Educational Trajectories and Different Displays of Masculinity in Post-industrial Wales

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ABSTRACT

While the work on men, masculinities and gender identities has exploded across the social sciences and in feminist and pro-feminist geography since the mid-1980s, very little of this work has looked at masculinities and what is means to be a young man in Wales. In this article, drawing on an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) study, conducted in a post-industrial community in south Wales, I focus on how young men's masculinities are performed across a variety of educational and leisure spaces. I show how expectations and transitions to adulthood are framed through geographically and historically shaped class and gender codes. These codes underpin expectations of manhood in this post-industrial place, and there are consequences for those young men whose performances of masculinity deviate from what is deemed as socially acceptable. In order to fully examine men and their behaviours, I suggest that Welsh men must be analysed within separate historical and geographical contexts and within the social construction of gender within a specific place.

Key words: place, masculinity, class, performance, space.

Introduction

The post-millennium period has seen big changes within a small nation and the distinctiveness of Wales, in terms of its political life and culture,

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has grown considerably (Mannay, 2016). Yet, these changes in Wales have also been accompanied by severe economic restructuring over the past half-century, impacting on traditional gender roles and individuals' futures (Parken et al., 2014). For men, the performances of a masculine self which accompany these shifts are highly contradictory to what preceded them (Kenway et al., 2006; Walkerdine, 2010; McDowell, 2012; Roberts, 2013). These changes in status and forms of employment patterns in Wales and in other countries in the global north has created an increasing anxiety in public policy and the media about the position of boys and young men (Tarrant et al., 2015; Ward, 2015a, Ward et al., 2017). These concerns have centred on a range of issues including boys' perceived educational 'underachievement' (when compared to girls), high rates of suicide and poor mental health among young men, boys' involvement in offending and anti-social behaviour and lack of positive male role models (Tarrant et al., 2015). However, although the generic category 'boys' is often used in policy and cultural commentaries, it is young men from working-class backgrounds and from particular marginalised places who are most often associated with this 'crisis' (Featherstone et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2017).

In light of these debates, drawing on a longitudinal ESRC ethnographic study with young men in a post-industrial community in the valleys of south Wales, I present the results of an 'active investigation of the way in which men are constructed' (Scourfield and Drakeford, 1999: 15). Given the diversity of the country, in terms of those who speak the Welsh language, social class dynamics and the north/south/urban/rural divide, I suggest that young men in Wales can only be analysed within separate historical and geographical contexts; and through the social construction of gender within specific places in the nation.

Placing Gender

Jackson's (1991, 1994) work in the early 1990s first marked the start of a geographical interest in the social and cultural construction of masculinity and questioned aspacial accounts of men's lives. Interdisciplinary studies began linking the notion of place and space to employment (Massey, 1995; McDowell, 1997) and further work across a range of areas explored the complex relationship between masculinities in different spaces (Bell, 2000; Brandth and Haugen, 2000). However, it was not until a few years later that a sustained analysis of men and masculinities began to be applied

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within the field of social geography (Berg and Longhurst, 2003). This used Raewyn Connell's concept of 'Hegemonic Masculinity', which was devised as a way to understand the gender order and the power dynamics of different forms of masculinity. Connell (1995) argues that 'Hegemonic Masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same, but that it is a process and a 'culturally exalted form of masculinity' (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985: 592) which all men do not benefit from equally. Therefore, a dominant form of masculinity can co-exist at the local, national and international level (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and across place and space. Masculinity must therefore be seen as relational and individual neighbourhoods, regions and nations shape the performance of young men's masculine identity, in the same way that other processes of identity formation, such as education and schooling do.

