

BULLYING BOYS: AN EXAMINATION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN THE PLAYGROUND

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ABSTRACT

Violence between young men, particularly resulting from the emergence of a so called 'gun and knife culture', is currently subject to extensive media coverage in UK². Alongside this there has been increased anxiety about both the scale and impact of bullying in schools (Cawson et al, 2002; Tyler, 2002). These issues form part of a more generalised concern about men and boys in Britain often referred to as a 'crisis of masculinity' (see Clare, 2000). This article examines findings from research with male respondents about their relationship with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1989, 1995, 2005) and bullying whilst at school and makes suggestions as to what can be done to tackle abusive behaviour amongst boys and young men.

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² See Lockhart, G; McClory, J and Qvortrup, M. (2007) Gun and Knife Crime in Great Britain, Policy Exchange, Research Note. Knife crime is a fact of life for teenagers (Bryony Gardon, [telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk), 31 May 2008).

Introduction

This article is in five parts. Part One outlines the theoretical background to the research. Part Two describes the methodology and the participants. Part Three discusses different types of bullying and the factors that were associated with them. Part Four discusses resistance to bullying and provides both successful and unsuccessful examples. Part Five goes on to discuss engagement with bullying and differences between those respondents that bullied others and those that did not. Finally, the conclusion examines the insights that can be drawn for future research on boys and men together with the development of public policies to address the issues of bullying and abusive behaviour.

Research on boys at school has suggested that hegemonic masculinity provides a discursive benchmark against which all masculine identities are evaluated, that includes issues surrounding heterosexuality, homophobia, misogyny, toughness, sport, competitiveness and resistance to authority (Mac An Ghail, 1994, 1996; Sewell, 1999; Frosh *et al*, 2002; Poynting and Donaldson, 2005).

This article is interesting for two reasons; firstly because it puts more emphasis on resistance to hegemonic masculinity than compliance. Because individual boys will be associated with the aforementioned factors to a greater or lesser degree, it is important to examine ambiguity and resistance to hegemony as well as compliance. This is not suggesting that previous studies have failed to find variance in compliance with features of hegemonic masculinity or examples of resistance (see Frosh *et al*, 2002), but rather that, at the time of writing, strangely insufficient attention has been paid to how practical policy initiatives can be developed from such knowledge.

Secondly, in contrast to much research which has sought to explore the working of masculinities within the school setting (see Frosh *et al*, 2002; Mac An Ghail, 1994, 1996), this study largely explores the meaning that adult men make of those experiences (see also Ortner, 2002; Malaby, 2009). Such studies are important for two reasons; firstly because they demonstrate that school experiences particularly those of bullying retain a resonance in the adult psyche and have implications for adult constructions of masculine identities. Secondly, memory work provides important reflections upon issues of power and different discursive positions (see Castle and Bryant, 2000) in a way that work with boys and adolescents may not. Foley (1990) and Malaby (1999) have noted how boys, including adolescents are often unaware of the networks of power that surround them. They point out that whilst the high school students they interviewed were able to describe their personal feelings about school, they failed to articulate an awareness of their position within different networks of power or even to a large extent admit to the existence of those networks. However, power relationships are an integral part of bullying practices and experiences (see Vaillancourt *et al*, 2003) and the reflections of adult men can help us to further our understanding of these.

Evaluating the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity which comes from the work of Connell (1987, 1989, 1995) has exerted a huge influence upon the literature on gender relations and masculinities. Connell's work explains hegemonic masculinity as an ideology about being a man; it represents the most valorised form of masculinity at a given time and place which informs a pattern of practices that allows men's dominance over women to continue. Connell explains that whilst only a minority of men might exhibit aspects of hegemonic masculinity in their daily lives sufficient numbers are complicit enough to maintain its dominant status over women and other versions of masculinity. Although

hegemony can entail violence it does not necessitate it; involving instead ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions and persuasion. While historically gender relations are subject to change (see Lusher and Robbins, 2009)³; there are ongoing 'evolutionary' struggles for hegemony (see Coles, 2009), which means that older forms of hegemonic masculinity can be replaced by more humane versions of masculinity, which can help to reconfigure patterns of gendered relations.

Gendered interactions involve 'situational accomplishments' (see Messerschmidt, 1993) whereby boys who inhabit the same social space draw on shared knowledge to configure the behaviour of both themselves and others through the notion of accountability. Therefore, the masculine identity of each boy is unique because he will choose from the discursive resources available to him and build these into his identity in different ways; although his ability to draw upon resources will sometimes be limited by structural restraints. Such an approach is indicative of a tendency for researchers on gender studies to increasingly locate the individual as a knowledgeable agent in the construction of their own gendered identity (see Butler, 1990; Davies, 2002).

Whilst the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been influential it has also been heavily criticised (see Collinson and Hearn, 1996, 2004; Collier, 1998; Peterson, 1998; McInnes, 1998; Whitehead, 1998; Edley and Wetherall, 1996; Hawkesworth, 1997; Demetriou, 2001; Beasley, 2008). For a response to such criticisms see Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) where the writers review the original concept and explain how it can be reworked to accommodate them. Nonetheless, some problems with the concept still remain (see Beasley, 2008); not least the failure to provide an explanation of subjectivity including the individual choices that people make when engaging with gendered discourses and practices (see Jefferson, 1994). This paper suggests some ways how this oversight might be rectified.

The research

The main aim of the research upon which this paper is based, is to explore and analyse the 'fear of crime'⁴ of men at different stages of the life course. The theoretical position behind the research is that past experiences are relevant to current gendered identity constructions and are likely to be implicated in men's fears around crime and victimisation. Using in-depth interviewing, a method that is well suited to developing new perspectives in the social sciences; men were questioned about their early home lives, experiences of schooling and also their current lives. The data on which this paper is based comes from a section of the interview on the schooling experiences of the particular respondents.

The research was conducted in a suburban ward in South Birmingham, approximately 7 kilometres south of the city, consisting of mainly inter-war and post-war family housing, half-owner-occupied and half rented. There was no upper age limit to the research. With the exception of one respondent the remainder of the sample were in blue collar, clerical occupations or were unemployed. Of the thirty-two respondents here, twenty-nine were White, three were Mixed Race; two being Afro-Caribbean/White and one Asian/White.

Interviews were undertaken with men from three different age ranges that were considered to be important stages in the lifecycle (see Goodey, 1997; Gardiner, 2002).

³ On the importance of context including specific relational settings.

⁴ The notion of 'fear of crime' is a contested one (see Hale 1996).

The choice of method, sampling technique and forms of analysis were associated with Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory. The 16–21 age group was chosen because this was the age that boys were leaving school and either going to college or starting work, 25–45 was chosen as a time when men start to settle down and may have family responsibilities and 60 plus was chosen because it is an age when men start to retire and/or think about retirement.

