

Chapter 5: Boys' Talk: The Roles of Language and Humour in Shaping Male Identity

Introduction

Language according to Berger and Luckman (1972) is the most important system of signs that humans utilise. Through language, ideas about acceptable social norms in a given society are transmitted, using commonly understood symbols. The centrality of language in creating an actor within the social world is highlighted by Layder who writes:

The self is constituted within the play of language (and discourse more generally) and the field of practices and power relations that define the social locations in which people live out their daily lives [...] The self is the product of a number of cross-cutting discourses and practices (1998: 97).

This chapter examines how language is integral in the creation of social hierarchies, and investigates how different masculinities are afforded various degrees of status by either creating or being the target of humour. Humour will be shown to have subtle yet powerful capacities to shape the discourses of gender by using ridicule to create hierarchies of respected or derided presentation. A tenuous border between good-natured joking, social isolation and emotional violence will be described. Beyond emotional violence lies physical violence, and behaviour which starts off as 'just a joke' will be shown to potentially progress to aggression if the target of the humour becomes sufficiently 'othered'. For violence to occur, the victim must be psychically removed from the peer bond, and joking/humiliation is a vital step in creating isolation. The chapter opens with a review of literature related to humour and humiliation, providing a theoretical context in which the data will be discussed.

Group dynamics: The controlling power of laughter

Goffman (1973) discusses the technique in which we create a sense of self by 'othering' those who are perceived as different; social psychologists such as Allport (1954), Tajfel (1982), and Tarrant (2002) describe similar occurrences where groups create their sense of cohesion by 'othering' those who do not appear the same. This

acts as a bonding mechanism for group members, allowing their individual sense of self to develop by mirroring peers and avoiding characteristics of the 'othered'. The 'other' is evaluated as having negative characteristics and can become a 'sounding board' against which the group considers its own positive characteristics. It is harder to aggress towards a group or individual to whom one is bonded, and the 'othering' technique creates a social/psychological distance between in- and out-groups. Humour, and its less-joyous doppelganger, humiliation, create a socially-performed display where acceptance into a group or rejection from it is enacted, as groups utilise humour to demarcate their boundaries (Burn 2000). Humour is not simply a technique to enunciate differences: humour is interactive, and it is how the target of the humour reacts that will determine the next act of the performance. As the data shows, an acceptable response to being laughed at can inaugurate acceptance into the group. Incorrect responses can facilitate an increase in the hostility until the social hostility embedded in the 'jokes' becomes social exclusion or violence.

Both verbal and non-verbal humour contain coded messages about social standards and mores, and denote what can be taken seriously or devalued. The meanings underpinning the messages are open to interpretation and change depending on the context in which they are used, the makeup of the audience and the intent of whoever is creating the humour. Far from being only an innocent way to make us laugh, humour is part of 'a theatre of domination in everyday life' (Lyman 1987: 150). In Lyman's view, homophobic humour has a specific function: it marks out the boundary between homosocial and homosexual interaction. The former allows males to bond over the 'othering' of the latter. Thus, homosexuality is shown up as a state that is not to be taken seriously, but is rather acceptable fodder for derision. Humour reaches out beyond its immediate impact, allowing the ideas contained therein to permeate the social environment and influence non-verbal interactions.

Ideas of what is humorous differ across different cultures, although the ways in which people use humour to police attitudes and behaviour is remarkably similar (Trotter 1993), with humour containing a subversive ability to parlay social power dynamics. This apparently light-hearted communication system has the ability to actively shape and constrain behaviour by expressing ideas that may not be verbalised directly: humour disseminates social mores obliquely by repackaging that which is

not spoken of into analogies and metaphors. Freud (1976: 135) described humour as ‘an envelope for thoughts of the greatest substance’, indicating the potential for it to convey information beyond that contained in the literal statements. However, not all humour is based on aggression (Zijderveld: 1983), and humour has the ability to convey social meaning on a broad range of topics through what Aristotle (1995) termed *mimesis*, or the representation of real life through the arts, including vulgarity and lampooning.

Based on the responses of those who hear and tell jokes, one learns ideas of what – and who – is acceptable to be laughed at or treated seriously. This process informs us of how different individuals or groups are positioned in relation to ourselves, and where we position ourselves in relation to dominant and subordinate groups. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud (1976) examines how these techniques bestow power, attention and status on the humourist at the expense of his or her target. When a joke-teller is highlighting a social taboo through humour, s/he accesses deeply cathected emotions that underpin the social discomfort around the topic: the more sensitive the topic, the potentially greater the laugh that ensues. Social dynamics can be mapped in these exchanges, illustrating what areas of the social world which, although not discussed openly, may have their boundaries encribed by humour. Humour can contain coded messages about maligned groups: race-based humour, for example, becomes a technique for the creation of social hierarchies between ethnic groups. Gender is a social construct, grounded in a sexed body, and we socially compare ourselves with those who are similar, and against those who we perceive as different. As most people fit into one of two sexes, it is a small step of logic to believe that there are two distinct genders which somehow congruently mirror distinct physical differences between the male and female bodies. The variations which exist in gender presentation make marking out the differences between the genders an ongoing social display, and we have come to learn that to act against one’s gender is inherently funny, as any number of comedians who rely on gender-crossing humour will attest to.

Within the rubric of humour are verbal jokes and amusing situations. The former consists of witty exchanges in which clever juxtapositions of seemingly unrelated ideas make the listener consider them in a new, humorous fashion. Jokes can

contain insults, stereotypes or may rely on denigrating a person or group in order to create social tension which culminates in laughter. Freud (1976: 58) cites a tale where a young man is described as having a 'great future behind him', a clever wordplay wherein the joke-teller elevates his/her position by displaying wit, while making the joke's target appear foolish. The public performance of the telling of the joke is vital, as a performance in a social vacuum brings no recognition to the performer. In *Love's Labours Lost*, Shakespeare (1982) writes:

A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it... (Act v, scene ii)

Another enactment of humour is activities that are not jokes and yet access the power dynamics on which jokes operate. In the above 'great future' joke, laughter is created through the social tension of making someone look foolish through a wordplay. In the non-verbal form of humour, amusement is created through embarrassing the target. This could be through a practical joke where the creation of surprise or pain becomes funny, and results in releasing social tension through cathartic laughter. These situations do not even require funny content to elicit laughter. The tangential relationship with verbal humour is that the perpetrator may make bystanders laugh through humiliation of the 'othered' target. The relief of tension causes laughter – possibly tinged with a sense of 'there but for the grace of God go I' for the audience – but laughter nonetheless. The fear of ridicule appears to be innate (Cameron 1993), and it is this dynamic that pulls people into the humour, for if they do not laugh at a situation where everyone else laughs, they may be seen as having more in common with the object of derision than the peer group. This risks having the same gaze focussed on them. Cameron notes how sexual innuendo or hints of sexual deviance are effective, widespread techniques to deflate the status of socially dominant people, and this form of humour can be conveyed both verbally or physically.

Both linguistic and practical jokes utilise 'othering' to create a target onto which social tensions underpinning the group are enunciated. In the case of race-based humour, different ethnicities are subjugated to instil power in the joke teller's group; in sexist humour, one gender positions itself as different and generally superior to the other by highlighting perceived biological or social differences between them. With homophobic humour, one sexuality performs its self-ascribed superiority over the

other, often by aligning the gender of the target with its gender opposite, i.e. gay men are derided as effeminate and lesbians are positioned as ‘mannish’. This indicates the partial overlap of sexism and homophobia, although as pointed out in Chapter 2, misogyny is only part of a network of influences that control gender and sexuality – Layder’s (1998: 97) ‘cross-cutting discourses’. These examples illustrate how ‘othering’ occurs by marking out the boundaries between groups. Failure to laugh, and thus being seen as aligned to the laughed-at out-group, can denigrate one’s position on the continually negotiated hierarchies of dominance.

Humour, and the shaping of male behaviour: ‘...there was no malice’

As well as overt homophobia, forms of humour exist which reference acceptable styles of masculinity. Ideas of acceptable gender presentation can be found in interpersonal interactions as well as media-delivered images. Many examples of derided masculinity contain signifiers that equate it with femininity and homosexuality. The following five excerpts are from a humorous article in *Esquire* magazine (Anonymous 1999: 24). Under the title *...And a few things a man should never do, no matter how long he lives*, the unnamed author gives directions about how ‘proper’ masculinity is enacted. In the first example, instructions are given for proper behaviour with no apparent reference to sexuality or gender. A man must not:

Mail an angry letter. Leave an angry voice mail. Use e-mail to complain about the boss.

However, underlying the images of emotional responses is the belief that emotions are feminising or emasculating. A hegemonic man is one who keeps his emotions in check (Kimmel 1996; Messner 1992). In the next example, masculinity is measured against femininity and immaturity – which according to Plummer (1999) are also both markers for homophobic targeting. A man must not:

Scream like a woman. Act like a child. Cry like a baby.

Ideas of acceptable sexuality being heterosexuality are stated as the norm in the following example. The presumption is that all prostitutes and all strippers are female. A man must not:

Pay a hooker with a check. Date a stripper.

In seven out of the 28 *Esquire* examples, acceptable masculinity is created through opposition to homosexual interests. A further eight examples start from a premise of assumed heterosexuality. All of the examples humourously relate to policing behaviour in one way or another, showing which activities are gender-approved and which may induce ridicule. Make sure you never:

Choose *Ally McBeal* over *Monday Night Football*. Let people know you like Barbra or Bette. Start a book club. Sing in the rain. Skip.

Football is acceptable. Watching ‘chick-TV’, knowing clichéd gay icons (and you are *very* suspect if you know who they are simply through their given names – Streisand and Midler), having an academic interest or doing ‘emasculating’ activities like singing or skipping is not.

In the final example, the proscription against any hint of homoeroticism is clear. Your masculinity is seriously in question if you:

Linger at the lockers. Talk to, look at or in any way acknowledge the existence of the guy at the next urinal. (That goes double for the guy in the next stall.)

The threat implied in being in the presence of the naked body or exposed genitals risks marking one out as a ‘fag’. The risk of being near a naked male also shows a deep social tension that can be mapped in this exchange: fear that another male may sexually arouse you. The final excerpt with its reference to lockers is presumably a sports or gym changing room. This is one of the few areas in which men can be naked in each other’s presence, but the humour sets out the rules of how men are allowed to behave in such a liminal space. Damien described the codes of behaviour which monitored the changing rooms at his school. He is talking about the curiosity about his sexual development in regards to his peers, and spoke of the risk of the wrong behaviour being telegraphed around the school, damaging a boy’s status.

Damien: Oh yeah, it was real quick glances as you were getting changed, things like that. You didn’t want to be seen because you’d be instantly labelled a poof or something like that. And that was something as a kid you didn’t want to be labelled with because it would go straight around the yard. (incarcerated mechanic, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

Ideas of ‘real’ or ‘failed’ masculinity are so continually portrayed through media that they operate below our daily perception. This can range from the continual presentation of heteronormativity against which all ‘other’ sexualities are measured, a

process which Rich (1980: 653) calls ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, to overt representations of homosexuality as something comic. Vito Russo (1987) gives a comprehensive overview of homosexuality in American cinema, with specific reference to humour in *The Celluloid Closet*. Cinema portrayals of homosexuality were cited in the interviews by a 26 year old participant. Recalling the 1980s when he was 10, he mentioned the *Police Academy* movies which featured a gay bar.

Rick: You may recall The Blue Oyster bar [from the movie *Police Academy*]? There were lots of jokes about the Blue Oyster bar. But it wasn’t a bad thing. I think it was sort of, it was something to be laughed at, definitely something to be laughed at, but there was no malice. I never remember anyone being insulted by it, like insulted enough to – by insulted I mean take it personally. (student, 27 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Here, homosexuality was presented in a comedy, and although Rick observed laughter, he failed to observe that some boys in the audience would have felt uncomfortable at this portrayal, or may have laughed only to ensure that no-one questioned their silence. Images of men dancing together, and thus presenting them as spectacle to laugh at, trivialises same-sex intimacy and to be laughed at is to be devalued. Although heterosexuality is the dominant representation of sexuality in media, other sexualities are being given more, albeit limited, exposure (Brown 2002) when compared to the period in which Rick grew to adulthood. While Rick meant no malice (and generally had very open attitudes to different sexualities), malice was detected in other examples of humour, and where jokes crossed the line into aggression.

Humour in the creation of schoolyard masculinity: ‘...a bit of sounding out’

After studying social interactions in classrooms, Butler (2002) described the social dynamics in action where boys used physical, clowning humour to deflect attention away from diligent students, and create social space between themselves and the teacher. Even in this unsophisticated form of humour, the ‘clowning boys’ are setting themselves out from the crowd, and allowing dynamics of social superiority to be mapped. If, as Plummer (1999) asserts, acceptance by the peer-group is so influential in how boys interact socially, then Butler’s example of boys setting themselves out from the peer-group may seem counter-intuitive. However Butler’s observation is congruent with Plummer, for what the individual boys are doing is performing

gender: although they are standing out from the crowd, they do so to show how much they are embodying culturally-accepted ideas of masculinity. They are performing hegemonic masculinity by being physical not intellectual, resistant to authority, suspicious of education, socially dominant, autonomous and showing a narrow range of emotions. Kehily and Nayak (1997) observed a similar capacity and motivation in their study: bravado and homophobic humour telegraphed the correct masculine status of boys to their peers. Insecurities were masked and negative attention is deflected by being loud and creating humour out of putting other boys down particularly by challenging their sexuality.

The other boys present in Butler's classroom observation had to choose to side with the boy by laughing, thus joining the clown's in-group, or side with the teacher who attempts to gain control of the class. The teacher must reassert his/her authority by castigating the boy and removing the social status he gained through humour – but then the teacher appears to be humourless and dull. Alternately the teacher laughs with the boy, reinforcing the boy's status as superior to the rest of the group, but in doing so abrogating some of the power that comes with the teacher's role. While on the surface, the attention-seeking appears to be grounded in a positive emotion – laughter – it is actually being used to challenge adult authority. No matter whether the teacher laughs with or admonishes the boy, s/he is effectively pulled into humour's vortex, as the play of in- and out-groups can be observed. The gender of the teacher here also has an impact. A female teacher may already be held in lower esteem by boys than a male teacher; therefore a man has more status to lose if the boy's antics successfully challenge his authority.

For boys and men, their peer group is vital to their sense of social cohesion and development of masculine identity. The following quote illustrate how a sense of social location is created by being included. Damien describes how boys positioned themselves in a pecking order using verbal wit that relied on denigration.

Damien: We made ourselves feel better at the expense of someone else. Put someone else down to make yourself feel good. And I think also a lot of it was showing off in front of the rest of your mates too. Who could come out with the smartest comments and the most cutting comments. (incarcerated mechanic, 37 y.o., metropolitan centre)

School, it appears, teaches more than the curriculum. Ideas about conforming were enunciated verbally, socially and physically. Any form of difference was reason to single out boys.

Rhys: Anything that was different. Anything that I could really poke a bit of fun at. [...] I generally only picked on and teased kids who took it really badly, or who I got a really good reaction out of. (telecommunications technician, 21 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Rhys shows how he maintained his standing in the pecking order by highlighting differences of lower-status boys. He was looking for the children who he could get most of a reaction out of. Those who failed this test risked teasing, bullying, physical violence and ostracisation. Theo reacted emotionally to teasing – which often involved boys laughing at him and his tearful reactions.

Theo: I think there's always a bit of sounding out. Trying to determine how a person's going to react and depending on their reaction, they're either acceptable or not acceptable. And most of the time I would have been in the unacceptable. My reaction would have been unacceptable. [...] It's like a test and it's not fair: if you don't know the ground rules of the test, how can you pass the test? (minister, 40 y.o., rural area)

Negotiating hierarchies through humour and teasing: '...push at that one soft spot'

The stratification of masculinity was frequently cited: male status was attained by a variety of techniques which would place you in a hierarchy relative to other men. As masculinity is conceptualised as a state grounded in dominant physicality, physical strength and prowess were frequently cited (see Chapter 6). Emotional strength was also tested, with boys who reacted to teasing emotionally leaving themselves vulnerable for ongoing abuse, as Theo's quote indicates. This then becomes a self-reinforcing cycle, as their inappropriate responses themselves become the focal point for continuing abuse – which, in turn could initiate more emotional reactions as they become more and more distressed. For Theo, this did become a self-perpetuating cycle which he could not break until he left high school. Rhys details the same sort of experience, but from the other perspective – that of the instigator – and describes how he would use perceived personal weaknesses to finesse his teasing.

Rhys: I'd get to know the person and I'd find a soft spot and then push at that one soft spot, which is pretty cruel. I've always done that. And I kind of can't help it. I've always found something that I shouldn't push, and that other people

wouldn't do, and I would. I mean I don't do that so much now. Like I've very much changed, but as a kid I was like that. (telecommunications technician, 21 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Re-reading this statement out of context of the entire interview does not paint Rhys in a very flattering light, and yet he was a very engaging, open-minded young man. He illustrates how attitudes to gender which may have been narrow and had a deleterious effect on the other young men around him dissipated as he grew out of adolescence. There did not appear to be animosity in how he interacted with his peers – it is just how the situation was. His attitude is exemplified in the words of other participants who were involved in bullying and abusive behaviour – that no harm was intended or done. This viewpoint does contradict the stories of the men who were the targets of this isolating, minoritising behaviour. They described the impact of this sort of behaviour as having strong, negative effects on their self-esteem. Some of these men questioned the 'no harm done' recollections of some of the bullies, as they felt that the boys involved were completely aware of the damage that they were creating, and took a sadistic joy in it. Both of these positions are commensurate with Healey (2004) who notes that those who are bullied at school are more likely to have experienced strong detrimental effects on their education and emotional wellbeing as a result of these activities.

Teasing and mocking, so often couched in terms of normal male interactions or harmless fun, was experienced in different ways, depending on whether one was the subject or the instigator of power. The following list illustrates seven different ways of experiencing these events:

1: No harm done to self: Joseph was humiliated by his sports teacher. He recalled the events with no apparent regret, and notes how the use of humiliation was to pull him 'into shape' – to form him into the right sort of non-reactive, stoic male.

Joseph: Another problem I remember which was unpleasant was the sports teacher. He tried to pull me into shape and make me take part. And he gave me a nick-name and used to make fun of me, and stir me up or something. I don't think there was any harm in it actually. He thought that was just how to do it. (artist, 56 y.o., regional centre)

2: No harm done to others: Lloyd noted how a friend was abused, and although homophobic insults were regularly cited as the most feared, Lloyd saw ‘fucking cunt’ as more damaging.

Lloyd: He was just constantly teased. I mean it didn’t matter what he was doing. He was constantly sort of teased.

PM: Again, what kind of words?

Lloyd: The ‘poofter’ thing. I mean we are talking about 12 and 13 year old kids. So I mean it’s not as though they were calling him a fucking cunt or any of that sort of thing. (at-home-dad/bartender, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

3: Harm done, but the cycle repeated: Some of the men who were targeted expressed that they felt these boys were simply acting in the ways that ‘real’ boys were expected to be. To Eddie, verbal and physical abuse were unpleasant activities that he was cruelly subjected to.

Eddie: I just felt dejected by everything because the kids would make fun of me ... the puny kid.

