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## **The Chameleonisation of Masculinity: Jimmy's Multiple Performances of a Working-Class Self**

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# The Chameleoning of Masculinity: Jimmy's Multiple Performances of a Working-Class Self

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## Abstract

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In this paper, drawing on ethnographic observations and using the case study of one working-class young man called Jimmy, I explore how multiple masculinities are displayed through a process of chameleoning. I show that in a variety of settings, within and beyond the school and through different social interactions, Jimmy navigates between numerous conflicts in order to try and achieve both academically, with aspirations of processing into higher education and also as a successful athlete. These processes are simultaneously met with demands to achieve a socially valued form of masculinity that has been shaped by the former industrial heritage of the region. This paper argues that young working-class men are not locked into displaying just one performance of masculinity, but have the agency to switch between performances and to adopt multiple identities. However, this process which I term chameleoning, is fraught with difficulties. This process illustrates how we must begin to think about young men having the ability to display multiple masculinities at various times, and are therefore not the bearer of one all-encompassing masculinity that is always, and everywhere, the same.

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**Keywords:** young masculinity, social class, heritage, performance, place

# La Camaleonización de la Masculinidad: Identidad Múltiple de Clase Obrera de Jimmy

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## Resumen

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En este trabajo, a partir de observaciones etnográficas y con el estudio de caso de un joven de una clase obrera llamado Jimmy, exploro cómo se muestran las masculinidades múltiples a través de un proceso de camaleonización. Muestro que en una variedad de entornos, dentro y fuera de la escuela ya través de diferentes interacciones sociales, Jimmy navega entre numerosos conflictos con el fin de tratar de lograr el éxito académico, acceder a la educación superior y también convertirse en un atleta exitoso. Estos procesos se cumplen simultáneamente con las exigencias de lograr una forma socialmente valiosa de masculinidad formada en el marco de un contexto industrial. Este artículo sostiene que los hombres jóvenes de clase trabajadora no solo están encasillados a mostrar una forma masculinidad, sino que también tienen la capacidad de cambiar de formas y adoptar múltiples identidades. Sin embargo, este proceso está plagado de dificultades que se observa cuando tenemos que empezar a pensar en los hombres jóvenes que tienen la capacidad de mostrar múltiples masculinidades en varias ocasiones. Por tanto no somos el portador de un solo modelo de masculinidad global que se reproduce siempre y en todas partes de la misma forma.

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**Palabras clave:** masculinidad joven, clase social, herencia, forma, lugar

This paper draws on research into young masculine identities and specifically seeks to develop the sociological literature on the lives of working-class young men in de-industrialised communities and the difficulties they face when trying to achieve successful transitions to adulthood. In former industrial spaces acceptable forms of working-class masculinities in particular are still often displayed through acts of physicality and male camaraderie, through contact sports, ‘banter’, sexual storytelling, the ability to drink large amounts of alcohol, expressing heterosexual desires and homophobic language and by studying certain educational subjects (Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Martino, 1999; McDowell, 2003; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Kenway et al. 2006; Ingram 2009; Ward 2014a, 2014b). However, other recent studies conducted with young men both inside and outside school have illustrated that young men’s identities can be quite fluid and complex, and that there are possibilities for constructing alternative masculinities which are not necessarily subordinated or oppressed (McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Roberts, 2013). In contemporary society as some authors have documented, men might actually be developing softer or more ‘inclusive masculinities’ (Anderson 2009, Roberts 2014), demonstrating a real shift in attitudes and practices among men. However, as Heward (1996, p. 41) has argued, a difficult question that arises when looking at changing masculinity is ‘the extent to which individuals are constructed by their structural contexts and how far they can build alternative identities despite their stigma’.

In this paper, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with young men (aged 16-18) in a de-industrial community in South Wales (U.K), I build upon the existing work with young working-class men in de-industrial communities in the U.K, Australia and the US (Nayak 2003; Kenway et al. 2006; Morris, 2012). Through a detailed case study of one young man called Jimmy, and his transitions through post-compulsory education, I explore how the challenges of working hard academically and aiming to be a successful athlete, are simultaneously met with other pressures to achieve a socially valued form of masculinity through engaging in risky leisure pleasures, such as drinking large amounts of alcohol. I use Jimmy’s case study to explore the difficulties facing working-class young men who try to be successful on many different fronts and how the continuation within

education in a de-industrial community, can create alienation from one's peers as one transitions towards adulthood.