The researcher is female. Snowball sampling was used and the researcher was heavily reliant on the male participant's co-operation to take part and recommend others for referral interviews. Unfortunately early in the research, the chain referral for snowball sampling broke down. Consequently, a switch was made to quota sampling.

The interview schedule used open-ended questions and the interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed by the same researcher. A combination of cross-sectional and non-cross sectional indexing was used in the analysis of the data. As the data was collected it was entered into the qualitative data analysis package of NUD.IST, a software package which enables the researcher to index and retrieve data across a whole set of coded interviews. This was used mainly as a repository for the hand-indexed data and to provide a visual illustration of the emerging linkages between key themes and questions but it was also used in conjunction with non-cross sectional indexing (Mason, 1996; Silverman, 2000). This use of NUD.IST alongside non-cross sectional indexing helped to alleviate some of the inherent problems with the use of software packages; such as distorting the meanings behind the data.

The use of semi-structured depth interviews permitted flexibility and an incorporation of reflexivity; it enabled respondents to use their own terminology and gave the researcher the opportunity to be responsive to them, to remain conscious of exploitative situations, to be open about the research designs and objectives and to answer questions as fully as possible. The researcher's subjective experiences were also analysed and made clear.

The research findings

Although the accounts of the respondents in this study are personalised and nuanced, they illuminate canonical narratives around hegemonic masculinity and ways of being 'acceptably male' that are shared across accounts. Bruner (1990) uses the term 'canonical narrative' to describe how within societies stories are produced of how lives should be lived in that culture and that these are reflected in individual accounts. In this study, therefore, hegemonic masculinity is found to represent a dominant form of masculinity that influences boys' understandings of how they need to 'be' in order to be acceptably male; in this sense it provides a discursive resource with which to build and compare one's masculinity (see also Frosh *et al*, 2002). That said, individual levels of compliance and resistance to hegemonic masculinity were variable.

Three points are worthy of note; firstly, of the aforementioned features of hegemonic masculinity, the most important is that of heterosexuality in terms of respondents proving that they were not gay; secondly, outside of this the *most valued* aspect of hegemonic masculinity is that of toughness. Thirdly, the significance placed on both of these features of hegemonic masculinity is deeply embedded within the context of

bullying.⁵ Further explanation and the implications of these points will be considered below.

Bullying

In the UK the term bullying within the schooling context is used to refer to actions and/or speech which causes physical or psychological harm (Whitney and Smith, 1993). Whilst there are various definitions, most have the following in common:

'...bullying is deliberate hurtful behaviour taking the form of negative actions or comments, where there is an imbalance of power making it difficult for the subject to defend him/herself and where the behaviour is repeated' (Olweus, 1993).⁶

Although this paper draws on the first two factors, it also includes a focus on discussions of transient episodes⁷ as well as ongoing incidents of abuse; albeit distinctions between the two forms are made. This is because the respondents included both examples in their discussions of bullying and also because the paper includes a focus on resistance and in doing so shows how some episodes were transient because boys were able to resist, whereas others were on-going.

Research has suggested that school bullying is so prevalent that it can be described as a 'normal feature of everyday life' (Tyler, 2002). Results on the actual number who have been bullied at some point during their education range from 37% (Elsea, 2001) to over 80% (Fontaine, 1991). It has been suggested that approximately 10% of all students experience severe and regular bullying for some part of their school life (see also McDougall, 1999). Research involving 2,300 pupils aged 10-14 from schools across England found that 30% of children did not tell anyone that they had been bullied. This percentage was higher for boys and older children.

Bullying is considered to be even more prevalent at secondary schools and it has recently been suggested that the UK has the worst record in Europe for this.⁸ However, research has also found a greater prevalence of bullying behaviours being reported by children at primary school in the UK than previously (Arora, 1999).⁹

A recent survey by Stonewall¹⁰ which asked 1,145 young people who were lesbian, gay or bisexual about their schooling found that almost two thirds (65 per cent) had experienced direct bullying.¹¹ A further study suggested that thirty five per cent of gay

⁵ The definition of bullying here was those offered by the respondents themselves which included physical abuse or verbal abuse.

⁶ See also The Office of Children and Young People's Services whose Anti-Bullying strategy (2007) and Vaillancourt, Hymel and McDougall (2003).

⁷ Referring to individual incidents.

⁸ UK schools worst in Europe for bullying; Bullying in Secondary Schools is worse in the UK than in the rest of Europe a new British Council Survey has found (Anthea Lipsett, guardian.co.uk, Friday February 29th, 2008).

⁹ It has been suggested that this may be because it becomes less acceptable to inform staff about incidents as one grows older and/or because older students have lower expectations with regards to the way that reported bullying is dealt with (see McDougall, 1999).

¹⁰ Stonewall is a London based charity which works against discrimination against gay and lesbian people.

¹¹ McKellen: Bullying of gay pupils a 'blight' (Ben Quinn, guardian.co.uk, Sunday July 6, 2008, 02.26, BST).

pupils did not feel safe or accepted at school (see Hunt and Jensen, 2007).¹² In the same year research by Mencap found that 82% of children and young people with a learning disability had experienced bullying (Mencap, 2007). This fits with other research on bullying (Leff, 1999) which suggests that bullies seek to marginalise their victims and so seek out those that are already vulnerable in some way. As Leff (1999) has argued a child with anything saliently differently from a very strict peer norm is more vulnerable and thus has an increased risk of being bullied.

Research conducted in 2003 revealed that 54% of both primary and secondary school children thought that bullying was a 'big problem' or 'quite a big problem' in their school (Oliver and Kandappa, 2003). Despite this, children continue to engage in bullying; a research study by Katz in 2001 revealed that a third of the boys (35%) and a quarter of the girls (26%) in the study admitted that they had bullied other children 'a little' or 'a lot' (see Katz *et al.*, 2001).

It is important to recognise that all bullying, including boy on boy, girl on girl and bullying between the sexes is informed by gendered socialisation and discourses (see Rich and Evans, 2009; see Susinos, Calvo, and Rojas, 2009) and that this affects how boys and girls are bullied including the practices and forms of abuse that are involved. Some research has documented gendered differences between the bullying of boys and girls (see Chambers, Ticknell and Van Loon, 2004). It has been suggested that whilst girls are often subjected to bullying, overall it is less physical than bullying between boys and that exclusionary practices are often more subtle,¹³ albeit their effects are equally damaging (see Osler, 2006; Bright, 2005). However, it is important to recognise that girls can be subjected to physical abuse and that verbal and exclusionary bullying practices against both boys and girls is commonplace in the UK and across the globe (see Thomson and Gunter, 2006; see Eliasson, Isaksson, Laflamme, 2007).