Yet he saw how other children would ‘make fun’ of him as part of the growing process: he fully expected to take his role as a bully in the cycle of violence as he grew older.

Eddie: They’d pick the weakest kid in the dormitory and the bully the hell out of him because it was part of the initiations and it was fun. And I always thought, when I get older, I’m going to do this back too.

PM: You were going to...

Eddie: Do the same as what I’d received.

PM: Would you have done it?

Eddie: Well I was determined at the time because I had it dished up to me. Yeah, I would have.

PM: So it didn’t make you want to *not* do it?

Eddie: No, I wanted to get my turn at this so that I had the power. (businessman 49 y.o., metropolitan area)

To Eddie, despite the pain he endured during this process, he recognised that this was a ritual which would give him access to the type of power which was being exercised over him. In writing about religious rites, Durkheim (1965: 414) notes how such transformative processes, 'because they serve to remake individuals and groups', have a bonding capacity on individuals who share intense experiences.

4: Harm done, but its impact minimised by the victim: Ivor described his adolescence at a private boarding school. The impact of the abuse is stated with differing levels of intensity at different points of his narrative.

Ivor: There was a lot of quite intense bullying at the school and if my memory of school is sour for any reason then that is it.

Although he described these events as 'souring' his school years, he later downplayed its impact – but then almost immediately located the bullying that he received and saw meted out on others as being the cause for his ongoing anger which has led him to many violent confrontations when he encountered bullies in adult life.

Ivor: And it's not that sort of scarring stuff.

[...]

I probably suffered over that as much as anyone, but at that age I was developing a lot of anger about people who would bully, and that's something that sort of grew from there that I have now.

PM: Was that because of stuff you experienced or stuff you saw relating to others?

Ivor: Both. Both. (student, 26 y.o., metropolitan area)

5: Major trauma: for Theo, the way he was teased and laughed at cited above resulted in emotional distress to the point of suicidal ideation (although this is also overlaid with the trauma of a sexual assault to which he was subjected as a child), and also for Shane who has had several long periods of depression since. These two narratives, with strong similarities, will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

6: Just joking: some men who cited minoritising language or denigrating humour saw that it was part of the Australian tradition. William described how race and humour intersected.

William: The bloke I was in the Army with, he was a full-blood Aborigine – a delightful bloke – and we were terrific mates, he and I. And I used to call him a ‘black bastard’ and he used to call me a ‘white bastard’. But there was nothing, anything about. It was just the way we talked.

Whether or not the Aboriginal soldier, whose power would be considerably lower than that of William, felt as comfortable about this exchange is unknown. William’s true feelings about the man may have been masked as well: later in the interview he acknowledged his racism towards Asians, saying:

... and if this is being racist, then I’m racist – I don’t want Asians in Australia. [...] I won’t even mention the Japanese because I loathe them. I can’t stand the bastards. (farmer, 72 y.o., rural area)

7: A bit of fun – that becomes physical: In a focus group, the idea of physical violence was similarly, blithely described. Terry described how non-hegemonic boys were:

...Picked on. Laughed at. The ones that used to go and sit in the library and all that sort of stuff, and play their computers [...] We used to give them a clip behind the ear if ever there was a problem. [...] It was mucking around but now I look back it, it would have done something to them in the way of self-esteem and all that sort of regard. But at the time it was just a bit of fun. (focus group 4)

The divergence in attitudes to this behaviour can be attributed, in part, to the level of intensity of the teasing. Joseph was baited by a sports coach, but the baiting did not appear to be replicated by his peers; Ivor describe bullying by some dominant boys as ‘souring’ his memories of school but ‘not scarring stuff’; Theo and Shane were traumatized by orchestrated campaigns that ran for years. It was the accumulated effect of ongoing abuse that led Rofes (1995: 80) to reminisce that ‘we were tortured and publicly humiliated because we refused to be “real boys”, acted “girlish”, or were simply different’.

Social control through homophobic joking: ‘Homo!’

Boys and men who were not continually targeted with this sort of language or abuse may not have realised the accumulative effect that it had on those for whom it formed

the pervasive sound-track of their development. The variety of ways in which boys responded to teasing and joking was dependent on the intensity and frequency – from a simple joke to physical violence, from an off-hand comment to ongoing abuse – and how the boy reacted under the assault. The justification for such abuse was the contempt with which gender transgressions were held.

The ‘sissy’ was the antithesis of masculinity. If you were unable to embody hegemonic masculinity, it was all but impossible to climb the pecking order. How a boy reacted to gentle teasing or abuse determined how he would be treated and whether or not it intensified. A tight rein on emotions when being teased was described as being vital.

Howard: If you reacted you lost. So you’d train yourself not to react to insults.
(accountant, 44 y.o, metropolitan centre)

Damien: Kids are pack hunters and any weakness is sort of exploited and if you get called a sissy and you sort of cower down to it, it will soon chase you around and you’ll really get a hard time. For the kids that would [react] it would give the rest of the kids something to feed on. (incarcerated mechanic, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

Damien’s statement shows how the maelstrom of teasing can be difficult to escape once you make the wrong reaction. The line between joking, teasing, bullying and physical abuse was constantly moving, unified by the ability of all of these techniques to police behaviour. Acceptable responses to being the target of the joke were to deflect the joke back onto the instigator, or onto a socially inferior male. These two techniques, combined with the ability to laugh at yourself, all have the effect of situating boys within hierarchies of social dominance.

Incorrect responses to ‘joking’ could cause an escalation to physical violence. Jeff explains how being well-spoken in a rough school created a social distance which eventually progressed to violence, all framed as jokes.

Jeff: And then it just got worse, it went from names to two or three of them rumberling me for a joke. But they used to hurt me, you know?

PM: What do you mean, ‘for a joke’?

Jeff: In front of other classmates they'd all start having a go, you know, jumping on my back and punching me, and that sort of thing. Just for a joke, you know, and they'd all laugh at me because I'd be crying on the floor. (focus group 3)

Responding by crying exacerbated the teasing. While Jeff does not cite any verbal homophobia in this exchange, he was under its policing thrall at other times. This was evident in the focus group in which we met which was dominated by the openly homophobic Kenny who attempted to use humour to bring the focus of the discussion back to him when other men were talking seriously. When discussing how tactile his family was, Jeff mentioned that his father, who was born in Europe, kissed all of his sons.

Jeff: He kisses us all, not on the mouth, but on the cheek.

PM: What would it say about an Australian man if he did that? What would people think of him?

Kenny: Homo! (laughs)

Jeff: See? That's what I mean. (focus group 3)

Similarly, when other men were discussing aspects of their lives like depression, Kenny interjected with 'jokes' about getting drunk to avoid feeling anything; when Marcus described his father's testicular cancer, Kenny joked that his testicles had dropped off; and made similarly insensitive comments when Marcus disclosed that he was potentially facing impotence following his own upcoming prostate surgery.

Jeff spoke with me privately after the group concluded, expressing that he felt constrained within the group about disclosing how he had been treated in school. What was being policed at school was Jeff's failure to embody hegemonic masculinity (because of his shyness, being well-spoken, having moved from a large city to a small regional centre) using 'othering' techniques, and his infantilising, 'poofy' response of crying exacerbated the assaults. What Kenny's frequent, 'humorous' interjections show is the power dynamics embedded in humour. He used his status as the group's joker to wrest attention from other men and continually focus it back on him, and his ability to portray one of the desired aspects of Australian masculinity: do not take anything too seriously.

Nearly a quarter of men interviewed described the process of becoming a man as being one of 'toughening up'. Joking toughened up 'soft' boys into 'hard' men, and learning to be tough marked an important transition towards adulthood. If a boy failed to be able to laugh at himself – even when the context was abuse or violence – he failed the test and was not admitted to the social realm of manhood. He was retained in the sphere of non-men – babies, sissies and poofters. Retaliation, whether throwing a joke back at whoever insults you, or physical aggression, has the ability to elevate devalued masculinity to the level of the aggressors as it shows adherence to the hegemony. To become accepted as 'one of the boys', you have to act like them, and this can involve taking on some of the less-desirable aspects of the hegemony, like performing violence or humiliating others.

Homophobic jokes and the control of boys: 'So Theo, where do you shave your legs?'

Sexual jokes form an aspect of flirting: 'By uttering the obscene word it compels the person who is assailed to imagine the part of the body of the procedure in question and shows her (sic) that the assailant is himself (sic) imagining it' (Freud 1976: 141). In this scenario, the joke-teller creates sexual tension: this works when there is an object of the joke who is a sexual interest. But how does Freud's position explain same-sex sexual joking? It would be a simplistic reading of homophobia to believe that all homophobic jokes pay subconscious reference to repressed homoerotic desires. What is policed by homophobia is transgression from acceptable gender enactments (Burn 2000; Kimmel 1994; Plummer 1999, 2001). In instances of homophobic humour, the jokes allow the broadcasting of the joke-teller's heterosexuality, his adherence to hegemonic masculine standards, and his repudiation of all that stands in opposition to it. (This is not to say that some men will not use homophobic jokes to deflect suspicion from them or to cover their interest in it.)

Homophobic jokes allow the dominant social model of masculinity to be expressed and validated. Thus boys use it to monitor the *behaviour* of all boys, not just the sexual behaviour of gay boys (Pascoe 2005). While an adult may be able to negotiate this form of exchange one-on-one, for children and adolescents this is more tenuous. The multiplying effect of a large audience may make this even less tenable, as the entire group may join in the derision to ensure that they are individually seen as part

of the majority. In the schoolyard, when egos are still forming and the construct of gender is at such a nebulous, fragile state, to challenge a homophobic joke is to risk having that label and its attendant derision focussed on you.

When homophobic jokes occur in school, there is a public challenge for a teacher who is in the vicinity – an even stronger challenge than that described in the earlier example of Butler (2002) where boys were simply using physical humour to jockey for position. If a teacher does not query the use of homophobia, or covers discomfort by also laughing along, the group and its ringleader gain social control, and the teacher is seen to authorise the use of such language (Pallotta-Chiarolli 1995). If the teacher objects, their sexuality, and in the case of male teachers, their masculinity, may be challenged as the joke-teller asserts his attempt at dominance with the implicit or spoken question: ‘What are *you*? Are *you* one?’ In the classroom and the playground, a series of ritualised tests of manhood are continually at play for all males present. Through these tests, masculinity can be won or lost.

The worst insult for a boy, the most un-funny of all topics that were joked about, was ‘poofter’. Homophobic language could be used in a variety of situations to control behaviour or punish transgressions from the hegemony. Body type was an aspect of childhood/adolescence that was frequently commented on, and one that was impossible for boys to change.

PM: OK, what were other insults thrown at you?

Theo: Umm, poofter.

PM: Why did you get that?

Theo: Why? Probably because I was quiet I suspect. I think I’ve always been pretty sensitive I suppose.

PM: And you also said you were small.

Theo: And I was smaller, yep, quite thin, and I was a late developer too. [...] One incident was with a bloke in an English lesson once. He was making comments about the lack of hair on my legs. It was like ‘So Theo, where do you shave? In the shower or the bath?’ (minister, 40 y.o., rural area)

No punchline exists in this interaction, only the apparently amusing visual idea of a teenage boy doing an emasculating activity like shaving his legs. Smooth legs indicates either immaturity or feminisation through vanity. Theo's differences – being sensitive, small, a late developer and not exhibiting secondary male sexual indicators like body hair – were highlighted in a context of humiliation where his peers could laugh at him. James and Olson (2000) refer to this as disparaging humour, a form which illuminates the differences of groups or individuals as the object of derision.

A similar experience was described by Shane. He highlighted the worst possible insult for a teenage boy, and linked it to a form of humour that he referred to as 'mickey-taking.'

PM: What was the absolute worst insult?

Shane: Probably being called a poofter. I think as a young male growing up, to be called that kind of dashed your sense of being a man [...] A close friend of mine who accused me of being gay once. And I really resented the fact because I knew that I wasn't. If I was then maybe I would have felt comfortable about it but because I wasn't I really resented the fact that I had about four years of bullying and mickey-taking because of it. (photographer/art teacher, 32 y.o., regional centre)

The phrases 'to take the mickey' or 'take the piss' were cited by six men in the context of laughing at one another to deflate the ego. It was often in a friendly context, but, as Shane described, could easily segue into humiliation and violence and become an ongoing feature of a person's adolescence.

Policing deviations from acceptable male behaviour and bodies: 'When I think about it now it's quite funny'

The policing of difference and emotionality by homophobic, exclusionary language was painfully described by both Theo and Shane, who were on the receiving end of this sort of abuse for the duration of their adolescences. Interviewed one day apart, both in small communities in New South Wales, they had remarkably similar stories: both spent the majority of their childhoods in developing countries. Theo moved to Australia at age nine and Shane moved to England at about the same age. Both had

acclimatised to different cultures, both had accents, and both were smaller than their peers.

From the time of their arrivals in Australia and England, each boy was extensively taunted with homophobic labelling, often framed as boyish banter, but causing intense distress. It only ceased when they left high school. The social nature of joking, practical jokes and abuse is shown in the following example.

Theo: I had this great sticker on my school case. And I remember we were in the classroom and the kids behind me were sniggering. And I turned around to see and they'd ripped my sticker off my suitcase and put in on the floor. And I thought, 'Great, here we go again'. So I bent down to pick it up but they'd actually sliced it with a razor as well. So when I went to pick it up it came up in pieces and it was ruined. So that was a group thing. Of course I didn't laugh about that. When I think about it now I think it's quite funny but not at the time.
(minister, 40 y.o., rural area)

As with many examples cited, there was no humour, just public humiliation framed by the laughter of peers. Nonetheless Theo himself still needed to retrospectively re-frame the event as funny, nearly 30 years later.

While both Theo and Shane are now happily married, have children and stable careers within their communities, both appeared to be deeply affected by their experiences, and these stories were the most emotionally draining for myself, and I sensed, for these men. Their adolescent lives featured continual homophobic name-calling, social ostracisation, bullying and physical assaults: what appeared to be being monitored was their failure to be the same as their peers: they had physical differences (body size, accents, Theo was a late developer, Shane rejected team-based sport) and social differences (being new to the area, emotional responses to abuse, being socially less confident, being internal and, in Shane's case, a volatile temper which he reported the peers seemed to enjoy inflaming). The dominant nominator that spanned their adolescence was 'poofster'. The shame induced by having their sexuality questioned – and thus their gender impugned – stopped these men from discussing what was going on with their parents. Theo did not discuss these events until seven years into his marriage; Shane, despite being very close to his twin sister, had never verbalised these experiences until he described them to me in the interview.

When I mentioned to Theo that some men had described this sort of behaviour as ‘character building’, he replied:

...That’s what my father would have said.

PM: What would you say?

Theo: I’d say ‘That’s crap.’ It didn’t build my character up. It crushed me.
(minister, 40 y.o., rural area)

Both men cited incidents of verbal jousting escalating to physical violence. Here, a perpetrator details how homophobic labelling escalated to practical jokes that were really undisguised public rites of humiliation and violence.

Mike: [we would say...] ‘You’re a poofter’ or ‘You’re a Nancy-boy’, and probably little pranks would be done on them as well.

PM: What kind of stuff?

Mike: Like walk through a door and a bucket of water would fall on you.

PM: Practical jokes?

Mike: Yeah practical jokes would be done on them. (solo father, part-time plumber, 41 y.o., metropolitan area)

In a focus group, Adrian described how this sort of attitude towards smaller boys would easily develop into violence, although in his recollection of his role in this sort of activity did not indicate that he saw it as anything more than harmless fun.

PM: You said that there were some weedy kids that got picked on. Tell me more about what you saw happen.

Adrian: Just push them up around you know, just having fun. Like using one of them bloody dolls that are heavy at the bottom that you can just push around and it bounces back up again you know? (focus group 2)

Although I have already discussed the possibility that boys who were not continually receiving this sort of abuse may not have realised its cumulative ‘water torture’ effect, Adrian’s blindness to the impact of violence in the schoolyard was all the more surprising, considering that his statement immediately followed that of Karl. He described with disdain the violence he saw meted out by one of the largest boys in the school onto smaller and younger boys.

Karl: He was a big kid. And he would go around and physically abuse other kids. Punching them up. Hanging them off fences. Holding them by the throat. The old cartoon of holding them upside down and shaking the money out, the rest of it. He was a mongrel. An absolute mongrel. (focus group 2)

When humour regarding a maligned minority negatively highlights their difference from the broader social world, indications of how the minority is socially positioned can be found. The malleable boundary between what was considered funny and what was hostile depended on whether you were the victim, or the perpetrator/bystander – and also dictated what social risks there are for members of the audience depending on their reaction. Challenging such behaviour is seen as challenging desired masculinity, and as Kenway, Fitzclarence & Hasluck (2000) point out, physical abuse is frequently minimised as ‘horseplay’ or joking to toughen up males.

Freud (1976: 147) described how an audience chooses to respond positively to the humour as the laugher ‘bribe[s] the hearer with its yield of pleasure, into taking sides with us without any close investigation’, but close investigation of the status of sexuality is already underway by primary school (Craig & Peplar 2003). The stakes are high if boys are not seen to align themselves with the joke-teller’s condescension: remaining silent (or especially questioning the probity of the joke) means a boy risks becoming aligned with the out-group. In the context of homophobic humour, boys must make a choice: ‘As part of male rites of passage, all boys were presented with a simple choice: suffer daily humiliation or join the ranks of the bully’ (Rofes 1995: 80).

For those on the periphery of the group – isolated by often-intangible differences – the joke can become an arena of self-debasement: either you object to the joke and ‘out’ yourself as different, or deny that difference and laugh with the crowd. Projecting the correct response became difficult to attain in two instances: if the ‘joke’ was based around the most feared insult of the playground – poofster – it could be difficult *not* to react; or secondly, if you were isolated because you were already considered to be non-hegemonic, the risks of standing any further out could be damaging.

Rites of passage: ‘...a bit like ‘Lord of the Flies’

In line with Plummer's (1999) findings, the current research indicates that during adolescence there was increasing pressure on young males to create an adult male persona in line with an idealised form of masculinity. The interviews describe a series of activities which can be considered 'initiation rites' to mark the transition from young masculinity to adulthood. In Chapter 4, Theo recalled how boys 'sounded out' each other, and how his emotional reactions stopped him from passing onto the next status level – that of adult male. We also heard how Rhys would hone in on perceived weaknesses. Here he recalls how the response of the boys would determine whether the baiting continued or if they were accepted.

PM: So if they just laughed it off?

Rhys: Exactly, if they laughed it off and bagged me out again [I would stop teasing]. Like I said, it was such a pecking order. (telecommunications technician, 21 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Rhys links two important, related aspects: that by laughing it off, the target passes a rite of passage; and this technique positions him higher on a pecking order. This eventually allows him to gain access to the power that is afforded to adult males.

'Initiation rites' were used to police the borders of gender in other all-male contexts. Techniques used included verbal joking and teasing which could segue into practical jokes and physical violence. Adherence to valourised masculinity and the ability to conform to the group's standards were policed as hierarchies were subculturally created and enforced. The impact of bastardisation, and its role in the suicide of Able Seaman Matthew Liddell, was highlighted in a senate report into Australia's military justice system (Department of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade 2004). Techniques used to 'other' Able Seaman Liddell, who suffered from post-traumatic stress condition following a fatal fire on the *Westralia*, included homophobic names, indicating that his emotional fragility must also mean that he was homosexual – and hence a failed male. Bastardisation is also rife in industries such as mining and construction. Duncan links what some men would consider a practical joke with humiliation to mark out acceptable responses of young apprentices.

