How young schoolboys become some*body*: the role of the body in the construction of masculinity

Jon Swain

Introduction

Although within the past two decades the body has re-emerged [1] as a major focus in contemporary social theory, Wacquant (1995) points out that one of the ironies of the increasing interest is the notable absence of empirical studies that examine the experiences of 'real blood and flesh'. In particular, there has been a conspicuous lack of empirical research about the bodies of children, even though childhood would appear to be a time when work on the body, and by the body, is relatively intense as physical development gets into its stride (Prout, 2000). This paper seeks to address this and considers the key role of the body in the construction of masculine identities amongst junior school boys aged 10-11.

Although there have been an increasing amount of research on young boys' masculinities in the primary school setting (see, for example, Thorne, 1993; Jordan, 1995; Renold, 1997, 1999, 2000; Skelton, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001; Warren, 1997; Adler & Adler, 1998; Benjamin, 1998; Connolly, 1998; Epstein, 1998; Francis, 1998; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Swain, 2000, 2002a 2002b; Epstein *et al.,* 2001), the body is generally only referred to obliquely. In this paper, my intention is to focus on 'real' material bodies, and delineate some of the ways how school boys use their bodies to become some*body* (Wexler, 1992).

Theories of embodied masculinity

Schools provide a key site where different masculinities are produced through performances that draw on the different cultural resources that are available in each setting (Connell 2000; Swain, 2001; Frosh *et al.,* 2002). Masculinity does not exist as an ontological given but comes into existence as people act (Connell, 2000); that is the

social and material practices through which, and by which, the boys' masculine identities are defined are generally described in terms of what they do with/to their bodies, and as such I have embraced the concept of embodiment (Turner, 2000). Although there are a number of ways of defining embodiment, it needs to be understood as a social process (Elias, 1978). Although bodies are located in particular social, historical structures and spaces, the boys in this study are viewed as embodied social agents, for they do not merely have a passive body which is inscribed and acted upon, but they are actively involved in the development of their bodies throughout their school life (and indeed for their entire life-span). Thus, as Connell (1995) argues, we should see bodies as both the 'objects and agents of practice, with the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined', and he calls this 'body-reflexive practice' (Connell, 1995, p. 61). The boys experience themselves simultaneously *in* and *as* their bodies (Lyon & Barbalet, 1994, p. 54) and in this respect *they are bodies* (Turner, 2000). They can be seen being consciously concerned about the maintenance and appearance of their bodies, endeavouring to make it 'the instrument of the will' (Frosh *et al*., 2002, p. 68); they can be seen learning to control their bodies, acquiring and mastering a number of techniques such as walking, running, sitting, catching, hitting, kicking and so forth, and using them in the appropriate ways that being a boy demands. Moreover, they are aware of its significance, both as a personal (but unfinished) resource and as a social symbol, which communicates signs/messages about their self identity. The body is thus an integral part of identity and of our biographies, for the process of making and becoming a body also involves the project of making the self (Shilling, 1993; Synnott,1993).

The empirical setting for this paper is the institution of the school, which for Bernstein (1996) is, essentially, a regulatory institution which attempts to control pupils and their bodies. Children are watched, judged, measured, described, compared, trained, corrected, examined and classified almost as soon as they step into the classroom on their first day, as they 'learn' to become pupils. Foucault (1977) gives us the useful notion of 'bio-power' which he sees as a form of social control which focuses on the body. In schools,

institutionalised practices involve knowledge of, and power over, individuals' gestures, movements and locations and is used to produce (or attempt to produce) 'docile' bodies through techniques of discipline, surveillance, classification and normalisation (Foucault, 1977), and which can be regulated and controlled, and which are generally acceptable to adults.

Of course bodies in schools can be seen in two ways: collectively and/or individually, but the system of schooling tries to control and train both. However, a body that can be trained can also be contested. All schools contain relations of (teacher) control and (pupil) resistance (Epstein & Johnson, 1998), and there is the ongoing tension between the body as an object and as agent which, in many ways, is about the struggle for the control of the boys' body. In fact, we will see that the boys' bodies in this study were far away from the 'docile', passive bodies that the school attempted to produce in the classroom and assembly hall; they were full of energy and action, and, especially in the context of the playground games/activities, the boys' bodies became bodies in motion, literally and metaphorically. As in Connell's (1995) conception, they were both the objects and agents in performances and practices in which their bodies/identities became defined and appropriated by others as 'skilful', 'fast', 'tough', 'hard' and so on.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of 'embodied' capital as a subdivision of cultural capital, Shilling (1991, 1993) contends that it is possible to view the body as possessing a 'physical capital', the production of which refers to the ways bodies are recognised as possessing value in various social settings. In this paper I wish to argue that bodies may have power, status and/or an array of distinctive symbolic forms which the boys are able to draw on and use as *resources* which bring agency and influence.

Background and methods

The findings in this paper are based on data gathered in a year long empirical study (my PhD thesis) between September 1998 and July 1999, and are set in three co-educational

junior schools [2] in or around Greater London. The schools were differentiated on the basis of the social characteristics of their intake (see Table 1), and whereas Highwoods and Petersfield had a mixture of ethnicities (mainly Asian), Westmoor Abbey was almost exclusively white.

