Boys in Schools: Addressing the Politics of Hegemonic Masculinities

Wayne Martino

Paper Presented as part of the Symposium, Addressing Boys' Education:
Framing Debates, Implementing Strategies and Formulating Policies, at
the AARE Annual Conference,
Brisbane, 30 November-4 December, 1997

Abstract

In this paper I draw on interviews conducted with a group of adolescent boys in a catholic co-educational school to explicate the regimes of practices in which they enact particular stylised forms of masculinity. Data are used to draw attention to ways in which these boys learn to relate to themselves and to others within the context of peer group relations and dynamics at this particular school. Possible implications of this research for establishing a gender equity framework for addressing the politics of masculinities in schools are indicated.

Introduction

In this paper a microanalytic focus on the interplay of masculinities is provided in an attempt to highlight the occasions on which specific
norms are deployed in the lives of adolescent boys at one particular co-educational high school in metropolitan Perth. Attention is drawn to how certain boys enact a stylised form of heterosexual masculinity within a regime of normalising practices which are tied to historically contingent regulatory technologies of the self (see Foucault, 1978; 1988a; 1988b). While considerable research has been conducted into the interplay of masculinities within school settings, this study adopts an alternative approach to deploying qualitative research instruments such as semi-structured interviews (Quinn Patton, 1990). In applying a Foucauldian interpretive analytics, it attempts to build on already existing research by focusing on the situationally specific dynamics involved in boys enacting particular masculinities and the occasions on which they are required to do so (see Frank, 1993; Connell, 1987; 1989; 1994; 1995; Kessler et al, 1985; Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Askew & Ross, 1988; Walker, 1988; Jordan, 1995a; 1995b; Parker, 1992; 1996; Skeggs, 1991; Skelton, 1996; Haywood, 1993; Frank, 1990; 1993; Kenway & Fitz Clarence, 1997; Davies, 1995; 1996; 1997; Epstein, 1997; Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Nayak & Kehily, 1996; Redman, 1996). Moreover, it refuses to treat the data as somehow providing privileged access to a putative consciousness which is grounded ideological processes of subject formation. Rather, attention is drawn to the regime of practices and social norms in which particular techniques for fashioning the self are imbricated. Thus, appeals to the hermeneutic subject (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982) as a site for the formation of a gendered subjectivity, which emerges in the symbolic space of consciousness, is refuted.
Developing a Foucauldian Interpretive Analytics for Theorising Masculinities

Foucault's elaborate theorisation of power and subjectivity informs the focus for analysing masculinities in this paper. He proposes a non-subject centred approach which links specific techniques for fashioning the self to a wider social network of normalising practices and political technologies. This forms the basis in this paper for analysing the rules, concepts, techniques and social practices through which a group of adolescent boys are incited to establish particular forms of masculinity. However, in following Foucault (1988a; 1988b), it is argued that these social practices are linked to wider regimes and political technologies of normalisation in which sexuality is deployed as an index of subjectivity. In other words, attention is drawn to specific regimes of practice involving a stylisation of the body and ways of acting, thinking and talking which avoid grounding such 'techniques of the self' in the meaning giving subject or in a space in which the self-determining subject and deterministic social structures are reconciled. In other words, an attempt is avoided to appeal to the consciousness of the subject as a social actor who is both constrained by social forces/structures, but who is also able to move beyond the ideological distortions of society once the blinkers have been removed.

For these reasons, Foucault refuses to resort to the use of explanatory
concepts such as ideology and repression as a basis for elaborating a political practice. He is careful about referring back to the idea that there is:

a nature or a human foundation which, as a result of a certain number of historical, social or economic processes, finds itself concealed, alienated or imprisoned in and by some repressive mechanism. In that hypothesis it would suffice to unloosen these repressive locks so that man (sic) can be reconciled with himself, once again find this nature or renew contact with his roots and restore a full and positive relationship with himself (Foucault, 1987: 113).

In short, Foucault's theorisation of power is built around a rejection of the 'repressive hypothesis' which is driven by the imperative to raise consciousness as a basis for elaborating an emancipatory politics designed to free the subject from the ideological chains of oppression:

...there are two further concepts which continue to act as a screen and an obstacle: ideology, on the one hand, and repression, on the other. All history comes to be thought of within these categories which serve to assign a meaning to such diverse phenomena as normalization, sexuality and power. And regardless of whether these two concepts are explicitly utilized, in the end one always comes back, on the one hand to ideology - where it is easy to make reference back to Marx - and on the other hand to repression, which is a concept often and readily employed by Freud...Behind these concepts and among those who employ
them, there is a kind of nostalgia for a quasi-transparent form of knowledge, free from all error and illusion, and behind the concept of repression, the longing for a form of power innocent of all coercion, discipline, and normalization. (Foucault, 1984e: 59)

For Foucault (1978: 94), power relations cannot be understood in binary terms as "an all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled". Furthermore, power is not essentially an oppressive force that emanates from top down and whose effects operate on the individual at the level of the unconscious or subconscious. Foucault avoids applying such a deconstructive analytics of power which signals freedom from a repressive mechanism. Rather, power is exercised and, according to Foucault, is "deployed and given concrete expression" outside of the limits of dialectical frames of reference for understanding its effects (see Foucault, 1978: 90). In other words, it is understood in terms of its productive potentialities:

By power, I do not mean "Power" as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body. The analysis, made in terms of power, must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination are given at the outset; rather,
these are only the terminal forms power takes. It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly as the strategies which they take effect, which general design or institutional crystallisation is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law in the various social hegemonies....[the exercise of power] must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty.....power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is in the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault, 1978: 92-93) (my emphasis)

Thus in claiming that power is not merely imposed as a violence, he implies that it can be strategically deployed to effect certain outcomes. Within a regime of power/knowledge relations, therefore, Foucault situates what he terms practices of freedom.. This focus on practices is important because it draws attention to the productive rather than the repressive nature of the workings of power within specific regimes for governing the conduct of individuals. Furthermore, it is a strategic attempt to dispel the notion that there is a
fundamental human nature or consciousness that can be retrieved outside of power/knowledge relations. And it is in this sense that he is sceptical of developing a political practice which is centred around notions of liberation or emancipation.

