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A new generation of business masculinity? Privileged high school boys in a gender egalitarian context

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ABSTRACT

While gender equality and new softer masculinity ideals have gained prominence in the Nordic welfare states in recent decades, the top echelons of business seem to constitute a bulwark against these changes. Elite corporate culture preserves more traditional business masculinity ideals, both in terms of gender composition as well as in attitudes toward gender equality. This article analyzes if, and in what ways, central tenets from traditional business masculinities are upheld among the prospective male business leaders of tomorrow. By situating the interviews of young privileged boys within the contexts of both their renowned business high school and the strong gender equality ideals that exist in Norway, this article taps into a vital period of the construction of a 'business masculinity'. The analyses show that, while softer masculinity traits are expressed when societal issues are at stake, the school context nonetheless seem to provide a 'safe haven' for traditional masculinity.

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Introduction

In the West End of central Oslo, a short walk from the Royal Castle, lies a beautiful functionalist building that houses one of the city's most renowned high schools, which has educated leaders in business, finance and politics since 1875. Today, it still holds its position as the foremost school for economic subjects and business preparation. Known for having a conservative and traditional culture and politically well-situated on the right side of the spectrum, they have also been subject for changes.

While gender equality and new softer masculinity ideals have gained prominence in the Nordic welfare states in the last few decades, the top echelons of business seem to represent a bulwark against these changes – both in terms of gender composition as well as in attitudes toward gender equality (Halrynjo, Kitterød, and Teigen 2015; Teigen and Skjeie 2017). In this article we aim to approach this 'stalled' gender revolution (England 2010), by analyzing if, and in what ways, central tenets from traditional business masculinities are upheld among prospective male business leaders of tomorrow. Drawing on

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interviews with adolescent boys from affluent homes and neighbourhoods – students at a renowned business high school with long elite traditions – we attempt to tap into the potential for more gender equality within the higher ranks of business life (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 852). By observing how individuals are simultaneously situated within different moral contexts, or cultural repertoires (Lamont 2000), and embedded in processes of class reproduction (Kimmel and Messner 1992; Christensen and Jensen 2014; Messerschmidt 2012; Proctor 2011), we hope to also gain further insight into the production and reproduction of masculinities within a powerful sector of society. More concretely, we ask if the contexts of traditional business masculinity and wealth are at odds with the national context of gender equality ideals, or if these may be aligned in new ways by the upcoming generation.

The literature on ‘hybrid masculinities’ emphasises that it may now be easier to distance oneself from masculine stereotypes – by, for instance, reconfiguring different elements of masculinity and femininity into more flexible and ‘hybrid’ masculinities (Pfaffendorf 2017). But there are also perspectives indicating that a more traditional ‘business masculinity’ could still be hegemonic (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In line with Kimmel (2008), who argues that there are fewer opportunities for young men to ‘swim against the current’, we take the view that we need more knowledge on how young privileged men construct their masculinity, within different and sometimes contradictory, contexts. The adolescent boys in this study, socialized and embedded in a local context that promotes traditional business masculinity, but at the same time living in a country where the wider societal normative climate is characterized by egalitarianism and gender equality, thus offer a unique possibility.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: First, we present perspectives on the connections between masculinities and the economic sphere and discuss what central tenets that can be drawn from what we dub a ‘dominant business masculinity’. Next, we slightly elaborate on the two main contextual levels of our analysis and their ‘dominant’ cultural repertoires: The Norwegian welfare state’s support of gender equality and egalitarianism and The Oslo Commerce School and its history. This is followed by a section on the sample and methods of the study, before we present analyses of the three main tenets: Tradition, Rationality, and Strength. The paper ends with a discussion of the findings and suggestive conclusions.

