

THE ROLE OF SPORT IN THE PROMOTION OF MASCULINITY IN AN ENGLISH INDEPENDENT JUNIOR SCHOOL

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Introduction

The use and consumption of commercial competitive sport appears to be on the rise globally and has become a leading marker and definer of masculinity in mass culture (Connell 1995, 2000), providing boys and men with ‘the quintessential manifestation of the masculine ethos’ (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998, p. 60). Schools are important agents in the formation of masculinities, and sport has a great significance in the cultural life of many schools, engaging the school population as a whole in the ‘celebration and reproduction of the dominant codes of gender’ (Connell 1996, p. 217). School sport is not meant to be some kind of innocent pastime, but is often used to create a ‘top dog’ model of masculinity which many boys try to aim for and live up to (Salisbury & Jackson 1996, p. 205). Having the ability to demonstrate and perform athletic prowess has become an important requirement for establishing and maintaining status in the majority of male peer groups in both primary and secondary schools (e.g. Whitson 1990; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Connell 1996; Skelton 1997, 2001; Gilbert & Gilbert 1998; Lingard & Douglas 1999). For many boys, being sporty is seen as being cool; it gives a kudos, and is a major signifier of successful masculinity. Central to this process is the body, a key material and symbolic signifier of how we come to understand ourselves as gendered (Shilling 1993; Gordon, et al., 2000). Indeed, some opportunities in life, especially those to do with sport, are largely conditioned and determined by the shape and physical attributes of our body.

Although there have been notable empirical studies set in senior public schools (e.g. Connell et al. 1982; Heward 1988; Tovey 1990, 1993; Morrell, 1994) very little attention has been given to forms of masculinity constructed by mainly middle and upper-middle

class boys in the preparatory and/or junior part of the public school system. Moreover, studies of masculinity in schools where there is (relatively) high academic achievement [1] is also an under-researched area. This paper, in particular, considers the role of sport in the construction of masculinities in the public school setting amongst a group of Year 6 boys (10-11 year olds). Although sport has been recognised as an important site in the formation of masculinity by a number of writers (e.g. Corrigan 1979; Kessler et al. 1985; Messner & Sabo 1990; Whitson 1990; Connell 1995, 1996; Hayward & Mac an Ghail 1996; Parker 1996a, 1996b; Fitzclarence & Hickey 1998; Martino 1999), recent empirical work in primary/junior schools (e.g. Renold 1997; Skelton 1997, 2000; Benjamin 1998; Connolly 1998; Epstein 1998; Swain 2000; Epstein et al., 2001) has tended to focus specifically on the game of association football (soccer) and little has been written about organised sport in general.

Theories of Masculinity

Many of the latest theoretical conceptualisations about masculinity have been coherently summarised by Gilbert & Gilbert (1998). Along with Connell (1995, 1996, 2000), they affirm a number of key points from recent feminist and feminist-inspired work:

masculinity is a relational construct occupying a place in gender relations; there are multiple masculinities; there is a hierarchy of masculinities; masculinity is a precarious and ongoing performance; and it is generally a collective social enterprise. Masculinity is contextually bound and assumes different meanings in different places, and so being a boy is a matter of constructing oneself in, and being constructed by, the available ways and meanings of being a boy in a particular time and place, or, as Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, p. 51) maintain, it is about negotiating a 'set of storylines' and 'repertoires of action'.

Many studies (e.g. Connell 1990; Parker 1996a; Kenway & Fitzclarence 1997; Renold 1997, 1999; Skelton 1997; Gilbert & Gilbert 1998; Brown, 1999; Martino 1999; Light & Kirk, 2000) describe a dominant or 'hegemonic' form of masculinity [2] which is

constructed in relation to women, and which gains ascendancy over and above other forms of masculinity which are consequently subordinated. The term 'hegemonic' can be used to define the most 'culturally exalted' or 'idealised' (Connell, 1990, p. 83) form of masculinity at each setting; it wields the single greatest power and authority, is able to regulate, influence and shape action, and in schools, personifies the characteristics of the 'real' boy. Although it could be questioned as to whether we need to use the term 'hegemonic' to do this rather than, say 'dominant' or 'leading' (which are often used as interchange terms), I wish to argue that hegemony is a different concept from domination. Although hegemonic masculinity maybe inherently vulnerable, often be underwritten by violence (of both implicit/subtle and explicit kinds), and generally experiences some kind of resistance, the important point is that these forms do not operate by domination but by *consent* (Williams 1977; Bocoock 1986). Moreover, in many ways, the less resistance, the more effective the hegemony.