It is possible to see how such an analytic framework informs the approach to analysing masculinities in this paper with its focus on techniques of the self and practices of subjectification (Foucault, 1978; 1980; 1982; 1985; 1986; 1988a; 1988b; 1988c; 1991a; 1991b, 1993). This emphasis on how adolescent boys learn to relate to themselves and to others as particular kinds of gendered subjects within regimes of normalising practices is informed by Foucault's non-subject centred approach. In fact, his elaborate theorisation of power and its deployment within historically specific regimes of practice is consonant with what may be termed a pro-feminist (Clatterbough, 1990) analysis of masculinities in this paper, which draws attention to the ways of acting, thinking and relating to the self and others that are implicated in the social practices of adolescent boys in their everyday lives at school. Such a focus on masculinities is strategic in that it attempts to draw attention to the specific effects and modalities of power in the lives of a group of adolescent boys as a basis for establishing a threshold around which certain targets for gender reform can be set for effectively addressing the politics of masculinity in schools.

Interviewing Adolescent Boys
The boys interviewed as part of this study attended a private co-educational school in Perth, Western Australia and were from a predominantly white middle class background. This paper draws on a selection of interviews with adolescent boys aged 15-16 attending this school. They were approached and asked to participate in a study which was attempting to document their thoughts and opinions about school and their relations with their peers. Twenty three boys were interviewed with each interview lasting for about forty minutes (see Martino, in preparation).

Due to having worked at the school and having taught many of the students involved in the study, very little resistance was met from the boys who expressed a willingness to participate in the interviews. The implications of the researcher being acquainted with the boys in this study, however, might also have some negative effects. While students might feel more comfortable with and trust a researcher they know with more intimate responses, there could also be a tendency for them to produce specific answers because they know what the researcher expects and wants them to talk about. Furthermore, having taught some of the boys might mean that they have already acquired a vocabulary and an understanding with which to articulate specific issues. Consequently, they might be more aware of the researcher's language use, tone, inflection so that they can "read" the many meanings and intentions behind the questions which are posed to them. Despite these limitations, however, what cannot be denied is that there are certain
benefits involved in the researcher being acquainted with the interviewees in terms of the latter feeling comfortable and open to expressing their thoughts and opinions without the fear that their masculinity will be brought into question.

The data from the interviews are used to examine some of the ways in which these boys learn to establish their masculinities at this local site with its constantly shifting parameters of social practices, routines and human interaction. Since as Skelton (1996) argues, not all schools "operate within identical constraints", such studies which focus on boys enacting masculinities in localised contexts are useful in drawing attention to specific practices and strategies that are deployed in maintaining hegemonic forms of masculinity in the daily lives of boys (see Walker, 1988; Willis, 1977; Connell, 1989; Kessler et al, 1985; Frank, 1990; Parker, 1996).

About the school

In light of Skelton's claims about differences related to specific institutional sites, it is important to draw attention to some of the characteristics of the particular school in which study was conducted. It was known as the 'football school' and had a reputation in the wider community for producing outstanding football players. The school had won a state competition in Australian Rules Football for five years consecutively and assemblies were frequently held to acknowledge the success of the football team. Many of the students had, in fact,
expressed irritation about the emphasis placed on football at the official level. Several boys from this school played for one of the local state football teams and had been drafted to the AFL (Australian National League Football). In this school a definite culture of football was established and supported strongly by many parents and certain staff. This emphasis on football needs to be acknowledged in light of many of the boys' comments about its role and status in their lives at this particular school.

Boys enacting their masculinities at school

On the basis of this research, it appears that many boys learn to establish their masculinity in opposition to femininity (see Connell, 1994). In other words, they define their masculinity within a set of cultural and social practices which involve a rejection and denigration of what they consider to be feminine attributes or behaviours that often serve as markers of homosexuality in the policing of hegemonic forms of masculinity (see Ward, 1995; Butler, 1996; Laskey & Beavis, 1996). This is also reflected in the tendency of many boys to avoid expressing their emotions which appears to be predicated on the basis that such capacities are perceived to be feminine or associated with females. And as one boy stated in an interview, learning to be masculine involves "staying away as much as possible from being a female."

When this student, who shall be called Jason (aged 16 years), was
asked whether he thought it was easy for boys to express what they
really think and feel with one another he made the following comment:

73 Jason: Um, it sort of depends, like I think it's a hell of a lot
easier for females to do it.

74 Wayne: Why is that?

75 Jason: Because they're more in to that kind of thing, um, they
don't, um, it all comes back to masculinity and stuff like that. Like
females sort of, they can talk to each other about personal stuff on a
more personal level I think than guys. Guys are sort of like, you can
talk to them about personal things but not really like inside feelings
that you might really think, you have to sort of go along with the flow
a bit. Like you can definitely be your own person but you sort of have
to um, like follow on some kind of line. Like you can’t really talk
about your innermost feelings like if you're quieter or not as rough
and stuff as some of the other ones, people might get crap for that.

76 Wayne: How? What do you mean,"they'd get crap"?

77 Jason: Oh, just like in terms of people might call them 'wuses' and
you know, 'poofs' and stuff like that.

78 Wayne: Why?
79 Jason: Um, because I suppose not following the trend of everyone else. So like if you don't conform, you're sort of cast out almost.

80 Wayne: So conforming for guys means what then?

81 Jason: Security I suppose, security in a group. Not so much popularity, yeah, just like security. So if you conform you're sort of accepted but of course there's always exceptions and stuff. So a lot of guys, I think, and you can tell, they're just like riding the cart or something, riding on the roller coaster, just following everyone else and not really doing what they want to do and stuff. It all comes down to peer pressure and stuff as well in terms of what they want to do and what everyone else wants to do.

