

**Rethinking Masculinities
and Young Age:
Primary school students
constructing gender**

Clare Bartholomaeus

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Gender, Work and Social Inquiry (School of Social Sciences)
and Politics (School of History and Politics),
The University of Adelaide**

May 2012

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Key to Transcriptions

/	a speaker is interrupted by another speaker
-	a speaker interrupts her/himself
...	brief pause
[inaudible]	inaudible
[comment]	comments added in for clarity
(laughs)	other sounds made (such as laughter)
[...]	talk is edited out

Abstract

Questions are seldom asked about whether Connell's influential masculinities framework may be entirely applicable to young people. In particular, young age is rarely considered as a potential barrier to hegemonic masculinity. Attention to the intersection of masculinities/gender and age is crucial to understanding young people's gender constructions, and illuminating the limits age presents to accessing particular gender discourses. This thesis offers a focused consideration of masculinities in young age, drawing on empirical research in two South Australian co-educational primary schools, comparing classes of students aged 6-7 years old and 11-13 years old. The views of boys, girls, teachers, and parents are all included to provide a broad understanding of gender in students' lives.

Connell's framework has identified that gender is produced hierarchically, and that hegemonic masculinity is privileged over other masculinities and all femininities which ensures men's privilege (as a group) over women (as a group). Drawing on Foucault's notion of discourse, this thesis considers the usefulness of reframing hegemonic masculinity as a *discourse* of hegemonic masculinity. This approach was used to conceptualise how, while in the research participants endorsed practices relating to a particular version of masculinity, boys expressed plural and fluid gender practices. As a result of their young age, boys were denied full access to physicality and sexuality, which are often viewed as key to hegemonic masculinity. Instead, the participants constructed a discourse of hegemonic masculinity largely around sport, an activity which many boys had access to and could practise. A discourse of idealised femininity was mainly defined in terms of appearance, and helped to uphold the overall privileging of masculinities.

This thesis highlights how young age exacerbates the incoherence and diversity of gender constructions, and explores how, while different gender practices may be subordinated, they can sometimes be combined with or challenging to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The strength of a hierarchical arrangement of practices relating to masculinities is also explored. The importance of considering masculinities within the broader gender context is illuminated by an examination of gender relations, and the participants' understandings of gender privilege, discrimination, and equality. This thesis demonstrates the ways in which young age impacts on gender constructions and offers a more nuanced way for theorising the intersection of age and gender.

Declaration

I, Clare Bartholomaeus, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Parts of Chapter One initially appeared in:

- Bartholomaeus, Clare (2009) "I'm not allowed wrestling stuff": The difficult fit between hegemonic masculinity and junior primary school boys', in *GEXcel Work in Progress Report Volume VI, GEXcel Theme 2: Deconstructing the Hegemony of Men and Masculinities*, Alp Biricik and Jeff Hearn (eds.), Linköping University, Sweden, pp. 201-208.
- Bartholomaeus, Clare (forthcoming) "I'm not allowed wrestling stuff": Hegemonic masculinity and primary school boys', *Journal of Sociology*.

Parts of Chapter Three initially appeared in:

- Bartholomaeus, Clare (2011) 'What it Means to be "Manly": Gender, Sport, and Primary School Students', *Outskirts: feminisms along the edge*, 24.

Clare Bartholomaeus

Date

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the participants involved in the research. I am grateful to the head of junior school and principal for allowing me to conduct research in their schools, and to the class teachers for letting me into their classrooms and for being willing to be interviewed. Thank you also to the mothers who volunteered to participate in interviews. Most importantly, a big thank you to all of the students who were involved in the research.

Thank you to my thesis supervisors Associate Professor Chris Beasley, Professor Emerita Chilla Bulbeck, and Dr Susan Oakley, for providing me with support, feedback, and confidence that my topic and arguments were worthwhile.

Thank you to the GWSI and Politics departments. Completing my PhD was assisted in various ways by staff and students from both departments. In particular, thanks to Dr Kathie Muir, Professor Margaret Allen, Dr Anna Szorenyi, Dr Megan Warin, Dr Margie Ripper, Dr Pam Papadelos, and Dr Kate Cadman. Thanks also to Dr Angelique Bletsas for our theory discussions and her general PhD advice. I also appreciate Sarah Hoggard and Ryan Cortazzo for all of their administrative and technical support, and Helen Attar and Marg Hosking for their library assistance. Thanks to fellow PhD students in both disciplines. From GWSI thanks particularly to Gabriella Zizzo, Kirsty Whitman, Jillian Schedneck, Dr Penelope Eate, Dr Pauline McLoughlin, Dr Toni Delany, Ruthie O'Reilly, Kanchana Bulumulle, Tom Cole, and Tara Bates. A special thanks also to Margie Charlesworth and Sam Williams for their friendship and proofreading efforts. Thanks to my History and Politics friends Jessie Edwards, Dana Papuc, Kieran McCarron, Elspeth Grant, Nicole Berry, and Rong Fan for their support and our 'sanity lunches'.

I have also gained a great deal from discussing my research with others at conferences and via email exchanges. Thanks especially to Janet Whitten for sharing sources with me.

I am grateful to everyone who has helped in some way with my thesis. A special thanks to Emma, Eleanor, Ciara, and Jasmine for their feedback on the student activities, and for their insights into the worlds of young people. Thank you also to Susan Ferguson for allowing me to practise a parent/teacher interview. I also appreciate the people who have read various forms of my thesis, particularly Andrew and Amy who both proofread the full thesis.

Thank you to all of my family for their support, especially my parents and brother Stefan. Thanks also to my friends, particularly Allana, Amy, Annabel, Steph, and Tamsyn, for providing me with much needed distractions from my thesis.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support I have received from the Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) scholarship, GWSI Postgraduate Funds, Postgraduate Allowance from the School of History and Politics, the Karen Halley Fund, and the HUMSS HDR Publications Support Scheme.

INTRODUCTION

Intersections of Age and Gender

Whereas current feminist theory has worked hard to incorporate nuanced understandings of racialized differences and those of sexual orientation, however, it has not seen age as so important a category, a failing that I suggest requires remedy.

(Gardiner 2002, 93)

Age represents the dimension of time and the life cycle and shows even more clearly than other social divisions how categories and their boundaries are not fixed and how their social and political meanings can vary in different historical contexts as well as being continually challenged and restructured both individually and socially.

(Yuval-Davis 2006, 201)

The fact that age is always present in studies of children and young people does not mean it has been adequately *theorised*. Theoretical explorations of age have advanced little since researchers moved away from the simplistic theories of sex role socialisation in which children are viewed as passively learning gender by imitating those around them. This thesis focuses on how gender is constructed and understood in young age, with a particular focus on masculinities, drawing on empirical research in two co-educational primary schools with students aged 6-7 years old and 11-13 years old. In masculinity studies the main theoretical frameworks appear adult-centric, and even those writers researching young people often fail to theorise how gender and age intersect.

Within feminist writing, it has increasingly been acknowledged that it is important to consider how gender intersects with practices of social class, 'race', ethnicity, sexuality, and able-bodiedness (see, for example, Davis 2008; Lykke 2010; Ray 2006, 460-461; Stacey 2006, 480).¹ While feminist writing pays attention to the interweaving of gender and these other factors (to differing degrees), age has been largely overlooked. Age is

¹ Coining the term 'intersectionality', Crenshaw (1989) points out that previously 'Blacks' and 'women' were both written about, but this was actually about Black men and white women. Thus, the intersection of 'Blacks' and 'women'—that is, Black women—was largely neglected. She argued for the need to go beyond single-axis frameworks to consider the intersectionality of different factors.

unique in that it differs from other factors because it is continuously changing (Hearn 1999, 82; 2011, 94), and thus offers the opportunity to highlight the fluidity and socially constructed nature of gender. In addition, attention to young age may illuminate the process of learning as well as challenging gendered norms, potentially revealing possibilities for social change.