The men and masculinities of the economic upper class

Images of pure masculinity have often been (and are still) portrayed in biological terms, connected to ‘roughness’, ‘violence’, ‘anger’ and ‘sexual domination’ (Kimmel 2008, 72). They are also, however, intrinsically connected to class. Not only by being attached to the masculine views and practices of the ‘strong’ working class man (Morgan 2005; Kimmel and Messner 1992; Kimmel 2008; Connell 1995), but also at the very other end of the class structure (Madrid 2017). As argued by Connell and Wood (2005, 348), ‘Hegemonic forms of masculinity are historically derived from the growth of capitalism and the growth of imperialism’, and thus historically there have been strong ties between dominant views on masculinity and important factors of class – such as occupation, possession of property and money and, not least, power. Since the inheritance of both property and the family name has followed the male line, the reproduction of power and privileges has for long given the sober

and rational man of the bourgeoisie an upper hand in the construction of a hegemonic masculinity. While this form of masculinity also had its correspondence in the working class with the 'respectable breadwinner', the demise of this breadwinner model may have made the masculinity of the rational upper class man even more dominant (Morgan 2005).

While both capitalism and forms of business management have changed, the large degree of power and dominance attached to influential positions with these formations, and the economic rewards they engender, continue to place them in a strong position to claim hegemony in the gender order (cf. Connell and Wood 2005, 362; Connell 2011). In fact, there are many indicators of a special relationship between money and hegemonic masculinity. While the economic sphere traditionally is both a masculine and conservative domain – enhancing traditional views on occupational boundaries and gender roles (Larsen 2005) – focused research on men and masculinities in the top sections of society is rather scarce, especially when it comes to groups in the economic sphere (Connell 2011; Madrid 2017). While traits may indeed be shared with a range of other male groups, there are, however, some tenets that stand out in the literature as describing men in business and higher economic sectors in particular. As the concept of hegemonic masculinities is in essence about power, domination and their legitimization (Connell 1995; Coles 2009), we will here focus on three such tenets that may be seen as central within the business field. Given the large influence of this field in society more generally, these may also be seen as constituting a wider source of societal power (Connell and Wood 2005). While recognizing that power may vary with age (Bartholomaeus and Tarrant 2016), we wish to stress that while we draw the tenets of business masculinities from a wider literature examining both adults and adolescents, the analyses conducted attempt to grasp aspects of hegemonic business masculinities among the adolescents under study. The central question being if, and in what ways, these tenets are present in their descriptions of themselves and their social milieu.

First, given the long lasting bond between economic and social power there is often an embrace of *traditions* within the economic sphere. Tradition is also seen as especially important in that it imbues businessmen with a claim of 'the right to command' (Connell 1995, 77), but also because it can be used to legitimize their economic privileges (Khan 2011). As Proctor (2011, 853) has shown for an elite Australian boys' school, an important part of the staff is 'history work – the reinterpretation and reshaping of heritage and tradition. In short, to help maintain the status quo.

Second, and in line with the prominence of tradition, *rationalism* or instrumentalism must also be seen as a significant tenet of masculinity within the economic sphere. Much of business life is, of course, centred around making rational calculations, and while Connell and Wood (2005, 361) question the presence of old bourgeois masculinities among businessmen in Australia, they simultaneously see management as having '... no deeper rationale than the 'bottom line' – in fact, no rationale at all except profit making'. As Madrid (2017) show for male corporate managers in Chile, they themselves associate rationality with masculinity. Further, having instrumentalism as a guiding light in business life, does not necessarily stop at the office door. As Aarseth (2016) has shown as regards parenting practices within Norwegian families, where one or both parents have high positions within business or finance, actions concerning the choice of schools, leisure activities and restrictions in the home, all serve as an explicit and instrumental means to an end. This was very unlike the family practices she found among families with academic parents (Aarseth 2014).

Lastly, men in higher sections of society often seem to embrace notions of *strength* and competition (Brown 2000; Madrid 2017). Again, while interpersonal violence in general is more prominent among men than women (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2005) it is noticeably prominent in the language of business, evident in how it helps create a gender-biased and aggressive context, visible through metaphors of war and aggression (Koller 2004). Both Poynting and Donaldson (2005) and Proctor (2011) describe boys in boarding schools as being inducted into the ultra-competitive culture of the ruling-class and argue that when privileged boys learn to construct ruling class masculinities, significant factors circle around aspects of toughness and control. However, research on privileged adolescents also shows that ambition and an embrace of competition need to be balanced with an expression of 'ease' in order to be regarded as a 'true success' (Khan 2011; Poynting and Donaldson 2005). In a somewhat broader vein, Kimmel (2008) similarly points to how the celebration of 'irresponsibility' is a central part of the modern world of 'guys'. Taken together, it thus seems highly important to develop an account of masculinity construction that is sensitive to the local school context without making wider material and normative structures invisible (McLeod and Yates 2006, 164, 183).