In this interview Jason draws attention to the role of a hegemonic form of masculinity in influencing the way boys relate to one another in peer group situations. In fact, he points to how specific behaviours are regulated within a regime of practices in which sexuality is deployed as a mechanism for policing the masculinity of boys within a peer group context. He claims that boys are cautious about expressing their innermost feelings out of fear for they risk having their masculinity or sexuality questioned by other boys who might label them a 'wus' or a 'poof'. These labels are used in a derogatory way by the dominant group to mark out those boys who deviate from a tough macho heterosexual model of masculinity. To be gay or to be associated with anything that smacks of femininity is to have your masculinity brought
into question. 'Wus', in fact, is a sexualised term which is a derivative of ‘weak pussy’ and refers to female genitals. What is important to emphasise is that gender and sexuality are operationalised here through a set of discursive practices involving the process of learning to be a heterosexual male which is based on an avoidance of the ‘feminine’ and homosexuality. Those boys who do not measure up to what is considered to be appropriate manly behaviour are positioned as the ‘other’ and are situated outside of the normative frames of reference for attributing desirable masculinity by the dominant group of boys.

This practice of feminising and sexualising those boys who do not measure up as ‘other’ is also brought out by another boy, Scott (aged 15 years), who draws attention to the pecking order of masculinities that exist within a schooling context:

51 Wayne: I want to ask you what you do at recess and lunchtime at school?

52 Scott: It depends really. I mean if there's something on, someone I want to speak to particularly I'll go and speak to them but um average lunchtime would be Joel, Aaron and there's a few other kids who sort of, you know the sort of kids who just want a little group to come to? Other guys don't accept them and we have about three guys like that -
we don't really have much in common with them. Everyone else has sort of kicked them out and we can't be bothered doing that cause we don't mind having them around, we're not threatened by them sort of. It doesn't bother me. But I sort of, I don't know, I've never thought of myself as one of those kids even though I have been. those kids who've sort of bounced around and not been liked by groups, but I've always felt sorry for the kids who have been, whereas I don't think anyone has ever really felt sorry for me about it. I just don't want to put anyone else through that anymore. It's really awful, I mean it's sort of...

53 Wayne: So you've been targeted?

54 Scott: Yeah, I've been like that from say early primary school and all the way through to Year 8 and stuff. I'm sort of the outsider kid. I'd get pushed around by all the different groups and end up with a few friends who sort of tag along 'cause you have to have these friends and if you don't everyone is going to call you names. You've got to have somewhere to go. It's the same at this school. If you sit with one person no one says anything but if you sit and read a book and someone sees you they start making fun of you and it's really strange and they want to hassle you and stuff.

So Scott reiterates how those boys who are placed on the 'outside' are treated by the dominant group of boys. Those boys who do not fit the dominant heterosexual model are harassed. In this instance, Scott draws attention to how a boy who chooses to read a book at school can be
targeted by other boys. This boy is located on the 'outside' through a set of practices which work to reinforce a binary oppositional structuring of gender relations. Within such a hetero/sexist regime, certain practices or behaviours, such as reading or expressing emotions, appear to conflict with what boys consider to be appropriate masculine behaviour (see Martino, 1994a, 1996).

Scott proceeds to elaborate on the dynamics involved in the way that boys relate to one another which are structured around an imperative to target those students who are considered to be on the 'outside':

Interview with Scott

64 Scott: ...To be in the in the group you have to be hassling someone else and they're all hassling each other. There are quite a few groups like that at this school.

65 Wayne : Can you talk to me a bit more about these groups...So is there one main group?

66 Scott: Yeah there's probably that large group, the football playing surfie sort of guys, and they're one big group. But what I've found I haven't really hung around their group since early last year, but when I did I mean it was always someone's the brunt of all the crap for one day and then it's someone else the next day
67 Wayne: You mean within their own group?

68 Scott: Yeah. And you know they have their kids that tag along and they're not liked that much and it varies - I was probably one of those kids, I used to get it every now and then.

69 Wayne: So you'd hang around with that big group?

70 Scott: Yeah, in Year 8 and Year 9

71 Wayne: How many in that group that hang around together?

72 Scott: Um, I wouldn't know. It's probably more than half of all the males in Year 10 anyway. It's a pretty big group. I think a lot of people hang around there sort of trying not to be noticed by the sort of more bullying people. But there are sub-groups and when I was trying to fit into them their fun part of it would be trying to hassle other people and sort of, yeah, dehumanise them and just keep hassling them

73 Wayne: So is that the way they relate to one another?

74 Scott: Yeah. What I'm saying, the reason I was probably picked on was I couldn't do it at that level, so maybe they could see that weakness. I mean, probably more subconscious and that, they probably sit down and think about it. They probably....get at you easily. I
don't know, I never felt like I fitted into those groups. I don't feel like I want to go back there or anything. It's just sort of pointless. But at the same time I feel sorry for them a bit. I mean their relationship with other people is a bit of a mess really.

75 Wayne: What do you mean?

76 Scott: Um, I don't know they just sort of get by hassling everybody and just having a few people they turn to and get them to laugh at the other people and it's all a bit of a mess really.

77 Wayne: So why do you think they behave like that?

78 Scott: Oh I don't know...um... it's just what they perceive as what they've got to do to be accepted I suppose. I don't know there's probably a better reason than that but um, that's what it looks like.

What this interview with Scott emphasises is the role of hegemonic models of masculinity in structuring the way that boys' have learned to relate to one another. Such ways of relating are based on a system of verbal abuse and put downs in which a hierarchy of masculinities is established (see also Connell, 1989; Kessler et al, 1985; Jordan 1995a, 1995b; Martino, 1997a). It would appear that a public hegemonic form of masculinity is enacted through a regime of abusive practices in which certain boys who are placed on the 'outside' become a target for harassment. For example, in section 76, Scott indicates that the peer
group dynamic revolves around being able 'to get a laugh' at the expense of those boys who are designated as the 'other' and who are clearly unable or who refuse to engage in such practices (see Martino, 1997a). Scott even suggests in section 72 that some boys choose to be a part of this group to avoid being bullied! In this way, he reiterates the cost involved of not being a part of this group. Moreover, the boys who wield power, according to Scott, are those who belong to the footballer-surfie group. In fact, many of the boys and girls interviewed mentioned this large group of boys who occupied a space on the oval. Many students, both boys and girls, were intimidated by this 'cool' group who, according to many of those interviewed, achieved a particular status and popularity through their involvement and profile in sporting practices such as football.