In this article, I suggest that it is only in the situated, empirically grounded analysis of actual men in actual places, that we can understand power relationships and masculinities better (Nayak, 2003; Kenway et al., 2006; Hopkins and Noble, 2009; Gorman-Murray and Hopkins, 2014). In examining the multiple ways young men live out their lives within one post-industrial community this article argues that young working-class men are not locked into one way of 'doing boy' and are demanded to perform their masculinities in different ways or to 'chameleonise' (Ward, 2015b) between performances given the audience and setting they are situated within. These contradictions highlight the pressures that an industrial and cultural legacy of a specific geographic area places on young men to conform to ideals of manhood. This focus on the local as Hopkins and Noble (2009: 815) argue enables 'the messiness of layered subjectivities and multi-dimensional relations in particular localities' to be explored. This placed-based approach highlights how the histories of place, class and gender impact on the educational decisions made by young men in one marginalised Welsh locale.

Context and Methods

This two-and-a-half-year ethnographic study examined how social, economic and political changes have impacted on young working-class men's lives in the south Wales valleys. In particular, I was interested in how these processes have altered transitions to adulthood and the relationships that exist between education, work and future aspirations in a post-industrial

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community. This article draws on the time I spent in the town of Cwm Dyffryn[1] observing and interacting with young men, aged 16–18 (n=35), within and beyond educational settings, and as the research progressed, beyond the town itself (Ward, 2015a). The research involved participant observation supported by extensive field notes, focus group interviews, ethnographic conversations and more formally recorded one-on-one interviews.

The study draws and builds on the rich history of sociology of education ethnographies conducted with young men over the past half-century (Lacey, 1970; Willis, 1977; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Nayak, 2003) and other research in the UK and beyond that have studied masculinities within and beyond the school setting (Frosh et al., 2002; McDowell, 2003; Roberts, 2013; Stahl, 2015). It should be noted here that apart from Brown's, these UK-based studies are in fact English-based studies, something this research sought to address by providing a Welsh perceptive on the issue. It also draws on the symbolic interactionist tradition of understanding gender as a performance, which takes place through everyday interaction in multiple settings (Goffman, 1959, 1976, 1977; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009).

The research site, Cwm Dyffryn, was in an area of Wales that was once a major contributor to the British coal industry (Williams, 1985) and one of the largest industrial centres in the country employing up to a quarter of a million men, one-third of the Welsh labour force (Smith, 1984; Egan, 1987; Francis and Smith, 1998). A strong division of labour characterised these communities, where a distance from anything seen as 'feminine' was deemed an essential part of manhood. Men earned respect for working arduously and 'doing a hard job well and being known for it' (Willis, 1977: 52). These roles were often seen as heroic with punishing physical labour that involved different degrees of manual skill and bodily toughness, creating a tough, stoic masculinity. Male camaraderie was established through physicality and close working conditions underground; and maintained through jokes, storytelling, sexist language and banter. Camaraderie was further supported through social institutions such as miners' institutes, chapels, pubs, working men's clubs and sports. Rugby union, and to a lesser extent boxing and football, still hold powerful positions in the culture of the locale influencing those who play it, those who watch it, those who reject it and those who are deemed unfit for it (Holland and Scourfield, 1998; Howe, 2001; Harris, 2007).

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The area is now characterised by a 'triangle of poverty' (Adamson, 2008: 21) with low levels of educational attainment and high levels of unemployment, health inequalities and poor housing across the region. Young people from the area have also become subject to social stigmatisation (Ward, 2014), with 6.7 per cent of those aged between 16 and 24 recorded as claiming Job Seekers Allowance (ONS, 2014). It is often the case that young people must move out of the area not only to find employment, but also to use the educational skills they have gained (Smith and Sage, 2014). For young people who remain within the locale, the prospects of getting jobs are extremely low, highly competitive and likely to be minimum wage.

Cwm Dyffryn, and the south Wales valleys more broadly, are examples of localities strongly rooted in the modern industrial era, which have experienced huge difficulties in transforming economically, socially and culturally to cope with a post-industrial society. The conditions described above have had a significant impact on how masculinity has been shaped and re-shaped within this environment. The following sections outline the differential ways in which I found different groups of young men were displaying their masculinities in various ways within and beyond the school that seemed to continue the industrial and cultural legacy of the region, but to also contradict it. I identified that there were three distinct friendship groups who I termed The Valley Boiz, The Geeks and The Emos who seemed to represent these continuities and changes particular clearly and engage with formal schooling in distinct ways.