Duncan: I guess what comes to mind is what happened in Sydney where this guy was wrapped in Glad Wrap, cling film and stuff like that. Humiliation. (former police officer, now works as a counsellor, 45 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Pat describes group-orchestrated humiliation of a young man during his days in the navy.

Pat: In those days you know it's a bit like *Lord of the Flies*; just weed out the so-called weak ones and run over the top of them. And that, for one reason or another, that happened to probably 50% of the intake. They were weeded out academically, physically or emotionally.

PM: By the system as well as by their peers?

Pat: Yeah. By both, yeah.

PM: So what kind of stuff would be done to him?

Pat: I recall he was scrubbed with yard brooms in the shower block. Because he didn't seem to know how to care for himself. And cleanliness was one of the things the navy pushed. He was covered in boot polish. He was tied up in a kit bag. And kit bags are this high and about that round [*gestures*] so you could fit a young man into them and tie them up, and roll down the road in them. Which would have been terrifying. I can remember a bloke in the year below us was a fellow from the [deleted region] of NSW who was a big, strapping rugby league player. They did him just to bring him down to size. Did the same thing but didn't break him. But they just let him know that he was a junior person. And that wasn't done by the authorities; that was done by his six-month, certainly older but six-months more senior in the navy people.

PM: So this happens to people who over-achieve?

Pat: Smart arses, I suppose you'd call them. (retired naval officer, now furniture restorer, 59 y.o., large city)

The boundaries between 'joking', 'teasing' and social ostracisation of 'failed' males are blurred, imbued in power relations and hold serious social proscriptions for those who fail the test. The common thread that binds these activities are the elevation of some masculinities over others, their public performance, and their similarities to the coming-of-age rituals of traditional societies. Also of note is the tacit approval which organisations like boarding schools and military units give to such activities, by allowing boys and men to enact these rites.

Jokes and the creation of Australian cultural identity: '...an Australian tradition'

Ideas of acceptable gender presentation and its relationship with national character find expression in reactions to humour (Davies 1998), by linking masculinity,

citizenship, and an acceptance of humour's policing strategies. As the butt of the joke, a man's reaction determined how the audience would consider him. The ability to laugh at himself was cited as an admirable quality, displaying characteristics which participants described in terms of an idealised Australian masculinity.

In a variety of contexts, the levelling quality of humour was vaunted as a means of showing that peers were considered to be on the same social level, and appropriate responses to jokes displayed characteristics that embodied both hegemonic masculinity and national identity. Here, William discusses humour between adult men.

You get a lot of mates together, blokes together, they're always taking the Mickey out of one another. They just never stop [...] It was just the way we talked. I suppose that's an Australian tradition. (farmer, 72 y.o., rural area)

Robert describes the dynamics operating through humour in boys' interactions at school.

PM: What would happen to the boys who didn't get the joke?

Robert: They'd probably be victimised somewhat, just as people who couldn't take a joke. For want of a better expression being un-Australian. You know, the Australian way is we have a dig at each other [...] Male culture, certainly Australian culture, has, I believe, a great tradition of people being able to take the piss out of themselves.

Both of these excerpts illustrate a meta-level 'othering' – boys and men are excluded from the national character if they cannot take a joke, but the jokes are frequently disguised interrogations to see if you are the right sort of male. To both Cameron (1993) and Powell (1996), this type of humour polices the boundaries of accepted social behaviour, defining who is 'us' and who is 'them', and punishes departures from the norm. The subversive nature of humour is its ability to make the creation of status levels appear to be a fun event in which no-one is truly harmed or disadvantaged. It is an effective technique for monitoring and controlling behaviour without the motives of the instigator being questioned (James & Olson 2000). Robert continues on the theme of the levelling capacity of humour, although he fails to understand structural differences between men of different statuses.

Robert: I think [laughing at self and friends] is a great leveller. From the boys on the building sites to the chairman of Macquarie Bank I think they should all

be able to take the piss out of each other. (public servant, 28 y.o., metropolitan area)

Robert believes in the ability of jokes and banter to level out social inequalities amongst men, and yet ultimately the chairman of Macquarie Bank is still the chairman and a man on a construction site remains on a lower social strata. Joking may allow them to find a degree of common ground but does nothing to bridge the social divide in anything but the immediate interaction. The chairman will be seen as one of the boys only as long as he follows the rules of joking interactions. Jokes police how these men interact, and the notion that humour is a 'great leveller' is in fact a smokescreen deeply implicated in the control of gender.

Dennis notes how gender-based humour is used to highlight his non-traditional role: having left the police service, Dennis now works part-time from home while raising his two young daughters. When doing housework, he is aware of being observed by builders working on the next property.

Dennis: I mean it's a bit of a joke. When these blokes were building the houses up the back here, I used to go out and hang the washing out. And I'm hanging bras, knickers and all this sort of stuff on the clothesline. And I said to these blokes 'If you blokes say one word, one word, I'll be over to see you.'

PM: So you got in before ...

Dennis: Before they start saying 'Look at you over there!' [...] My next door neighbour, sometimes I catch him. I say, 'What are you doing there mate, hanging the washing out? You've lost your tail feathers haven't you?' You know, the rooster. I say 'You're as weak as piss!' He says, 'What are you doing?' I say, 'Well now I'm going to hang the washing out.' So there's this sort of banter, you know? (former police officer, part-time pilot, property developer, stay-at-home dad, 49 y.o., regional centre)

Dennis is displaying acceptable gender performance within his non-traditional role: he does not take himself too seriously, he can take the joke, and he deflects his own 'emasculated' status as a housedad back onto his neighbour who has similarly 'lost his tail feathers'. This allows him to maintain his masculine status in the eyes of his peer.

The subversive, controlling capacity of humour was illustrated in the following example, where a non-masculine behaviour (picking flowers) induces ridicule, not

just in childhood, but right through a man's life. Homophobia may be unstated, but there was often with the threat of a 'poofter' comment hovering in the conversation. Joseph describes humour being used in a variety of contexts to monitor his adult behaviour, culminating in the ultimate emasculation of being called a poofter. The initial example has no overt homophobia, but a non-hegemonic activity like picking flowers is singled out for attention.

Joseph: Well, they'd say, 'I saw you with those flowers. Is it for your wife's funeral?' They'd come up with something to make you cringe, make you feel silly in front of your mates.

Later, he cited his Anglo-Australian workmates using humour to cover their inability to deal with his attempts to engage them in discussions about art or feelings.

Joseph: Don't let on anything. Don't let on, don't let on. Just say a joke or something funny.

Joseph contrasted these reactions to those he received from a Greek-born workmate when discussing problems with his wife.

Joseph: 'Oh,' he'd say, 'Joseph, come here, sit down. I think you've got trouble with your wife, have you? You don't look so good. Listen mate'. And he'd put his arm around me and say, 'Look, what you do with women is you just say "yes, yes, yes" and you mustn't let it worry you, you see, because you're a bloke'. They'd just go on like that.

PM: OK. Now, you just said that he'd sit down and he'd put his arm around you. Would an Aussie do that?

Joseph: Jesus! Don't be ridiculous.

PM: Why would that be –

Joseph: Except, you see them in football games where they all hug each other after getting a try or something. But that's a false thing. It's been rehearsed.

PM: OK. What would happen if you saw one of the Aussie guys at work who looked like he was a bit down and you went and put your arm around him?

Joseph: Well you know what he probably would think, or you're thinking he would think.

PM: Tell me.

Joseph: Homosexuality. That's what one thinks they think anyway. And you often hear jokey remarks.

PM: Like what?

Joseph: Poofster and that sort of thing. Soft. But there was nothing like that with these Greeks. They were real men, I can tell you. (artist, 56 y.o., regional centre)

The 'othering' capacity of homophobia is displayed clearly here: the Greeks, despite their ability to show compassion, were 'real men', indicating that others exist who are lesser men when measured against them. In this statement, Joseph ties together aspects of Australian culture which he found stultifying: the aggressive competitiveness, the limited range of topics that men were allowed to discuss, avoidance of 'weak' emotions and interests, and the fascination with sport which he described as a 'cancer on society'. Proper masculinity was seen as physically but not aesthetically oriented, and humour challenged the masculinity of any who stepped outside of those boundaries.

Despite Joseph's rejection of so much of Australian male culture, and despite his embrace of the expressive masculinity of European men and his understanding of how jokes policed the boundaries of how he could interact with his mates, he himself still felt the need to defend the masculinity of the Greeks: despite being emotionally open, they were not 'soft'. Despite his Anglo mates considering such behaviour as obliquely homosexual, Joseph said that the Greeks were 'real men, I can tell you'.

Unacceptable emotions: 'You could talk about sport or whatever, but you can't talk about feelings'

Humour emerged frequently as a context in which appropriate behaviour was modelled, and inappropriate behaviour was humiliated. However, it was not generally jokes *per se* that were cited. Although homophobic humour was mentioned, most of the discussion about laughing was in relation to social humiliation or the displacement of other emotions such as fear. There is a double effect operating here: one is the policing of behaviour through the fear of being laughed at; and the other is the modelling of humour itself as one of the few emotions that men are allowed to

express. Other emotions that were considered to show weakness were dangerous and had to be suppressed.

PM: How were men who did express their emotions considered?

Justin: Oh weak, I suppose I didn't really express them ... I expressed emotions to myself, I didn't express them in the presence of other people. (retired minister, 72 y.o., metropolitan area)

The public performance of 'weak' emotions is what brought censure, not the emotion itself. Frank continues this theme. He is a former soldier who now works as a police officer mentoring with boys and young men who are getting into trouble. As a boy, Frank's father told him that it is not un-manly to cry, and he now encourages his charges to be emotionally open. However, this is still something that he feels men should do in private, away from the gaze of peers.

Frank: I mean you don't want to make a public display, but you've got to get in touch with this [crying]. And I certainly remember when I joined the Army, blokes would say 'I was in the toilet with the cubicle door shut, and I had a bit of a bawl'. (laughs) (retired soldier, police officer, 39 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Crying, laughter and privacy are united in this statement: expressive emotions are acceptable when there is no witness to the potential emasculation, and the whole statement is moderated by his laugh. Even for a man who has been brought up to be expressive, the all-male environment of the army moderated his father's teaching. William, who was brought up during the Depression and was taught not to cry, gave examples of when a man may cry – although again, only in private.

William: I suppose that if you want to have a bloody bawl about something you go and do it by yourself. And I've done that too when I've lost a dog, or something like that. When my father was killed, I cried then. But you can cry for ... I can cry at times listening to music, which is a different sort of crying, isn't it? That gets a bit emotional. I can get a bit upset about decent people getting the rough end of the pineapple in one way or another, but I don't think I'd ever cry [in front of my mates] ... I'd be too embarrassed to do that.

PM: Why would that be embarrassing? What kind of man would cry in front of someone else?

William: Well once again, I don't know. I certainly wouldn't. And most of the blokes that I knew of my vintage wouldn't. But you get blokes today that would. I don't know, I'd look at a bloke that did that very hard. I'd think about what was making him tick.

Wondering what ‘makes a man tick’ indicates that his whole life’s motivation is under scrutiny if he cries, and it can only be extreme events: losing a dog or a father, or people getting ‘the rough end of the pineapple’ – an Australian colloquialism meaning a rough deal in life, but also overlaid with a very disturbing Freudian penetration image. William’s ‘I don’t know’ response to a question about the type of man who would cry resonated with his ideas about homosexuality when that came up in his interview. Without any prompting to discuss sexuality, he alluded to ‘those kind of blokes’.

PM: What was ‘one of that kind of blokes’ like?

William: I don’t think I had much time to study them because we didn’t take much notice. I’m just trying to think of a very well-recognised football player and he played for Australia in rugby union and he played for Australian rugby league. [...] He was on television being interviewed by somebody. Rex Mossop – that’s his name. They asked him – I don’t know how the subject came up and I’m not putting anything into this – ‘What do you think of homosexuals?’ Quick as a flash he said, ‘I don’t think of them at all’. So I think that sort of sums it up; you can understand the analogy I’m trying to make? You just didn’t think about them. (retired farmer, 72 y.o., rural area)

Emotional men and homosexuals were linked to William, both as the wrong kind of man, and Mossop’s quick-witted response to an uncomfortable question positioned him as the right kind of humorous Australian male. Mossop’s history as a player of both rugby union and rugby league added to his hegemonic status.

To Robert, who was born in 1977, crying shows weakness whether by men or women, and is only allowable for boys until just before puberty. After this it displays a devastating character flaw, unless, like William, serious tragedy befalls a man.

Robert: I’m very anti male tears.

PM: Why?

Robert: It shows weakness. I really do. I think that, you know, unless your family’s died in a car crash, I don’t believe a man should cry in public. Yeah, it does show weakness. For instance, the other night I was with my girlfriend and her flatmate, and her flatmate was saying, ‘I had an emotional day at work,’ and she’d have a few tears. And my girlfriend said, ‘Oh yeah, you need that every now and then’. And I said, ‘You’re fucking joking? If I cried at work I’d never show my face again.’ Yeah, and I was quite, quite sure in what I was saying, in that as a male I consider it very weak.

PM: How would people consider you if they saw you crying?

Robert: They'd be shocked beyond belief, I think. I'm not aware of anyone seeing me cry in the last 20 years, or 15 years. And yeah, I think people would naturally be shocked because they never would have seen me do it before. (public servant, 28 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Again, only a tragedy like losing your entire family in an accident would allow a man to be seen to cry in public. The transition to adulthood begins at puberty when infantilised emotional responses are left behind. For an adult male to cry after this without undue cause would move him back into weak, childlike responses.

Laughing became one of the few emotions that men were allowed to express.

Bryce: There are certain things in our culture that are reinforced as being OK and not OK. So definitely one of the main reasons is because most young men have grown up learning, be it consciously or unconsciously, that to express certain emotions is not OK. It's a sign that you are less of a man.

PM: So what are the emotions that men are allowed to express and what are the ones that they aren't?

Bryce: Well they're allowed to express anger and whether they're happy, and laugh, and stuff like that. That's about it, really. (former carpenter, working as a counselor, 34 y.o., metropolitan centre)

In his mid-20s, Frank transferred from the Australian army to the British army, and was posted to a combat zone. On his first patrol through sniper-held territory, he mediated his fear through laughter.

Frank: A few weeks later on when I did my first urban patrol in [deleted], I said to the bloke – and I didn't care – I was laughing but I said, 'Mate, I'm scared. I am shitting myself'. (retired soldier, police officer, 39 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Here, an unacceptable emotion such as fear can be displayed when by repositioning it as something to be laughed at: thus Frank maintains his autonomy and masculine status. In this way, he is able to express a negative emotion, but while embodying an appropriate hegemonic reaction.

Policing space, behaviour and thought: '...don't drop your wallet'

Humour polices male behaviour at different stages of a man's life and in a variety of environments. To be part of the peer group, to get the joke, to be accepted, are all

powerful motivators, so like a panopticon, humour has an on-going self-policing aspect: men continue to partake in its controlling mechanism to remain in humour's embrace. In the following examples, by using well-recognised symbolism regarding the male fear of penetration, men's access to geographical space is monitored, as is their proximity to gay men.

Alexander: [in the army] I lived in a hut with 38 fellows and three of them were gay. And there was never any poofter bashing as such. The standard joke was, 'I'm going down to the shower now. Is [deleted name] finished down there because I'm not going to go down there. I need to take soap on a rope in case he's there'. I mean, we'd just laugh it off. (retired soldier, now counsellor, 59 y.o., metropolitan area)

Robert: We went out for dinner just before I moved up here [from Melbourne to Sydney] and they were all making jokes, you know, the typical homophobic jokes about don't drop your wallet on Oxford Street [the thoroughfare through Sydney's main gay ghetto] or if you do, kick it all the way home. (public servant, 28y.o., metropolitan area)

Alexander's comment shows that there is no need to use 'poofter-bashing' to police peers' behaviour: the threat of being laughed at or aligned with the poofters was sufficient to keep other men at a distance from the gay soldiers. As jokes broadcast the mores in the society in which they are told, there is no need to explain the punchlines: bending over risks penetration. This shows how the language of homophobia is understood in a wide variety of contexts and cultures, as the rules and codes are so well known and indoctrinated into males that they only need to be implied to be understood. The surface-level subtext is that gay men are predatory, that any heterosexual man bending over (especially while naked) presents an irresistible target and simultaneously reinforcing the concept that straight men are an irresistible target to gay men. But when the lens is reversed, we can also see a warning to straight men not to be in the presence of a naked man for fear that he himself may be under suspicion – or worse still – aroused. The underlying social tensions are about male penetration, but also about homoeroticism: humour keeps gay men at a distance, but also ensures that a straight man avoids situations where arousal could cause his sexuality and thus his masculinity to be challenged.

Before he became a minister, Justin was in the navy during World War II. He told of how homosexuality was controlled through jokes.

Justin: But ah, I knew that in the navy, I knew that there was people like, called poofers around, and you had to be careful, there was all sorts of jokes about them. When you first come on the ship, the chief stoker will say ‘Come down and I’ll show you the “golden rivet”, which is at the back of every ship’ and when you bend over to look for the Golden Rivet, *beware* ... it was half joke but it might have an element of truth in it. (retired minister, 72 y.o., metropolitan area)

Jokes about poofers were used to stop men in close confines experimenting sexually, lest they be laughed at, and penetration fears were activated through the story of the mythical ‘golden rivet’ on every ship. The warnings are: avoid behaviour that may cause you to be ridiculed, and avoid situations where you may risk being penetrated, and thus emasculated. The accepted forms of masculinity are stated in opposition to the masculinities to be avoided, and when couched as humour is a technique which is difficult to negate. For all men within earshot, they are ‘performing’ gender if they laugh or do not challenge the joke.

Humour policing difference: ‘...perhaps they’re not joking’

Any form of difference could potentially be highlighted as setting a boy out from the group: Walter discussed the social isolation that was associated with ethnic difference, and saw it being policed in a similar manner to boys who were thought to be gay, or at least not masculine enough.

Walter: Passing, belittling [...] Questioning their sexuality, perhaps their ethnicity. It was very common in those days, the 1970s, 1980s, very very common for people to be called wogs. [...] So I think they were two main ways of belittling someone.

Walter’s choice of words, as was often the case in his interview, was illuminating. This form of social isolation ‘belittled’ males: it rendered them as emasculated and infantilised. He later drew a parallel between this teasing behaviour in childhood, and the policing of ‘failed’ adult masculinity through jokes. He grew up in a large Australian city, and after graduating as an accountant moved to an international financial centre where he socialised with a group of expatriate Australian lawyers, doctors and stockbrokers. I asked him if he was ever targeted with homophobic labels.

Walter: That was very common among them in a jokey kind of way. And that was related to the fact that I guess I was little and I played soccer, which was regarded as a suspect activity by these boys [...] I no longer associate with this

group. Whilst I initially thought it was a joke, eventually the subtext got to me and I thought 'Well perhaps they're not joking', and I did find that there was an overwhelming feeling of homophobia and chauvinism and racism, elements that ran deep in the group that I hadn't really noticed [...] Some of it was jokey but not really, [quietly, introspectively] not really. (accountant, 38 y.o., metropolitan area)

Here, the wrong type of sport (soccer) and the wrong body type (small) were policed by homophobia. Eventually this sensitised him to the other discriminations the group espoused. While generally unmentioned by these middle-class, educated professionals, the disinhibiting effects of alcohol allowed deeper-held feelings to be broadcast through sexist and homophobic humour.