Within the last decade a number of writers have begun to suggest that the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been over-simplified and over-used as an analytic tool, and that there is a danger that it may limit or even restrict understandings (see, for example, Donalson, 1993; Edley and Wetherall, 1995; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 1996; Kerfoot and Whitehead, 1998; MacInnes, 1998). Whitehead (1999) argues that hegemonic masculinity can only explain so much; that its own legitimacy becomes weakened once the multiplicity of masculinities and identities are stressed; and that it is unable to reveal 'the complex patterns of inculcation and resistance which constitute everyday social action' (Whitehead 1999, p. 58).

However, it is my contention that the existence of multiple patterns of masculinity are not incompatible with, and need not invariably diminish, the authority of the hegemonic form. Although I have drawn on the theories of Connell, and appropriated his terms of hegemonic and subordinated forms masculinity, I have also found myself needing to propose other forms and relations of masculinity outside of the hegemonic-subordinated binary which I have called 'liminal' and 'personalised', and which I elaborate on below.

Masculine Embodiment

Masculinity does not exist as an ontological given but comes into existence as people act (Connell, 2000); in other words, masculinity is both a social process, and a set of material practices which refers to bodies and what bodies do. As such, a major theme in this paper embraces the idea of embodiment which needs to be understood as a social process (Elias, 1978). The boys are viewed as embodied social agents and experience themselves simultaneously *in* and *as* their bodies (Lyon and Barbalet, 1994, p. 54). They could be seen learning to control their bodies, and to use them in the appropriate ways that being a boy demands (e.g., in sitting, walking, running, catching, throwing, kicking, hitting and so forth). Moreover, they were also consciously concerned about the maintenance and appearance of their bodies; they were aware of its significance, both as a personal 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; Turner 2000).

In some ways, bodies can be regarded as structures: that is they can both facilitate and constrain. Although the corporeal characteristics of the body enables human beings to engage in social interaction and conduct, they also have to cope with the restrictions imposed by the body, its movement and communication. As Connell (1995, p. 56) says: 'the body...is inescapable in the construction of masculinity; but what is inescapable is not fixed,' and he argues that 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' (Connell 1995, p. 61), and which he calls 'body-reflexive practice'. In other words: active bodies can be acted upon (see, also, Crossley 1996).

Of course bodies in schools can be seen in two ways: collectively and/or individually, but the official processes of schooling tries to control and train both. However, the boys' bodies at Highwoods were far away from the Foucaultian 'docile', passive bodies that the

school attempted to regulate and produce in the functionally specific settings of the classroom and assembly hall (Foucault 1977); they were full of energy, movement and action, and particularly in the context of the playground games/activities and on the sports field, 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 as 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) argues 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. They may have power, status and/or an array of distinctive symbolic forms which are used as resources of agency and influence.

Background and Method

This paper is based on the findings of an ethnographic study of an upper-middle class school situated on the outskirts of Greater London. The school, which I have called Highwoods [3], is a private fee-paying, co-educational junior school of 360 pupils which acts as a feeder for the senior Highwoods school. Pupils are aged between 7-13, which is different from LEA (state) junior schools where pupils leave at the age of 11. Although the majority of pupils are white there are also a significant number of other, mainly Asian, ethnicities. The school is divided into lower and upper schools and Year 6 is the first year of the upper school where pupils are taught by individual, subject teachers. There are three forms (clusters) of entry in each school year, and one upper school class in each Year group is selected by academic ability. Four years ago the school began to admit girls, and the ratio of boys to girls is roughly 3 to 1 throughout the school. In Year 6, there were a total of 59 pupils (43 boys and 16 girls).