As will become clear in this article, it could be argued that some of these young men's parents appear to be employed in middle-class occupations. However, as Reay (2017: 5) points out 'there are many different ways of being working class', and a complex relationship exists between the working classes and education. I therefore use the term 'working class' here (also see Ward, 2015a) to refer to all these young men, as I believe it is important to recognise the inequalities that they experienced by coming from a deprived locale. Having a parent who is a teacher in a marginalised community is very different to having a parent who is a teacher in a more affluent area (see Weis, 1990; Reay, 2017). Consequently, it is important that the geo-demographics of place are considered when defining class and how successful boys from poorer communities experience education (Burrows and Gane, 2006). I now turn to explore the narratives of the first of these groups of young men, The Valley Boiz.

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The Valley Boiz: The Re-traditionalisation of White Working-class Masculinities

The Valley Boiz were a large group of white, working-class young men who were all born and brought up in Cwm Dyffryn; their friendship developed as they progressed through their secondary (high) school. The Valley Boiz anti-school behaviours and negative attitudes to education were similar to those documented in other ethnographic studies of working-class young men of a similar age (Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Nayak, 2003). Yet, there were a number of differences between The Valley Boiz and these other studies of young men. The Valley Boiz persevered with the profoundly contradictory process of continuing in post-16 education after their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams. This decision clashed with the traditions of the local community and their general anti-school behaviour. However, returning to school enabled the group to delay uncertain employment futures for a further year or two. The school was also a safe and familiar space for the young men, which provided access to a small amount of money in the form of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA).[2]

The Valley Boiz were a large friendship group with around nine key members; however, there were other young men who were loosely affiliated with them and joined them for nights out in the town, drinking or driving around in their cars as they grew older. The core members of the group comprised of Dai, Birdy, Jonesy, Shaggy, Clive, Hughesy, Davies, Brad, Cresco, Tomo and Bunk.[3] The group dynamics were fluid and others such as Jimmy, Frankie, Bakers and Ian (see Ward, 2015b, 2017) also joined the group on occasions. As the young men progressed into and through the school's sixth form (Year 12 and 13), their friendships changed and some ended due to arguments, fights, the development of deeper relationships with girlfriends or moving out of Cwm Dyffryn to different educational institutions.

The legacy of the region's industrial past was evident in their family backgrounds with the young men speaking of relatives who had worked in the coal industry or related occupations, such as working in coal cleaning plants or driving lorries delivering coal. Their fathers, who had grown up in the industry's decline, had continued the tradition of working-class occupations by entering other male-dominated jobs in the building trade or haulage. A small portion of the group had families who owned their own businesses such as Birdy's family who ran a local post office and Tomo's father who co-owned an electrical factory employing

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twenty-three people. Others like Dai and Jonesy were a bit unsure as to what their parents did or were reluctant to admit to it. For example, all Jonesy could tell me was that his father 'worked in a big office somewhere in Cardiff', which as far as he was concerned, was enough and not terribly important in defining his father to him.

The situation of the young men's female family members was more varied, with mothers being described as 'housewives', cleaners, clerical workers and retail assistants. Some, like Dai, had older sisters in higher education. Brad was a little unsure of his mother's exact job title, but he said she worked as an 'assessor' in the local college. Brad was perhaps indicating here that she was involved in some form of teaching or training role. However, none of their parents had any experience of higher education (apart from Brad's father who had attended university briefly in his late twenties before dropping out) and the majority of the young men were in receipt of the EMA. While a contradictory class position was evident for a few of the young men due to their parent's slight upward mobility, as a group these boys come from traditional white working-class families. However, their relatively stable family backgrounds (only Jonesy had parents who have divorced) and employment histories indicate that these boys were quite distinctive from those of their counterparts who had totally disengaged from schooling at the age of sixteen and who were not involved in education, employment or training (NEETs).

I first encountered the young men in the spring of 2008, when they were in the final weeks of compulsory schooling and contemplating their impending futures. When asked during a group interview what they planned on doing after their GCSEs, some of these aspirations became clear whilst other less so.

