**Boys will be boys -negotiating masculinity and the impact of gender in the assessment of young males who have offended in England and Wales (empirical paper)**

The aim of the research is to make the very workings and the effects of heteronormative ([Ingraham 2002](#_ENREF_6)) understandings of masculinity visible in a context of Youth Offending Services in England and Wales. This paper highlights the contribution the gender of the assessor makes to the construction of masculinity of the young offender (YO) assessed as well as the access to information from and about the young person. Equally, it emphasizes the need of practitioners’ to critically reflect- on an organizational as well as personal level- on one-dimensional gender roles and how their own performance of heteronormative gender stereotypes either grants or denies the access to and information about the young male assessed. Further, this paper will highlight the internal struggle of the assessed in relation to his own construction of masculinity and will argue that the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is far from being an authentic or indeed helpful concept when working with young men in spaces where they are not given the opportunity to critically reflect on their own masculinity ([Seidler 2006](#_ENREF_7)).

This research has been conducted by using a mixed-method approach aiming to understand concepts of masculinity in the context of the masculinity. in England and Wales on three levels: (1) Research on the policy level has taken the form of document analysis, more specifically the in-depth investigation into 278 Assessment forms and interpretation of 3528 Case Diary Entries of ten high-end male offenders in the Youth Justice System. (2) Research on the practice level has been conducted through three months of ethnographic fieldwork in the settings of a Youth Offending Service (YOS) in England as well as through 13 interviews with staff on the various levels of the managerial hierarchy at the YOS and one focus group. (3) Research on the ‘young male service user’ level took place in form of a number of semi-structured interviews (assisted by visual aids), one focus group and ethnographic observation.

The findings of the research have strengthened the link made by recent sociological and criminological literature between masculinity and offending (Hobbs 1994; Messerschmidt 2000; Hood-Williams 2001; Winlow 2002) and somewhat validated theories of ‘hegemonic’ ([Connell 2005](#_ENREF_4)) and ‘hyper’ masculinity ([Broude 1990](#_ENREF_1); [Hood-Williams 2001](#_ENREF_5)). However, it has also made visible the role staff and their gender-perceptions play in the construction and of the masculinity of the young offender on a personal as well as an organizational level ([Skeggs 1997](#_ENREF_8); [Connell 2005](#_ENREF_3)) in relation to assessment of and the access to information from or about the young person. Lastly, it has highlighted that concepts of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ are far from authentic or helpful in relation to the construction of masculinity for the young people themselves, and that the lack of spaces for young males in the YJS to safely reflect on their own masculinity leads to a struggle to understand and construct their own gender identity as well as understanding their offending.

This research has been limited by the lack of appropriate methodology when researching young males from a disadvantaged background. It’s relatively small scale has given important indications in relation to the construction and performance of gender, and particularly masculinity, in a system that has too often has been  accused of being the epiphany of masculinity, designed around ‘male needs’ ([Caulfield 2010](#_ENREF_2))and around ‘male values’ (Liebling 2004). Indeed, it oversees its own contribution to the construction of masculinity (and associated offending). More importantly, the YJS fails to assist young males understand their own masculinity, and thereby barricades the way to the construction of a more positive and non-heteronormative gender identity.

Broude, G. J. (1990). "Protest Masculinity: A Further Look at the Causes and Concept." Ethos **18**(1).

  Caulfield, L. (2010). "Rethinking the Assessment of Female Offenders." The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice **49**(4): 315-327.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Masculinities Los Angeles, CA, USA Univeristy of California Press.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Globalisation, Imperialism and Masculinities Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities M. S. Kimmel, Hearn, R., and Connell, R. London, UK., Sage Publications.

Fuss, D. (1990). Essentially Speaking - Feminism, Nature and Difference Routledge London,  U.K. .

Hatty, S. E. (2000). Engendering Violence. Masculinities, Violence and Culture. S. E. Hatty. London, Sage Publications.

Hobbs, D. (1994). Manish Boys. Men,Masculinity and Crime- Just Boys Doing Business. T. Newburn and E. A. Stanko. London, Routledge.

Hood-Williams, J. (2001). "Gender, Masculinities and Crime: From Structures to Psyches." Theoretical Criminology **5**(37).

Ingraham, C. (2002). TheHeterosexual Imaginary. Gender- A Sociological Reader. S. Jackson and S. Scott. London, Routledge Student Readers.

Liebling, A. (2004). Prison and their moral performance- A study of values, quality and prison life Oxford, UK., Oxford Univeristy Press

Messerschmidt, J. W. (2000). Nine Lives- Adolescent Masculinities, The Body, And Violence Oxford, U.K., Westview Press

  Seidler, V. (2006). Re-thinking Male Violence

. Transforming Masculinities - Men, cultures, bodies, power, sex and love V. Seidler. London, UK., Routledge

 Skeggs, B. (1997). Becoming Respectably Heterosexual. Formation of Class and Gender. B. Skeggs. London, Sage Publications.

Winlow, S. (2002). Badfellas: Crime, Tradition and New Masculinities. Oxford, Berg Publications.

Wittig, M. (2002). The Straight Mind. Gender- A Sociological Reader. S. Jackson and S. Scott. London, Routledge Student Reader.

Broude, G. J. (1990). "Protest Masculinity: A Further Look at the Causes and Concept." Ethos **18**(1).

Caulfield, L. (2010). "Rethinking the Assessment of Female Offenders." The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice **49**(4): 315-327.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Globalisation, Imperialism and Masculinities Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities M. S. Kimmel, Hearn, R., and Connell, R. London, UK., Sage Publications.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Masculinities Los Angeles, CA, USA Univeristy of California Press.

Hood-Williams, J. (2001). "Gender, Masculinities and Crime: From Structures to Psyches." Theoretical Criminology **5**(37).

Ingraham, C. (2002). TheHeterosexual Imaginary. Gender- A Sociological Reader. S. Jackson and S. Scott. London, Routledge Student Readers.

Seidler, V. (2006). Re-thinking Male Violence

. Transforming Masculinities - Men, cultures, bodies, power, sex and love V. Seidler. London, UK., Routledge

Skeggs, B. (1997). Becoming Respectably Heterosexual. Formation of Class and Gender. B. Skeggs. London, Sage Publications.