

COMMENT

## Accuracy, Critique and the Anti-Tribes in Sociology of Education: A Reply to Sara Delamont's 'Anomalous Beasts'

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In a recent edition of *Sociology* (34, February 2000), Sara Delamont provides an interesting account of the relationship between the sub-discipline, sociology of education, and parent discipline, sociology. It is refreshingly original because articles which reflect on the relational structure of sociology as a discipline are rare, especially those which focus on sociology of education. That said, I disagree with substantial parts of her characterisation of sociology of education and I believe that some parts of it are so misleading that they need to be corrected.

In brief, she argues that 'the hooligan is an anomalous beast for sociologists of education, who paradoxically revere him: while the sociology of education is an anomalous beast for the parent discipline, whose practitioners reject and fear it' (Delamont 2000:95). Essentially, the latter part of her argument amounts to the claim that the wider discipline of sociology has neglected sociology of education. In this respect, Delamont raises some important issues for reflection by sociologists across the discipline. However, my response is concerned with her unsatisfactory characterisation of British sociology of education.

### **Sociology of education: the studies**

According to Delamont (2000:96–7), sociology in Britain has 'two grand narratives, both male' – one derived from the 'political arithmetic' tradition is 'quantitative, empirical and focused on social mobility', and the other 'discursive and focused on anti-heroes; the portrayal of the rebellion or resistance of the hooligan'. For Delamont (2000:97, 98, 99), Willis (1977) is the 'most famous example of this tradition', but this 'qualitative sociology of education' also includes the 'ethnographic work on adolescent working-class and Afro-Caribbean boys in British schools, such as Hargreaves (1967), Patrick (1973), Parker (1974), Corrigan (1979), Abraham (1995a) and Sewell (1997)'. It is this latter 'tradition' on which Delamont concentrates her critique, with which I am most concerned in this paper.

These authors, Delamont claims, have ‘lovingly chronicled and even celebrated as heroes’, the ‘anti-school, delinquent, rebellious young working-class urban males’, creating ‘a story about how a rebel is made into a hero’, which is ‘bad sociology’ (99, 100, 101). In the context of a discussion of these authors’ work, she warns readers against ‘lauding’ and ‘endorsing’ the perspectives of such ‘lads’ and ‘treating the world views of “the lads” as that of revolutionary heroes’ (Delamont 2000: 100). She sees the ethnographic studies by these authors as all falling into the same tradition and characterises progression within it as follows (2000:99):

In 1967 David Hargreaves published the pioneering ethnography of a boys’ secondary modern school in Lancashire. A decade later Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labour* perpetuated the convention with his twelve lads from the Black Country secondary modern school. Both these books were best sellers, both much cited. Corrigan’s *Schooling the Smash Street Kids*, which appeared close to Willis and was overshadowed by it, took a similar celebratory view of the anti-school boy. In the 1980s, John Abraham in Britain and J. C. Walker in Australia continued the tradition ... Sewell’s study of Afro-Caribbean boys prolongs the practice.

Patrick (1973), Parker (1974), Willis (1977), Corrigan (1979), Walker (1988) and Sewell (1997) are different from Hargreaves (1967) and Abraham (1995a). The former six studies are about anti-school boys or young male hooligans, as Delamont states. In these six books, the perspective of the anti-school boy or male delinquent is by far the predominant one. Thus, my first disagreement with Delamont concerns her characterisation of Hargreaves (1967) and Abraham (1995a) and, by association, of the ethnographic sociology of school students by Colin Lacey and Stephen Ball.<sup>1</sup> I contend that it is wrong to think of Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970), Ball (1981) and Abraham (1995a) as being about anti-school boys, let alone macho anti-school boys. Rather, these case studies are primarily concerned with whether, and how, differentiation within the secondary schooling system produces various kinds of polarisation among the student population, including both pro- and anti-school behaviour and values. Of course, I do not dispute that contained in these works is some reference to macho anti-school boys. Later, I shall examine whether those references may be reasonably regarded as a celebration of such boys.