Bunk Apprenticeship.
MW Ok you want to tell me a bit about that?
Bunk I've applied for one with Ford and Quick Fit …
MW So that's work as well as college or …
Bunk Yeah …
Tomo That be good that is, be paid to do an apprenticeship!
Bunk I think Quick Fit was like £280 a week …
MW Ok sounds good…
Hughesy … stay on and see about something.
Brad I'm going to go to the sixth form till Christmas so I can go skiing again and err then I'll go and work with my old man then …
MW Shaggy, what about you then?
Shaggy Whatever happens …

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MW	OK whatever happens …
Birdy	I want to go to uni cos of the girls …

[Group interview]

Bunk had already looked into a modern apprenticeship and reports that he has applied for two different schemes with national motor vehicle companies. Tomo seems impressed with this and illustrates that he has already some background knowledge about the modern apprenticeship because he realises it is accompanied by a paid wage. The validation for Bunk's choice comes through the ability to earn whilst studying in an acceptable (male-dominated) industry, reproducing an idealised form of masculinity, which for the others in the group is the performance to be maintained. Those who are not sure what they want to do, but have decided to stay on in education like Hughesy, Brad and Birdy, validate their choices in different ways reconfiguring their macho front performance. Hughesy expresses nonchalance without committing to anything, whilst Brad justifies his decision to return to the sixth form purely because he can go skiing again[4] and will then go to work with his father in an acceptable manual occupation as a floor tiler. Birdy was the only one of the group to look beyond the immediate future by suggesting he wanted to go to university. But, he justifies this quickly by saying 'because of the girls'. His aspirations are validated by emphasising (hetero) sexual motives, rather than academic ones.

With a heritage of working-class family backgrounds and recognisable manual skills, educational qualification leading to occupations, which could be gained through apprenticeships, or training schemes, were deemed most desirable. However, it was not just their family backgrounds and the industrial heritage of place that had an impact on their views of education, and what constituted acceptable performances of self: interactions of the friendship group within these spaces also contributed to the construction of acceptable masculinity.

Whilst The Valley Boiz attended sixth form regularly (as their attendance had to be proven to receive their EMA), they did not always attend every lesson, as they should have, and often opted to sit around the common room chatting about girls and plans for the weekend or making use of computers in the library to surf the internet. During lessons, their interactions with their teachers were very casual and banter was often exchanged about football or rugby results. Even in the empty classrooms (there were

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only around half a dozen students on their courses) The Valley Boiz sat at the back of the room as far away from the teacher as they could. Resonant of their compulsory school days, they still exhibited an indifference to being close to the front of the classroom, which might have meant being seen by the others as over-investing in the lesson and therefore gaining a derogatory label as a swot or a geek. Sitting at the back of the class also meant that chatter could occur whilst out of earshot of the teacher where a certain amount of 'piss taking' and sexual storytelling occurred during the lessons (Ward, 2017). A clear example of this can be seen when Hughesy recounts a tale from the weekend's activities during a group experiment in an applied science lesson.

> The boys began taking 'the piss' out of Hughesy about an incident with a caravan. I asked to hear more about this and Hughesy told me eagerly. He'd been out on a Saturday night in the town and 'pulled' an older woman in a nightclub. After getting a kebab (which he'd dropped all over his black shirt) he'd gone home with her. But instead of being invited into her house, she took him into a touring caravan that was parked outside it. When he awoke in the morning (with scratches all over his back he was happy to tell us) he had no idea where he was. Alongside the 'rough bird' he had 'pulled' there were a few Doberman dogs in the caravan which he said looked 'fucking scary!' He called everyone on his phone to try and get a lift home, but only Clive had answered and gone to collect him in his car, at 8:30am on the Sunday morning. Clive had commented that Hughesy had sounded 'well quiet' and shy on the phone and as Hughesy wasn't sure exactly where he was, it took him a while to find him. Hughesy admitted not calling her again and lying to her about his age. He told her he was in university so that she would think he was older and would sleep with him.
>
> [Field notes]