Changing masculinities

While these are tenets that stand out in the field of business today, masculinities are also subject to change (Bridges and Pascoe 2014), not least due to generational differences in gender attitudes and practices (Connell and Wood 2005, 348; Madrid 2017), but also because of changes in 'non-discursive practices including wage labour, violence, sexuality, domestic labour, and child care as well as through unreflective routinized actions' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 842). In accordance with larger international changes, norms of gender equality have become more dominant and there is, in general, a larger acceptance of 'softer' masculinities (Halrynjo, Kitterød, and Teigen 2015). As Pfaffendorf (2017) argues, there may now be an increased possibility to navigate what she dubs the 'masculinity dilemma' – in which a dominant position can be upheld at the same time as traits associated with femininities or subordinated masculinities are strategically incorporated into 'hybrid masculinity styles'. Young, privileged men of today may thus embrace a wider range of masculinities than before.

However, it may also be that cultural homogenization has made it more difficult for adolescent boys to go their own way: 'More choices may not mean greater freedom, just a larger number of possible alternatives that are dismissed as wannabes and also-rans' (Kimmel 2008, 16). In a somewhat different vein, Messner (2007, 477) has noted how the 'new masculinities' of many professional class men may have taken on board feminist critique resulting in the toning down of 'hypermasculine' traits. But since 'this new man style tends to facilitate and legitimize privileged men's wielding of power over others, this is probably better seen as an example of feminism's being co-opted into new forms of domination – in this case, class and race domination'. Bridges and Pascoe (2014, 247) similarly find that 'systems of power and inequality' can prevail with new ways of aligning with hegemonic masculinity. It is thus an open question as to how prominent the traits of old business masculinities are likely to be among the adolescent prospective business leaders under study.

Cultural repertoires: the nation and the Westside School

Though masculinities, in a similar fashion to wider primary socialization, are to a large extent shaped in the family (Adams and Coltrane 2005), there is also widespread recognition that masculinities vary considerably between different contextual settings – local, regional or global (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). We have already described some general traits of the field of business or economic sphere (Coles 2009), but will here briefly lay out some characteristics of two overlapping, but analytically different cultural repertoires (Lamont 2000).

The Nordic welfare state regime: gender equality, egalitarianism and class reproduction

Nordic welfare states have strong egalitarian features, visible for instance through corporatism, economic redistribution, a unitary school system and gender equality policies, such as the ‘father quota’ in parental leave or the law requirement of a minimum of 40 per cent women in corporate boards (Esping-Andersen 1996; Teigen and Skjeie 2017). It is, however, also evident in a rather widespread embracement of egalitarian *values* (Ljunggren 2017), making a specific national form of the cultural shift among elites to move towards ‘commonness’ (Friedman and Reeves 2020). Especially so in the area of gender equality, where the Nordic countries at times are portrayed as being gender equality ‘nirvanas’ (Teigen and Skjeie 2017). As Bendixsen, Bringslid, and Vike (2018, 25) states: ‘Together with gay tolerance, gender equality has become a trademark and part of the self-representation of the nation state, and particularly so for Norway and Sweden’. In line with this, the welfare state is also seen as contributing to the creation of ‘softer’ masculinity ideals (Aarseth 2009) that are less violent, less authoritarian and more inclusive (Anderson 2009) than previously.

While egalitarianism is indeed a prominent feature of Norwegian society, recruitment into top economic positions is nonetheless substantially ‘classed’ and gendered (Flemmen et al. 2017). While top occupations in both culture and academia, as well as in the classic professions [medicine, law], has come closer to being gender balanced in Norway, this is far from the case in business, where only 13 per cent of top positions were occupied by women in 2015 (Teigen and Reisel 2017). Thus, while egalitarian norms have a strong foothold in Norway, there is no doubt that, as elsewhere, both class and gender play an important part in the recruitment to higher economic positions.