I spent between two and three days a week for a period of a month in each of the three terms between September 1998 and June 1999 following two classes, the top set 6J, and 6B. The descriptions and interpretations presented below are based on two major sources of data: firstly, my non-participant observations of the boys and girls during class lessons and around the school site; secondly, on a series of 30 loosely-structured interviews (22 involving only boys; 8 involving only girls) based on nominated friendship groups of between 2-3 pupils. I tried to make the interviews resemble the social encounters and interactions found in everyday life. I saw my own role as a facilitator and the pupils were encouraged to express their views and feelings, and share their experiences, on a wide range of topics; however, I also used direct questioning to test out various emerging theories, to pursue and clarify points arising during the interviews, and to cross check data from other pupils.

Competitive Sporting Ethos

For Connell, 'gender is embedded in the institutional arrangements by which a school functions,' which he refers to as the school's *gender regime* (Connell 1996, p. 213) [4]. Certain 'masculinising practices' could be identified at Highwoods which were ordered in terms of power and prestige and included academic competition and hierarchy, constant testing, competitive team games, strict discipline, a strict code of dress/uniform, divisions of labour and patterns of authority. For example, although there were 19 women out of a total of 33 (58%) teaching staff, only 3 women out of 13 (23%) were heads of subject departments.

The main storylines at Highwoods centred around competition in sport and competition in school-work. Teaching methods tend to didactic or 'traditional' with pupils sitting at their desks in rows working individually, rather than collaboratively. The vast majority of the boys wanted to work hard, but although it was generally acceptable to work hard and achieve high academic marks in all three Year 6 classes without being reproved from within the peer-group, a boy needed to succeed in sport first to be accorded the highest

peer prestige. While it was possible to be hardworking and sporty, or non-hardworking and sporty, life was made harder for those who were hard working and non-sporty.

Competition was structured within classes, between Year groups, and through the House system, in both sport and work, and other pastoral activities like music and drama. Many boys recognised that competition was a constitutional and necessary ingredient of school life, and it had been ingrained into them from an early age. For some, it seemed like a compulsive need:

Calvin: The competitiveness in us is because you sort of want to show off to your friends that you did this/

Jim: That you're better than them/

Calvin: Competitiveness is like you...you do compete a lot, you have to compete

JS: Yeah...why do you have to compete?

Calvin: 'Cos you don't get very far in school if you don't compete

JS: Right, OK

Calvin: And you have to compete, like, if you want to do well, like, if you want to do well in school you have to kind of compete don't you?

While some boys appeared to thrive on this competitive spirit, others felt that it put them under a continual pressure, which is illustrated in the following exchange:

Terry: [Another] bad point about Highwoods is everything you do is a competition; like you work, you get sigs., you get commends, [reward and sanction systems] it goes towards your House for a competition, and when you play sports it's competition, it's a competition to get into a team, everything you do ends up as a competition

[...]

- Benjamin:* The problem is that if its all a competition in your life, if I do this wrong, I'm letting my House down and stuff like that/
- JS:* Do you feel that?
- Benjamin:* Yeah
- Terry:* Sometimes
- JS:* Do you feel under pressure?
- Benjamin:* Yeah, a lot.

The main official school sports of rugby (autumn-term), football (spring-term) and cricket (summer-term) were organised by a hierarchy of A, B and C teams. The competitive ethos was reinforced through frequently organised inter-House sports competitions, and the playing against teams from other schools. The most popular game amongst the boys was football. Although many writers (e.g. Crosset 1990; Heward 1991; Meadmore & Symes 1996; Parker 1996b; Tosh 1999) point out that an emphasis on sport/games has been an important ingredient of English public (fee-paying) school life since the early Victorian era, there has been a tendency to view football as a working class sport, and it has, consequently, suffered from an accompanying cultural disdain. However, football was now played in all the independent schools in the surrounding district, and with its connections with consumer, commodified culture, it had become an influential model in promoting and maintaining a number of specific, hegemonic, representations of masculinity within the male peer group.

