

**0041**

## **Enter the New Folk Devil: Why Muslim boys and young men in England?**

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### **Background**

Muslim boys, especially those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, have in recent years come to occupy the status of a folk devil (Alexander 2000, Archer 2003) or what Cohen (2002) refers to as 'visible reminders of what we should not be'. At one time regarded as passive, hard working and law-abiding, they have in recent years been recast in the public imagination as volatile, aggressive, hotheads who are either 'at risk' of being brainwashed into terrorism or involvement in gangs, drugs or other such criminal activities. While statistics on achievement show them to be among the biggest 'losers' in the achievement game, Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys have not been the focus of concerns about underachievement in the same way that boys in general have. Instead, discourses of self-segregation (Cantle 2001) and global (in)security posed by the 'war on terror' position them simultaneously as the victims of cultural and religious practices and as a threat to the social order. Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys have been further marginalised by the intense focus on white working class boys since 2008 (see Gillborn 2009) which has contributed to an ethnicisation of class (Bottero 2009).

### **Research Questions**

This paper sets to develop an analytical framework for understanding the current location of Muslim boys as a social policy problem. In doing so, the paper will engage with theoretical debates that go beyond education, to explore, for example, the significance of state led campaigns such as the 'War on Terror' in the manufacture of consent for the state's political legitimacy at a time of intense economic crisis. A central concern of the paper will be to establish and analyse why particular Muslim communities and Muslim boys and young men in particular, have come to be the targets of punitive state measures over the last two decades.

### **Methods**

Empirically, the paper utilises data (mainly interview material) drawn from two small-scale qualitative studies in the West Midlands to highlight the range of preoccupations that shape the local lived realities of working class Muslim Asian boys. The first study was conducted in 2002 with a group of boys aged 11-19 who regularly attended a local youth group. The second study focused on secondary school aged boys (aged 12-16) accounts of their experiences of schooling.

### **Frame**

The paper will contribute to existing work on racialised working class masculinities (Archer 2003, Alexander 2001) but will also engage with more recent political debates about the role of the state in the criminalisation of marginalised and poor communities (Coleman et al 2009; Shain 2010).

### **Research findings**

Key questions addressed by the paper include:

- 1) Why have Muslims and Muslim boys and young men in particular, come to occupy the status of deviant Others over the last two decades but especially since 2001.

- 2) How can we make sense of state strategies such as Community Cohesion and recent initiatives such as Contest and Preventing Violent Extremism as part of a broader state response to 'problem' communities?
- 3) What specifically has been the role of education in this process?