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Masculinity at work: the experiences of men in female dominated occupations

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the findings of a research project on the implications of men's non-traditional career choices for their experiences within the organization and for gender identity. The research is based on 40 in-depth interviews with male workers from four occupational groups: librarians, cabin crew, nurses and primary school teachers. Results suggest a typology of male workers in female dominated occupations: seekers (who actively seek the career), finders (who find the occupation in the process of making general career decisions) and settlers (who settle into the career after periods of time in mainly male dominated occupations). Men benefit from their minority status through assumptions of enhanced leadership (the assumed authority effect), by being given differential treatment (the special consideration effect) and being associated with a more careerist attitude to work (the career effect). At the same time, they feel comfortable working with women (the zone of comfort effect). Despite this comfort, men adopt a variety of strategies to re-establish a masculinity that has been undermined by the 'feminine' nature of their work. These include re-labelling, status enhancement and distancing from the feminine. The dynamics of maintaining and reproducing masculinities within the non-traditional work setting are discussed in the light of recent theorizing around gender, masculinity and work.

KEY WORDS

gender / masculinity / non-traditional occupations / post-structuralism

Introduction

This article explores the motivations and experiences of male workers in non-traditional occupations and the implications of their career choice for gender identity. Men and women are increasingly moving into gender atypical areas (Hakim, 2000) and while there is extensive literature on 'token' women (e.g. Ely, 1994; Kanter, 1977; Simpson, 1997, 2000), there is relatively little research on men who perform what could be seen as 'women's work' (notable exceptions here include Williams, 1993; Lupton, 2000; and Heikes, 1992, discussed later in this article). The tendency to overlook issues concerning men in 'female' roles, may reflect gender studies' dominating focus on women and the absence, until recently, of issues concerning men and masculinity from mainstream academic research. Recent work, however, has placed men at the centre of the analysis by focusing on the dynamics of masculinity (e.g. Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Connell, 1995, 2000; Kerfoot and Knights, 1993) and on organizations as important arenas for the definitions of masculinity and for characterizations of 'masculine' and 'feminine' work. These characterizations carry strong implications for occupants of non-traditional posts where conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity are 'on the line', highly visible and vulnerable to challenge (Morgan, 1992). Token women, for example, can be severely disadvantaged by their minority status through negative stereotyping (Kanter, 1977) while assumptions of male careerism and managerial potential often mean positive career outcomes accruing for men (Floge and Merrill, 1989). The fragmentary literature on men in non-traditional occupations means that little is known about the motivations and experiences of men in 'female' occupations and how men manage any potential conflict between the 'feminine' nature of the job and their gender identity. This article aims to address the above research gap. It considers three questions that relate to career motivations and aspirations, to the significance of men's minority status and to the implications of occupational choice for gender identity. Results are discussed in relation to existing literature on gender in organizations and to post-structuralist interpretations of gender processes.

Recent research

Early work on gender and organizations has traditionally assumed men and masculinity to be the normative standard case against which difference (i.e. women) has been measured (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Criticisms of this claim to universality have led to the emergence of diverse theoretical and conceptual frameworks (e.g. Barrett, 1996; Connell, 1995; Hearn, 1994; Kerfoot and Knights, 1993). One such development concerns the dynamics of 'hegemonic masculinity', defined by Connell (2000) as the culturally exalted form of masculinity which guarantees the dominant position of men. This and other

constructions of masculinity are often located in, acted out and negotiated within the context of work and organizations (Morgan, 1992) so an understanding of how masculinities are experienced and constructed can usefully begin within this context.

Theoretical frameworks within masculinity studies remain, as yet, somewhat fragmentary, reflecting the relatively new status of the area. All approaches reject the monolithic status of patriarchy, which underpins early feminist literature, as the single cause of women's oppression. Instead, in common with later feminist work (e.g. Alvesson, 1998; Alvesson and Due Billing, 1997), they suggest that gender relations are multidimensional and experienced differentially within specific organizational contexts. Three dominant frameworks have emerged from the literature. Psychoanalytical approaches focus on the psychic investments that individuals have in dominant sexual and gendered discourse, with masculinity historically defined as a flight from women and the repudiation of the feminine (e.g. Chodorow, 1994; Holloway, 1994; Kimmel, 1994). The 'social relations' perspective (Carrigan et al., 1985) examines ways in which social practices are organized as sets of social relations. On this basis, masculinity is viewed as a set of distinct practices (e.g. Connell, 1987; Tolson, 1977). Tolson (1977), for example, focuses on the significance of class and father-son relationships for constructions of masculinity, while early work by Connell (1987) explores the structure of social relations in the form of power, production and emotional relations and how the patterning of these relations make up a 'gender regime' within an institution. Gender is therefore seen as a social practice and masculinity as a configuration of that practice. More recently, work on masculinity has focused on issues of complexity, ambiguity and fluidity and on the roles of agency and symbolism in its construction as well as on institutions and social practices. This 'post-structuralist' perspective (Connell, 2000) explores the dynamic nature of masculinity, how it is constructed and reconstructed, how it is experienced at a subjective level and how multiple masculinities exist in relation to the dominant (hegemonic) form. Masculinity is therefore likely to be internally divided, ambiguous and often contradictory (Alvesson, 1998; Connell, 2000; Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Kerfoot and Knights, 1998).

