Future directions for intervention programs addressing masculinities and resilience for at-risk boys.

This paper will address the need for gender issues and the discourses of power to be explored within resilient frameworks for successful outcomes for at-risk males in intervention programs. Due to the western valorisation of traditional masculinities, the ‘backlash politics’ debate internationally constrains the challenges to the existing gender order within intervention programs. The discussion will deal with the notion of hegemonic masculinities and how boys with behaviour problems act out traditional masculinities to gain a sense of male power. It will focus on the notion of at-risk which defines these boys into the new victims of accepted social values and does not address the issues of how men victimise other men from different ethnic, class and sexual preference minority groups, through violent and aggressive tactics. For these boys to explore the interplay of hegemonic masculinities within society, will enable them to move into connecting protective processes/factors within alternative programs and the community. Finally, I make suggestions for the design and implementation for future intervention/preventative programs that will integrate gender construction and resilient protective processes/factors.
Introduction

This psychosocial study connects gender and protective processes (alternative program) and the role that gender construction plays in successful educational outcomes. This study presents a synthesis of such research and considers the lack of research on the impact of masculine performances on resilience. For at-risk adolescent males to be successfully reintegrated into an educational setting the environment must provide the opportunity to challenge the legitimacy of traditional masculine performances. The aim of probing the resilience literature is to develop a framework for understanding dominant acting out masculine behaviours, which has a major impact on the effectiveness of an alternative program.

Resilience and Gender

“Resilience” is defined as the capacities to rebound and adapt successfully in the face of adversity (Benard, 1995; Kaplan, 1999; Masten, 1990). Capacities for resilience help children develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose. The concept of resilience grew out of recognition by clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and others interested in child development, that the term “at-risk youth” was based on a negative perspective of young people and failed to recognise and appreciate their strengths, individuality, and uniqueness. Risk factors are defined as variables that increase the probability of bad outcomes. However, a merely statistical concept of risk, provides no information about the underlying processes (Cicchetti, 1993).

Resilience focuses on children at-risk of adverse developmental outcomes and on specific factors such as children’s competence as a strength. Researchers have found that many young people who lived in high-risk situations overcame risks. Studies of children at-risk led quickly to the recognition that certain children did not succumb in the same way as others to maladaptive behaviour. Such children seemed to be in some way protected against the negative effects of parental, social, or environmental factors so that their development could proceed apparently unimpaired by difficulty.

Researchers reaffirm the perspective of resilience for children in differentiation and hierarchic integration within adolescent development. The unexpected onset of depression or the sudden emergence of eating problems in an individual who has always appeared well adjusted may well be rooted in this type of occurrence. Similarly, such processes may account for situations where people react in an unexpectedly competent way to particularly adverse types of experience. Therefore, such ideas have helped to move the focus of much developmental research towards issues such as the relationships between continuity and change in development, or the significance of the different types of transitions which development bring (Collins, 1990).

When observing aggressive at-risk adolescent boys the concept of hegemonic masculinities is the way in which many adolescent boys occupy positions of power and how this relates to groups of adolescent at-risk boys who aspire to positions of power within social relationships. The concept of hegemony is about the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups. The notion of hegemonic masculinities was constructed and used primarily to maintain the central focus in the critique of masculinities. The public face of hegemonic masculinities is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power.
The aim of this paper is to understand the need for gender issues and the discourses of power to be explored within resilient frameworks for successful outcomes for at-risk males in intervention programs. Within this research the results have found that societal and contextual factors have considerable impact on at-risk boys and their role in power relationships, which, contribute to their subjective experience of themselves and their world. In particular, this relates to their masculine values and the gendered nature of emotion, and its role in maintaining power differences within educational institutions. I will conclude with making suggestions for future intervention/preventative programs that will integrate gender construction and resilient protective processes/factors.

Methods of Research

In the present study, qualitative 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 employed to add to demographic information. Four factors were central to a productive analysis of the students’ views of masculinity. Firstly, the aim of the narrative was to collect information from the boy’s subjective experience of themselves and their world. 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 alternative program and support networks for these adolescent males.