In examining these performances of working-class masculinity, I draw upon contemporary gender theories of hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), and the work of Goffman (1959, 1974, 1976) on the performance of self and the formation of social identity and other work influenced by the symbolic interactions tradition (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). I argue that Goffman's often overlooked dramaturgical framework (see Jackson & Scott, 2010; Beasley, 2012) has important implications for analysing performances of gender and specifically young masculinities. When applied to masculinities (and femininities) this framework highlights how gender comes into being through socially constructed performances which are understood (consciously and unconsciously) as publicly acceptable in a given situation, setting or community, not as innate biological accomplishments or discursive practices.

This paper contributes to the sociology of masculinities literature by using one case study to illustrate how the performances of young masculinities in de-industrialised communities are far from straightforward practices, being influenced by social interaction and the history of industry and place. I introduce the term 'chameleoning' to capture these complex processes and I suggest that this metaphor is a useful step forward for the field of study as it enables the multifaceted processes young men have to navigate whilst growing into manhood to be illustrated. I argue that this process can help how we begin to think about young men having the ability to display multiple masculinities at different times, and not as the bearer of one all-encompassing masculinity that is always, and everywhere, the same.

### **Code-shifting and multiple performances of a masculine self**

In Goffman's most renowned work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, ([1956] 1959), he lays out a dramaturgical framework to represent the conduct of an individual's interactions using the stage metaphors of front (made up of setting, appearance and manner) and back regions to illustrate how the self is a social product of performances that individuals or 'teams'

of individuals (Grazian, 2007; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Hughey, 2011) display in different situations.

The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature and to die; it is a dramatic effect, arising diffusely from a scene that is presented and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited. (Goffman, 1959, p. 245)

This can perhaps best be summarised by saying that there are many aspects to one's self which can be altered in different situations. Nonetheless, some of these aspects of self are more prominent in some situations than in others and actors must work hard not to reveal certain characteristics in front of the wrong audience.

Influenced by Goffman, Elijah Anderson (1999) in his ethnographic study of an inner-city neighbourhood in the US, where most of the residents were poor African Americans, found that younger members of the community characterised themselves and each other as coming from either 'decent' or 'street' families. Those from 'decent' families (those more likely to be financially stable) were socialised to accept the values of hard work, to have respect for authority, a deep religious faith and a belief in education as a way for self-improvement. Those younger people from 'street' families were more likely to lead lives less secure than their 'decent' street counterparts, with drug and alcohol problems, and where violence was a part of everyday life. However, Anderson also found that some young people behaved in different ways according to the situation they found themselves in. Anderson (1999, p. 98) therefore suggests that 'the child may learn to code-shift, presenting himself one way at home and another with his peers'. He found that 'decent' young people saw the ability to code-switch, to play by the code of the 'street' with the 'street' elements and by the code of 'decency' when in other situations, as crucial to their survival in a violent inner-city neighbourhood. Those most associated with the 'street' see little value in gaining middle-class knowledge. How far the young people went to become 'street' depended on their socialisation at home, their own opportunities and their own decision-making processes and life chances.

Although not directly drawing on the symbolic interactionist tradition, Reay (2002) illustrates many of the same processes as Anderson (1999) in her study of Shaun, a young man from an inner-city social housing estate in London. The case study explores how Shaun had simultaneously to balance his academic school side with also trying to maintain a local version of hegemonic masculinity based on violence (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which, as in Anderson's study, is needed for young men to survive in the socially deprived community he inhabits. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the specific performance of gender in any given setting that 'legitimises the global subordination of women to men' (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832) and the system of power relations reflecting differences among men. While this process defines masculinity as plural, masculinities should not be seen as psychological typologies, but displays of practice (Beasley, 2012) or 'manhood acts' (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009) that are more revered and acceptable than others in different situations and places.

However, Connell (2001, p. 8) has further suggested that there are 'fixing mechanisms that limit the fluidity of identities', with class, as Reay (2002) indicates, being one such mechanism that can limit the effectiveness of young men to display or perform masculinity in different ways that are deemed acceptable in all situations. A second 'fixing mechanism' is the importance of place, as individual choices are geographically and historically specific and differentiated sets of opportunities develop (see also McDowell, 2003; Nayak, 2006). For young working-class men in particular, these opportunities were often connected to certain forms of heavy industrial labour. However, as de-industrialisation has occurred across the global metropole since the 1970s, the performance of a masculine self which accompanies the new industries that have replaced them, require different values, skills and attributes. I now turn to outline how these changing industrial practices provide the context for this study, before moving on to discuss the concept of chameleonisation and then use Jimmy's story to illustrate some of these processes.

