

**Behavioural Problem Boys Voices on Violence and Authority: Psychology & Sociology.**

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**Abstract**

*This paper begins with a discussion of traditional masculine performances that contribute to aggressive behaviour for boys in an education suspension program (ESP). On one hand sociological researchers have proposed that aggression stems from marginalisation defined as the relationship between masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes and racial groups. On the other hand, some psychological researchers argue that aggression in adolescent males is due to biological impulses (Arnot, 1984, 89, 92). We have often heard that “men are innately angry,” “all Year 9 boys are like this,” or “anger has an evolutionary function for men.” While these biologically determined views go some way to acknowledge that it is often men who display anger in certain obvious ways, it leaves few options for response. These ideas contribute more to feelings of hopelessness than re-creative conversations.*

*The following questions shaped the interviews (narrative) with the boys’, each question is discussed in relation to both literature areas. The following questions were the basis for discussion in this paper:*

- *How does the boys anger relate to the social construction of masculinity?*
- *In what contexts does violence appear?*
- *How might violence be used to exercise domination and control?*
- *How does anger relate to a broader culture of violence?*
- *How are “meanings” of violence socially constructed and can vary in different contexts?*
- *What can we do to prevent violence?*

*The interviews with the boys were designed to probe violence and the impact of violence in their lives. The boys talked about the violence they experienced in a number of social contexts, that is, as witnesses or victims to family violence, victims or observers of peer violence, or simply as perpetrators of violent acts themselves. The boys appeared not to have defined clear boundaries between playing, harassment, and abuse.*

*The boys in the present study expressed views that appeared to be more in line with the sociological than the psychological/biological perspective. Their aggressive reactions focused on authority and accentuated dominant forms of masculinities as defined by certain behaviours. Throughout this paper, the boys’ narrative provides a context for discussing power in relation to male identity.*

***Brief overview of Research***

I had worked previously in Behaviour Support Services (Brisbane, Australia) so I was aware of the issues or obstacles that I would encounter with the boys in the program. The two main issues were keeping them on task with the activities and having open genuine discussions to answer my interview questions. I spent about one half day with the boys before data collection sessions started. This developed rapport with the boys in informal situations, after the data collection session I rewarded them with pizza. I also assisted the facilitators with other activities to develop a rapport with the boys.

Having worked in Behavioural Support Services I was not considered to be an outsider and this made the facilitators comfortable and confident in my ability to manage the students. I gained written permission from the manager (Behaviour Support Services, Brisbane) and principals of the two ESP schools to recruit the boys into the research project. I negotiated the focus of the activities with principals and facilitators and discussed the timetabling and objectives of the 3 groups of 6 week programs. Permission was obtained from the Principal and the participants' parents or guardian and the students.

### ***Method***

In the present study, qualitative and quantitative data were gathered via observations, worksheets, interviews, and closed questionnaires. The worksheets gave stimulus to discussion around masculinities; interviews provided an opportunity for gathering information about students' attitudes and beliefs. The questionnaires were collected to add to demographic information. Four factors were central to a productive analysis of the students' views of masculinity. Firstly, the aim of the larger narrative study was to collect information from the boys subjective experience of themselves and their worlds. Secondly, the analysis focused on the central role of power relationships in our society, and on masculine values. Thirdly, the gendered nature of emotion and its role in maintaining power differences for these boys. Fourthly, the influence of gendered behaviour (masculinities) on an ESP (Educational Suspension Program) and support networks for these adolescent males. This paper represents one small part of a major eight part study covering all previous factors.

### ***Participants***

Participants were three groups of male adolescents ( $N=30$ ), who had completed a 6-week alternative suspension program called ESP (Educational Suspension Program). All the students were from the North Eastern suburbs of Brisbane. The male students were Caucasian and one male was indigenous. Ages ranged from 14 to 16 years. All but four of the participants came from fragmented family constructs i.e. the fathers of two male students were in prison. Twenty-six students lived with single mother families. Three males lived with their mother and father. One male lived with his father and grandmother. The boys had been suspended or excluded from their schools due to truanting, violent or antisocial behaviour. The schools referred the boys to their education district, Behaviour Support Services in Brisbane after a particular number of warnings and behaviour contracts had already taken place within the school. Many of the boys were happy to be and stay in the program as they saw it as fun, others felt embarrassed. Suspension programs in Brisbane ranged from one to 12 weeks.

### ***Interviews***

The interview questions were open group discussions, providing the opportunity for the group to discuss amongst themselves conflicting views. The topics included, education, school, teachers, the alternative program, masculinities, support networks, and the future. Following each interview I made reductions/summaries to cover all four themes described in the methods section.

Within the qualitative narrative analysis the researcher endeavoured to include all issues that participants indicated were significant. The number of participants who spoke about a particular issue was not important, as the focus was upon representing the effect of the participants' experiences.

Analyses of interview data was organised under four broad sets (major themes or domains) covering Psychological and Sociological frameworks. Throughout the report participants are identified by fictitious names, and paragraph numbers are used to reference quotations from interview transcripts. For example, (Jacko, par. 12) indicates that data are drawn from the transcript data for Jacko at paragraph 12.

### ***Data collection***

There are two main types of data collection gathered via worksheets and taperecorded interviews collected over a period of one year. I designed my own demographic, interview questions and some worksheets were from the "Boys Talk" program (Friedman, 1996). This helped to start the boys to think about gender and develop a rapport for future interviews.

