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Growing up masculine: rethinking the significance of adolescence in the making of masculinities

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ABSTRACT: Adolescence is not a fixed stage in a life-cycle, so much as a terrain of encounters between growing persons and the adult world. International research on youth shows the importance of a relational approach. Masculinities are constructions within a gender order; but gender orders are neither simple nor static. Projects of masculinity formation reflect social diversity and inequality. Developing bodies are re-interpreted and challenged in new practices, institutions such as the high school are encountered and negotiated, the state and the corporate economy are approached. Hegemonic definitions of masculinity exert strong pressure, yet multiple paths through adolescence are found by different groups of youth. The importance of adolescence in the making of masculinities lies both in the ways existing masculinities are appropriated and inhabited, and in the negotiation, and sometimes rejection of old patterns.

KEYWORDS: adolescence, youth, masculinities, gender, education

Introduction

Issues about youth are prominent in public controversies about masculinity. Debates about the supposed 'boys' education crisis' focus on statistics that show teenage girls outperforming teenage boys in high school. Discussions of the supposed 'men's health crisis' often focus on youth suicide, alcoholism and high rates of injury in motor accidents. Popular concerns about masculine violence also focus on youth, especially the youth of ethnic minorities. Moral panics about 'street gangs' and politicians posturing as 'tough on youth crime' are now an Australian as well as a European and North American phenomenon (Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar, 2000).

These public discourses are based on essentialist conceptions of both gender and adolescence. In the usual mass media view, boys and girls are naturally different, in character as well as in body. Adolescence is the time when, in the

aftermath of puberty, the inner masculinity of boys finds its way to the light. Testosterone-driven 'risk taking' becomes usual – hence those road accident statistics. Male sexual urges find expression in a natural attraction to girls and in sexual adventuring. Male energy finds expression in football, fighting, and trouble at school. Conflict with parents and police becomes inevitable as adolescent males feel their powers and try to establish their independence.

We now have a considerable international body of research on masculinities (reviewed in Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, 2005), that systematically challenges essentialist accounts. Part of this research concerns youth. Until recently, however, the material on youth and masculinity was not cumulative and consisted mostly of small-scale studies in specific sites. In the last few years a number of broader studies of adolescence and masculinity have appeared, from several countries, which converge in some of their key findings. Researchers are now in a position to provide a solid alternative to the essentialist stories about youth.

In this paper I bring together the findings of this recent research with the more scattered materials of earlier studies, and offer a reconceptualisation of the field of adolescence and masculinity.

Adolescence

The concept of 'adolescence' has itself changed meaning. The term was introduced into social science by Hall (1904), who pictured adolescence as a biologically-determined stage in a fixed cycle of human development. At much the same time, Freud treated adolescence as a particular stage of psychosexual development, and mainstream psychoanalysis has promoted the idea of a normative sequence of development ever since (e.g. Silverman, 1986).

Influential psychologists of the mid-twentieth century moved away from biological determinism though not from the idea of stages. Erikson (1950) presented adolescence as the stage of growth when problems of 'identity' came to a head. Inhelder and Piaget (1958) treated adolescence as the culminating stage of intellectual development, the moment when 'formal operations' predominate, transforming the growing person's capacity to interact with and understand the world.

In the later twentieth century, the sociologists of the Birmingham school (Hall and Jefferson, 1975) developed a concept of 'youth cultures' which had no model of development at all. In this work, adolescence was defined not by reference to earlier stages of growth, but simply in contradistinction to the adult world. Meanwhile historians studied youth as a socio-cultural category constructed in recent history by professional discourses, state policies and the growth of institutions such as the high school (e.g. Irving, Maunders and Sherington, 1995).

The notion of fixed developmental sequences is obsolete. We should be careful not to fall into the trap of treating 'adolescence' as a necessary stage in the development of masculinity. (Many pop-psychology texts presume just that, claiming that boys need 'initiation' into masculinity at this stage.) Yet human growth is a reality.

It is not only possible but likely that, in a particular cultural setting, characteristic *encounters* will occur in the teenage years between the growing person and the social order.