Increases in levels of bullying can be attributed partly to the emergence of newer forms of technology which have led to increases in incidents of 'indirect' bullying. Cyber-bullying is when someone repeatedly makes fun of another person on-line or repeatedly picks on another person through emails or text messages, or uses on-line forums and postings online, intended to harm, damage, humiliate or isolate another person (see Patchin and Hinduja, 2009).¹⁴ The use of mobile phones and the internet means that incidents of bullying are no longer restricted to verbal and physical confrontations within particular physical locations and also that the audience and potential for participation are much wider and can be anonymous (Patchin and Hinduja, 2008, 2009; see Quing Li, 2006).¹⁵ Moreover, this also means that a combination of different forms of bullying can amount to the constant harassment of pupils both inside and outside the context of the school.

In 2005, Hinduja and Patchin completed a study of approximately 1,500 Internet using adolescents and found that over one-third reported being victimized online, and over 16% admitted to cyber-bullying others.¹⁶ A further study of more than 11,000 secondary

¹² School complaints to be overhauled, Balls announces parents' panels to handle grievances (Polly Curtis and Debbie Andalo guardian.co.uk Wednesday September 24 2008 13.26, BST).

¹³ Crackdown on schoolgirl bullying epidemic (Anushka Asthana, *The Observer*, Sunday January 20, 2008).

¹⁴ Hinduja and Patchin (2009) have recently updated the definition to account for cyber-bullying through the internet that occurs without actual text, such as videos being uploaded to Youtube.

¹⁵ Research has suggested that teachers have also been subjected to harassment via these mediums (see ATL Conference, 2007).

¹⁶ See also 2005 survey by the National Children's Home Charity and Tesco mobile.

school pupils from 2002–2005 which asked them how often they had received threatening text messages or e-mails showed an increase year on year (Rivers and Noret, 2006/7).¹⁷

Certainly the psychological effects upon children who have been repeatedly bullied are known to be severe. Research conducted by the NSPCC in 2000 revealed that a quarter of young adults bullied by their peers during childhood reported that they suffered long term harmful effects as a result (Cawson *et al*, 2000). Indeed in some cases of repeated bullying over time the effects can be particularly tragic resulting in pupils taking their own lives (see Marr and Field, 2001).¹⁸

Hegemonic masculinity, types and patterns of bullying

In the current study, sixteen of the thirty-two respondents recalled being bullied at some point during their time at school.¹⁹ However, it was notable that thirteen of the older men did not recall being bullied by other boys or engaging in bullying themselves.²⁰ This does not suggest that bullying did not go on during their schooling; these respondents may have forgotten incidents through the passage of time or this may have reduced their impact. Interestingly, these respondents also claimed to have known nothing of homosexuality until they were adults and this was perceived to have been a feature of the historical period in which they were growing up:

Tom (aged 70): ‘It was completely unheard of. You never heard it mentioned, nor lesbians, sort of thing. It never came to light.’

Therefore, whilst the accounts of these respondents suggested that they had constructed their identities against the ‘otherness’ of females and ‘femininity’; this had not involved the ‘otherness’ of homosexuality as had the accounts of the other respondents in the study. More recent research, to be discussed shortly, has suggested that homophobia is endemic to bullying in schools²¹ and such were the findings amongst the younger respondents in the current study. It is suggested therefore that as homophobia was less prevalent during the schooling of these older men, there may have been less rigid policing of behaviour in line with ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and homophobia and correspondingly, less bullying, or it may have been less severe. Another factor which may have contributed to less recollection of bullying was the harsh discipline from teachers which was described by most of these respondents; this was much more severe than that recalled by the younger respondents who had lived through a period of no corporal punishment in schools:

¹⁷ See also ABC News (<http://abcnews.com/>) on a survey in September 2006 prepared by Safe.Org (<http://isafe.org/>). See also 2006 survey by Harris Interactive in the USA which reported that 43% of U.S. teens had experienced some form of cyber-bullying in the last year.

¹⁸ Girl, 15, leapt to her death after ‘abuse from Facebook bullies’ (Steve Bird, *The Times*, Monday September 21 2009). Second pupil from school dies after suspected overdose (Paul Kelbie, *The Independent*, 18 June 2003; see also Megan Meier in USA).

¹⁹ Although there were forty-five respondents in the study only thirty-two recalled bullying or defined incidents as bullying.

²⁰ A few of these men recalled the odd fight or quarrel between children of approximately equal strength which is not classed as bullying (see Sharp and Smith, 1994) and they did not define it as such.

²¹ In terms of girls as well as boys (see Lees, 1986, 1993)

Seamus (aged 76): 'I hated my teacher. She was vicious. She used the cane. Have you seen the film 'Matilda?'²² My grandchildren have got it, the awful woman in that. That's what she was like.'

It may well have been that this severe treatment by teachers meant that respondents were less likely to categorize incidents with other boys as victimization and/or to recall them. Moreover, the punitive regime recalled by these older men, may have meant that there were less incidents of bullying between schoolchildren to report. Therefore, since these respondents did not discuss bullying the paper focuses on the accounts of those respondents that did, but such differences in experiences of younger and older men could be examined by future research.

Hegemonic Masculinity and bullying practices

For the remaining thirty-two respondents, hegemonic masculinity was implicated in practices of bullying in several ways; in the identification of legitimate targets, in choices to engage in bullying, and in resistance to the bullying of oneself and others.

The most fundamental way that it was implicated was in setting parameters for acceptable and unacceptable ways of 'doing boy' (see also Frosh *et al*, 2002). Acceptable ways of 'doing boy' involved the features of hegemonic masculinity identified by other researchers (Frosh *et al*, 2002; Mac An Ghail, 1994) as being components of 'popularity' including being sporty, tough, cool or a joker²³:

Kieran (aged 20): 'There was always a guy who was the star athlete. He could run, he could swim, he could play football, every single element of that physical thing. He was sports guy of the year, and he was loved and looked up to by the students, the teachers and by girls, because he was a good looking guy as well. So he kind of had everything and everyone loved him.'

Some respondents mentioned one or more of these features when describing themselves or others. It did seem that popularity involved several features of hegemonic masculinity (see also Frosh *et al*, 2002). Since this has been dealt with by other researchers it will not be focused on in any depth here, except, at a later point it will be argued that because of the issue of bullying, the concept of popularity itself is contestable.

In contrast to those features of hegemonic masculinity that were seemingly connected to acceptable masculinity and popularity, other factors could bring a boy's masculinity under suspicion for being an 'unacceptable' male and insufficiently masculine. What was common to the accounts was that the most important part of building a masculine identity at school had been proving you were not gay. The respondents had built their masculine identities against the dual 'otherness' of females and homosexuals who were associated with and represented femininity (see also Poynting and Donaldson, 2005). Therefore, many of the examples of bullying discussed can be attributed to the practice of dissociation from the binary 'other' of female which has been associated with homosexuality:

²² Seamus is referring to the feature film 'Matilda' (1996) based on the children's novel of the same name by Roald Dahl. In this film version the teacher he is referring to is played by the actress Pam Ferris.