Three things seem to be occurring here in the telling of this tale, which continues the 'macho' front performance. First, The Valley Boiz are engaging with a practical task and whilst carrying it out are reproducing normative expectations of heterosexual prowess. By interacting around a practical task, a sanitised older world of industrial work is being re-traditionalised in the classroom space. Secondly, through storytelling Hughesy occupies an honoured position and reaffirms dominant myths about what constitutes a 'real man'. As Goffman (1959: 44) contends, the impression of a particular character is 'idealized in several different ways'. Hughesy is enjoying being the centre of attention and his desires are shared by the others. Hughesy portrays himself as a hero, he went through dangers (the Dobermans), incurred injuries (the scratches on his back) and needed

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to be rescued from the ordeal by his friend (who drives to find him) after the event. His story is also validated by this rescue, as some of the tale is authenticated by Clive. Finally, the sexual objectification of the girl in the story is complete when Hughesy states that he did not call her again and admits to lying to her in order to sleep with her. This incident strengthens the group identity and acts as a collective normalising practice, by reinforcing myths about the roles of traditional masculinities in the locality and through emphasising a heterosexual prowess.

This transformation of the industrial base of the region has led to changes in the relationship between work and masculinity. Yet the attitudes to work and identity are still intrinsically connected to their community and their family biographies. To be a 'proper' boy or man from the valleys an archetype of masculinity associated with an older world of industrial work must be outwardly performed through 'masculine' affirming practices associated with certain educational subjects, engaging in physical and aggressive behaviours and certain ideas of male embodiment. The expulsion of the feminine or homosexuality is an essential aspect in this performance and enables the Valley Boiz to perform their masculinities through re-traditionalising practices, which re-transmit the traditional values of the locale through pain, heroism and physicality. These practices, which Scourfield and Drakeford (1999) also highlighted, are often seen as key to a Welsh man's identity and to diverge from them can be problematic. I now turn to two groups of young men who did diverge from these normal scripts and highlight some of the issues that they faced within and beyond the school gates.

The Geeks: The Performance of Studious Working-class Masculinities

The Geeks friendship group consisted primarily of Leon, Gavin, Ruben, Scott, Nibbles, Alan, Sean, Ieuan, Sam, Sin and Nixon. Apart from Sin, who was of Chinese heritage, all were white and had been born in the town and when I met them, in Year 11, they had the highest grades in their year group. In the extracts below, a 'geek' is described by the young men themselves as someone who does not participate in sports and is more interested in video games, films and comics:

Sam Get a sporting accolade and you're already like the greatest person ever
Alan If you don't do sport in school you're like …

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Sam	… a geek …
Sean	… yeah a geek basically

[Group interview]

MW	So do you play a lot of video games then?
Sean	Yeah, I'm a geek I am, I love games!
MW	So are you really a geek like when you say you are?
Sean	Yeah I love all the geeky things, like um games, films um …
MW	… you're well into your films are you?
Sean	Ah yeah! Graphic novels, comics, things like that.

[Individual interview]

As Sean indicates here, being defined as a geek was evident in more subtle ways than just being positioned as academically successful. In Year 11 some of The Geeks were smaller in stature and less physically developed than many others in their year group, making them easy targets for bullying. They arrived at lessons on time with their own pens and pencil cases, did their homework and carried their books and other equipment in bags, which others in their year group did not always use. Along with this compliance to rules, they correctly adhered to the school dress code of white shirts, with red ties, black V-neck jumpers, black trousers and black shoes. This uniform was accompanied by neat haircuts and, for some, horned-rimmed glasses or braces on their teeth, which completed the stereotypical geek persona. These artefacts then operate as forms of 'expressive equipment' (Goffman, 1959: 32) and marked The Geeks with their own recognisable identity.