Until comparatively recently Independent schools used to be more concerned with social conditioning than academic success. The private sector was simply not meritocratic in the sense it is today, and many schools (especially the senior ones) saw their function to prepare a high proportion of pupils for the armed services or the City, neither of which was interested in academic qualifications (Wilby, 2002). However, during the last two decades or so independent schools have experienced an intensive process of competition, commercialisation and commodification, and they have found themselves needing to prepare pupils for an entrepreneurial world of high-tech and credentialled labour markets (Heward, 1991). Highwoods existed as part of a highly competitive world and was first

and foremost, a business. As one of a number of fee-paying schools in the area, the parents had plenty of alternatives of where to send their children, which meant, in effect, that it was a 'buyer's market'. Highwoods marketed itself on a platform of high academic achievement (as measured by examination success), first-class resources (such as science laboratories and computer suites) and sporting excellence. Although, as a school objective, academic achievement/attainment had a higher priority than sporting accomplishment, the value attached to sport in the school was unmistakably evident and publicly exhibited in the entrance hall by the main staircase, where there were a number of cabinets prominently displaying various shields, cups and medals. In the 1997-1998 school brochure reviewing the previous year, about 14 pages were devoted to sport/games as opposed to only 6 pages reporting on academic subjects.

The head of upper school, Mrs Taylor, told me that after the academic results, (in the form of the Standard Assessment Task [SAT] results at 11, and the Common entrance exam at 13), the other main attraction of the school for both prospective parents and pupils was the spacious grounds and extensive sporting facilities. Mrs Taylor felt that hard sport/games was a good compliment to hard work, and they formed a large part of a pupil's school life. In terms of time, they took up very nearly 20% of the timetable, (which is approximately three times the percentage time suggested in the state sector (Dearing, 1994) [5], and included two whole afternoons of games. Each class was also time-tabled for a weekly session of swimming for half of the year. Each pupil was required to have an astonishingly exhaustive sports kit consisting of 21 items. In addition, there were 26 lunchtime and after-school clubs run by the teachers of which about half were sports orientated. Sports were organised along strictly gendered lines: rugby, football (soccer), cricket and tennis for the boys; netball, hockey and tennis for the girls. Playground games were also all-male affairs, and when football was played on the tennis courts during morning break girls were emphatically excluded. Despite statements emphasising policies of equal opportunities made to me by both Miss Taylor, and the deputy-head, some of the girls told me that they had grown weary of asking teachers to let them join in, and the high perimeter fence which they sat behind watching the boys play acted as a potent symbol of exclusion.

Collective Patterns of Masculinity

Lesko (2000, p. xvi) writes that ‘masculinities are not individual psychologies but socially organised and meaningful actions in historical contexts:’ that is, they are a collective endeavour, and the informal life of the peer group is one of the most important features of a school setting where pupils try to define, negotiate and perform their own masculine identities. Four types or patterns of masculinity were identified among the boys in this study: hegemonic, liminal, personalised and subordinated. They demonstrate the range of masculinities that I found at the school, and highlights the relations between them.

Hegemonic masculinities

The leading masculinity at Highwoods was linked to the physical capital of the body, and was a kind of ‘muscular athleticism: those who were the fastest, fittest, strongest and most skilful at sport, were the boys who were the most popular, and who had the highest status amongst their peers. Although it was only practised by a small minority of boys in its idealised form, this masculinity was hegemonic in the sense that the sporting storylines and practices were an inescapable part of school life: the formal school culture celebrated and honoured boys’ sporting achievements in assembly, and the material evidence of a boy’s success was there for all to see in the trophies and cups, and magazines. The top-sporty boys were not only ‘exemplars’ of the formal-school sporting culture, but were also a highly visible, prevalent and pervasive part of the informal peer-group culture; this form of masculinity seemed to be the natural order of things and the accepted situation. Moreover, the official backing of the formal school-culture gave it an enduring social authority and made it culturally powerful. It had an inherent stability, and unlike hegemonic patterns in other studies (e.g. Parker 1996a; Skelton 1997, 2000; Martino 1999; Renold, 1999), it did not have to be defended on a daily basis, and had no need to maintain itself by subordinating and pathologising other forms.