Participants

Participants were three groups of adolescents, (N = 32) who had completed a 6-week alternative suspension program called (Learning Adapted Special Education Requirement) LASER. There were 2 females only, in the first group. All the students were from the Northern Eastern suburbs of Brisbane. The male students were all Caucasian and one female was indigenous. Ages ranged from 13 to 15 years. All but four of the participants came from fragmented family constructs. The fathers of two male students were in prison. Twenty-seven students lived with single mother families. Three males and one female 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 so many 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, compared to the book knowledge within their schools, others felt embarrassed. Programs ranged from one to 12 weeks.
Demographic Details

Data were collected on family characteristics, age, and socio economic background. Of the 29 participants 2 only were female (one was of indigenous origin); 26 lived with their mothers, 4 with mother and father and 1 with his father and grandmother.

Instruments

Worksheets
I used Worksheets from a program called “Boys Talk” (A Program addressing masculinities/gender, Friedman, 1996). The program included humour, cartoons and fun activities for the boys. It also developed a rapport between myself and the boys to stimulate discussions on the struggles they felt as a male today.

Interviews
The interview questions were opened 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.

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. These are described below. Throughout the report participants are identified by respondent numbers and fictitious names, and paragraph numbers are used to reference quotations from interview transcripts. For example, (A1, par. 12) indicates that data are drawn from the transcript data for respondent 1 at paragraph 12.

Processing the data and displaying the narratives

Transcribed interviews were edited to create a coherent document to ensure readability. This was because readers seek coherence and casual connections between incidents and conventions as they construct the meaning of the narrative for themselves (Iser, 1976, Culler, 1981). However, it was necessary to use the words of the students themselves to reveal the knowledge and, hence, retain the personal nature of the reflections (Schratz, 1993).

Procedures
I had worked previously in Behaviour Support Services 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, Stafford district, Brisbane) and principals of the two LASER 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 6 week program. Permission was obtained from the Principal and the participants’ parents or guardian and the students.

**Data collection**

There are two main types of data collection gathered via worksheets and tape-recorded interviews collected over a period of one year. I designed my own demographic, interview questions and the worksheets were from the “Boys Talk” program. This helped to start the boys to think about gender and develop a rapport for future interviews.

As mentioned previously, each set is composed of categories providing information about topics, features, and processes. The results of this analysis are presented below in a highly abbreviated form. Only one or two comments are given to exemplify view shared among the participants.

**Theme 1: Educational Experiences**

**Set 1 – Reflections on school and teachers**

This subset was composed of responses about topics, features, and processes related to school and the transition into the alternative program. Stories contained a temporal sequence, beginning with accounts of life at school, impression of teachers, significant events leading to suspension/exclusion, progressing to descriptions of the alternative program and the teachers within the program. The boys discussed how they would like teachers and schools to change in relation to them.

Several boys had histories of physical assault of teachers and students. They were involved in school brawling which, by their admission, was a reaction to the frustration they felt about academic failure, boredom, and peer group acceptance. Many had a history of non-conformity to school rules and rejection of the curriculum due to its irrelevance. For some boys, school authority is perceived as an alien power and they react by defining their masculinity in a confrontationalist way.

Adolescent males with behavioural problems commonly adopt goals that lead to non-conformist reputations. For many, getting into trouble was an implicit goal. When asked what events reflected their antisocial behaviour, all participants were willing to respond and included comments such as, “I had problems with my school work and I got into a fight and almost broke some fella’s jaw and then I got suspended after I wagged school” (A3, par. 20).

The boys drew attention to ways in which school environments are social situations where abuse is experienced and learned. The boys express their boredom and failure at school and especially their vulnerability to the label, “behaviour problem”. A4 commented, for example, “This kid got me in trouble by asking me what the answer was and I haven’t even done any maths and I don’t know why he asked me (laughter). They don’t like me out there.

The boys knew what behaviour was expected within the classroom, and this lead to a discussion about how they want teachers to stop harassing them and treat
them in a more positive way than normally experienced. However, they are confused about how they to be treated or give respect. A1 stated, “… the teacher’s are saying, ‘treat us with respect’ and they don’t care about you when you do treat them with respect” (A1, par. 18). They were not sure how they wanted teachers to change, except to be treated in the same way as their parents treated them. Curiously, most of the boys’ fathers were physically or emotionally violent, or absent. They viewed male roles as aggressive and this extended into their problem-solving behaviour. This is evident when the boys give non-functional responses, A4 for example, expressed the animosity he sensed from a particular teacher, “… he just doesn’t like me so he constantly speaks crap, so I get up him and get into trouble for it” (A4, par. 31).