Ideologies and discourses of gender have a crucial role to play in promoting and sustaining the sexual division of labour and the social definition of tasks as either 'men's work' or 'women's work'. As Morgan (1992) suggests, notions of work are central to masculine identities and organizations exist as major sites for the construction and reconstruction of 'what it means to be a man'. This has consequences for those men and women who move into gender atypical areas and who thereby challenge conventionally held attitudes and assumptions concerning male and female work. As Bradley (1993) suggests, it may be easier for women to push into male jobs than vice versa. 'Compromised femininity' is still a possible female identity, involving as it does status enhancement and potential increases in pay. By contrast, the man who moves into women's work upsets

the gender assumptions embedded in that work so that he is not seen as a 'real' man (Williams, 1993).

Considerable work has been conducted on the difficulties women face when they move into previously male dominated areas of employment. Kanter's (1977) early work on 'token' women points to systems of bias and discrimination whereby the dominant (male) group controls the group culture and through various processes marginalizes and excludes the minority of women. In particular, tokens experience three processes that are detrimental to their experiences within the organization and to their careers. High *visibility* creates increased performance pressures; *polarization* occurs as differences between the dominant group and tokens are exaggerated, leading to separation and isolation; finally *assimilation* means that individuals are made to fit into stereotypical roles associated with their group (seductress, mother, pet, iron maiden), constraining behaviour so as to fit the 'role trap'. Other work (Simpson, 1997, 2000) suggests in a similar vein that gender imbalance heightens career barriers, limits career progress and helps to create a hostile working environment for the minority of women. Sexual harassment of women, for example, has been found to be both more prevalent and more virulent in male dominated occupations (Collinson and Collinson, 1996).

While 'token' women can be severely disadvantaged by their minority status, positive career outcomes may well accrue for 'token' men. Men working in non-traditional occupations have been found to benefit from their token status through the assumption of enhanced leadership and other skills and by being associated with a more careerist attitude to work (Fløge and Merrill, 1989; Heikes, 1992). Male nurses often ascend the hierarchy more quickly than female counterparts (Bradley, 1993). Men therefore tend to monopolize positions of power and are rewarded for their difference from women in terms of higher pay and other benefits (Williams, 1993). On the other hand, emotional labour such as teaching, nursing and social work may call for special abilities that only women are deemed to possess (Hochschild, 1983). This can create problems for men (Heikes, 1992) who call into question their competence and suitability if they assert a traditional masculinity and yet who invite challenges to their sexuality and masculinity if they adopt a more feminine approach. In primary school teaching, for example, men have been found to be in a double bind: their presumed masculine interests in sport and male bonding give them an initial hiring advantage but these same characteristics can alienate them from female staff (Williams, 1993). These challenges raise issues about how male workers reconcile the feminine nature of their work with the demands of a hegemonically masculine gender regime. As Lupton (2000) found, men working in female dominated occupations fear feminization and stigmatization. One response is to reconstruct the job so as to minimize its non-masculine associations. Men may also engage in compensatory gendered practices so as to 'restore' a dominating position (Alvesson, 1998). One strategy may be to emphasize the male and downplay the female elements of the job (Williams, 1993). Such strategies suggest a tension for men in non-traditional

roles between the 'feminine' nature of the job and dominant discourse of masculinity.

Aims and research method

Against this background, the aim of the research project was to explore the motivations and aspirations of men in non-traditional occupations and the implications of their career choices for their experiences within the organization and for gender identity. It accordingly posed the following questions:

- What are the motivations and aspirations of men in non-traditional occupations?
- How are men's experiences at work affected by their token status?
- What are the implications of men's non-traditional career choice for gender identity and how do they manage possible conflict in this respect?

The research was based on 40 in-depth interviews, conducted in London and the South East of England, with male workers from four occupational groups: primary school teaching, flight attendance (cabin crew), librarians and nursing. These groups have been identified as being traditionally held by women – for example only 10 percent of nurses, 14 percent of primary school teachers and 15 percent of 'personal service' workers are male (EOC, 2002). At the same time, they are notable for requiring the feminine skills and attributes (e.g. sensitivity, beauty, nurturance and service) that society normally attributes to women (Heilman, 1997; Hochschild, 1983).