### **Context and methods**

The research site, Cwm Dyffryn<sup>1</sup>, was in an area of Wales that was once a major contributor to the British coal industry (Williams, 1985) and one of the largest industrial centres in the country. A strong division of labour characterised these communities, where distance from anything seen as ‘feminine’ was essential for a strong masculine identity, which would enable the communities to survive (Walkerdine, 2010). These roles were often seen as heroic with punishing physical labour that involved different degrees of manual skill and bodily toughness, creating a stoic form of masculinity. Male camaraderie was established through physicality and close working conditions underground and maintained through jokes, storytelling, sexist language and banter. This camaraderie was further supported through social institutions such as miners’ institutes, chapels, pubs, working men’s clubs and sports.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the region underwent rapid de-industrialisation due to the economic restructuring policies of the UK government and this acute collapse coupled with the decline of the manufacturing industry, led to a drastic increase in economic inactivity. These industrial losses were accompanied by the erosion of traditional apprenticeships and youth training schemes, which would have supported these industries and provided a platform into adulthood and other forms of manual employment. The area is now characterised by a ‘triangle of poverty’ (Adamson, 2008, p. 21) with low levels of educational attainment and high levels of unemployment, health inequalities and poor housing across the region. Young people from the area have also become subject to social stigmatisation as a result of these social inequalities (Ward, 2014c).

Given this background, a two and a half year Economic and Social Research Council funded ethnographic study was conducted, to explore the diversity of a group of white, working-class, young men living within this former industrial region. The overall aim was to investigate how masculinities were formed, articulated and negotiated by one school year group at the end of their compulsory schooling and then to follow them through their post-16 educational pathways. After completing Year 11, a sample of 38 young men were tracked. Furthermore this research was also undertaken across multiple other arenas of their lives. This was carried out

to further highlight the numerous ways that these young men performed their masculinities to different audiences and in different contexts. The research area was personally known to me, so as a result I was able to form close relationships with many of my respondents through a shared biographical history. The fieldwork included participant observation supported by extensive fieldnotes, focus group interviews, ethnographic conversations, and more formally recorded one on one interviews with a number of these young men. The interviews were fully transcribed and along with the detailed fieldnotes, coded using a CAQDAS package for key themes.

Several key themes emerged; First, the multiple, nuanced ways young men's lives were lived in a specific de-industrialised place emphasised that there was a degree of code-shifting occurring, where respondents adjusted and altered their performances of masculinity with different audiences. Second, different academic and vocational educational pathways framed the definition of the situation for these young men, learning what roles were expected of them when studying a certain subject or course and what was also expected of people around them, ultimately resulting in classed and gendered implications that impact on their future life chances. Third, outside their education institutions, the legacy of the region's industrial past and the working-class cultural milieu of the locale, were re-embodied and re-traditionalised in different ways across other local sites and spaces (See [Ward 2014a](#), [2014b](#), [2014c](#); [Ward, 2015](#)).

I drew the data together based on friendship ties that became apparent as the fieldwork progressed (see [Ward, 2015](#) for these narratives) but there were also individual young men, who adopted multiple presentations of self and tried to switch between friendship groups. Jimmy was one young man who tried to do this. As Goffman (1974, p. 573) reminds us, the 'self, then, is not an entity half-concealed behind events, but a changeable formula for managing oneself during them': so despite the social-economic barriers Jimmy faced as I will show in this paper, this young man was still involved in a constant practice of code-shifting which results in a form of what I term 'chameleonisation' occurring.

### **The Chameleoning of Masculinity**

As I have shown the young masculinities literature over the past few decades has illustrated how masculinity is performed in different ways and in different settings. However, there is little in the literature on how individual young working-class men alternate between masculinity identities (see [Reay, 2002](#) for a notable exception) or how the pressures to conform to specific ideals of manhood, often termed hegemonic, are juggled with other demands to perform alternative displays of masculinity which are defined by place ([Morris, 2012](#)). I propose that young men are capable of acting out different performances across multiple fronts, but that the success of this depends on a complex set of classed, racial and territorial processes. I suggest one of ways of capturing and understanding how different front displays of masculinity are switched between, can be defined by a process of chameleoning. We find that chameleons are a distinctive and specialised species of lizard that are famed for their ability to change skin colour<sup>2</sup>. Although not all species of chameleon can actually change their skin tone, and there is a base colour for all, most can camouflage themselves to fit in with almost any habitat ([Le Berre, 2009](#)). The metaphor is therefore useful for trying to understand and make sense of how multiple performances of self are attempted in different situations. As I will go on to show, Jimmy switches between academic and athletic performances in order to create successful future options for himself and to adapt to different situations, but this act of chameleoning is hindered by what are deemed acceptable forms of masculinity fostered by the locale and the working-class industrial heritage of the region. Ultimately his defence against being ostracised from his community and peers by indulging in risky leisure practices, impacts on the success of his academic and athletic life and his future is uncertain. The chameleoning of masculinity thesis, builds on Connell's work by showing how masculinity is 'done' in a micro context through interaction, but also how these pressures are linked to global economic changes and how critical studies of men and masculinities can understand how young marginalised men deal with such social change ([Beasley, 2012](#)).