A consideration of young or old² age has had little impact on masculinities theorising. Connell's (2000; 2005b) theoretical framework of multiple masculinities centred on hegemonic masculinity³ has been central to the formation of masculinity studies (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 834), and she is referenced in most works within the field (Beasley 2005, 191-192).⁴ However, these theories have received little critique on the basis of age, and there are still comparatively few empirical studies conducted about young or old age from feminist-informed masculinity studies approaches.

There are some interesting parallels between young and old age which highlight that masculinities theorising focuses on a middle age group often perceived to be universal to all ages (or at least the most important). While boys and old/ageing men are both privileged by sexism, they are disadvantaged by ageism (for this point in relation to old age, see Hearn 2011, 95). The interaction of age and masculinities also influences the theorising and lived experience of embodiment (Gilbert and Constantine 2005; Hearn 2011; Hearn and Sandberg 2009; Slevin and Linneman 2010), and produces potential barriers to constructing masculinities, including hegemonic masculinity, via avenues such as athleticism and sexuality. Dependency on others, common in young and old age (Hearn 1999, 83), also interferes with constructing hegemonic masculinity. Hearn highlights the implications of old age and gender for constructing hegemonic masculinity:

[h]egemonic masculinity has limits as a framework for taking on board all the complexities of ageing (men). The complex picture, with men being

² I follow the lead of Calasanti and Slevin who argue for the use of 'old' age rather than 'older' age, both as a way of reclaiming the term 'old' and, I think more importantly, because 'older' positions this age group in relation to a centre of middle/normal age (2001, 9-10). As they note, 'no one suggests that we refer to Blacks as "darker" or women as "more female."' (Calasanti and Slevin 2001, 10).

³ I discuss the concept of hegemonic masculinity in depth in Chapter One.

⁴ Formerly R. W. Connell, Connell has identified as Raewyn Connell since 2006 (Beasley 2008, 100 note 4). Connell has specified that she prefers to be referred to as a woman in both the past and present tense (Wedgwood 2009, 338 note 2), therefore I use female pronouns when discussing her work. However, when referencing her work I use the name which appeared on the original publication (R.W., Raewyn or Bob) to reflect her public identity at the time and to assist with locating references.

both given status through ageing and old age but at the same time marginalized, is difficult to encompass or conceptualise within the frame of hegemonic masculinity (2011, 95; see also Boden 2009; Hearn and Sandberg 2009).

Despite several similarities, the key difference between young and old age groups is that many boys can look forward to status gained by economic earnings, athleticism (or at least are likely to have stronger and more athletic bodies than they have in young age), and sexuality. In comparison, old men may have enjoyed these things in the past and, indeed, may be benefited by finances accrued with old age (Hearn 2011, 95).

Thus, the critical point is that masculinities are unlikely to be fully available for young or old people in the ways in which they have commonly been theorised in masculinity studies. A lack of access to hegemonic masculinity can play out in a number of different ways – some of which are a challenge to dominant gender discourses. As has been noted in relation to men with disabilities, this may involve *reformulation* where hegemonic masculinity may be redefined in terms of what is accessible; the *reliance* on, and a more fervent take-up of, aspects of hegemonic masculinity which are accessible; or a *rejection* of hegemonic masculinity and the creation of alternative masculinities (Gerschick and Miller 2007). Therefore, a consideration of masculinities at the margins can highlight both challenges to and the tenuousness of dominant gender discourses.

Attention to young age in masculinity studies has largely focused on high school boys. In comparison, there is currently only a small amount of empirical research about primary school boys and masculinities from feminist perspectives (Connolly 2006, 141; Swain 2005a, 214). It is important to recognise that young age is not a homogeneous age group, and experiences of gender may vary according to age. I outline masculinity studies theorising, and provide a background to research about masculinities and young age, including an overview of previous studies, in detail in Chapter One.

While feminist-informed discussions about young masculinities have not received a great deal of attention, the same cannot be said of popular discourses about boys. Broadly, debates about gender in schools, and education systems and policies, such as in Australia, are now commonly focused on boys rather than girls and gender equity, and work with simplistic understandings of gender (Lingard and Douglas 1999). Challenging popular

discourses about boys is important because simplistic theories relating to developmental psychology, socialisation, and/or biology have more of an influence on how boys are conceptualised compared with sociological perspectives which focus on gender as a *construction*. There are widespread discourses relating to boys' 'disadvantage', academic achievement, and 'male role models'.⁵ Particularly problematic about such perspectives is that boys tend to be constructed as a homogeneous group, and boys and girls are positioned as remarkably different. Such perspectives can be found in, for instance, government reports (see, for example, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training 2002),⁶ and popular psychology books about parenting and raising boys (see, for example, Biddulph 2003; Gurian 1996; Kindlon and Thompson 1999; Pollack 1998).⁷ Even a journal dedicated to boys (*Thymos: Journal of Boyhood Studies*) is organised around boys as a theme, and most articles do not problematise or offer a critical view on gender and masculinities (for exceptions see Drummond 2007; Riggs 2008). In order to counter these perspectives, more sophisticated ways of theorising young age and gender from feminist-informed positions are needed.

In this thesis I argue that masculinity studies theories are largely adult-centric and that attention to age both questions and enriches current theorising. I am attempting to depart from developmental psychology and socialisation perspectives which theorise gender as being developed in 'stages' and working towards a cemented gender identity. Instead, by comparing two age groups in primary school, I demonstrate while age and gender often intersect, gender does not necessarily become increasingly fixed with age. In order to consider the fluidity of masculinities, this thesis draws on Foucault's notion of discourse and the conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity as a *discourse* of hegemonic masculinity (see, for example, Beasley 2008; Elias and Beasley 2009).

⁵ The simplistic argument for 'male role models' draws heavily on socialisation theories where boys are presumed to passively follow older males. Furthermore, calls for 'male role models', often in the form of male teachers, fail to account for differences between men, which raises a number of issues including the implication that all men are similar; that male teachers need to ascribe to a hegemonic or narrow form of masculinity; and that some men may not be positive 'role models' for boys (for critiques of 'male role models' in the form of teachers, see Cushman 2008; Francis 2008b; Martino 2008; Martino and Frank 2006; Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2010; Mills, Haase and Charlton 2008; Roulston and Mills 2000; Sevier and Ashcraft 2009; Skelton 2001, Chapter Six; 2003).

⁶ For critiques of this report, see Gill (2004; 2005), Martino and Berrill (2003), Mills, Martino and Lingard (2007), and O'Donovan (2006). A similar direction in government initiatives and policy is also evident in the United Kingdom and the United States (for an overview see, for example, Francis and Skelton 2005, Chapter Three).

⁷ These types of books have been heavily critiqued. See, for example, Anderson and Accomando (2002), Kidd (2000), Riggs (2008), and Weaver-Hightower (2008).

Chapter One presents the theoretical frameworks used in this thesis, focusing on the influential work of Connell, and her theories of hegemonic masculinity and related hierarchies. I also outline the way I apply Foucault's concept of discourse. In addition, this chapter provides a background to previous research about gender in primary school, with a focus on masculinities.

In Chapter Two I outline the approaches which shaped my empirical research, including strategies for comparing gender across age groups, and conducting research with young people. This chapter outlines in detail the schools, participants, and methods which inform the empirical research on which this thesis is based, and concludes with some reflexive notes on the research.