Seven interviews took place with academic librarians, five of whom were at assistant librarian level. All were contacted through a UK-based university. To establish a sample of male teachers, initial telephone contact was made with 20 schools in three separate boroughs around London. As a result, 12 head teachers with male staff agreed to put up a notice requesting help with the project. However, only two teachers responded. The author then drew on personal contacts within the teaching profession. This yielded a further five primary school teachers who were asked to contact, where appropriate, male colleagues in the profession. Another three interviewees came forward. Of the ten interviewed, from six different schools, two were on the senior management team, one was nursery manager and seven were main scale classroom teachers. Samples of cabin crew and nurses were established by advertising the project on the intranet site of a UK-based airline and through a professional nursing journal. All those who responded were interviewed and in some cases this led to other contacts. Accordingly, eight interviews were conducted with cabin crew from three different airlines and with 15 nurses from six different hospitals in the South East of the UK. Two of the cabin crew were at more senior, purser

level. Five nurses were involved in mental health, four in accident and emergency, one in palliative care and the remainder in general nursing.

The aforementioned sampling techniques can have certain drawbacks. Interviewees who 'self-select' by responding to requests from help – in this case through an intranet, a staff notice board and trade journal – may be more aware of and reflexive about the significance of gender at work or may have more 'issues' in relation to their non-traditional occupational choice than other men in these occupations. Equally, reliance on personal contacts may lead to a sample that is not wholly representative. However, such techniques have been used in other exploratory research on non-traditional occupations (see Chung and Harmon, 1994; Murray, 1996) and may therefore be seen as acceptable, given the above reservations, in this case.

Interviews were semi-structured, following a set of themes that concerned career issues (career background, motivation, aspirations), issues relating to minority status (potential advantages/disadvantages) and issues concerning implications of career choice for identity and self image (image of the job, its fit with self identity and self perception, possible challenges to masculinity and associated response). In terms of the latter, respondents were asked to reflect on the reaction of friends and family, as well as on the reaction of men and women they meet for the first time, to their non-traditional career choice and to consider their own response in these situations. Fourteen men (one librarian, two primary school teachers, six cabin crew and five nurses) identified themselves as homosexual, some of whom offered insights into the importance of sexual orientation. However, because of the sensitivity of this issue, the significance of sexual orientation for the way men managed masculinity in a female dominated environment was not explored in any systematic way and was only discussed if it was raised, unprompted, by interviewees.

Given the above areas of discussion, the gender difference between interviewer (female) and interviewee (male) may have had an influence on the quality and reliability of the data. Men may have been reluctant in this context to discuss gender sensitive issues and be resistant to disclosure. However, in mitigation, all the men interviewed spent a large amount of their working day with women and were therefore used to communicating with women on different levels. Certainly, when this issue was raised with one interviewee, the response was that he would feel more constrained (and threatened) talking to a man.

Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and analysed using framework analysis as outlined by Ritchie and Spencer (1996). This is a grounded approach in that theory emerges from data and in that it is heavily based in and driven by the original accounts and observations of people it is about. It involves a number of distinct though highly interconnected stages which do not necessarily follow a particular order, some of which have overlapping qualities with the grounded theory approach of Corbin and Strauss (1990). These processes involve sifting, charting and sorting material according to key issues and themes.

Results

What are the motivations and aspirations of men in non-traditional occupations?

A variety of motivations were given for men's choice of career. For librarians, this concerned an enjoyment of dealing with books and information. Primary teachers cited an enjoyment of working with children and the attractions of a solid profession. For cabin crew, the job gave the opportunity to travel and to meet different people while for nurses the desire to work in a caring profession was paramount.

Adopting Williams and Villemez's (1993) typology of 'seekers' (those men who actively choose the 'female' occupation) and 'finders' (those who find the occupation in the process of making general career decisions), cabin crew were characterized by having a high proportion of seekers. Seven out of the eight cabin crew interviewed came into this category on the grounds that they actively sought out the occupation, though they did not necessarily see the career as a permanent one. In five of these cases, the decision to join an airline had involved a career change (mainly from other 'female' occupations such as teaching, retail, hairdressing and catering). Librarians, on the other hand, were likely to be 'finders' and to arrive at librarianship because of the absence at the time of a more desirable alternative. 'I just fell into it' was a typical comment here. In five out of the seven cases, librarianship was a 'second best' career after failed entry to preferred choices. However, a third category of 'settlers' emerged from the interview data. These were men who had tried a variety of different (often 'masculine') jobs with limited levels of job satisfaction and who then entered their current ('female') occupation and settled. One ex-army professional, who had also worked as a croupier, car salesman and IT consultant, commented after entering the teaching profession: 'I never looked back'. Similarly, an ex-engineer reflected on his career choice:

All those years of not being sure about why I was doing things, they all clicked into place and I knew exactly what nursing meant to me.

On this basis, teaching and nursing were characterized by a high proportion of 'settlers': seven out of ten primary school teachers and ten out of 15 nurses came into this category. For all settlers, the choice of occupation had involved at least one career change, e.g. from accountancy, building, mining, sports management, entrepreneurship, music and design.