Paul also highlights the role of sporting practices such as football in the formation of a particular model of masculinity which impacts upon the lives of those boys who do not measure up:

Interview with Paul

97 Wayne: What about the popular group? Why do you call them popular? Why are they popular do you think?

98 Paul: Just because that's just what they always were from Year 8. They're always teasing everybody. Gary (he is a member of the football/surfie group), I sort of like him, I don't hang around him or
anything, but he's not evil or a teasing sort of person, so he's alright to talk to. The other ones are just too good for you. They think they're too good for you but they're just basically stupid. Popular because they play football, that's why. I was never really accepted there because I didn't play football until last year, and so I started playing in a team with all the guys I went to primary school with, the people I actually like. That's why I think they got popular, because they all liked the ones that did good at football, because I couldn't really kick the football. That's how they get popular...I remember in the start of Year 9 David came and Joel came. I'd met Joel a couple of weeks before school started so I just sort of knew him because we went to a party because our families knew each other, so I talked to him for a while. On the first couple of days of Year 9 I was still with them, and then everyone started playing football. I talked to Joel and David and David looked like he'd never played football in his life, and Joel he was really, really good. So instantly, Joel was popular and David wasn't....So a person who was good at football, he became popular. It doesn't make sense but that's what happens.

What this interview with Paul illustrates is that a high status masculinity is conferred upon those boys who are skilled at playing football and/or who surf. This is significant in light of the valorisation of football in this localised site. Through engaging in such practices certain boys establish a particular profile or 'cool' demeanour which enables them to acquire a certain status and popularity. Both these interviews point to the effects of specific
forms of masculinity and their impact on the lives of these two boys who just do not measure up or who refuse to enact such masculinities. It is a public enactment of such a form of masculinity which appears to be at the basis of boys’ rejection and denigration of other practices and behaviours which are considered to be feminine and which involve capacities for being sensitive and expressing emotion (see Martino, 1995a).

Nathan like Scott, also draws attention to how those boys who read or who perform are often feminised or labelled in pejorative ways:

Interview with Nathan

29 Wayne: Why is that do you think [that there are more girls than guys in the Extended English class]?

30 Nathan: Um I think it would be because a lot of guys don't like reading maybe and they're not as good at English as others, or ...

31 Wayne: Why do you think they don't like reading?

32 Nathan: Maybe they don't think it's masculine or whatever to read books, but um, I don't know what the other English class is like - how many guys and girls there are in that one

33 Wayne: Not very many
34 Nathan: 'Cause you know when you're brought up as a kid girls always read more books and that - it's just the way you're brought up really

35 Wayne: What are you saying then, that?

36 Nathan: I'm saying that it's like a stereotype, you know, girls read more and they don't go out and play sport and, well they do, but it's just like the way most of them have been brought up, like they do a lot of work, do a lot of reading, so they're normally the ones who do better at school and get to the top classes

37 Wayne: And guys don't?

38 Nathan: Oh guys do, but you know like they're afraid to um ... I know a lot of friends who are really smart but they don't want to try because they think they'll get called names and stuff for trying hard, doing extra work and that.

39 Wayne: What kinds of names?

40 Nathan: Oh you know like 'squares' and 'squids' and 'suckers' and that but most of the time you just ignore it. You just say you've got to go somewhere and they're not, so then they shut up

41 Wayne: So you think that stereotype influences attitudes - is that
what you're saying?

42 Nathan: Yeah, there's a lot of stereotyping. You know guys are supposed to be big, strong; girls are supposed to be really smart, weak and that. Well, in some cases it is, but not all the time

43 Wayne: Is the stereotyping strong do you think at school?

44 Nathan: I think it would be because a guy that does well, they always get called names and that. Girls do it as well, but they're more accepted to be smart than guys are, so it's, I mean, of course they wouldn't want to be called 'squids' and that but they still, they don't really mind it

45 Wayne: Why do you think they don't mind it as much?

46 Nathan: Because they like, 'cause they are smart so they think about what's going to happen to them when school finishes and they're the ones who are going to have a better life so they don't really worry about it as much

47 Wayne: And guys don't think as much about it?

48 Nathan: Oh they do but they don't like, most guys now don't want to sit around a desk and do work for their lives and that. They'd rather be out playing sport, watching TV so they'd rather not think about
their education and how smart they want to be 'cause they don't think that when they're older they'll have to work. They just don't want to work, you know, they sit at home and don't want to be stuck behind a desk or, from 6 till 7 or whatever. They'd rather be out doing something else. A lot of girls have the same attitudes but um I just think the majority of them are smarter in what they want to do in their future careers or their lives and that

49 Wayne: Are you saying they think a lot more about, more carefully about

50 Nathan: They think about the consequences in life, you know, like what they do now is going to reflect and lead to what they're going to do when they're older, so if they do well now they're going to do well in the upper school, get a good job and then have a good life, get a lot of money and have a family and that. I suppose a lot of guys don't really see it the same way. They think they can just get through school like on the borderline or whatever, just get a job as a brickie or something that they don't need a lot of education for but they will get paid for it so they think they can get by just doing that.