TABLE I GOES ABOUT HERE

The ethos, or atmosphere, of each school was very different. Highwoods marketed itself on the twin pillars of academic achievement and excellent sporting facilities; there was a highly competitive atmosphere and the pupils were tightly regulated and controlled. Petersfield also promoted high academic achievement (as measured by the SAT results) and also had firm control and regulation, although there was a deliberate policy of non-competitiveness. In contrast, the main focus for Westmoor Abbey consisted of dealing with, and trying to contain, pupil (mis)behaviour, and the promotion of high academic standards was of secondary importance. This was a survivalist type of school (Hargreaves, 1995) where the ethos was less stable and social relations were generally poorer.

During my fieldwork I followed a rolling programme spending about a month each term in each school, concentrating on boys in Year 6 (10-11 year olds). My descriptions and interpretations below are based on two major sources of data: firstly, on semi-participant observations of the boys and girls during lessons and around the school site; and secondly, on a series of 104 loosely-structured interviews (62 involving only boys; 39 involving only girls; and 3 mixed) based on nominated friendship groups of between 2-3, and where pupils were encouraged to express their views freely, and share their experiences, on a wide range of topics.

The pupil peer group and importance of status

One of the most important features of the school setting is the informal life of the pupil peer group which has a fundamental influence on the construction of masculine identities (see, for example, Pollard, 1985; Woods, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Adler & Adler, 1998; Connolly, 1998; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Harris, 1998; Connell, 2000). It provides boys with a series of collective meanings of what it is to be a boy, and there are constant pressures on individuals to perform and behave to the expected group norms. Thus, the construction of masculinity is, primarily, a collective enterprise, and it is the peer group, rather than individual boys, which are the bearers of gender definitions (Connell, 2000; Lesko, 2000).

One of the most urgent dimensions of school life for boys is the need to gain popularity and, in particular, status (see, Weber, 1946, 1963; Corsaro, 1979; Adler & Adler, 1998). Indeed, the search to achieve status is also the search to achieve an acceptable form of masculinity. The boys' notion of status comes from having a certain position within the peer group hierarchy which becomes relevant when it is seen in relation to others. It is not something that is given, but is often the outcome of intricate and intense manoeuvring which has to be earned through negotiation and sustained through performance

Ultimately, the boys' position in the peer group is determined by the array of social, cultural, physical, intellectual and economic resources that they are able to draw on as they attempt to establish friendships and relationships in the course of their everyday interactions. Although some resources may be an embodied form of physicality (sporty, tough etc), others can also be intellectual (general academic capability and achievement); economic (money); social, emotional and linguistic (interpersonal, including humour); or cultural (in touch with the latest fashions, music, TV programmes, computer expertise etc). Of course these resources will also always exist within determinate historical and spatial conditions; moreover, the resources that are available will vary within different settings, some may be more conspicuous than others; and some may be easier to draw on than others at particular times and in particular places. It also needs to be understood that the boys, who use a set of resources and interactional skills to establish a high status in

the dominant pupil hierarchy in one school, will not necessarily be able to sustain this position in another.

Bodily resources

Physicality/athleticism

For much of the time the boys defined their masculinity through action, and the most esteemed and prevalent resource that the boys drew on across all three schools to gain status was physicality/athleticism which was inextricably linked to the body in the form of strength, power, skill, fitness and speed. The boys were classified and divided by their physicality by both formal and their own informal school cultures where the other bodies around them provided them with a differential reference point for their own bodily sense of self.

Sporting success was a key signifier of successful masculinity and high performance in sport and games (both on the field and in the playground) was generally the single most effective way of gaining popularity and status in the male peer group. Sport not only provided a way of measuring a boy's masculine accomplishment against each other, but also against the wider world of men. In all three schools the best athletes were generally the most popular in their class and school year. The importance of sport as a leading definer in the formation of masculinities has been recognised by a number of writers (see, for example, Corrigan 1979; Kessler *et al.*, 1985; Messner & Sabo 1990; Whitson 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell 1995, 1996, 2000; Hayward & Mac an Ghaill 1996; Parker 1996a, 1996b; Bromley, 1997; Fitzclarence & Hickey 1998; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Martino 1999). Television programmes and magazine articles offer the boys images, models and fantasies of what being a 'proper' man is all about. Boys are strongly encouraged to be active, physical, competitive, aggressive and so on, and it is seen by many as an entry into the world of men.

Typically, the top sporty boys had a higher status in the cultural life of the school. This was particularly true at Highwoods where sporting achievement was celebrated and honoured by the formal regime, and it was the boys who were the most accomplished players who were the most popular and who held the highest status. Although it was also possible to gain a limited amount of status through work and academic achievement, sport (and football in particular) took precedence.

Calvin:	If you're not good at football you're not friends with anybody who's good at football, all the people who are good at football are the best people, like the most/
Josh:	Popular
Calvin:	Yeah, popular
JS:	[*To Josh and Patrick*] True?
Josh:	Very true!
Patrick:	Yeah
Josh:	We're sporty people
Calvin:	And the sporty people are much preferred than the people who are much more brainy

Many writers (see, for example, Renold 1997; Skelton 1997, 2000, 2001; Benjamin 1998, 2001; Connolly 1998; Epstein 1998; Swain 2000) have documented the role of football in the formation of dominant masculine identities, and establishing oneself as a good footballer went a long way in helping to establish one as a 'real' boy. By the time many boys have reached the age of 10 or 11 they will have spent thousands of hours, almost in rehearsal, practising to become men, trying to look like and emulate the moves of their professional heroes (Swain, 2000). There was an almost ritualistic and fantasised quality to many of the games that I observed which, in many ways, were a series of set-piece, highly visible, stylised bodily exhibitions.