## **In What Contexts does Violence Appear?**

### ***Psychological Effects of Violence***

The psychological literature linking violence and gender is limited. No single factor predicts who is likely to engage in aggressive and violent behaviour. Many longitudinal studies have established developmental pathways that lead to antisocial and delinquent behaviour, which includes patterns of aggression and violence (Carroll, 1995; Catalano, 1996; Leone et al., 2000; McEvoy, 2000). There is evidence that environmental and intrapersonal characteristics—rather than internal characteristics of children alone—interact to dispose a person to violence. Some writers advocate profiling to identify potentially violent children through their psychological characteristics (McEvoy, 2000). A recent Federal Bureau of Investigation report (O’Toole, 2000), however, cautioned that:

trying to draw up a catalogue or ‘checklist’ of warning signs to detect a potential school shooter can be short-sighted, even dangerous. Such lists, publicised by the media, can end up unfairly labelling many non-violent students as potentially dangerous or even lethal. (p. 2)

A more effective approach may be to identify factors that contribute to antisocial behaviour, and the risk factors involved, and use this information to create strategies for prevention.

Violent children often come from violent homes where parents model violence as a means of resolving conflict and handling stress (Mendel, 2000). Even if children are not abused physically themselves, they can suffer psychological trauma through emotional abuse, including lack of bonding from witnessing battering (Lerner, 1992). Children who witness violence can display an array of emotional and behavioural disturbances, including low self-esteem, withdrawal, nightmares, self-blame and aggression against peers, family members and property (Christenson, et al., 1997). When these conditions are present, children may be “literally trained to be aggressive during episodes of conflict with family members” (Forgatch, 1998, p. 86). This presents a complication to educators aiming to arm students with alternative dispute resolution techniques to aggression. One of the boys in the study expressed the view that assertive training offered in the ESP was in conflict with his family’s values:

In Samoa ya get a whack or good floggin if ya done something bad, so I reckon it’s bullshit this assertive training shit. What a joke. ‘I feel hurt when ya do this. Could ya please do it this way?’ What a fucking joke! Ya get another whack for backchattin [group laughing and agreeing]. (Ben, par

It is clear that Ben has learnt from his home environment and peers that violence is an accepted means of communication. In reality, facilitating one form of psychological rehabilitation framework was limiting the boys' understanding of why or how they construct particular dominant masculinities.

The boys in the study were far from being successful, advantaged or powerful, and certainly did not express views that they were. Their male friendships were generally with like-minded youth groups or gangs involved in a range of recreational activities; watching/playing football, boxing or martial arts, and in illegal or anti-social activities that included drinking alcohol, using illegal substances, fighting, and displaying other aggressive behaviours.

Many of the boys saw physical violence as having few negative consequences. They talked about how they perceived other significant males and peers in their lives as having power through aggression and violence. "My stepbrother has heaps of chicks after him cause he's head of his gang. He's tough shit. Ya wouldn't want to cross him!" (Pete, par. 220); "My cousin is part Samoan and Fijian. He's a big fucker. You should see him in action. He just has to show his teeth and ya shat ya self" [group laughter] (Ben, par. 221); "That actor Vinnie, have ya seen how he fucking fights? I wouldn't mind ending up like him. He looks fucking mean, man" (Hugh, par. 222); "I don't know. My fucking old man. Ya wouldn't want to mess with him after a few beers" (Rob, par. 223). These comments seemed to suggest that males in the boys' homes and peer environments were threatening and violent.

Many of the boys thought that power and prestige were linked to class, race, size, sporting/fighting prowess, and academic achievement. Mel, for example, commented on the power brokers in his school, generally boys from Samoan or Aboriginal backgrounds: "They're all the tough big blokes who can fight" (par. 373), and continued, "... because if you mess with them then you mess with getting your head smashed by millions of them" (par. 376). Harry agreed, "Guys fear the Samoan dude and chicks like him" (par. 380).

A lack of power and status at the institutional level can result in the exercise of violence at the individual and group levels (Bender, 2001). Glen and Louie also perceived the power base of those from other cultures and expressed views that suggested that male dominance/subordination is often worked out using physical violence between ethnic or cultural groups. Louie abruptly stated while tapping his desk insistently with a

pencil, “Yeah, all the different colours hang out in gangs” (par. 389), and Glen extended this view: “There are so many wogs, if you pick one of them then you pick, like, fifty of them” (par. 385). These comments reflected the boys’ perceptions that aggression and violence were the basis for gaining and maintaining status and for establishing the pecking order. They went on to talk about size, muscles, and the importance of being successful at sports as represented by the following comments: “Ya gotta be Arnold Schwarzenegger” (Mel, par. 90) “Ya gotta be a big muscly bloke” (Ben, par. 92), or “... be good at sports” (Jesse, par. 93).

The transition from out- to in-group membership can often require a violent rite of passage that signifies power and potency and pays off in group leadership, popularity, pride, friendship, and excitement that may not be available in settings outside the group or gang (Pease, 2002). This would suggest that the boys can be both perpetrators of violent acts and also victims of them. The boys believed that traditional masculine performances (such as aggression, large physical size, and strength) represent ways of achieving success and popularity amongst peers, and more importantly, in society. The boys talked about how ethnic gangs victimised them when in small numbers: “The Samoans and the Aborigines and all the tough big blokes who can fight”; “Yeah, fuck em, they always hang out in gangs, pick one of em and ya then got the pack on ya” (Nick, Ben, pars. 110, 112). “[A Samoan] He flogged me up on New Year’s Eve just because I had like three bucks or four bucks and I wouldn’t give it to him” (Jacko, par. 115).