Librarians, cabin crew and some nurses had aspirations to move up the hierarchy into senior positions or, in the case of cabin crew, into training and development. By contrast, only four of the ten teachers had aspirations of promotion. The remainder expressed no interest in moving up the hierarchy on the grounds that this would take them away from the teaching they enjoyed. Two were on the senior management team and wanted to go no further. Similarly, while most nurses had aspirations of reaching higher grades, these aspirations

were limited by an unwillingness to sacrifice seniority for time spent on clinical practice. As one nurse put it:

Men have come into nursing against the odds – so they don't want to be taken away from the job they enjoy and the reason they came into it in the first place.

Of the 40 men interviewed, only two (both cabin crew) expressed dissatisfaction with their career choice and as a consequence had plans to leave.

How are men's experiences at work affected by their token status?

Work by Kanter (1977) indicates that penalties accrue to people in a minority status in the form of performance pressures, isolation and confining 'role traps' which limit and constrain behaviours. In this study, men were asked to reflect on the implications of this status. Four key themes emerged: the 'career effect', the 'assumed authority effect', the 'special consideration effect' and the 'zone of comfort effect'.

Many men recognized that their minority status as men gave them career advantages (the career effect). These advantages were particularly evident in teaching and nursing where men felt welcomed into the profession. In teaching, selection boards were perceived to look favourably on male applicants on the grounds that they were needed to provide a role model for the male pupils. Similarly, many nurses believed that men were moved rapidly up the hierarchy into management and some admitted they had been 'fast tracked' in this way. In addition, assumptions of careerism meant that men were given opportunities to acquire skills and expertise that may not be so forthcoming for female colleagues. One nurse commented on his student days on the ward:

I always got first crack at does anyone want to go to theatre to see this, would somebody like to accompany the doctors to do that.

Librarians often 'groomed' male library assistants, giving them more responsibility and opportunities for learning than similarly placed women. Equally, male teachers were encouraged by head teachers and other staff to go on courses to improve their chances of promotion. However, assumptions of careerism were not always welcomed. Teachers and nurses in particular felt under pressure to move into management and were often uncomfortable with the expectations that they would quickly be promoted:

I've talked to staff nurses and they've said oh you won't stay at D (lowest grade) for long, they never do the men. And I'm thinking what's wrong with just being a normal nurse? Why should a man have to go up to management level?

As one teacher commented, 'I just want to be a good classroom teacher'. These attitudes go some way to explain the non-management aspirations of some teachers and nurses discussed above.

As we have seen, the career effect involves differential treatment that enhances career prospects. In addition, many men felt their token status acted in their favour by affording them special consideration in other, non-career oriented ways (the special consideration effect). For example, many men felt they were subject to different, and more relaxed, rules and expectations. Younger librarians and nurses in particular remarked on how they were given an 'easier ride' than female colleagues and that they often 'got away with' more mistakes than female colleagues. One nurse recounted an incident when, as a student, he committed what he described as the 'cardinal sin' of being late for duty – a situation that would normally demand a reprimand from the nurse in charge:

On one particular occasion I overslept for an early shift and I was woken in the nurses' home by somebody hammering on my door at nine thirty to say the ward's on the phone. So I went to the phone and it was the sister saying 'You've overslept'. And I said 'Yes, I'm ever so sorry'. And she was going 'No, no, not a problem, have you had your breakfast?' 'No, I haven't had breakfast'. 'Well you get your breakfast inside you and then you make your way up to work and don't worry we'll see you when you get here'. So I got ready, had my breakfast, sauntered up to the hospital and got onto the ward about eleven o'clock.

Older women in particular were seen to take on a protective 'mother' role towards younger male colleagues, and female administrative staff were seen to be especially accommodating to requests from male teachers. Several commented on how they were 'looked after' in terms of printing, typing and photocopying, while acknowledging that women were not always given the same consideration.

Nearly all men recognized that their status as men gave them greater authority than their female counterparts (the assumed authority effect). For example, male teachers were thought to be better at discipline and at handling difficult classes so that even student teachers on placement were called upon to sort out unruly children. Many teachers agreed that they commanded deference from older pupils, which they related to 'being a man and being assertive and giving out signals'. They therefore experienced fewer discipline problems than some female staff. In a similar vein, both nurses and cabin crew were aware that they encountered less 'hassle' than female colleagues. Cabin crew argued that passengers felt safer in the presence of male crew because they were seen as having more authority:

Passengers feel reassured having men on the craft, they feel that security, they feel that strength, they feel that authority – especially where passengers are irate it's good to have the male strength.

There were, however, some disadvantages associated with the assumed authority effect. Many teachers felt resentment that they were often given the more difficult classes. Men were also assumed to be more vocal and assertive and were therefore expected to speak out, sometimes on behalf of women, at meetings.