Growing boys and girls are active creators of their own lives – both individually and, as Willis (1990) argues, collectively. They are not just passively engaged in role learning and being 'socialised'. At the same time their activity is social practice, drawing its meaning from a social framework (language, material resources, social structure), and having effects in the lives of others. Practice always arises in specific circumstances and may be severely constrained by them. This is brilliantly illustrated by Wexler's *Becoming Somebody* (1992), an ethnography of youth in US high schools which shows the fierce abrasion of the self that can occur (especially for youth in poverty) under the pressures of an authoritarian institution.

One of the most important circumstances of young people's lives is the gender order that they live in. Masculinities are constructed, over time, in young people's encounters with a system of gender relations. We know that gender orders differ between societies and change over time (Connell, 2002). This will result in cultural diversity in the experiences of young people and in the masculinities they fashion.

Since masculinities are (by definition) the configurations of practice associated with the social position of men, the life-histories of boys are the main site of their construction. However it is also possible for girls to engage in practices, and acquire characteristics, socially defined as masculine. And it is certainly possible for boys to engage in practices, and acquire characteristics, socially defined as feminine. We could expect this, from the relationship between boys and their mothers in the course of growing up. The recent London study by Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) found adolescent boys more often reported being emotionally close to their mothers than to their fathers. This is consistent with earlier research findings, such as the Sydney surveys in the 1950s and 1960s that showed mothers figuring more often than fathers as most influential person in teenagers' lives, for boys as well as girls (W.F.Connell et al., 1957, 1975). Indeed these possible gender complexities often become real, as we see in the life stories of the marginalised teenagers in Australia interviewed by Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003).

Adolescent boys' lives and emotions, then, will not be categorically distinct from adolescent girls'. But when a society's dominant gender ideology insists on the absolute difference of masculinity from femininity, a developmental dilemma is created. This turns out to be a characteristic problem for adolescent boys. One common solution to it – though not the only one – is to exaggerate the enactment of masculinity as a way of 'doing difference'.

Young bodies

The bodies of women and men are different only in limited ways. Nevertheless bodily difference is the arena in which gender relations are defined, the point of reference for gender distinction as such. Masculinities (and femininities) are

formed in a process of social embodiment, in which bodies, as well as social relations, are shaped (Connell, 2002).

Adolescence too is a matter of social embodiment. The physical changes of puberty used to be the staple of textbooks on adolescence, with the average age – and the wide variation in age – of menarche and testicular development carefully calculated, together with the adolescent 'growth spurt', the advent of pubic hair, and changing hormonal production. These are the changes which essentialist accounts of adolescence emphasise, in explaining gendered behaviour by teenage youth. Indeed adolescence is popularly understood as the time when the hormones go crazy, and boys therefore get out of control.

The physical changes matter, but they do not directly determine the experience of adolescence. That is a question of how social practices take hold of, and give meaning to, bodily change and bodily difference.

Adolescence is commonly pictured as the time of sexual awakening, auto-erotic experiments and first sexual relationships. Sexual experience is often a source of pride, and a claim to masculine honour, among teenage boys. Nevertheless very large numbers of teenagers are not experienced. The most systematic evidence on this comes from national surveys of sexual behaviour. The best study of this kind for the United States suggests an average age at first intercourse of around 18 years, varying between ethnic groups (Laumann et al., 1994). That is to say, in this social context first sexual intercourse most often occurs around the *end* of what is conventionally considered adolescence, or later.

Sexual intercourse is therefore far from a universal experience in adolescence. Yet the idea of adolescent awakening is widespread, and is available to youth to account for their experience – even when that experience is heavily stigmatised. Leahy's (1992) interviews with the younger partners in cross-generation homosexual relationships not only found this discourse of adolescence at work, but also found a concept of masculinity that embodied a *right* to sexual pleasure. This concept can also be found among heterosexual male youth. Totten (2000), in a disturbing study of violent 13–17 year olds in Canada, finds that youth who bash their girlfriends characteristically believe in male entitlement, rigid gender divisions, and the 'natural' subservience of women to men's desire. They are likely to have learnt an authoritarian/patriarchal gender ideology either from their fathers or from male peer groups, or both.