Chapter Three examines the existence of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity among the students in my research. I argue that sport and physical bodies were key to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity for both age groups. This worked as a legitimating masculinity which influenced many boys and was also supported by a number of girls. However, I suggest there were limitations to the strength of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity because of the young age of the students.

Chapter Four emphasises the diverse practices amongst boys in the research. This chapter focuses on three key themes: displaying 'intelligence' and being studious; involvement in traditionally 'feminine' activities (such as cooking and dancing); and the demonstration of caring relations. I illustrate how, often because of age, these practices could be sometimes combined with or sometimes challenging to practices relating to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter Five considers the patterns of practices and hierarchies amongst the boys in the research. In this chapter I draw on Connell's multiple masculinities as *practices* to account for how boys moved amongst 'categories'. I also pay attention to how engagement in different practices influenced boys' overall acceptance in the context of the specific classrooms.

In Chapter Six I explore how girls and femininities were constructed in the research. I show how, in contrast to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on sport, a discourse

of idealised femininity was centred on appearance, displaying particular personality traits, maintaining friendships, and engaging in notions of ‘girls’ stuff’.

Chapter Seven examines the relations and hierarchies between genders. I argue that while boys were sometimes regarded as superior to girls, it was more often the case that girls were constructed as *inferior* to boys, and that boys were also sometimes viewed as ‘the norm’. I examine how some of the students recognised gender discrimination and restrictions for girls (and boys), and how some drew on notions of gender equality. I also consider how resistance to dominant gender discourses was often framed in terms of individualism.

The Conclusions chapter reviews the findings of my two key arguments relating to the influence of age on gender, and the fluidity and incoherence of masculinities. I end this chapter with some ideas for practical classroom interventions for disrupting dominant gender discourses, and suggestions for further research.

Analysing the intersection of young age and gender is crucial both to furthering the understandings of gender in primary school while also posing questions for, and contributing to, the theoretical perspectives underpinning the field of masculinity studies, and feminist studies more broadly.

***PART I –
Situating the Research in Context***

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Frameworks

Introduction

[S]cholars within the studies on men and masculinities have not profited fully from the new social studies of childhood. They have mainly focused upon children and young people – and especially boys and young men – as gendered, rather than using the theoretical development within childhood studies to look at how gender – including masculinity – is ‘aged’ (age-marked).

(Eriksson 2007, 62)

Eriksson’s argument raises an important and largely overlooked critique of masculinity studies, and feminist studies more broadly. The first part of this chapter outlines the key theoretical concepts used within the feminist-informed masculinity studies field, focusing on the influential work of Connell. It also considers critiques of Connell’s work, and how her theories may be built upon using Foucault’s concept of discourse. The second part of this chapter highlights the gaps in adequate theorising about young people and gender, focusing on how boys have been theorised in Connell’s multiple masculinities framework, and how these theories have been taken up, often uncritically, in empirical research with primary school students. I then consider the few critiques of adult-centric theories of masculinities before examining possibilities for drawing on both Connell and Foucault to allow for a more sophisticated theoretical conceptualisation of gender and young age.

Theorising Gender and Masculinities

Connell’s theories contributed to the development of masculinity studies as a field of research and allowed a move away from sex role theory (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 834). Her masculinities framework is central to the academic field of feminist-informed (often called ‘pro-feminist’¹) masculinity studies (Beasley 2005, Chapter 20), and has had

¹ The term ‘pro-feminist’ is often used in masculinity studies, particularly by men, to distinguish men who are feminists (‘pro-feminists’) from women who are feminists (feminists). The main justifications for this are that the term feminist is viewed as only able to be applied to women because they have the lived experience of sexism and inequality or oppression based on gender (Canaan in Griffin and Wetherell 1992, 152; *continued on next page*)

a significant influence on how masculinities are theorised. Despite their usefulness, Connell's theories do not fully capture the fluidity and instability of gender. Therefore, after outlining Connell's theories I discuss some critiques of her work and suggest that using Foucault's notion of discourse may expand conceptual thinking.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Complicit Masculinities

Hegemonic masculinity is Connell's key concept in a hierarchical framework of masculinities, the usage of which is almost omnipresent in masculinity studies (Beasley 2005, 192), and has also had a significant influence in feminist, sexuality, and international studies (Beasley 2008, 88). The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first explored in Connell's 1979 paper 'Men's bodies' (published in 1983, 17-32; see Beasley 2005, 192; Hearn 2004, 56).

Connell devised the concept of hegemonic masculinity utilising Gramsci's understanding of hegemony as a means to conceive class relations in Italy. Drawing on Gramsci, hegemony is defined by Connell as 'a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes' (1987, 184). When applying the concept of hegemony to gender, Connell writes that:

[h]egemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (2005b, 77).

Connell and Messerschmidt highlight that while hegemonic masculinity does not describe a common experience—that is, it is not 'normal'—and may only be applicable to a small

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Clatterbaugh 2000, 884; Sterba 2007, 505-506), and as a strategy by men not to 'appropriate women's work and identities' (Brod 1998, 206). However, there are a number of problems with this perspective. The concept of 'pro-feminism' borders on the absurd when writing as a feminist woman about the field of masculinity studies. Continually referring to 'pro-feminism' distances women and women writers from the masculinity studies field, and makes men the central actors. Relatedly, using these terms creates a potential binary between women (feminists) and men ('pro-feminists') which is counter-intuitive to building alliances between feminist studies and masculinity studies. Finally, calling women feminists and men 'pro-feminists' relies on biological determinism (Francis 2001, 75), something at odds with the generally social constructionist approach of feminism. Therefore, in this thesis I use the term feminist to refer to women and men, using 'pro-feminist' only when it is employed by the writers I discuss.

number of men, it is *normative* (2005, 832). Hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily negative or violent, for this would then simply describe coercive dominance rather than hegemony (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 840-841). Instead, the process of hegemony involves coercion and consent where '[o]ther patterns and groups are subordinated rather than eliminated' (Connell 1987, 184). Connell specifies that hegemony 'does not mean total control' and can be disrupted (2005b, 37). Importantly, she argues that "[h]egemonic masculinity" is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same' (2005b, 76; see also Connell and Messerschmidt 2005); it is historically and contextually specific (Connell 2005b, 77; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Therefore, it is the *process* of hegemony which is crucial to understanding its continuation.

Connell and Messerschmidt write that hegemonic masculinity:

embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men (2005, 832).²

While the two functions of hegemonic masculinity are not always made explicit in other writing, Demetriou usefully distinguishes between 'internal hegemony' ('hegemony over other masculinities') and 'external hegemony' ('connected to the institutionalization of men's dominance over women') (2001, 341).³ Demetriou writes that '[i]nternal hegemony or dominance over other masculinities ... seems to be a means for the achievement of external hegemony rather than an end in itself' (2001, 344). I focus on 'internal hegemony' here and return to the concept of 'external hegemony' later in this chapter.

What is important for hegemonic masculinity, or at least seems to ensure its continuance, is that it is organised around something regarded as *valuable* – what Connell calls the

² Hegemonic masculinity is usually considered to be inaccessible to women. Connell and Messerschmidt argue that 'bourgeois women may appropriate aspects of hegemonic masculinity in constructing corporate or professional careers' (2005, 847). This is the only mention I have found where Connell links women with hegemonic masculinity. Others have also suggested that some women can engage in hegemonic masculinity (Addelston 1999; Cheng 1999a), although they do not provide strong arguments for why or how they ascertain this.