I think also there's an expectation when you have staff meetings – that you will have an opinion and you will voice it, whereas other members of staff don't come forward. So consequently I know I get lots of things told to me in the hope that I will voice their opinions – so you're firing the bullets for other people basically. (teacher)

The assumed authority effect could also include an over-estimation of expertise. This was particularly pertinent to nursing, where decisions relating to patients are frequently required (male nurses, for example, were routinely taken for doctors). One recently qualified nurse commented on his experience on the wards:

They all seem to come to me rather than Tracy (more experienced female colleague) and even Tracy will come to me and ask for advice when she's more than capable of knowing herself. But sometimes you're frightened you're going to say the wrong thing all the time because I don't have the knowledge base ...

The 'assumed authority effect' could therefore be contradictory. While on the one hand there was a reduced likelihood of attracting or encountering challenging behaviour, on the other, men were expected to take on difficult situations. At the same time, men could experience pressures associated with assumptions of enhanced status and with over-estimations of expertise. However, there were cases where men were expected to step into lower status roles. Assumptions of superior strength or technical skills meant that librarians were frequently expected to carry out heavy lifting and portering jobs and teachers were often asked to undertake caretaking tasks (mending equipment, moving furniture) when porters/caretakers were not available.

Few men felt isolated or marginalized at work, despite their minority status. In the main, relations with women were seen as positive and a source of comfort (the comfort zone effect). Many men commented on how much they 'liked' women and how they enjoyed their company. Male company was often viewed less favourably:

I love working with women because I like women. I worked with men apart from being in teaching and men like to posture, show their masculinity and they like to show mine's bigger than yours.... Women don't want to do that, they don't need to and it's a much more comfortable environment to work in. (teacher)

They don't have problems talking about period pains, they don't have problems talking about boyfriends or husbands and things they've been doing ... they treat me like one of themselves. (nurse)

The comfort zone effect meant that men felt relaxed and at ease working with women and this was often related to a deficiency in these areas when working with men. Assimilation into the realm of women was highly valued and only one of the men interviewed expressed negative attitudes in this respect. Paradoxically, some distancing from women was also evident (discussed in detail later).

What are the implications of men's non-traditional career choice for gender identity and how do they manage possible conflict in this respect?

Men were asked to describe the popular image of their job and to reflect on how this fitted with their own self image and with dominant notions of masculinity. Interviews also explored the reactions of friends and new acquaintances to men's non-traditional career choice as well as interviewees' responses. Results indicate some incongruity between self identity and the (female) image of the job. Various strategies were adopted to overcome associated discomfort: re-labelling the job, re-casting job content to enhance more masculine components and distancing from the female.

With the exception of cabin crew, popular images of the non-traditional occupation were generally seen to be dull, physically unappealing and female. Librarians and teachers, for example, shared a dowdy, female image. For nurses this female image incorporated notions of caring and serving while cabin crew, by contrast, saw their image as sexy and glamorous, though still essentially feminine.

Not surprisingly, these images were perceived to be at odds with conventional notions of masculinity. Commenting on the difference between the image of the head teacher (conventionally male) and the class teacher (conventionally female), one man commented:

The head would tend to be a conventional man in a suit. The class teacher tends to be ... not a conventionally aggressive type male person but more of a social work type of person.

This lack of congruency could create problems in terms of men's self perception and lead to discomfort. A nurse who had previously worked with drug addicts and who had recently decided to move out of health-visiting, explained some of the reasons for his decision:

It wasn't a problem for anyone else but me, but for me having worked in quite a sort of rough and ready area with drug users around quite tough issues – then to be working with a group of middle aged, middle-class women. I didn't look the picture. I'm tall and big and unshaven and got a big scar on my face, I didn't feel comfortable in a woman's world ... I didn't feel able really to be myself.

Various strategies were used to overcome associated discomfort with the image of the job and to bring the job more in line with dominant notions of masculinity.

Firstly, many men attempted to re-label the job to minimize feminine associations. For example, several librarians referred to their titles as 'information scientist' or 'researcher', thereby highlighting the technical skills required. Re-labelling was important when meeting people for the first time. In this context, a person's professed occupation can be a powerful statement of self and, for men in non-traditional occupations, some adjustments to job title and/or omission of key details, were accordingly made:

There's this stereotypical librarian with a bun and a cardigan.... I do feel embarrassed when I say I'm a librarian – I play on the context and say I work at (university).... I say I look after business information, that sounds more impressive.

A second and related strategy was to re-cast job content to emphasize the 'male' components. Cabin crew, for example, highlighted the 'male' safety and security demands of the job over and above the more 'female' service function.

It's anything but a service job – we are there for safety and security. You are not there for the niceties ... though they'll (the passengers) get you running around if you let them.