There were seven boys in Year 6 who were classed by the other boys and their teachers as being top sportsmen, and it was not a coincidence that the two boys who were consistently cited as being the most popular in the Year group were Scott (the captain of the football A team), and Billy (the leading goal-scorer). For many pupils, these two had a certain charismatic, 'star' quality which is difficult to define as it is linked to their personality, but whenever I saw them they were generally active and smiling, and judging by the number of boys around them, they seemed fun to be with. They also had the additional cachet of being thought of as 'good looking' by many of the girls, and which is another illustration of the part played by the body.

In the conversation below, which took place early in the autumn term, three boys from 6J identify two pupil-groupings: those who play sport, and those who work hard; and although, like these three boys themselves, it was possible to be both, the ability to demonstrate sporting prowess seems to come first. Calvin had only arrived at Highwoods at the beginning of Year 5, and had found it hard to make friends; in his view, the forming of friendships and sporting ability were intertwined, although it was football, in particular, that dominated and had the greatest prestige.

- 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:* [*Looking at Billy and Josh*] True?
- Josh:* Very true!
- Billy:* Yeah/
- Josh:* We're sporty people/
- Calvin:* And the sporty people are much preferred than the people who are much more brainy

For Calvin, sporting ability gave the leading boys the power to choose friends:

- Calvin:* Scott knows he's good at football so he knows he can have... he can choose...
- JS:* Right, what friends?
- Calvin:* He can choose which ones he wants

There was a hierarchy of sports amongst the boys and, in terms of status, the order was football first, then rugby, and then tennis and cricket. Many of the boys actually told me that they found rugby too rough. There had been an unfortunate accident in January when Keval had accidentally bitten through Darshan's cheek during a tackle which ended up in hospital and left a broken tooth and a scarred face. Football was the most valorised game at Highwoods amongst the informal school culture and skilled performances brought the highest rewards in terms of status. It was not good enough to be just a fine athlete: there were a few boys who were very good at cricket or tennis, or who were very good runners, like Oliver, who was fast and usually won the cross country race, but they were not part of the dominant set. One of the worst things was not to take the games seriously, not to try. The following conversation shows one of the few times when I found out that the hegemonic masculinity was sometimes backed up by the threat of violence:

- Scott:* When, in the football season, we get serious and people like Oliver just mess around the whole time we send them off the court
- JS:* You mean the sport has got to be taken seriously?
- Josh:* Yeah
- Frankie:* Definitely

Liminal masculinities

In any hierarchy of competitive sport there are going to be 'many more places for the unsuccessful than for the champions' (Messner 1992, cited in Connell 1992, p. 741) and this is also the case in the hierarchies of masculinities. There was a form of masculinity

at Highwoods which I have classified as 'liminal'. In some ways liminal is similar to marginalised forms, but whereas Connell (1995, 2000) uses this term to describe gender types which are produced in exploited and/or oppressed groups such as ethnic minorities, I am using liminal to categorise an aspirant type of masculinity which is embodied in boys who would like to inhabit the world of the idealised boys but who lack sufficient personal resources. The three or four boys that I have classified exhibiting this form could often be seen hanging around the edges of the dominant group watching the action: in the term used by Adler and Adler (1998) they were 'wannabes'. Although they were also good at sport, and had any number of desirable sporting qualities such as perseverance, self-control, tactical awareness and so on, they did not have enough of the other, requisite, qualities to make them exceptional from the accepted norms. They were good, but not good enough. Although it was still possible to be friendly with the sporty boys, they found it almost impossible to be a close friend without actually being a top player. From their own accounts, they would have liked to have been included in the leading group but, despite their attempted ingratiations, they found themselves tolerated instead of being really accepted, and were pushed towards the periphery. These boys looked up to the top sporty boys, and some regarded them like heroes. In the extract below, Terry and Edward reflect wistfully on their former friendship with Billy before he began associating himself with the 'better', by which he means 'sporty' people:

Terry: Billy started going off with people and we wanted to go in his group but he always went with better people

JS: What do you mean 'better' people? In what way?