To alleviate their boredom and failure at school the boys seek situations in which they can get into trouble with teachers and become involved with other behavioural problem boys.

In this context they were asked how school could change to make their circumstances more positive. A2 simply said, “Fucking teachers!” (A2. par. 522). They had few ideas other than avoid school, for example, “Not go at all! … Don’t throw chisels at them, they don’t like it … don’t tell them they are crazy” (A2. par. 531, 549);

Throughout the interviews the boys thought that their teachers did not provide appropriate role models. They thought that “acting up in class” was a way of acting as a boy in the face of adult authority and was consistent with the oppositional culture that they had developed and used permanently, but with limited positive outcomes.

For these boys, school is an environment that offers few role alternatives other than traditional masculine performances based on patriarchal power. The comments raised in the section above give examples of a variety of non-functional behaviours that the boys employ to deal with teachers’ attitudes and responses to them and their problems. For these boys academic failure are the results from social circumstances, therefore being the results of class, gender, race, family, and school factors.

Getting into trouble at school is a process that leads boys to construct masculinities through conflict with authority (Mills, 2000). In effect, the institution of school maintains authority and privilege to which disadvantaged boys have no access (Connell, 1996). They attend only because they are legally required to attend and they despise the “book knowledge” that shows is largely unrelated to the struggles of their everyday lives.

The following section leads into the struggles of educational achievement and the embarrassment many of these working class boys face when placed into an alternative program. It is apparent that many of these boys see the advancement of educational achievement only open to a very few with particular abilities and mostly from middle class backgrounds. They struggle with finding alternatives or seeing any future success around education within their socio-economic lifestyles.

**Reflections on the alternative program**

In some cases, alternative suspension/exclusion programs may increase the likelihood that the abuse will reoccur and increase the student’s feelings of alienation in school. At worst, it may escalate the problem particularly when alternative programs are viewed as a punishment and the application of systemic power.

By acting out violent or avoidance behaviours, many of these young males placed themselves in situations in which they were unable to positively influence
others in ways that can be expected when climbing educational hierarchies. Therefore, the doors to power within these hierarchies are locked, especially for those living in low socio-economic or ethnic communities. The boys did not have positive feelings about returning to the environment that they perceived to be hostile toward them.

The inequities surrounding masculinities for these boys reinforce their (dis)advantage within the educational environment and often settings beyond the school. Connell (1997) claimed that these issues pertaining to masculinities and the role of educational institutions “as masculinity making devices,” the boys clearly acted out traditional masculinities in securing their power and authority.

Theme 2: Male Identity

This section includes descriptions of how the boys perceived the male identity. They described their view of the ideal man, male heroes, and their perceptions of social equity, interaction with the law, and reflections about anger and how it affects their present life as a male.

Set 1: The ideal man

This section deals with the boys talking about feelings, aggression and the attributes of a successful male. The discussion started with the boys observing a cartoon (Boys Talk Program) with the question ‘What does the Millennium man look/act like?’ The cartoon depicts a muscular male treading water in his boxer shorts. Above the water, his facial expression is angry with a fist in the air. Below the water he is cuddling a teddy bear. The boys enjoyed colouring in the male, giving him wild hairstyles with brightly coloured, patterned boxer shorts. The teddy bears were given a range of emotional expressions, colours and patterns.

During the discussion, the boys described what they thought the cartoon character was feeling emotionally. They expressed traditional masculine behaviour in avoiding communication on an emotional level … “He’s cuddling a teddy bear underneath the water … his a soft cock! … he’s not really strong” (A1, par. 119).

Further discussion focused on physical appearance and what a ideal male should look like and wear, “Muscly, big, strong, cool and tough, got to be tough and good at sports” (A2, A4, A3, par. 129, 130, 133,134). “Comfortable but good looking clothes Baggy … homey … with your pants hanging down to your bum, showing your undies (A1, 2, 3, 4, par. 141, 142, 143, 144, 147).

When asked about sexual activity and how to impress girls, the boys stressed that you needed to be tough to attract the opposite sex, to have lot’s of money and material possessions. Discussion about sex was about the physical experience without emotions. “I don’t get enough of it! … Fond of it … Get into it! (laughter) … More, more! [laughter] … to get nice girls you gotta have lots of money and a cool car” (A1,2,3,4, par. 149,150,151,152).