Comments made by the boys along the lines of those reported above reinforced views of their harassment through the inequities that characterise masculinity. Success in competitive sport and being a “tough bloke” was a clear indicator of status. The boys recognised status associated with intergroup and intragroup rivalries and the advantage of group membership. The conflict between and among groups to which they referred reflects conflicts that have often existed among racial groups (Adelman, 1996). The version of hegemonic masculinity presented by the boys is a reiteration of a long and complex series of domination of marginalised groups and alternative gender performances (Collins et. al., 2000).

While schools and communities should be aligned when dealing with aggression and violence, they can also facilitate aggressive and violent behaviour. Students who are failing academically often have low school involvement, social failure, lack of clarity and follow-through on rules and policies. Some schools that have poor and/or inconsistent administrative support make few allowances for individual or cultural differences

and, in addition, disciplinary practices in many schools are inconsistent and inequitable (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Ben related his difference to his Pacific Islander heritage and the impact this had on him in the school environment. He commented on his “clan” [Pacific Island] in relation to the school environment, believing there was no understanding of his cultural identity, nor encouragement for the boys in that group to concentrate on their academic performance. He believed the school was only interested in him (and his family peers) being successful in rugby, “Cause we’re all good at rugby, the school don’t give a shit about our clan or doing good at school work” (Ben, par 109).

### ***Violence and Learning***

Throughout my conversations with the boys, the emphasis was continually on the use of violence as a way of dealing with all scenarios in school environments. This would suggest that chronic exposure to violence must adversely affect the student’s ability to learn. Such views have been expressed by others (e.g., Gullone, 2000; Hearn, 1998; Leone, 2000). Pete commented on how he feels about learning when he is angry: “What is the point? I can’t do the shit [school work] so why the fuck bother? If I’m going to cop shit at school, well, I’ll dish it back” (par. 113). Calvin similarly accentuates the cycle of frustration with learning and acting out violently, “They [teachers, school] say they want to help, but ya just keep getting in trouble so why bother? I just want to flog em if I cop any more shit” (par. 114).

Learning itself has been proposed as an essential tool for violence prevention (Christenson et al. 1997); Ben clearly disagreed with this point of view in relation to the environment from which he came: “Mate, where I’m from, ya don’t need brains, if ya can’t fight ya dead, tougher ya are the better!” (par. 116).

Notwithstanding Ben’s view, research evidence suggests that children who are successful in school and develop appropriate reading, critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills are better able to cope with stressful and particularly dangerous situations (Baker, 1998). There is also evidence to suggest that the stressing of academic achievement enhances the development of positive self-esteem and self-efficacy, both of which are necessary for children to experience emotional well being and to achieve success (Vatterott, 1999). The relationship between violence and learning is particularly significant because cognitive skills that are crucial for academic success are also essential for the establishment of self-esteem, and for the development of coping skills and resilience. Charles disagreed that education is essential. He commented, “Ya can get lots of dosh [money] from not doing school work. I know this chippy [carpenter]

who only did grade 9. Ya should see his V8 turbo ute and he's a fuckin' big, tough, boxer" (par. 117).

The literature gives evidence of patterns of violence which cannot simply be understood in relation to the deviance or deficiency model of personality for a perpetrator or victim (Catalano, 1999; Christensen, Hirsch & Hurley, 1997; Hearn, 1998; Johnson, 1986). Furthermore, the literature classifies the dysfunctions of the particular family, culture or subculture, although these may be relevant to a degree (Leone, 2000). Several bodies of psychological research literature support the view that violence is widespread in schools, and that most often it is perpetrated by males and can be understood as a violent expression of certain types of masculinity (Pease, 2002; McEvoy, 2000). Hence, schools might be implicated in the making of masculinities and can consequently be involved in the unmaking of the types of masculinity that are implicated in violence. However, connections between psychological and sociological models of intervention, and the exact role of the school with regard to the prevention of violence and how it might best be carried out, are not clear in the minds of many educators (Arnot, 1989; Batten, 1995; Bender, 2001).

In relation to gender based violence, the following section begins by exploring understandings of how delinquency occurs. Through these understandings, we may further identify the sources or drivers of the boys' acts of violence in relation to their social environments.

### **How Does Anger Relate to a Broader Culture of Violence?**

#### ***Delinquency Theories***

When considering marginalised males, it is important to review the various explanations of delinquency relating to the school delinquency debate, as these views may contribute to the masculinities literature. The literature examined is from a variety of disciplines and includes material that draws upon a diverse range of perspectives within the separate disciplines. The literature on criminality can help us understand delinquency.

Early scientific attempts to explain criminality (Beccaria, 1804; Lombroso, 1876) had implications at two levels. First, the research indicated the possibility of biological foundations to criminal behaviour. Secondly, empirical research could be used to construct stereotypes, which in turn could be used by authorities to aid them in the detection of criminals. The former is significant in providing the basis of a school of psycho-criminality. The latter is significant because it did much to establish criminology as a normative discipline; it

may also contribute to the categorising of boys with behavioural problems (Blackmore, 1974).