The Oslo commerce school: tradition and innovation at Oslo’s west end

The *Oslo Commerce School (OCS)* is one of the largest high schools in Oslo, and while it historically worked against opening for female students (Larsen 2005), the gender balance today is close to equal. In terms of further composition traits, it stands out by having one of the *highest* shares of students with higher economic class origins and one of the *lowest* shares of students with a minority origin (Andersen, Bakken, and Pedersen 2017).

This corresponds in many ways with the prominent spatial class divisions of Oslo. As a general image, the city is divided between an affluent west end and a more deprived, and

mixed, east end, which also has the largest presence of minorities with non-western origin. The spatial class divisions in Oslo have been prevalent throughout the city's history but have intensified substantially during the last few decades (Ljunggren and Andersen 2015). There is no private schooling sector to speak of in Norway. However, the strong residential segregation makes this less of an issue for wealthy families – in practice their local primary schools are often exclusive to those that can afford to reside in the school districts. While the high schools follow a system of admission requirements, the main pattern is nonetheless a continuation of the residential segregation of the adolescents' neighbourhoods and primary schools, more so for the adolescents on the west side (Andersen, Bakken, and Pedersen 2017).

While the average grade at OCS has shown a small decline in recent years, it still upholds its historical claims to being an elite institution (Gaztambide-Fernández 2009). The school's vision of 'tradition and innovation' is clearly visible in its historical path. Until 1936, when the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration was established, the OCS actually provided the country's highest commercial education, and there have been historical ties between the two schools ever since. The school context is characterized by a clear orientation toward business. Visible both in the self-promotion as Oslo's most specialized high school in economics, as well as in the courses offered, such as 'Marketing and management' and 'entrepreneurship and business development'. They are further the only school in Norway offering a specialized programme, called 'Innovation and business', where the students focus on business and gründer-spirit through the entire three years of high school, and where time is provided for them to work with their own company, and obtain an 'entrepreneurial skill pass'. Several of the interviewees have such money generating projects, for instance selling beats or party equipment to their peers.

The study

Being part of a larger project on elite schools and youth culture in Oslo, a total of 34 interviews with students at the OCS were conducted – 18 girls and 16 boys. All the interviewees were 17 or 18 years old at the time of interviews in 2016, a period of life when peers are of vital importance for socialization in general, and masculinity construction, in particular (Furlong 2012; Kimmel 2008; McLeod and Yates 2006). All the interviewees gave their informed consent and have been given fictive names in order to secure their anonymity. The study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service.

The semi-structured interviews, lasting between 90 and 180 minutes, were conducted at the OCS, after class by two junior and one senior sociologist. The main topics in the interview guide included personal ambitions, schoolwork, plans for the future, the east/west divide in Oslo, alcohol and drugs, and sex and romances. Thus, while neither aspects of gender nor masculinity was included with explicit questions from the start, they stand out as prominent themes across the main topics, frequently brought up by the interviewees themselves. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and coded, using the qualitative research software programs HyperTRANSCRIBE and HyperRESEARCH. In the coding of the transcribed interviews we utilized both a thematic approach – using for instance 'Oslo', 'parents', 'friends' and 'school work' – but also a more open form of descriptive coding, where the initial codes were expanded by sub-codes of 'speech acts'

(cf. Holstein and Gubrium 2003), that covered for instance ‘what is a man’, ‘who are ‘the boys’ and ‘gendered expectations’. In the analyses, both forms of codes proved helpful in scrutinizing how aspects of masculinity were constructed by the interviewees in the stories they chose to share with us in the interviews.

In addition to the interviews, all interviewees filled out a short survey with information about among others their parents’ occupation, education level, and property, and asked to name their five closest friends, the last time they visited them and if they knew their parents. From this information we were able to both construct a strategic analytical sample, as well as to get a more thorough account of their social origin (cf. McLeod and Yates 2006, 162). Since we here were preoccupied about the social context in which masculinities are constructed and performed, we used the information on their closest friends to distinguish a group of 13 interconnected boys (cf. Ward 2014). Through their neighbourhoods, friendships, activities, practices and experiences, they can be seen to form a quite interwoven in-group, which often also refer to themselves as an ‘influential group’. We thus restrict the sample to these 13 interviews, paying particular attention to their accounts of shared actions.