The ‘differentiation–polarisation’ research programme began at the University of Manchester with Colin Lacey and Audrey Lambart (Abraham 1989; Hammersley 1985).<sup>2</sup> Initially, the programme was to research two grammar schools, a boys’ grammar, ‘Hightown’, investigated by Lacey (1970) and a girls’ grammar, ‘Mereside’, by Lambart (1976). At that time the programme had not crystallised into a ‘differentiation–polarisation’ theory. Rather, the research enquiry was influenced by important social and policy problems, which had not then been sufficiently addressed by social science and were of interest to the Ministry of Education.

Working within the ‘political arithmetic’ tradition, and using surveys to explore links between education and social mobility, Glass (1954), Douglas (1964) and Floud,

Halsey and Martin (1966) found that there was massive under-representation of working-class children at grammar schools. Controlling for IQ, these children significantly under-achieved relative to their middle-class counterparts, despite the proclaimed 'equality of opportunity' of the 1944 Education Act in England and Wales. These important early studies compared 'inputs', such as social class, 'aptitudes', 'giftedness' and 'intelligence' with 'outputs', such as formal education, examination achievement and occupation, but treated the grammar school itself as a 'black box'. The studies by Lacey (1970) and Lambart (1976) were designed to open up the 'black box' – hence the selection of one boys' and one girls' grammar school (Lambart 1982). Later, Hargreaves joined the research team at Manchester to study a boys' secondary modern school. This extended the scope of the research beyond grammar schools and offered some comparison with them (Lacey 1982). Thus, there is much more complementarity between the 'political arithmetic' 'grand narrative' and the 'differentiation–polarisation' programme than Delamont acknowledges.

It was in this context that 'a recognition of the centrality of the processes of differentiation and polarization emerged in the Hightown study' (Lacey 1982). Lacey (1966:252) laid the conceptual foundations for the 'differentiation–polarisation' theory as follows:

By differentiation is meant the process of separation and ranking students according to a multiple set of criteria which makes up the normative academically oriented, value system. ... This process is largely carried out by teachers in the course of their normal duties. Polarization, on the other hand is a process taking place within the student body, partly as a result of differentiation.

The theory claims to be a major explanation for the increasing divergence in academic performance and behaviour between top and bottom stream students over the course of their school lives.

With the publication of *Hightown Grammar: The School as a Social System* in 1970, Lacey elaborated the theory, documenting the subcultural polarisation of pro-school and anti-school boys *in relation to* streaming and other forms of differentiation within the school system. As there was a positive correlation between top streams, middle-class background and pro-school boys, on the one hand, and lower streams, working-class background and anti-school boys, on the other, he further argued that differentiation amplified the pre-existing inequalities in social class distribution of cultural resources.

Lambart's 'Mereside' was largely unstreamed, but there was streaming by sets for some subjects. Indeed, there was 'such a concentration of able girls in top and second sets (and its converse)' that she 'initially inferred crypto-streaming' (Lambart 1982:192). Lambart did not write up her research as a major book, but it did find publication much later in smaller pieces of work. The complexity of the partial setting in 'Mereside' makes Lambart's findings regarding 'differentiation–polarisation' theory difficult to interpret. On the one hand, the lack of (social

class-related) clear-cut polarisation among the ‘Mereside’ students could be interpreted as support for the theory because there was also an absence of clear-cut streaming, even by sets (Lambart 1982). On the other hand, Lambart (1976) also found that some of the high-achieving girls were also among the worst behaved – a finding which does not support the theory.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, Hargreaves’s study of a streamed secondary modern confirmed the processes of differentiation and polarisation developed by Lacey (1966). Most of his book, *Social Relations in a Secondary School* is about the relations between streams and how these relate to polarisation into anti-school and pro-school boys, and about the consequences for the boys’ academic performance and behaviour. This is made most clear in Chapter 8 entitled ‘Two Subcultures’ (Hargreaves 1967:159):