Building on work by Gibbens, (1963), Glueck and Glueck (1950, 1956), and Sheldon (1940) sought to establish links between various physical attributes, chromosomal structures, chromosomal disorders and criminal proclivities. Others regarded offenders as possessing personality structures or major mental or emotional disorders which left them unable to control aggressive drives or anti-social impulses (Feldman, 1969; Filmer et. al., 1972; Gold & Reimer, 1975; Quinney, 1980; Haskell & Yablonsky, 1974; Rodman & Grams, 1967). Offenders were regarded as possessing personality structures or major mental or emotional disorders that left them unable to control aggressive drives or anti-social impulses.

Colvin (1994, 1997, 2000) identified six main sociological theories of crime, these being learning (different association), strain, control, labelling, conflict, and radical criminology. The first four represent mainstream criminology. Learning or differentiation association theories variously emphasised Pavlovian or classical conditioning, operant conditioning, or observational learning, a link to their provenance in the behaviourist tradition. De Fleur and Quinney (1966) researched differential association theory, but did not consider tendencies, maintenance or performance. Nor did they consider the differential receptivity of individuals to their associations (Blackburn, 1993).

The identification and subsequent isolation of variables based upon individual pathology or biological determinism tend to produce contradictory or even conflicting explanations of criminality. Even more so, concentration upon aspects of individual pathology ignores wider social realities, such as the difference in social, political, and economic power available to men and women as a consequence of social history.

### ***Delinquency Theories and Schools***

The biological, psychological, and sociological theories of delinquency are important in connecting rehabilitation approaches that emphasise changing the characteristics of juvenile offenders. The following section further discusses delinquency theories in relation to schools. The focus is on strain and control theories, and labelling theories. Strain theories assume people to be naturally conforming unless forced into deviance, while control theories assume that conformity to a conventional order requires explanation (Blackburn, 1993). Labelling theorists argue that norms and values within society are continually changing and that the impact of affixing these labels needs to be explored in regards to boys in ESPs.

### ***Strain.***

Within the institution of the school, the subcultural (strain) theorists acknowledge the role that schools may play in the development of delinquency. Strain theorists have argued that many delinquents are not typically motivated by frustration of high aspirations. Most influential has been the social control theory of Hirschi (1967, 1969, 1977), which proposed that conformity depends upon the acceptable healthy bond between the individual and society, and that deviant behaviour results when this bond is weak or broken. Hence, many working class youth perceive the institution of school as being largely irrelevant, and become dissociated from the values of school and later alienated from work. In an effort to generate the excitement no longer provided by the traditional patterns of working class leisure, many working class youth commit delinquencies as a peripheral leisure activity. In this light, delinquency can be regarded as hedonistic.

### ***Control.***

Merton (1938) argued that nonconformity to social standards and mores reflected pressures exerted by social structures and rejected the notion that deviance resulted from the breakdown of controls against basic impulses. He claimed that legitimate opportunities for achieving success are more restricted among some lower classes, leading to feelings of frustration (or strain of disparity) between aspirations and expectations.

### ***Labelling.***

Social reactions to defiant violations may alter the course of deviance; although there is no unanimous theory, labelling theory stresses the characteristics and sources of labels such as “criminal”, the conditions under which they are applied, and consequences for the person so labelled (Plummer, 1992). The labelling theory assumes, first, that acts are not intrinsically deviant, and crime is a label from the interest of the powerful, which becomes attached to defiant behaviours for social reasons. Secondly, the reactions of criminal justice agents, such as the police and prisons, to labels are governed by the supposed characteristics of the offender, such as age, race or class, rather than by characteristics of the offence. Thirdly, being publicly labelled a criminal or delinquent results in a deviant self-image, and hence, may foster a delinquent career (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967).

Labelling theorists have suggested that being labelled deviant by a social audience, or by an agency of social control, can change one's conception of self and possibly lead to a situation where, even if there is no initial commitment to deviation, there may be a progressive turn to such commitment. Hence, processes of social

control can lead to the development of negative self-image (Erikson, 1962) or a symbolic reorganisation at the level of self (Lemert, 1967).

Lemert's (1967) explanation for deviance is suggested in ways in which the initial imputation of deviance (by significant others) is implemented by a person of authority (e.g., parent, teacher, policemen). This can lead to consequences for any subsequent deviant behaviour. It may deter further acts, or it may lead to justification of deviant behaviour.

Understanding the impact and processes of affixing labels within any given social structure is imperative. Norms and values are continually being constructed, reconstructed, redefined, and affirmed by the members of any social structure. The outcomes of this ongoing, dynamic process largely determine the quality of interactions between the various members of social structures. Within the process of labelling lies a critical and crucial interplay of power and authority. Social orders place possibilities of re-defining meanings—both of events and identities which have already occurred or been established—firmly in the hands of those regarded as being in positions of power and authority.

Through understanding delinquency theories and the impact they have on boys' and schooling may we have a wider perspective for rehabilitation processes. The following narrative provides evidence for the struggles the boys have had socially and economically. It gives examples of how the boys interacted with the law, as a majority of leisure time was spent at night walking the streets and participating in illegal activities for entertainment.