Based on the survey, we were able to categorize the students’ class origin, taking advantage of a well-established Norwegian occupational class scheme, that also distinguishes between fractions within classes according to the composition of cultural and economic capital (cf. Flemmen et al. 2017). All the interviewees, but one, had grown up in the affluent west side and had parents with occupations that, according to this scheme, places them well within the upper-middle or upper class. Most within the economic fraction of the upper class, such as economists and investors in real estate, but also occupations with a more balanced composition of cultural and economic resources, such as medical directors and lawyers.

Constructing new business masculinities

We here ask the question of whether central tenets from traditional business masculinities are upheld in the stories and identity constructions among these business-students as prospective male business leaders of tomorrow.

First, we will briefly describe some general aspects concerning how the interviewees see themselves as ‘OCS guys’, a label they use themselves. Asked about social situations in the classroom and in social activities, the interviewees described these in heteronormative ways (cf. Kriebekx 2018), as highly gender-segregated activities. In the classroom, boys often sit around boys, and girls around girls. None of the ‘groups’ have both girls and boys as members, and pre-partying is also gender segregated before they meet up and mix at parties. The school is homogenous and traditional when it comes to sexuality, but this is hardly talked about by the students – ‘everybody is heterosexual’, as one of the students put it. One of the few times homosexuality is talked about in the interviews, is when Magnus (economic upper class), states that ‘My friends are very homophobic [...] reactions like ‘yuck, what the fuck?’ or like ‘Are you gay, or what?’. Using a more self-conscious language, Magnus sees sexual orientation as natural, and therefore something one should not be judged for, even though he says that it happens at the school.

While explicitly acknowledging the social differences between east and west, by saying for instance ‘it would be ignorant to say that Oslo’s not a divided city’, the boys also

explicitly draw symbolic boundaries between ‘whites’ and ‘immigrants’. When asked about the lack of diversity in the school, Geir (upper class) says:

It doesn't recruit new people. And the new ones that actually come, they get drawn into the OCS gang, and instead of bringing in more new, erm, people of their own, with them, they, they end up pushing them away, because they have become a part of the OCS 'diversity'. The OCS 'diversity' is very white, not because it's white, but because it built on a very traditional white structure, in a way.

As Geir points out, traditional structures are upheld at OCS, both from the school, officially, and among the boys themselves. In the following section we pursue this and pay particular attention to what it means, to them, to be an ‘OCS-er’.

‘Tradition and innovation’

The school's vision ‘Tradition and innovation’ is prominent in both the material surroundings and in the students' accounts, where they talk warmly about the values they learn. The OCS has an impressive assembly hall right inside the main entrance, with several sculptures and a large pipe organ. In addition, the walls are filled with portrait paintings of the earlier rectors, as well as photos of all the former students. Esben (economic upper class) regards the school partly as a museum:

[OCS is] generally a bit more preppy, with the tradition and all that, it is kind of a museum. So in that way there is a bit more prestige. And especially if you are, you know, engaged in economics, then this is *the* school.

To actively engage with the history of the school is something they learn at OCS, and the stories become symbolic means of production that they have privileged access to. Students are actively encouraged by teachers to consider themselves ambassadors of the school. They also go to find their family members' photos in the halls, which as Geir explains, contributes to a feeling of belonging. If they do not take these traditional sides of the school into account, they will, according to Magnus, be considered as ignorant. Magnus therefore views OCS as an elite school ‘at least at world basis, most certainly, and actually in Norway as well’.

The boys speak competently about the history of the school and how lineages have traditionally formed the identity. Nevertheless they do not fully identify as elites. Instead they emphasise how both themselves and their teachers are more ‘casual’ and ‘chilled out’ than before. Knut explains that it is easy to get an impression of the school as ‘snobbish’, but that is only from the outside: ‘I cannot say that I perceive it as snobbish now as I am a student here, even though I did [...] before I started’. This narrative may tell us about the guys' conception of their school's history, in that they wish to live up to traditions of collective identity processes, similar to classic elite institutions, but also that they negotiate these traditions with more modern values.