The boys are not distributed throughout the streams in a random way; rather, from our knowledge of a particular boy’s stream we can within limits predict some of the main values he will tend to hold. We have seen that the higher the stream of a boy, the greater the tendency for him to be committed to the school’s values. His attendance at school is more regular and his participation in school activities is deeper. He likes school and the teachers, to whose expectations he conforms, whose values he supports and whose approval he seeks ... as we move from the highest stream to the lowest, this trend tends to reverse itself, and the values held by the low stream pupils are the opposite of those held by their peers in 4A [the top stream] ... In the low streams, the boys do not approve of the teacher’s definition of his own role and disapprove of pupils who meet the teacher’s definition of the pupil role.

Out of nine chapters in *Social Relations in a Secondary School*, only Chapter 6, ‘The Delinquent Group’, focuses specifically on anti-school boys. This may be contrasted with Lacey (1970) whose Chapter 6, ‘The Express Stream’, focuses specifically on top achievers. In most other respects, the two books have similar structures. It seems *highly unlikely* that this difference stems from a propensity of Hargreaves (1967) to celebrate anti-school delinquent boys as heroes. Rather, it seems perfectly sensible that Hargreaves (1967) should concentrate some attention on the anti-school boys because they were far more prevalent in the secondary modern school, whose students had already been defined as failures relative to their grammar school peers. By similar reasoning, it makes good sense that Lacey (1970) devoted a chapter specifically to top stream differentiation.

In a meticulously documented ethnographic study, Ball (1981) powerfully developed the ‘differentiation–polarisation’ research programme in a comprehensive school, which was streamed broadly by banding. Importantly, it was a *mixed-sex* comprehensive, that is, Ball studied a sample of boys and girls. Like earlier studies within the programme, Ball’s *Beachside Comprehensive: A Case-Study of Secondary Schooling* was sensitive to the wider social and policy context. In the mid 1970s, when the fieldwork was undertaken, many comprehensives were relaxing streaming by forms to streaming by bands or experimenting with mixed-ability classes, often in response to the increasingly problematic drawbacks of student polarisation, and to

the progressive educational ideas of the time. Ball (1981) confirmed the theory with respect to streaming of boys *and girls* in a *comprehensive* school. This includes accounts of anti-school boys, but also in equal measure, accounts of pro-school students, anti-school girls and teachers' perspectives. He took the scope of the theory to new heights. Significantly, he was able to show that polarisation effects were reduced when mixed-ability grouping was introduced. Moreover, he also related differentiation and polarisation to *curricular* organisation, showing that students in the higher bands tended to be filtered into 'high-status' 'academic' subjects, while their peers in lower bands were much more likely to find themselves 'opting' for 'low-status' 'practical subjects' (Ball 1981:122–62).

In the mid to late 1980s, Abraham (1995a) further investigated differentiation and polarisation. Like Ball, he studied a *mixed-sex* comprehensive, analysing data for boys and girls separately as well as in combination. Readers of Delamont (2000) are very likely to be misled into believing that Abraham's *Divide and School: Gender and Class Dynamics in Comprehensive Education* is based on a boys-only sample, especially as it is listed along with other ethnographic studies, all of which do research boys-only samples. In fact, Abraham's main sample of 127 students comprised fifty-two boys *and seventy-five girls* (1995a: 31).

