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Men accessing higher education : theorizing continuity and change in relation to masculine subjectivities

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Abstract

I explore the question of men's participation in higher education (HE) in relation to shifting, discursive and intersecting masculine subjectivities by drawing on qualitative interviews with men participating in HE. The paper contributes to a sociological understanding of the impact of masculine subjectivities on higher educational participation and aspiration. The in-depth interviews focused on the men's memories, aspirations and experiences, taking a life history approach to mapping continuity and change in relation to educational participation. The context for the research is the wider UK policy of widening educational participation and notions of a 'crisis of masculinity', which I critique drawing on feminist perspectives. In deconstructing the discursive production of the ideal student-subject produced through widening participation (WP) policy, I argue that an analysis of men's participation in HE must take into account the differences between boys and men in terms of complex power relations, inequalities and misrecognitions. The paper explores the theme of continuity and change in terms of the men's subjectivities, their memories of education and their

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shifting aspirations. More specifically, it examines the men's accounts in relation to the themes of respectability, bullying and laziness, which emerged from the data. I argue that the men take up the neoliberal discourses that underpin WP policy, placing emphasis on individual attitudes and deficit, and demanding forms of self-regulation. The men's accounts illuminate the fragility of their projects to be recognized as worthy of HE participation both through and against self-regulating practices and through the distancing of 'Other' (contaminating) identities. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)