"Schools are like old-fashioned factories, and what they produce is gendered individuals"
(Kimmel, 2008)

Philomena Murphy

Education plays a pivotal role in the way in which gender identities are constructed and maintained. Aside from the immediate family unit, schools and the education system are one of the earliest places for the socialisation of children; as well as being the place where children and young people spend a large amount of their time. Schools are often one of the first places where children learn about and enact the different gender roles and learn to behave in ways which are deemed as being appropriate for their gender (Macionis, 2012). Durkheim believed that the purpose of education "is to create adults out of children who reflect the ideals of their society" (Pickering, 1979: 104). A large part of these ideals are based around the socially constructed differences between the genders and the separate roles which men and women are expected to carry out (Macionis, 2012). In this paper, I will attempt to outline and explore the myriad of ways in which education and the school environment influence the behaviour and attitudes of students and promote the creation of their gender identities.

The gendering of various subjects taught at second-level education plays a significant role in the construction and maintenance of gender differences. The labeling of certain subjects as "masculine" and others as "feminine" has a profound impact on the types of subjects taken up by boys and girls. Research conducted by both Sé Sí (2007) and Smyth and Darmody (2009) found that a far greater number of boys than girls take up traditionally masculine subjects such as Physics, Metalwork and Wood Technology; whereas a far greater number of girls take up traditionally feminine subjects such

as Home Economics and Biology. Sé Sí (2007) noted that "pupils conform closely to the traditional gender stereotypes in terms of the subjects they study" (Sé Sí, 2007: 4). This in turn serves to provide young men and women with two very different sets of skills upon exiting the formal education system (Russell, 2010; Smyth, 2005; Smyth & Darmody, 2009). However, part of this difference in subject take-up between the genders can be attributed to expectancy value theory – how useful a subject is going to be to a student in terms of their future career plans. Darmody and Smyth (2009) found that "gender differences in subject choices reflected existing patterns of occupational segregation by gender and social class within the labour market" (Darmody & Smyth, 2009: 285). Another factor which serves to exacerbate the disparity in subject choices between young men and women is the range of subjects which are available from individual schools; as well as the way in which these subject choices are structured. In the schools where the Darmody and Smyth (2009) research was carried out, not every school provided technological subjects because these were thought to be "unsuitable" for their female students; while in other schools, due to an over-subscription for some subjects, students were being assigned a choice between a traditionally masculine subject (Materials [Wood] Technology) and a feminine subject (Home Economics). In another school in the study, Metalwork was being assigned to boys and Geography was being assigned to girls. Measures such as these only serve to reinforce the idea that some subjects are more suitable for boys, whereas others are more suitable for girls. This in turn has long-term implications for students with regards the types of courses they choose to pursue in tertiary education and consequently the gender-typical careers that men and women enter into upon leaving the formal educational system (Smyth, 2005; Smyth and Darmody, 2009).

Adopting a macro perspective, it is possible to contend that the gender relations of wider society are reflected within the educational system and that this in turn produces a gendered workforce; with each gender possessing a separate set of skills. Marx believed that the type of education which is given to young people is dictated by the needs of the economy (Dillon, 2014; Macionis and Plummer, 2012). In this sense, it is possible to view the ways in which boys and girls receive different types of education and training both at secondary level and tertiary level as fulfilling and maintaining the needs to the economy and the market's demand for a specialised and gendered work-

force. The feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith believed the educational system to be an important institution for the repression of women and a means of reproducing the patriarchal establishment of society. Smith argued that the high concentration of women in positions of lower influence within the education system (such as teaching), in contrast with the high concentration of men in positions of control and influence over the education process (such as policy making) illustrates this point (Smith, 1987). Smith states that for women "their training and education ensure that at every level of competence and leadership there will be a place for them that is inferior and subordinate to the positions of men" (Smith, 1987: 337). From this perspective, it is possible to view the 'final product' of schools and the education system as being gendered individuals who have already been pre-sorted into gender-segregated careers where the rewards are much greater for men than they are for women (Smyth, 2005). Findings from Schweitzer et al. (2011) on the gender-segregated disposition of academic fields of study; as well as the different returns between male and female graduates who hold the same qualifications (Russell et al., 2010) would support this argument.