To be an OCS-er means to pay respect to both the history of the school, but also to students' families. Family wealth and material well-being is expected not to be shown. Asked about how to gauge if someone comes from a very wealthy family, the answer is that you get to know it when you visit them. As Gustav (upper class) says:

[...] a great many I know that live in extremely grand houses with huge garages and stuff. Not so much in my circle of friends – I think I have been a bit, in a way, what should I say, lucky when it comes to that. The friends I have grown up with haven't been so extremely wealthy. But my brother for instance, [...] has some friends who are just absolutely insanely rich – who have skate parks in the garage, and lots and lots of cool cars and indoor pools and such. But I think maybe I have been a bit lucky, because I've kind of been a bit shielded from that.

Gustav himself comes from a wealthy family, but he is self-reflexively distancing himself from excessive and conspicuous wealth. By paying attention to those more affluent people Gustav may be seen to implicitly position himself closer to the 'middle', and as such aligns himself with important egalitarian values. This is a way of drawing on the national repertoire and may also be seen as an example of 'discursive distancing' (Bridges and Pascoe 2014), where boys are simultaneously distancing themselves from hegemonic masculinity while also aligning themselves with it. He is an ordinary guy, symbolically belonging to some broad middle, and not to be classified with those ostentatiously rich people preoccupied with materialism and excess. As visible here, wealth and money has to be dealt with in 'strategic' and subtle ways to achieve status (cf. Khan 2011). We will pursue this and other forms of instrumentalism in the next section.

Rationalism

In a similar fashion to families that 'show off' their wealth, girls are often looked down upon. Many girls at OCS are 'daddy's girls', which, according to our interviewees, means that they spend a lot of money on clothes and 'Michael Kors' bags', and are being driven around the city whenever they want. The main point in these considerations seems to be that boys are more independent and give an impression of being relaxed and rational – an important part of the traditional 'masculine business habitus' (Madrid 2017) and very similar to the traditional gender perspectives found among adolescent boys in Australia (McLeod and Yates 2006). Conspicuous consumption, while in its traditional Veblenian sense was originally associated with the upper classes, is today increasingly associated with wealthy *women* (Sherman 2017). Consumption is *gendered* by being rational when guys do it, and excessive when women do it. Unlike the case of traditions, the national repertoire of gender equality does not seem to come into play here. This stark gender inequality appears rather to be an important part of the school repertoire and taken for granted.

While rationality and instrumentalism is, indeed, highly present throughout a range of topics addressed by the interviewees, it seems to be especially predominant in discussions of balancing social life with schoolwork. Good grades are encouraged at school and many consider getting low grades embarrassing. In response to questions about grades and homework, the boys often contrast them with jobs and social life outside school. The importance of the latter makes grades less important, while focus is placed on keeping these social spheres in balance.

The pressure at the school is not toward getting the best grades, but 'acceptable ones', quite contrary to the narratives that Aarseth (2016) found among parents in the financial elite. The mantra seems to be that everybody at OCS naturally gets good grades – it is put forth as a result of effortless achievement (Jackson and Dempster 2009) – a trait they have

in common with elite students elsewhere (Gaztambide-Fernández 2009; Khan 2011). To explain why the grades at OCS are comparatively low in Oslo, they say, as Geir did, that a C from OCS counts as an A from other schools. The 'ease' of naturally getting acceptable grades is articulated by Geir:

I haven't done, to be honest, and this doesn't even have to be anonymous, I haven't done a single piece of homework this whole semester, and I will have an average grade of 4.8, which is far above the general average.

Klaus (economic upper class) also says 'I'm not doing homework, really. I practice for tests'. When asked why, he explains that it is about being rational: 'No, I wouldn't say that many do either. I don't feel that doing homework helps particularly. So, I rather practice for tests'. The boys recognize some of the work at school as both necessary and educational, but especially homework is seen as unnecessarily time consuming. This resonates with Mijs and Paulle's (2016) study from Netherland, which points out that school rejection may also be an elite phenomenon. The students at OCS are pre-occupied with appearing both rational and knowledgeable – both important characteristics for future leaders in business life – and to study 'just enough', so that one can also make the proper 'investment in the social life' a point emphasized by Oliver (upper middle class):

I'm very social and very fond of being social, and of doing sport and work with the revue, and, of course, school is very important, it is sort of, it is supposed to be the number one priority. But at the same time, we're attending OCS, and that is very social, so you have to live a social life at the same time.