### **How are Meanings of Violence Socially Constructed and Can They Vary in Different Contexts?**

#### ***Interactions with the Law***

All the boys had been in contact with the juvenile justice system and had clear views about the law and law enforcement. "Sack cops," Davo said, "That's all they do, harass me" (par. 322). "Why don't they harass the bad people? Because they are piggers" (Josh, par. 323). At least some of their comments described what the boys perceived as intimidation. Charles explained that, "Catching trains without tickets or even when you are walking around on the streets. What do you have on you? 'Can we search ya'?" (Charles, par. 324). "Next time they do that, tell them that you have a big dick down your pants and then when they take you to the

police station they will find the big crap down your pants” (Warren, par. 325). “They can search you on the spot if they want to!” (Gabriel, par. 326). “They searched all three of us up there at the train station. This guy got taken away because he looked bad” (Craig, par. 327). “My friend got searched, I was with him at the train station near the toilets and they stripped searched him and found a quarter of hash” (Jarred, par. 328). “Man, I would have had loved to score that hash” (Matt, par. 329).

Due to the boys being left to their own devices much of the time at home, and many of their peers being in the same situation, they would wander the streets. I asked the students how their parents/parent felt about them regularly walking the streets late at night and getting in trouble with the police. They responded, “Well, my Mum is always at the pokies or at the pub with her boyfriend. Maybe if I got nicked she give me a belting” (Calvin, par. 335). Harry agreed, “Yeah, but at least you don’t have to look after your little brother while your Mum is out. He’s always hanging around” (par. 336). The other boys elaborated, “Well my Mum always says I stress her out so I reckon she’s happy when I’m not at home” (Jacko, par. 337). “All the other boys our age hangout at night in the neighbourhood, what’s the big deal?” (Luke, par. 338). The lack of positive male role models within their family contexts means the boys had difficulty in seeing themselves in a useful positive place in society; this was shown in their expression of little hope (or total fantasy) for the future, a finding which is further elaborated on later in this paper (Future Careers).

The boys believed they were unfairly targeted by the police—even though they may have been participating in illegal behaviour or substance use. They perceived the police as a negative force in their lives, and wandering the streets at night as an acceptable part of the neighbourhood activity for adolescent boys. Discussion of law enforcement led to discussion of how other people conducted their lives and how people from socially advantaged backgrounds had more power and advantages in society than themselves.

### **Social Inequality and Power**

The boys discussed their beliefs about people who were living in more socially advantaged circumstances than they were. Their perceptions were that rich parents stayed together and their children lived in more fulfilling, intact and safer environments. They argued that it was acceptable to steal from rich people. The boys’ believed that poor people should be able to steal some of the wealth of wealthy people. “That is why a lot of my friends steal because they want to be like the higher up like the other people, like the rich kids”

(Harry, par. 404). "Because the rich blokes pay chicks to stay there because usually, most of the time, when they're rich they've always got someone there. Yeah, they pay each other to sleep at one end of the house and the other at the other end, so they stay together because of the money" (Richard, par. 400). "Rich kids have way more fun than us" (Matt, par. 401). "They have more money to do what ever they want" (Tommo, par. 402). "Can buy whatever they want" (Arnold, par. 403). "That they cannot afford so they steal off them. Half of em are kicked out of home" [their friends] (Sam, par. 405). "My friends just mug em" (Luke, par. 406). "I know homeless people that are rich, like they have 6,000 dollars just from stealing. How's that?" (Josh, par. 407).

When asked if they thought that rich people have miserable marriages and problems in the same way as poor people, they said. "The blokes just go to the corner and buy a hooker" (Warren, par. 410). "Exactly!" (Group agrees) (Charles, par. 411). "Why do you think that you get all these wackos when they are sixty going off with young chicky babes, Yeah, it is true. All these old rich fellas in their sixties married to the young models just cause the old bastard has heaps of dosh" (Harry, par. 412).

The boys believed that wealthy families have an easier life than their own families. Overall, they agreed that wealthy white middle/upper class people have intact families because of their wealth and material possessions. They stated that wealthy white middle/upper class men have access to attractive young females and that sex solves their problems. The boys believed that wealthy white middle/upper class children have no problems and that poor people are entitled to steal from wealthy people.

The boys recognised their disadvantaged circumstances. They know that they are not members of the dominant group. They expressed views, recognised by (McIntosh, 1990), that wealth, power, sexual orientation, physical ability, and age determined social status and power. They reflected views that their own low income and power reduced their influence on others and their ability to change circumstances in the longer term, and that this made them cultural and social scapegoats. Weis, Proweller and Centrie (1996) dealt with this issue in the following terms.

While white working class men are privileged via their color, they are relatively less privileged than their economically advantaged white male counterparts. They believe they are currently losing the edge that they had in the economy over men of color. White, working class men represent the loss of such privilege. It is the simultaneous moment of privilege and loss that we excavate when we turn

our attention to the production of white masculinities. It is their whiteness and maleness that privilege them. However, it is also in this space of historical privilege that they begin to confront the realities of loss. (p 3)

Working class young males exist within a class system that sustains a patriarchal class order, although they are not the main beneficiaries; they are expendable (Weis et al., 1996). These men do not hold a dominant position with white middle class males, indeed, the boys stressed that dominant class males do not share wealth or power with them. Working class males cannot compete because dominant class males have wealth and power to retaliate against them. Therefore, working class males choose to associate with groups against whom their claims can be used to advantage, such as women, people of colour, and same sex attracted people (Connell, 2001).

### ***Future Careers***

I asked the boys what they wanted to accomplish after ESP and into the future. Two boys talked about going into an apprenticeship, but most talked about a career in the army. I asked them about the appeal of the military: “Not go back to fucked school!” “Because you get heaps of money for the rest of your life” “You don’t get killed. There are not many wars on” (Sam, Luke, Craig, pars. 395-401).

