

Journal editor's introduction

Welcome to this March 2025 edition of 'journal corner'. In these pieces we try to offer curriculum friendly summaries of papers published in the BSA journal *Sociology*. These are accompanied by an informal interview with one of the authors. Papers selected for this column will be free to download for a period of time.

In this issue we look at Dr Richard Gator's 2023 article – Amalgamated masculinities: the masculine identity of contemporary marginalized working-class young men. We hope this inspires wide-ranging discussions about current ideas of masculinity and what it means to be a man.

A point we need to make up-front – **the paper does contain swearing** and you may wish to redact parts before sharing with students. The inclusion of swear words does raise interesting methodological questions and we discuss this below in both the summary and interview with Dr Gator below.

Best wishes

The Editors of *Sociology*

Amalgamated Masculinities

As Dr Gator explains in his article, studies have tended to associate working class young men with macho, laddish identities. Willis' study from the 1970s, for example, talks about how young working-class men reject school, have manual labour aspiration and view women as inferior. Others, like Mac and Ghail, also suggest that antagonism to school based learning, homophobia and sexism are central to working-class young men's lives. Because of this, we often think about working class young men in terms of 'protest' masculinities. This is a gender identity which draws on many of the themes of hegemonic (dominant) masculinities – such as strength, aggression and emotional suppression - but reworks these in an attempt to obtain power with limited means.

Whilst these studies were important, Dr Gator is interested in whether wider changes in contemporary masculinities “translate to the lowest qualified and most marginalized contemporary working class men (page 313).” Nowadays significant attention is being paid to the impact of masculinities on men's health and to the problem of so-called 'toxic' masculinities. Contemporary masculinities - which include hybrid and inclusive forms – can also now embrace such things as emotional intimacy and resistance to traditional ways of being a man. Yet questions remain about the “extent, type or meaning of changes in working-class young men's behaviour . . . especially among the most marginalized” (page 317).

Methodologically, Dr Gator's research consisted of ethnography, which included 120 hours of participant observations and interviews, and predominantly became a case study of a group of nine young men. It was carried out collaboratively with a youth centre organization in an area suffering from high levels of deprivation.

Whilst this article touches on several important themes across the curriculum, it speaks most clearly to issues across *Gender and Identity*. On the one hand, things looked like they had not changed much and participants did express and demonstrate gender practices associated with protest masculinities. However, there were also behaviours which challenge these ideals. For example, the Ladz, as Dr Gator calls them, engaged in acts of physical tactility which included hugging and clasping hands. They also showed sensitivity, compassion and empathy; and expressed gender-egalitarian views. As Cole, one of the Ladz, is reported as saying: “It wouldn't bother me at all working with women or gays.... Your sexual preference or gender or anything like that doesn't make odds on your personality” (page 319).

Toward the end of the article, Dr Gator turns to ask where his study might leave us in terms of theorising masculinities.

Hegemonic masculinities - The young men's deprived locality and marginalized status means that they are denied the power and privilege of hegemonic masculinities.

Protest masculinities – Whilst protest masculinities still had some explanatory purchase it does not capture the nuances and complexities of the young men's responses.

Inclusive masculinities - This only has partial explanatory power. One of the key components of this theory is the presence of pro-gay attitudes. Despite comments like the above from Cole that it “wouldn’t bother” him, some of the other Ladz did draw on homophobic and sexist discourse.

Amalgamated masculinities - Dr Gator ultimately proposes the idea of ‘amalgamated masculinities’. This, he suggests, captures the fusion of protest masculine behaviours with softer masculine attributes. As he argues, the Ladz displayed or openly admitted to gender practices which resonated with protest masculinities and patterns of masculinity constructed in working-class settings. Yet, the young men also appeared to be assimilating softer masculine ideas from outside of their immediate community. These amalgamated masculinities include the ones of the local setting as well as wider ideals; such as those shared through popular culture and media.

As a final point, we found it interesting that Dr Gator did not censor the extracts used and several quotes from participants include swear words. A study carried out [in 2006](#) asked research users (such as senior policy makers) whether we should keep swear words in verbatim quotes. They seemed uncertain about this – with some suggesting that keeping them in could help build the picture of a person, or show their depth of feelings. Others wondered about the motives for keeping them in and whether the author was purposefully aiming to shock readers. We turn this question back to Dr Gator in the interview below.