The boys talk about using aggressive strategies to solve problems with females. “What with a chick? … smack her in the head, talk to her, tell her to fuck up” (A2, par. 127). The discussion changed focus to talk about positive ways to impress a potential female partner. “Be cool … give her presents … be nice” (A2, A4, A3, par. 136,137,138). The boys commonly expressed opposition involving denigration and the idealisation of femininity. The boys define themselves in terms of their difference
from girls, and so must avoid doing anything viewed as traditionally feminine. For example, when asked to reflect on mens’ roles and responsibilities around children they stated, “Fun … No, gotta play with them, girls’ stuff … Sometimes their bloody annoying!” (A1, 2, 3, par. 172-176).

While boys asserted themselves as tough and active, they attached different meanings to feminine and masculine as two separate identities. This highlighted the powerful role that sexuality plays in terms of how these boys’ police and monitor their masculinities within heteronormative regimes that involve internalised homophobia.

The boys views on ideal masculine attributes stressed how the practices of peer females contributed to the boys acquisition of a particular stylised masculinity and, hence, social status. The girls’ role is to reinforce heterosexual masculinity and females are expected to maintain subordinate traditional feminine roles. Moreover, attention is drawn to the way in which masculinity is displayed by accentuating in giving women material possessions and not showing feelings, otherwise males are “soft cocks.” This is indicative of the boys posturing and presenting aspects of their personalities to present a particular heterosexual masculinity, not only for the girls, but also for other boys as well. The requirements for displaying a particular heterosexual masculinity are spelt out in terms of demonstrating aggression, physical strength, being able to attract the opposite sex readily, and engaging actively in sports, partying, drinking and drugs.

This section of narrative highlights the regime of self-surveillance and the gendered dimension of displaying no emotions as normalising practices. They comment on the norms governing the public display of traditional forms of masculinity that emphasise the avoidance of communicating on an emotional level in peer group situations. Through enacting a particular currency of heterosexual masculinity.

**Set 2: Father**

The boys were generally reluctant when drawn into the topic to talk about their fathers. They wanted to change the subject, became angry and started to swear. “His an alcoholic … He’s shit! … I don’t even want to know what he looks like let alone what he does. I don’t even want to know him!

When asked about the attributes they would like to avoid in their fathers, they expressed similar parental traits to those they perceived they themselves possessed. in themselves … “He’s like me but thirty years older … He is always on the verge of being a total psycho (A1-4, par. 276-289).

Relationships with parents were of considerable continuing importance to the boys, but were regulated in gender specific ways. When the boys spoke about their relations with adult men and women, they usually referred to their parents. Most of the boys constructed their mothers as more sensitive and emotionally closer to them, than their fathers who were seen to be aggressive, abusive, and both emotionally and physically. The boys reinforced that it is other males within their socioeconomic structure reinforcing traditional masculinities; their Father role models, older male siblings, and peers from marginalised groups. This suggests that not all men can be categorised into one homogeneous group without taking into consideration class, race, and factors other than gender.
The argument goes that patriarchy has always involved a struggle for power between the fathers and the sons. Freud’s Oedipus complex represents the psychologising and universalising of conflict between the male generations, and popular American movies of the 50s were often obsessed with boys’ alienation from their fathers. The most popular explanation of social problems, such as juvenile delinquency, was father absence, which was said to cause boys to experience anxiety about their masculinity. Hence, there is a long history to men’s uncertainty about their masculinity from other men. It is apparent that these boys feel the lack of emotional support from other boys, including fathers and older male siblings who are still reinforcing the notion of traditional masculinities.

**Set 3: Male Heroes**

The boys discussed the attributes of male heroes. Most typically they referred to sporting prowess or popular culture (sports heroes, pop stars), doing drugs, drinking, and having sex. The boys viewed their older siblings or close males as protectors who used aggressive tactics when problem-solving. “My male friend, I don’t know, he’s always … I don’t know, everybody likes him. He’s a smart arse. He does all the stupid things and everyone likes him for it … My brother his cool, he has a nice car and house” (A1, par. 194).