Walter: These inhibitions were dropped in the presence of football and in the absence of women ... I mean, the beer and the brokers and the jokes about chicks and fags. It's very common. (accountant, 38 y.o., metropolitan area)

Homophobic teasing is a feature of childhood interactions, and, as Walter shows, it continues into adulthood. The double disinhibitions of alcohol's presence and the absence of women point to the deeply held, but rarely expressed, tensions around gender for young men. The absence of women means that a more aggressive form of masculinity was paraded – a factor which permeated all interviews which discussed all-male environments. Again, for a man to challenge to the jokes in this context risked having the focus of the joke turned on him, and Walter expressed discomfort both at the use of language of these men, and their subtext of controlling him through it.

Duncan, a former policeman, works as a counsellor for apprentices in the construction industry. He sees difference from the peer group being controlled through humour and bullying, which he sees as being intimately related.

Duncan: If there's an indigenous kid [they get targeted]. We've had Jehovah's Witnesses, we've had Mormons who have been bullied. As soon as they're highlighted as such, then immediately there's a problem.

PM: So we've got colour difference, religious differences. Anything else that is highlighted?

Duncan: Sexuality. Sexual preferences. There has been the odd one who says, 'He's a queer'. 'She's a dyke.' One particular female said, 'You either have to sleep with all the blokes, therefore you were a bike. If you didn't, you were a dyke'. So it was like damned if you do. And I've seen that before. I've seen

that in the police. When you've got a male-dominated culture, the females are [seen as dykes or bikes] so you've got that. And if a guy speaks with a voice that is not quite the deep macho then he's gay. Low tolerance level. And it's something that we have confirmed in our training.

The masculinity being displayed here is heterosexual masculinity. Women are considered only as potential sexual conquests or derided by homophobia if they do not make themselves sexually available. Men must conform to physical standards and join in the objectification of women or risk homophobic censure if they resist. Like Walter, Duncan found a pronounced overlap between homophobia and racism, and as his earlier comments indicated, any form of difference was singled out.

Duncan: There is a huge amount of homophobia and racism [in the construction industry]. They are two key aspects that have arisen out of the training that we did. I suspect that these guys – because we get to them every two or three weeks – are picking up [these attitudes during apprenticeships rather than earlier in life]. Because the first few sessions we have with them are pretty open. But by the time we get to deal with those issues, which is probably nine months in, they're really homophobic and it's like they've been here [in construction] for twenty years. Same with the cops. You see even in ... from joining myself, enjoying all these aspirations. [...] but by the end of two years, which was the full probation, you were fully indoctrinated. It was a sense that you had to be one of them. [...] And it's the same in this industry; I just see similarities and parallels. It's like a culture: you either chip away at it or you become part of it. (former police officer, now works as a counsellor, 45 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Duncan links one of the most important recurrences in this research: it is difference *of any sort* that is being policed, but homophobia is often the voice that is used to do so. For women in the construction industry or the police force, their sex marks them out as trespassers into a male domain; minority religions and ethnic groupings are the mirror against which mainstream Christianity and Caucasian ethnicity are reflected; and poofter, the most feared playground insult, is the ultimate control of any men who do not embody a narrow range of hegemonic masculine attributes in homogenous environments. Duncan does not believe that these attitudes are set in school, contrary to the majority of the data collected here. However, his observation that these attitudes become crystallised in almost exclusively male environments such as the police force in the early 1980s or the current construction industry is congruent with the remainder of this theory. In the face of near-universal attitudes to gender in all-male environments, to challenge such ideas risks forcing an individual into the out-group, possibly becoming the target of minoritising language or violence (Kenway, Fitzclarence & Hasluck 2000). When that language aligns you with the most despised

form of masculinity, it becomes a powerful motivator to conform, especially in the years of gender and sexuality insecurity of youth. As Duncan notes, 'you either chip away at it or you become part of it.'

The role of jokes in maintaining social structures: 'The idea was to weed people out'

As well as peers policing each other's behaviour, men discussed humiliation as being ordained by the different structures in which it occurred: schools, the construction industry, the police force, and in this example, the armed services, where an Australian soldier transferred to the British Army. His outsider status was jokingly highlighted.

Frank: ...the NCOs would make me jump up and down between the trenches saying 'Boing, boing, boing, I'm an Australian bastard.' That wasn't bullying, that was funny. I mean another person may have been belittled by it, and maybe he shouldn't have been a soldier. The idea was to weed out people who couldn't deal with that stuff. (former soldier, police officer, 39 y.o., metropolitan area)

While Frank found this behaviour to be funny, he admits that others would find it belittling. His final statement enunciates the purpose of joking in this context: weed out the wrong sort of men. Bastardisation, with and without violence, with and without taints of homophobia was cited by several men who had been in the services, but as with school, failure to accept the joke risked the ultimate male put-down: poofter. Its role was seen as authorised within the male-dominated forces.

Ivor: [Bullying] was more officially endorsed and known as bastardisation.

PM: How did that play out?

Ivor: I guess it was disguised bullying in that you would get older people hiding behind the guise of rank, bullying younger people. I had less of a problem with it then because to my mind it was always regarded as a useful tool in training. (student, 26 y.o., metropolitan area)

Both Ivor, who had experienced bullying at boarding school and the army superiors themselves, considered this to be 'a useful tool', although as noted earlier, the suicide of Able Seaman Matthew Liddell shows how strong the impact of this behaviour can be. Similar techniques were cited in the construction industry.

Duncan: Bullying happens from many angles. It happens out of sight, with practical jokes that are far beyond practical jokes [...] Humiliation.

Unfortunately, it happens with the organisations that are supposed to be caring for these young men. The executives, they've come through a hard time, you know. 'I've been through it,' so they bully. But they don't see it as bullying.

PM: What do they see it as?

Duncan: They see it as fair management.

PM: Fair management?

Duncan: Firm. Hard. Hard but fair. But it isn't. (counsellor in the construction industry, 45 y.o., metropolitan area)

These examples show how joking leading into bullying are considered to be useful strategies for organisations to maintain a specific type of masculinity. Men who are seen to embody hegemonic masculinity are able to progress through organisations which rely on male domination. This becomes a self-reinforcing cycle, wherein men who present a threat to hegemonic masculinity are forced out, leaving only those who embody its aggressive, unemotional aspects in control of the organisations. Many of the men interviewed described how, as they aged, they rejected the most restrictive aspects of masculinity: this research attracted eleven men who had been in the police and the armed forces, all of whom had rejected some aspects of the male-dominated cultures that they were trained in, and yet these social structures continue to reproduce the same conditions. The report into Australia's military justice system detailed a history of systemic abuse, including tactics of humiliation centred around real or perceived homosexuality, a state which does not yet appear to have changed. Despite Duncan's work as a counselor in the construction industry, he sees this form of behaviour continually being reproduced despite his efforts to counteract it.

Productive uses of humour: 'It was also a good laugh – he brought me back out of my shell again'

What have been described so far have been negative uses of humour, but clearly it also has a productive impact on interpersonal relations. While the earlier-cited examples of men using humour to bring each other down to the same level could have negative impacts on some men, this technique also had the ability to broadcast who shared the same perspective, attitudes and style of humour. While Theo's behaviour was frequently constrained by being laughed at in his youth, he himself nominated

how effective humour was for him in ascertaining how a stranger could be identified as potential friend.

Theo: Well, I've got a good friend ... The moment I met him we clicked like that [*snaps fingers*]. The reason we clicked is because he insulted me and I insulted him straight back. So this banter developed but it was a friendly banter. He said the same thing, he said, 'I knew I'd get along well with you,' and I thought the same thing. (minister, 40 y.o., rural area)

By finding out that they found similar responses amusing, they created a platform on which to build an enduring friendship. Similarly, although Shane had been humiliated by the creation of in-and out-groups through laughter as a teenager, this technique – 'taking the mickey' – was later used to demarcate the boundaries that surrounded his soccer mates, identified the differences between them and fans of other teams, and created their social bond.

Shane: [Weekends consisted of] typical bloke stuff ... Nine o'clock or ten o'clock in the morning go for a big cooked breakfast, cup of tea, read the *Sun*, look at the tips on page 35, have a laugh, go to the pub before the soccer game, have a few pints, go and see West Ham play, have a sing-song, swear at the police ... and generally take the Mickey out of other supporters.

Here again, Shane gives an account of how his mates used a gentle form of teasing in an acknowledgement of the onset of a depressive episode. Comments were made about his music choice (The Cure), and his developing interest in art and photography.

Shane: They'd say 'Where's your slash-your-wrists music? You're not listening to that depressing stuff again ... We know about your photography magazines ... They're really your pornographic mags.' And they would wind me up about it, not in a nasty way but in a good way. (photographer/art teacher, 32 y.o., regional centre)

While his friends may have found it difficult to initiate a discussion on a sensitive area such as emotions, by bringing Shane's depression into the discourse by joking about it 'not in a nasty way', they acknowledged the emotional pain that he was currently experiencing and proffered support and friendship. The technique of 'winding him up' mirrored the abuse he received as a teenager, but its intent contained no malice. For young men who may not have had the words to directly vocalise their support and concern, the techniques of humour that in a different context had instigated pain and isolation, now expressed their affection. There are similarities in this account to that of Frank, laughing about being scared when sent to

a warzone. Frank was unable to admit fear and so laughed as a means of expressing the emotion obliquely, and in an acceptable form for the hegemony; similarly Shane's friends used humour to communicate around an area that males have been socialised to avoid – emotional connectivity between men.

Conclusion

Laughter requires a fall-guy, and while much humour creates this situation good-naturedly, some humour requires denigrating a person or group in order to make us laugh. Some humour based on minorities is genuinely funny, and even if it plays on stereotypes it can still be inoffensive. Members of minorities will use humour that plays on stereotypes which reference how they see themselves in the broader social world – and the nastier power dynamics of stereotypes can be negated when a group makes a self-referential play on them. But humour often references negative attitudes that mark out the differences between groups in society which have power and those which do not.

In the absence of a solid core to gender, humour can create a sense of cohesion by creating a gendered 'other' which becomes the antithesis of the masculinity that men are expected to embody, and against which each man can measure how successful this embodiment is. As masculinity is hierarchical and continually contested, humour becomes one of the techniques to negotiate gender hierarchies.

Humour's role as an 'othering' technique has two functions: one is that it marks out what is to be taken seriously such as stoic, heterosexual masculinity, and what can be devalued by being laughed at, such as 'niggers' and 'poofers'; secondly, how a man uses humour indicates where he fits in the hierarchy of acceptable or devalued categories. His performance as a humorist is equated with his performance as a man. As there is no single agreed-upon way of using humour to convey information about the self, great skill is required to manoeuvre around these borders, and the risks of failing can mean emasculation.

Homophobic humour captures modern insecurities about masculinity. Failures to embody correct gender will be laughed at, and if questioned the hostile intent behind

the laughter can be masked as 'just a joke'. A vague and malleable line between genuine laughter and abuse shows both how difficult this technique is to monitor, and the different ways in which humour delineates power structures in society. Not all aspects of the social construction of the individual are controlled by homophobia, and not all jokes about sexuality or gender are malicious. However, homophobia has been shown to be a powerful motivator, able to constrain the attitudes and behaviours of all men.

The embodiment of gender, how the body is 'read' by an audience, and how it is seen to operate were all aspects examined through language and humour: those whose bodies were not considered 'masculine enough' were frequently laughed at. As well as the use of language, the embodying gender onto a sexed body was the other main topic of participant's discussions as it provided a visual marker of the transition from childhood/boyhood to adulthood/manhood. The most public display of the use and development of the body was through one of the key enactments of the male body, sport.

Chapter 6: Sport and the Creation of Australian Masculinity

Introduction

Boys are tough. They may not be born that way, but to be validated as males they have to learn to become tough – and not all manage to learn this. Qualities that are valued in boys are aggression, competitiveness, autonomy, refusal to submit to pain, and the sublimation of individual needs in favour of those of the peer group (Kimmel 1994; 1996; Plummer 2006). As with the previous chapter, this chapter opens with a literature review pertinent to the main theme of the discussion. This provides a theoretical framework on which the empirical data regarding sport will be contextualised.

Robertson (2003) describes desired masculinity as competitive, aggressive and team oriented, and locates its production in sport, which has become an institutionalised, ritualised and rule-based method of schooling ‘proper’ gender into boys in the West since the nineteenth century. With its focus on physical superiority and competition, sport has become a ubiquitous public performance of desirable masculinity in the West, and it is in physical education classes that ‘obvious lessons of masculinity’ (Davison 2000: 197) are taught. As such, sport represents masculinity beyond the immediate reach of the sports fields or television broadcast: sport has become written into the social DNA as the code of ‘true’ masculinity. To both Griffin (1995) and Plummer (2006), this is why sport is so vigorously defended as a bastion of male heterosexuality, for if sport represents pre-eminent masculinity, and homosexuality represents failed masculinity, what would gay athletes say about the status of heterosexual athleticism?

Ricciardelli, McCabe and Ridge (2006: 578) write that ‘Sport plays an important socializing role in promoting physical, mental and social development during childhood and adolescence, particularly for boys.’ However, as the authors note, their research was based on a small snowball sample of Australian adolescents who were largely interested in sport. Consequently their research does not take into account the experiences of boys who dislike sport and who find the emphasis placed on it

detrimental to their development. But for many boys, sport is an important marker of their masculinity and their social status. As such it has a strong influence on all boys, on girls' attitudes to boys, and on adult perceptions of desirable masculinity. Birrell (1981) proposes that sport be considered on a sociological level, in much the same way the Durkheim considered religion: as a social rather than psychological phenomenon which communicates ideas through rites, and has a functional role in bonding otherwise disparate individuals into a social unit. The rapid social changes instigated by the Industrial Revolution fundamentally changed the structures of society, with mechanical solidarity based on common bonds and repressive laws being replaced with organic society featuring interdependence and restitutive laws which bound the individuals to the group. While this allowed for the development of new ideas, a cult of individualism fostered a simultaneous increase in anomie (Durkheim 1933). It is the bonding mechanism of individuals to the team that Birrell suggests we consider.

Sport receives much attention in the media, in institutions of childhood such as school, and in male-dominated institutions such as the military. Dominant, physically-oriented masculinity can become so entrenched in our ideas of how men should behave that Butler (1995) sees a *post-fact* essentialist reading of proper masculinity developing: sport is presented with such saturation that it appears to encapsulate what masculinity indispensably is. Sport, aggressive masculinity, heterosexuality and the denial of 'soft' emotions become a self-reinforcing cycle, as homosexuality and femininity are held as the 'other' against which this hegemonic masculinity is constructed. In this context, the role of heterosexual women in homophobia and the elevation of hegemonic masculinity becomes apparent as they, as fans, partners and parents of players, reinforce a narrow range of masculinities. The idolisation and sexualisation of men who play the various football codes in Australia (Australian Football League – Australian Rules or AFL; Rugby League; Rugby Union) is illustrated in *Footy Chicks* (Barry & Perske 2006). In this documentary, three young women describe players in terms of successful masculinity which is bound by physical size and strength – and heterosexuality. Any men who do not 'measure up' on these criteria are not considered worthy of these women's time or sexual interest.

During school, boys who fail to play may be considered ‘lesser males’, and called poofers: this can be sufficient motivation, as the data will show, to coerce boys into playing games that they were not necessarily interested in. This is not to say that homophobia is the only mechanism underlying sport and people’s fascination with it. For an audience, sport contains spontaneous, unscripted drama, and team members who are so frequently seen that they appear to be part of the viewer’s community. The visual spectacle contains bodies in peak condition, admirable either for simple aesthetics or for the homoerotic potential in the male form. The data will show that sport allows an opportunity to watch the male bodies in motion, an activity that is considered questionable in other contexts, but it is a simplistic reading of the phenomena of sport to see this as displaced erotic desire. The term ‘homoeroticism’ is used to talk about the sexual allure of the body without necessarily implying a desire to have sex. This is a subtle distinction that must be stated to allow an understanding of the complex interest that sport has for its audiences. For players, sport melds the adrenalin of competition, the embodied pleasure of utilising the body to its full potential in which it has been trained, and the exhibitionistic nature of performance.

During the interviews, when participants were asked what they saw as the defining characteristics of those who were popular or seen as being of the ‘right sort’ of boy, sporting ability was cited in every case but two. Idealised boyhood and masculinity were described in terms which indicated their belief in the existence of a core form of masculinity; for example, ‘real boys’, ‘boys’ toys’, ‘normal boys’, ‘typical boy’s stuff’, ‘men’s work’ and ‘real men’. Lesser forms of masculinity were contrasted against these. Ideas of sport were often conflated with these core masculine qualities. The following exchange with a group of older men in a retirement home is illustrative.

Jock: A proper man’s sport?

PM: Yeah.

Jock: Rugby League.

Harvey: I don’t think you could –

Jock: – say which was a man’s sport.

Harvey: No, you couldn’t. All sport’s good.

During the Depression, not playing sport was not an option: sport was an intrinsic part of male life.

Joseph: I would say from my experience that boys’ popularity depended on their quality of sport. They admired somebody who had brains but, chiefly, admiration went for sporting heroes.

PM: OK, what happens to boys who were useless at sport?

Joseph: Well you were left out of things. Nobody asked you to play in their team.

Ross: Everyone admires a good sportsman.

PM: So sportsmen got a lot of admiration?

Jock: No matter what sport it is.

Joseph: When I went to school, our sport, there was only two types of sports for the boys and that was cricket and football. That’s all we had. We played football and cricket in our bare feet. They were the Depression days.

Harvey: Whether you liked it or not, you played. (focus group 1)

Thus without aiming to focus on sport as a discussion topic, it became apparent during the course of the interviews that sport provided a rich field of data in which to discuss men’s ideas of idealised masculinity.

The chapter will cover six topics:

- How ‘real’, valorised masculinity is grounded in physicality, specifically aggressive physicality;
- The importance of team interactions, and the problematising of individuality;
- How boys are coerced into playing by equating a failure to play with being weak, effeminate or gay;
- Hierarchies of sports that had more or less masculine status;
- The roles of organisations such as school and the military in promoting aggressive, team-oriented masculinity;

- The ability of sport to provide an emotional outlet to men who are otherwise expected to be emotionally restrained.

History of sport

Sport, in its modern Western incarnation of a rule-based team enterprise, began to coalesce in the early nineteenth century. Prior to this, sport had existed in a series of loosely defined folk games in Europe, many of which had structural-functional characteristics that assisted in reinforcing social relationships between people, communities and institutions. Such games also provided a technique to train the body and the mind for warfare (Howell & Howell 1992). Sport continues to function in a socialising capacity, reinforcing specific styles of physical and social masculinity, and problematising other gender enactments that deviate from the acceptable performances. While a specific form of masculinity will be shown to have had utility for the West in relation to industrialisation, urbanisation and the needs of colonial and territorial expansion, I argue that this has resulted in a narrow style of masculinity which has now become accepted as *the* style of masculinity, and sport is the technique by which it is taught.