### **Being Jimmy**

I was first introduced to me to Jimmy by his teachers during the initial phase of research at Cwm Dyffryn High School (Spring 2008). He was in the top set for most of his subjects (all school subjects were streamed into ability groups) and a promising athlete competing at both cross-country and track events (800 and 1500 metres). The local newspaper had written about him and tipped him to appear for the Welsh Commonwealth team in the near future. He was one of the oldest in his year group and lived with his parents and younger brother in a small terraced house a short distance from the school on the edges of the town. Jimmy's father was a train driver and his mother was a ticket sales assistant at a nearby railway station. Both were born in the town and had left school at a young age, neither having been to university. Jimmy was short at around 5ft 7in, slim, with blonde streaks in his stylish quiffed-up hair, which, coupled with his good looks, meant he bore a resemblance to the America teen actor Zac Effron<sup>3</sup>. This resemblance was a source of humour between him and his best friends Bakers, Frankie and Ian, (Ward, 2015) but it was something that he said did not bother him too much, as it tended to bring him attention from girls in the town. Jimmy was polite, softly spoken, well-mannered and seemed popular with teachers and the majority of his peers. His main interest outside school was his running, which connected him to his father, with whom he went training with on occasions and who had also been a successful long distance runner in his youth. As the study progressed Jimmy, supported by his father, began to run for different clubs and took part in competitions both at regional and national level.

His other interests included music and, along with learning to play the guitar, he told me that he liked a wide range of music spanning different decades and this was a key part to his identity. Outside school he usually dressed in T-shirts with the names and logos of different rock bands on them and often went to watch local bands play in the pubs around the town. During the summer holidays between Year 12 and 13 along with some friends he had also been to the *Sonisphere* heavy metal music festival<sup>4</sup>. He still wore the entrance wristband months after the event, which he said was to remind him how good it had been. When I asked him about his favourite bands he told me:

Well I like *Metallica*, *Jimmy Hendrix*, *Black Sabbath*, *Led Zeppelin*, ah *The Beatles* they got to be in there, *ACDC*...ah there's too much choice man, *Avenged Sevenfold*, also don't mind a bit of *Bullet*...*Joe Bonamassa*.

[*Individual Interview*]

During the early stages of the study Jimmy was constantly changing girlfriends and had a reputation amongst his friends as being a bit promiscuous or, as they termed it, a 'player'. This was something Jimmy always denied, stressing that he was only really looking for 'the one' and that it was girls who tended to mess him about, not the other way around. Towards the end of his time in school, things became more serious with one girl, Rhiannon, and as he began to spend more time with her, he distanced himself from his male friends and saw less of them (for a similar discussion of the retreat from friendship groups, see [Frosh et al., 2002](#)). I now address these different areas of his life in more detail, drawing out the tensions that came with performing multiple masculinities across separate fronts.

### **The Academic Achiever**

Jimmy had done well in his GCSEs, achieving 10 A\*–C grades, and returned to school in September 2008 to study Biology, Chemistry and Physical Education (PE) for AS and subsequently A level. His best friends left at the end of Year 12 ([Ward, 2015](#)) he began to find school a difficult place to be, especially as many of his other friends with whom he had played in different rugby union and football teams, were not taking the same subjects as him.

Jimmy: It's not as good as the old days when you're in Year 9 or 10 like.

MW: Why do you feel like that then?

Jimmy: Because like Frankie and Bakers and that aren't here cos they were the ones I used to bother [hang out] with the most...

MW: Right.

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Jimmy: And like when Hughesy, Birdy all that come in...when they come in it's fine like...but the problem is they hardly come in to school.

*[Individual Interview]*

Jimmy was expected by the school to do well and he wanted to go to university to study sports science, with the eventual aim of becoming a professional athlete or a PE teacher. However, without his close friends in school and with many of his other former sports team mates in different classes to his own A level ones, Year 13 became a struggle. As these field notes illustrate, he found himself increasingly alienated and alone during his A level classes.