³ Howson also highlights this distinction, but uses the labels of 'intra-relationality' (between 'key masculinities') and 'inter-relationality' (between 'key masculinities' and 'key femininities') (2006, 59). Such articulations may prove sufficient to counter arguments that by using hegemonic masculinity it is difficult to differentiate between hierarchies amongst men and the overall privileged position of men (as a group) in relation to women (as a group) (for example, as argued by Flood 2002, 209).

‘patriarchal dividend’. Connell argues that ‘[t]he patriarchal dividend is the main stake in contemporary gender politics. Its scale makes patriarchy worth defending’ (2002a, 143). The ‘patriarchal dividend’ available to men as a group includes monetary gains, ‘authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, and control over one’s own life’ (Connell 2002a, 142). Such benefits are available not only to men who have access to hegemonic masculinity, but also to those who are complicit in the current ‘gender order’ (Connell 2005b, 79-80).⁴

Connell outlines complicit masculinities as related to the majority of men – those who benefit from the ‘patriarchal dividend’ and are supportive of the ‘gender order’ without having access to hegemonic masculinity (2005b, 79-80). A large number of men engaging in complicit masculinities, as well as compliance or support from women, are crucial to upholding hegemonic masculinity:

[m]en who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity. It was in relation to this group, and to compliance among heterosexual women, that the concept of hegemony was most powerful (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832).

Thus, hegemony and complicity are inextricably bound.

While hegemonic masculinity has had considerable influence in theorising masculinities, it has been critiqued from a number of angles. These critiques include hegemonic masculinity having different meanings (Beasley 2008, 88); the difficulty in applying the concept to actual men (Flood 2002, 209); the difficulty of working out which version of masculinity might be hegemonic in practice (Beasley 2008, 93); and that hegemonic masculinity has been taken up in some work to mean certain fixed character ‘types’ (Connell 2000, 23). Critiques have also come from post-structuralist perspectives where hegemonic masculinity has been viewed as evoking typologies which suggest fixity and a binary division of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities (see, for example, McInnes 2008).

⁴ Connell also suggests that some women may benefit from the ‘patriarchal dividend’, in terms of being married to wealthy men, and gaining advantage from other women’s underpaid and unpaid work (2002a, 142-143).

It is important to acknowledge that some of the critiques of hegemonic masculinity relate to its *application* rather than the concept itself as devised by Connell (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 853-854; Hearn 2004, 58). While there are some problems with hegemonic masculinity, the term can bring with it certain connotations which are derived from misuse and misunderstandings. Because hegemonic masculinity has sometimes been taken up differently from Connell's theorising, its usefulness to understand gender hierarchies and the perpetuation of particular gender relations has been threatened.

One way in which hegemonic masculinity appears to be more useful is by reframing it in the plural. Connell and Messerschmidt propose that in empirical research three levels of hegemonic masculinity can be analysed: local hegemonic masculinity as 'constructed in the arenas of face-to-face interaction of families, organizations, and immediate communities'; regional hegemonic masculinity as 'constructed at the level of the culture or the nation-state'; and global hegemonic masculinity as 'constructed in transnational arenas such as world politics and transnational business and media' (2005, 849). Beasley argues that an understanding of hegemonic masculinities as multiple is necessary to move away from the usage of a monolithic concept, and that '[h]egemonic masculinity, even at the local level, may be seen as hierarchical and plural' (2008, 98). However, it is evident elsewhere within Connell and Messerschmidt's article that they consider there *cannot* be multiple hegemonic masculinities: '[w]hatever the empirical diversity of masculinities, the contestation for hegemony implies that gender hierarchy does not have multiple niches at the top' (2005, 845). Conceptually, there is a lack of clarity about the notion of multiple hegemonic masculinities, which are so far under-theorised. For example, Connell and Messerschmidt are not clear on the relationship between the three levels (local, regional, global) of hegemonic masculinities.⁵ Utilising hegemonic masculinities as plural potentially allows a move away from viewing the concept as referring only to adult men (adding further dimensions in terms of different age groups and genders), and from a singular model of hegemonic masculinity which is applicable in all settings. For this thesis, drawing on local hegemonic masculinities, which are relevant in the context of particular classrooms/schools, appears especially useful.

⁵ While it would seem logical that local hegemonic masculinities are subordinated by regional and global hegemonic masculinities, Connell and Messerschmidt suggest this is not necessarily the case (2005, 850).

Non-hegemonic Masculinities

Hegemonic masculinity is most often discussed in relation to the non-hegemonic masculinities labelled as subordinate and marginalised, concepts under-utilised in comparison to the frequent citation of hegemonic masculinity (Lusher and Robins 2009, 390; Wedgwood 2009, 335). Connell argues that '[i]f people focus on the dominant pattern, or the dominant definition of masculinity, they can fail to see the alternative patterns that also exist' (2008a, 133; see also Nordberg, Saar and Hellman 2006). A tendency to focus only on hegemonic masculinity implies that hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities are distinct entities that do not overlap. However, a consideration of the interaction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities, including ways in which non-hegemonic masculinities may uphold and be complicit with hegemony in particular ways, is crucial to feminist-informed studies of masculinities:

[h]egemony may be accomplished by the incorporation of such [non-hegemonic] masculinities into a functioning gender order rather than by active oppression in the form of discredit or violence. In practice, both incorporation and oppression can occur together (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 848).

Connell most often theorises non-hegemonic masculinities in terms of complicit, subordinate and marginalised masculinities. While complicit masculinities are sometimes viewed as non-hegemonic, they closely relate to hegemonic masculinity, and hence I have included them in the discussion above. As Gottzén notes:

at times complicit masculinity may be understood as subordinated to hegemonic masculinity, other times it seems to be using hegemonic masculinity for its own purposes, to legitimate and guarantee the subordination of women (2011, 3).

By contrast, Connell links subordinate masculinities particularly to gay masculinities and other masculinities associated with 'femininity' (2005b, 78-79), thus reinforcing the subordination of 'femininity' rather than 'masculinity' (Schippers 2007, 96). This demonstrates how 'internal hegemony' and 'external hegemony' (Demetriou 2001) overlap and work together. What is problematic about the concept of subordinate masculinities is

that they are discussed in relation to a singular 'femininity'. This is reflective of the lack of theorising about femininities in masculinity studies, which I consider in the next section.

The second major terminology which Connell employs to refer to non-hegemonic is marginalised masculinities. Marginalisation here refers to '[t]he interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race' which are *outside the 'gender order'* (Connell 2005b, 80), where marginalised masculinities 'may share many features with hegemonic masculinity but are socially de-authorized' (Connell 2000, 30-31). Connell gives the example of black athletes being 'exemplars for hegemonic masculinity', which is related to specific individuals rather than benefiting black men as a group (2005b, 81). In light of Connell's discussions, age may also be viewed as a factor for marginalisation, although this is likely to be a more temporary reason for marginalisation than ethnicity or social class.

Other masculinity studies concepts such as hyper masculinities have received less theoretical attention from Connell. Although Connell does not provide an explicit definition of hyper masculinities, the term refers to attempts to engage in hegemonic masculinity which go 'too far' to ensure legitimation (see Beasley 2008, 101 note 15). Connell uses 'hyper-masculine' display/persona in relation to those of her research participants who engaged in 'the road and the party scene' (2005b, 118), and 'smoking, fighting and resisting' the established order of their schools (2005b, 147).

Connell's multiple masculinities approach is useful for understanding masculinities in the plural. However, this approach has been critiqued for not taking sufficient account of fluidity, where people may fit into more than one 'category' (hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalised) (Pringle 2005, 266). Thus, attention to the *fluidity* of masculinities allows for a consideration of boys'/men's engagement in a variety of different gender practices in a range of sites.