²³ Note the last two features are not only relevant to boys (see Lyng, 2009).

'Men are engaged in an ongoing process of resisting commonly defined 'feminine' attributes to demonstrate that they are not female' (Gillon, 2007).

In this sense, therefore what boys are told not to be by their culture becomes every bit as important, if not more so, than what they are encouraged to be (see Blake, 2006). This binary process also involves the divorcing of rationality from emotion (see Poynting and Donaldson, 2005). Respondents reported that acceptable forms of emotion had included anger and jocularity²⁴ but not those which were in any way suggestive of vulnerability such as sadness or fear.

Therefore, because hegemonic masculine identities are shaped against the otherness of both females in general and homosexuals in particular, misogyny and homophobia are connected (see also Epstein, 1997) and both are central to bullying between boys. This female/gay benchmark was key to both 'in-group' and 'out-group' (see Allport, 1954) assessments of acceptable masculinity and therefore to bullying between boys: informing the choice of targets and the language used in bullying incidents including the inter-changeability of the terms 'cissy' and 'gay'. Respondents discussed how assumed gay behaviour was associated and typically conflated with femininity which assumed weakness and inferiority in gay men and in all women (see also Lees, 1986; Mac An Ghail, 1994). Given this, it comes as no surprise that effeminate boys who represented femininity were labelled as gay and repeatedly bullied. Indicators of effeminacy included 'girlish' speech and mannerisms, the playing of 'girls' games, the displaying of 'girlish' taste in music and/or the avoidance of P.E. (see also Hearn and Collinson, 1994):

Jeff (aged 37): 'It was kids at school who were obviously a bit effeminate.'

The following account comes from a respondent who was labelled as gay and repeatedly bullied on this basis:

Robbie (aged 30): 'I had lots of name calling and physical incidents. I remember one, I was sat on a bench that was open back and one of the lads behind me got a match and held it underneath my bottom, until I jumped up and my blooming trousers was alight! That sort of thing. Secondary school was a miserable time.'

Repetitive bullying of this kind could have extremely damaging effects:

Adrian (aged 29): 'We weren't too sure about one lad at school. He was picked on and tormented by a lot of boys and it really messed him up. They nearly drove him over the edge.'

Respondents also recalled how the 'taboo' nature of gayness and its association with 'femininity' meant that gay terms were used as a resource for insulting any boy because they provided the ultimate insult,²⁵

Jeff (aged 37) NM: 'It's a term of abuse really.'

²⁴ See Trickett (2009) on expressions of vulnerability in men.

²⁵ All thirty-two respondents recalled the practice of using gay terms to cuss and joke.

In this way gay terms were also used for generalised abuse against those boys who were under suspicion for being insufficiently masculine, for their lack of conformity with 'hegemonic masculinity' such as being tough, disruptive, sporty and/or cool (see also Frosh *et al*, 2002; Chambers *et al*, 2004). These boys included those who had a geeky appearance, wearing glasses or braces, those that were non-sporty and/or liked schoolwork and were articulate. Although these respondents had not been permanently labelled as 'gay' they were regularly subjected to gay abuse (see also Frosh *et al*, 2002):²⁶

James (aged 25): 'I got called gay sometimes. I got verbal abuse because I liked art.'

Stephen (aged 37): 'I wasn't very fashionable. My hair wasn't styled well. I wore glasses. I was shy and awkward, a bit gawky.'²⁷

In addition to the aforementioned examples of boys that were bullied through insufficient compliance with acceptable features of hegemonic masculinity, there were further examples of bullying based on differences such as speech, appearance and/or origin:²⁸

Andy (aged 31): 'My sister has Down's Syndrome and I was dragged through the dirt with that. The other kids used to taunt me, shout 'Mongol' and stuff. One kid started what was effectively, eighteen months of abuse. You'd kick a ball wrong and it was 'Oh, it's 'cos your sister's a mong.'

Bullying based these differences often began within the context of 'rites of passage' bullying. This was a very common experience and appeared to take two forms; the first example included the bullying and/or challenging of new boys; i.e. those that had started a new school later than the official entry age. Being new meant that they were subjected to scrutiny:²⁹

Danny (aged 20): 'When I first arrived from Ireland I was treated with suspicion. People couldn't understand what I was saying because of my accent. I was different to them, there wasn't anyone else who was Irish there and I was taunted at first.'

Rites of passage bullying also involved the bullying of younger boys by more senior boys:³⁰

Brian (aged 32): 'There were older bullies. I mean when you join the seniors it's like head down the loo job isn't it? See the blue goldfish, that happened to me a couple of times and it happened to another lad in my class.'

²⁶ Seven respondents recalled having this kind of abuse.

²⁷ In line with findings from recent research on bullying, sometimes these practices were also linked to fashion and the commercialism of designer brands, as noted by Frosh *et al* (2002) there were particular brands that were acceptable markers of style. See 'Brand new bullying in fashion' (Natasha Gilbert, *The Guardian*, Monday 11th August 2008).

²⁸ Ten respondents recalled such bullying.

²⁹ Six respondents recalled this.

³⁰ Fourteen respondents recalled being subjected to such incidents.

Jeff (aged 37): 'I was hung out of the second storey of a building by my feet by older boys. I have had my head flushed down the toilet.'

The bullying of younger boys and/or new boys has also been documented within the boarding school context by Poynting and Donaldson (2005) who have pointed to how new boys bore the brunt of the formal school system and endured abusive treatment at the hands of 'prefects'; such treatment included their use as servants for older boys, often referred as 'fagging'.³¹

In the current study, these examples of 'rites of passage' bullying appeared to be connected to hegemonic masculinity in that boys that were better established in terms of being tougher and/or older were proving their dominance; within this context, for those on the receiving end, proof of being able to cope with it was taken as evidence of 'true' maleness. It seemed therefore that differences such as origin, speech, race and appearance were often the basis on which to initiate tests of masculinity. As will be shown shortly, because of this, those boys that rose to the challenge were sometimes able to resist further bullying.

Finally, respondents who had demonstrated compliance with some aspects of hegemonic masculinity but who were also associated with other characteristics, were often in contradictory positions (see also Frosh *et al*, 2002) and were sometimes bullied. For example, Ian played football and cricket but reflected that he had been 'unpopular':

Ian (aged 29) NM: 'I was bullied. I think it was partly to do with my stammer, just like a chicken and egg thing. At primary school, it was an Irish Catholic school, I always ended up feeling like I was the posh kid 'cos my mom and dad were deemed English and lived in a nice house and then when I went to secondary grammar school, I felt like the working class kid 'cos every one else was like really middle class. I got sent to Coventry, when I was about 13 or 14 [soft laugh]. They just didn't like me. I had a couple of friends, but even by them I felt tolerated. I wasn't very popular.'