Highwoods and Westmoor Abbey both had school football teams (Highwoods had three in Year 6) that played competitive matches against other schools. At Highwoods,

informal games of football were played every breaktime on the courts, but although conversations about football dominated the peer group discussions at Westmoor Abbey, school policies dictated that games were only allowed to be played once a week by the boys in Year 6, which meant that, in practice, it was only played in the playground for about an hour a week. At Petersfield, football was banned for the vast majority of the year as the headteacher, Mrs Flowers, felt football was associated with, and attracted, the 'wrong' forms of masculinity. However, its attempted elimination (for two terms of the Year) did not mean that the more conventional and competitive macho types of embodied masculinity disappeared, but rather that they appeared in other forms; they compelled the boys to find and invent a range of alternative activities during their breaktimes, and these were based particularly on the physical resources of speed, fitness and strength, and this was also the case at Westmoor Abbey.

The number of different kinds of informal pupil games tended to be fewer at Highwoods due to the greater range of facilities, and the freedom and movement of the body allowed by the school in terms of the use of space and facilities. At the other two schools space in the physical layout was far more controlled: there were fewer amenities to use, and pupils were generally confined to the playground which became the central space of expression, and the stage for competitive embodied performance.

The ability to run fast was a particularly valorised resource and all the boys that I interviewed could tell me who was the fastest boy in the class. There were frequent tests of speed in the playground, sometimes involving a direct head-to-head confrontation. At Petersfield and Westmoor Abbey, some of the playground games, such as chase-games (called Bulldog, at Petersfield, and Runouts at Westmoor Abbey), had been deliberately created around a competitive test of speed, for being a fast runner meant that you were more often a winner, and losers risked subordination and isolation. The following exchange comes from two boys at Petersfield:

> *Jameil:*   If you're a slow coach, you won't be able to catch with us...'cos the main fastest kids are like, me, CT, Benjamin and [...] Hussein

JS:	They're the fastest, and is that quite important for the games you play...if you're a real slow coach you get caught?
Jameil:	As we're the fastest we can get to the other side easily
Matthew:	And then when we play with Rod, he always gets caught first, but we don't let him be 'it' [*in Bulldog*] because he's always going to be caught

Being fast also meant that a boy could excel in a greater range of sports and in the informal playground games. The relationship between sport and popularity/status is also affirmed in these two extracts from interviews at Westmoor Abbey.

Jimmy:	Like Runouts, is all about speed and dodging, and thinking about what you're going do... and football's thinking about your passing, and you've got to have a good speed to get passed defenders and good skill

----

JS:	How important is it to be good at sport?
Chris:	Quite important because if you're good at sport, it means that you're a fast runner, you can get away quickly, you're good at games/
Ryan:	If you're good at games, and you're a fast runner, you can get past people/
Chris:	You get pretty popular if you're good at sport

Bodily strength was also another important resource, and was a prerequisite in physical games that were deliberately designed by the boys to test toughness and stamina. As was the case with the fastest runners, the boys were also able to name the strongest boy in the class. One of the favourite games at Westmoor Abbey was called Predator and the object was to catch an opponent and then hold them down for a period of 10 seconds.

Wrestling-type games also occurred at Petersfield, although here they needed to be a covert activity as they had also been banned by Mrs Flowers.

Acting tough and 'hard'

In all of these games that were devised to test speed, stamina and physical prowess it was important for a boy to refrain from showing weakness by admitting the feeling of pain and, particularly, by crying. In any game of physical contact, ability to withstand bodily pain is frequently going to be put to the test, but for most boys crying is equated with being a 'wimp' or a 'sissy'. Having said this, although the sports field was accepted as a place for aggressive forms of physical domination, many of the boys were wary of assaulting and inflicting their bodies with too much pain. At Highwoods, many boys told me that they had become wary of tackling too hard, or too closely, in rugby after a boy had split his cheek open and lost a tooth.

The attribute of physicality also appeared in other forms apart from games and sport. For instance, there were some boys who deliberately cultivated aggressive, 'macho' forms of behaviour, which they saw as a way of establishing their masculine authority. Toughness seemed to characterise much of their attitude and relations towards other boys, though scarcely ever with girls. Most of the data in this section comes from Westmoor Abbey, as this was the school where acting tough and/or 'hard' (including fighting) was one of the main ways of procuring status, and a strategy very much open to any boy who had the physical resources to back it up. Even threatening behaviour, such as intentional pushing/shoving, was a limited option at the other two schools, especially at Highwoods where a boy would be more likely to damage his reputation rather than enhance it if he had to resort to using physical coercion.

Although still a limited option at Petersfield, one of the class leaders, a boy known as CT, had established his status in the group by acting tough. His authority was underwritten and backed up with displays of violence and intimidation, and although this did not

necessarily always bring him popularity, it earned him a certain amount of wary respect. Moreover, there were also a few other boys in the peer group who set out to invoke the strategy of fighting in an attempt to gain peer group acceptance and to prove their 'macho' credentials, although there was a strict moral code never to hit a girl. In this next extract a boy called Vinny is boasting of his fighting prowess, and appears to believe that it is a way of gaining status and enhancing his position.