The narratives give examples of how masculine culture is constructed for these boys’ heroes. The boys did not mention any characteristics that disrupted masculinities. The narratives expressed the avoidance of emotions among admired male heroes, which has been parallel with the lack of emotional expression and physical affection of their absent fathers, and older male siblings. This emphasises the impact of fathers and adult men in establishing norms that govern boys’ behaviour as gendered individuals. What is also significant is the way in which these boys have developed specific capacities for reading masculinity and applying them to their own practices and those of other males that establish norms for practices and the policing sex/gender boundaries to which (Steinberg, 1997).

**Set 4: Social Inequality**

The boys discussed how they believe rich parents stay together and contribute to the fulfilment of their children’s life in an intact and safe environment. This belief was seen to justify preying on rich people. Because rich people have a better life, poor people should be able to take some of that wealth.

When asked if they think that rich people have miserable marriages and problems as well as poor people, common responses included, “The blokes just go to the corner and buy a hooker … Exactly! (Group agrees) … Why do you think that you get all these wackos when they’re sixty going, old rich fellas in there sixties married to the young models” (A1-4, par. 317-320).

The boys believed that upper and middle class white males are to have the membership characteristics of the dominant group. These include wealth, power, and gender, sexual orientation (heterosexual), physical ability, and age. Characterised by working class males whose class status relatively lower income and power refuse to examine class issues. If they did, they would discover their claim to dominant group membership is weak. Weis, Proweller, and Centrie’s (1996) study of working class men reinforced looking for scapegoats.
Working class males work in a class system to sustain a patriarchal class order, but they are not the main beneficiaries. They are, in fact, expendable; these men did not make decisions about paycuts or the closures of factories. Indeed, they blamed affirmative action policies on the loss of jobs that they believed were their right. For working class men who aspire to be like their bosses, blaming affirmative action rather than their bosses or capitalism and its class divisions, was logical. Not only did these men espouse that only merit should be the basis of employment and academic decisions, but also that the essential biological fact of being white and male entitled them to dominant class privileges.

The boys asserted that dominant class males do not share wealth and 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 affiliate with groups against whom their essential biological claims can be used to advantage. The other groups are women, people of colour, and homosexuals.

Set 6: “Blokes and Chicks”

When asked how they behave differently around male friends compared to female peers they expressed, “around males ya’ don’t get all embarrassed and blush and all that (laughing) … Males just swear heaps and when I am around females I just show off? …Try and be tough and big note yourself … Talk with them … muck around with ya’ mates in front of them … pick fights … you pick fights with people that you know you can beat in front of the girls … I don’t know, they’re just different”.

One of the boys goes into describing that girls acting out traditional masculinities are feared by the other males … “The tom boys, like my sister she is a tom boy … they watch blokes fight, they like to join in … Like this girl flogged up this Year 8 guy when she was in Year 7. She almost killed him. I felt sorry for him because he wouldn’t hit her back or nothing and she was sitting there kneeing him in the head and uppercuttering him. I tried to stop her and she just told me to piss off … so I just walked off, ‘cause otherwise my mates would have given me shit if I tried to stop it” (A1-4, par. 323-353). The boys had a dismissive or threatened attitude towards female peers acting out hegemonic masculinities, hence, females can and do perform hegemonic masculinities. For example, a woman who is attempting to join the hegemonically masculine group is through the symbolic appropriation of a penis, e.g., G.I. Jane (1997). The penis is then a cultural artifact of gender performance.

The boys talk about the courtship process and how a girl is most impressed by spending money in taking her to nice places and buying her lots of presents, “act gentleman like and give her presents on her birthday … shout them to the movies … buy her clothes and stuff … take them out to dinner? … That costs too much! … I just take them Maccas or somewhere … I took one to a Chinese restaurant and it cost me fifty bucks” (A1-4, par. 354-362).

The boys expressed how they avoid verbally communicating to girls by acting the fool or projecting macho behaviour was a few ways to impress girls, “Sitting around smoking and drinking, like with our female friends we have a lot more fun just playing around … I don’t know we just play around and be more childish … Walk away … In front of girls ya’ more worried about being cool” (A1-4, par. 363-371).

Performance of gender is not necessarily based on sex, although it appears majority of the time that way, because most individuals conform to biologically
essential definitions of what their gender performance “ought to be.” For example, women ought to be “feminine” or “men” ought to be masculine. The boys positioned girls as powerless and in need of protection or to provide material possessions to win their approval amongst other male and female peers.