Unlike Ball (1981), Abraham (1995a) studied a comprehensive, which was streamed by *setting*, rather than banding. Unlike Lambart's girls grammar, the setting in Abraham's 'Greenfield Comprehensive' was clear-cut – top, middle and bottom sets for each subject. After an unstreamed first year, setting in each subject began from the second year. Following Ball (1981), Abraham (1995a) also studied differentiation and polarisation in terms of curricular organisation. Like Ball (1981), he confirmed the 'differentiation–polarisation' theory for boys *and girls* in a *mixed-sex* comprehensive, even where setting, a less severe form of streaming, was implemented. Indeed, he was able to show that, while setting certainly produced polarisation, the polarisation was less marked, as one would expect from the theory. Like Lacey (1970), Hargreaves (1967), Ball (1981) and, to some extent, Lambart (1982), Abraham (1995a) argued that, because middle-class students were disproportionately streamed into the upper sets, while their working-class peers were disproportionately streamed into the lower sets, differentiation by setting produced social class-related polarisation effects, which increased social class inequalities in educational achievement. He also confirmed Ball's extension of the theory to curricular organisation, with similar implications for social class division and inequality.

As its subtitle suggests, in *Divide and School*, Abraham attempted to extend the scope of the theory to gender differentiation and polarisation. This involved not only researching boy–girl differences and divisions ('sex differences'), but also 'same-sex' gender differences. Sex-stereotyping of students by teachers and teachers' perspectives on sex-stereotyping in the school's textbooks were investigated, as were the gender relations within some of the student sample. Abraham (1995a) argued that

gender dynamics can also constitute forms of differentiation and polarisation within secondary schooling.

Out of nine chapters in *Divide and School*, only one, entitled 'Gender, Differentiation and Deviance' focuses specifically on anti-school students – the anti-school girls are discussed first. Out of the entire book of 176 pages, forty-two pages may be regarded as pertaining to student subcultures as distinct from students' perspectives on school knowledge or teachers' perceptions of students. For fourteen of these forty-two pages, pro-school and anti-school students (boys and girls) are discussed in equal measure in relation to setting and other organisational features of the school. Another six pages discuss the social relations of a middle set, which was *not* predominantly anti-school. Pro-school and anti-school students within the set are discussed in equal measure – the most detailed discussion involving *seven girls* and three boys. Of those forty-two pages, four are devoted specifically to anti-school girls' subculture, four to anti-school boys subculture ('the lads') and four to a mixed-sex anti-school group (the 'gothic punks').

Like the other contributors to the 'differentiation–polarisation' research programme, Abraham (1995a) was also sensitive to the social and policy context of the time. By the late 1980s, severe streaming by forms or bands had lost credibility in many comprehensives because of perceived polarisation effects. Moreover, mixed ability grouping and teaching had come under sustained attack from the Thatcherite Conservative Government, which branded it 'socialist education'. Consequently, many comprehensives introduced setting in the belief that it was less divisive than other types of streaming and better tailored to individual pupils' 'needs'. The investigation of streaming by sets was, therefore, particularly germane to social conditions of that time. Moreover, as some scholars have commented, it remains so because the 'New Labour' Government appears to believe that setting is the best way to organise state secondary schooling (Hargreaves 1996; Lacey 1996).

Lacey, Hargreaves and Ball conducted their research when the government of the day had some concern about social class division and working-class failure in education. By contrast, Abraham conducted, and wrote up, his research during Thatcherite government, which was hostile to comprehensive schools and even to the sociological concept of 'social class'. Delamont complains of sociologists' lack of response to right-wing attacks on (sociology of) education, but some response is to be found within the very ethnographic sociology of education, which she has misrepresented. In Chapter 1 of *Divide and School*, Abraham acknowledges the ideological groundwork being laid by the Conservative Government in the early and mid 1980s in order to launch an attack on comprehensive education. He explains that these right-wing arguments against comprehensive schooling are hopelessly incoherent and ultimately dependent on an indefensible biological reductionism. In Chapter 9, under 'The Empire Strikes Back', Abraham reflects on the right-wing legislation and policies introduced by the Conservative Governments after the

fieldwork and analysis for his study was completed. These policies are shown to owe more to the right-wing ideological prejudices outlined in Chapter 1 than to evidence on the social science of education.