The majority of teachers were aware of the lower status attached to primary school teaching, with its emphasis on caring, compared to secondary school teaching which was seen to be more 'male' and to require a 'hard-nosed disciplinarian' approach. Primary school teaching, therefore, was seen as a 'job for women'. Highlighting the importance of sport, however, helped to recapture a more masculine image and many teachers focused on the sports side of their work and the importance they put on managing the football and cricket teams. Others referred to the benefits of playing 'rough games' with the boys and of providing a role model for male pupils.

A third strategy to align the job with more conventional notions of masculinity was to create a distance from the 'feminine' aspects of the job. For example, while many men professed an enjoyment of female company (discussed above), women were often assigned by men to a different (and lesser) category. Accordingly, men attempted to separate from the work performed by women. Some cabin crew distanced themselves from women by claiming special attributes such as the ability to keep a 'cool head' under pressure while librarians frequently referred to female library assistants as a separate category of non-career oriented 'second income' earners, focusing on the more menial aspects of their jobs:

I think one thing women are particularly good at is the basic sort of housekeeping, the running of the building rather much the same way as most women are really good at running the home.

In the case of nursing, distance was practised through the choice of specialism. This involved a separation from general nursing, which was perceived to be largely female. Accident and emergency, described by one nurse as 'adrenaline charged' and demanding quick thinking under pressure, and mental health, a traditionally male area with its historic associations with custodialism, were popular choices here. Both were seen as separate from the mundane and routine:

It is exciting – more, for me anyway, than any other branch. I know some people will find it very stressful and hard to handle and they'd like to go off and work in outpatients where they'll see patients every hour ... (A&E specialist)

Several specialist nurses commented on the positive relationship they enjoyed with doctors and expressed the view that doctors listened to specialist nurses'

opinions and diagnoses more than those of general nurses. General nursing (largely female) was therefore seen to have a lower standing.

Separation from women and from 'female' associations therefore allowed a special status to be claimed. This claim could be made by creating meaning around the job that highlighted 'masculine' characteristics. Such characteristics were often associated with a professionalism that women were not thought to possess, special skills requirements that were seen as essentially male (e.g. coping under stress) and the nature of the job that was seen to embody 'masculine' qualities (e.g. excitement, challenge).

Re-labelling, recasting the job content and distancing from the female were three strategies that emerged which helped to align the image of the job with a more conventional notion of masculinity. Such 'gender work' was particularly important when meeting men, who were seen to be less accepting than women of the non-traditional career. In fact, considerable anxiety was expressed around the perceived reaction of male friends and acquaintances where disapproval and some ridicule became evident:

Men in particular – they laugh and say oh you're a man for goodness sake, why have you chosen to do nursing? Why can't you be a doctor?

Anxiety was expressed around the 'stigma' (a term frequently used by interviewees), of the non-traditional career choice. This was associated mainly with implications of homosexuality and, particularly in the case of teaching, of sexual perversion.

Disapproval or negativity towards career choice may not always be openly expressed, however. As a result, considerable anxiety was generated by interviewees around possible unspoken judgements of other men. Comments around the theme 'I can hear them thinking ...' were commonplace. Interviewees accordingly presented themselves in ways that were likely to conform to a more masculine image and this often involved an emphasis on involvement in sports activities:

Most of my friends when they say what do you do and I say a primary school teacher and they're like ... maybe they think I'm a wimp or something. Then I go: I work in a gym. They fail to realize that I also work in a gym – so I can relate to them on that aspect.

Women, by contrast, were reported as being more accepting and as expressing interest in men's unusual career choice. In fact, several younger primary school teachers felt women were impressed by the caring demands of the job and that this put them 'on a good footing' with them as potential partners.

Despite the ambiguities created by their non-traditional career choice, and with the exception of two cabin crew who were planning a career change, all the men interviewed gained enjoyment and satisfaction from their jobs. Their career was acknowledged to be an important part of their lives and a positive influence. Nurses and teachers often pointed to the positive outcomes of their career choice on their values and their self-esteem. Some contradiction

therefore emerged between high levels of comfort with their career choice in terms of the 'private' self (work satisfaction, self-esteem) and the more problematic 'public' presentation of self and the job.

Discussion

This analysis throws new light on various issues relating to men in non-traditional occupations. Firstly, a typology has been identified based on differences in career history, career aspirations and the nature of career choice. This conforms in part to Williams and Villemez's (1993) typology of 'finders' and 'seekers'. Finders did not originally state a preference for the occupation but found it because of availability or convenience during the period of job search. Seekers, by contrast, actively chose the occupation. In a departure from Williams and Villemez's work, a third group of 'settlers' has also been identified. Like seekers, their occupational choice tended to involve a career change but this was often from a traditionally 'masculine' field – after which they 'settled' in their new career. The desire by many 'settlers' to remain close to professional practice, and a reluctance to take on managerial and leadership positions, may well reflect a disillusionment with the rewards of the male 'careerist' model of steady progression and increases in status and power. Therefore, contrary to predictions concerning the ambitious work attitude amongst men in non-traditional occupations (e.g. Evans, 1997; Isaacs and Poole, 1996) and their tendency to experience 'fast track' or 'straight through' careers (Williams, 1993), this research suggests that not all men aspire to such goals.