Vinny:	I beat up these two boys, they came at me with three fingers [*Vinny has a missing finger*], they went like that [*displayed a 'missing' finger*] so I got them like that [*round the neck*] and started choking them
JS:	What sort of age group were they?
Vinny:	Year 6, and they were bigger than me, they were bigger than me
CT:	Except for 'Tiny Tim'
Vinny	'Tiny Tim' is small
JS:	So you don't mess with Vinny?!
CT:	I would

It is significant that Vinny believes that he gains more status by tackling boys who are from his own age group and who are bigger than him (which he repeats), and it is also interesting to notice CT's last comment which is designed to keep Vinny in his place, and to let him know who is the real boss.

However, the vast majority of the tough boys were to be found at Westmoor Abbey where, it could be argued, there was a relation to working class patterns of cultural behaviour (Canaan, 1991), and some of these boys undoubtedly imitated actions seen, and learnt, within their families and from other members in the local community. It was a necessary prerequisite of the informal culture for all the boys to appear as being tough, and one of the boys told me that 'you can't afford to be nice 'cos people will think that you're soft inside'. Acts of daring and displays of courage could also bring admiration and status, and some of these happened outside school. Inside school reputations of

being tough were continuously being made and lost, and in the following conversation I am asking two of the class leaders, Dan and Luke, about another boy in a parallel class:

JS: Isn't is true that last year Elvin was quite a tough kid?

Dan/Luke: No!

Dan: Everyone thought he was but now he's come to these fights and he's getting caned, and so everyone knows he's a weed; everyone used to think he was but not now

Luke: The only reason anyone likes me/

JS: But he used to win his fights?

Dan: No, he never used to have fights

Luke: The only reason that people started to like me is because I beat him

JS: Oh you beat Elvin did you?

Luke: Yeah yeah, in Year 3...because everyone didn't know me, and they was thinking I was a weed, but then I punched him and beat him, and then everyone felt proud of me

This exchange points to the essential insecurity of the dominant masculinity in this school because there is an almost daily need to sustain and defend it against challengers (Pattman *et al.,* 1998). If a boy bases his status on toughness and fighting, he needs to be ever-attentive to potential rivals; he is only going to be as good as his last fight, and if beaten his status will rapidly diminish. It also shows how Luke used the tactic of fighting to ingratiate himself with the peer group when he arrived from another school in the early part of his junior career.

Some of the fights that I saw had an unmistakable, gladiatorial and performative nature, with crowds gathering round in a circle urging the boys on with sustained tribal chants of 'fight, fight, fight'. However, the majority of the boys tried to keep away from fighting. Although a boy could also show how tough he was by publicly defying adult authority, showing an insouciant 'couldn't-care-less' attitude, and/or by challenging the rules and receiving more disciplinary actions than others, many boys were negotiating their way

between the two school cultures, and did not want to run the risk of getting into serious trouble. However, sometimes their options became constricted, and few boys were prepared to chance peer ridicule by ducking out of a direct challenge: this was particularly true if it came from a boy in a younger age group.

> *Tom:*   You have to have a fight with someone, you can't walk away
> otherwise you'll be taken the micky out of

The performance of masculinity can often be vulnerable and hazardous. If a boy wanted to maintain his position of status in the peer group he had to learn to stand up and look after himself in the face of verbal threats and physical intimidation. In fact, not standing up for oneself was seen as a social sin and a matter of individual honour, and many boys told me that their parents had told them to 'sort things out for themselves' by hitting back, rather than by telling a teacher. At one point in the following conversation, Chris asks me to confirm the practice of standing up for yourself and hitting back, a point which I studiously choose to ignore. Although using the help of an elder sibling or relative was not nearly as bad as telling a teacher, and may have been an effective short term tactic, a boy would usually pay the price for this in the long run.

> *Robert:*   Ryan needs to toughen up a bit
> *JS:*   Ryan does?
> *Tom:*   He lets himself get pushed around and then he don't fight back
> *Robert:*   He got pushed into a bush by a Year 5, right it was Sam, and he
> goes, 'Stop it' 'cos Sam was starting calling him names, and then
> we go, 'Just hit him,' and he goes, 'I will if he hits me or pushes
> me' and he started pushing him around and he didn't do nothing;
> he got pushed into a bush and he walked off and he was crying
> *Chris:*   Eric and all us said we wouldn't join in, just you two have the fight
> but he wouldn't, but if that was someone else, if someone pushes
> you or punches you, you'd just hit them back wouldn't you?

JS:	So you've got to be quite a good fighter and look after yourself, stand up for yourself?
Robert:	Some people like Simon go, 'Oh I'll get my sister's boyfriend on you and Tim O'Neil' [*an unknown person*] but he won't touch me 'cos my brother's older than him and my brother's left school and my brother/
Chris:	That's what Dan used to do, Dan used to get his brother but when you get your brother, that shows that you're really not that strong, you have to get someone fighting [...] you can't fight for yourself.

Clothing

The body is sign-bearing and sign-wearing and also a producer of signs, and the clothes that we choose to wear make a highly visible statement of how we wish to present ourselves to the world; who we think we are, or who we would like to be (Goffman, 1959; Finkelstein, 1996; Turner, 1997). These opportunities are generally curtailed in schools where a school uniform is strictly imposed and enforced, for uniform is one of the structural techniques charted by Foucault (1977) and is used to produce the disciplined and submissive, quiescent body. However, where school uniform is only loosely applied and enforced, a trajectory is opened up for pupils to use the wearing of fashionable, brand-named clothes and trainers as another constituent in the construction of their masculinity, as a resource to achieve peer group status, and also to show a outward/public display of resistance to school regulation (Meadmore & Symes, 1996). Thus many of these opportunities depend upon the official approach and policies taken in each school. While this was one of the top ways of gaining recognition at Westmoor Abbey, this option was restricted at Petersfield and almost totally closed at Highwoods for, being an independent school, it was associated with the long, historical public-school tradition of wearing school uniform, and the policy was rigorously and stringently applied.