Delamont rightly criticises some of the media's crude attacks on state schooling. It is unclear whether she also implicates Abraham, Hargreaves and others in the 'differentiation–polarisation' research programme in this. Nevertheless, readers may be interested to know that the first page of the introduction to *Divide and School* (Abraham 1995a:xi) reads as follows:

The book is critical of comprehensive schooling, but it is not an exercise in 'school bashing' or 'teacher bashing'. I do not believe that Greenfield was a 'bad' school either in its performance or treatment of pupils ... Rather, the purpose of the book is to contribute to a process of cumulative understanding about the internal social workings of the comprehensive school. Through this collective understanding we can move forward to propose and perhaps implement informed changes.

It might be argued that Delamont (2000) intended only to claim that the way in which Hargreaves (1967), Abraham (1995a), and the other ethnographic researchers listed refer to anti-school boys within their studies is celebratory. That is a very much more limited claim. Furthermore, I do not believe that it is the one she has actually made. Nevertheless, it needs to be addressed, if only as part of the grander claims, which I believe she has put forward.

My reading of Hargreaves's (1967) account of his anti-school boys is not at all that he celebrates, lauds, endorses or 'lovingly chronicled' their deviant behaviour. Moreover, I think the nature of the book, as a whole, supports my reading. For brevity, however, I shall concentrate on Abraham's (1995a) depiction of anti-school boys' subculture. In the ways most relevant to Delamont's argument, this occurs in detail in Chapter 5 of *Divide and School*. It should be noted that two 'types' of anti-school boys are discussed there, namely, 'the lads' – a boys-only friendship group, and 'the gothic punks' – a mixed-sex friendship group.

I contend that it is self-evident that none of the direct quotes from 'the lads' or immediate discussions of them in *Divide and School* celebrate 'the lads' anti-school behaviour. In fact, in comparison with the 'gothic punks', the masculinity of 'the lads' is shown to be less counter the school than the anti-masculinity of the male 'gothic punks' in some respects. Hence, Delamont's reference to 'Abraham and his vivid depiction of the "macho lads"' appears to be a major misunderstanding of his work (2000:100). To elaborate, Chapter 5 (Abraham 1995a:71, 83–4) reads:

[Willis's *Learning to Labour*] gives the impression that working class boys' counter-school culture is, on the whole, sexist and machismo, and that the alternative group must be conformist and inept in their relationships with girls ... there is a danger that the counter-school element of 'the lads's' gender might be exaggerated on account of their overall (particularly social class-derived) culture clash with the school ... As regards gender, 'the lads' in my study were less of a counter-school culture than the 'gothic punks'. Indeed, the

practices of some of the teachers rested on the same fundamental assumptions about sex roles and gender as were held by 'the lads'. Institutionally, the school uniform also acted as a continual reminder of how a boy should look compared with a girl. The 'gothic punks' (females and males) complained about the uniform, whereas 'the lads' generally accepted it.

In other words, Abraham (1995a) is at pains to point out that the conflation of 'macho' masculinity with anti-school behaviour is an oversimplification to be avoided. Despite this, Delamont entertains the conflation and then wrongly attributes it to Abraham.

Regarding the question of whether Abraham celebrates the resistance of the anti-school boys, it may be noted that he argues against even conceptualising their anti-school behaviour as 'resistance'. This seems to be clear from the following discussion of 'the lads' and the 'gothic punks' in the same chapter (Abraham 1995a:82, 83):

Whether or not the behaviour of the 'gothic punks' represented any resistance to the dominant gender relations in the school is a different matter ... Certainly I found no evidence that the 'gothic punks' were 'actively oppositional to the continuance of patriarchal relations in general'. Hence, it may be more correct to define them as 'recusants', rather than resisters ... 'The lads' ... never talked about 'the system' ... I found little or no evidence to support the contention that 'the lads' were resisting the school as a system even though they experienced excitement in their tensions with certain elements of the system.