Further critiques of Connell's approach relate to its tendency to link masculinities to male bodies, thus essentialising *bodies* as male or female (Francis 2008a, 214).⁶ Alternatively, some post-structuralist writers use masculinity in the singular, presumably to avoid linking masculinities with male bodies. However, this approach essentialises *gender* by using

⁶ However, Connell does occasionally state that 'masculinity' is not exclusive to male bodies (2000, 16, 29).

‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ in singular forms (Francis 2008a, 214). Francis (2008a) asserts that the construction of such a binary advances static definitions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, where practices have to fit into one or the other category. In particular, Halberstam’s (1998) writing about ‘female masculinity’ highlights the lack of room to theorise combining elements of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, or to consider a range or continuum of practices (Francis 2010, 485). For these reasons I focus my attention in this thesis on masculinities linked with male bodies, although I am conscious that linking masculinities exclusively to male bodies is not ideal.

‘External Hegemony’: Theorising femininities

Many writers in masculinity studies (rhetorically) argue that men must be studied in relation to women (see, for example, Brod 1994, 88-89; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 848). However, girls/women are often absent from masculinity studies writing, and gender relations often drop out of focus.⁷ As Holter argues, ‘the men and masculinities field is brimful of discussions of forms of masculinity, while forms of femininity are absent or added as an afterthought’ (2009, 134). If masculinity studies is a ‘pro-feminist’ field it must study gender relations and not men or masculinities in isolation:

[i]n the pro-feminist view that dominates the [men and masculinities] field, women are important on the ideological level. Yet they are often missing in action – women’s agency is not a central part of the actual research focus (Holter 2009, 134).

‘Femininity’, often used in the singular form in masculinity studies, is more likely to be drawn on as a unitary something which masculinity/ies can be defined *against* (and what boys/men define themselves against) rather than what girls/women actually do (or how femininity/ies may be theorised in relation to girls/women).

⁷ For example, in the *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities* (Flood, Gardiner, Pease and Pringle 2007) there is little about femininities, girls/women, or gender relations. There is an entry for ‘gender relations’ (Lukas 2007), but this is about sexuality and focuses on men rather than being about relations between genders. Furthermore, the encyclopedia does not include a definition of Connell’s concept of emphasised femininity (I outline this term on the next page), nor is it mentioned in the definition of hegemonic masculinity.

The importance of what Demetriou (2001) calls ‘external hegemony’ can be seen in Connell’s own writing:

[h]egemonic masculinity is hegemonic not just in relation to other masculinities, but in relation to the gender order as a whole. It is an expression of the privilege men collectively have over women in a patriarchal society (Connell 2001b, 49).

However, a consideration of gender relations often drops away when multiple masculinities are discussed (Beasley 2005, 223).

In their rethinking of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt emphasise the importance of theorising femininities (and women), but they do not offer suggestions regarding how to do this (2005, 848). In Connell’s earlier theorising, the concept of emphasised femininity was put forward as a complementary counterpart to hegemonic masculinity (1987, 183-188). She wrote that emphasised femininity ‘is defined around compliance with this subordination [of women to men] and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men’ (Connell 1987, 183). As with hegemonic masculinity, emphasised femininity is historically situated, does not necessarily reflect lived experiences, need not be the most common pattern of femininity, and is culturally privileged over other forms of femininity (Connell 1987, 186-188). However, where emphasised femininity differs from hegemonic masculinity is that it does not rely on the subordination of other femininities (although it does inhibit ‘other models of femininity [from] gaining cultural articulation’) (Connell 1987, 187-188).⁸ In her original theorising, Connell also vaguely mentioned other patterns of femininities: ‘[o]thers [femininities] are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation’ (1987, 183-184). Howson suggests that these other patterns were not clearly defined or developed because they were viewed as less important to the overall pattern of hegemonic masculinity (2006, 66).

⁸ That emphasised femininity was not theorised as subordinating other femininities downplays the existence of hierarchies and differences amongst femininities. I return to this point in Chapter Six.

Emphasised femininity as a counterpart to hegemonic masculinity is *mentioned* by a number of writers discussing early childhood and primary school students (Blaise 2005; Browne 2004; Epstein, Kehily, Mac an Ghaill and Redman 2001; MacNaughton 2000; Reay 2001b; Thorne 1993, 100, 170); high school students (Kaplan and Cole 2003; Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie 2005; Shakib and Dunbar 2002; Williams 2002); and adults (Cheng 1999b; Dworkin 2001; Dworkin and Messner 2002; Korobov 2011; Morris and Evans 2001; Neverson and White 2002; Talbot and Quayle 2010). However, none of these sources give particularly sophisticated accounts of what emphasised femininity entails or how the concept is still relevant. Indeed, the concept of emphasised femininity may be less useful in understanding current gender relations than when it was originally named. Connell and Messerschmidt suggest that emphasised femininity is still relevant in relation to patriarchy, '[y]et gender hierarchies are also affected by new configurations of women's identity and practice, especially among younger women' (2005, 848).

While some theorists refer to 'hegemonic femininity' (see, for example, Charlebois 2008; Pyke and Johnson 2003; Schippers 2007), which allows for the theorisation of hierarchies between femininities, Connell explicitly stated that 'there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men' (1987, 187). Yet this assertion remains simply that. Although theories about hegemonic masculinity in terms of 'external hegemony' should be useful to make visible the overall subordination of women (Demetriou 2001), these have not been explored in-depth, and a theoretical consideration of differences and hierarchies *between* femininities is virtually absent (Howson 2006, 59-60). The lack of theorising about femininities within masculinity studies makes it difficult to theoretically examine masculinities and femininities in relation to each other. For this reason, along with the critiques of Connell's multiple masculinities framework as outlined above, it is necessary to consider some alternatives to Connell's theories.

Building on Connell's Framework: Post-structuralism and discourse

The masculinity studies field remains centred on the work of Connell who draws on modernist ideas about power and the subject (Beasley 2011), and is influenced by both (weak) structuralism (Beasley 2011; Connell 2004) and an associated materialism (I discuss this further below). Connell is largely dismissive of post-structuralist theories (see

2000, 19-21; 2001a, 7-8; 2002a, 70-71; 2004, 22-25; 2005b, xviii-xix; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 841-843). In theoretical writing, Connell's approach and post-structuralist perspectives have been represented as being opposed to each other (see, for example, Whitehead 2002). While there are differences between the two perspectives, some aspects of post-structuralist approaches might well be advantageous for masculinity studies. For example, post-structuralist thinking, such as Foucault's concept of discourse, allows for a deeper consideration of the subtlety and flexibility of gender practices. Moreover, it can be argued that elements of both modernist and post-structuralist frameworks can be usefully combined to enhance theorising of gender. Beasley argues, in this context, that it is possible to draw upon both modernist and post-structuralist perspectives, but such an attempt should be done with caution and an awareness of their different theoretical underpinnings (2011, 2; for this argument in relation to combining Gramsci and Foucault, see Pringle 2005).⁹

The theorising of power is a key difference between Connell's modernist approach relying on (weak) structuralism and post-structuralist theorising (Beasley 2011). Connell tends to view power as oppressive and embodied in or possessed/held by groups of men: '[i]t is familiar that many men who *hold* great social power do not embody an ideal masculinity' (emphasis added, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 838; for a critique, see Beasley 2008). In contrast, post-structuralist perspectives frequently draw on Foucault's work where power is viewed as productive and circulatory (like a chain) (1980, 98). In this framework, power is:

never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation (Foucault 1980, 98).