The most noticeable sign of pupil resistance at Petersfield was the wearing of trainers, and the boys were quick to point out to me they were wearing them. Although the number of boys with trainers increased over the Year, in general the school's rigorously enforced systems of surveillance made it difficult to import contemporary mass culture inside the school gates and severely restricted the wearing of any items of clothing that displayed brand-names and 'makes'.

This situation was diametrically different at Westmoor Abbey where a loose enforcement of school uniform created a space for pupils to use clothing as a means of gaining recognition and status, of generating common bonds, and of sharing interests and intimacy within the peer-group cultures (Swain, 2000a). Certain items and brand-names acquired a specific, symbolic value, acting as a powerful signifier of the pupils' worth as people. Although the headteacher, Mr Lane, tried to enforce a loose form of school uniform consisting of five different top colours, lack of parental support, or in some cases, outright opposition, meant that even the 'colours' rule had turned out to be 'an on-going battle'.

The majority of the boys (and girls) wore sports-associated clothing and training shoes. Parker (1996b) and Hargreaves (1987) have drawn attention to the connection between commercialised consumer culture and sports which both use the body as a principal symbol of expression. Within peer-group relations, certain items acquired a specific, localised, symbolic value such as particular brand names, and these were ascribed a higher cultural value than others. However, it was the training shoe that had the greatest currency in terms of status, with their signifiers of wealth, choice, freedom, equality, sportiness, casualness, anti-school, and of collective belonging. For the boys that I interviewed, it was their comfort and mobility, but most important of all it was 'the look' and 'the style' (Radley, 1995), and as with the tracksuit tops (and also the T-shirts, jackets etc), there was a hierarchy of brand names.

There were serious risks involved for anyone not conforming to the group norms, for the wearing of certain clothes was very much a cultural imperative. It was as if masculine

competence was on trial or on show, and looking good and having the right stuff to wear needed commitment and dedication, knowledge, and importantly, peer-group recognition, validation and legitimation. I would also argue that, although the boys' appearance was equated with their performance, and in many ways 'to look was to be' (Skeggs, 1997, p. 116), there was also the need 'to look' in order to be safe. Those who did not conform to the right 'look' at Westmoor Abbey were categorised as 'other', and this could lead to rejection and/or peer-group ostracism. This was policed by the boys from the dominant groups: if a boy wore anything associated with the regulation school uniform, apart from the sweat shirt, they would often be called either 'boff' or 'gay', and they were used on an interchangeable basis. A boy could have a boff shirt, boff trousers or boff shoes, which usually meant that anything 'smart' was equated with conforming to the school's values and authority. 'Gay' basically connoted 'naff' or awful, and this even included his choice of shoe:

Jimmy: Some people say that Tom has got gay trainers because they're old

Tom: These are old but I'm getting new ones.

Dominant and subordinated forms of masculinity

Every setting, such as a school, will have a hierarchy of masculinities and will generally have its own dominant, or hegemonic form, of masculinity which gains ascendancy over and above others; it becomes 'culturally exalted' (Connell, 1990, p. 83), and exemplifies what it means to be a 'real' boy. The hegemonic masculine form is not necessarily the most common type on view and may be contested, but although it is often underwritten by the threat of violence, it generally exerts its influence by being able to define what is the norm and many boys find that they have to fit into, and conform to, its demands. Although this may differ in each school the dominant patterns of masculinity in the three schools in this study were linked to the physical capital of the body, and for many boys the physical performative aspect of masculinity was seen as the most acceptable and desirable way of being male (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998).

The leading form of masculinity at Highwoods was a kind of 'muscular' athleticism, and those who excelled at sport were those who were most popular, and who had the highest status amongst their peers. The top-sporty boys were 'not only exemplars' of the formal-school sporting culture, they were also a highly visible, prevalent and pervasive part of the informal peer-group culture; it seemed to be the natural order of things, and although it was only practised by a small minority of boys in its idealised form, it was given an enduring stability by the official backing of the formal school-culture, which gave it social authority and made it culturally powerful. Although it was more difficult to classify any single, particular 'idealised' type of boy at Petersfield, there were still a limited number of acceptable ways of being a boy, and the hegemonic form of masculinity was still primarily based on and around an embodied form of physicality/athleticism which manifested itself, for instance, in speed and strength. Although the idealised form of masculinity at Westmoor Abbey was again based around the body it was very different from the hegemony at Highwoods, for rather than being sanctioned by the formal school culture it was constructed against it. Moreover, there was also a greater emphasis on the use of the body in demonstrations of strength, toughness and intimidation.