Whilst The Geeks adhered to school rules, others in their year group sought to disrupt uniform policy and replace compulsory items with one's own. It was common practice to replace the standard black V-neck jumper with a round neck one, because this then meant that the school tie could be removed and it would go unseen by teachers. Other attempts by The Geeks' peers to disrupt school rules included replacing shoes with trainers, wearing hooded jackets and baseball caps, and adorning their bodies with flashy rings, chains and single earrings or studs. A large group of pupils who were registered on sports subjects were also allowed to wear a tracksuit instead of the regular uniform. This process not only validated a specific form of masculinity based on sporting prowess by the educational institution itself (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), but also acted as a symbolic marker of status, which The Geeks did not have access to and were therefore 'othered' as a group for not belonging to the sporting elite.

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After achieving good GCSE grades, all The Geeks returned to the school's sixth form. The subjects chosen by The Geeks to study were predominantly in the arts, natural sciences, maths and IT. The Geeks had been in the top sets for all their core subjects at GCSE level and even though they were a close group of friends, they were fiercely competitive over their grades. They also all harboured aspirations to go to university. This is not to say that others in their year group did not aspire to go to university or gain well-paid and meaningful employment, but for The Geeks this seemed to be of paramount importance to their projected futures. For example, Sam planned on spending a year in America studying:

Sam	Journalism is what I'd like to get into at the moment.
MW	Alright.
Sam	And I'd like to go to America as well for my university course.
MW	So you've thought a little bit down the line where you want to go?
Sam	Yeah I have done a bit of research into it and they do offer it in some of the English universities and the exchanges into American universities, so I'll aim for that first … if I get rejected I'll just go lower down the ladder.
MW	So you've thought about going to uni then?
Sam	Yeah [shouts] I am going to uni!

[Individual interview]

Sam's final statement demonstrates a powerful sense of agency: he is not constrained by place and his ambitions illustrate a willingness to move on. His determination to find a way to his goals by attending different universities if his first choice is unavailable is also clear. Arguably, for Sam attending university is a way to gain a hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell, 1995) so often denied him (and other boys like him) who have invested in academic capital in this community.

It could be argued that The Geeks family biographies contributed to their positive outlook on academic qualifications. Ruben, Nixon, Ieuan and Leon had fathers and mothers who had some experience of higher education and were employed in professional occupations such as education. Other parents owned their own businesses in the form of garages (Sean) and takeaway food shops (Sin). Yet, there were also some parents who worked in more traditional working-class occupations such as lorry drivers (Scott) and caretakers (Sam); or were unemployed (Gavin, Alan). Three of the boys (Scott, Ieuan and Gavin) said that their mothers stayed at home and described them as housewives. Sadly, Nibbles's mother had died when he was fourteen and his stepdad (his biological father had left the family

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years before) was on long-term incapacity benefit after being injured in an accident whilst driving a lorry. I now want to turn to a final group of young men, who further illustrate the diverse performances of masculinity in south Wales.

The Emos: The Performance of 'Alternative' Working-class Masculinities

The key members of The Emos friendship group were Bruce, Clump, Jelly Belly, Jack and Tommy.[5] Over the time I was acquainted with them, and as their educational pathways changed, other young men and women were introduced to the group. Jenkins, Dai and Billy-Joe became friends with Clump and Jelly Belly at a local further education (FE) college and Brittany and Rosie also became part of the wider group when they became romantically involved with Clump and Bruce. The young men performed together in different bands playing music in pubs and clubs across the region and were part of a global youth culture often referred to as the 'alternative' scene.

The alternative scene revolves around a combination of guitar-based bands stemming out of broad genres of non-mainstream music that transcends the globe (Moore, 2010). Alternative can be used as an umbrella term for a music scene with fluid, flexible boundaries, which can incorporate many sub-divisions of punk, different forms of heavy and extreme metal (Harris, 2000), hard-core, glam, thrash, grunge, riot grrrl (Moore, 2010), emo (Riches, 2014) and the goth scene (Hodkinson, 2002). Multiple forms of dance and violent body movements, such as moshing, slam dancing and crowd surfing accompany the live arena with many of these activities being carried out in spaces known as 'pits' (Riches, 2014).