⁹ Beasley uses 'postmodern as a coverall term to include the more specific connotations of poststructuralism' (2011, 2). This thesis uses post-structuralism because I draw on Foucault. Other writers in masculinity studies also tend to draw on post-structuralism and Foucault, rather than other versions of postmodernism. Thus, when discussing Beasley's work I have substituted her use of postmodernism for the more specific post-structuralism, which is what she is often actually discussing.

Lupton and Barclay argue that:

[t]he Foucauldian understanding of power relations is that central discourses invite and persuade individuals to conform to norms and expectations rather than directly coercing them, appealing to individuals' desires and wants at both the conscious and the unconscious levels (1997, 11).

For Foucault, power is produced and mobilised in discourses. Despite the fact that the term discourse is so widely used in academic writing, it is often left undefined (Mills 2004, 1) or is confused with linguistics (Bacchi and Bonham 2011). For this thesis it is useful to consider discourse as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972, 49). Knowledge and what is perceived to be 'real' or 'true' is constructed via discourse (Bacchi and Bonham 2011). What is useful for feminist studies is that some discourses have more influence than others. As Weedon writes:

[w]ithin a discursive field, for instance, that of the law or the family, *not all discourses will carry equal weight or power*. Some will account for and justify the appropriateness of the status quo. Others will give rise to challenge to existing practices from within or will contest the very basis of current organization and the selective interests which it represents. Such discourses are likely to be marginal to existing practice and dismissed by the hegemonic system of meanings and practices as irrelevant or bad (emphasis added, 1987, 35).

Discourses compete for claims of 'truth', 'authority', and institutional support (Mills 2004, 17). For the purposes of this thesis I find Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse and power to be useful explanatory tools for examining young people and gender.

Considering the differing views of power between Connell and Foucault, an examination of how subjects are theorised is important. Connell views subjects as distinct from structure and '[s]ince subjects are intentional agents that are incompletely shaped by structures and respond to them, gender is "done to" subjects but they also "do" gender—they are doers' (Beasley 2011, 4-5). Connell's understanding of the subject draws from psychoanalysis:

[t]he concept of hegemonic masculinity originally was formulated with a strong awareness of psychoanalytic arguments about the *layered and contradictory* character of personality, the everyday contestation in social life, and the mixture of strategies necessary in any attempt to sustain hegemony (emphasis added, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 843).

While Connell views the subject as internally complex, she retains the conception of subjects as unitary actors who can resist power relations. In contrast, Foucault provides a more thorough-going critique of the subject/self. Foucault contests ‘the idea of a sovereign subject’ (1991b, 61) and is critical of ideas about theories of the subject as autonomous, stable, and independent (Hall 1997, 55). Foucault’s later work pays some attention to the subject, although, according to Hall, ‘he did not restore the subject to its position as the centre and author of representation’ (1997, 55). Foucault views the subject as ‘*produced within discourse*’ (emphasis in original, Hall 1997, 55). He is most interested in ‘*what people say*’ rather than in ‘*what people say*’ (emphases in original, Bacchi and Bonham 2011, 9), privileging the examination of discourse/knowledge and constructions of ‘reality’ over notions of autonomous actors/subjects.

Connell explicitly argues that:

[t]here are, of course, different ways of representing the incoherence of the subject. The conceptual language of *poststructuralism is only one way of doing that*; psychoanalysis and the model of agency within contradictory social structures provide others (emphasis added, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 843).

However, there are only rare occasions when Connell writes about masculinities as fluid and incoherent: ‘we must now explicitly recognize the layering, the potential internal contradiction, within all practices that construct masculinities. Such practices cannot be read simply as expressing a unitary masculinity’ (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 852). For the most part such understandings are little expressed in Connell’s work (or by those taking up her theoretical frameworks):

[t]hough Connell stresses plural hierarchically ranked subjects, the identities she outlines are largely conceived as unified and stable platforms for action

whether complicit or resistant. This form of modernist theorising concentrates on particular modes of ‘being’ (Beasley 2011, 5).

Thus, as Gottzén points out:

[e]ven though Connell argues that masculinities change, there is no theorizing on how individuals could move from one masculinity category to the other, how one masculinity can change from being subordinate and become hegemonic, and whether individuals could be positioned in several masculinities within a hierarchal gender order (2011, 5).

This is where the usage of Foucault and other post-structuralist accounts are beneficial to allow for theorising subjects and gender practices as incoherent. From a discursive psychology perspective drawing on interviews with men, Wetherell and Edley use both hegemony and discourse, arguing that gender identities are incoherent, with ‘multiple and inconsistent discursive resources available for constructing hegemonic gender identities’ (1999, 352). They propose that complicity and resistance should be used ‘as labels to describe the effects of discursive strategies mobilized in contexts as opposed to labels for types of individual men’ (Wetherell and Edley 1999, 352). Drawing on complicity and resistance as *practices* which boys and men can engage in alongside other practices allows for more sophisticated thinking about the fluidity of gender. This is particularly useful when conducting research with young people because, as I show in relation to my empirical research in primary schools, it appears that the incoherence of gender is exacerbated by (young) age. Thus, focusing on practices allows for enhanced understandings of the complexities of gender.

Potentially then, hegemonic masculinity may be reframed as a *discourse* of hegemonic masculinity – that which is most influential in defining what is most ‘masculine’ in any given setting, and that ensures men’s (as a group) authority over women (as a group). As Beasley suggests, ‘hegemonic masculinity [may be viewed] as a political mechanism—as a discursive ideal mobilizing legitimation’ (2008, 100; see also Elias and Beasley 2009). Thus, a discourse of hegemonic masculinity can be viewed as more influential than other discourses of masculinities, it is legitimating, and avoids a slippage into fixed ‘types’ of masculinities or men. This reframing ‘prevents a slide towards depictions of men with

institutional power and instead concentrates the term upon its legitimizing function' (Elias and Beasley 2009, 288).

A discourse of hegemonic masculinity incorporates both the ideal and the material. However, Connell tends to view discourses as unable to account for material factors: '[g]ender relations also are constituted through nondiscursive practices, including wage labor, violence, sexuality, domestic labor, and child care' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 842). Furthermore, she suggests:

[bodies] do not turn into symbols, signs or positions in discourse. Their materiality (including material capacities to engender, to give birth, to give milk, to menstruate, to open, to penetrate, to ejaculate) is not erased, it continues to matter (Connell 2005b, 64-65).

Yet Foucault does account for the material; it is just that he views the material as *only able to be interpreted through discourse* (see Hall 1997, 45; Mills 2003, 56). There is no 'reality' that can be understood outside of discourse. As Bacchi and Bonham argue, Foucault's 'notion of discursive practice/s ... is material at its core' (2011, 28). Foucault's attention to the materiality of bodies is clearly evident in his writing about, for example, sexuality (2008), and criminal punishment, schools, and prisons (1991a). Therefore, I follow the view that '[r]econsidering hegemonic masculinity as a discursive political ideal involves taking up conceptions of the discursive which are *not* estranged from the material world, nor discrete from it' (emphasis added, Elias and Beasley 2009, 290).

In this thesis I draw on a discourse of hegemonic masculinity to highlight that it is a practice as well as an ideal; a privileged knowledge. Such a reframing of hegemonic masculinity allows for deeper consideration of movement between hegemonic and non-hegemonic practices. Furthermore, I consider what a *local* discourse of hegemonic masculinity constituted in order to move away from hegemonic masculinity as a monolithic concept, and to be able to apply the term to boys. Alongside this I draw on the idea of a discourse of idealised femininity to consider how practices relating to a particular version of femininity had an honoured and privileged status, as well as helped to support a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, the taking up of discourses also allows for enhancing the theorising of femininities currently available in masculinity studies, where femininities are often absent, discussed in the singular, or drawn on using inadequate

theories of emphasised femininity or hegemonic femininity, as critiqued earlier in this chapter. As I show in the next section, the appeal of combining aspects of Connell and Foucault for theorising gender is increased when the complexities of young age are considered.