While there will be other types of masculinity which do not aspire to emulate the leading form, other modes will be oppressed and subordinated, and positioned outside the legitimate forms of maleness. As all masculinities are constructed in contrast to being feminine those which are positioned at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy will be symbolically assimilated to femininity and tend to have much in common with feminine forms (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). Indeed, the dominant bodies were inevitably heterosexual bodies, for masculinity and heterosexuality are entwined and to be a 'real' boy (or girl) is to be heterosexual. Thus the boys at the bottom of the pupil hierarchy were often positioned and controlled by feminising them, and by using the strategy of homophobic abuse (Epstein, 1996). Across the three schools, the different strategies of subordination were all constructed under the two generic headings of 'difference' and/or 'deficit' (or deficient). The powerful pressures to conformity that characterised the peer

group cultures meant that a boy had only to look, and be, *slightly* different from the norm to be accorded inferior status. Although boys were subordinated for a variety of reasons such as being too-closely aligned with the formal regime, many of these were again linked to the body. Although I did not come across a single incident of any pupil being subordinated explicitly because of their ethnicity or race, this is not to say that ethnicity and/or race are not used as markers of difference in these and other settings, and of course they are inextricably linked to the body anyway. In the schools in this study it was aberrant physical appearances and differences in body language that were so keenly scrutinised and commented on. For example, a boy needed to wear the right clothes, play the right playground games, as well as move (sit, walk, run, catch, throw, kick, hit etc) in the 'right' way. I did not come across any pupil being teased because they were wearing glasses, but Simon was bullied at Westmoor Abbey because he was deemed to have a 'funny shaped head'. However, the major material bodily difference came from the impression of being overweight, and my data is littered with disparaging references directed to boys and girls being 'a big fat blob', 'fat-boy', 'too fat', 'so fat', 'really fat' and so on. It was a serious handicap to boys' (or girls') attempts to establish peer group status, and boys needed to use other strategies and resources in order to compensate for it.

Under the heading of 'deficit', subordination could come through perceived exhibitions of immature and babyish behaviour (doing 'silly' things, playing infantile games, or associating too closely with younger children). However, boys were also subordinated for the perception that they were deficient in certain culturally acclaimed traits, and these were particularly connected with physicality/athleticism, such as in skill, strength and speed etc; displaying a lack of toughness (such as crying, showing fear of pain, and/or acting 'soft'); being too passive and generally not active enough; and showing a lack of effort which was usually connected to a sporting context. Some of these themes are illustrated in this following exchange where two boys at Highwoods are explaining to me why they have been calling another boy, Timothy, a girl.

> *Sinclair:*   He doesn't like football, he doesn't like any sports apart from golf/
> *Calvin:*   He's different from everyone else

JS:	Yeah, but/
Derek:	He's just one person/
Calvin:	And he likes to be by himself very often
JS:	What do you mean, he's like a girl
Sinclair:	Well/
Calvin:	Well he does everything/
Derek:	Well he doesn't really act like a boy […] he's quite scared of stuff as well, like scared of the ball in rugby/
Sinclair:	Yeah I remember in football, there were two people running for the ball and Timmy sort of like backed away
Derek:	And when the ball is coming at him [*in rugby*] he just drops it and/
Sinclair:	Yeah he can't kick it you know [..], it was painful to watch yesterday
Calvin:	He's like a boy yeah, he's like.../
Sinclair:	He's a boy but he, like, wants to be a girl
Calvin:	Well he doesn't want to be, I think like, he backs away from everything, and he's like...if someone has a go at us...if someone pushes us we'll push them back, this is a simple way of saying it: if someone pushes us, we'll push them back.

Conclusions

Gilbert & Gilbert (1998, p. 176) write of the 'embodied reality of masculine practice', and in this paper I have stated that masculinity comes into existence as people act, and refers to bodies and what bodies do (Connell, 2000). Thus, rather than viewing the physical practices described above as expressions of an already existing masculinity, I am arguing that masculinity is brought into action through these practices, although it will always be shaped by intersections with social class, ethnicity, race and sexuality. This paper has also shown that different masculinities exist *within* as well as *between* different settings. Although physicality of the body that was the principle material

symbol of status, it was articulated in slightly different ways within the contexts of each school and some of this was connected with social class: for instance, whereas the body was employed in more forceful and domineering ways in the playgrounds of Petersfield and, most notably, at Westmoor Abbey, this use of the body was generally confined to the games field at Highwoods. Embracing the theories of embodiment, I have maintained that, although bodies are situated in specific social and historical spaces and structures, the boys are actively involved in the development of their bodies, and so active bodies are acted upon (Crossley, 1996). There was a struggle over the body between the school system and the boys which was a contestation between control against agency: whilst the official practices of the school attempted to regulate and control the bodies to render them docile and receptive, the boys in this study were full of activity and agency and often resisted these attempts. Schools need to acknowledge, and take into account, the tension within this relationship which will have implications for regulatory policies and practices.

Bodies are used to classify boys in the formal school culture and in the informal pupil peer groups, and the main argument in this paper is that boys use the somatic body as the main resource to construct their masculinity and to gain and establish peer group status. The most revered and widely used resource is physicality and athleticism, but I have also considered ways in which the body is used to act tough and hard, and as a socio-cultural symbol to display items of clothing and shoes. Finally, I have looked at how the body forms a major constituent of dominant and subordinated forms of masculinity, and how the boys are positioned by the shape of the bodies, and the things that they do with their bodies.

Key to transcripts

[*text*]   Background information;
[…]   extracts edited out of transcript for sake of clarity;
...   pause;

| / | moment when interruption begins; |
| ------- | an extract from another part of the same interview |

Notes

[1] Although some writers refer to the recent 'discovery' of the body, Light and Kirk (2000) point out that, given the implicit recognition of the body in the social theories of such writers as Durkheim (1976), Goffman (1959), Marx (1963) and Mauss (1973), the increasing interest in the body over the last twenty years or so should be more accurately described as the 're-emergence'.

[2] To protect anonymity, all names of places and people have been changed.