The boys believed that the military lifestyle was going to make them more mature, macho, strong, fit, rich, and admired by peers and girls. They viewed it as a fun and easy way to be paid to be macho. At the same time, they saw similarities between school and the military: “Play footy, do heaps of muscle training ...”, “You get paid lots of money for being in the army but you don’t get paid lots of money for being at school ...”; “It all comes down to money ...”; “You don’t have to pay rent or food when you’re in the army ...”; “We will be getting paid to be yelled at ...”; “What’s the difference at school?” (Calib, Jarred, Luke, Nick, Matt, Bruce, pars. 405-412).

The boys believed that by joining the military, they will become equals with the police and even have a certain amount of power over them: “Yeah...we’ll be able to flog the cops then, cause we’ll be in the military...”; “The long run, I want it now ...”; “Yeah ... and they train you to do everything”; “If you get sent away overseas then that means that you don’t have pay rent and you don’t need a house and so you are saving money. It is as easy as that ...”; “I can outrun a copper or military bloke ... I can outrun a copper, so there. I can outrun all of them ...”; “No, I am doing it for the experience because I want to do it and not go to

school ...”; “I will give myself twenty years and then I am leaving with all the money they give ya”; “Yeah ... we’ll be able to flog the cops then cause we’ll be in the military” (Davo, Sam, Nick, Mike, Mel, Hugh, Gab, pars. 413-430).

The boys’ believed that if they joined the military after Year 10 they would: “get it harder, because you are not mature enough, that is why I am finishing school and then going into it”; “... you can earn heaps man ... money, money, money ... is the answer” (Will, Davo, pars. 430-465).

The boys’ discussions around possible future career options seemed limited in scope; they wanted to prove they were tough and strong, and earn a lot of money. They had limited career options and associated traditional masculine performances with a successful career for a male. They associated a successful career with a large earning capacity, but also desired to be linked with a position of institutional authority, such as within the military. I found this surprising, as they despised conforming to the authority of rules, but felt comfortable with the idea of living in a normalised institutional environment. They had become at ease with being observed, within a mode of social organisation and administration. They saw law enforcement and the military as having equal positions of power in society, thus enabling them to battle or compete with the police for power. In doing this, the boys stressed the importance of belonging to a traditionally male dominated and gender normed occupation. They reinforced their need to prove their hegemonic masculinity in order to be accepted for membership by their reference group. Conformity to occupational and organisational hegemonic masculinity helps these boys produce the image that they are powerful males. They have satisfaction in believing that joining the military will give them equal grounding to “flog the coppers”.

Sex gender segregated divisions, the bi-polarisation of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity is reproduced in the division of labour (Game, 1983). Certain occupations are hegemonically masculine, such as the military, law enforcement, construction, and firefighting. Emphasised femininity has its own occupations, such as nursing, teaching, social and secretarial work. Technology is also associated with this bipolarisation (Game & Pringle, 1983), as are earning differentials and status. Hegemonic masculinity is associated with heavy, dangerous, dirty, unskilled/skilled as well as with mobile, defense weapons and moving machinery.

## **How Might Violence Be Used to Police Dominant Forms of Masculinity?**

Connell's (1996) notion of the social organisation of masculinities recognises the relationships within an hierarchical system of masculinities. The interplay between forms of masculinity is an important part of how the patriarchal social order works. Connell's (1997) social theory of masculinities makes it clear that alternative or non-hegemonic masculinities can exist which are not excessively influenced by class, race, generation, and other factors.

Hegemonic masculinity embodies gender practice that legitimises patriarchy; that is, the dominance of men and the subordination of women in society. In this context, hegemony is the successful claim to authority. Hegemonic masculinity becomes the form of masculinity against which all others are measured. Those men and boys who do not measure up are often punished. This punishment causes many men and boys to demonstrate their pursuit of the hegemonic ideal (Connell, 1995a). Homophobia is a powerful form of punishment in schools, boys know the consequences of being called a "poofter" or "faggot", because it is a mark of scornful difference, particularly an expression of affection or weakness. This was evident in my interviews.

I asked the boys what they thought of males who made "feminine" gestures or liked traditionally "feminine" subjects at school. Richard sat back quickly, crossing his arms and expressed loudly, "Fucking fags! Belt em" [group laugh] (par. 400). Davo elaborated, "They get a lot of shit dumped on em, cause they can't stick up for themselves cause they're poofers" (par. 405), and Gabriel added, "They're not like us guys so they hang out with the girls" (par. 406). "Who'd want to hang out with poofers anyway?" (Arno, par. 407).

In this context, conformity to hegemonic masculinity and homophobia is rewarded. Antagonism to gay men is a standard feature of hegemonic masculinity and it is through social support of heterosexuality that anxiety about their own manliness is reduced for many boys and men. Male heterosexual identity is sustained and affirmed by fear and hatred of gay men (Hearn, 1998; Reay, 1990). Collier (1998) also drew attention to how this is misogynist as well, "to call a boy a poof is derogatory but this term, in denoting lack of guts, suggests femininity—weakness, softness and inferiority" (p. 180). Hence, homophobia and misogyny are two sides of the same coin.