Aside from the visible official school curriculum, Kimmel (2008) also talks about the role played by the "hidden curriculum" in how gender differences are constructed and maintained. This can include informal activities such as interaction amongst fellow students, as well as interaction between students and teachers: "By the time we enter our first classrooms, we are learning more than our ABCs...we learn – and teach one another – what it means to be men and women" (Kimmel, 2008: 175). This view is further supported by research undertaken by Lodge (2005) on the role played by children's social worlds in the construction of their gender identities. Lodge (2005) found that both the school institution and children's peer groups played a substantial role in "policing the boundaries" of gender-appropriate behaviour (Lodge, 2005: 178). Another aspect of the "hidden curriculum" which serves to further exacerbate the socially-constructed differences between the genders is the school dress code and school uniform. School uniform is an aspect of the majority of schools across the world and for the most part consists of trousers and shirts for boys, and skirts and blouses for girls. The differences between school uniforms for each of the genders imposes upon students the separate dress codes which they are expected to adhere to on a daily basis (Browne, 2011; Lynch, 1989). Lynch and Lodge

(2002) found that students attending all-female Catholic schools experienced constant surveillance from teachers with regards their school uniform, appearance and behaviour. This is in contrast with students attending single-sex male schools and co-educational schools where a more lenient attitude towards school uniform, appearance and behaviour was observed (Lynch & Lodge, 2002).

The type of school attended by boys and girls also has a large impact on the construction and preservation of gender identities, especially if it is a single-sex school. Research conducted by Halpern et al. (2011) found that single-sex schooling "increases gender stereotyping and legitimises institutional sexism" (Halpern et al., 2011: 1706). Their research found that boys who spend more time in each other's company are more likely to become aggressive and develop behavioural problems, while isolating girls can lead them to accept gender stereotypes. This concept is further advocated by Kimmel (2008) who states that boys often exaggerate their "masculine" quality of "boisterousness" so as to "better fit in with other boys; they over-conform to the expectation of their peers" (Kimmel, 2008: 185). Ireland is quite unique in comparison with the rest of Europe and the US with regards the high number of second-level single-sex schools (Sé Sí, 2007; Halpern et al., 2011). The main reason behind the high number of Irish single-sex schools is largely historic; traditionally, second-level schools in Ireland were mostly single-sex institutions, and run by religious orders. This had an enduring impact on the way in which the Irish education system was founded (Lynch & Lodge, 2002). As this paper has previously stated, the choice of subjects available to students attending single-sex schools can vary (Smyth and Darmody, 2009). Research by Lynch (1989) found that music and the arts have traditionally been promoted in single-sex girls schools, whereas single-sex boys' schools tend to place a greater emphasis on sports.

However, while co-educational schools are often posited as being the solution to problems regarding negative gender-role stereotypes, research has shown that this is not always the case. Research conducted by Lynch and Lodge (2002) on the experiences of students in co-educational schools in Ireland found that while there were a high number of classrooms where both male and female students were equally involved in work-related interaction; for the classes which did not have a gender-balanced level of interaction, it was male students who tended to dominate classroom interaction rather