[3] In order to disguise the school's identity the number of pupils on roll have been rounded up or down to the nearest 25

References

ADLER, A. & ADLER, P. (1998) *Peer Power: preadolescent culture and identity* (London, Rutgers University Press).

BENJAMIN, S. (1998) Fantasy football league: boys learning to 'do boy' in a special (SEN) school classroom, in: G. WALFORD, & A. MASSEY (Eds) *Children Learning in context* (London, Jai Press Inc).

BOURDIEU, P. (1986) The forms of capital, in: J. RICHARDSON (Ed) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood Press).

BROMLEY, R. (1997) The body language: the meaning of modern sport, *Body &Society*, 3, pp.109-118.

CANAAN, J. (1991) 'Is 'doing nothing' just boys' play?: integrating feminist and cultural studies perspectives on working class young men's masculinity, in: F. C. LURY & J. STACEY (Eds) *Off-Centre: feminism and cultural studies* (Cultural Studies Birmingham) (London, Harper Collins Academic Press).

CONNELL, R. W. (1990) An iron man: the body and some contradictions of hegemonic masculinity, in: M. A. MESSNER & D. F. SABO (Eds) *Sport, Men and the Gender Order: critical feminist perspectives* (Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics).

CONNELL, R. W. (1995) *Masculinities* (Cambridge, Polity Press).

CONNELL, R. W. (1996) 'Teaching the boys': new research on masculinity and gender strategies for schools, *Teachers College Record,* 98, pp. 206-235.

CONNELL, R. W. (2000) *The Men and the Boys* (Cambridge, Polity).

CONNOLLY, P. (1998) *Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children: social relations in a multi-ethnic, inner-city primary school* (London, Routledge).

CORRIGAN, P. (1979) *Schooling the Smash Street Kids* (London, Macmillan).

CORSARO, W. A. (1979) Young children's conceptions of status and role, *Sociology of Education,* 52, pp.46-59.

CROSSLEY, N. (1996) Body-subject/body-power: agency, inscription and control in Foucault and Merleau-Ponty, *Body & Society,* 2, pp. 99-116.

DURKHEIM, E. (1976) [1912] *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London, Allen & Unwin).

ELIAS, N. (1978) *The History of Manners: the civilising process, Volume I.* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell).

EPSTEIN, D. (1998) 'Stranger in the mirror': gender, ethnicity, sexuality and nation schooling. Paper presented at the *Multiple Marginalities: gender Citizenship and Nationality in Education Conference (*Nordic-Baltic Research Symposium [NORFA], Helsinki).

EPSTEIN, D., KEHILY, M., MAC AN GHAILL, M. & REDMAN, P (2001) Boys and girls come out to play: making masculinities and femininities in school playgrounds, *Men and Masculinities,* 4, (2) pp. 158-172.

EPSTEIN, D. & JOHNSON, R. (1998) *Schooling Sexualities* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

FINKESTEIN, J. (1996) *After a Fashion* (Melbourne, University of Melbourne Press).

FITZCLARENCE, L. & HICKEY, C. (1998) Learning to rationalise abusive behaviour through football, in: L. FITZCLARENCE, C. HICKEY & R. MATTHEWS (Eds) *Where the Boys Are: masculinity, sport & education (*Geelong, Australia, Deakin Centre for Education & Change).

FOUCAULT, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (London, Penguin).

FRANCIS, B. (1998) *Power Plays* (Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham).

FROSH, S., PHOENIX, A. & PATTMAN, R. (2002) Young Masculinities: understanding boys in contemporary society (London, Palgrave).

GILBERT, R. & GILBERT, P. (1998) *Masculinity Goes To School* (London, Routledge).

GOFFMAN, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London, Penguin).

HARGREAVES, J. (1987) *Sport, Power and Culture* (Cambridge, Polity).

HARGREAVES, D. H. (1995) School culture, school effectiveness and school improvement, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 6, pp. 23-46.

HARRIS, J. R. (1998) *The Nurture Assumption: why children turn out the way they do* (London, Bloomsbury).

HAYWOOD, C. & MAC AN GHAILL, M. (1996) Schooling masculinities, in: M. MAC AN GHAILL (Ed) *Understanding Masculinities* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

JORDAN, E. (1995) Fighting boys and fantasy play: the construction of masculinity in the early years of schooling, *Gender and Education*, 7, pp. 69-86.

KESSLER, S., ASHENDEN, D. J., CONNELL, R. W. & DOWSETT, G. W. (1985) Gender relations in secondary schooling, *Sociology of Education,* 58, pp. 34-48.

LESKO, N. (Ed) (2000) *Masculinities at School* (London, Sage).

LIGHT, R. & KIRK, D. (2000) High school rugby, the body and the reproduction of 'hegemonic' masculinity, *Sport, Education and Society,* 5, (2), pp. 163-176.

LINGARD, B. & DOUGLAS, D. (1999) *Men Engaging Feminisms* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

LYON, M. L. & BARBALET, J. M. (1994) Society's body: emotion and the 'somatization' of social theory, in: T. J. CSORDAS (Ed) *Embodiment and Experience: the existential ground of culture and self* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

MAC AN GHAILL, M. (1994) *The Making of Men: masculinities, sexualities and schoolin g*(Buckingham, Open University Press).

MARTINO, W. (1999) 'Cool boys', 'party animals', 'squids' and 'poofters': interrogating the dynamics and politics of adolescent masculinities in school, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 20, pp. 239- 263.

MARX, K. (1963) [1852] *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York, International Publishers).