The elevation of team sports began in the West as a result of changes instigated by the Industrial Revolution. Howell and Howell (1992: 22) cite the work of Ingham and Beamish who wrote of the impact of industrialisation on sport. Although written about the changing social world in the United States, this theoretical framework:

... could have relevance for Australian sport. In brief summary, through industrialisation, which is an outgrowth of capitalism, there is accelerated urbanisation, technological innovation, expanded transport and communications. These developments occasion increased discretionary time and income, class restructuration and changes in ideological dimensions of the dominant meaning system. Each of these developments has an effect on sport.

In the United States, industrialisation and urbanisation impacted on men's work practises as independent artisans, farmers and shopkeepers, who were absorbed by larger companies and corporations. Before the Civil War, nine out of ten Americans were farmers or self-employed: by 1871 this figure had fallen to one in two, and by 1910 less than one in three. This changed the relationship that men had with their

work, removing an important marker of masculine status as workers were increasingly separated from their work by the interface of machinery, the production line and bureaucratisation (Kimmel 1990; Kimmel & Kaufman 1994).

Rugged individuals who were more at home on the frontier became the archetype for American masculinity, but industrialisation brought more and more men into the confines of cities which were seen as having corrupting, effeminising effects on men (Aldrich 2004; Kimmel 1990). Sport was increasingly valued as a mechanism in which acceptable masculinity could be expressed, and a sports craze swept America in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Kimmel 1990; 1996; Messner 1987).

Australia and the United States share a similar demographic anomaly in that their gender make up has been at times disproportionately male. In California during the gold rush of the 1840s, the population was 93% male (Kimmel 1996: 62); while not as extreme as the Californian example, Australia has also had a skew towards males for much of its history. This is reflective of the gender ratio of shiploads of convicts, and the amount of time required for this imbalance to be bred out. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2006) records the number of prisoners arriving from 1788, but only by gender from 1796 when women made up 27% of the population. The percentage of women fluctuated, growing to 36% in 1812 before gradually dropping to its lowest point of 23% between 1824 and 1828. After 1828, this figure increased slowly and eventually reached gender-parity in 1916 when a large number of young men left to serve in World War I.

In Britain, industrialisation led to a similar surge in urbanisation with an associated decrease in village life. By mid-century the 12 hour day was replaced by the ten-hour day, and by the 1870s Saturday only required work in the morning, leading to more leisure time (Howell & Howell 1992). The 'Victorian antisexual ethic' (Messner 1992: 95) required that leisure time be filled productively to absorb energy which may otherwise be misdirected to sinful, sexual activities: sport filled this role by providing homosocial interaction, which due to its physically tiring qualities minimised the feared possibility of homosexual interaction. To Hardin (2000) it is no coincidence that the emergence of codified team sport occurred at the same time that homosexuality was categorised and pathologised, and sport became an acceptable

institution for 'nurturing in boys the values necessary for manhood [...] a means of instilling moral fibre' (Robertson 2003: 707).

White and Vagi (1990) write of rugby as simultaneously being an acceptable forum in which to display aggression in a Victorian world where for males any emotions – especially emotions expressing softness - were otherwise kept in check, and also as a reaction by boys against femininity. This psychoanalytic history of rugby notes a concurrent increase in the role of women in childrearing brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Having been raised largely by women, boys then felt an acute sense of rejection when they were sent to the harsh all-male environments of public schools. Crying and other overt expression of emotions were treated with violence and humiliation, and were considered to be 'feminine' responses – the responses of the very people who had abandoned the boys to these violent encampments. Boys learnt to suppress 'softness' in themselves and denigrate it in other males: aggression became one of the few emotions permissible and the sporting arena became one of the few places in which emotional exuberance was tolerated. Enforced gender isolation, the shared activities of regimented physical exercise, and a limited means of emotional expressivity caused boys to bond. The most 'masculine' – physically dominant, violent and emotionless – boys elevated their status compared to those perceived to be effeminate or lesser males. Rugby institutionalised these ideas into practise. Within Australia, Rugby League presented a form of structured violence that brought status to dominant males, although by the 1990s this was moderated to less extreme but still highly theatrical versions, which Hutchins and Mikosza (1998: 257) term 'spectacularised and legal'.

According to Kimmel (1996), the emergence of the suffragists caused an immense challenge to men's sense of autonomy, a point echoed by White and Vagi (1990) who draw a direct relation between that movement and the upsurge in popularity of rugby. In rugby's earlier incarnation, both men and women played rugby, but in reaction to first wave feminism, it became a male preserve (Muir & Seitz 2002). Men needed a sphere in which they could perform their differences from women, and this became enacted in both the aggression of the game and the subsequent deviant behaviour (male strips, drinking binges, bawdy songs) that accompanies team culture. At its extreme enactment, this can manifest as sexual assault: high-grade sportsmen are

disproportionately over-represented in such crimes, created in a culture that valorises high levels of violence, promotes a socially dominant position accorded to men, and segregation between the sexes. Sex comes to be part of the bonding mechanism – sometimes violent – for team members (Crosset, Benedict & McDonald 1995).

Team sports instilled the importance of sublimating individual needs for the greater good of the group and reinforced the importance of submitting to authority – another technique which was transferable to the training of men for both the male-dominated worlds of business (Delaney 2005; Messner 1992) and military life (Connell 1995; Fitzclarence & Hickey 2001). Howell and Howell (1992: 24) cite the folk wisdom which saw that ‘ “the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton” ’. This idea permeated down from the peak of the Empire to the development of the modern nation state (Crosset 1990; Miller 1998; Probyn 2000). Visible symbols of the parallels between sport and Empire are on display in school halls where flags and banners hang alongside plaques naming the rugby First XV captains, like so many honour rolls of war’s fallen soldiers (Connell 1995).

The adoption of British sport early in Australia’s history initially demonstrated our status of being a colonial outpost, wherein the culture and norms of the ‘mother country’ were imported unquestioningly. Later, the vast distances between population centres allowed variations in games to develop, and these began to mark out differences between the states. Similarly a sense of nationhood formed as teams competed overseas, or against visiting teams from other countries (Adair & Vamplew 1997). The hierarchical aspect of the country’s founding was initially replicated, with different sports the preserve of different classes. As Australia was founded as a prison colony, sport had a role in providing a productive use of leisure time: eventually shared interest in activities such as gambling quickly began to bring the classes together and began to form a sense of egalitarianism beyond the original class structure which the colony was founded upon.

Just as Connell (1995), Fitzclarence (2001), Howell and Howell (1992) and Miller (1998) wrote of the role of sport in shaping British male behaviour for the military, Adair and Vamplew (1997) see a similar motivation occurring in Australia. Britain required an effective military in the unstable late colonial period when loyalty was

required for the Boer War and World War I, and this required specific styles of male behaviour for military life. Soldiers had to be brave and impervious to pain – or at least prepared to minimise how it impacted on their performance. They had to sublimate their individual needs for the benefit of the entire unit. They had to be strong and determined and yet yield unquestioningly to authority. All of these factors were able to be fostered through training boys and men in sport, and came to be considered as the way that all men should be.

To Connell (1995), this increasing use of sport as a training mechanism for Western masculinity has inculcated men with an elevated sense of competition that had not previously existed. As Butler (1995) discusses how aspects of a socially constructed gender become so ubiquitous as to be seen as essential, so too can this vision of aggressive, competitive masculinity: warrior-like attributes of masculinity pervade our social consciousness and media so fully that other enactments of masculinity are seen as lesser or deviant. And yet as Mead (2000) showed in her anthropological examination of non-Western countries, there are different enactments of gender in other cultures, particularly in those with less separation between men and women in daily life, such as the Arapesh. Competitive masculinity is simply the modern, Western performance of manhood, and sport has become a pervasive, corporatised, media-disseminated display which instructs men how to perform.

Different experiences of sport for boys: ‘I was fearful’ ... ‘I was very keen’

The men interviewed for this research had varying experiences of sport in childhood and adulthood. For some it was a joyous means of connecting with their developing body.

Bryce: It was really good for me. A really great way to engage my body I think. (former carpenter, working as a counselor, 34 y.o., metropolitan centre).

Howard: It took me a while, [but] I got to be quite a good sportsman and I love sport to this day. (accountant, 44 y.o., metropolitan area)

Other men experienced a weekly humiliation as they were pitted against more able boys in violent, competitive displays.

Alan: I was fearful of the aggressiveness of it. [...] There was certainly a lot of aggression and assault in those days in football, and cricket. (primary school teacher, 55 y.o., metropolitan area)

Theo: My experience of team sports wasn't that crash hot. I got picked to be on the wing and the ball would never come my way. [...] When it came to group sports, I would avoid them. So my tactic, yeah, I was hurt so I withdrew. (minister, 40 y.o., rural area)

Jordan had been sexually abused by a group of men from preschool until early adolescence. He participated in sport grudgingly, but did so because he acknowledged the social benefits of being involved in the 'right' sort of activities for young males, and the protection that this built up around him.

Jordan: I thought this if I could play sport, then no one could touch me. And I was lucky in that regard: I was born with a natural ability. I could turn my hand to anything in a sporting way. Having said that, though, I didn't necessarily enjoy sport. I found that it was all about the competition. (at-home dad/youthworker, 42 y.o., rural area)

While a sizeable percentage of men described disdain or ambivalence toward sport, it was a central part of the experiences of childhood and young adulthood for all participants. For many of the men it encapsulated some of their finest memories of peer interaction and male bonding.

Arthur: So yeah, I participated. I was never a world-beater. But I enjoyed the physical side of things. (former soldier, federal police officer, 37, metropolitan area)

Pat: I was very keen in my sport. In fact I can recall looking out the window during classes thinking that in one hour, half an hour, fifteen minutes we'll be on the sporting field. Every afternoon [in the navy] we played sport, five days a week. (retired naval officer, now furniture restorer, 59 y.o., large city)

Sport created a social milieu in which boys could find their competency carrying across to other areas of their lives. For Ian, who moved countries twice as a child and described himself as very shy, sport allowed his sporting aptitude to countermand his shyness and 'new boy' status.

Ian: I was always good at soccer and that was sort of a good confidence boost for me. (student, 25 y.o., metropolitan area)

Sporting ability was closely linked to notions of schoolyard popularity, as was general physical presence. Sport provided an environment in which boys were allowed and

encouraged to excel, to stand out from the crowd. Whereas academic ability was considered internal and emasculating, being good at sport showed an embodiment of the socially-valued enactments of gender – external, aggressive competitiveness. It should be noted here that academic ability is generally a predictor of success after school, and while intellect is valued in adults, physical prowess was less valued than in youth. This illustrates both the changing nature of acceptable masculinity over the course of a man's life, and a major contradiction in idealised masculinity: do not stand out, except in a narrow range of activities.

Sporting ability could provide social capital for boys who were either academically gifted or challenged, as they could have these damaging traits overlooked by peers and the school if they excelled at sports (Davison 2000). Boys who were physically small could over-ride this if they were enthusiastic players, and thus their spirit encapsulated the sporting hero that their body did not necessarily project.

Walter: I've got a couple of friends in particular who were certainly very confident. They were gifted sportsmen. [...] They were very little men, and both grew into very confident, happy men as far as I know. (accountant, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

Some boys were simply incapable of playing, and the impacts were profound. Eddie was a small child with a hole in his heart, and his inability to partake in such a key enactment of childhood became a socially and personally damaging ritual.

Eddie: And because I wasn't allowed to play sport, I wasn't allowed to run, I wasn't allowed to do anything, I was the misfit. It made me very conscious of that. (businessman, 49 y.o., metropolitan area)

As shown in Chapter 4, Eddie's adult life became a series of self-destructive attempts to compensate for his perceived physical inadequacies and the social rejection he received as a result of his masculine 'failure'.

Specific behaviours taught through sport were modelled in such a way that they were presented as the idealised way for males to perform. The introduction to this chapter discussed the shaping of male behaviour as a reaction to feminism (Kimmel 1996), a fear of softness in men following the Industrial Revolution (Howell & Howell 1992; Kimmel 1996; Messner 1987) and the need to create a specific style of masculinity for the military (Adair & Vamplew 1997; Connell 1995; Fitzclarence 2001; Howell & Howell 1992; Miller 1998). These attributes of fearlessness, imperviousness to

pain, prioritising the team over the individual, and submission to authority were echoed in the words of the participants as they described who was granted social prestige in the transition from boyhood to manhood. Aggression was seen as masculine.

The competitiveness of sport was apparent in two distinct areas: within the game, and between different types of sport. In any given game, aggression and ability to play elevated your status, particularly if your team won. Between types of sport, team games had more status than solo sport, indicating the elevated status of peer-group interaction in the socialisation of boys; thus long-distance running had less cachet than any form of football. The most aggressive sports were considered to have the most status, particularly masculine status. So soccer, despite being the most popular game in the world, had less status in Australia than Australian Rules, which in turn had less status than rugby, which relies on a heavier male body, and more punishing, violent play (Hutchins & Mikosza 1998). The type of game that you chose to play or were able to play determined how you were considered within the playground social system. All the men interviewed spoke of how boys who did well at sport were socially advantaged, both in the eyes of their peers and in the feedback they gained from teachers. These two inter-related spheres of influence will each be addressed separately.

Sport embodies masculinity: ‘The sportsmen were seen as the “real” men’

Masculinity is not a stable trait, equally available to all men. Thus it is something which is continually performed and contested. The race to become masculine is related to sporting ability, and is, in the words of Ivor:

... a bit of a lottery. Developmentally, the ones who developed first were obviously favoured with strength and speed that smaller people didn't have. [...] Since most of the sports were things like football and ‘British Bulldog’ they're all physically orientated, so the bigger the better. (student, 26 y.o., metropolitan area)

Ivor links size and sport: those who were big had an advantage in the physically-demanding world of aggressive games. In the ongoing challenges for social dominance amongst boys, this gave them an advantage by being able to physically dominate the social world. Some boys are genetically predisposed to larger bodies

and/or reaching puberty early. According to Craig and Peplar (2003), these boys are far more likely to use their presence for social advantage by bullying smaller boys. They specify the role of sexuality around the time of puberty in childhood dynamics and the control of boys by peers: 'adolescents can readily acquire power over others by identifying vulnerabilities related to sexuality and using these as a means to bully...' (2003: 579). The daily reality of bullies in peer-group interaction is linked to both being soft and failing to perform adequately at sport by Rofes (1995: 79-80) when he writes: 'Heresy was a boy who cried a lot when he got hurt. Heresy was a boy who couldn't throw a baseball [...] In any group of three or more, the bully was present.' The link between size and bullies using homophobic language was cited by Trevor, who like Rofes, notes the group dynamics inherent in bullying.

Trevor: I was picked on a bit more then, bullied a bit more.

PM: What happened?

Trevor: Fighting with different lots. Called names.

PM: What sort of names were used?

Trevor: Oh, 'Sissy [deleted alliterated surname]' was one [...] As in any school, there's always a bully group.

PM: Describe those kids for me.

Trevor: I wouldn't have known then but I know now that they were low socioeconomics. They were all physically bigger. They were not the brightest, sharpest tools in the cupboard. (salesman, 55, metropolitan area)

Trevor hints at a link between boys who were not academically proficient, who had an advantage of physical size and who became bullies; Shane went further, specifically linking sporting prowess, bullying, and a distance from academia.

Shane: If you didn't play sport you were relegated to being a nerd. I always remember that the kids who were great at football always seemed to be the ones who were bullies for some reason. (teacher, 32 y.o., regional area)

Shane's comments are born out by Plummer's (1999; 2001; 2006) research, which found links between boys socialising in groups, specifically sports-based activities, and bullying. This is in line with Connell (1995) and Mac an Ghail (1994) who linked bullying and homophobia. Rofes (1995) describes the amount of research

conducted on physical and sexual abuse of children at the expense of emotional abuse, and recent Australian research (Healey 2003) finds that the impact of social bullying is as profound as physical forms. She describes bullying as a form of child-abuse which can have psychological impacts including increased suicide risk and long-term depression.

The importance of physical presence was echoed by other men who described the status that being one of the bigger boys brought, and in this example, size and sporting ability were linked in their ability to increase a boy's status. This resonates beyond the schoolyard, in Western culture, where men are constantly informed that their masculinity is defined by their bodies (Duggan & McCreary 2004).

PM: What got you popularity for a boy?

Howard: For a boy? Popularity? Certainly size. If you were taller and you could do something better than the other boys, you were popular.

PM: What sort of 'something'?

Howard: Particularly in the sporting area. But even just a skill like perhaps bike riding. Able to ride the furthest, the farthest, or do it on the front wheel, or something like that. A boy who can build up a reputation and have that story embossed as legend, and then pass down, would then generate an interest from other boys. (accountant, 44 y.o., metropolitan area)

This statement illustrates the constructed nature of status and the social performance imperative in its dissemination. Skills, particularly physical skills came to represent masculinity which had an almost-mythical ability to telegraph the 'legend' of your masculinity to others. Sport became linked to the projection of an acceptable style of masculinity, and discourses of 'real' masculinity, typical blokes, and normal boys peppered the interviews.

Justin: Well, at [deleted private boys' school], it was the sportsmen who were seen as the 'real' men. (retired minister, 72 y.o., metropolitan area)

Here, Shane gives two different contexts for 'typical' behaviour, but both are related to male behaviour being typically physically-oriented.

Shane: Mum and dad always said that my sister spoke first and I walked first. My sister was the person who would be good at speaking and maths, and talking and discussing, where I'd be the more typical bloke, I suppose, going off and doing stuff.

[...]

At those ages [between 18 – 25] I was going down the pub, going to the football. Typical bloke stuff. (teacher, 32 y.o., regional area)

In the first example, ‘typical’ boys were physical and ‘doing stuff’ in contrast to communicative girls. In the second example, ‘typical’ behaviour for a man was socialising with other men based around sport and alcohol.

Ideas of ‘real’ masculinity resonated with these men. In a focus group I did not have time to finish the question before it was answered.

PM: What did other people think ‘proper’ masculinity was at school? Who were the guys that were turning into ‘real’ men and who were the ones -

Anton: (interrupts) The football players. They were it.

PM: OK, so we’ve got footy guys.

Anton: You’ve got footy, sports. If you were into sports you were in the in crowd.

Karl: When they’re in that football team they don’t have the weaker ones around them so therefore they’re not being picked on. They’re being more like normal boys. (focus group 2)

In this context, sport is seen socialising the stronger boys together, and this insulates them all from the possibility of being picked on, a fate left to small, ostracised boys. Sport bonded boys – if they had the right body, were capable of playing with some degree of skill and enthusiasm, and were prepared to engage in it. It was a public enactment of both having an acceptable male body, and adherence to acceptable modes of behaviour. It showed that you were one of the ‘normal boys’. The socialising potential of sport was described by Mike, who felt that proper masculinity and sportiness were in binary opposition to failed masculinity, homosexuality and non-sportiness.

Mike: When I was a kid, rugby and cricket were instilled in me. So why wouldn’t I like it now? I’ll do that to my son. I want him to play rugby. So I’ll show an interest in rugby and be rugby orientated, and cricket orientated.