Theorising and Researching Gender and Young Age

The theoretical frameworks in masculinity studies that I detailed above are largely adult-centric. Empirical research about masculinities and young people has tended to draw on masculinity studies concepts with little consideration of how the intersection of gender and young age may make it difficult to apply the concepts in full. It is also the case that many empirical studies have drawn on concepts relating to Connell and post-structuralism without acknowledging the differing theoretical underpinnings of these two approaches. Before reviewing the existing literature about young masculinities, it is important to situate studies of gender and young people in context, noting the widespread influence of developmental psychology and socialisation theories, and the lack of attention to gender in ‘the new sociology of childhood’ (James and Prout 1997a).

A great deal of thinking on children, including within education systems, has been dominated by developmental psychology perspectives, such as those of Piaget (Browne 2004, 13; MacNaughton 2000; Prout and James 1997, 12). These theories often also rely on notions of ‘natural’ development drawing on biology (Burman 1994, 4; Morss 1996, 2-3). Piaget’s developmental psychology views children as developing ‘naturally’, largely without influence of society or culture (Browne 2004, 13), and the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ child of this approach is male, white and middle class (Browne 2004, 14). From this perspective gender is viewed as fixed or inevitable to develop in certain ways.

A differing but also flawed theory is that of sex role socialisation. Sex role socialisation was central to writing about gender and education in the late 1970s and 1980s, and continues to be the most influential way of understanding gender for educational practitioners and the public (Connolly 2004, 55-56). The early use of sex role socialisation was important for providing a social account of gender, and showing how gender is important in the lives of children (Connolly 2004, 56). However, there are a number of problems with this approach. Socialisation generally views children as passive objects and/or recipients of active agents (Alanen 1988, 58; Connolly 2004, 56; Davies 2003a, 6),

where children are seen as learners of adult culture (Oakley 1994; Thorne 1987) and ‘adults-in-the-making’ (Thorne 1987, 93). More broadly, sex role theory has been critiqued for the construction of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ as singular, and its inadequacy for theorising power (Connolly 2004, 57-58). Twenty years ago, Arnot wrote that sex role socialisation had largely been discredited for being too simplistic (1991, 453). However, the tradition of socialisation theories continues to have some hold in writings about gender and young age (see, for example, Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2009; Hylmö 2006; Kimmel 2008), including those focused on masculinities (see, for example, Adams and Coltrane 2005; Anderson and Robson 2006; Ashley 2011; 2003; Berridge and Romich 2011; Pease 2002).

A move away from developmental psychology and sex role socialisation approaches is evident in ‘the new sociology of childhood’,¹⁰ mapped out in James and Prout’s (1997a) edited book *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (originally published in 1990).¹¹ This approach to theorising young age has a number of benefits including understanding childhood as a social construction; viewing childhood as diverse and interacting with factors such as social class, gender, and ethnicity; considering children as valuable to study; viewing children as active in their own lives and not passive subjects; using methodologies such as ethnography which allow for voices of children to be heard; and relating these new ways of thinking to ‘reconstructing childhood in society’ (Prout and James 1997, 8). Importantly, Prout and James stress that theorising childhood should not be conducted separately from ‘mainstream’ sociology (1997, 23). Despite this, sociology rarely studies ‘adulthood’ itself, because ‘adulthood’ is always at the centre of sociology and other age groups are measured against it (Blatterer 2007, 26).

However, what is particularly striking about ‘the new sociology of childhood’, and James and Prout’s (1997a) edited book in particular, is that scant attention is paid to gender and feminist studies, and that feminist studies have had little influence on contributing to this perspective.¹² In ‘the new sociology of childhood’ age is overwhelmingly given

¹⁰ This has since been modified to ‘the new social studies of childhood’ (see, for example, Eriksson 2007; James, Jenks and Prout 1998, 207) to incorporate a wider range of disciplines than just sociology (Holloway and Valentine 2000, 764). It is the broad conceptual thinking rather than the name I am interested in here.

¹¹ For other early writing challenging traditional conceptions of children and childhood, see in particular Alanen (1988), Ambert (1986), Hardman (2001), Jenks (1982), Mayall (1994), Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta and Wintersberger (1994), Thorne (1987), and Waksler (1986).

¹² Surprisingly, claims have been made that feminism was very important to the development of ‘the new sociology of childhood’. For example, in the *Australian Feminist Studies* special issue on ‘The Child’, Baird (*continued on next page*)

precedence over gender. Presumably as a result of this, those studying children and gender tend not to refer to it (Eriksson 2007, 62).

On the other hand, while there is considerable research with young people from feminist perspectives, most of this fails to consider how gender and age may be theorised together. Thorne highlighted the point that gender and age were rarely considered simultaneously within feminist studies nearly 25 years ago:

[w]hen either gender or age is highlighted, the other dimension often recedes from conscious view. For example, in probing varied definitions of ‘adult’ and ‘child,’ Kagan (1984) neglects gender; and in starting with gender, feminist scholars often do not reflect upon their assumptions about age (emphases added, 1987, 95).

Twenty years after Thorne wrote this, Mac an Ghaill and Haywood similarly noted that ‘[w]ork in the area of gender and schooling has tended to understand age as an aspect of gender rather than a key constituent’ (2007, 97). Thus, the failure of adequate theorising of the intersection of gender and young age remains.

In the next section I consider broad feminist perspectives about children and young people, before I examine in detail the feminist-informed masculinity studies concepts outlined above in regards to their usefulness for research with young people, and how they have been used in empirical research with primary school students.

Feminist Approaches to Childhood and Youth

Within feminist studies, children have historically been ignored or not been included as research participants (see Alanen 1994; Oakley 1994). The limited consideration of children in feminist studies was surprising considering feminists’ usual attention to

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writes that ‘[f]eminist work has been central in the formation of both “the new sociology of childhood” (see James and Prout 1997a), an area about 20 years old, in the cultural studies interest in children and childhood (see Jenkins 1998a), and in the emerging body of queer theory concerned with children and childhood (see Bruhm and Hurley 2004)’ (2008, 297). The relative absence of gender and feminism in sociological studies of childhood (not only that included under the rubric of ‘the new sociology of childhood’) is also evident from other edited collections such as *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (Qvortrup, Corsaro and Honig 2009; for an exception in this book that considers gender and feminism, see Alanen 2009).

unheard voices, and use of participatory methods and methodologies. Some claim that the marginalisation of children in feminist studies arose because of ‘the need to challenge and transcend malestream theory and practice which equated women’s interests with those of children’ (Burman and Stacey 2010, 228), and as women tried to separate themselves from maternal responsibilities (Burman and Stacey 2010, 229). Indeed, as David writes:

children and gender construction in *schools* ... was never really a major concern to the early academic women’s movement, particularly not among feminist sociologists, especially not in the USA. Their interest in gender socialisation, if at all, was confined to issues about the family and mothers’ roles or responsibilities, and to thorny questions of childcare in the private and public spheres. Education as a social or public institution was rarely the subject of feminist or gender analysis, especially not that of early childhood and elementary education. Nor were children taken as a separate topic of investigation (emphases in original, 1994, 265).