What Nathan highlights is a particular culture of masculinity in which high achievement and reading are rejected by the 'cool' guys who would rather play sport or watch TV than "sit around at a desk" and study.
And it is through a practice of labelling those boys who do achieve or who are avid readers in derogatory ways as the other that the footballers and the 'surfies' are able to establish a dominant form of masculinity. What is particularly interesting about this interview is that Nathan points to a dimension of a counter-school culture in which a group of middle class boys enact a particular form of protest masculinity. In other words, as Nathan points out in section 38, the 'cool' boys 'act dumb' in order to establish a hegemonic form of masculinity through which they can demonstrate their opposition to the values embodied in the aims of formal education. This form of protest masculinity is asserted by targeting those boys who achieve such educational aims in derogatory ways as 'squares', 'squids' and 'suckers'. Willis (1977) has also documented how such a form of protest masculinity is enacted by a group of working class 'lads' in a working class school which involved defying the values and aims of formal education as well as support of the school institution. Moreover, those boys who conformed to the aims of the institution were targeted by the 'lads' as 'ear oles'. The fact that Nathan appears to be documenting a similar dynamic in a middle class school is interesting and might be related to culturally specific practices within the Australian context. It also relates to the status that is attributed to football at this particular school. The role of such sporting practices in enacting a public form of heterosexual masculinity takes on a particular significance in this local site with its shifting parameters of social practices, routines and patterns of human relations. This also taps into wider cultural practices of
mateship and modes of relating that are imbricated in enacting a public form of heterosexual masculinity which emphasises a ruggedness and a sense of being an 'ordinary bloke' with no pretentions.

Later in the interview Nathan emphasises the role of sporting practices in establishing a desirable form of hegemonic masculinity:

88 Wayne: So um what would lead someone to be rejected then?

89 Nathan: Well it could be like you know, say there was a school of like a group of guys that played a lot of sport and that or hang around together and the person comes from overseas or whatever, a new school and is like, you know sits at lunchtime and reads on his own, doesn't play much sport, he's gonna get hassled by the guys that play sport and that. They'll want him to come out at the start maybe, come and play sport, but he'd rather read or like be on his own or whatever and then so they think oh we don't need him and he can sit there and have his book the whole time and it'll just, people will ...you know how people talk about others and people will get influenced by that and that person is just rejected.

Nathan's reference to the person from overseas who becomes designated as the 'other' perhaps points to a subtle form of racism in the maintenance of this style of hegemonic masculinity (see also Bach, 1994). What is interesting is that he highlights the social differentiation amongst peer groups at school in terms of their
involvement in particular kinds of sports:

91 Nathan: ...everyone's really friends but are mainly friends together in like certain groups

92 Wayne: Tell me a bit more about those groups, so there's the popular group ...

93 Nathan: Yeah you've got the popular group, you've got the groups that play football, you've got the basketball groups, the groups you know that hang around, play kingpin. And like there's either groups

that go to the library and then there's just groups that just sit
around and talk in different areas around the school and then they all hang around together and they do stuff on the weekend. Like they're still all friends but they're more friendly with the groups they hang around with

94 Wayne: Tell me about kingpin. What's kingpin?

97 Nathan: It's a game that they play with a tennis ball. You would hang around with groups like people who are the high achievers and that, they often hang around together, 'cause normally you get someone who's really smart being in classes with others who are really smart and they start to get together and talk about similar things, so they
can relate to each other and sit down and talk whatever. And then other people join other groups - it's just who your friends are really. Like some people might just think of them as a loser group if they're not very good achievers or if they're not socially accepted for any reasons then they're thought of as the loser group whatever.

Nathan highlights the differentiation amongst certain groups as documented by the researcher's observational data. What is interesting is that certain practices such as football and handball are imbricated in enacting particular versions of masculinity or rather form the basis upon which certain attributions of masculinity are made. For instance, Nathan indicates that the 'hand ballers' are high achievers who are also differentiated in his eyes through engaging in 'kingpin' as a particular stigmatised practice which is set against the tougher sport of football. Many of the boys, however engaged in practices of differentiation which were operationalised both within certain peer groups, in terms of how boys related to one another, and in terms of the way they related to other friendship groups.

What is interesting is that Nathan, as a high achiever, has been able to successfully negotiate a position of acceptance within the dominant group since he is an esteemed football player and he enjoys surfing. Moreover, he has also developed a highly sophisticated capacity for analysing the peer group dynamics of adolescent boys in this school which has enabled him to align himself with the dominant group without compromising his willingness to perform well at school.
126 Wayne: So how do you fit into this picture then, like 'cause I'd see you as being accepted and quite popular and yet quite a high achiever...?

127 Nathan: Yeah well 'cause I play a lot of sport I fit into the real sporting group and I surf so, surfing is like, if you surf you're quite cool which a lot of people think that so they try and take it up and then you get more friends by people trying to do what you do. But I've got another friend who plays football, surfs and they're really smart - we get on really well - and I also hang around with people who have similar interests even though they don't care anything about education. So we're still linked - it's mainly by sport that we've all hung around together. We're all linked by that as our basis but a couple of them are bogans, a couple are surfs, a couple are just ... all they do is play sport ... and then a couple of us actually commit ourselves to schoolwork - we can find time for both so we balance out as being in the accepted group by the way we are and the sport we play even though we do spend more time than others doing work

128 Wayne: But sport's the key thing then?

129 Nathan: Yeah I think sport's the main thing that brings people together 'cause like when you go to someone's house you don't really just sit there and talk, you want to go out and do something. So you might not invite somebody over to your house because you know they
can't play basketball so you invite people that can play basketball and
you get friends like that, so you're not in a team with your friends.
I think sport is the main reason why people are friends. 'Cause in our
group we've got, say there's like ten guys, there's like three of us
who are in at least one extended class and there's four of them that
are in modified classes because they spend more time playing sport than
they do with their education so they miss out on the education side but
some are top athletes or football players and that.