The chemistry lesson only had a small number of students present. The class was made up of Sam, Ieuan, Leon, Nixon, Sin, and Jimmy, whilst Abby and Carys joined the class from another school in the area as part of the combined post-16 educational programme. Jimmy was sitting on a work bench on his own in the middle of the classroom, whilst the others were clustered around the front bench. I sat next to Jimmy and we chatted whilst the homework was passed around by the teacher. He suggested that life had got a bit better for him since he last saw me, but still didn't feel like he was free enough, and wanted to leave school as he felt like he was in limbo.

*[Fieldnotes]*

We can see from these field notes that Jimmy was sitting alone, often his practice in his A level science lessons. As Jimmy got older and his former certainties had been dislodged, he had fallen out of place. His friends had moved on, but there was tension between him and those who remained around him. As his final year in the Sixth Form progressed, he later told me that he felt rather irritated by some of the others in his class. When I asked him more about this he told me he found the attitude of his class mates towards him annoying.

MW: You were telling me about science, didn't you say that you don't feel comfortable in there sometimes?

Jimmy: It's just that there's an attitude from um, like Ieuan and that, they are looking down on me type of thing, like when I get a question wrong or something a snide comment comes out and they kind of go [sighs loudly] and they put their heads down [on the desks]. Come on we're 18 now...also it's trial and error, you're not going to get anywhere if you don't try...

MW: Do you feel that if you shout something out and you're wrong, you think some people may have a dig or a go at you?

Jimmy: Um I know they'll dig at me...but it still won't stop me. Half the time I know some of the stuff the teacher's on about so it don't bother me.

MW: So is that the same in PE then?

Jimmy: Ah no it's tidy there like, good boys I got in my class, cos I think they are into sport as well. You know you get that like sort of sport personality if you get what I mean, extrovert whereas the non-athletic types are a bit um...a bit ahh...all for themselves I find. You got to do what they want to do type of thing; like the other day when I was in the library I was just minding my own business and I heard Alan say that Sam called me inferior because I'm doing lesser subjects than him sort of thing!

*[Individual Interview]*

Despite the area's industrial decline, to be a 'proper' boy or man from the South Wales Valleys, an archetype of masculinity associated with this older world of industrial labour and 'masculine' ideas of male embodiment are still the default reference points. However, Jimmy felt that in his science class his classmates belittled him when he tried to answer questions asked by the teacher and he was also mocked by Sam for his choice to study PE, which, as a subject that uses the body, could be seen as a direct link to a manual world of labour. Of course this is the very area where he excelled and the sporting sphere, where he felt comfortable, was a space which most of his classmates avoided and distanced themselves from. It was also clear how insightful Jimmy was in recognising the different forms of masculinity that were on display where he discussed with me the differences between the 'sports personality', e.g. local hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell

& Messerschmidt, 2005), and those who he referred to as ‘all for themselves’, e.g. the individualistic, academic achieving, middle-class aspiring geek. Jimmy then proceeded to tell me how he felt his subject choices were further criticised by some of his peers.

MW: Do you think there’s a type of snobbery then?

Jimmy: Yeah... definitely.

MW: So the subjects you do in school, other people either look up or look down on you maybe?

Jimmy: Yeah apart from in PE like, it’s a good subject...and there’s more to PE than those boys think as well! Cos I still get comments off um saying that PE isn’t a subject mun, you know...

MW: (laughs) Who said that then?

Jimmy: Ha well them again really, Ieuan, Sam and them in Biology.

MW: Even though you do a lot of Biology as part of PE don’t you?

Jimmy: Yeah and history of sport...there’s a lot, I can’t wait to get out of here!

[*Individual Interview*]

Jimmy’s A level science classmates are illustrating a form of what Redman and Mac an Ghaill (1997, p. 169) suggest is ‘muscular intellectualness’ (See also Edley & Wetherell, 1997). This front performance helped articulate a form of masculinity that differed to what traditionally defined being a ‘proper’ man in their community and normally it was not equal to the power held by the more sporty boys (see also Mac an Ghaill, 1994 for a similar process), however for Jimmy trying to cross between these two spheres, was not easy and he felt he was judged and without his best friends in his class he was open to ridicule and felt out of place. He did not fully achieve the chameleonisation process and couldn’t quite fit in.