Terry: People who are in the A team

Edward: People who are good at sport.

Personalised masculinities

In every setting, there will also be other patterns of masculinity which will co-exist alongside the dominant form, or are actually produced at the same time (Connell, 2000). Just because there is a culturally-authoritative form of masculinity within each setting it does not automatically follow that all boys (or men) will attempt to engage with, aspire

to, or challenge, it: some, of course, are simply unable to do so. However, this also does not necessarily mean that these boys (or men) are inevitably subordinated, or that they have any desire to subordinate others. I have classified this form of masculinity as 'personalised', and although the term is not an ideal one I am unable to improve on it. I began with the term 'alternative' masculinities which characterised a different set of individualised forms of *doing* boy [6], but I felt that this had too many connotations with 'alternative lifestyles' and so I abandoned it. Although the idealised form of masculinity at Highwoods manifested itself in the top sporty boy, the majority of boys in the year got on with their lives without allowing the storylines of competitive sport to dominate them. Once again, though, the body played its part. These boys had no desperate urge to become captain of the football A team for the simple fact was that even if they wanted to, they lacked the physical capital in terms of attributes and resources (body coordination, shape, strength, force, speed and so on) to succeed at the highest school level in the top-status sports of football and rugby. The majority of boys at this age have already come to realise whether they are proficient at sport or not. Certainly, on the basis of the interviews and observations, it seemed that the majority of them were acutely aware of their physical limitations, and although many of them enjoyed the school sport/games, many had already negotiated and renegotiated a number of personalised ways of constructing their masculine identities. This large group was fairly amorphous and comprised of a series of small well-established friendship networks with boys who had similar interests; they were popular within their own peer-cliques; and were generally non-exclusive and egalitarian without any clearly defined leader. At breaktime, most kept away from the hard courts where the boys played their football and found alternative interests: some played other games such as 'it', some went on the adventure playground, some played in the woods (except for the winter months), some went to the computer room or to one of the many lunchtime clubs that were available, some just liked to 'hang around' and talk. Although they may have been pathologised by a few of the top sporty-boys, and even, at least implicitly, by the formal school-culture, they posed no threat to the hegemonic regime and so were generally accepted and not picked on by any of their peers. In many ways, they co-existed alongside the hegemonic form. I found no evidence that they had any feelings of envy towards the sporty boys, and although their

non-opposition was in some ways an expression of consent to the hegemonic form, they appeared to have no desire to imitate or challenge it: indeed, as I have argued, the hegemony was so overwhelmingly effective that it was the accepted situation. In many ways, these personalised groups seemed to have a high degree of social security and regarded themselves as different rather than inferior. They were certainly not complicit in any subordination, nor did they, in general, feel an imperative to subordinate anyone else.

These boys still understood that sport/games played a big part in the life of the school (they could hardly fail *not* to understand it?), and in fact, the physical attributes of these boys meant that many of them were able to play sport/games at a reasonable level of competency. Some of these boys even excelled at some sports/games: for instance, Derek won the Y6 tennis competition, and Murdoch was a highly successful swimmer, but these were not amongst the high-status sports. Certainly the majority enjoyed most of the sport/games. However, they appreciated that you had to be ‘quite good’ and put in a lot of effort, and were fully aware that a boy risked subordination/harassment (and therefore, implicit violence) if they were judged to be totally useless. However, for many of them, having a ‘good personality’ took precedent over sporting prowess, and by ‘good’ they meant kind and helpful, but also, lively and exciting, and sharing a common interest. These sentiments can be seen during this next interchange as I am asking three boys about the relation of sporting ability to the forming of friendships.

JS: Say you’re a boy and you’ve just joined the class, to really get on with people... do you think you have to be good at sport?

Simon: Well kind of

Duncan: Well you’ve got to be quite good, OK, and not muck up everything all the time

JS: Can you just be very clever and not good at sport and still have lots of friends, or do you have to be good at sport?