The way they combine reading for tests with an arm's length recognition of the school creates a specific type of rationality – one where they are able to perform when necessary and they are able to define what is necessary themselves. This separates them from other students who more easily accept demands that are put forth by others, such as the school or parents (cf. Aarseth 2016). They point out that there exists a world 'outside school' in which only regular schoolwork makes you ill prepared. Most of them plan either military or higher education after high school, but this is most often considered as an intermediary stage toward a firm footing within working life. Some speak of the option to start in their father's business, while others want to run their own.

Strength and competition

All the tenets we bring forth here deal with how the boys construct masculinities where they appear as autonomous individuals. When we asked them about conflicts and disagreements at school the answers often came in the form of stories about fighting, which they explicitly say is a 'guys' thing', resembling Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth's (2013) perspective of fighting as a way of confirming masculinity. Esben describes it as 'alpha', and equivalent of girls 'freezing out' other girls. Feelings must be dealt with rationally, and fighting is the way to do it, seems to be the general story.

The stories are about violent fights with other guys from the West End, often with police involvement as an element. The moral of the stories at first glance seem to be: 'it's just an outburst'. Gustav, a seemingly calm guy, told this story from a weekend party:

We had an incident like that at [anonymised place] not too long ago [...], where it turned into complete chaos. Like, everybody started to fight, and everybody was handcuffed by the police, and erm, had to sit in the drunk tank all night and stuff [...]. A friend of mine, I think he called a girl a 'whore', and then her boyfriend, I think, an older guy, came over and confronted him and said like 'You can't do that stuff here', and got really pissed off. And then a friend of his, the boyfriend, came over – and while the two of them were talking, he took a bottle of beer and smacked it straight in my friend's head.

The themes in this story is rather typical: The fight occurs to defend the honour of a girl or their own respect. When Ole (economic upper middle class) is asked about why they fight, he answers: 'You get respect from the guys. If you're smaller than the other one you can get a lot of respect for it'. Magnus tells a story from another party; one of the older guys at school goes toward Magnus and says he has to pay the price for not showing respect: polish his shoes. Magnus does not accept this and starts fighting to set an example: 'they don't dare to fuck with a guy that has balls, right'. He also explains how he showed up the Monday after this weekend with a plastered broken arm: 'It's things like that I think that sets you in respect'. Not showing respect is a common reason for fights and is seen as a way of standing up for both yourself and your friends, and establishing hierarchies and natural order (Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth 2013). Also Geir describes the fighting as a natural 'guy's thing':

It was minimal, it was basically just a relief of testosterone, where you meet a large group of guys, and you actually want it to escalate into a fight. (...). So, in a way you want to be the guy who knows how to fight, how to protect yourself. It's also something about guys' nature, that guys have larger shoulders, larger biceps, and more testosterone, partly because they fight more. So, it creates a good reputation.

The starting of the fights might be unclear, but the fights are nonetheless seen as a necessary, rational solution when someone 'crosses a border'. In the interview with Oliver, he interrupts his own story and makes a direct comment to the interviewer: 'I don't think you understand just how normal this is'. The way they talk about the fighting may also be seen as an expression for the homosociality among them – only by someone like themselves can they be judged. No matter what happens or what activities you engage in, there is a coda at bottom, which is to 'stay with your boys'.

A new generation of business masculinities?

The study of masculinities plays an important part in gaining further insight into the production and reproduction of inequality in different sections of society. While we are yet to see the future careers of the adolescent boys in this study, we still consider it important to tap into a socialization arena that the business elite often recruits from. Furthermore, we do this during a formative period of these adolescents' masculinities – and pay particular attention to how context and different cultural repertoires come into play. They will, in some form, 'carry' these masculinities with them into adulthood, and therefore possibly influence the norms and practices of gender equality, as well as heteronormativity (Krebeck 2018), within the next generation of business leaders. As research has shown, masculinities are open ended and (some aspects are) changing (Anderson 2009), and even though old masculinities are reproduced, they are negotiated by new actors in new circumstances (McLeod and Yates 2006).