Mike did not seem to comprehend the possibility of his son being gay as an adult:

Because he's a boy. He's a *real* boy. He loves to climb this and do everything, and be out there. And I would hopefully be able to bring him up in such a way that he won't want to be sexually orientated with me. That he will actually want a woman. (solo father, part-time plumber, 41 y.o., metropolitan area)

To Mike, by teaching his son sporting traditions would insulate him from the possibility of failing is the quest to embody masculinity. As his two-year old son was already physically active, to Mike this denoted that he was developing into the right kind of active, autonomous male.

If sport denotes the normal boys, and effeminacy of homosexuality mark out 'failed' masculinity, what happens when gay men succeed in sport? Pronger (1990:182) found that gay men were likely to be rejected from the more aggressive, team-oriented sports. This appears to be mediated by twin fears. The first is that the physicality and nudity involved in sport is already 'a deeply disguised form of homoerotic pornography', overflowing with heightened emotions in a homosocial milieu. The crossover from social to sexual is too much of a risk. Therefore any males who may already be liable to 'betray' gender must be kept away, and those remaining must have strict codes of behaviour enforced on them (Lewis & Karin 1994; Pronger 1990). Secondly, sport acts to police the boundaries between men and women, and between the 'right' men and 'failed' men. If 'failed' men can succeed in the apotheosis of physical masculinity, what challenges does this initiate for the masculinity of those supposedly laying claim to this exclusive domain of glory (Wellard 2002)?

Unacceptable behaviour in childhood and adolescence included rejection of sport, in particular team-based activities, and the rejection of schoolyard masculinity which idealises boys as physical, but not academic. Although children are at school to expand their intellectual capacities, intellect was not always a socially-valued attribute for boys. The discussion will now turn to the different ways in which sport and academia were considered, firstly by the boys, and then by schools.

How boys treated academic ability: '...you were perceived to be more on the girls' side of things'

Across the interviews, when men were asked about what sort of boys they wanted to be or liked, and who was to be avoided during childhood and adolescence, the

responses bore a frequent similarity. When asked, 'What got you more popularity at school: being good at sport or being good academically?', the answers closely paralleled each other.

Bryce: Probably at our school it would have probably been being good at sport I would say. (former carpenter, working as a counselor, 34 y.o., metropolitan centre).

Ray: Yeah, athletic activities, not academic activities. That's what made them popular. (detective, 56 y.o., regional centre)

Rick: Among the peers it would have been sport. (student, 27 y.o., metropolitan area)

In the following examples, the same type of behaviour induced the controlling mechanism of homophobia: in Luke's example this was directed at less-physical boys; in Mike's example, shy, academically-inclined boys. The policing mechanism and the language used is the same in each of these situation, as non-sporty boys and academic boys were both considered to have 'failed' masculinity.

Luke: In later primacy school they would start to be more picking on anyone who wasn't very physical.

PM: What kind of words would be used in this kind of exchange?

Luke: There was certainly some challenging of your masculinity in the later years of primary school. You might get called a fag. (former soldier/IT professional 26. y.o., metropolitan area)

PM: So was there anyone who stood out at that period, as being different from the other boys?

Mike: I'd say so. They were the 'Nancies'.

PM: What were they like?

Mike: They were the quiet, introverts, in their own little inner-circle, did their school work and you sort of saw them around the edges; you didn't really see them being a part of the whole scenario of what was going on. (solo father, part-time plumber, 41 y.o., metropolitan area)

Ian also observed homophobic language being directed both at boys who were intelligent, and other boys whose interests were not based around physicality.

PM: What about words that would be used to control or question someone's masculinity?

Ian: 'Are you gay', that was always one that sort of floated around.

PM: Who would that be directed at? Across the board or focused in on some groups?

Ian: Probably on some groups. Like the more academic groups. And probably the guys that had different interests. Because there were two social groups. There was one big social group who were playing rugby and rowing, and tough sports. The party people. The drugs people. And that was like the cool crew. Then you had the other sort of like more academic crew who were the guys who after school were playing 'War Hammer' and computer games, and that sort of thing. (student, 25 y.o., metropolitan area)

Ian's statement reflects an important theme which emerged constantly in the data: 'difference' was viewed as problematic, and was marked out with homophobic language. Since academic prowess is 'different' from the sporting norm of these boys, this academic achievement therefore denotes a failure of masculinity. The sexuality of the academically-inclined boys is challenged by asking 'are you gay?'

The 'right' or 'cool' sort of young men at this high school were the ones who partied, took drugs and were sporty. Although taking drugs and performing well in sport may appear to be counter-intuitive, both display aspects of desired masculinity, and show the contradictions that permeate the hegemony. Taking drugs is a rejection of rules and refusal to conform to adult ideals of behaviour: males are expected to be autonomous. But overlaying the desire for autonomy is a directive inculcated into boys through institutions like sports teams: acquiesce to authority and be a team-player. Boys are pulled in multiple directions: be an individual, a rule-breaker, but also suppress individual desires for the good of the team.

In sport, everyone plays for the team and all share in the social dividend afforded by the win; with academic prowess, only one student can be first in class, and the rest are grouped behind. The different status of being top of the class compared to excellent sportsmanship was enunciated by Ryan:

... Well, the most popular kid in our group eventually became school captain. He was very good at sport. Excellent basketballer. But you wouldn't call him a shining example of academic competency but he was certainly no dill. He had a finger in every camp, basically. But it's interesting how if you're, even if you're

competitively threatening for sport, the absolute *crème de la crème*, that doesn't somehow get you ostracised like being the *crème de la crème* of being bright. (former air force officer, now IT professional, 53 y.o., metropolitan area)

Being the '*crème de la crème*' academically was considered very differently.

PM: What about academic achievement? Did that get you attention from other boys in a good way or a bad way?

Howard: Good question. I would say in a bad way. I was in that boat, personally, and because you were able to perform mentally above your peers, you were perceived to be more on the girls' side of things; on that side of the fence. (accountant, 44 y.o., metropolitan area)

Of course, you can be both sporting and academic, and the deleterious social effects of being bright can potentially be offset if you are able to embody the hegemony in other contexts.

Brett: If you were good at sport, you sort of rose to a different category in the classroom than other kids.

PM: What if you were good at classroom stuff?

Brett: You were a girl. Very rarely did you have blokes that were both. But when you did get a bloke that was both, he would be embarrassed about being good academically. He'd keep that quiet. It was playing football. It was swimming and running, and doing all that boys' stuff that we recognised in the classroom. (businessman, 50 y.o., rural area)

In Howard's comments we see how academic ability was considered to be a feminine capacity, and Brett describes how boys who were academically proficient could use their sporting abilities – if they possessed them – to overwrite the emasculating potential of intellect with acceptable male behaviour. I asked Frank about the social distance between these two styles of boys, and his initial comments indicated that they were simply two groups with equal power sharing the same environment.

PM: I want to look at the sporty boys and the academic boys. What were these two groups like? Did they overlap?

Frank: Yeah, yeah. The person I probably I looked up to the most in primary school was very athletic and very academic as well. There wasn't any problem with bullying there at all, we were all friends.

Frank's initial discussion about schoolyard dynamics indicated that there was little separation between sporty and academic boys in contrast to other participants' recollections. However, when probed on this point, he described a social dichotomy, and the potential violence directed towards non-hegemonic boys.

Frank: If you were athletic it was alright to be intelligent, but if you were that little nerdy bloke in the corner, then you had a problem.

PM: OK, so you can only be smart if you have a physical presence to back it up? What happened to the little nerdy boy in the corner?

Frank: You know if you studied for your exams and you got a good result, you were there to be the duty punch bag basically (laughs). And ostracised of course. But if you were good at footy, well you know, free pass. (former soldier, police officer, 39 y.o., metropolitan area)

Frank's example shows a link between concepts of intellect and infantilisation, and echoes Davison's (2000) observation that sporting prowess has the potential to overcome the stigma of academic ability. Howard discussed the potential of emasculating language to be directed at any boys who did not play sport, and homophobic language directed at boys who were seen as 'softer' than he was.

Howard: So therefore [if you did not play sport] you would be classified as saying, 'You're not much of a boy.'

PM: Was there any language or names that were used that come to mind?

Howard: The usual names which just happens in any peer group, in a friendly banter manner.

PM: Such as?

Howard: 'Pansy'. (accountant, 44 y.o., metropolitan area)

As in Chapter 5, the words used by Frank and Howard have been conceptualised as banter or 'the usual names'. Again, the meaning behind the words may be interpreted differently depending on your relationship to the speaker and closeness to hegemonic presentation. While Howard had his masculinity challenged for being 'not much of a boy', he downplays such language as 'the usual names'. As with terms like 'real men' and 'typical boys', homophobic, emasculating nominators were spread across the interviews, creating a discourse of failed masculinity. Some terms queried gender

(girl), maturity (baby, mummy's boy) or sexuality (poofter, pansy, homo, fag) but not all related to the actual sexuality of the boys under attack. As outlined in Chapter 5, homophobic language became the default position, the greatest insult for those who were not seen as sufficiently masculine. As sport holds an almost mythical status in Western masculinity, homophobic names were used against non-sporting boys to either distance 'real' boys from the non-hegemonic or force those on the borderline to try and attain the most masculine embodiment during the transition from boyhood to manhood – the sportsman.

Institutions: How schools, sports teams and male-dominated environments valorise physical masculinity: '...academia seemed to matter less to the school'

As well as boys elevating the social status of sport, schools did likewise. Sport was seen to bring status to schools and although the primary function of a school is to educate its charges, physical education is also part of the curriculum. However, some of the comments from men about how sport was integrated into the school culture indicated that it had a status that was disproportionate when compared to the central role of education. Sport was used to bring prestige to the school by broadcasting an aura of athleticism.

Ray: I went to a Christian Brothers boarding school so their emphasis on athletics, rugby, swimming, was particularly high. So if you didn't get the marks there, you weren't really giving them the publicity that they were looking for as a school.

PM: So other boys considered it good for you to be physically competitive and the teachers as well?

Ray: Yeah, I mean particularly Christian Brothers. They were always very focussed on athleticism, rugby, anything that would gain the school notoriety and good publicity. (detective, 56 y.o., regional centre)

Walter: In those days again I think sport was very important, in this country sport is very important. The high school I went to prided itself on being a great sporting school so anyone with any particular abilities was highly regarded, both by the teachers as well as the other students I think. Academia seemed to matter less to the school, sadly. I'm not sure if it's changed but probably not. (laughs quietly). Umm, yeah. (accountant, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

Ryan agreed, and expanded Walter's belief that an anti-intellectual undercurrent permeates Australian society.

Ryan: If you go take a look at the honour roll, they're all guys who've gone out and played rugby or played basketball. But there's no-one on the honour roll that's gone and become a physicist or a mathematician. Not that Australians tend to hold that in very high regard anyway, and even if somebody had they probably wouldn't have even posted it there. (former air force officer, now IT professional, 53 y.o., metropolitan area)

Comments about how schools regarded their sportsmen bore a similarity over the course of the 20th century. Talking about Australian schools in the 1930s, Justin said:

... Well there were various groups in there. First of all there were the big country boys, who were very good at footy and didn't always have that much up top, and they were favoured, I always felt, the rowing ... and, yes ...

PM: By the other boys or by the teachers?

Justin: By the teachers. (retired minister, 72 y.o., metropolitan area)

Dennis's academic shortcomings were overlooked in the 1960s.

Dennis: I can recall having an interview at the school with the headmaster and my father said, 'My son is no good at maths'. And the headmaster said, 'But does he play sport?' And my father said, 'Yeah, loves rugby'. And I got in. (former police officer, part-time pilot, property developer, stay-at-home dad, 49 y.o., regional centre)

Messner (1992) cites similar examples of athletes being privileged in their assessment by colleges: sporting prowess causes their unimpressive marks to be overlooked. Sometimes the elevation of sports stars was more subtle, wherein ability brought recognition. Those with less capability tended to be overlooked by staff, as in the following two examples from the 1970s.

Alexander: If you played cricket and rugby for the school you were, the headmaster would recognise you. You know how they'd call you by your surname as you're walking up the path. But if you didn't play rugby or cricket for the bloody school, nup. (retired soldier, now counsellor, 59 y.o., metropolitan area)

The elevation of the sporting boys also showed itself in some blatant examples. Dennis recalled an example of favouritism by a headmaster who privileged the rugby team.

Dennis: I mean the First XV had steak on a Friday night. No-one else did.

PM: You're serious?

Dennis: The First XV would have steak and eggs for dinner on a Friday night before Saturday playing football. We would go into his room and we'd all sit down for a special dinner with him and his wife. The housemaster was a great rugby union fanatic. And it was just fantastic, you know, because you were special at school. I can recall getting into trouble and being sent to the headmaster's office. And the headmaster said, 'What did you do?' And I would tell him whatever I'd done. He said, 'Are you in the First XV still?' And I'd say, 'Yes, yes sir'. He said, 'Well don't do that again'. Now if I hadn't been in the First XV I would have been caned. But I was never, ever caned at school because I was part of the First XV rugby union side. It's bloody bullshit but that's how it was. (former police officer, part-time pilot, property developer, stay-at-home dad, 49 y.o., regional centre)

For Jordan, school in the 1970s was difficult but sport gave him status from both peers and teachers.

Jordan: Formal education scared me; I couldn't see how that applied to my life. The teachers didn't really want me in the classroom but they were more than happy to have me on the footy field. (at-home dad/youthworker, 42 y.o., rural area)

For Jordan, sport gave him an inverse form of protection compared to that wherein sporting capacity provided protection for bright boys from accusations of being soft. For teachers, a student who did not excel in the classroom would be tolerated for their sporting ability, and Jordan's imposing physique and talent made him a desirable team player even if his intellect was not well-valued.

In a different context, Frank described how the fear of being labeled with emasculating words like 'poof' would drive him and other boys to similarly prove their masculinity through aggression.

PM: And for that word [poof], when people would use it, how would it feel?

Frank: You did a lot to try and prove that you weren't, I think.

PM: Such as?

Frank: Just the brash, tough behaviour. (former soldier, police officer, 39 y.o., metropolitan area)

Although Frank is not discussing sport *per se* in this example, he is using concepts that have come up in the sporting discourses: proving masculinity, and tough behaviour. As has been shown through the data, aggressive team-based sport can be

seen as a series of performances of adherence to hegemonic masculinity by those boys with the right body and the desire to use it in the authorised ways. Interview transcripts reveal a preponderance of ideas about successful masculinity involving 'toughening up' soft boys into real men. Both the peer group and teachers are complicit in reinforcing these ideas about masculinity (McCann 2007). Howard gives an example of violent assaults with a disturbingly sexual overtone, and of the tacit approval he saw coming from the teachers.

Howard: And I can recall in my junior high school days there was a favourite event where you would have half a dozen of these boys would come and attack one individual and would pick the boy up, and the term was called 'poling' where you would have a pole in the school grounds and they would hold the legs apart and they would ram you in until you'd hit your balls. And it was very painful indeed.

PM: What would teachers do when stuff like this was going on?

Howard: They would turn a blind eye until a complaint was made, and then the response that we could see was announcements made, don't do it again. (accountant, 44 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Dennis cited two separate incidents where failure to embody masculinity through sport was policed, the first with a similar sexual overtone to Howard's comments.

Dennis: Sport is team exercise, you're in because you're part of the team. If you're not in the team, you're something ... you're different. And I now talk to a schoolmate of mine who to this day is extremely bitter about what happened to him at boarding school.

PM: What sort of things happened to him?

Dennis: Well, he was blackballed on many occasions.

PM: Meaning?

Dennis: Boot-polish was rubbed on your testicles.

There is a disturbing similarity to the boot-polish incident which Pat recalled from his navy days; the similarity continues, as the depersonalising characteristic of wrapping a boy in a laundry bag occurred in both situations.

Dennis: And I can recall we had big laundry bags, and this is the middle of winter. And we would grab these young fellows and take them up to the oval. Tie them in a laundry bag and leave them there. Freezing cold. [...] It wasn't that he was too small. The height was ok. At that age we're all fairly thin and

growing, so it wasn't the height thing and it wasn't the weight thing. It was just basically because he was Chinese-looking even though he spoke with an Australian accent and came from a mixed family.

PM: So race more than physical size?

Dennis: Yeah and the fact that he wasn't into sport like the rest of us. (former police officer, part-time pilot, property developer, stay-at-home dad, 49 y.o., regional centre)

This incident illustrates two aspects of the boy which were not considered to be proper: although Australian-born, he looked different; and not being 'into sport like the rest of us' indicated a betrayal of acceptable masculinity which was publicly punished.

Dennis and Howard's recollections show a similarity in their methods of policing unacceptable behaviour occurring in school, and also in the navy as Pat's earlier example showed. The military and boarding schools (in Dennis's example) are male-dominated environments. Even in co-educational schools there is a separation between genders, with boys and girls being treated as separate categories by the teachers, and gendered activities being marked out through such ideas as boys' sport and girls' sport.

The quotes in this section came from a variety of participants including those who were held outside of the elevated forms of masculinity as well as those who embodied the tough, sporty hero. Some of the hegemonic males felt that the way their physical capacities benefited them was unfair, despite the social benefit it brought to them. Some of the other men who embodied this form of masculinity commented on their roles in socially isolating boys who could not compete, and yet expressed no insight into how their action may have impacted on them.

Sport and the military have roles in shaping boys into specific modes of socialisations, such as toughness, fearlessness and peer-bonding which are required for the development of cohesive groups. It is these concepts, specifically shaping boys into members of a group, which we now examine.

Socialising boys into teams: ‘... it taught you to be part of a team’

Socialisation occurs in many social contexts, and, as Asch (1951, 1955) showed, we are strongly influenced by the behaviour of those around us, particularly in groups. Conforming to group norms can be a simple process wherein it is easier to mingle with those with similar characteristics to ourselves, and in the interviews men spoke of how they formed associations in a variety of contexts and for different motivations. This could be mediated by the structures that they existed within: their ethnicity, appearance, socio-economic group or religious affiliation.

Alan: There was very much the jock group, there were the farmers’ [sons], there were the people who came from town whose fathers were in business, there were a couple of professionals but they mostly sent their kids away to boarding school in [city]. And then the Catholics set up a Catholic high school in [town] so they used to get bussed there every day. And there were groups of subcultures there: families descended from the cane cutters; there were some part-Aboriginal families there. (primary school teacher, 55 y.o., metropolitan area)

Evan: But going to a Catholic high school, it was quite segregated, because a lot of the Italian kids would group up, and they’d just get locked because of the cultural issue. You had Italian kids and then you had a couple of surfer kids and a couple of nerdy kids and, you know, so it was just the classic schoolyard scenario I suppose. (builder, 34 y.o., metropolitan area)

Evan indicates how deeply integrated into the culture was the idea that different groups created their own social identity: it was a ‘classic scenario’. Beyond systems of religion or ethnicity was another simple sorting method: boys organised themselves so that they interacted with people of similar interests. This did not appear to have any macro-level, structural impetus, but was simply a case of ‘like attracts like’. Boys with sporting ability grouped together as sport became a common referent for them, and non-sporting boys were forced by default into the ‘other’ groups which have been shown to hold less masculine status. Academically-oriented boys were held at a distance.

PM: So thinking back to school days, who were the kind of kids you hung out with?

Robert: Much like me: sporty types. During my school years I was above average academically but only marginally. However, the guys who I knocked around with were mainly the sporty types, sporty guys and sporty girls. Just simply because we shared many of the same interests.