The broad scene is also marked with different clothing fashions, but these are frequently combined together to make a complex appearance. Leisure pursuits or 'extreme' sports that are loosely associated with the music, such as skateboarding, BMX riding, surfing and snowboarding, also accompanied the scene. Holly Kruse (1993) argues that the loose term of alternative music also means that 'local identities and traditions interact with relatively coherent trans local frames of reference' (Kruse, 1993, cited in Hodkinson, 2002: 27). The shared task of networks, communications and commerce can connect people with each other.

In keeping with this scene and using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework to understand this interaction order, one of the ways these

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young men's personal front performance of masculinity was displayed was through their distinctive style of clothing. When not in school uniform, they tended to dress in baggy trousers or very tight skinny jeans, with dark T-shirts that had their favourite band logos on them and big hooded jumpers. The Emos tended to have long hair which was dyed a variety of bright colours and sometimes, but not always, pulled down over their eyes. Their bodies were also adorned with piercings in their eyebrows, ears, tongues, noses and even through the base of the neck. Even in their school uniform, they stood out with these symbolic representations of the alternative scene, and the young men were constantly reprimanded by teachers for breaking uniform policy.

As they grew older, ever more elaborate tattoos were added on their arms, legs and bodies, further enabling them to showcase their allegiance to the alternative scene. However, embracing this scene caused alienation within their schools and colleges from both teachers and their peers. They were often bullied in the wider community because of the way they dressed, their hairstyles and the variety of body piercings and colourful tattoos that made them stand out as they transgressed accepted patterns of behaviour and masculinity. While this bricolage of styles acted as an unofficial group 'uniform', its contradictions to a more traditional working-class culture highlight the plural nature of young working-class masculinities in contemporary Wales and how gender is produced and performed within this space.

At school, teachers and their peers referred to the group as 'emos', something the popular press and other forms of media have sought to mock and vilify when writing about the 'dangers' of non-mainstream youth (Peters, 2010; Riches, 2014). The Emos did enough to 'get on' in school and achieved a mid-range of GCSE grades (see Brown, 1987; Roberts, 2013). Yet, they all said that they hated the way they were treated in school and the majority of the group left after their GCSEs to undertake a variety of music- and arts-based courses at an FE college. Bruce and Tommy did opt to return to school to undertake A levels, but they continued to feel out of place. This feeling of alienation resulted in Tommy leaving before he had completed his course, so only Bruce remained to complete his final year. Between lessons Bruce used to distance himself from the rest of his year group and escape to the art department to work on his art project or play his guitar, preferring being on his own to mixing with his peers.

Alongside the alienation experienced within the school, The Emos felt that they did not fit in with the town of Cwm Dyffryn. Their involvement

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with the different aspects of the alternative scene attracted unwanted attention within the locality.

Jack	Yeah, it used to be bad, and used to be annoying, because everyone hated each other but it's a bit better now cos everyone's grown up a little bit now.
Clump	Yeah used to get heaps of shit everyday in like Year 7 …
MW	… Who did?
Bruce	Us, cos we're different to everyone else so we just got shouted at … called names but now in Year 11 we get hardly any of it.

[Group interview]

Jack, Clump and Bruce frame the bullying as occurring in the past and therefore make it safe by indicating that it 'used to be bad' and that now, as they are all older, they 'get hardly any of it'. In this way, The Emos can distance themselves from any negative feelings associated with this bullying or how it may have affected their self-esteem and attitudes to school in general. Outside school the bullying took a more violent turn. They explained that on certain occasions when they were out at night they felt threatened and intimidated when they came across other young men drinking alcohol in parks or in the street.

Jack	Like, yeah, wherever we go out, cos we don't wanna go out drinking round the street, say we wanna go up the country park sitting on the swings like that and a load of piss heads (drunks) will walk up like.
Bruce	Yeah I can guarantee that you'll go out on a Friday night and you're guaranteed to see loads of um.
Jelly Belly	It's like they can't enjoy themselves.
Clump	Like drink after drink just to get smashed and …
Bruce	[cuts in] … the bad thing then is that you're walking through them you're a bit weary of things.
Tommy	You walk past some of um and they'll go [aggressive tone] 'can I have a fag en butt' [can I have a cigarette then] and if you don't have a fag you're fucked!
Bruce	Yeah that's it like, no fag or lighter they start on you!
Jelly Belly	Me, him [points at Clump] and Jenkins [not present] right got jumped on down the skate park because we didn't have a fag [cigarette] or nothing, they kept shouting at us, about fifteen of um coming on to us.
MW	Did you manage to get away?
Jelly Belly	Well all them lot, Jenkins and Clump run off!
Clump	Yeah I had to! I got head butted!