Pat/Duncan/Simon: No

Pat: It doesn't really count if you're good at sport, it's just what you're like.[...] It's not if you're really clever, it's like if they're kind, their attitude.

Subordinated masculinities

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 and Gilbert, 1998). During the process of recording pupil classifications of friendship groups, and from my own observations, it soon emerged that there were only two boys at Highwoods who were isolated from the rest of their peer milieu and who were regularly subordinated, in the sense that they were actively, and almost continually denigrated and pursued: Timothy from 6J and Daniel from 6B. As Highwoods operated a policy of selection, subordination by low academic attainment was not such a prominent feature within the peer-group culture as in other schools. Both boys were perceived by their peers and their teachers as being poor at sport/games and had become 'feminised' by many of the boys. The following quotation could apply to either:

Edward: He can't play football, he can't run, he can't play rugby, he can't play cricket and...he can't play anything!

They were both bullied and experienced sustained homophobic harassment, being called, for example, 'girl', 'gay' and 'wimp', and Timothy was given the additional sobriquet of 'goody-goody' which was the Highwoods term for a hard-working, teacher's pet. Although they did not comply in their subordination, they found it too powerful to effectively resist. Many researchers have written about the association between lack of sporting prowess and perceived homosexuality (e.g. Connell 1990; Thorne 1993; Parker 1996a; Renold 1997; 1999; Skelton 1997; Epstein 1998, 2001; Gilbert & Gilbert 1998; Martino 1999), and indeed Epstein (1996) maintains that homophobia also plays a fundamental role in regulating and constructing heterosexual masculinities in schools: masculinity and heterosexuality are entwined and thus to be a 'real' boy (or girl) is to be

heterosexual. Parker (1996a) asserts that these homophobic insults should be conceptualised in terms of *gender* as opposed to *sexuality*, and that they therefore imply being 'non-masculine' and 'effeminate' rather than homosexual: however, the essential point is that homophobia is used to police and control the general behaviour of boys *and* their sexuality, and is used as a strategy to position boys at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy.

However, other Year 6 boys who were in the school C teams (and who were therefore both perceived and formally positioned as being less-talented) told me that they experienced little or no homophobic abuse, and further investigation revealed that there were a number of other reasons for the exclusion of Timothy and Daniel. The fundamental reason was that they were different from the norm in a number of ways: both boys were no good at sport, they did not enjoy rough games, and, importantly, gave the impression of putting in little effort. Daniel was also accused of preferring to play with younger aged boys (presumably because he did not have any friends in Year 6), and he, supposedly, had an obsession with sticks and was referred to by some of the boys as 'The Woodsman'.

Some researchers such as Jordan (1995, pp. 69-86) and Renold (1999) claim that it becomes even more important for subordinated boys to define themselves against the female, and that when they are threatened, and feel more insecure, they are more likely to engage in anti-feminine behaviour than boys who exhibit other masculine forms. However this was not confirmed amongst the subordinated boys in this school. From my observations and interviews (including those with the girls), I was unaware of either of these boys traducing the girls. If anything, they tended to keep away from them as they were still keen to mark out their own spaces and define their identities as different from femininity. 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

This paper attempts to add to current understandings of masculinity and embodiment amongst a group of comparatively high-achieving boys in the public school sector. I have argued that the body, and various bodily practices, go a long way in conditioning, and even determining, a boy's options of constructing and performing their identities, and they become particularly pertinent in a setting where sport/games have such a high profile. In some ways, Highwoods was engaged in the production of 'physical capital' (Bourdieu 1981; Shilling 1993) whereby the boys' bodies were constructed and conferred

with certain symbolic values of power and status. Boys were classified and divided by their physicality both by the school and their own peer-group, but whereas the official processes of the school tried to produce controlled and passive bodies, the boys' bodies were decidedly active and energetic across time and space. To succeed at the top, high-status sports of football and rugby a boy needed at least four requisite qualities: speed, skill, fitness and strength, and they needed the ability to perform all four collectively incredibly well. Despite the school promoting sport in general, football was, by far, the most valorised game amongst the boys' own peer-groups, and it was the boys who were the most accomplished players who were the most popular.