The boys also reinforced that heterosexual women who are attracted to “Alpha Males,” i.e., males who perform traditional masculinities or leading hegemonically masculine males. Are actually reinforcing hegemonic masculinities by rewarding this gender behaviour with attractive validating responses, if not dates, sex, love, and marriage. These females use men as objects of success, as hegemonically masculine men use women as sex objects (Gould, 1974). This reinforces the notion that if gender behaviour and gender relations are to change, so must rewards for those behaviours. Rewards, such as affiliation, love, and sex, must not be attached to behaviours that are no longer desirable. This motivator may not be as applicable to heterosexual women who perform hegemonic masculinities, for most heterosexual men may not be attracted to women who present themselves in this manner.

**Set 5: Aggression and victimisation**

Many of these boys in the present study were not successful, advantaged, or powerful and certainly do not feel so. Male friendships were orientated toward belonging to groups or gangs and were involved in a range of activities, that included watching/playing football, boxing or martial arts, drinking and using illegal drugs at parties, fighting at parties in front of the girls, and displaying tough, aggressive behaviour in front of peers.

For males who live in poverty, who are from racial and ethnic minorities, or who are educationally disadvantaged, homeless, and unemployed, risky and violent behaviours provide one way of obtaining status and cultural resources (i.e. by obtaining material objects that are considered attributes by their peers). Physical violence was seen as of little consequence among them who have more to gain and little to lose. Although, it was more likely to occur outside the mainstream of education, employment, and stable relationships.

Many of these boys felt the negative influence of other relations of power and prestige based on class, race, and age or, for example, size, sporting prowess, intelligence, and academic achievement. A2 commented on who he perceived tough blokes in his school, “… the Samoans and the aborigines and all the tough big blokes who can fight” (A2, par. 373). A lack of power and status at the institutional level can result in the exercise of violence at the individual and group level. A4 and A3 discussed the exercising of power by those from other cultures, “There are so many wogs, if you pick one of them then you pick like fifty of them” (A4, par. 113). “Yeah, all the different colours hangout in gangs” (A3, par. 114). These statements accentuate that male dominance/subordination relations are often worked out using physical violence across ethnic or cultural barriers.

The transition from outer to inner group 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 to them in other settings outside the group or gang. This would suggest that those males who are most marginalised in society are most susceptible to violence and who subscribe to such values and are victims of such values. The boys believe that traditional
masculine performances such as aggression, large physical size, and strength represented a way of achieving success and popularity amongst peers and society.

When I ask if he is most popular with the girls the boys state, “I think so … guys fear him and chicks like him” (A3, par. 107). One boy goes onto to describe how much tougher he is, “I’ll pick him, bring him on! … I don’t fear nobody. I don’t care if I get flogged up!” (A1, par. 104, 108). “The Samoans and the aborigines and all the tough big blokes who can fight … ’cause if you mess with them then you mess with getting your head smashed by millions of them” (A2, par. 110, 112).

The boys talked about how ethnic gangs victimised them when in small numbers. “There are so many wogs, if you pick one of them then you pick like fifty of them” (A4, par. 113). “Yeah, all they different colours hangout in gangs” (A3, par. 114).

Across the scope of social and cultural boundaries for these boys they are reinforcing their own disadvantage within the inequities of the masculinity role, be it in the public schools setting, within cultural institutions such as competitive sport or in the arena of organised civil disobedience. Competitive sport and being the “gladiator” to maintain status is being stressed as a gender defined institution for a “marginalised” group; they were the “Wogs,” Samoans or indigenous boys. When I speak of marginalisation, I am broadly referring to intergroup and/or intragroup relations, “activities between and among groups” (Alderfer, 1987, p. 190). Marginalisation means peripheral or disadvantaged unequal membership, disparate treatment.

By examining history, in particular coloniality for ethnic groups of males, and its discourse of civilisation and modernisation. It is apparent that the present version of hegemonic masculinity is the latest reintegration of a long and complex series of domination against marginalised groups and alternative gender performances (Bederman, 1995). This is apparent in the ethnic gangs acting out traditional masculinities to maintain a position of power in lower socio-economic environments.

For upper white middle class men the notion of “Civilisation” is a particular socially constructed discourse for a dominant group. It links the dominance of hegemonically masculine men to white supremacy. Upper and middle class men used the civilisation discourse to maintain class, gender and race privilege.