In the analyses, we have explored if, and how, three central tenets in the literature on business masculinities – *traditions, rationalism and strength* – play a role in these adolescents' understandings of themselves and their social milieu. While the tenets are indeed still prominent, this does not mean that the masculinities of yesterday are simply reproduced. Rather than *either* maintaining a traditional masculinity *or* moving toward softer masculinities (cf. Pfaffendorf 2017) they seem to do both at the same time, displaying a form of hybrid masculinity. The tenets of the past are present, but negotiated in different ways, similar to findings of both adolescent boys in Australia (McLeod and Yates 2006) as well as among corporate managers in Chile (Madrid 2017).

The logic seems to be that the closer we get to the boys' everyday lives, the more they draw on the local repertoires of the school, and – vice versa – the more we talk about historical and structural matters the more they draw on national repertoires. Accordingly, the more we get into their everyday lives, the more traditional conceptions of masculinities and femininities are articulated. On a self-conscious level, they seem to be in favour of gender equality traits, such as equal pay, affirmative action and more female leaders, while on a more personal and local level they seem to reproduce traditional gender perspectives and regard girls as inferior, preoccupied with excessive behaviour, while boys, and especially their own group of 'guys' (Kimmel 2008), are seen as *naturally* more rational.

When talking about tradition and wealth the boys recognize that they are part of a privileged lineage, while also appealing to a 'commonness', as also adult elites, both in Norway (Ljunggren 2017) and internationally (Friedman and Reeves 2020), have been shown to do. This can be seen as a part of a historical cultural shift among elites to move away from legitimising advantages in ascription, towards modern acts of distinction through achievement and commonly accepted moral traits (cf. Khan 2011). The boys in this study explicitly draw on a national repertoire of egalitarianism that places them in line with prominent national norms. However, when it comes to the tenet of rationality, the national repertoire of gender equality does not seem to be as strong, as they very explicitly distance themselves from girls in general, as they are 'irrational' consumers. It is within the tenet of strength, however, that the traditional ideas of masculinity are most explicit – the central aspects being that the boys are ultra-competitive and preoccupied with not being perceived as weak. They regard the need for fighting as resulting from biological differences, and as such fighting is a 'guys' thing'. This makes it possible to tie strong connections among 'the guys', where a coda is constructed. This is similar to what Kimmel (2008) finds, where 'the guys' only recognize each other as judges and not girls, parents or outsiders. They know, and express, that their 'celebration of irresponsibility' is controversial, and frowned upon in the national repertoire, but at the same time, this is well in line with the image they have of their school and the Westside. The solution seems to be to mostly keep this among themselves – the guys.

While their display of strength and code of honour through fighting can be seen as an act to confirm their masculinity (Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth 2013), this hardly connotes the same ease and controlled appearance that lies at the heart of the tenets of tradition and rationalism, and is thus neither in the local repertoire of the school nor the Westside. But these actions could also be seen as a way of compensating for an image of being privileged and soft West End boys – as posing a 'masculinity dilemma'. But contrary to Pfaffendorf's (2017) interviewees, this is not dealt with by

incorporating femininities or subordinated masculinities, but by the closing of certain arenas as 'only for them'. It is not the 'tough and rough' East End boys that set the standard, but themselves. This may be seen as a specific version of the hybrid masculinities, with a discrepancy between their 'discursive acceptance' of national repertoires and their actions. In other words, these boys are far from harbingers of the feminist change in masculinities, but more adapting to norms of gender equality on a discursive and structural level.

In a larger sense, the negotiations of these three tenets show us how it may be important to scrutinize local settings and specific groups, even when we wish to understand wider trends – for instance those of gender equality stagnation or the reproduction of inequality in general. While Norway and other countries have indeed made progress in terms of gender equality in recent decades, the business and finance sector has served as an anomaly in several ways. Since we know that the recruitment base for the top economic sections of society is rather narrow, in-depth analysis of these socialization arenas could contribute to understanding the production and reproduction of masculinity ideals and how central and historical tenets are recast in negotiated versions. Given the findings here, we encourage future research to pay attention to how masculinities may be hybridized, and created in *both* local and wider moral contexts.

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