Jimmy continued to work hard with the hope of being the first one in his family to go to university. However, when discussing his future and university options, it became clear that Jimmy was adamant that he wanted

to attend somewhere local, despite initial ideas about applying to universities further away from Cwm Dyffryn.

MW: So um when you decide to leave school you're going to go to uni?

Jimmy: Yeah.

MW: And you're going to go to UWIC [University of Wales Institute Cardiff<sup>5</sup>]?

Jimmy: Hopefully yeah.

MW : And what other choices have you...

Jimmy: Um...Glamorgan<sup>6</sup> is my um (click fingers) insurance is it?? And I turned down Swansea.

MW: Ok...and where else did you apply?

Jimmy: Um well just those three.

MW: Ahh right...cos you had six choices didn't you?

Jimmy: Five I could choose yeah.

MW: Five right...

Jimmy: Um cos I wanted to go to America like but...

MW: Right.

Jimmy: But I didn't bother in the end.

MW: Maybe you could...

Jimmy: ....didn't bother applying or nothing like...

MW: Because you mentioned Bath to me a while back didn't you?

Jimmy: Yeah I was thinking of Bath Uni...but it don't entertain me. UWIC's just as good as...it's on your doorstep init...Welsh people...and this is my home like, do you know what I mean?

MW: Yeah, do you feel then that they would be a bit different up in Bath then?

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Jimmy: (Laughs) Um well you know what it's like when you go to a different country, also different sense of humour...like with UWIC or Glamorgan, I just do my work, come home chill out around here...

[*Individual Interview*]

Jimmy seemed to be trying to reconcile his aspirations to go to university with his desire to stay at home in a place where he felt comfortable (see Lucey et al., 2003 for a discussion about working-class girls who also feel this pressure). As illustrated above, Jimmy struggled with the environment of the A level science classroom and his classmates' attitudes towards him. From his experiences it is clear that he does not fit in with the others, who are themselves marginalised in the community for being academic achievers, but what it further showed is how his potential is hindered by his experience of studying without a close friendship group for support. Jimmy felt lonely battling against his classmates, whilst trying to succeed in the subject in order to progress into higher education. Although social class is not overtly mentioned here (nation in fact replaces it) what Jimmy does refer to in his decision making is that he would rather stay local as a 'different sense of humour' would exist elsewhere and he feels he wouldn't fit in. A 'sense of humour' could be read in terms of class, as the studying environment in Bath would be vastly different to that of the socio-economic conditions he is under in Cwm Dyffryn. His choices represent his desire to study with people he is familiar with and also show that his chameleonisation is perhaps limited to the local level and he cannot take this into other environments.

### **The Party Boy**

Whilst trying to achieve academically Jimmy was also caught in the position of trying to display a localised version of acceptable masculinity. As Year 13 wore on he went out at weekends and during the week drinking and partying at night. He also bought a car from *Ebay* and took to driving around the town at high speed with Frankie and Bakers. However, when he went out at night during the week, this affected his academic performance in class. As the extracts from my field notes below show, trying to burn the

candle at both ends, or to perform a more macho masculinity, alongside a more studious position in the classroom, was not always possible.

When I walked into the registration classroom I joined a group of boys sitting at the back. Jimmy, Brad, Bunk, Tomo and Birdy were chatting about a party they had been to in the town's rugby union club the previous night. Jimmy was looking quite hung-over with a white face and dark bags under his eyes and was explaining to the others who had also gone out the night before, how bad he was feeling.

Biology was the first lesson of the day and the class contained Jimmy, Ieuan, Leon, Nixon and two girls, Abby and Carys. The lesson was based on the human life cycle and sexual reproduction. From the beginning and throughout the lesson Jimmy struggled. This seemed due to his hangover and not having done the notes he'd needed to do in order to catch up, as he'd missed the previous lesson. After around 50 minutes into the lesson the teacher suggested that Jimmy was half an hour behind everyone else which caused the others in the class to laugh. It appeared that Jimmy's 'party boy' image and his attempt to be popular with everyone, certainly wasn't helping today. His hangover seemed to be affecting his work and he had to ask the teacher and the others for help. Whilst they were waiting for Jimmy to finish off copying the diagram from the board, Leon showed the teacher his revision notes and the teacher marked the electronic register.