I asked the boys why they do not accept boys who are feminine, and Matt answered quickly, "Cause they'll

try and feel ya up or something” (par. 410). Others followed: “Yeah, jump ya bones!” (Matt, par. 411); “Yeah, I’m no fag!” Craig, par. 412); “They aren’t like us blokes. They like all pink and girly shit” (Pete, par. 413). I then asked if they would accept a feminine boy as a friend. Hugh quickly stated, “Ya fucking joking! All the other blokes will think ya a fag” (par. 414), and Warren added, “Shit mate, ya wouldn’t have any other mates” (par. 415). “Fuckin’ bash em if they think I’ll be into that shit!” (Luke, par. 416).

Metaphorically, then homophobia functions as the “crocodile” at the gates of an alternative masculinity; it polices the boundaries of conventional masculinity. On the one hand, homosexuality is perceived as gender betrayal. On the other, any deviation from dominant masculinity is perceived to be same sex attracted. Gay men may have a different experience of masculinity from that of heterosexual men. While some gay men may benefit from some of the privileges of being male, they also suffer oppression and discrimination because of their sexual identity.

The issue of homophobia thus shows the power relations between men. Between 1998 and 1999, American cities observed a 40 per cent increase in violent incidents against gays, with violence directed toward gay men the most prevalent, constituting 75 percent of known incidents (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Gay men suffer oppression at the hands of heterosexual men similar to that inflicted on women; some are mocked for their effeminacy, some are bashed and even killed by heterosexual male gangs. More generally, heterosexual men receive social status and approval as heterosexual men, while gay men do not receive any social status or approval (Connell, 2001).

Hence, there has been growing attention to homophobia among men in the men’s movement and others concerned with men and masculinity (Connell, 2001; Cossins, 2000; Pease, 97, 2002). However, in the men’s movement, homophobia has often been considered as the fear of intimacy between men. Less attention is given to other aspects of homophobia, the contempt and attacks directed specifically at gay men because of their sexuality, and the discrimination and injustices that gay men face. Gay politics involves a wider critique in which homophobia polices the behaviour of all men and boys (Reed, 1999).

Boys’ and men’s violence has become the focus of growing public concern and action and there have been claims that we cannot address violence without also addressing homophobia (Mills, 2001). Homophobia and heterosexism are directly implicated, for example, in boys’ and men’s bashings and abuse of other boys and

men, in the young male 'sport' of "poofter-bashing", and in other hate crimes directed at those who are non-heterosexual or who are perceived to be non-heterosexual, and in some forms of violence directed at women (including abuse of lesbians) (Connell, 1997).

The strong relationship between homophobia and masculinity is also a factor in boys' and men's practice of date or acquaintance rape and other forms of sexual violence (Cossins, 2000). They may seek to have sex with women to prove to themselves and to others that they are heterosexual, to prove their manhood, and to gain status among their peers (Pease, 2001) for example, Josh stated, "I want a girlfriend like my brother's, she bangs like a dunny door, but don't talk much" (par. 601).

The issue of homophobia is not just a gay issue, but a crucial one for all men and for any consideration of how to change masculinity. If we want to understand how boys and men are kept within the boundaries of dominant masculinity, we need to understand the diverse realities of men's lives and the power relations between men (Pease, 2002).

One way of exploring the policing effects of homophobia is through gender programs in educational institutions. Educational institutions may sometimes appear to erase sex from the formal curriculum, but young gay men recognise that sex and sexuality is hidden within the curriculum while at the same time being apparent. Sexual issues and sexuality reappear in an extensive repertoire of student-student interactions, including name calling, flirting, classroom disruption, harassment of girls, homophobic abuse, playground conversations, and students' dress codes, as well as in teacher differentiated student-teacher interactions (Epstein, 1997). Heterosexuality and homosexuality, therefore, might be a key to the social, cultural, and political arenas in which an individual is positioned and which an individuals, male and female, position themselves.

### **What Can We Do to Prevent Violence?**

#### ***Boys and Violence in Educational Suspension Programs***

Many western ESPs attempt to disrupt dominant constructions of violence and gender. Many, however, are based on mythopoetic approaches that focus on the emotions of boys without examining the social role of emotion (Lingard & Douglas, 1999). Such programs teach boys to express their feelings, but place little emphasis on gender relations and their social organisation. There seems to be a belief that encouraging boys

to be more expressive will limit their oppressive behaviours. Such approaches, however, do not resonate well with many young males. Craig stated his reluctance about being taught communication and assertiveness skills at ESP: “My fucking old man would slag off at me if I started talking this feeling shit” (par. 251). “Yeah, my brothers would belt me over the head!” (par. 252), Luke added, “If I spoke like that stuff my mates would send me to the loony bin!” [group laughter] (par. 253).

Implementation of many ESPs also emphasises the importance of a male leader or male mentor. This is intended to provide boys with male role models that shoulder the major responsibility for promoting non-sexist education. However, oppressive behaviours and gender issues will go unchallenged if the more general issue of feminism is not given at least some consideration. Hence, the type of male leader/mentor is important.

I asked the boys what they thought about having female facilitators in the program and how females are different in their approach when compared to the male facilitators. Mel smiled and commented, “As long as they’re spunks, it’s heaps better” (par. 345). Nick stated, “Chick teachers are easier to talk to sometimes” (par. 346). I asked why. He replied, “Cause ya don’t have to be all tough and stuff” (par. 347). I then asked him why he had to be tough around the male facilitators and not the females. He said, “Cause they’re all sporty and stuff” (par. 348). Jacko commented, “Yeah, sometimes ya feel like ya have to be tough in front of them cause ya just a shit-kicker” (par. 349). I gathered from these comments that the boys thought that they did not have to engage in traditional masculine performances to the same degree as they did with the male facilitators. This brings me to the issue that for many of these programs the male facilitators need to challenge their own notions of masculinity and its relationship to other masculinities and femininities. This could lead to a disruption of dominant masculinities for these boys and the female facilitators working in the program.