Nathan's point about the function of sport in the context boys' social
relations with one another at this particular school is important. In
section 129 he mentions that boys do not 'just sit there and talk' when
they visit their friends at home which is significant in highlighting
the role of sport as a masculinising practice in the lives of these
boys where being communicative and expressive is associated with
femininity. Moreover, to sit down and to talk is framed in opposition
to sport which draws attention to the binary frames of reference that
are implicated in specific regimes of practice in which adolescent boys
learn to enact their masculinities. Such a normalising regime involves
the deployment of public and private gendered categories of the self
which are structured in dualistic terms. It is at such a nexus that a
hegemonic form of heterosexual masculinity emerges in oppositional
relation to femininity and homosexuality (see Martino,1994a; Ward,

Later on in the interview, Nathan reiterates what he thinks are some of
the problems that boys his age experience in feeling compelled to live up to a particular standard in which sport functions as an indicator of desirable masculinity:

124 Wayne: What would you say then are some of the problems that boys your age experience?

125 Nathan: Well because they have to live up to a certain standard they have to try and sometimes the things that - like education and that - they'll put it off then they'll like um, they're not like um, they should be out doing sport rather than doing education. So then they'll put education off even though they think that it's important to them. So they take a step down in life 'cause you're missing out on your education because you'd rather be ... - instead of being you know like smart and have heaps of friends and that - they'd rather have heaps of friends and not worry about their education because they think they might lose friends by studying more time in the library and things. They don't want to get stereotyped out of being important and having heaps of friends and that. They don't think it's like cool and macho to do homework and to go to the library when you've got an assignment, going in at lunchtime to do extra work. They think it's really uncool to do that. But then, what else, um, you have to live up to a standard and if you don't make it you get put down.

Thus 'being cool' is a priority for these boys and is established within the context of a hierarchical set of social relations with their
peers in which there is a constant jostling of hegemonic and
subordinate masculinities. Within this regime doing homework or going
to the library become markers of a subordinate form of masculinity.
Moreover, rejecting such practices which lead to academic achievement
is also a means by which the 'cool boys' can establish themselves as
rebels in their rejection of the institution's values. It is in this
sense, as Nathan emphasises, that learning to relate to other boys
within the peer group context involves the deployment of specific
techniques of the self which are operationalised through a regime of
practices involving specific modalities of power. So for Nathan, living
up to a particular ideal or version of masculinity is very much a part
of his everyday life at school. However, through the ways in which he
is able to negotiate his position within the dominant popular group at
school, it is possible for him to achieve a particular valorised status
as a male, despite his active involvement and achievement in the
academic side of school life. In this way, he is able to escape the
position of the other which is conferred upon those boys who refuse to
or who are unable to measure up to the demands of this dominant model
of masculinity.
Adam, another member of "footballer" group, also mentions the need to
negotiate his position in the dominant group in order to be accepted.
He describes this in terms of balancing the academic and social sides
of his life which is integral to enacting a desirable masculinity that
is invested in sport and establishing a particular demeanour:
108 Adam: So I don't know, I think I'm sort of a mixture of both, you
know what I mean. So I don't know, it works off, it works out alright
though, like I think that I can sort of balance that you know, quite well the social side of the school and the education side, ‘cause I think there is two sides to school you know, the socialising and the parties, and the parties and all that sort of stuff but also the education and you know you’re, it always seems that you have the two groups at school like all the people you know, who are worried about education or the guys that just think that socialising is the way to go and I think that I’m sort of a mixture of both…it works out pretty well but it can often be a bit of a drag sort of, you know trying to balance both um, both the social and the education sort of sides of school.

Thus meeting the requirements associated with what appears to be two disparate departments of social existence can be 'a bit of a drag' in that it creates certain pressures for Adam:

110 Adam: So yeah, but I see that it works out okay and you know, and you still have your same friendship groups and that sort of stuff so it's quite good. And I think that's probably a problem that a lot of guys face, is um whether they choose to be in the you know, just the social side, just worry about that or whether education is going to be the main priority you know, in their lives so I think that it's a pretty common problem.

111 Wayne: So there's a pressure there?

112 Adam: Oh yeah, for sure. I think you sort of, you know you work out whether you’re going to be the one who's going to be the social person you know, and sort of school takes a back seat or you know, school's the number one thing and um social life sort of comes second.
So, I don't know, there is a pressure there to either, to be one or the other and whichever one you choose also I think determines what friendship group you're in.

113: Wayne: Hm, hm

114 Adam: So, you know, there is certainly once again a point there, whether you're the "squids" or whatever you want to call them or whether, you know, you're the person who's going to be sociable and you know, a "party animal" sort of thing you know, you go out all the time and that sort of stuff, so ...

Thus Adam is caught between two positions - a 'squid' and a 'party animal' - which involves a balancing act to ensure that his masculinity is kept in tact in maintaining a 'cool' demeanour:

115 Wayne: So guys wouldn't see being smart then and being a high achiever necessarily as being "cool"?

116 Adam: Oh no, not at all, not at all. It can, it sort of, it can be on various scales like um, not you know, being the high achiever um a lot of the time isn't "cool", it really I think depends on how you act and how you take it, you know because that can be, you know, if you're like the person who is the high achiever and that, you know, and then that's your life sort of thing, achieving you know is the higher thing. That's your life, you know, and you can't get past that or whether you're the person who does that and at the same time is sort of humble about it but also um, you know it's not their "be all and end all."

You know, there's also the social side of school and that too that you've got to worry about.

117 Wayne: So are you saying that if you are a high achiever, you can't
afford to show that too much?

118 Adam: Yeah, yeah for sure...not so much show that but um, it really depends on how you take that, how you take that on, whether that makes you, if you achieve higher, a person who you know, is really stuck-up and big-headed and that sort of stuff or whether that makes you a person who sort of you know, builds your character and builds your personality and sort of makes you go out and say hello to people and meet people and that sort of stuff, so it can sort of work both ways in that sense.

What is significant here is Adam’s emphasis on acting and ‘taking on’ a particular demeanour which becomes recognisable as an instance of a stylised masculinity (Coleman, 1990) that must be carefully orchestrated to risk slipping into the category of a 'squid'.

On this basis of this data it would appear that these boys invest a lot of energy in maintaining their position within the dominant group. This is understandable in light of the consequences of their failure to measure up to heterosexist norms for enacting a desirable masculinity. In negotiating their position within the dominant group, both Adam and Nathan are able to escape the violence of homophobic and other forms of abuse that are directed at those boys who are not a part of this group and about whom Scott talks.