At 10.00am the teacher stopped the lesson for a 10-minute break and the majority of the class headed to the shop just outside the school gate. Jimmy followed a few minutes later after finishing the diagram. When he arrived at the shop, he bought a can of coke and before drinking complained that he felt really ill and stated how hung-over he was. On the way back to class Jimmy and Leon started discussing some chords from a song they had both been trying to play on their guitars, but when they returned to the classroom Leon went back to his place on the front bench and the conversation was cut short. The teacher resumed the lesson and continued to go through other parts of the reproductive process with diagrams on the board and the students making notes and answering questions. Towards the end of the lesson with Jimmy still showing signs of struggling due to his hangover, Carys mentioned that this would be worthy of a Facebook status

update which made the others laugh and she criticises him for always drinking.

[*Fieldnotes*].

As these fieldnotes show, this ‘party boy’ image not only had an effect on his schoolwork, but also alienated him from his A level class mates. This is not to say that his classmates did not go out at night, but they tended to go out on weekends or during the holidays when it would not impact on their school work. These practices acted to police and regulate their behaviour, something which Jimmy could not do if he was to maintain his standing with his wider peer group, and an acceptable form of masculinity with them: so he began to fall behind in his academic work. Drinking alcohol was a way to maintain an acceptable symbol of manliness and a connection to the heritage of the locale from which he was in danger of becoming disconnected from by his investment in academic labour—and the hangover he was suffering was a symptom of this pull. His drinking also began to have an impact on his running and performance as an athlete.

### **The Athlete**

Jimmy took his running seriously. After spending so much time with him and discussing and reading about his continual progress in the local newspaper, I was interested in watching him race for myself. When a trial for the Welsh schools team was held at a nearby athletics track towards the end of Year 13 I went along to support him.

I parked my car just behind the running track and as I walked into the stadium, asked the people at the table by the entrance gate what time Jimmy was due to start. As the events were running ahead of schedule, the race was to begin shortly, so I quickly found a seat at the back of the spectator stand to watch. As I sat looking over the track to where the ten or so runners were lining up for the 3,000 meters, I caught sight of Jimmy. He was wearing a black and yellow vest with the number 22 pinned to the front and standing in the middle of the athletes behind the starting line. When the gun sounded he took off at speed and from the beginning of the race he was out in front with

another competitor and left the rest of the field far behind. Coming into the final lap he was still leading and holding the other runner off, but as the contest neared its climax, the other athlete was too strong and made a surge for the line and took first place. Sitting high up in the stand and looking down on Jimmy, I couldn't help but feel more than a little disappointed for him. He had told me in the morning that this was his last chance to get into the Welsh schools team. I left the stand and walked to meet Jimmy at the end of the track. Jimmy's father was there and he seemed slightly frustrated at Jimmy's 2<sup>nd</sup> place. After briefly chatting to Jimmy I left him to it as the atmosphere between Jimmy and his father seemed rather tense.

[*Fieldnotes*].

During an individual interview we talked about the pressures he felt to go out and socialise and to run. However, as can be seen in the race described above, to do both was not always successful.

Jimmy: Doing pretty well in my running like you know running for Wales and stuff but umm...in the past four months I'd say there has been a lot of socialising going on outside of it like...drinking and all that...but I got to get myself back on track been a week now. I know it sounds like I'm an alcoholic speaking but...but you got to start somewhere.

MW: So you know when you're running and that, how many days do you run?

Jimmy: Six days a week I reckon.

MW: And what or how much are you running?

Jimmy: About 10 miles or well about 8 miles a day on an average day, don't want to do too much too soon.

MW: So you want to increase distance or speed or?

Jimmy: Um both really got to push yourself past your limits.

MW: Um when you're running like cross-country distances, what's your distance?

Jimmy: Four mile normal...but when I reach twenty it'll be um six miles.

MW: OK...and how fast are you doing it?

Jimmy: Um for cross country it don't really matter about time like...just position, but um when track season comes now, time will matter

MW: And you do six minutes on the track is it?

Jimmy: 800, 1500 and 3,000 metres. Yeah.

MW: So when you do the running though, do you think it's a good way of coping with everything else that's going on?

Jimmy: Um because I've been doing it for so long I don't really think about it like that, but thinking on it or reflecting on it does help. Just switch off, get into a rhythm and don't think about anything else.

*[Individual Interview]*

While the running was a form of escape for Jimmy and he said that when he was doing it he could stop thinking about other things, drinking alcohol was again having an impact on his performance, this time his athletic ability. He talked with knowledge about his sport and seemed to know what was expected of him as an athlete; however, drinking with his friends impacted on how good a sportsman he could be. Also, as Connell (1990, p. 86) notes in the life history interview with the water sports iron man Steve Donahue, being successful as an athlete should have prevented 'him from doing exactly what his peer group defines as thoroughly masculine behaviour: going wild, showing off, drink driving, getting into fights', but the temptation to participate in these activities was strong. This is also made clear below when I asked him what his father thought about his drinking:

Jimmy: Um he hasn't said much but he said it won't help your running, let's put it that way!