Moreover, in a theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 of *Divide and School*, Abraham is critical of resistance theory. He cites supportively the work of Jim Walker, who has criticised Willis (1977) for romanticising student resistance. As Abraham (1995a:25) notes, Walker (1985; 1986) argues that the socially progressive/revolutionary aspects of 'the lads' counter-school culture, which Willis refers to as 'penetrations', do not manifest themselves in the data presented in *Learning to Labour*. In concluding his review of resistance theory, Abraham says that 'basing resistance theory on Willis's study may be a hazardous undertaking' (1995a:25).

Delamont is also wrong to characterise Hargreaves (1967) and Abraham (1995a), and, by association, Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981), as non-quantitative. Their ethnographic studies included many quantitative research methods, including quantitative analysis of school data and statistical analysis of data they collected themselves. Thus, the utilisation of quantitative methods is a feature *common* to the 'differentiation–polarisation' research programme and the 'political arithmetic', 'grand narrative', rather than one which distinguishes the traditions. As Hammersley (1985:254–5) puts it: 'It seems to me of great importance not to confuse the distinction between survey and case-study research design with that between qualitative and quantitative data.'



Unlike researchers in the ‘differentiation–polarisation’ programme, Patrick (1973), Parker (1974), Willis (1977), Corrigan (1979), Walker (1988) and Sewell (1997) are indeed qualitative, as Delamont notes. Furthermore, Patrick (1973) and Parker (1974) need to be distinguished from Willis (1977), Corrigan (1979), Walker (1988) and Sewell (1997), because the former two studies are very little concerned with schooling. The index of Parker’s *View from the Boys: A Sociology of Down-Town Adolescents* does not even have any entries under ‘school’ or ‘education’, while that of Patrick’s *A Glasgow Gang Observed* has only a couple of pages entered under ‘schools, pupil violence’. Thus, Patrick (1973) and Parker (1974) are, in effect, in-depth descriptions of the subcultural relations of particular delinquent male gangs. No serious attempt is made to relate the behaviour of these delinquents to the schooling system one way or another.

By contrast, Willis (1977), Corrigan (1979), Walker (1988) and Sewell (1997) are concerned with how the behaviour of anti-school boys relates to schooling. For example, Willis (1977) and Corrigan (1979) imply that the anti-school boys, whom they studied, ‘saw through’ the pretence of equality of opportunity in schooling, and consequently resisted schooling. As Corrigan puts it on the back cover of *Schooling the Smash Street Kids*: ‘the boys do not believe in the myth of equal opportunity but experience school as repression and organize themselves against its power’. I am persuaded by Walker’s (1985; 1986) arguments that Willis (1977) displays an over-rapport with the anti-school ‘lads’, and that this makes him vulnerable to romanticising their anti-school behaviour as resistance not only to schooling, but even to capitalism. A similar problem may be identified in Corrigan (1979) and, as Delamont points out, Sewell (1997) shows similar tendencies.

Regarding such over-rapport, Delamont is right to point to similarities with Patrick (1973) and Parker (1974). For example, Parker (1974:216) recounts his sense of ‘loyalty’ to the delinquent boys when appearing in court and Patrick (1973:141–2) writes of his fondness for a violent delinquent (‘Tim’), despite his ‘brutalities’. It is ironic to see Walker (1988) characterised by Delamont as a celebration of male working-class anti-school behaviour, because he has criticised Willis (1977) for doing just that. I am not convinced that her representation of Walker (1988) is justified.

Nevertheless many of the ethnographic studies of the subcultures of anti-school boys or male delinquents do tend to provide overly eulogistic accounts, as Delamont asserts. However, I hesitate to dismiss this tradition as ‘bad sociology’. I suspect that its practitioners would argue that a great deal of rapport is needed with these male delinquents in order to gain an in-depth knowledge of their cultural features. Yet I agree with Hammersley (1985) that the tendency in these delinquent-subculture studies to see ethnography as qualitative description, rather than as the development of testable theory using appropriate qualitative and quantitative methodology, limits their sociological explanatory value and their potential to inform social change.