Interview with Dr Richard Gator

Richard is currently a research assistant at the Centre for Adult Social Care Research (CARE), Cardiff University. Prior to this he was a post-doctoral fellow at the same University. You can read a little more about Richard here <https://profiles.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/gaterr>

Can you tell us what led you to write this paper?

The research that the paper came from was my PhD study. This research project focused on marginalised working-class young men's attitudes towards education, employment, and their masculine identity. My decision to pursue this research topic was somewhat inspired by my lived experiences.

As I document in the paper, marginalised working-class young men are commonly associated with a rejection of education, drug and alcohol use, violence and crime. Honestly, when I was younger, and I'm not proud of it, this was pretty much how my life was lived.

I returned to education at age 33 with no GCSEs to my name because, as a teenager, I rejected education, thinking it was irrelevant to my future.

As a mature student, I came across the writing and research of Paul Willis, Valerie Walkerdine, Mike Ward and Steven Roberts, scholars who had researched working-class young men. Their research intrigued me because I could personally identify with their research findings and the young men who were the focus of their studies. Also, as someone who has always lived in a deprived former coal mining community, I was continuing to see young men rejecting education and favouring manual employment.

However, I also noticed differences between young men today and those from my generation, especially in my role as a youth rugby coach. I saw a young man injure himself and openly cry in front of his teammates. Unlike in my youth, when expressing emotion was often frowned upon and could lead to ridicule, thankfully, his teammates showed support and compassion.

I was interested in these continuities and changes in how marginalised working-class young men expressed themselves and what influenced them. I guess I also wanted to make sense of my own youthful life choices while also finding ways to help improve the lives of these young men.

Why did you do it this way?

My research involved a variety of approaches and drew on several theories, especially those related to masculinities. One of the study's strengths was the use of ethnography, or what I call systematic people-watching. Basically, I watched the young men's behaviour patterns and tried to understand the reasons behind their actions.

This ethnographic approach helped me notice changes in the young men's behaviour compared to what I previously understood about marginalised young men and how previous

research has discussed them. If I hadn't visually explored their behaviour, I might have missed important actions, like the hugging greeting practice I documented in the paper.

The research also mainly draws on two strands of masculinity theory, including one related to traditional ideas of manhood and ideas of being tough, unemotional, and stoic and a more recent development in masculinities theory that identifies softer expressions of masculinity. The research required this dualistic theoretical lens to try and make sense of the combination of continuity and changes in the young men's behaviour.

What do you remember most about it?

The thing I remember the most about the research was the mental struggle as I wrangled with watching the young men engage in behaviours and express views that were totally alien to how I remembered my experiences as a marginalised young man and also how prior research had documented these young men.

I found it baffling that the young men conformed to typical understandings of marginalised youth and were involved in crime and on first-name terms with the police. Yet, they also displayed softer, conflicting behaviours. I was worried about explaining these mixed behaviours, as the current masculinities theory didn't correctly explain the combined actions. This confusion and dilemma ultimately inspired the concept of amalgamated masculinities.

The research was also mentally challenging because, as someone with a personal connection to the study topic, I had to reflect on my own past and write about it openly. This process made me realise that my rejection of education had possibly led to many missed opportunities in life, which sometimes saddened me.

Why did you choose to keep the swearing in the extracts?

To be honest, I was surprised that the journal of *Sociology* didn't ask me to remove the swearing, especially Stan's use of the "C-Bomb", which some people find particularly offensive. I've faced reactions and raised eyebrows when presenting my research findings because of it. However, I was grateful that *Sociology* kept the swearing in. For me, being a sociologist means documenting people's real-world experiences and being truthful about what the research tells us. Words carry meaning, and people choose their words for specific reasons. I think changing language can alter the participants' voices and the stories they share with us and impose our perspectives on the research.

What's next?

I am in the process of having the whole PhD thesis converted into a book with Emerald Publications, which is due for release in mid-2025 and will be open-access and available for everyone to read.

I have also recently shifted my research focus to adult social care. I am using what I know about men, masculinities, employment, and health to study issues within this field. I am

enjoying this new research direction and have received strong support from my colleagues during my transition. However, I still have a keen interest in research on young men and stay updated with current publications. I am pretty sure that I will return to this area of study in some capacity in the future.