Sexual relations are the occasion of excitement and widespread interest among boys. As indicated by Wood's (1984) British study, teenage boys' sex talk can be the vehicle of an inchoate sexism as boys boast and joke with each other, trying out sexual attitudes. But they are likely to retreat, if put in their place by an assertive girl. Such discussions are one facet of a larger process, the learning of heterosexuality. Popular ideology treats adult heterosexuality as 'natural'. In fact, becoming heterosexual involves complex learning of interactional repertoires and identities as well as sexual techniques. It also involves the marginalisation of other sexualities, especially homosexual eroticism. Mac an Ghaill's (1994) British

school ethnography, and Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli's (2003) broad interview study in Australia, agree on these points. Heterosexuality is learnt, and the learning, for boys, is an important site of the construction of masculinity.

The body practice that is now almost as important as sexuality, as a site of masculinity formation, is sport (Messner, 2002; Huerta Rojas, 1999). Organised competitive team sport – a distinctively modern social practice – is intensely gender-segregated and male-dominated. Sports such as football are also extraordinarily popular, with high rates of participation by adolescent boys. A recreation involving bodies in ritualised combat is thus presented to enormous numbers of youth as a site of masculine camaraderie, a source of identity, an arena of competition for prestige, and a possible career.

Very few men actually realise a professional sports career – and those who do, are likely to suffer chronic illness later in life (Messner, 1992). The practice of sport often involves injury. There is social pressure on youth to show toughness, deny pain and play despite being hurt, which leads sportsmen to distance themselves from their own bodily experience (White et al., 1995). This is likely to contribute to a widespread problem in men's health, a tendency to deny illness and to under-use primary health care. Moreover in adulthood most men do not even get the benefit of the exercise, since most relate to sport only as spectators, increasingly through mass media, which now relentlessly exploit the popularity of sport as spectacle.

The adolescent years may also be formative for other health issues, such as the use of social drugs. An Australian study shows the percentage of high school boys who report drinking alcohol rising from 20 per cent in Year 7 (about age 12) to 68 per cent in Year 11 (about age 16) (Hibbert et al., 1996). Another important health issue is violence. Severe violence is experienced, or inflicted, by a small minority of adolescents. Moderate levels of violence are a much more common experience. Studies of bullying in schools, pioneered in Scandinavia, estimate that 10 per cent to 20 per cent of pupils are involved in bullying, as perpetrators or victims – boys more often, and more likely to be physically aggressive – with peak rates in early adolescence (Besag, 1989). The school bullying research tends to play down gender issues. But other studies of youth violence emphasise the gender dimension, and see educational work on masculinity issues as crucial to prevention (Wölfl, 2001).

Adolescence may therefore be understood as a period in which the embodiment of masculinity takes new forms and moves towards adult patterns. But this is by no means a standard process following a pre-determined path. Indeed, body practices such as sexual encounter and organised sport become important means of differentiation among boys and young men, as well as markers of difference between men and women.

Ironically, the body practices which are often adopted by boys pushing early for adult status and masculine prestige among their peers are those with the most toxic effects on their bodies – smoking, reckless driving, physical violence, and unprotected sex. It is not only their own bodies that are involved. In a context of

community poverty and rising HIV prevalence, as seen in Wood and Jewkes' (2001) ethnography with Xhosa youth in South Africa, the consequences may be deadly, not only for young men but also for the young women in their lives.

Powers and seductions of the adult world

The adult world confronts young people as fact, as a world already made, not as the product of their own desire or practice. Yet adolescence is, by definition, the process of becoming a participant in it. The powers of this world – the state, the market, corporate capital – are therefore close at hand, less mediated than they have been in childhood. At the same time the pleasures and freedoms of adult life are also close at hand.

Children meet the state principally in the form of the school system, which in wealthy countries occupies most of the day of most of the population from middle childhood to late adolescence. The coercive powers of the state become clear when teenagers come into open conflict with the school, which happens most often for working-class youth, and much more often for boys than for girls. In public schools in New South Wales, for instance, boys were the targets of 85 per cent of serious disciplinary actions in 1998, and the rates were highest in working-class areas (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1999). The striking ethnography of a working-class comprehensive high school by Fine (1991) in the US shows how the bureaucratic processes of a large education system create dropout ('discharge' from the school) as the easiest solution to all sorts of problems, from disciplinary conflict to inappropriate pedagogy. A large proportion of the students, meeting conventional curricula and routinised administration, simply do not find their time in school productive.