Secondly, the implications of minority status for men's experiences in the organization can be seen as largely positive. Studies of men have pointed to the various benefits that accrue in these contexts in terms of special attention from heightened visibility (Heikes, 1992), faster career progress (Floge and Merrill, 1989) and greater pay and benefits (Williams, 1993). This corresponds to the positive outcomes of the 'career effect' and the 'special consideration effect' from this study – although, as we have seen in this article, not all men choose to exploit their position of advantage.

Penalties associated with minority status, highlighted by other work, are also less evident here. These relate to heightened visibility, one of the three conditions that Kanter (1977) argues adversely affects the performance of tokens. A similar outcome emerged from this study in the form of the 'assumed authority effect', which demanded a performance (e.g. giving advice, taking the lead at meetings, dealing with difficult situations) commensurate with an authority ascribed to a masculine status. Rather than leading to highly cautious behaviour, as Kanter predicts in her study of women, visibility and assumptions of authority may well be developmental for men by exposing them to challenging situations that demand initiative and resourcefulness.

Two further conditions (polarization and assimilation) were thought by Kanter to disadvantage members of minority groups. Polarization refers to the

isolation and marginalization of tokens by the dominant group. As we have seen, some distance was created as men sought to separate themselves from women and the 'female' associations of the job. However, unlike in Kanter's study where tokens were marginalized (and denigrated) by the dominant group, in this case it was the minority group (men) that was active in creating a distance from the dominant group (women) and who claimed a higher status in the process. A similar outcome emerged from Cross and Bagillhole's (2000) work on men in non-traditional occupations and Heikes's (1992) study of male nurses.

The third condition discussed by Kanter – assimilation – refers to how individuals are assumed to take on the stereotypical characteristics of their group and so be confined to corresponding 'role traps'. Some evidence of stereotypical roles emerged from this study. Under the assumed authority effect, a 'father' role was often conferred on men who were expected to be the disciplinarian, to take charge of demanding situations and to be authoritative in formal work settings, while younger men could find themselves in a 'son' role – looked after by older female staff. Finally, as in Heikes's (1992) study of nurses, some men were expected to conform to a 'muscle-man' role and to take on physically demanding jobs even when this lay outside their specific remit. This suggests that expectations by women may precipitate men into more 'masculine' roles. However, perceptions of differential treatment by men may partly reflect their own gendered perspective, which, as Kanter suggests, assigns women to a limited set of stereotypical roles. Assignment of 'father' and 'son' roles may therefore be based on men's own assumptions of the 'appropriate' positioning of men and women in the workplace as well as on women's preferences to allocate roles according to stereotype. In this way, a son role ascribed to younger men may to some extent reflect younger men's assimilation of older women into a stereotypical 'mother' role.

Whatever the basis of the assimilation process, outcomes may be less detrimental than in Kanter's analysis. Firstly, men may not be trapped in their roles to the same extent as women, who often encounter sanctions if they do not conform to type. Instead, the greater integrity commanded by men over choice of behaviours suggests they may experience a less defining 'role pressure' – where resistance is more readily accepted. Secondly, rather than being confining or belittling, role pressure (e.g. to 'son' or 'father' roles) may be developmental through exposure to learning opportunities. Therefore, contrary to the predictions of Kanter, who saw the disadvantages of token status as applying to all minority groups, men may well benefit from preferential treatment and from exposure to roles and situations that are challenging and developmental. This suggests, in accordance with Bradley (1993) and Heikes (1982), a need to include social and cultural factors into any analysis of the structural significance of numbers. A focus on numbers alone, as in Kanter's work, overlooks the positive cultural valuation given to male attributes in society and the rewards that accordingly accrue.

A third key issue raised concerns the 'gender work' that men undertake to bring the job in line with conceptions of masculinity. Similar outcomes have emerged from other studies where men reconstructed the job in order to enhance its 'masculine' components (e.g. Cross and Bagilhole, 2000; Heikes, 1992; Lupton, 2000; Pringle, 1993) and where a distance was practised from the feminine (Lupton, 2000; Williams, 1993). As Alvesson (1998) and Williams (1993) suggest, such strategies help men restore a dominant position and may serve to support masculine identities that would otherwise be threatened by feminization and associations with homosexuality. Fears of feminization and stigmatization, common anxieties for men in non-traditional roles (Lupton, 2000), appear to intensify under the gaze of male friends and acquaintances. The idea that ideologies of manhood function primarily in relation to the surveillance of male peers and male authority (Kimmel, 1994), may explain the high level of anxiety which emerged around the judgements of men. It may also explain the apparent disjuncture between the private self (based on high levels of satisfaction and personal fulfilment in their career) and the public self (situated around anxieties over how they are seen by others). Accordingly, as Kimmel suggests, men need to prove to other men, rather than to other women, that they are sufficiently 'male'.