Another respondent Kieran had been considered as a swot and not cool or fashionable but like the aforementioned respondent had been popular with girls. This ambiguity around hegemonic masculinity will be considered in more detail in the section on resistance, where it will be shown that these respondents were not able to resist being bullied.³²

Bullying: perpetrators

Hegemonic masculinity was also important to patterns of engagement with bullying and/or resistance to it. The level of engagement with bullying was variable; of the thirty-two respondents, twenty-one admitted engaging in the bullying of others. There appeared to be differences between those boys that engaged in bullying and those that did not. With regards to the bullying of effeminate boys, it seemed that some

³¹ This involved junior boys doing 'housework' for older boys in a peculiar mimicry of domestic service in which the work of servants would be undertaken by young boys for older boys (Poynting and Donaldson, 2005, p336). The choice of term for this practice is interesting in that it can be associated with that of 'fag' a slang term for a homosexual man.

³² Six respondents.

respondents reflected that they had chosen to join in because of peer pressure and also because it was considered to be an accepted practice:

Kieran (aged 20): 'If people thought that you were gay, you must have gone through hell. Even I'm guilty of saying things. I can remember that I would sometimes do it as well.'

Some respondents also reflected that bullying others had provided them with the opportunity to affirm their own masculinities whilst shifting any negative focus onto others (see also Poynting and Donaldson, 2005):

Dave (aged 28) NM: 'To be honest you also hope that the focus will be on those that you are calling names and not on you.'

Of the twenty-one respondents who admitted bullying others, twelve had previously been bullied themselves.³³ This meant that victimisation was sometimes cyclical in that those who had been bullied would start to bully others and therefore victims often became perpetrators:

Trevor (aged 36): 'But it [the bullying] sort of had an opposite effect, 'cos I was a bit of a bugger then, and I used to bully other kids a bit then as well, calling 'em gay and that and pushing them around.'

Of course, given the small sample involved it is impossible to say that bullying breeds bullying, indeed there is always the matter of choice. In terms of the choices made about whether to engage in bullying or to desist what appeared to be important was the weight afforded to different factors. The use of hegemonic resistance appeared to be relevant for some boys that had been bullied but had also bullied others. In other words, it appeared that once they had demonstrated an association with toughness, they were keen to maintain this standing. It did not follow however that these respondents did not feel empathy for other boys; indeed, given their own experiences they were well placed to empathise but this was outweighed by their desire for survival which appeared to be the overriding factor in their choices to engage with abuse rather than to challenge it:

Jeff (aged 37): 'I was bullied at school and to a certain extent I became a bit of a bully. I'm not proud of it but you do.'

The bullying of others therefore became both a vehicle for demonstrating toughness and also for preventing the resurrection of negative attention upon themselves by deflecting it upon others (see also Poynting and Donaldson, 2005). Arguably, therefore the bullying of others became a means of invoking 'hegemonic resistance' to the bullying of oneself; which will now be discussed.

However, some respondents reflected on how they felt remorseful over their involvement with the bullying of other boys and wished that they had reflected on their behaviour at the time and refused to join in:

Ian (aged 29) NM: 'I dunno why I did it. You don't understand it as a child do you, unless somebody sits you down and gets you to examine

³³ A recent study conducted by the Institute of Education in London, has also found that many bullies have been bullied themselves and suggests that the issue of bullying is more complex than some people believe it to be. Study finds bullies are the bullied too (Dan Bloom, guardian.co.uk, August 29, 2008, 11:13 BST).

it, what you're saying and why you're saying it. You just say it 'cos everyone else says it. It's like a peer pressure thing'

Resistance to bullying of oneself

Patterns of resistance to bullying were linked to the features of acceptable and non-acceptable masculinities discussed earlier and this meant that some types of bullying were repetitive and difficult to overcome whilst others were easier to overcome and therefore, could be transient. The repetitive nature of the bullying of effeminate boys was recalled by all of the respondents and the consequences of this type of bullying were often severe (see also Poynting and Donaldson, 2005):

Adrian (aged 29): 'We weren't too sure about one lad at school. He was picked on and tormented by a lot of boys and it really messed him up. They nearly drove him over the edge'

Trevor (aged 36): 'My brother got picked on because he was very effeminate. He had loads of abuse. They used to pick on him all the time. He got chased home from school once and wet himself on the way, he was that frightened.'

The bullying of respondents whose masculinities had been questioned for not conforming sufficiently to hegemonic masculinity also tended to be on-going; albeit that this was not as severe and persistent as the bullying of effeminate boys; and in one case the bullying was over time but was intermittent. However, bullying based on perceived 'difference' was sometimes transient and sometimes ongoing. It appeared that it could be transient when it occurred within the context of rites of passage bullying which often testing the masculinity of new boys, which some respondents managed to overcome whilst others did not.

The most effective strategy to deal with the bullying of oneself was termed 'hegemonic resistance' so termed because it involved invoking key aspects of hegemonic masculinity by demonstrating toughness and competence in sport:

Jeff (aged 37): 'There was a lot of bullying that went on. I don't agree with bullying but there's two ways that you handle it, you either cower in a corner or you stand up to it and that builds character and you learn things.'

Ricky (aged 19): 'When he tried to hit me again, I did hit him and then after that he never did anything to me again. In fact he was one of my good mates through junior school. I was amazed actually.'

Respondents who had successfully employed hegemonic resistance appeared to have drawn on both strategies:³⁴

Jeff (aged 37): 'On my first day, I was confronted by every black person in the school. They came up to me and warned me that if I stood out of line then they would sort me out, just because I was from South Africa. I stood up to the biggest guy who was obviously the leader, as it happens I was good at sport. The leader of the black kids,

³⁴ Seven respondents.

he was like the record holder for the school in the hundred metres and I beat him.'

Importantly, by employing hegemonic resistance, these respondents had managed to re-negotiate their masculine identities from a 'different' newcomer to an accepted boy; the result being that the label of 'victim' was resisted, some boys had befriended them and others had left them alone and stopped bullying them:

Danny (aged 20): 'I was left alone after that and I never had any more trouble.'

Interestingly, it appeared that hegemonic resistance could also be invoked successfully on behalf of others, even those labelled as gay. For example, one respondent had stood up for his effeminate brother against other boys although he had personally subjected him to bullying:

Trevor (aged 36): 'He used to talk like a girl and that, and it used to annoy me, so I used to hit him. But I wouldn't have him bullied at school, it was OK for me to do it but if anybody else did it at school, they used to get a slap, definitely. And then when I started hanging out with the tougher kids, we had our own group and if anyone messed with anyone in the group, the whole group would sort em out. If anyone picked on him, then I'd dive in and then the other boys would. So then it was like, 'well, we better not pick on him, sort of thing. Everybody used to protect him, then.'