In such a situation, many will see entry to the workforce as a solution. Large numbers of teenagers are already wage workers, full-time or part-time. The poorer the community, the more likely teenagers are to be in the labour market. In very poor communities, teenagers are mostly in the informal labour market and are among the most vulnerable there. Informal labour is often gender-segregated. For instance, boys are more likely than girls to be recruited into the part of the informal labour market consisting of the drug trade and small-scale robbery. This gender division of labour is reflected in the much higher rate of arrest and conviction of teenage boys (for instance in 2001, males accounted for 88 per cent of such convictions in NSW courts: Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2002).

Where a formal labour market exists, and is strongly gender-segregated, working-class youth may learn masculinity by participating in 'shop floor culture', as described by Willis (1979) for an industrial city in Britain. The wage itself becomes a marker of adult manhood. However the experience of this transition may be far from satisfying. A small oral history study of working-class men who grew up in New York suggests that in youth, some had ambitions for jobs based on their interests, but all were disappointed and obliged to settle for various forms of

alienated labour (Handel, 1991). Transition from childhood into the adult world of alienation – whether in sexuality or industry – may then be a defining feature of adolescence under capitalism.

Adolescents also meet the corporate world as consumers. In the rich countries, indeed, this is their main encounter with the economy. Teenagers have, in the last half-century, become a very significant consumer market – for clothes, music, magazines, entertainment, electronic goods such as cellular phones, even vehicles. Klein's (2001) celebrated *No Logo* documents the care with which corporations track, and try to manipulate, changes of style among teenagers.

Most, though not all, of these consumer goods are gendered, i.e. produced and marketed in different forms to adolescent girls and boys. The advertising creates attractive images of healthy, carefree teenagers having gender-appropriate fun with the gender-appropriate product. Mass consumption thus becomes a site for reproducing a normative gender dichotomy. However it can also be a means for circulating gender innovations. The 'unisex' style in the 1960s was one interesting case; the anti-normative punk style being revived today may be another.

Growing up into adulthood also offers new possibilities of intimacy. Despite some sociological theories to the contrary, intimacy remains strongly gender-structured (Jamieson, 1998). It is a familiar finding of earlier research on adolescence, in first-world countries, that friendship in early adolescence is typically within the same gender, but over time cross-gender friendships become more common. Connell et al. (1975: 210) speak of this as one of the most 'dramatic' age-linked changes in their whole study.

Nothing in the recent studies contradicts this, and it can indeed be taken as a structural feature of the modern Western gender order, with its family system based on heterosexual adult couples and its prohibition on child sexuality. Adolescence is the period in which heterosexual couples become a normative pattern in peer group life. As Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) argue, and show empirically, what is normative is by no means universal. Other patterns of sexuality and identity – gay, fluid, transgender – are also emerging. Nevertheless heterosexual couples are the most commonly formed, and account for much of the sexual activity that has occurred by the end of adolescence. In many cultural settings, from Britain to Chile, fatherhood is an important part of dominant definitions of adult masculinity, and therefore many youth look forward to fatherhood as an important part of their future (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Olavarría, 2001).

Some teenagers become parents immediately, without intending to. Most attention has focussed on 'teen mothers', but young men are also involved. Some evidence about teen fathers exists, and makes clear the diversity of responses to their partners' pregnancy. They range from shock and confusion, rejection and attempts to escape responsibility, all the way to active engagement with fatherhood (Massey, 1991). Interesting community-based education is now occurring with very young fathers in Brazil (Lyra, 2005), building on their interest in partner and baby to change the conventional patterns of masculine behaviour.

Starting-points and projects

The young fathers in Massey's (1991) study are black. They come from the group in US society which is the main target of racism, has a high rate of poverty and violence, and has the lowest average age of first intercourse. The youth involved are therefore likely to be constructing their first sexual relationships in conditions of deprivation and social tension, very different from those of affluent white teenagers, even in the same country.