than girls. Also, while only a small minority (14%) of co-educational students reported incidences of gender-inequality in their school, the vast majority of these complaints were made by female students. In addition, one of the principal findings of Lynch and Lodge (2002) was that quite often, sexist practices either went unnoticed or unreported by both students and teaching staff; worryingly "there was (also) a sense in which sexist behaviour was considered ‚normal'" (Lynch & Lodge, 2002: 127). Female students attending co-educational schools were also more likely to report discriminatory behaviours and attitudes with regards male and female school sports teams, with several girls stating that their school placed a far greater emphasis on the achievements of male sporting teams in comparison with the achievements of female teams (Lynch & Lodge, 2002). However, interestingly, research carried out by Jackson (2002) on the topic of whether or not co-educational schools should have single-sex classrooms for some subjects found that although girls benefited significantly from single-sex mathematics classes since they were no longer being ridiculed by the boys for getting wrong answers; the girls were still willing to go back to their co-educational mathematics class, especially when they heard how poorly the boys had fared without them in terms of reduced concentration and increased aggressiveness. The presence of the girls had a calming effect on the boys (Jackson, 2002). A Durkeimian perspective on this would be that social order and cohesion are made possible because each of us has our own specialised function (in this case gender) and that by working together we create an effectively functioning society (Dillon, 2014). However, in eyes of Dorothy Smith, this could be seen as being further proof of girls lowly status within the school system and larger society, and of their objectification by men (Smith, 1987). It is possible that the girls may have internalised their feelings of being "mere objects and accessories for men" in that they were willing to return to their co-educational classes even though to do so would bring them no obvious benefit. They felt a responsibility towards the boys and so put aside their own wants and needs for the welfare of the boys.

Education works in conjunction with other factors such as social class to create multiple masculinities and femininities. These multiple masculinities and femininities often come into existence as a direct result to the classroom setting itself and include "laddism", "sporting masculinities" and "studious working class masculinities". Jackson (2003) identifies "laddism" as a form

of hegemonic masculinity whereby young male students overtly reject their academic studies because to be seen as taking an interest in academic work is perceived as being "feminine". This outward rejection of academic work also serves as a self-worth protection strategy which allows schoolboys to blame their lack of success in school as a result of a lack of effort as opposed to a lack of academic ability. Sporting masculinities are another form of hegemonic masculinity which is often highly privileged within the school community, particularly if the school places a big emphasis on team sports (Francis, 2010; Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Ward, 2014). Male students who were interviewed by Lynch and Lodge (2002) often reported their school's more lenient approach towards students who were active members of school sporting teams. Research carried out by Ward (2014) on working-class boys in Wales identified a form of "studious masculinity" which was at odds with the school's hegemonic sporting masculinities. Ward (2014) found that young men who had invested heavily in their academic capital were able to acquire a form of hegemonic masculinity by attending university once they had finished their secondary education. Research by Mac an Ghaill (1994) on the construction of gender in classrooms has identified four main types of masculine identities; these are "macho lads" - white, working-class boys who are defiant of the school system; "academic achievers", whose masculine identities are constructed from diligence in their school work; "new enterprisers" who have less interest in their academic studies than the "academic achievers", but have a keen interest in areas such as computer science; and "real Englishmen" who believe themselves to be capable of effortless academic achievement. Research by Francis (2010) identified a handful of cases where students can be seen to embody characteristics of "female masculinity" and "male femininity" within the classroom setting. For some female students, adopting a mask of "precocious femininity" allowed them to display "masculine" characteristics such as assertiveness, confidence and resistance, while still retaining their femininity. For some male students, actively participating in hegemonic forms of masculinity such as team sports allowed them to also actively engage in their academic studies and still retain their veneer of masculinity (Francis, 2010).

In conclusion, it is evident that the role played by education in the construction of gender cannot be underestimated. There are a multitude of ways, both visible and invisible, through which the social institution of edu-cation influences the behaviour of the individuals within it and helps mould their gender identities. The gendering of subjects at secondary level translates into significant gender differences in the field of education studied at tertiary level (Smyth, 2005); which in turn manifests itself as occupational segregation (Schweitzer, 2011). The invisible influence of the hidden curriculum reinforces the gendered dress code while members of our peer group and classmates monitor our behaviour and "outward" attitudes to ensure that they comply with the "unwritten" rules about proper conduct and presentation for our respective gendered selves (Ward, 2014). Durkheim regarded that "the prime purpose of education is to make man, or rather the child, see his place within the environment and to realise its influence upon him, both as a fact and as an ideal" (Pickering, 1979: 107). A large part of this education relates to the difference between the genders and the separate roles and occupations which each of the genders are expected to perform in our society.

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