This provides an example of what can happen when tough boys choose to defend effeminate boys. In contrast, there was an unsuccessful case of 'hegemonic resistance'; the respondent in question reported that he had been bullied by three brothers whilst at school, and despite attempting to fight back, he had continued to be bullied until he had left. However, the family connection between the bullies may have been relevant here together with a lack of association with other tough boys. This respondent also reported that he had been friendly with an effeminate boy. This example provides a useful contrast to the previous successful example of hegemonic resistance where an effeminate boy had resisted bullying because of his association with tough boys; conversely for this respondent it may have been his association with a 'gay' boy which thwarted his attempts at hegemonic resistance.

Other respondents³⁵ who had neither fought back nor been associated with tough boys had not prevented their victimisation and, on reflection, they suggested that this had meant that the bullying had continued:

Ian (aged 29): 'I never fought back and I should have done and it ended up just going on and on.'

Kieran (aged 20): 'I was tall but skinny. I wasn't sporty or physical in any way and I wasn't into fighting .so I just never fancied having a go, not physically and I just used to put up with the abuse.'

Interestingly, the last two respondents, had experienced episodes of bullying since primary school because of their perceived 'difference' and continued to be bullied

³⁵ Six respondents.

throughout their time at school, despite being popular with girls, and for one also good at sport. Having a girlfriend had arguably opened up a 'discursive space' (Connell, 1995) for these boys and had potentially provided an opportunity for 'hegemonic resistance' to their bullying; but, despite this, their girlfriends were not taken as symbols of hegemonic status:

Kieran (aged 20): 'I always went out with the best looking girl and everyone was like, we saw her with her ex-boyfriend. Just trying to break it up really. It's not 'Give us your pocket money' type of bullying but it is hurtful. It's jealousy that's all I'd say it was because some guys were always playing football, were very sporty and recreational but I wasn't, and I had boys say to me 'How do you do it?' and I was just like 'I dunno'. I think that if you're on that same wavelength with someone at that age and if girls see you as not trying to have that whole 'macho' image and being a bit more sensitive they find it attractive, but you did get a lot of grief, backlash.'

On reflection these respondents discuss their ambiguity around masculinity. Kieran suggests that being 'truly' male did not make you popular with the girls. He also puts the attitude of other boys towards him down, in part, to their jealousy and points to how they could not understand why he was popular with good looking and popular girls despite subverting the 'true male' image.

As well as being popular with girls, Ian was also good at sport, but this did not prevent him from being unpopular because, as was shown earlier, he was considered to be 'different' in other ways as he acknowledges:

Ian (aged 29): 'I enjoyed sport. I played cricket and I played football as well for a football team but I never fitted in.'

For both boys, therefore, their girlfriends and popularity with girls were used *against* them in episodes of bullying and taunting; for Kieran, his confidence in his relationship with his girlfriend was undermined by rumours of her supposed infidelity and reminders of her sexual appeal to other boys, whilst for Ian, it was the ridicule over his lack of sexual experience:

Ian (aged 29): 'I was going out with a girl when I was about sixteen but she was an Italian Catholic and wouldn't let me get near her. So, all of the other boys were losing their virginity and I wasn't actually having sex. Boys realised that I wasn't and it became a thing to take the piss out of, and then there were a group of lads who decided that they were gonna write horrible things about my girlfriend to get at me.'

In this example, therefore, it was the 'virginity' of the respondent that was used to close the discursive space and reaffirm his 'unpopularity':³⁶

Ian (aged 29): 'It became just another thing to use against me, to remind me of my place'

From these examples it would appear that it was the issue of having sex that was important rather than having an attractive girlfriend. Certainly, having a girlfriend in

³⁶ See conclusion for why this is arguably a contested term.

itself did not provide such boys with a means of preventing bullying by establishing hegemonic resistance but simply provided another way for boys to continue their bullying. The issue of relationships with girls and the effects on bullying between boys requires closer examination by future research.³⁷

Resistance to bullying: examples of non-hegemonic resistance to the bullying of oneself and others

There were different types of resistance to hegemonic masculinity and to bullying; some of it was private whilst some of it was public. Non-hegemonic resistance took several forms including deflecting attention, the setting of boundaries, 'being ordinary' and being sympathetic to the plight of others. In terms of the non-hegemonic resistance to the bullying of oneself there were several strategies, mostly involving avoidance or deflection of unwanted attention. Thirteen respondents described themselves as 'ordinary':

Simon (aged 20): 'There was your in-group, there was the group that always got the piss taken out of them, then there was your ordinary group that no-one really bothered. I was never in a group where all the tough guys were hanging out and stuff, winding up the teachers and going to fight boys at other schools and I was never in the group where I was in Maths Club after school, anything like that. I was in the ordinary type of group.'

Such ordinariness was a way of avoiding unwanted attention and was often connected to keeping a low profile or being invisible. This involved keeping your head down, and managing your lack of compliance with key features of hegemonic masculinity in a way that was not too conspicuous:

Richard (aged 17): 'You had to be careful what you did and said at school, to avoid being singled out by the hard knocks.'

Adrian (aged 29): 'You try to remain inconspicuous'

Part of remaining inconspicuous also involved choosing who to 'hang out with' as some respondents reflected that they had not wanted to attract the wrong type of attention by hanging out with those who might draw negative attention:

Woody (aged 30): 'You have to watch who you hang out with. I mean no-one in my group was really special or anything but no-one was too dodgy either. We were just sort of average.'

Lee (aged 20): 'I hung out with the sort of kids that were respected and that gives you some status cos other lads look at you in the same way'

It also required the avoidance of any display of inappropriate emotion which might show vulnerability; indeed, all of the respondents had 'policed' their own behaviour in this respect:

³⁷ Whilst there is some research on gendered harassment (see Robinson, 2005) and sex talk between boys and girls (see Chambers et al, 2004) there is little available on the implications of relationships with girls on friendships and bullying practices between boys.

Dean (aged 34): 'Crying was out. You just didn't do it. It was taboo.'

Simon (aged 20): 'You couldn't cry. It was just treated like that was for girls. Boys were expected to hold it together, you couldn't show vulnerability.'

This issue of not showing inappropriate emotion was part of the ideology of hegemonic masculinity discussed earlier, which was implicated in the processes of proving maleness including distancing oneself from supposed 'femininity' (see also Poynting and Donaldson, 2005).

A further aspect of not attracting attention was not to publicly challenge or confront tough boys. Despite this, respondents reflected on how they had not really liked such boys and recalled how they had disparaged them in private and/or amongst their own friends:

Stephen (aged 37): 'You wouldn't want to be friends with the tough kids. They just weren't my type. Most people found them dull, playing up in lessons and all that. It was tedious really, but you didn't say anything.'