MW: Do you find though that it does mess it up a bit?

Jimmy: Ahhh yeah definitely you just feel tired all the time, can't be bothered to do anything.

MW: Must be difficult like when the boys are drinking?

Jimmy: Yeah yes it is, but um touch wood I won't do it for a long time now.

MW: I think if you balance it though, it should be alright?

Jimmy: Humm, yeah just like you know not every weekend like, it's going to be hard let's put it that way! Well I want to get in good shape for the summer now...so if I start now, it'll get easier.

MW: It must be hard when all the boys are going out...

Jimmy: Yeah I'll have to start going out and not drinking like which is going to be hard like.

*[Individual Interview]*

Jimmy's constant chameleonising took a huge amount of effort to maintain, and the contradictions in his multiple performances of masculinity were clear. As I have shown through this narrative, Jimmy experienced various obstacles in performing his masculinity across the different educational and leisure settings. As an academic achiever, by investing in 'mental labour' (Willis, 1977) Jimmy would be perceived by some in the community to be in opposition to what constitutes a dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity. But by investing in sports and also by going out drinking and partying, he could maintain an acceptable form of masculinity to offset this and chameleonise between these two worlds. However, a major consequence of this was that Jimmy could not truly fulfil his academic goals and he suffered within the more studious environment and had conflict with his classmates there.

As I have shown throughout this paper, Jimmy's multiple performances were not fixed dualities, but were fluid and changed in specific spaces and in different interactions. Jimmy had the ability to chameleonise, to be able to present himself in different ways and to shift the cultural and local ideology of what it means to be a man in diverse situations, to varying degrees of success. Nonetheless, most of Jimmy's anxiety was attached to the hyper performance of his heterosexual masculinity. The ability to chameleonise into the dominant masculine performances produced the most difficulties and was accompanied by a high level of stress and uncertainty,

ultimately impacting on the more studious performances and potential future life chances.

### **Conclusion**

In August 2010 after completing his final exams Jimmy received an A in PE and two C's in his sciences. Despite getting the grades, he rejected his first choice university, instead opting to go to a university which was closer to Cwm Dyffryn. His rationale for this, he told me, was that this way he could keep his part-time job at *Domino's Pizza*, be close to his girlfriend Rhiannon and remain living at home. His running had petered out and although he planned to start again when he went to university the following month, I felt that this would be difficult with the new pressures he would face as an undergraduate with an even busier social calendar.

Jimmy's story highlights the challenges and conflicts that accompany the multiple performances of masculinity adopted by one working-class man in a de-industrial community. I have shown how those who adopt different pathways to the traditions of the locale, like Jimmy, face demands to adopt multiple subjective positions to decrease the risk of becoming alienated. His performances of masculinity alter or, as I have termed it, he chameleonises his masculinity across different spheres, within and outside the school gates. It is not only the dominant versions of masculinity that Jimmy feels he has to adopt to become credible which are disturbing about his story. What is also disconcerting is that he cannot fully achieve his goals and future desires, due to his disadvantaged social class position and the pull of the locale. Nonetheless, there are glimmers of hope in his story, as he had a very close relationship with some other young men and, despite acts of macho bravado, this is a small platform for discussing many of the issues he found troubling in his life. In detailing some of these issues and problems, this case study contributes to the literature on young masculinities by outlining how we must begin to think about young men having the ability to display multiple masculinities at various times, and are therefore not the bearer of one all-encompassing masculinity that is always, and everywhere, the same. This could help educators and others working with young men, to combat some of the more negative or damaging aspects of masculinity and recognise how working-class young men in particular

are under pressure to adopt multiple identities in order to appear successful across different fronts and still fit in to their home communities.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All names used in this paper are pseudonyms, the town name which translates from Welsh to English as 'Valley Valley'

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Chameleon> and <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2013/12/10/chameleons-convey-different-info-with-different-body-parts/>

<sup>3</sup> Zach Efron is an American actor who started in the Disney franchise High School Musical. (See <http://www.zefron.com/>).

<sup>4</sup> *Sonisphere* is a large heavy metal festival which tours Europe during the summer months. (See <http://uk.sonispherefestivals.com>).

<sup>5</sup> Now re-named as Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK.

<sup>6</sup> Now re-named as University of South Wales, UK

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