Within many of these ESPs there is a need to explore power structures, the abuse of power, and the recognition of ways in which males themselves participate in dominant constructs of gender. To achieve this, schools, teachers, administrators, and school systems might be encouraged to challenge boys to be more self-aware, and socially active. If we want boys to accept responsibility for their behaviour, schools may need to take the lead in personal reflections of (pro)feminist beliefs and challenge the dominant representations of

masculinity. Cohen (1990) claimed that men will not give up patriarchy until they see something to gain.

Discussion and debate are needed on how this might happen.

Within the education system, the competitive curriculum is a central aspect of the production of masculinity and attempts to deal with the most obviously negative aspects of boys' behaviour (Connell, 1989). The dominant construction of being male, and the win-at-all costs mentality for some boys, may present a mockery of relationships, caring, and empathy and could set the scene for what lies ahead of them as adult males.

One of the central paradoxes of masculinity is of direct relevance to boys' education. Men hold the reins of power within society yet many men experience powerlessness (Connell, 1995b; Pease, 2002; Segal, 1990). Most men work in an institution that is hierarchically structured, and that generally allows little sense of personal agency due to hegemonic pecking orders. Foucault (1972, 78), for example, stated that institutions are created to centralise, harness, and manifest power over others. They appeal to individuals by promising personal power, although this is largely illusory.

Many of the boys in the ESP expressed little sense of personal agency of power inside or outside educational institutions. They related personal power with physical or verbal violence over other boys or adults in positions of authority. Josh commented, "School's boring shit so ya pick fights and piss the teachers off, no one could give a shit so may as well do something" (par. 450). Louie added, "I just pile shit onto the nerd boys, and then my mates join ya. Cause school is so boring" (par. 451). Warren stated, "I like stirring up the teachers. There's this one fat old bag who goes bright red and sweats like a pig as ya keep fuckin around in the class. It's really funny watching her get so revved up" (par. 452). Hugh added, "My mates and I scab tuckshop money off the little kids" (par. 453). The boys claim their power through attacking other vulnerable students; they also seem to revel in rebelling against teacher/facilitator authority.

In summary, for boys to take the step towards responsible and alternative ways of being men, educational programs and facilitator/teacher development requires care. Programs and facilitators/teachers that establish themselves as 'other' or in any way superior, or facilitators/teachers who are punitive in some way in their interactions with the boys, risk replicating patriarchal culture and minimising the chance for meaningful change.

In engaging with men's experiences, and seeking unique outcomes that may be openings to alternative non-controlling and non violent ways of being, care is required when talking about individual men's experiences of powerlessness. In Australia, and internationally, some aspects of the men's movement have created a discourse about men's powerlessness that is implicitly or explicitly anti-feminist (Martino, 1999). This discourse focuses entirely on men's subjective experiences while ignoring broader histories, culture and structural relations of gender injustice. When applied to men's violence, this discourse often has the effect of once again diminishing men's responsibility and contributing to women-blaming. Because of this context, it can be fraught to speak about men's experiences of powerlessness in relation to men's violence.

### **Conclusion**

Within the groups of boys we talked about violence against women, males, and family members. Physical violence within their home and peer environments was seen to have few negative consequences. Alongside these conversations, we explored ways of taking responsibility for violence, and talked about the effects of men's violence against men, competition, homophobia and females.

This paper presented aspects of the boys' narrative which help us to understand the actions of males in ESPs. The boys' behaviours provide an insight into how they gained power through violence and aggression, and how this discourse is used against other boys of race, class, same sex attracted boys and females. The discourse of aggression also played a specific role in their interactions with schools and teachers versus peer and socio-economic understandings in relation to masculinities. Power and prestige was associated with males of a particular class and race; this is apparent in the boys' specific career choice of the military and desire to compete with police. This choice, however, accentuated the boys' lack of power and prestige, thus leading to further violence. The boys' anger is a result of how they construct their masculinity. Throughout the narrative, the interplay between different types of masculinity is apparent. The boys have constructed violence as an acceptable way of being within their environments. This was strongly represented in their interactions with the law and the lack of parental monitoring of illegal activities or role modelling of non functional behaviours.

The psychological delinquency theories outlined in this paper help in developing an understanding of these

boys' masculinities and behaviours. They demonstrate that the bond between the individual and the social environment is weak, thereby explaining why these boys perceive school as largely irrelevant and dissociate from the values of the school. Furthermore they help to explain the mismatch between these boys' home cultures and the middle class cultures of the school, which also contributes to these boys' deviant behaviours. Finally, they also demonstrate how as a consequences of these boys being labelled by those in positions of power as a behavioural problem (delinquent), has perpetuated the self-concept of being defiant.

In conclusion we can observe from the boys narrative that to isolate either discipline of psychology or sociology in the context of ESPs gives us a limited perspective on how violence occurs in different contexts or can be prevented for at-risk males. For the prevention and rehabilitation of at-risk males exhibiting violence and aggression educators and schools need to further investigate the connections between gender, delinquency and resilience.

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