MAUSS, M. (1973) Techniques of the body (translated by B. BREWSTER), *Economy and Society*, 2, pp. 70-87.

MEADMORE, D. & SYMES, C. (1996) Of uniform appearance: a symbol of school discipline and governmentality, *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education,* 17, pp. 209-225.

MESSNER, M. A. & SABO, D. F. (1990) Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: critical feminist perspectives (Champaign, Illinois, Human Kinetics Books).

PARKER, A. (1996a) The construction of masculinity within boys' physical education, *Gender and Education,* 8, pp. 141-157.

PARKER, A. (1996b) Sporting masculinities: gender relations and the body, in: M. MAC AN GHAILL (Ed) *Understanding Masculinities* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

PATTMAN, R., FROSH, S. & PHOENIX, A. (1998) Lads, machos and others: developing 'boy-centred' research, *Journal of Youth Studies,* 1, (2), pp. 125-142.

POLLARD, A. (1985) *The Social World of the Primary School* (London, Cassell).

PROUT, A. (2000) (Ed) *The Body, Childhood and Society* (Macmillan, London).

RADLEY, A. (1995) The elusory body and social constructionist theory, *Body & Society,* 1, pp. 3-23.

RENOLD, E. (1997) 'All they've got on their brains is football': sport, masculinity and the gendered practices of playground relations, *Sport, Education and Society,* 2, pp. 5-23.

RENOLD, E. (1999) 'Presumed Innocence': an ethnographic exploration into the construction of gender and sexual identities in the primary school, Unpublished PhD thesis (University of Cardiff).

RENOLD, E. (2000) 'Coming Out': gender, (hetero)sexuality and the primary school, *Gender and Education,* 12, pp. 309-326.

SHILLING, C. (1991) Educating the body: physical capital and the production of social inequalities, *Sociology,* 25, pp. 653-672.

SHILLING, C. (1993) *The Body and Social Theory* (London, Sage Publications).

SKEGGS, B. (1997) *Formations of Class & Gender* (London, Sage).

SKELTON, C. (1996) Learning to be 'tough': the fostering of maleness in one primary school, *Gender and Education,* 8, pp. 185-197.

SKELTON, C. (1997) Primary boys and hegemonic masculinities, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18, pp. 349-369.

SKELTON, C. (2000) 'A passion for football': dominant masculinities and primary schooling, *Sport, Education and Society*, 5 (1), pp. 5-18.

SKELTON, C. (2001) *Schooling the Boys: masculinities and primary education* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

SWAIN, J. (2000) 'The money's good, the fame's good, the girls are good': the role of playground football in the construction of young boys' masculinity in a junior school, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 21, pp. 95-109.

SWAIN, J. (2002a) The right stuff: fashioning an identity through clothing in a junior school, *Gender and Education*, 14 (1)

SWAIN, J (2002b) The Resources and strategies boys use to establish status in a junior school without competitive sport, *Discourse*, 23 (1), pp. 91-107.

SYNNOTT, A. (1993) *The Body Social: symbolism, self and society* (London, Routledge).

THORNE, B. (1993) *Gender Play: girls and boys in school* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press).

TURNER, B. S. (1997) What is the Sociology of the Body?, *Body & Society*, 3 (1), pp. 103-107

TURNER, B. S. (2000) An outline of a general sociology of the body, in: B. S. TURNER (Ed) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, 2nd edition (Oxford, Blackwell).

WACQUANT, L. (1995) Pugs at work: bodily capital and bodily labour among professional boxers, *Body and Society*, 1, (1), p. 65-89.

WARREN, S. (1997) Who do these boys think they are? an investigation into the construction of masculinities in a primary classroom, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1, (2) pp. 207-222.

WEBER, M. (1946). Class, status, and party, in: H. GERTH & C. W. MILLS (Eds) *From Max Weber* (New York, Oxford University Press).

WEBER, M. (1963) [1922] *The Sociology of Religion* (translated by E. FISCHOFF), (London, Methuen).

WEXLER, P., with the assistance of CRICHLOW, W. KERN, J. & MARTUSEWICZ, R. (1992) *Becoming Somebody: toward a social psychology of school* (London, Falmer Press).

WHITSON, D. (1990) Sport in the social construction of masculinity', in: M. A. MESSNER & D. F. SABO (Eds) *Sport, Men and the Gender Order: critical feminist perspectives* (Champaign, IL.,Human Kinetics).

WOODS, P. (1990) *The Happiest Days?* (London, Falmer)

Name of school	Type of school	No. on roll [3]	Social characteristics of intake
Highwoods Independent	Private, fee-paying	350	Upper-middle class
Petersfield Junior	LEA	425	Middle class
Westmoor Abbey Junior	LEA	300	Working class

Table 1: School type, size, and the social characteristics of their intake

How young schoolboys become some*body*: the role of the body in the construction of masculinity

June 2002

Abstract

This paper explores the key role of the body in the construction of identity in school boys aged 10-11. The findings are based on data gathered from a year long empirical study set in three UK junior schools. I argue that the body is used by the boys as a means of classification, inclusion and differentiation, and is the principal resource to establish status and position within the pupil peer group. The most prevalent and esteemed resource is physicality and athleticism (found particularly in sports and informal playground games), but I also examine how the body is used in tough and intimidating ways, and show how boys construct identities by using their bodies as a social symbol to display items of sports-related and brand-inscribed clothing. Finally, I consider how the body forms a major component in the construction of dominant and subordinated forms of masculinity.