This study set out to explore the motivations and aspirations of men in non-traditional occupations, and the implications of their career choices for their experiences within the organization and for self perception and self identity. Findings indicate that men in non-traditional occupations fall into three categories dependent on career history, career goals and nature of the career choice. Findings also indicate that for men, minority status has mainly positive outcomes and that pressure to conform to stereotypical behaviour can place men in positions that are potentially rich in development opportunities. However, considerable 'gender work' is undertaken to restore a masculine image that has been undermined by the female nature of the job.

Conclusion

Rather than seeing organizational structures as essentially neutral, as liberal feminists and work by Kanter suggests, these findings support a post-structuralist interpretation of gender relations and processes where a focus on multiple masculinities and on ideologies and discourses of gender take precedence over structural implications of numbers. Rather than reducing masculinity and femininity to a dualism of homogeneous categories, post-structuralists emphasize heterogeneity and diversity – and the different aspirations of 'seekers', 'finders' and 'settlers' goes some way, albeit in a rudimentary form, in helping to consider masculinity in the context of non-traditional occupations in a more differentiated way. The supposed stability of gender categories is also challenged from within this perspective. Masculinity and femininity are accordingly seen as ideologically and discursively produced and hence as contingent,

fluid and uncertain (Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Kerfoot and Knights, 1998; Whitehead, 2001). One dominant discourse is hegemonic masculinity, which, as Connell (2000) points out, men internalize and act out in day-to-day practices as they construct and reconstruct what it means to be a man. In the context of organizations, such practices may help to align the norms of hegemonic masculinity with the performance of their work and the 'gender work' undertaken by men in this study may well support this view. However, as Kaufman (1994) and Connell (2000) suggest, few men meet the hegemonic standard so that for the majority, manhood is 'chronically insecure' and a source of anxiety. As we have seen, this anxiety is particularly acute for men in non-traditional occupations whose relationship to this dominant form is made precarious by their association with femininity. According to Kimmel (1994), men scrutinize each other for signs of femininity and homosexuality and, as we have seen in this study, men in 'female' roles fear the approbation of other men – the 'gatekeepers' of the hegemonic ideal. This ideal is strongly heterosexual (Connell, 2000), with homosexuality 'subordinated' to the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men (Kimmel, 1994). Consequently, men in non-traditional occupations, irrespective of sexual orientation, experience anxiety around the powerful stigmas associated with the homosexual status.

While hegemonic masculinity remains a dominant discourse for men, as Kerfoot and Knights (1998) point out, an individual's 'social field' is made up of multiple social discourses. Gender work to (re)capture a masculinity will therefore tend to be incomplete and fragmentary as other discourses cut across and contradict the dominant form. On this basis, 'being masculine' can be precarious and subject to disruption (Kerfoot and Whitehead, 1998) as well as internally divided, ambiguous and often inconsistent (Alvesson, 1998; Connell, 2000). Consequently, in the context of the current study, while many men practised distance from the female to enhance and emphasize their (masculine) status, this was disrupted by an incorporation of and comfort with the feminine and with discourses of service and care. In the privacy of their own classroom, male primary teachers cared for, read to and patiently engaged in the learning experiences of their children. In the one-off intimacy of the flight crew, men gossiped with colleagues and served meals to passengers. Male librarians stamped books, answered queries and catalogued returns. In other words, the daily 'gender work' to maintain a masculine identity can be contradictory, fragmentary and incomplete. Coinciding with this work, is a 'zone of comfort effect' as men enjoy the company of women and the 'female' activities of caring, service and the more mundane.

This research has made a significant contribution to the work on men in non-traditional roles. Firstly, it maps out a typology of men in non-traditional occupations and suggests some differentiation in terms of motivations and career aspirations. As Kerfoot and Knights (1998) point out, a focus on differentiation is important to further our understanding of the gender/organization interface as well as the 'bias' to maleness. On this basis, the typology presented in this article can be a useful frame for further research. Secondly, it suggests

that men and women experience minority status in different ways. Drawing on a post-structuralist framework, it suggests that men undertake considerable 'gender work' to re-establish a masculinity that has been undermined by their female occupation. At the same time, it demonstrates how men can feel comfortable with 'female' discourses of service and care while drawing on resources from other, more privileged discourses to overcome any disadvantage associated with their minority status. As such, this work has made an important contribution to our understanding of gender and the 'feel' (Kerfoot and Knights, 1998) of how it is to labour at being a man.

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