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MW	Really? Hang on, start again!
Jelly Belly	Well as Jenkins and Clump run off they all chased um, I stayed there for a little bit and they all went, then when I jumped down [off the skate ramp] they were all round the corner, about fourteen of them and then I got jumped again!

[Group interview]

In keeping with other studies of marginalised masculinities (Connell, 1995), The Emos were subordinated by others for not adhering to the normative masculine practices of Cwm Dyffryn. Over the course of the study The Emos voiced their concerns about the bullying and harassment. But, instead of seeing themselves as victims, The Emos attempted to frame their experiences as heroic narratives. As Jelly Belly states 'fifteen of um coming on to us', it is clear he sets himself up as trying to battle back against the odds in the face of intimidation and to hold onto his pride. He does not talk about the pain that these beatings may have caused him, physically or emotionally, again adding to his heroic narrative and proving he can suffer and take a beating. This is potentially also about the reinforcement of a minority marginalised status through the numerical terms of the bigger group of 'them' versus the smaller outside group of 'us'.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that a group of young men in post-industrial Wales perform their masculinities in different ways before various audiences and spaces. This study therefore illustrates the multifaceted nature of one community, at one particular level of Welsh society. This was something Scourfield and Drakeford (1999) argued was needed in order to understand not just the inhabitants of Wales, but also the lives of those with and without power. This would, they suggested, enable us, as a nation, to critically explore the social processes surrounding the construction, production and reproduction of masculinities. In this article these processes have been exemplified through separate, but interlinked friendship groups within and beyond the school gates. For The Valley Boiz, re-traditionalising older masculine practices through selecting specific 'masculine' educational subjects and engaging in risky leisure activities is a way to hold onto a legacy of the industrial past and to maintain a connection to their community. For The Geeks their more studious performances of masculinity through academic achievement is a way to find solace from a community

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they do not feel they belong to and an escape route to a more successful future. And, for The Emos, their more alternative non-normative performances of manhood, played out through their musical interests and leisure pleasures, offers another route to escape from the post-industrial community but also producing a troubled and risky subject position.

Despite industrial changes, a particularly 'hard' form of working-class masculinity in this community is still the default reference point. This display of masculinity is interlinked with family histories, gender, class and place and has consequences for those who adopt or deviate from this script. However, as this article demonstrates, for some groups of young men it is also a divergent identity and one that can be enacted, banished or resisted in multiple ways. What this article clearly identifies is that the attitudes identified by the three groups of young men are likely to have significant implications for education participation and achievement in Wales. Given that there is a strong perception that the achievement of working-class boys, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is particularly low in Wales (and elsewhere in the UK), further research that builds upon these insights is needed to explore the subtleties of this within and beyond the school gates.

Notes

1 A pseudonym.
2 Depending on the household income (less than £23,077 per annum) up to £30 per week could be gained as an incentive to stay in education post-16. Finally, for a minority it was also seen as a viable route into gaining a place at a local university. See *www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe.aspx* (accessed 4 August 2017).
3 Nicknames or slightly modified surnames, e.g. Hughes to Hughesy, or first names such as David to Dai were used to refer to each other. This practice of shortening names has a long tradition in south Wales and I suggest it was another link back to the male camaraderie that developed alongside the growth of heavy industry. Some names were also chosen by the respondents.
4 Despite being situated in a highly deprived community, Cwm Dyffryn High School ran an extensive programme of school trips with skiing and foreign-language trips to Europe every year.
5 Participants chose their own pseudonyms, many of which reflect their musical tastes. Bruce chose his because it was the lead singer's name of one of his favourite bands, Iron Maiden, and Jack chose his after the musician Jack White.

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