## Sociology of education: the academics

According to Delamont, the male sociologist, like those discussed above, ‘builds his career’ on his ‘insight and skill in portraying’ ‘the macho perspective’, such as that of anti-school boys (2000:100). She concludes (p. 106):

Inside the sociology of education, we have a group of men who have made successful careers writing about a lifestyle that they have themselves rejected in ways that make hooligans into memorable heroes, resisting schooling.

By reference to the research, which Delamont cites or implicates by association, I have already demonstrated that Lacey (1966, 1970), Hargreaves (1967), Ball (1981) and Abraham (1995a) have certainly not made ‘hooligans into memorable heroes’ or celebrated anti-school behaviour as revolutionary resistance. However, given Delamont’s perspective on these sociologists’ work, it is worth examining her claims about their career success.

Lacey, Hargreaves and Ball have all attained personal chairs in education and Abraham a personal chair in sociology. I think it is reasonable to agree with Delamont that these academics have been successful in their academic careers. I would also agree that there is nothing in Delamont’s argument to suggest that these academics’ success is unmerited – that is not at issue. A major problem with Delamont’s analysis of their career development is that she neglects to consider publication of double-blind refereed articles in journals and attainment of research grants, let alone teaching and administrative duties, as other significant contributors to successful academic careers. Nevertheless, leaving that difficulty aside, let us consider the plausibility of Delamont’s claims about the career development of these academics solely by reference to their book publications.

Lacey’s first book was *Hightown Grammar*, but by the time he received his chair he had researched and written *The Socialization of Teachers* (1977) and done the groundwork for a later book on educational management and evaluation.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, he produced two books on environmental education and one on *The Press as Public Educator* (1997). None of these books, except for *Hightown Grammar*, made any significant reference to anti-school boys.

Prior to receiving his chair, Hargreaves had published at least four books, *Social Relations in a Secondary School* (1967), *Interpersonal Relations and Education* (1972), *Deviance in Classrooms* (1975) and *The Challenge of the Comprehensive School: Culture, Curriculum and Community* (1982). The second and third of these books clearly built on Hargreaves’s ethnographic study of a boys secondary modern. However, they do not draw on any extensive new ethnographic work. Rather, his early ethnographic research seems to have inspired him to engage in more reflective and theoretical work around the themes of social and interpersonal relations within secondary schooling. This work was not confined to anti-school boys; it

included pupil–pupil, teacher–pupil, teacher–teacher and self–institution relations. Hargreaves’s fourth book anticipated the heated debate over comprehensive schooling, which would develop in the 1980s, and contains very little reference at all to anti-school boys.

Following the publication of *Beachside Comprehensive* (1981), Ball co-edited *Defining the Curriculum: Histories and Ethnographies* (1984) and *Comprehensive Schooling: A Reader* (1984) and authored *The Micro-politics of the School* (1987). By the time he co-authored *Reforming Education & Changing Schools: Case Studies in Policy Sociology* (1992), he had already received his chair. Neither of Ball’s chapters in his edited books is about anti-school boys. They are about ‘Imperialism, Social Control and the Colonial Curriculum in Africa’ and ‘Becoming a Comprehensive? Facing up to Falling Rolls’, respectively. Similar comments apply to *The Micro-politics of the School*, which is about how teachers and head-teachers manage change in a shifting social and political climate.