PM: What about other kids? Who were the popular kids and who weren't? Who wouldn't you want to hang out with?

Robert: The kids who I didn't and wouldn't have wanted to hang out with were generally the kids who were not so much more academically based but just, to use the expression 'nerdier'. Wouldn't know a football if they fell over it and just didn't share the sporting interest that I shared. (public servant, 28 y.o., metropolitan area)

Robert notes that indicators of status were attached to certain groups: 'nerdy' boys had low status, and football skills gave boys cachet. There was a frequently-cited link between bonding with the socially dominant boys and physical size. Unpopularity was equated with a lack of physical competency, and the presence of intelligence, shyness, effeminacy and being thought gay.

Brian: You know, you were either in that gang – I mean we're talking about 13, 14-year-old boys here in some cases – you were either in that gang or you were outside that gang.

PM: So apart from being in the wrong gang, what were the things that boys would get picked on for?

Brian: Any effeminacy. Any effeminacy. It was almost a situation where those that were very academically bright, really weren't visible, probably because they weren't game to be visible. (business manager, 53 y.o., rural area)

Brian notes the self-policing of boys who would not be 'game to be visible' if they were bright. As lack of social presence has already been described by participants as being predictive of low status, this becomes a self-reinforcing cycle where quiet, academic or gay boys were shunted further into the background.

I asked Sam about who got bullied, and he replied:

... I suppose I was a quiet sort of kid. Wanted to learn. Didn't play around in the classroom, which was not ... if you weren't one of the gang, if you were a teacher's pet, sort of thing. (retired engineer/alternative health practitioner, 72 y.o., regional area)

Failing to play physically, being more interested in teacher approval than peer approval and not being in the gang singled boys out for social ostracism and physical violence. While Sam notes the potential for bullying and isolation, Brian's comments were typical of men who were simply seeking out others with similar interests. There

is no malice in this commentary, as Brian simply talks about bonding through the interest in sport.

Brian: I would say that the boys I had most to do with at school were the ones that I had most in common with from a sporting perspective. Rugby players, involved in surfing. So more in common with them from a sporting perspective. Not so much from an academic perspective. I didn't achieve a great deal at school, academically. So those that were academically inclined I probably had less to do with at school. (business manager, 53 y.o., rural area)

Brian is describing a *social* distance, but in a study mapping the physical layout of English primary schools, Epstein et al (2001) described a similar demarcation in *geographical* spaces: large, central areas of the playground were allocated for team-based male activities in contrast to lower status areas allocated to girls and boys who did not play team games. Similar dominance of public play areas were described by Martino (2000) in a Western Australian high school. These children, to use a sporting metaphor, were sidelined.

Damien expressed a similar distance between sporty and non-sporty boys. Social bonding formed around peers with similar physical capacities and interests. Similarly, material objects such as a motorbike or the social performance of having a girlfriend, brought masculine status which was denied the academic achievers. Damien describes the hierarchy of adolescent masculinity as a 'chain' on which boys jostled for top position.

Damien: Well with me and the people I associated with, it had nothing to do with our school marks. It was the guys that did well on the football scene. Maybe had a girlfriend and we were a materialistic little bunch. If you had a motorbike or a mini bike, you were the ant's pants. You were the top of the chain. [...] So it was I guess your sporting prowess and your material things. What you had materialistically. And how good you were at football.

He integrated the idea of finding boys with similar interests – particularly football – and the creation of a social persona which embodied tough, autonomous masculinity. Some activities had status of 'law-breaker'.

Damien: When I was going through school, you were judged not so much by who you were but what you did. By if you were on the school football team; if you were one of the kids who was game enough to hang out at the back of the science blocks and smoke cigarettes. I guess you were instantly a law-breaker. [...] It didn't matter who you were or how smart you were or what sort of personality you had, it was by what you did. If you were in the footy side, if you were one of those physical type kids. I guess we might have been seen as the

bad kids. And we didn't want to see them [academic boys] because they were always talking, we didn't want to talk to them because they were seen as the 'goody-two-shoes' type thing. And a lot of it was about impressing your mates. You were too busy impressing your mates. (incarcerated mechanic, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

A contagion fear maintained non-overlapping social spheres between those who were the 'bad' boys and the 'goody-two-shoes'. The distance held some physical boys away from an academic mindset for fear that it would mark them out as less than male, a 'goody-two-shoes', or a poofter. Damien was a quiet, thoughtful man who was interviewed while on weekend release near the end of a thirteen-year prison sentence. While it is a drawing a very long bow to say that being in the tough team leads to prison, he clearly stated in four different contexts the impact that trying to impress mates had on how his life ended up:

- At school, he tried to present as one of the tough boys and maintained distance from the 'wrong' sort of intellectual boys;
- As an apprentice mechanic, he drank until he had a drinking problem so that his co-workers would consider him to be a man;
- He began using drugs due to a similar fear that failure to do so would lead to him being considered less of a man and;
- He began injecting amphetamines and heroin to appear to his girlfriend that he was the 'tough guy'.

It was this chain of events and the developing addiction formed by always wanting to be seen to be able to handle large amounts of drugs and alcohol that led him kill a man in a drug-fuelled psychosis. Clearly this is an extreme case of the outcome of 'trying to be the man', but lesser examples occur every day when a young man gets caught up in what van der Meer (2003) calls the 'vortex of violence' of gay bashings, or drinks too much and crashes his car. In childhood, adolescence and into adulthood, the desire to create of a sense of self is mediated by comparison to those most like the self and the differences from those seen as 'other'. The formation of group identity requires an awareness of membership, of shared beliefs with the group, and an 'emotional investment' (Tajfel 1982: 2), allowing a social identity to develop and bond the individual to the peers.

Boys were supposed to be interested in sport but not in the arts. However, as Shane has already described in Chapter 5, in his mid-teens he developed an interest in photography and art. This formed a counterpoint to his interests in football and the pub, and he was lightly teased about it by his friends. Similarly, Brian began finding his peer group's interest in rugby and surfing too constricting.

Brian: I recall clearly I wrote some poetry at some stage. My friend and I were going surfing a lot. And I read the poetry [to my girlfriend] and she then told her sister, and the sister told my friend. And my friend wrote a poem, taking the Mickey out of me. Which didn't offend me; I found it quite funny. But I think, looking back, it was an example of the rejection. Writing poetry is not something you do. [...] His poem used the term 'my poofter mate' (business manager, 53 y.o., rural area)

As in Chapter 5, this example shows how Brian's poetry writing was seen as a betrayal of gender norms by his sporting friend, and was policed by his friend's humorous calling him his 'poofter mate'. As an adult, Robert continues to find poetic expression an 'uncomfortable' art form and sees a friend who writes poetry as a 'softer sort of bloke'.

Robert: One of my mates from uni is quite into the poetry. He's a bit of a softer sort of bloke. But at the same time he's a rough country boy. Would I feel comfortable [if he read his poems to me]? No. I wouldn't feel comfortable. (public servant, 28 y.o., metropolitan area)

There were clear differences in Brian's attitudes and Robert's attitudes on a range of indicators, including gender roles, male emotions and sexuality. Robert remains closely integrated into the hegemony, whereas Brian felt the need for stimulation from a broader range of inputs that sport could provide.

Mike describes an important instrumental function of sport: while homophobia actively stops male friendships becoming too close (Flood 1993), sport creates an arena in which shared experiences between males can create strong bonds without motivations being questioned. Mike found no need to look beyond hegemonic masculine interests for peer-connectivity: as a well-developed, sporty and aggressive boy, he managed to fit the ideals of sportiness easily and this provided sufficient stimulation and companionship for him. To him, peer-bonding through sport demarcated his friendships and sense of masculinity. He expressed no interest in expanding his interests further, and indeed in his home the only decoration on the

walls were sports-related: photographs of players, team posters and a framed, signed rugby jumper.

Mike: Rugby and the sports that you had to play, which were all team sports, it taught you to be part of a team. And it was compulsory. You couldn't just not do it. You had to be a part of it. And I think what that did is it taught you a bit more about camaraderie and morals, and standing up for your peers, and being part of something. (solo father, part-time plumber, 41 y.o., metropolitan area)

For some men, masculinity and the shaping of boys into homogenous, group-oriented people was restrictive; for others, like Mike, the forming of boys into collectives based on shared ideals happened naturally and happily, and was augmented by institutions such as school and sports teams. The importance to being part of a team, and being seen as tough is highlighted by Hutchins and Mikosza (1998), who link team sport, autonomy, loyalty to peer groups and rejection of authority with the correct performance of masculinity in Australia.

Socialising men into teams: '...there's pressure to conform'

While participants generally described a desire to be seen more as individuals as they grew older, there were situations where conformity was enforced, including male-dominated workplaces and the armed forces.

Pat: As an adolescent I wanted to fit in and I was very much part of the group and as a man I was more assured of myself and my position and was quite happy on my own space in a group. Because I was in the forces for a long time, there's pressure to conform to the model, but outside of that I don't think I did conform. (retired naval officer, now furniture restorer, 59 y.o., metropolitan area)

This socialisation in the military was compulsory, and physical activity was central to this process. Some of this was initiated by the physical demands of soldiering and the risks to the team of having a weak member were explained by Ivor:

... As an example, I can't think how many times in my army career I carried a fucking log somewhere. You're travelling 20 kilometres today, everyone's got their pack and rifle, and you're taking the log as well. It's just designed to take you right to the edge physically [...] The thing that was most socially criminal was to jack on your mates. If you weren't carrying your load, you were being jack on your mates for dragging them down. [...] Because a lot of the training is physically oriented and because nearly everything you do is group work, it is nearly always a disadvantage of some sort to have a woman in your group or a weaker person, because the sort of exercises you do are designed to drive you physically to the edge. That's where they really see who can lead and who can't. (student, 26 y.o., metropolitan area)

The requirement by the military to have cohesive units and physical strength meant that individualism was problematised, and a pressure was brought to bear on those who were physically struggling with training not to let the team down. And yet although the soldiers were being socialised into a cohesive unit, as are sports teams, there still exists a hierarchy potential where leaders arise from within the group. In the army they become platoon leader, and in sports teams they jostle for the most prestigious positions or to become captain. Successful embodiment of masculine ideals is a requirement for leadership. Women can become leaders but they must show that they possess attributes of idealised manhood – strength, decisiveness, loyalty to peers and autonomy.

The jostling within the supposedly ‘all-for-one’ atmosphere and the potential for standing out for the wrong reason makes creating and elevating positions in a hierarchy a fraught action. Wanting the opportunity to show some individuality, leadership and the chance to display superiority had to be balanced against the admonitions not to reach beyond your station or appear superior to peers. These tensions occurred in varying contexts as the participants progressed towards becoming adults. Aspects of socialisation involved being formed into groups: some of this was forced socialisation; part of this was voluntary as the boys sought out the security that groups can bring.

The risks of no longer being one of the boys: ‘It was the last I ever saw of him’

In the years when boys are transitioning into adult men, the need to be seen as the right sort of man gave the peer group the capacity to provide a reference group exemplifying acceptable masculinity. If they fitted the hegemony like Mike, this made adolescence easier than for Brian when he attempted to move beyond his mate’s narrow sporting interests. Men were frequently constrained in their choices by the fear of rejection by peers who held onto the safety of accepted styles of male interaction, or by the fear of being thought un-manly, a concept so often framed by homophobia. However, Brian found that the focus of male activities – interests in rugby, surfing, the pub and picking up girls – was restrictive. When he voiced this, he was rejected by his peers.

Brian: He’d been my best friend. And all he wanted to do was go to the pub. And I was just sick of just going to the pub. I wanted something else. And I

said, 'No, why don't we go to a restaurant and have a meal?' 'No. You don't do that. You just go to the pub.' That was the last I saw of him.

PM: Because you suggested something different?

Brian: You know I was sick of doing that. I wanted something more. It wasn't drastically different. It was just having a meal instead of drinking and drinking, and drinking all night. I'd done that. I wanted something different.

PM: You were starting to find that aspect of male culture boring?

Brian: Yeah, yeah. It was very narrow-focused.

PM: OK, so what was the focus? What were the allowable male activities?

Brian: Going to the pub. Playing rugby. Going out with girls. Sexual exploration. Those three things, particularly. Surfing. When you weren't playing rugby you were surfing in summer. Very narrow.

PM: What activities would have been off-limits to that group?

Brian: I think anything. I can recall doing things say with my family that I didn't necessarily talk about because it was probably off-limits. It might have been going to a garden display with my mother. I probably wouldn't have instigated it but I went with her. And quite enjoyed it. And yet, you wouldn't then go out to the pub that night and tell everyone that you took your mum to a garden display.

PM: How would that be perceived?

Brian: You're a poofter. Rejected. Rejected.

PM: So gardening's a poofy thing?

Brian: Oh yeah, yeah. That would have been one. Just doing, again, I guess I'm relating things that I did with my mother, because I guess her influence was an influence that was of aesthetic things. She was interested in music. She was interested and still is in gardening. And I might go for a walk with her on a Sunday afternoon. Again, not the sort of thing that you'd necessarily talk about to your mates.

PM: Hanging out with your mum?

Brian: Yeah.

PM: So what would that be seen as?

Brian: Effeminate. Why would you do that when you could be at the pub? Or why would you do that when you could be surfing?

As an adult, Brian sees masculinity as encompassing far more options.

Brian: I think a 'real' man is multi-dimensional. If I can elaborate a bit, I think a 'real' man is as comfortable looking at art and listening to music, and enjoying the fine aspects of life, and then going and watching his son play rugby or his daughter play netball and standing on the side-line screaming in support. That to me is the essence of being a 'real' man. (business manager, 53 y.o., rural area)

But before adulthood is reached, boys are constrained in their behaviours. They learned that transgressing gender norms risked invoking homophobic names which would be used to bring them back to acceptable masculinity.

Luke: You learned (laughs) pretty early on to do what was necessary to fit in. It happens everywhere. It happened in the schoolyard, it happened in the family, it happens at work. You know, you learn enough at school not to be called a fag. (former soldier, IT technician, 26 y.o., metropolitan area)

While Luke was aware of the constraints enacted upon him and other men, and looked back from a perspective of introspection, Kenny held onto these ideas and freely expressed homophobic sentiment in the focus group in which we met.

PM: If you're 12 or 13 and half the boys want to go and play footy and you decide you want to sit inside and paint? What do they think of you?

Kenny: Proper pansy. (focus group 3)

The right sports: 'Soccer was for Europeans and Nancy-boys'

The quotes that open this chapter were from a group of older men who said that all sport was good, but then reframed that statement to prioritise rugby. For them, rugby was the highest enactment of masculine sporting ability. Analysis of the interviews found the concept of hierarchies permeating the discussion of sport, with some games accorded more status according to how aggressive the game was, or in some cases by the traditional status of a particular game in a geographical area. In the states of New South Wales and Queensland, rugby held the mantle of elevated masculinity. In discussing the socially dominant boys at his New South Wales boarding school, Ivor tied rugby into discourses of desired, tough heterosexual gender presentation, against which other forms of masculinity were contrasted.

Ivor: They [the socially dominant boys at boarding school] all played rugby, they all played well, they all did the manly things, they dated girls. (student, 26 y.o., metropolitan area)

Three games were cited in opposition to rugby: AFL, soccer, and hockey. Of these, only AFL has a tradition of being the dominant game, and only in the southern states. Arthur came from Victoria, where it was the game of choice.

Arthur: Some guys played rugby, but the emphasis was on Australian Rules. That was the big sport. The other ones were seen as, not inferior but just not... it was Melbourne, I mean, you know. [...] At that school there were other options during the football season. A lot of those guys ended up playing things like hockey [...] The guys who weren't terribly good at sport ended up playing hockey or perhaps soccer. (former soldier, federal police officer, 37, metropolitan area)

Four interesting undercurrents are on display in these two statements:

- Ivor explicitly links aggressive team sport and heterosexuality as the 'manly thing'. To play, to play well and to have a girlfriend were public performances of desirable masculinity.
- Arthur's coda, 'I mean, you know' to this first description of AFL being the game for Victoria indicates that there is almost no question about playing anything but AFL there. (It should be noted though that rugby union in all Australian states is associated with private schools, and hence does have an elite status: Arthur's comments are in regards to Victorian state schools.)
- Arthur's middle statement 'there were other options' positions AFL as the dominant game, and if other games were presented, they were lesser alternatives to the preferred choice.
- Finally the implication about hockey and soccer in the statement about boys who were not 'good at sport' is that that only AFL was really 'sport'. If you could not play AFL, you could play hockey or soccer but while they may have been games, they were relegated to the status of non-sports. That privileged title was reserved for AFL.

Although hockey was the game that Rick played, he dismissed it as being a low status sport for smaller boys, in contrast to the 'popular' rugby which was dominated by bigger boys.

Rick: Hockey was the sport that you played if you didn't play the popular sports. [...] The bigger kids were more likely to play rugby. Smaller kids played hockey. (student, 27 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Robert echoed the theme of hockey's low status. He specifically located it on a lower rung in the hierarchies of masculinity, by linking an inability to perform at football games (aggressive close-contact sport) to the relegation of boys to the lesser sport (stick game) of hockey.

Robert: The kids who played hockey were the ones who couldn't play football. But yeah so I consider the football sports, including soccer, to be masculine, but I don't consider hockey to be masculine. (public servant, 28 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Hockey appeared to have the lowest status of any of the team sports cited (netball was discussed but only as a girls' sport). AFL had more status than hockey everywhere, and in the northern states both forms of rugby had more status than AFL.

Rick: So union, rugby union; anyone who played that, or even AFL to a lesser extent, they were looked upon favourably, by teachers as well. (student, 27 y.o., metropolitan centre)

AFL had a lesser degree of status during the 1980s in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) where Rick grew up. In the first decade of the third millennium in New South Wales, a similar bias is shown towards rugby for boys at school as Tom's son, but here, homophobia is explicitly used to mark out AFL as 'othered', using the term 'gay' in its current popular form to denote anything undesirable:

... [they] don't like Aussie Rules so it's called 'Gay FL'. (cleaner, 36 y.o., rural area)

In discussing soccer, which appeared to have more status than hockey (through being a football game) but less than AFL (because it was less contact-orientated), Robert utilised homophobic language to denigrate boys who chose this sport.

PM: OK, what are 'men's sports'?

Robert: Football.

PM: AFL or rugby, or -

Robert: No, all forms of football. Even soccer.

PM: What do you mean 'even' soccer?

Robert: Well, certainly soccer had a stigma associated with it when I was growing up.

PM: Which was?

Robert: Which was 'pansies'. (public servant, 28 y.o., metropolitan centre)

Robert's comments refer to his childhood, and yet such attitudes still pervade adult consciousness. Homophobia represents an allowable discrimination (Pallotta-Chiarolli 1995): even if Robert was racist, it is questionable that he would have said that 'Soccer is a game for niggers', even in the privacy of an interview. It is impossible to conceptualise such a comment being published in a newspaper, and yet as the 2006 Soccer World Cup came to dominate the news this year, the following letter was published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

All this forced frenzy over a silly bloody game like soccer! It is a game of some skill, admittedly, but never a true contest as it lacks the elements of strength, power and endurance. It might be all right to have twinkle-toe skills, but unless these skills can be reignited after being physically flattened (as in rugby league) it can only be a choreographed hootchy-coo performed by pansies. (Worthington 2006: 6)

Marshall also considered soccer to be an effeminate sport, and yet he appeared to be surprised at the violent, 'un-feminine' behaviour of soccer fans who during the 1980s had a reputation for hooliganism in England, and which has also been witnessed sporadically in Australia.