The diversity among young people, the different situations they face, and the variety and complexity of the masculinities that they construct, has emerged strongly from the recent studies. This is perhaps their most important common theme. The large study of secondary school students in Ireland by Lynch and Lodge (2002) documents the continuing importance of class inequalities, but also documents inequality and difference along lines of region, sexuality, ethnicity and gender. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) title the second section of their book 'diverse masculinities', and document diversity in terms of sexuality, disability, ethnicity, race and region across Australia.

With this and other evidence, we have strong reasons for emphasising the differing social circumstances in which young people encounter the gender order. Considering the formation of masculinity as a life project (Connell, 1995), we may argue that the project has differing starting-points for different groups of boys, so the social trajectory of gender formation is likely to be different.

White working-class youth have been the subject of considerable research in Britain since the 1970s. Early studies such as Robins and Cohen's (1978) *Knuckle Sandwich* emphasised the collective response of working-class boys to deprivation and heavy-handed policing. They developed a project of claiming symbolic territory of their own – a source of football violence on the one hand, grassroots racism on the other.

In some respects this behaviour is not greatly different from responses found among targets of white racism, i.e. ethnic minority youth. Afro-Caribbean boys in the same country (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000) also face heavy policing and social prejudice. In some cases they develop a strong ethnic-gender identity that is simultaneously defensive and aggressive. But with minority youth the 'ethnic' identity is likely to be much more emphasised by other social actors than it is for members of the dominant group. As Ferguson (2000) shows for urban black boys in the United States, the interplay between racial prejudice, policing and school authority on the one hand, active masculinity formation on the other, steers many into a trajectory of conflict and disciplinary responses, with devastating educational and social consequences.

Some youth encounter powers that are more coercive still. For instance Palestinian youth under Israeli occupation grow up in conditions where the occupying forces routinely beat, and sometimes shoot, men and teenage boys, and have destroyed much of the prior framework of social authority. Here, resistance

and masculinity become interwoven. The achievement of manhood is a project defined within the collectivity of young men via protest, imprisonment and violence (Peteet, 2000). It is clear that similar processes occurred among male youth in South Africa in the struggle against the apartheid regime (Xaba, 2001). Indeed they are likely to occur wherever teenagers are recruited into resistance movements, paramilitary forces or armies.

In an unusual piece of research Donaldson (2003) has looked at the construction of masculinity in circumstances of wealth and privilege. Growing up very rich, while it gives material abundance and a sense of entitlement, is not a pretty business. Among the stresses on rich youth are emotional isolation from parents, a deliberate 'toughening' regime, a sense of distance from the rest of society, and difficulty in forming close and trusting relationships.

Part of this training is provided in the system of elite private schools that services the ruling class in Australia, as in many other countries. Privileged families' projects of sustaining wealth, and their sons' individual projects of development, are woven through institutions that both reflect and produce social division. This process is particularly clear in Morrell's magnificent historical study of Natal, *From Boys to Gentlemen* (2001). In the pastoral midlands of this colony, land-owning British settlers created a system of boys' secondary schools. These schools, through a regime of hierarchy and brutality, defined a dominant masculinity oriented to privilege and violence. This gender pattern spread through white settler society and contributed to the maintenance of racial dominance and class hierarchy over several generations.

Not all boys, of course, become complicit in such a project. Secondary schools are complex institutions and alternative pathways exist in them. Mac an Ghaill (1994), in a detailed study of a British secondary school, shows how different versions of heterosexual masculinity are constructed by laying emphasis on different aspects of school life – the academic curriculum for one group, sports and informal peer group life for another group, vocational opportunities and ideologies for a third.

Of particular interest is Mac an Ghaill's documentation of the experience of gay youth. For them, the project of masculinity formation is more explicitly sexualised because they are defined as deviant by a hetero-normative culture. Here the *lack* of institutional support for the construction of masculinity is notable: the school does not have a space for 'gay masculinity' in its cultural repertoire. Other studies on the construction of gay sexuality, such as Dowsett's (1996) Australian life-history study and Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli's (2003) data, confirm this picture of generally unsupportive schooling. And gay youth need support – there is abundant evidence of continuing widespread homophobia among their peers, especially among boys (e.g. Lynch and Lodge, 2002: 136–8).