I have classified the dominant masculinity as 'hegemonic' which was based on the resource of physicality/athleticism and exemplified in the embodied form of the top sporty boy. The weight of official school approval gave it a durability and security which meant that it was culturally commanding; it ruled by consent, and went largely unchallenged which abrogated the need to maintain itself by subordinating other forms.

Although sport/games provided a key site around which some friendship groups were organised, other groups took a number of forms, and settled around a variety of interests. Although I have utilised the terms 'hegemonic' and 'subordinated' forms of masculinity from Connell (1987, 1995, 1996, 2000) I found that I needed to propose other patterns and relations of masculinity in order to explain what was going on, and in doing so my intention is to add to existing understandings. 'Liminal' forms are as aspirant type of masculinity found in boys who wished to emulate the top boys but who lacked sufficient physical resources. The majority of the other boys at the school negotiated alternative or 'personalised' ways of *doing* boy which seemed to be generally acceptable within the peer-group culture. Although these alternative forms had neither the inclination or the power to mount any challenge, they also had no desire to imitate the hegemonic form, and they persisted and co-existed independently alongside. If top-sporty boy equated with 'real' boy', these boys seemed to think of themselves as any less 'real' for not being able to demonstrate sporting excellence.

Although, in common with other researchers, I found a connection between poor sporting ability and subordination/feminisation, the data from this school has emphasised that lack of sporting prowess is often only one factor in their subordination, and there are other reasons (constructed around the notion of difference) which maybe more influential and of greater significance.

Jon Swain, July 2002

* 6550 words

Key to Transcripts

/ Indicates the moment when an interruption in speech begins;
... a natural pause in the conversation;
[*italic text*] descriptive text to provide background information;
[...] extracts edited out of the transcript;

Notes

[1] National Key Stage 2 Results in 1999. The SATs (Standard Task Assessments)

Percentage of pupils reaching Level 4 and above:

	English	Mathematics	Science
Highwoods	97	98	100
National Average	70	69	78

[2] The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first introduced into the feminist and profeminist debate by Carrigan et al., (1985), and has been further developed by Connell (1987, 1995, 1996, 2000).

[3] All the names of people and places have been changed

[4] This was first used in an article by Kessler et al. (1985)

[5] The Dearing Report (1994) recommended that PE/games should take up 1.25 hours from a suggested directed teaching time of 20.25 hours each week. This represents just over 6% of the teaching time.

[6] Thorne (1993) writes that gender is not something one passively *is* or *has*. Changing the noun boy to the verb *doing* boy signifies that masculinity is a process, an ongoing construction and negotiation.

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THE ROLE OF SPORT IN THE PROMOTION OF MASCULINITY IN AN ENGLISH INDEPENDENT JUNIOR SCHOOL

Abstract

This paper concerns the central role of organised sport in the construction of masculinity amongst Year 6 boys (10-11 year olds) at an English independent (fee-paying) junior school. The data comes from an ethnographically-based study which took place over a year amongst two classes, and the boys' own accounts are placed at the centre of the research. The formal school culture consciously promoted a range of sports/games and made them an integral part of a competitive, masculine regime, although the informal peer-group culture gave primacy to football. The leading form of masculinity was the sporty boy, which was sanctioned by the school, and this gave it a powerful cultural and social authority. The body played a vital part: groups of boys were classified and divided by their physicality which restricted the opportunities for most boys to compete for this ideal. Although I have taken the term 'hegemonic masculinity' from Connell (1987, 1995, 1996, 2000), I found it necessary to propose other forms and relations of masculinity which I have called 'liminal' and 'personalised'. Liminal forms are an aspirant type of masculinity found in boys who wished to emulate the top sporty boys but who lacked adequate resources, while personalised forms were made up from the majority of boys who appeared content to pursue their own types of identity, and did not aspire to, or imitate, the leading form. Only a very few of the boys who were not sporty were subordinated and feminised by the dominant regime, although this was also due to a series of other factors which are further explored.

Key Words: Masculinity; Boys; Hegemonic; School; Junior school; Public school; The Body; Sport