*Divide and School* was Abraham’s fourth book. He graduated in mathematics. His first research on education made no reference to anti-school boys, but rather was about the implications of sociology of mathematics for the development of a secondary and tertiary ‘Mathematics & Society’ curriculum (Abraham and Bibby 1988;1989). He also conducted research in line with his interests in public education about environmental risk, including food safety (Millstone and Abraham 1988; Abraham, Lacey and Williams 1990). During the 1990s, he authored four books before receiving his chair, which were about political economy of food, differentiation and polarisation in secondary education (*Divide and School*), political sociology of medicine and a sociological analysis of the regulatory science of sleeping pills (Abraham 1991; 1995a; 1995b; Abraham and Sheppard 1999).<sup>5</sup>

I contend that the claim that Abraham and Ball have ‘made successful careers’ writing about anti-school boys has no validity, and that it has very limited validity regarding Lacey and Hargreaves. It follows that Delamont’s claim that Hargreaves and Abraham, and arguably Lacey and Ball by association, have made their careers by celebrating the behaviour of anti-school boys has *even less* validity. Given this, Delamont’s grander claim that such celebration by men is a significant problem in sociology of education is at least partly compromised.

My knowledge of the career development of the authors of the studies of male delinquent subcultures is much more limited, so I reserve judgement on Delamont’s claims about how they have ‘made successful careers’. However, I think it can be stated with confidence that research on such delinquents has made a significant contribution to their career development. Whether a celebration of these delinquents’ resistance to schooling or hooliganism has contributed to their career success is a different question.

## Conclusion

Delamont has attempted to characterise (mainly) British ethnographic studies, which include some reference to anti-school/delinquent boys, and which have been conducted by male sociologists, as falling into the same category. However, this similarity does not hold along the dimensions she has chosen. The consequence is a *misrepresentation of the sub-field*, not to mention the work and career development of some of the individuals involved.

A possible consequence of her misrepresentation is that the important lessons from British ethnographic sociology of education may be downplayed or even lost. Delamont gives the impression that this work amounts to little more than the discovery that secondary state schooling produces divisions within the school student population. Regarding the 'differentiation–polarisation theory', this work implies that these divisions are produced and shaped in ways that result in the accentuation of social class and gender inequalities and stereotyping. More constructively, a positive research programme building on this previous work can be sketched, but cannot be pursued from a position of value-freedom (Abraham 1994; 1996). At the very least, participants would need to regard social class and gender inequalities as important social problems. Such a programme might include the following:

- a systematic investigation of the links between the large-scale surveys of the 'political arithmetic tradition' and the ethnographic tradition
- further studies using *quantitative* and qualitative ethnographic methods to examine the nature and effects of gender differentiation between, and within, the sexes<sup>6</sup>
- an investigation of the validity of the 'differentiation–polarisation theory' with respect to race and ethnicity
- more research on the relationship between internal school organisation (including differentiation and polarisation) and government policies on schooling
- without pandering in any way to a media agenda, an investigation of broader influences and possible consequences of differentiation and polarisation, such as social exclusion, the development and/or validity of an 'underclass', the creation of 'sink' schools and the privatisation of 'failing' state schools.

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### NOTES

1. Delamont implicates ethnographic work on working-class adolescent boys, 'such as' that of

- Hargreaves (1967) and Abraham (1995a). As I explain in this paper, if Hargreaves (1967) and Abraham (1995a) fall into this category, then so must Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981).
2. Hammersley (1985) first coined the term 'differentiation–polarisation theory' to describe the core of the research programme developed by Lacey (1966, 1970), Hargreaves (1967) and Ball (1981). Although none of Ball, Hargreaves or Lacey referred to their work in this way, I have followed Hammersley's terminology for purposes of brevity and because I think he is right in identifying the processes of differentiation and polarisation as fundamental themes in their work.
  3. A gender effect is also a possible explanation, but this has not been supported by Ball (1981) or Abraham (1995a), whose samples also included girls.
  4. By the time *The Socialization of Teachers* was actually published, Lacey had just received his chair.
  5. Abraham and Sheppard (1999) was already in press when Abraham received his chair.
  6. In a critical review of *Divide and School*, Gewirtz (1996) argues that the book attempted too much by researching class and gender differentiation and polarisation. While not entirely convinced by this argument, it has some force. There is certainly scope for a study solely focused on the application of the differentiation–polarisation theory to gender.

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