With the rise of anti-discrimination laws there has been a trend for schools to adopt policies of tolerance for sexual diversity, and to reject homophobia along with other forms of social prejudice. Evidently these policies remain weak, at

school level. For teenagers who have developed an erotic attachment to people of their own gender, to discover other aspects of the adult world – either informal sexual networks among men, or the 'gay community' of the inner city – is vital in gaining self-respect and crafting a path into adulthood.

Masculinity in youth cultures

Where collective responses among young people are prominent, and take symbolic forms – distinctive dress, speech, recreation or sense of solidarity – it has become common, following the work of Jefferson, Hall and colleagues, to speak of 'youth subcultures' (or simply 'youth cultures'). Prominent in the British accounts of youth subcultures are strongly-marked patterns of masculinity, often energetic, combative, anti-authoritarian and homophobic (Hall and Jefferson, 1975, Willis, 1977, Robins and Cohen, 1978). There is an emphasis on masculine 'hardness', a contempt for women, and anger towards more privileged classes – often expressed in sexual or gender terms, seeing white-collar men as feminised.

Youth cultures are conceptually important for an understanding of adolescence. The fact that they arise and vanish in specific historical circumstances is important evidence against a biological-determinist model of a fixed path of development for youth. The fact that they are self-created (often being disliked or feared by the adult world) is important evidence for the agency of youth in making their own lives. And the collective agency shown in their making argues against the individualised model of growth that has been common in developmental psychology. Yet we should not think of youth cultures as totally independent. The original British researchers emphasised that they were subcultures within a broader working-class culture, and more recent research has emphasised the way young people draw from commercial mass culture.

There now exists a colourful international research literature describing youth cultures. This research too emphasises diversity. A recent Australian volume (White, 1999) includes skateboarders, car enthusiasts, hip hop, Spice Girls fans, fanzines, Aboriginal, Lebanese and Vietnamese youth, prison inmates, lesbians and gay youth, all under the rubric of 'youth subcultures'.

Within this range, plainly, there is a variety of masculinities. Subcultural masculinity is no longer, almost by definition, 'hard' protest masculinity. Indeed Kersten (1993) describes a youth subculture in Japan where male style verges on transvestism. The emergence of 'queer' style in street life and music venues also breaks down stark gender oppositions, and this has been markedly associated with youth.

There has been a growing recognition of race and ethnicity, not as static 'context' for young people's lives, but as a dynamic pattern of relationships which is interwoven with gender formation. Poynting, Noble and Tabar (2003) provide an exemplary case study of this process among the Arabic-speaking Lebanese minority in Australia. This community, which has been the target of vicious prejudice in

recent years, has high levels of unemployment, a troubled relationship with the school system, and high levels of harassment from the police. All-male peer groups assert Lebanese identity ('Lebs rule!'), trade insults with other ethnic youth, and assert a masculinity based on physical prowess, heterosexual success, and the capacity to intimidate others. In the face of racism, Lebanese boys thus demand respect and provide each other with solidarity. But, drawing on heavily patriarchal traditions, the dignity they assert is masculine and requires the subordination of women.

Yet it would be a mistake to think of ethnic minority status as producing only one pattern of masculinity. O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000), for instance, describe diverse masculinities among the 'Asian' (mainly Indian and Pakistani) minority in Britain. These include protest masculinity (which they call 'macho subculture') but also include projects of upward mobility through education. Chinese and Japanese youth in the United States and Australia also commonly have a strong orientation to education, grounded in class and national tradition.

High schools and youth work

For large numbers of boys, especially middle-class boys, schools are the most important formal institutions in their lives. The growth of a secondary education system was a key condition for the emergence of 'adolescence' as a social category, and for the emergence of youth cultures. Schools both provide a contemporary milieu for the teen years, and powerfully shape trajectories into adulthood – doing the 'sorting and sifting' of young people long documented in the sociology of education and starkly visible in newer research (Wexler, 1992, Lynch and Lodge, 2002).