**Theme 3: Reflections on Support Networks**

**Set 1 – Support Networks**

This set contains responses relating to the perceived support the boys received from the alternative program, school, friends and family. Reflections are also included on the positive relationships that exist inside and outside the school/educational environment.

The boys felt that the child psychologist/school guidance counsellor, Mothers or siblings helped with problems and treated them equally … “The psychologist at school … the counsellor, she butts her nose in whenever I get into trouble. I walk into the office swearing and then she comes in and says “What is wrong with you, what did you do!” Sometimes it is the wrong time for someone to talk to me … when you’re settled is better … they say that they are going to do something about it. They do something or they try to do it like some teachers’ say they will help you but they don’t do anything about it” (A2, A1, par. 579, 589).
Generally the alternative program was seen as a relaxing break from school, the boys were dreading going back to school … The boys were generally worried about what people would think of them after being in an alternative program … “Probably think that I am stupid or something” (A4, par. 391).

When asked about how has LASER made life better? … It gives you work experience … It gives you a break (laughter) … We get to do fun stuff … Rock climbing, ya’ learn teamwork” (A1, 2, 3, 4, par. 601, 602, 603, 604).

The boys talked about the communication differences between the LASER teachers … “They don’t scream at you or send you out of the classroom or sit you by yourself … They sit and talk a lot … easier to get along with the teachers here because they understand what you are on about (A1, 2, 3, 4, par. 618-621). When asked how they think they have changed since being in the alternative program … I don’t know, I want to do things, like at school I didn’t … Feel more motivated … Happier … Like go surfing, look forward to doing stuff … I have improved marks … don’t swear as much … I have got more confidence and if I put my mind to it then I can do anything … I can concentrate more … Don’t swear at teachers … lot calmer at home (A1, 2, 3, 4, par. 625-639).

**Theme 4: The Future**

The boys have a dislike for law enforcement, but admire the notion of the Military and its routine/structure. They like the idea of being told what to do and when to do it. The notion of being paid to be trained to be tough, fit and use weapons represents an admiration for traditional aggressive masculinities. “Go to the army …Not go back to fucked school! … Because you get heaps of money for the rest of your life and get trained to use cool weapons … You don’t get killed. There are not many wars on”.

Here the focus is on gendered-job theory, on the ways in which certain types of work actually carry within them certain definitions of what it means to be a male. For example, the height and weight of machinery and equipment may be scaled to a male or female average. Often this form of machismo workplace definition takes is governed by social class, as Willis’s (1977) study of working class lads and workplaces shows. Willis study accentuated the ritualised, masculinised mateship and vocabularies of sexist abuse and the normalised misogyny, which is part of the macho violent vocabulary in gendered job theory. The epitome of the military, manual arts, computers, and male dominated sports. For example, working with machinery which could be invested with aggressive definitions of male behaviour and sexuality. Certain instruments and machines can be regarded as representations of masculine power and as subordinating extensions over women. This is not to suggest that males from other social groupings are non-violent, rather it is to offer an explanation for the relatively high levels of violence among less powerful and disadvantaged groups of males.

When discussing future careers, intriguingly, the boys had a fascination with joining the military and yet they despised law enforcement (e.g., “coppers, piggers are the enemy, they make our fucking lives a misery, they’re out to get us”). The boys continue to talk about joining the military, “We will be getting paid to be yelled at … What’s the difference at school? Yeah…we’ll be able to flog the cops then, ‘cause we’ll be in the military”. The military epitomised the idea of masculinised mateship (gangs) and admiration of male power in the form of weapons, aggression, and violence.
They believe to be a successful male is to have money, here the interplay between masculinities and class is apparent. The above statement is evidence that there is a milieu of different masculinities according to different social settings and social classes.

**Implications for intervention programs addressing masculinities and resilience**

Certain models of problem behaviours and negative outcomes attempt to account for outcomes not merely by identifying and tallying negative influences but by investigating the ways in which different sets of positive and negative factors interact leading to different outcomes. I stress the concept of “adaptation to” or “coping with” a particular problem, stress, etc. Rather than the more general notion of resilience. Therefore, emphasising the importance of considering the variety of ways, means and styles that a particular problem or stressor may be differentially effective for gender differences under different situations.