Marshall: It's weird calling [soccer] a girl's sport, seeing as how they have riots every weekend. How does that sort of make sense? (focus group 4)

To further strip soccer of status, Jordan considered it un-Australian. The notion of difference being policed by homophobia had a double impact here: effeminacy and different ethnicity are combined together to create the antithesis of tough, rugby-oriented Australian-ness. Before completing a drug rehabilitation programme, Jordan was incarcerated several times, and worked on road gangs. He previously held traditional attitudes to ideas of masculinity in contrast to the man he has now become.

Jordan: When I was a hard man we were generally ignorant, we didn't read newspapers unless it was about South Sydney [rugby league club] or sport, or

something like that. We watched cricket and football. Soccer was for Europeans and Nancy boys. (at-home dad/youthworker, 42 y.o., rural area)

Soccer is 'othered' in this context, both a game for 'Europeans' (non-Australian) and 'Nancy boys' (failed masculinity). This conflation of 'other' ethnicity and 'other' masculinity recurred in different contexts such as Walter's observation of the questioning of the ethnicity and sexuality of less dominant boys, or comments from Duncan regarding the construction industry where he described the interplay of homophobia and racism in monitoring the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

It was rugby that had the capacity to insulate a boy from challenges to his masculinity, and choosing to do one of the lesser aggressive sports provoked emasculating taunts.

Terry: The rugby players, they'd go up and say, 'You're a pussy, playing soccer'.

PM: So was rugby seen as a more masculine sport?

Terry: Yeah, oh yeah. You're out there, you run into people and you're getting tackled, and all this sort of stuff.

Terry observes how this was a sport which required a specific body type: one which could tackle and be tackled by similarly large males. However, this protection was only available to boys with the type of body that allowed them to successfully play aggressive games. The social protection of sport was not on offer to smaller, uncoordinated boys, leaving them vulnerable to emasculating, homophobic language. Terry went on to imply a socially constructed nature to the status of sport: in New South Wales and Queensland, while rugby is the dominant game, soccer is the more popular game globally. But just as Jordan saw it as a game for Europeans, to Terry it was a game for 'wogs'.

Terry: But when it comes to the scenario at the skill level, it takes more skill to play soccer than it does to play rugby. In my eyes, anyway. I never really played soccer. That same scenario, it was more in [other] cultures; wogs played soccer and the skips (colloquialism for Australians: from Skippy, the bush kangaroo, a popular children's television show from the 1960s) played footy.

He went on to link ideas of tradition, what 'blokes do' in the context of acceptable sporting practice.

Terry: My parents split up when I was about 12. Then we went up to Queensland. Played footy. Boxing. That's about the way with sports.

PM: Why footy and boxing?

Terry: I don't know. Footy was just, I don't know, the old man sort of, the upbringing. That's what blokes do. You don't play netball. (focus group 4)

Boxing and fighting as masculine performance: 'I'm a boy, I'm supposed to be able to fight'

The majority of the discussion of sport revolved around team sport. As has already been discussed in the contexts of sport and humor, peer interaction is a vital part of male socialisation, and such socialisation has a performative aspect. In Terry's final quote, boxing is put on the same plane as rugby as something that 'blokes do'. We now look at boxing and fighting, activities that are not team-based, but are grounded in twin concepts related to masculinity: the elevation of aggression, and the performance of that staged behaviour to enable the broadcasting of embodied masculinity. The links between valourised masculinity, rugby and fighting are enunciated in the following example.

Frank: There is a perception that you need to be a man and we still associate being men with being able to punch people if you have to and being a you-beaut rugby player. I mean they are our role models, aren't they? (former soldier, police officer, 39 y.o., metropolitan centre)

While physical presence has been frequently described as advantageous to portraying male status, the following example shows how smaller men can compensate for lack of size. Displaying the correct personality which included tenacity and a preparedness to fight over-wrote the potential impression of failed masculinity.

Ivor: I'm thinking of a couple of guys in particular who were very popular who weren't big fellows. But they were both physically capable in that I have a recollection that they could both fight. So a complete absence of relationship between intellect and popularity. It was all about physical attributes and that would manifest itself in sports and conflict. (student, 26 y.o., metropolitan area)

Being masculine was related to being attuned to your body, but it also referred to performing within the scripts of accepted masculinity. Competitive sport was one version of this, but the interface between male socialisation and embodiment also came together in boxing: peak physical strength is required for a performance of socially ordained aggression. As a sport, there are few as violent as boxing; as a social enactment it exemplifies what Jordan described as 'base masculinity'. Outside of the rule-based activity of boxing was fighting, which used the same techniques of hitting other boys for dominance. Fighting becomes the ultimate physical expression of the challenge of masculinity – whoever is stronger and able to withstand more pain

is considered to be more masculine. Lloyd tangentially linked fighting and the expectations put on boys to his father's military life and his brothers' sporting abilities.

Lloyd: I remember getting beaten up at school and not telling anybody at home, and keeping out of the way until my mother noticed I had a black eye and said, 'Why didn't you say anything?' And it's like 'Well I'm sort of expected to, I'm a boy, I'm supposed to be able to fight in the playground.' My old man was in the army. Both my brothers played rugby league and all those physical sports. (at-home-dad/bartender, 37 y.o., metropolitan area)

Justin described an ongoing atmosphere of violence when he was in the navy during World War II.

Justin: In the navy you had to be a good fighter, you know? Punch-ups and so on. I was very quiet and they used to stir me a bit. I remember getting in a fight. I had a bloodied nose and so forth [...]. He had been a miner, from [deleted mining town]. And you know, street fighters, and often their uncles or their fathers would train them to look after themselves, which my parents never did anything like. I bought a few books on boxing but I don't think I ever learnt that much from them.

PM: Did you feel a need to, to try and compete on that level with them?

Justin: No, I didn't try and compete.

PM: Why did you buy the books then?

Justin: Oh well I did ... just in general, you know, I wanted to just defend myself. [...] I was reasonably big. Yeah I was 5'10 1/2" when I joined the navy and I was about 11 stone, 12 stone. So it wasn't that I was small or anything like that. In fact I might have been a bit of a coward. Yeah. (pause) Anyhow there we were.

Although Justin was of average height and weight, he attempted to overcome his shyness and cowardice by learning the techniques of masculinity that he hoped might allow him to defend himself against belligerent masculinity. Later, he was challenged by two of the most aggressive men on his ship.

Justin: He was a pretty rough sort of character, he was always in trouble on the ship and he said, 'What do you think you're doing?' He said 'Put 'em up now!' I didn't think I had upset him in any way; I didn't take any notice of him. He just knew me as someone perhaps he could pick on. And ah, so this other fellow who was with him said, 'Oh what is it? Is, is he, is he a pervert? Is he homosexual?' And this other fellow said 'No he's not a homosexual, but he is a *sissy!*' And I was thinking 'Oh well this is almost as bad as being a homosexual.' I wasn't happy at all. (retired minister, 72 y.o., metropolitan centre)

In this exchange, the overlaps between perversion, homosexuality and a lack of masculinity are illustrated. If he is a 'real' man, he will accept the challenge to his masculinity by proving himself in an extreme display: public violence. By not accepting the challenge, his status as a sissy and potential homosexual becomes entrenched. Sixty years after the event, the pain is present in his softly spoken understatement, 'I wasn't happy at all.'

Mike possessed a different sort of masculinity: he had a strong physical presence which he augmented with a dominant, aggressive personality. He has already described an incident at a new school, where as a third former he accepted the challenge to fight a senior boy. He had communicated an aggressive masculinity by accepting any challenge and projecting aggression. This negated the need to actually fight and he still assumed a mantle of dominance. Years later he allowed himself to take on a man he knew would beat him in an attempt to prove his mettle to a potential employer.

Mike: I wanted to go fishing. I used to hassle this guy on the jetty. That had a story to it as well. This boxing troupe came to town, Fred Brophy's Boxing Troupe where he has five fighters and everything. And one of them was this mean-looking Abo [sic] and he was beating a drum – boom, boom, boom, boom – and they organised all these fights in the ring. No-one would fight this black bloke. And the guy that I was trying to get the job with was the skipper of this boat. He was the guy organising [the fight] and that sort of thing. Anyway no-one would fight him and the guy says, 'It's \$10 for a minute,' or something like that, 'If you can last two minutes'. I said, 'I'll do it if no-one else will. I will'. And I was standing up for the town's honour, so I became a big hit overnight with the rest of the people. I got flattened. Knocked out, or whatever. The skipper turned around and he said, 'You've either got a hell of a lot of guts, or you're just plain stupid. But you can come fishing with me.' (solo father, part-time plumber, 41 y.o., metropolitan area)

Through a public performance of hegemonic masculinity, Mike felt he had defended the town's honour, and won the respect of an employer who then offered him a job. Such a performance can be regarded by other men as establishing a man's position on the hierarchies of gender. Ivor described aggressive, physical masculinity's role in a variety of male dominated contexts – contact sport, boarding school, the army and pubs.

Ivor: You learn that the culture is to win things by force. There's a lot of highly competitive contact sports that you can play and at the same time I was doing a

lot of martial arts, so that I guess teaches you a culture of violence and succeeding in getting your own way through violence. (student, 26 y.o., metropolitan area)

Males learn that aggression gets results both through its enactment and its threat, and boxing, like rugby, is a public performance of the expulsion of softness (Messner 1992). Those who do not rise to the challenge risk being devalued in the eyes of their peers, and considered to be the least form of masculinity, the poofster. Performing sport, particularly the more aggressive team-based sports, projected a sense of acceptable masculinity. Those who could perform and enjoyed sport had their masculinity validated. Other boys were coerced into playing games that they were not good at, that they did not enjoy, and were potential sites for violence: all motivated out of the fear of appearing emasculated.

Male emotions: ‘...eaten alive’

As discussed in the Chapter 4, the emotions that can be experienced by boys and men are as diverse as those available to girls and women. Some emotions, or too strong an emotional expression, bring social risk. Kimmel (1996) observes how extreme emotionality can bring about an aura of emasculation, as it is associated with being out of control and lacking in proper masculine stoicism. Crying is especially problematic (Buchbinder 1994; Möller-Leimkühler 2003) although it is allowable in some circumstances such as over a fallen comrade (Bordo 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). However, just as sport creates an environment in which the male body can be gazed upon and discussed without the taint of homosexuality (Ricciardelli, McCabe & Ridge 2006), so too does sport provide an arena in which exuberant emotions can be displayed and shared with peers (West 2006). One of Townsend’s (1994: 230) participants spoke about how he could let his emotions run free while watching a game: ‘There’s real tribal spirit. You yell, you shout, you scream and cry. You’re totally there for the evening.’ Shared experiences of heightened emotion are also cited by Durkheim (1965) as situations which assist in bonding the individual to the community.

Discussing his Australian adolescence in the 1970s Jordan linked emotional restraint, sport and masculine presence.

Jordan: Any bloke that showed any sign of weakness when I was a kid, any boy that showed any softness – you were eaten alive. You were chewed up, spat out and walked on by girls as well as boys. And that was really sad. I saw a lot of good blokes humiliated and belittled and abused for no other reason that they weren't no-neck footballers. (at-home dad/youthworker, 42 y.o., rural area)

Interestingly, Jordan highlighted the role of girls in upholding a narrow ideal of masculinity. The creation and broadcasting of acceptable male ideals is not simply at the impetus of male peers: boys and girls, and men and women are all active participants.

The range of emotions that boys are allowed to express is limited, but sport presents an outlet where men can be emotionally expressive: cheering or crying and, importantly, sharing these emotional moments with their friends. Male-to-male expressivity is suspect, but in the context of sport it shows a bond to peers. Both emotional and physical contact between men is authorised in this environment, without having motivations called into question. Ricciardelli, McCabe and Ridge (2006) found that sport opened up a discourse in which boys could discuss their bodies in a non-threatening environment, allowing them to vocalise their likes and fears about their bodies. This can be considered an emotional interaction wherein uncertainty about body type and development can be shared in a personal context. Still, as Plummer (2006) notes, there are strict rules and rituals based around how boys may interact in these situations, and a gaze held too long, too much interest in the male body or the wrong physical contact can still bring the feared homophobic epithets.

As well as the emotional connection, sport provides an encounter in which men are allowed physical contact. Outside of sport, most physical contact is problematised and overlaid with homophobic references.

Jeff: I come from a more European background; a bit of German background and that sort of thing. And it's like, in my family, for my dad to kiss his brother goodbye, it's like normal.

[...]

Kenny: I don't like blokes kissing on the cheek or nothing. A handshake, pat your back.

Herbert: That's the rules ain't it?

Kenny: Well, as I said, a pat on the back and a handshake, that's about it. On women it's all right but I don't like blokes touching me.

PM: Why? What might that say about him, or what might that say about –

Kenny: (interrupts) They'd say you're a poof. You don't do that. (focus group 3)

Ian discussed physical and emotional intimacy after being dropped a grade by his team, and contrasted the level of physicality he received to how he thinks he would have been treated, had he dropped a grade at an earlier age.

Ian: Guys in the club will quite openly give people a hug. Like one guy I was out with last night, because I recently got dropped from the first grade side to the second grade side, he goes, 'Come here, it's all right'. And just gave me a hug. No issues at all.

PM: Again, say you were dropped to a different grade and you were 15, and you were upset. Would anyone have comforted you physically?

Ian: I don't know, maybe a tap on the shoulder or a little tap on the lower part of your back. But probably no, probably not physically, no.

PM: And what's that about?

Ian: I don't know. Probably people, on the sporting field you'd go and have a hug if you do something good or you perform well. That used to happen. But probably not as openly as what happens around the club now.

At the age of 15, physicality was allowed as a celebratory moment, but not for emotional comfort. Outside of the sporting arena, there were few if any allowable moments of celebration where they could touch another man without being called a poofster. As adults, sport was seen to provide a forum in which men could develop close emotional relationships that were difficult otherwise.

Ian: Yeah, I think particularly our club, we've become very close because a lot of the guys have been in the club for a couple of years now. And particularly playing in certain teams, you probably do tend to form a bond more closely with guys you play with week in week out because you train mostly with them. (student, 25 y.o., metropolitan area)

This shared activity created a focus around which the men could bond, and was cited in several instances. The term 'camaraderie' came up frequently in the interview

analysis, and largely in the context of shared sporting moments. It was a term which seemed to encapsulate how men related to each other. Mike described his relationships with the boys he went to boarding school with.

Mike: They were fine. There was camaraderie. They were from all over the place. I had one really good friend, he was Jim and he was from [deleted town]. And then one of the boys died when we were going there. Dave Citizen. They put a memorial up and he was one of our close mates. There was [sic] Jim and Dave; they were my best friends at boarding school. And so we lost one of them. Another guy his name was Steve. He was a really big bloke and he played rugby with us. We all did well in rugby. We enjoyed it. [...] The other thing is, one of the things you might want to know about boarding school is that it isn't really in a public school system, which does sort of create a much better camaraderie thing. You're forced to actually go to the football or whatever, to watch the First IV or whatever. And war cry, you have to go and do war cry practice for school war cries and things like that. (solo father, part-time plumber, 41 y.o., metropolitan area)

Mike identified sport as the bonding mechanism between him and his mates, who he described as big, physically competent at sport, and it was the camaraderie aspect of hypermasculine activities that were seen as central in bonding peers together by Mosher and Tomkins (1988). Brian also cited the concept of camaraderie. It was a closeness to peers that was not sexual, although he did enjoy the close physicality of playing rugby.

Brian: Look, in none of my 16 years of playing rugby was there any overt homosexual action, or confrontation of any description. As I said, yes there was touching, yes there was a camaraderie; I'd put it more in those terms. It was one of the most enjoyable aspects of the game. (business manager, 53 y.o., rural area)

This was echoed by Arthur both in the context of sport, and the male dominated industries that he had worked in.

Arthur: I enjoyed the competition and camaraderie of sporting competition.

PM: Camaraderie comes up quite a bit in these conversations.

Arthur: Well when you're playing with a team, it's one of those sort of things.

[...]

PM: There's a couple of things I'm thinking of here: Initially all of your work has been very 'blokey'. Army, police, and it seems like there's a connection with the things you liked at school; structure, achievement –

Arthur: Absolutely. Variety. Camaraderie. Teamwork. There's no secret there.
(former soldier, federal police officer, 37, metropolitan area)

Conclusion

Men described intense bonding in all-male or male-dominated environments such as sports teams or the military, although there is a selecting process that has been shown to occur in such environments, leaving only those with similar physical capacities and a desire to accept the rules of behaviour. In line with Griffin (1995), participants cited functional qualities of sport which were central to maintaining gender inequalities and heterosexism: it defines and reinforces traditional masculinity; provides a safe context for male bonding and intimacy; creates status levels amongst males; reinforces male privilege; and reifies heterosexuality.

Sport provides a means in which boys can, in the absence of other socially acceptable ways of bonding physically and emotionally, create intense shared experiences. To feel that sport-based contact is simply a field of sublimated homosexual desire is reductive and ignores the multiple facets that impact on boys over their lives. Perhaps for some, including gay sportsmen who I have discussed this idea with, there is a strong homoerotic element in the team activities. But for the men in this study, who openly discussed a range of issues to do with sexuality, gender and identity, sport's main roles were bonding with mates, friendly competition and engaging their bodies. For young adults who continue to play sport, it can form a strong bond to their teammates beyond childhood. For some men, these exchanges provided some of their closest moments of friendship with other males, although some also described an eventual boredom with socialising based around sport.

Sport permeates the culture to the extent that Australians see themselves as a sporting nation. Through sport we create and disseminate ideas of idealised masculinity, and the data from which this paper is drawn showed the centrality of sport's role in constructing these ideals. Children use sport as recreation, and as a healthy means of exercising, but sport has powerful social influences in the creation of in- and out-groups. As such, sport can force children into activities which valorise some attitudes, and problematise others.

Analysing sport allows us to use a widespread phenomenon as a window into relationships between men, and between genders. Sport permeates organisations such as schools and social clubs, and the styles of interacting that are useful in sport have been shown to be created and replicated in other gendered institutions. Tracing how sport develops over time, in different cultural contexts, and in different periods in a man's life, allows us to map the changing influences that sport has over us as men, and our interactions with each other and with women, and our ideas of notions of Australian masculinity.

Brian and Shane both described how sport ultimately failed to provide enough stimulation for them. These men and many others in the sample began to branch out once they entered adulthood to find more diverse interests. This does not mean that they necessarily abandoned sport: during a follow-up interview with Shane during the 2006 Soccer World Cup, he spoke with excitement of being able to watch so many hours of soccer of such a high standard on Australian television. Although he is happy living in Australia, he described how the game ties him back to England, and how he anticipates sharing such events in the future with his young son. However, Shane augments his mental stimulation with the arts.

Other men also found a balance in their interests, especially once the pressures of adolescence and young adulthood passed. The restrictive attitudes which held so many men in a narrow range of interests were loosened. Pressure to perform in the narrow scripts of the hegemony allowed some of these men to explore the world without the fear of being called a poofter. It is to this idea – that men can unlearn restrictive attitudes to gender – that we turn for the final results chapter.