Like other institutions, schools have definable gender regimes, including a marked gender division of labour among teachers and non-teaching staff, and gender divisions in the formal and informal curriculum (Connell, 2000). Such divisions are highly visible to boys, as shown by Martino's (1994) research among Australian students on 'English' (i.e. language and literature) as a secondary school subject. Though English is a compulsory subject, studied by all students, boys strongly tended to see it as a subject suited to girls. And in fact, more boys failed examinations in English, and more girls were awarded distinctions.

Within the gender regime of a secondary school, different constructions of masculinity are possible. This important fact is documented in many studies (Willis, 1977, Connell et al., 1982, Mac an Ghaill, 1994, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002). The different masculinities do not simply sit side by side. There are concrete relationships – hierarchy, exclusion, negotiation, and sometimes tolerance – between them.

This is vividly shown in one of the best of all school ethnographies, Foley's (1990) *Learning Capitalist Culture*. In the rural Texas high school of this study, several types of masculinity can be identified: the sporting Anglo 'jocks', the anti-authoritarian Latino 'vatos', the complicit but inconspicuous 'silent majority'. The

jocks hold most prestige, the vatos maintain a cool and ironic distance, 'fags' (effeminate or homosexual) are targeted for hostility, but most of the bullying is done by hangers-on, not by the real jocks. Prestige in this hierarchy is linked to prestige among the girls. 'Cheerleaders' model the community's approved form of femininity, and only the most prestigious of the boys can risk rejection and ask these girls for a date. The other boys fantasise.

Schools have many organisational features in common, but their gender regimes can differ significantly. There is an obvious difference between co-educational and gender-segregated schools. In Lynch and Lodge's (2002) study, it was segregated boys' schools that had the most strongly-marked definitions of hegemonic masculinity.

These differences point to another important conclusion: schools' gender regimes can change. Morrell (2001) reminds us that schools as masculinising institutions come into being in particular historical circumstances, which have now, in South Africa, radically changed. Another notable historical study, Heward's (1988) *Making a Man of Him*, shows the masculinising practices of a British boys' school changing over a twenty-year period. The emphasis on sport declined, while academic and vocational emphasis increased, in response to broad economic changes and the altered strategies of the boys' families.

In the era of gender equity programs, such changes may occur as conscious reform. Attempts to engage boys in the reduction of sexism in schools have been going on for more than twenty years (Dowsett, 1985, Novogrodsky et al.1992). With widespread public concern about boys' education, increasing numbers of secondary schools in English-speaking countries have introduced special-purpose programs for boys, or have attempted to eliminate gender stereotypes affecting boys. These efforts have mostly been small-scale and their effects are still unclear. Yet they are now a common feature of secondary schooling in the developed countries, alongside special-purpose programs for girls (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998, Lingard and Douglas, 1999).

There is a much longer experience of special-purpose programs for adolescent boys in youth organisations. Historians have explored the masculinising agendas of organisations like the Boy Scouts, which tried to bring frontier manliness to the middle-class youth of the metropole (Mangan and Walvin, 1987).

It is only recently, however, that critical reflection on masculinity has been possible in such programs. The German youth program discussed by Kindler (1993) is a particularly good example of what can be done. With the goal of building youth's self-knowledge, capacity for relationships, and commitment to gender equity, nineteen specific workshops were developed. They covered a range of topics including careers, men's bodies, men and spirituality, and sexuality. Among the most interesting outcomes was information about why youth participated in such programs. The motives included personal development and the desire for exchange of ideas with other young men, finding a space for non-traditional masculinity, and principled commitment to gender reform.

Imagining masculinity

The young men in the program described by Kindler were, clearly, imagining new and different ways of being masculine. It is equally clear that this is something the violent youth described by Messerschmidt (2000) and Totten (2000) find difficult or impossible to do. Recognising alternative narratives of masculinity, different ways of being a man, is a key to the 'respectful ways of working with young men to reduce violence' developed and put into practice by Denborough (1996).