Conclusively, by focusing on the factors and mechanisms of resilience instead of the outcome may we broaden the impact of contributing factors overall. For example, some researchers have considered family factors as being stressors, and have not given equal consideration to the role of other family factors as compensation, protective and/or facilitative forces. I relate this to the issue of resilience research in addressing gender and the lack of further investigation in how some boys are placed in society to act out traditional masculinities and the impact this has on resilient factors.

Discourses of power and gender influence how these males think and solve problems. Traditional forms of masculine performances have an impact on supportive environments (protective processes). Therefore, the resilience literature needs to take into account the impact of gender in educational environments.

Many researchers have considered these influences under the topic of resilience as focusing on “resiliency factors” or protective personality traits (Wolin, Desetta, & Hefner, 2000). Often these shorthand “factor labels” mask a more complex interaction between a resilient youth and his/her environment. Hence, risk factors that anticipate more or less desirable outcomes may influence factors that moderate the relationship between the risk factors and the outcome. It is essential to identify the effective mechanisms through which protective/vulnerability factors operate and to distinguish these mechanisms from the indicators of the protective factors. For example, boys are more likely than girls to develop behaviour disturbances in response to family discord because of such circumstances as sons being more likely to be placed in some form of institutional care and to evoke punitive responses from adults to male specific emotional distress (Rutter, 1990). Similarly, the presence of difficult temperamental characteristics exacerbates the effect of parental discord by increasing parental hostility. Therefore, the apparent protective effects of marital support and positive school experiences may have been mediated by the effect of these variables on self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Rutter (1990) suggested four mechanisms that are implicated in protective processes; the first of these refers to the reduction of risk impact, the impact may be reduced by altering the appraisal of the risk factor or by altering exposure to the risk. In the former case, controlling exposure to the stress so that the individual can
successfully cope with smaller doses of the experience may alleviate the meaning of the risk.

The second type of mechanism refers to the reduction of negative chain reactions that follow exposure to risk and perpetuate the risk effects. The third mechanism through which protective functions may be served is through the promotion of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Finally, protective factors operate through opening up opportunities to obtain experiences that might moderate the effect of early risk factors, therefore being affected by other variables, protective factors moderate the influence that each has on the risk outcome relationship.

In conclusion, Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1983) recommended the use of social ecology models or person process context models to study the relationship of contextual risk and protective factors, intervening processes, and individual characteristics. (Rutter, 1987) has also argued that resilience be understood in terms of processes rather than just identifying static factors. In the following I summarise my findings under six major predictors of resilience, adapted from Kumpfer (1999);

1. Stressors or Challenges – The boys’ degree of stress perceived as threatening both from in and out of school did not activate any type of resilience process or disruption in homeostasis or in the organizational unit.

2. External environmental context – The interaction between protective factors (i.e., program) and processes (i.e., community, peer, family, school, peer group) had little or no positive impact on resilience factors due to feeling only reinforced or empowered through acting out traditional masculinities.

3. Person-Environment interactional processes – The transactional processes between these boys and their environment as the boys or caring others either passively or actively attempted to perceive, interpret and surmount threats, challenges or difficult environments did not construct more protective environments. Due to reinforcement of gendered behaviours from other consistent males within their socio-economic environments.

4. Internal self-characteristics included negative individual, cognitive, social/behavioural, physical and emotional/affective competencies. They felt little success in different developmental tasks within the program and diverse personal environments, e.g., work experience, but no success in different cultures or socio-economic environments.

5. Resilience processes included minimum short term resilience or stress/coping processes learned by the individual through gradual exposure to increasing challenges and stressors that would help the individual to bounce back with resilient reintegration.

6. Positive outcomes or successful life adaptation in specific developmental tasks, which are supportive of later positive adaptation in specific new developmental tasks were unknown due to the short term collection of data. Therefore, findings could not assess the likelihood of a positive outcome suggesting resilience is also predictive of later resilient reintegration after disruption or stress.

A resilience perspective underscores the importance of understanding processes that avert, counterbalance, or moderate the negative influence underlying risk and vulnerability. Therefore, neglecting the impact of gender on protective
factors/processes and how the relationship between the environment, the individual and the individual choice of outcomes affects resilient outcomes. Hence, knowledge of these processes in addition to the process that produce risk or increase vulnerability to psychopathology needs more comprehensive investigation for increasing the success of intervention programs (Masten, 1998).

References