Scott, in one part of the interview, mentions how the dominant boys make homophobic comments about other boys who are 'outside' their
86 Scott: ...they walk past and hassle all these other groups and make
comments about them.

87 Wayne: What comments? Like?

88 Scott: 'Oh I hate him, he's really gay' or 'Gee, those guys are real
whatever'. I mean it always gets back to gay with all these guys It's
sort of like the big insult.

89 Wayne: They call other people 'gay' do they?

90 Scott: Yeah, and we've had one guy right through from Year 8 and he
got stuck with it and everyone decided, oh, you know, oh he's
definitely, he's a poofter, we hate him. You can tell the way he
talks, he's friends with a lot of girls more than guys. I mean, it's
his choice really, but everyone's sort of stuck him with that tag and
what surprises me when you talk to him, he's actually really homophobic
himself. So it's odd that he's sort of been hassled so much with it
and he's like that as well. It's funny that. He doesn't say it as
such, but he wouldn't call people gay all the time, but yeah he's
definitely homophobic. Strange, 'cause I would have thought that if
you got hassled with it ... that's like with me I got switched off to
it all sort of.
Scott highlights the normalising practices in which sexuality is deployed as a specific category for defining acceptable masculinity. He refers to one boy who has been marked as a 'poofter'. The criteria for labelling him in this way relate to (i) his manner of speaking, and (ii) the fact that he tends to associate with girls as friends. This boy, therefore, is targeted on two counts, both which have associations with the 'feminine' and a rejection of a hegemonic model of masculinity. The way this boy talks, presumably, is considered to be outside the range of what constitutes acceptable modes of speaking for males and his preference for having girls as friends also confirms that he is engaging in a non-normative practice. Boys are expected to talk in a particular way and to 'do masculinity' with other boys. If a boy at school chooses to spend time with girls as friends, he may risk having his masculinity brought into question.

Perhaps this is related to the importance of sharing specific gendered practices and interests for boys and girls in the formation of acceptable masculinities and femininities. Researchers such as Hite (1981; 1994), for example, have highlighted the role of fathers and other males in instructing boys not to be 'sissies' and not to associate with girls as they are growing up. Such practices or ways of relating immediately become more visible within the institutional context of the school with its regimen of routinised practices and regimes. For instance, the practices of schools and the social relations between people within them are organised around the public spaces of the 'playground' and classroom which are structurally built
sites for the deployment of sophisticated apparatuses of surveillance and moral supervision (see Hunter, 1988; Foucault, 1977). Within such spaces students are not only monitored by school personnel, but learn to monitor themselves within a regime of normalising practices involving the deployment of sexuality. This is reflected in the comment that Scott makes about the boy who is targeted as gay actually being homophobic himself. This points to the extent to which this boy has learned to monitor and to relate to himself within a normalising regime of heterosexist practices. Moreover, it draws attention to the cycle of abuse which is often implicated in a regime of bullying practices with the victim perpetuating the very practices of which he has been the target.

Thus, through the interviews with adolescent boys which have been included in this paper, it is possible to draw attention to the role of hegemonic forms of masculinity in the lives of these boys in terms of how they have learnt to relate to one another. The emphasis and status accorded to football at this particular school also helps to establish the role that sporting practices play in enacting a desirable masculinity for many of the boys. In fact, there was definitely a pecking order of masculinities at this school with the 'footballers' wielding the most power. Those boys who could not play or were not interested in football or who simply did not 'measure up' were relegated an inferior status and harassed as a consequence (see also Arnot, 1984: 48; Frank, 1993; Lehne, 1976; Dunning, 1986; Whitson, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Ward, 1995; Hinson, 1995; Nickson, 1995;
Butler, 1995; Boulden, 1995; McLean, 1995b). What was also highlighted in this study was the role of homophobia in the construction and maintenance of dominant versions of masculinity. It appeared that homophobia was a mechanism or strategy in a particular gender system (Connell, 1994) for policing and regulating masculinity for these boys (see Epstein, 1997; Nayak & Kehily, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Holland, Ramazanoglu and Sharpe, 1993).

Placing masculinity on the agenda in schools

Many of the boys when asked explicitly about masculinity and what it meant to be male made the point that they had never really been encouraged to think about such issues. Eric, a Year 12 student aged 17, for instance, talked at length about homophobia and about particular versions of masculinity that are considered to be acceptable in society:

Eric: ....There seems to be a real thing about homophobia around males which I don't think I understand that well. The only explanation I could come up with is that they are insecure about their own feelings, so that's why they're afraid of other people, other people who are different to themselves.

Wayne: How do you think that could change? Could it change?

Eric: It would be hard, it's not going to be easy. It would have to
begin with schools, your parents, society, TV, newspapers...everything is seen as the one type of male stereotype, but it's a particular version of masculinity. You have to be at least sort of interested in sports, you have to like girls and all the rest of it and it is always fed to you from day one... and you've never actually seen the other version of masculinity which is perfectly normal in the sense that it is just a different way that guys feel about other people, but it's not seen as you are growing up. So, when people see that other people are different to what they've been made to believe all their lives then obviously they will want to reject that sort of behaviour or that sort of person because it's something different and everyone hates change, everyone wants to stick with the things that they know best and all of a sudden you just see this other version of masculinity and you've never like, you know, through your education, you've never been told about it, you never know about that sort of person until you hit high school and that's when people really start calling you names and labelling.

