities and realities:

Having several years' experience in university middle management in the UK (as Head of School, Director of Initial Teacher Education, programme leader), I was recently appointed as a leader in an Australian university, and charged with bringing about change in an education grouping in which teacher education plays a dominant part. I had reached the position of professor, and been in a position to move overseas; I was positioned by leaderist norms (Morley 2013) of a globalised higher education system; and I should not have been surprised therefore to be greeted by new managerialist discourse that positioned me in such a way as to provide an explanation for my beliefs and behaviour. I was surprised though, and pained, for I saw neo-liberalism not as a description of practices of individuals on the ground, but the consequences of specific economic policy decisions that, as such, engender conditions at work through which everyone employed in a university lives. These intersecting spaces provoked great emotional conflict the like of which I have never before experienced, and which ultimately drove me to read Fitzgerald's (2014) account of women caught out playing the leadership game (Drake, 2015, pp.161-162). …

Reflections: in the spaces of dis/appearance

Increasingly in neoliberal times, reflecting on the work of 'being' in Higher educational institutions requires a mining of the folds and pleats of experience. Held tight by the highly conventional stories of and about what universities should be and how the work within is to be done, such stories invariably simultaneously smooth, inscribe and discipline ways of knowing and doing intellectual work. Critically thinking upon and considering how our connections to our teaching and research practices are variously storied, gendered and enacted effectively disclose the rituals of power. Reflection on experiences through which we are formed and in which we re-encounter ourselves point us towards understandings of how our chosen manner of being in the world, how in our ways of acting visible within intricate relations with others that our lives as intellectual workers are contoured. The situated nature of teaching and learning and research inevitably has to account for the broader social and cultural dynamics in which are practices emerged and as Drake (2015, pp.161-162) suggests:

Constructed from this space, insider-outsiderness is complex… Roles, such as 'manager', 'leader', 'rank-and-file', are constructed for particular purposes, embody power relations, and are designed to prevent examination….to take charge of the space and to position ourselves dynamically within it allows us to reject the cultural essentialism of being either one thing or another. How we construct ourselves in relation to roles, which after all are processes, not properties of people. (Drake, 2015, pp.161-162)

Locating 'I' as 'the *embodiment* of discursive practices which both describe and produce the self through the operation of power' (Atkinson and Hayes, 2006) we, in this paper have drawn on personal narrative to show something of how the concept of 'maleness' as a form of managerial

drag. It is, we suggest, in the neoliberal academy, a tactical performative site for women to occupy from which to pass through the effects between 'proper' and 'improper' ways of being and speaking.

This suggests that women in positions of power are only able to fulfil those roles to the satisfaction of the neoliberal academy by describing and producing a self which identifies with particular concepts of maleness. Similarly, this might also explain the relative invisibility of those 'feminine men' who locate themselves in feminized discourses of caring and compassion which are in tension with those concepts of 'masculine' maleness which are associated with leadership and power within the academy. If we are to address this, as well as the neo-liberal managerialist approaches to governance which now permeate the higher education sector internationallyly, we need to not only question and theorise the prevailing (masculine) hegemony, but to find ways of disrupting and disturbing it. Ultimately, it is only by through questioning and critique that we can begin to speak truth to power, and engage in actions which can result in positive change, leading to an academy in which less dominant constructions of masculinity are prevalent, which are respectful of all individuals and thus more consistent with social justice. As Allison (1996, p.39) has remarked: "Behind the story I tell is the one I don't. Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear". That story is the 'absent presence' of women in educational leadership. It is perhaps in what Gee, (2008, p.1) has identified as being the 'other stuff' of language, namely: 'social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world' that an understanding of epistemic difference surrounding women in power will be populated. Difference matters and academic labour and intellectual work is not immune from being worked over by the us/them, inside/outside, dichotomizing practices that make differences exclusionary.

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