Creating narratives of masculinity is, in fact, a familiar practice among professional writers and film-makers. The 'Bildungsroman' – the novel of education – traces the complexities and ambivalences involved in growing up, and provides rich cultural documentation of masculinities. This is well shown in the masterpiece of the genre, James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. At the other pole are the narratives of cardboard masculinity in blood-and-thunder adventure stories, once ground out by the thousand for boys' magazines and now re-worked in Hollywood 'action movies', whose principal audience is boys and young men. Such narratives in youth fiction and comics have been used by Ito (1992) to map recent changes in gender identity in Japan, especially the growing tensions and uncertainties for boys and men.

Writing stories is also a pedagogical technique. Rhodes (1994) asked Australian adolescent boys to create stories in the classroom. The boys were not particularly interested in characters like themselves, preferring characters they admired, i.e. those with cultural legitimacy, and they resisted critique of such characters. Interestingly, the stories created by groups reinforced dominant images of masculinity more than individually-created stories did. Individually-written stories showed a greater variety of masculine types.

The imagination is at work in other contexts too. Walker (1997) interviewed a young car thief in an Australian juvenile detention centre, who was a specialist in elite cars. He followed a system of rules derived from an old-fashioned code: earn your living, protect women and children (he repaired, and returned, a blue Mercedes he had mistakenly stolen from a woman), and steal from other men. Walker justifiably calls this 'a fantastical construction of hegemonic masculinity' – masculinity as a fantasy of power.

This is an exceptional case. There is, however, an argument that imaginary masculinities are part of the routine enactment of gender. Wetherell and Edley (1999), using the techniques of discursive psychology, propose that masculinities exist not as settled character structures but as imaginary positions in discourse. Actual men use these positions strategically, sometimes adopting them, sometimes distancing themselves from them. Consistently with this, though from different theoretical positions, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) speak of the way young people negotiate and interrogate normative masculinities; and Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) document young people's awareness of contradictions around hegemonic masculinity. Both observations imply a capacity to imagine alternatives and adopt or invent new positions.

Yet there are limits to this flexibility, and in some gender research the limits become highly visible. The way hegemonic masculinities are imagined typically draws strong boundaries around a narrow zone of acceptable behaviour and feelings. Frank's (1993) interviews with Canadian high school boys, aged 16–19, found heterosexual hegemony enforced by intimidation of gay and feminine boys. This is a common pattern, as Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli's (2003) respondents testify. Homophobic intimidation can involve serious violence. Recent criminological research by Tomsen (2002) shows that homophobic murders are usually committed by teenagers or very young men, who in attacking older men they believe to be gay, feel they are defending male honour or punishing those who breach it. These killings can be exceptionally brutal.

Conclusion

In this paper I have assembled evidence for a view of adolescence and masculinity that does not rely on any notion of a fixed cycle of development, yet acknowledges the reality of growth. The evidence shows the importance of a relational approach to gender, which understands masculinities as constructions, sometimes provisional and sometimes long-term, within a gender order. The interplay of gender relations with other structures of social difference and inequality means that the construction of masculinity has different starting-points in different lives. This results in a diversity of trajectories, very well documented in recent research.

Adolescence emerges not as a single moment in development but as a loosely-defined period of life in which certain types of encounters occur. Developing bodies are re-interpreted and challenged, sometimes damaged. Institutions such as the high school are encountered and negotiated, and the powers of the adult world are approached and confronted.

These encounters form an arena of pleasure, humour, curiosity, relationship-building and success, but also an arena of anxiety and violence. In recognising, as we should, the creativity and inventiveness of young people, we should not forget their youth, the often awkward combination of adult bodily powers with inexperience and doubt. Sometimes errors, over-simplifications and hatreds result.

Adolescence is, inherently, transitional. That is what the word means, and most 'adolescents' think of themselves as young adults or almost-adults rather than as members of a distinct age-grade. The masculinities of adolescence, then, will generally have a close relationship to the masculinities defined for adults in the communities concerned – though they do not simply photocopy the older models. The importance of adolescence in the making of masculinities lies both in the ways existing masculinities are appropriated and inhabited, and in the imperfections of the match. There is contradiction, distancing, negotiation, and sometimes rejection of old patterns, which allows new historical possibilities to emerge.

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