Shaun, another student, also makes a similar point when he claims that in schools "there's no opportunity for guys to get down and think about what they're doing and why they're doing it and stuff like that". I ask him why he thinks that there is no opportunity and he replies:

I'm not sure. I think one thing is that...it's almost as if, it's like a mismanagement of what they teach in schools. They teach Algebra and Maths and stuff like this that we will never use later on in life but
they won't teach us stuff that is important to us and that we should know and learn. We have to find it out for ourselves and if we don't then we're stuck. Instead of learning how to divide this and do that and stuff that isn't that useful to us in life, maybe they should start teaching us stuff that is related to us and that we need to know about, so like if a situation does occur and people are expected to do something, they can handle it more instead of just sitting there and going I have to do what these guys say. There has been stuff about don't fall to peer pressure and stuff like that but that's nothing as deep as going into stuff about how you feel about being masculine or what is masculinity. I'm not sure why we don't have the opportunity. It could be an error on our part but I think it's mostly the people that have to teach stuff that maybe they should turn around and look at what they're teaching us. Right now they are teaching us pretty much crap that we will never need to know later on in life but this [masculinity] is something that is pretty important to a whole lot of people

It would appear that Shaun is advocating an approach which assists boys in developing capacities for critical thinking about the impact of masculinity in their lives. He is also drawing attention to the need to develop and to teach a curriculum which is more relevant to the daily lives of students and which targets the politics of masculinities in schools.

Further implications of the research
It would appear, in the light of this research into masculinities, that it is imperative for educators to help students to develop capacities for discussing the impact and effects of hegemonic masculinities in school. However, as Davies (1995) has pointed out, it is important to ensure that such practices are not merely recuperated into an alternative binary oppositional gendered framework in which asymmetrical power relations between men and women remain intact (see Davies, 1995). Davies comments on the ways in which apparently non-hegemonic forms of masculinity are "written into and over the more powerful hegemonic masculinities" with new discourses of masculinity being reworked to become the old (see Biddulph, 1994; 1997). For instance, many attempts to address educational reform for boys are grounded in what Cox (1995) terms the competing victim syndrome. The effects of such approaches, which set boys' interests against those of girls, is to reinforce oppositional differences between the former and the latter (see Kenway, 1995; 1997; Yates, 1997). Moreover, these approaches are not based on an adequate theorisation of power and disadvantage (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1995).

This is evident when many problems that boys experience such as binge drinking, irresponsible sex and risk-taking are attributed to a lack of or deficient fathering (see reference to Biddulph in Safe, 1997: 15). For instance, Biddulph claims that "whimpish fathers are everywhere" (1994: 119). This absent or deficient father syndrome, he argues, leads to 'father hunger' which is directly attributed to the emotional problems and unruly behaviour that boys experience. This is further
exacerbated, he claims, by the effects of a Western industrialised society which does not allow for structured rites of passage for boys' initiation into manhood (see Safe, 1997; Biddulph, 1997). The problem with such a position is that:

(i) it tends to cast all boys into a similar mould and thereby treats them as belonging to a homogeneous group (see Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997);

(ii) it tends to treat boys as victims at the basis of which is an anti-female or feminist sentiment (Dyer, 1997).

Thus when addressing masculinities in schools it is important to avoid framing gender equity concerns in these terms. The effect of this is to reinforce already existing gender regimes in which masculinities are defined in opposition to femininities with certain power relations remaining intact.

In the light of the research provided in this paper, it would appear that it is necessary for educators to find ways of interrupting the association between being labelled a 'poof' and specific practices and behaviours which are associated with being feminine. But the question of how students might be encouraged to critically reflect on the nexus between sexuality and masculinity in this capacity still remains unanswered. The activities and texts used in the textbook Gendered Fictions (Martino & Mellor, 1995), which deals with issues around
masculinity, have been useful in this respect. Through using the kinds of texts that are included in this book, sociological and political knowledges about the social construction of masculinities can be made available to students along the above lines in a non-threatening way. Moreover, through the activities that are set up around these texts, students are encouraged to reflect critically on masculinity. For example, students are asked to consider the cultural construction of a hegemonic masculinity which is based on a denigration of the feminised 'other' through reading a story about a boy who plays with dolls and who is called "a lilly livered poofter" by his father as a consequence (see Martino, 1995b). In this way, they are encouraged to consider the effects of a hegemonic form of masculinity and to develop an understanding of the role of homophobia in policing specific sex-appropriate practices for boys. The text, therefore, can be used in the literacy classroom as a vehicle for targeting specific issues around the impact of hegemonic masculinities and for exploring the ways in which those boys who do not measure up are treated (see Martino, 1995b; Martino, 1997b).

Conclusion

Overall, the research referred to in this paper highlights the role that certain norms play in establishing particular forms of masculinity for a group of adolescent boys at one particular school. The complexities and nuances involved in how individual boys negotiate and establish their masculinities are related to wider technologies of
normalisation and regulation in which sexuality is deployed to police
gender boundaries (see Epstein, 1997; Steinberg et al, 1997; Redman,
1996). In light of this research, it would appear that it is important
for those working in schools to help boys to develop specific
capacities for developing an understanding of the effects of certain
forms of masculinity. To do so is to find ways of encouraging the
latter to reflect on power and how it is exercised in their lives and
in the lives of others. McLean (1995a) argues that encouraging boys to
reflect on and to recognise the injustices in their own lives can form
the basis for enabling them to develop and value capacities for
empathising with other people’s experiences of injustice. Perhaps, in
this way, students can be led to consider the damaging effects of
homophobia, and other forms of power, in the lives of those boys who
just don’t measure up (see also Martino, 1996; 1997b). Such gender
equity initiatives designed to encourage boys to productively engage
with issues related to the politics of masculinity are presented as
complementing attempts to improve and enhance the achievement and
social situation of girls in schools.

It would appear that addressing issues of power in relation to boys
enacting hegemonic heterosexual masculinities will have pay offs for
both girls and boys. However, based on what some boys said in their
interviews, it seems that such spaces for discussing masculinity and
its effects have not yet been created. The task for educators and
administrators in schools is to find ways of broaching these issues
with students. Until matters related to homophobia and the role that it
plays in establishing hegemonic heterosexual masculinities are addressed on a whole school level, existing gender regimes will remain intact.

For Correspondence:

School of Education
Murdoch University
Murdoch WA 6150
Email: martino@central.murdoch.edu.au
References


Westview Press.


the English Classroom. English in Australia, No. 107, March.