In terms of resistance to the bullying of others, seven respondents had actively refrained from bullying other boys. There were differences between these respondents and those that had engaged in bullying. Resisters appeared to have accorded more weight to the factor of empathy, had been more tolerant, less susceptible to peer pressure and willing to make personal judgments based on their own perceptions of the boy in question. They had also been more reflective at the time about key aspects of hegemonic masculinity, such as toughness and homophobia, and more willing to resist them.

Such resistance took private, semi-private and public forms. For example, in the following quotation, Kelvin, a 'resister' to bullying, expresses his 'private' respect for a boy who is willing to publicly challenge a conventional hegemonic norm by crying in public. Kelvin admits that he also privately questions the validity of this 'norm', although he still conforms to it publicly:

Kelvin (aged 16): 'I've got a friend at school that like, if he's hurt himself, he'll cry. People take the mick, but in a way, I sort of respect him because I mean he lets people see him like that.'

Woody (aged 30): 'One kid on our class, he got picked on quite badly but I felt sorry for him.'

Kelvin and another respondent, Kieran, admitted how they had realised that letting such feelings out was healthy and that bottling them up was unhealthy, although they did not let such feelings out, at least not publicly.

Some of this resistance was semi-public i.e. in public but outside of the attention of tough boys. These respondents stated that they had not disliked effeminate or other bullied boys and had felt sorry for them, sometimes making friendly overtures towards them in the corridors of school or outside the grounds:

Kyle (aged 19): 'I used to see him around and stuff and I just like said 'Hello' to him, cos he was alright as well, he was still alright to me. Even though he was a bit funny.'

Sid (aged 60): 'I knew a lad like that, other boys picked on him but I never did. I liked him. We used to walk home from school together.'

Adrian (aged 29): 'One kid got loads of abuse at school cos he was effeminate, but I liked him. I used to sit next to him on the train on the way home from school.'

However, examples of public resistance i.e. openly defending another boy and publicly questioning hegemonic values were rarer:

Richard (aged 17): 'The other lads in our year used to constantly have a go at one lad. He wasn't macho, he was quiet and shy and gentle he never used to bother anyone he was skinny and a bit girlish but I never used to bother him. Sometimes I used to tell my mates to lay off.'

In the following quote the respondent recalls his choice to verbally defend an effeminate boy which demonstrates his contempt for the behaviour of the bullies by ridiculing their behaviour and subverting the hegemonic norm of toughness to which they subscribe:

Vincent (aged 28): 'One kid in our class, he got picked on quite badly and one of my friends used to pick on him as well and I remember the younger kids coming up and saying 'Oh, we beat up a kid in a higher grade' and then they said it was him and I turned around and said 'Oh yeah, well that's not much of a contest is it really?'

However, it is notable that these examples of public resistance involved the friends of the respondents and/or younger boys. Therefore, whilst these respondents would tell their own friends to leave the boy alone and/or younger boys, they did not challenge tough boys of their own age or older outside their own social circles.

Notwithstanding, these examples demonstrate two things, firstly, that those who were labelled as gay were not disliked and ridiculed by all boys and secondly, that these respondents were strong individuals who made choices based on their own judgements, demonstrating both empathy and the ability to resist both hegemonic masculinity and peer pressure. Therefore, as documented in this research and earlier studies, hegemonic masculinity is still a dominant ideology and implicated in practices in the playground but it is important to keep in mind that there is scope for change.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that the enduring ideology of hegemonic masculinity in the Westernised school playground is sustained by bullying and that accordingly the most important features of hegemonic masculinity are homophobia and toughness because these are the primary factors in patterns of bullying and resistance, which means that certain types of bullying are harder to overcome than others.

However, there are two important points to retain; firstly, that the factor of toughness is valued for self-preservation and yet boys do not always like or respect those that are tough. Secondly, boys are not always privately hostile to those who are considered to be the antithesis of toughness and acceptable masculinity. These points mean that key

components of hegemonic masculinity are not always valued and that the reality of popularity of such boys at school may need to be reassessed; which may prove useful in designing anti-bullying initiatives.

A fundamental question for researchers now on boys and schooling is how can change be achieved? Firstly, it must be noted that boy's continued engagement with negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity is, in part, driven by bullying and importantly, that both are part of wider cultural expectations which are implicated in the socialisation of boys in Westernised societies. Secondly, we must learn from examples of resistance to hegemonic masculinity in all its forms. This study, has demonstrated that boys and men can present softer masculinities within particular contexts (see also Trickett, 2009; de Visser, 2009), and that they are more likely to express anxieties (and expose vulnerability) when talking to an adult interviewer, for example, rather than in a peer group setting (see also Walker and Kushner, 1997; Wight, 1994; Pattman, 1991).³⁸ Certainly more qualitative and reflective work with boys within supportive research settings could help to provide important insights into the choices that they make and also highlight possibilities for change.

As explained by Frosh *et al* (2002), a real danger is that research on boys and schooling has become so preoccupied with the ways that boys aggressively and competitively assert themselves that it fails to acknowledge the possibilities presented by softer, less binary masculine identities, except as subordinate masculinities in opposition to which hegemonic masculinities are always enacted.

The real challenge therefore is how to provide boys with credible alternative *ways of being male* and how to provide them with more opportunities to engage positively with wider aspects of male identity.

What is it exactly about 'men as men' that encourages their negative behaviour towards others and often, themselves? Why is it that a significant proportion of young men embrace violent forms of masculinity over others and what is it about our society that makes these versions attractive? These questions have long been strangely avoided. Although the British Government has highlighted recent gun and knife crime and bullying as issues to be tackled, they, overall, fail to engage significantly with the issue of masculinity, bullying and serious violence in society.

The challenge for government and policymakers therefore is to centre a consideration of bullying and the development of initiatives to tackle it within the context of masculinities. Until there is such an engagement policy initiatives³⁹ will not be 'gendered' and therefore will fail to be as effective as they might in tackling the problems.⁴⁰ To this end, future research needs to place more emphasis on: i) the choices boys make when interacting with discourses around masculinities; ii) the weight afforded to the different factors in their identities, and iii) degrees of engagement and resistance to hegemonic masculinity. Fundamentally, however, in questioning why boys engage in bullying practices around masculinity and what they achieve through

³⁸ Other studies have shown how boys are able to be 'softer' and less competitive when with their girlfriends rather than their male friends (Walker and Kushner, 1997).

³⁹ Research on anti-bullying initiatives include Colvin *et al* (1998), Cowie *et al* (2008), Merrell *et al* (2008), Minton and O'Moore (2008), Randall (1990), Vaillancourt *et al* (2003) and Souter and McKenzie (2000).

⁴⁰ This is not to suggest that policy approaches which do not engage with masculinity but which focus on other factors i.e. poverty, social exclusion and gang culture will fail to have any impact but that the success will be more modest than approaches which full engage with the issue of masculinity.

doing so; there is a requirement also to focus upon personal, psychological issues impacting upon the behaviour of bullies and the sorts of qualitative research referred to earlier could help to address such issues and also the controversy about the lack of subjectivity in many studies on hegemonic masculinity.

Therefore, a consideration of bullying and abusive behaviour between men and boys needs to be centred within the subjective sociological and psychological process that all men share – the process of becoming and proving they are male.⁴¹ This process is centrally occupied with the connected issues of disambiguation and anxiety reduction i.e. the management and amelioration of a raft of culturally initiated but profound and personally embedded (or embodied) anxieties (see Blake, 2006).

Men and boys define their masculinity against their binary other i.e. actual females, but also with regard to evaluation by other males. This is especially marked at some stages in the life course of boyhood and adolescence, because this is the most fundamental stage in development where boys are trying to gain a tentative foothold on being male within an institutionalised setting. This helps to explain why within the playground anything ‘girlish’ is vilified, why adolescent girls are objectified as sexual objects rather than as human beings and the ubiquity of homophobia.

A view of men as hidden and defended subjects (see Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) is extremely important when examining both bullying and more serious forms of violence such as gun and knife crime. Abusive behaviour provides men with i) an acceptable way of being male which diverts attention away from their ‘vulnerable’ hidden selves. In this sense therefore, violence and bullying are the products of defensive psyches; of defended males manifested in the apocryphal ‘attack is the best form of defence strategy’ (see Blake, 2006). And on this note, however, it is necessary also to remain mindful of the social factors including cultural incentives that present such images of masculinity, inform child rearing practices (Chodorow, 1989), and reward boys for behaving aggressively, thereby encouraging them to form their masculinity in a binary way shunning, publicly at least, any suggestions of ambiguity.

It needs to be recognised that within contemporary Westernised societies the psychological and cultural processes involved in becoming men still result in boys becoming disassociated from their very selves. Jackson (1990) documented how he learned to conceal his emotional life and survived schooling by publicly engaging with a masculinity that ‘effectively stole away my emotional self’.

This kind of analysis can help to explain why boys engage in the sorts of abusive behaviour that they do; including bullying at school and violence generally both of which often involve dissociation from one’s emotions including desensitising to the emotions and plights of others.

Whilst in recent years there have been some cultural shifts in ideas about masculinity; these have remained extremely limited in their scope. Only recently has it become more acceptable for men to demonstrate emotions other than anger, but these ideas have been most prevalent within the particular context of fatherhood (see Vuori, 2009) and even here there are still problems.⁴² It is also interesting to note that⁴³ these ideas about

⁴¹ See Blake (2006) on the need for a psycho-social approach to the study of masculinities.

⁴² Greenwich council has experienced problems getting young men to attend ante-natal and parenting classes because of gang culture around postcodes in the area (Marc Jacobs, Fathers Outreach Worker, 22 February 2009).

masculinity have not filtered down to many younger men or to interactions between boys in the playground and this feeds into the continued complicity of schoolboys with tough and abusive forms of masculinity. Therefore, research on masculinity in other areas where men are permitted to demonstrate caring behaviour⁴⁴ can help to inform work on bullying. Certainly, future researchers need to pose such questions and consider how they may be answered and how anti-bullying programmes and wider anti-violence initiatives can incorporate such knowledge. In the current study, there was some evidence of individual respondents as boys recognising such ‘ambiguity’ in them and in others; but rarely making this public, because of the pervasive culture of bullying.

At present, there has been little consideration on how practical policy initiatives can be developed from research on boys and schooling. However, just as Government ministers and criminologists can no longer ignore the issue of masculinity nor can schools; for violence between boys and young men is very much influenced by a culture of masculinity which begins when they are very young.

Schools are key sites where issues around abusive forms of masculinity including later criminal manifestations can be tackled. Whilst the British Government is currently committed to the idea of teaching citizenship, the curriculum barely touches on the issue of gender and masculinities. This is a serious omission because notions of masculinity are often at odds with citizenship and the consideration of others.

In practical terms, boys need to be given more information and assistance when making choices about masculine identities and how to interact with others. In order to change and expand existing definitions of masculinity for boys, there is a need to debunk the myths about gayness and its assumed associations with femininity, to help boys to recognise that feelings other than anger are not just feminine but human, and also to make public reflections on male behaviour. This may be helped by more positive media coverage of boys rather than the popular ‘demonising’ portrayal of boys and young men as hooligans.⁴⁵ Investment in more recreational facilities and diversionary programmes for young people generally particularly in disadvantaged areas is needed.

There is a need also for some provision of incentives for desistance from abusive behaviour; although there were a few examples here of public resistance to negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity the majority of resistance was private, but there is a need to support boys in order to make it public. The development of initiatives to help boys become more comfortable and less defensive in their masculine identities needs to involve men; primary schooling in particular is female dominated. This is not to subscribe to the view that schooling is ‘feminised’ but rather, in contrast, to argue that men are needed to help expose the myths around gayness and femininity which fuel bullying practices.

Workshops on ‘What it means to be a Boy or a Man’ could also be introduced at school; these might involve men and older adolescents interacting with schoolboys and sharing

⁴³ In terms of the increased involvement of some men with their children, for instance. Although some research has questioned the extent of practical changes in men’s involvement in childcare and domestic tasks (see Ransom, 2001).

⁴⁴ Such as nursing professions for example.

⁴⁵ For a rare example of positive media discussion of boys and young men see ‘Teen Spirit: The secret life of Britain’s teenage boys’ (Simon Hattenstone, *The Guardian*, 10th October 2009). ‘Not yobs but loving, maligned boys – survey finds’: Research shows teenagers feel wrongly demonised (Simon Hattenstone, *The Guardian*, 10th October 2009).

their experiences around masculinity as men and boys; both good and bad.⁴⁶ Certainly, the reflections of adult men, as here, who have been through the process of becoming an adult male and grappled with the contradictions around masculinity, are informative. Such research could help to inform work on all of the aforementioned issues including policy approaches to boys and bullying. Initiatives which have involved adult men who have 'gone straight' by breaking away from a former life of crime 'have proved helpful in work with some young men at risk of gang violence.'⁴⁷ Critically, however, what is needed is thoughtful and long-term engagement sustained by financial investment rather than merely tokenistic measures.

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⁴⁶ Some recent initiatives on gang related crime have included intelligence from gang members. Police launch anti-gang strategy (BBC News Channel, 10 February 2006, 13:42 GMT). Research challenges government plans to clamp down on knife crime (The Community and Youth Workers Union, Wednesday, July 16, 2008).

⁴⁷ Croydon gang culture school lessons trial ends (Harry Miller, *Local Guardian*, 13 February 2009). Former gang member leads Concord anti-gang efforts (Robert Salonga, *Oakland Tribune*, July 26th 2008).

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