In the 1970s and 1980s, some feminists turned their focus to children in terms of gender in children’s books (see, for example, Bradley and Mortimer 1972-1973; Healy and Ryan 1975) and feminist fairy tales (see, for example, Zipes 1986). While feminists critiqued the issue of *girls* and schools in terms of equity (particularly in the 1980s and 1990s), this was again largely informed by an adult agenda (for an exception, see Kenway 1993). In 1994 Alanen suggested that:

feminist theory has not disrupted the sociological inheritance of marginalizing children; in discussing gender issues related to children, it has, unfortunately, remained just as functionalist and adult-centred in its analyses as mainstream/malestream social science (1994, 34).¹³

Important early feminist thinking about gender and children/young people appeared in the work of Davies, particularly *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales* (2003a), originally published in 1989, Thorne’s *Gender Play* (1993), and Walkerdine’s work (see, for

¹³ This trend still continues in some ways. Particularly notable here is that even one of the key journals relating to young people and gender, *Gender and Education*, is listed by the ISI Web of Knowledge as pertaining to ‘education’ and is *not* also considered to be a ‘women’s studies’ journal (Hart and Metcalfe 2010, 147).

example, 1990). All three of these writers moved away from socialisation theories and contributed to newer ways of thinking about gender in young age. These writers and their approaches have influenced a significant amount of recent feminist empirical research with children and young people about gender, including research about masculinities.

Despite the influence of Davies, Thorne, and Walkerdine, feminist frameworks for *theorising* the intersection of gender and age still remain underdeveloped. The adult-centricity of feminist writing is highlighted by Driscoll who argues that ('adolescent') girls are considered to be the *opposite* of women and thus theorised as what women are not (2002, 9; for related arguments, see also Currie, et al. 2009, 4-6; Eisenhauer 2004). The focus on adults which Driscoll outlines can also be seen in research about masculinities, which I discuss in detail in the next section.

Feminist Approaches to Schooling, Boys, and Masculinities

Eriksson argues that within masculinity studies, academics have not paid enough attention to how gender is 'aged' (2007, 62). In this section I examine the intersection of young age and masculinities, focusing on primary school masculinities, and end with a consideration of how Connell's approach may be combined with post-structuralist ideas to theorise the incoherency of gender exacerbated by young age.

As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, the focus on young age in masculinity studies is dominated by research in high schools. Early influential texts on boys in (high) schools included Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour* and Walker's (1988) *Louts and Legends*. These and subsequent key studies have used groupings or typologies of masculinities to interpret their empirical findings: Willis's (1977) 'the lads' and 'the ear'oles'; Walker's (1988) 'the footballers', 'the Greeks', 'the three friends', and 'the handballers'; Mac an Ghail's (1994) 'Macho Lads', 'Academic Achievers', 'New Enterprisers', and 'Real Englishmen'; Martino's (1999) 'cool boys', 'squids', 'party animals', and 'poofs/poofers'; and Connell's (1989) 'cool guys', 'swots', and 'wimps'. Drawing on groupings of masculinities allowed for a recognition of masculinities as plural and hierarchical, which was important for demassifying 'masculinity'. However, such an approach suggests a fixity and does not allow for a full consideration of fluidity and movement between groupings, or the incoherence of masculinities (Francis 2000, 14). Such groupings are less

often drawn on when primary school boys are researched, although there are some examples such as Warren's (1997) 'Princes of the Park' and 'Working-class Kings'.

The focus on high school-aged boys and masculinities is clearly evident from the two key masculinities journals, *Men and Masculinities* and *The Journal of Men's Studies*. *Men and Masculinities* has published numerous articles focused on high school-aged students and 'adolescent' masculinities (Abrams, Anderson-Nathe and Aguilar 2008; Chu, Porche and Tolman 2005; Fair 2011; Firminger 2006; Johnson 2010; Kehily 2001; Klein 2006; Laberge and Albert 1999; Lyng 2009; McCarry 2009; Manninen, Huuki and Sunnari 2011; Messerschmidt 2000; Morrell 2001; Nilan, Demartoto and Wibowo 2011; Norman 2011; Poynting and Donaldson 2005; Redman 2001; Stoudt 2006; Totten 2003), compared to few which have focused on or included primary school-aged boys (Epstein, et al. 2001; Hasbrook and Harris 1999; Renold 2007; Swain 2006b). In addition, a small number of articles have considered both primary school-aged and high school-aged boys (Drummond 2010; Grogan and Richards 2002; Hartill 2009; Korobov 2006). Such a focus on older boys is even more the case for *The Journal of Men's Studies*, which has no articles on primary school-aged boys but a number about high school-aged students and 'adolescent' masculinities (Anderson and Robson 2006; Davidson 2006; Davison 2000; Drummond 2003; Galligan, Barnett, Brennan and Israel 2010; Johansson and Hammarén 2007; Korobov 2005; Mac an Ghail 2000; Martino 2000b; Segal 2000; Singleton 2007; Watts Jr. and Borders 2005). Neither journal has published any articles about pre-primary school-aged boys.

Edited collections about boys and masculinities also include significantly more chapters focusing on high school-aged boys than younger age groups. These edited collections include *Failing Boys? Issues in gender and achievement* (Epstein, Elwood, Hey and Maw 1998), *Masculinities at School* (Lesko 2000), *What about the boys?: Issues of masculinity in schools* (Martino and Meyenn 2001), *From Boys to Men: Social constructions of masculinity in contemporary society* (Shefer, Ratele, Strel, Shabalala and Buikema 2007), and *Boys' Bodies: Speaking the Unspoken* (Kehler and Atkinson 2010).

However, there is a growing amount of feminist-informed empirical studies considering masculinities with primary school-aged people¹⁴ which listen to the voices of students.¹⁵ Such research has been conducted in England (Ashley 2003; Buckingham 1993; Clark and Paechter 2007; Connolly 2006; Francis 1998; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007, Chapter Four; Newman, Woodcock and Dunham 2006; Redman, Epstein, Kehily and Mac an Ghaill 2002; Renold 2005; Skelton 2001; Swain 2006b; Warren 2003; Willett 2006); the United States (Baker-Sperry 2007; Davis 2001; Hasbrook and Harris 1999; Korobov 2006; Letts 2001; McCaughtry and Tischler 2010; McGuffey and Rich 1999; Nespor 2000; Thorne 1993; Young 2000); Australia¹⁶ (Davies 2003b; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Keddie 2003c); Northern Ireland (Connolly 2004); Ireland (Lodge 2005); Sweden (Nordberg, et al. 2006); and South Africa (Bhana 2008).¹⁷ (See Appendix One for a table outlining these studies including the age of participants.)¹⁸

While there may be similarities between masculinities for the different age groups, there are also likely to be a number of differences. Broadly, primary school and high school may differ in terms of the age of students, the organisation and management of the schools, teacher motivations, the curriculum, and purposes of the schools (Clark 1989b, 81-82; Skelton 2001, 23-26). Skelton proposes that school is more important for younger boys than older boys in the construction of masculinities:

[m]any of those writing on adolescent boys in the secondary sector have argued that schooling has only a minor part to play in the formation of masculine identities for most men (Walker 1988; Connell 1989; Mac an Ghaill 1994). More important, according to Connell (1989: 301), are the ‘childhood family, the adult workplace or sexual relationships (including

¹⁴ Dividing studies into the two age groups relating to South Australian primary schools (aged approximately 5 to 12-13 years old) and high schools (aged approximately 12-13 to 17-18 years old) is not always straightforward. In some of these studies ‘middle school’ students are involved in the research, which overlaps with the older age groups in primary school and the younger age groups in high school (Davis 2001; Letts 2001; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007, Chapter Four; McCaughtry and Tischler 2010). Korobov (2006) draws on data with boys aged 10-15 years old (from elementary and middle schools) and Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) studied both primary school and high school students.

¹⁵ Some of these writers (particularly Francis, Keddie, Renold, Skelton, and Swain) have numerous publications from the same empirical studies so I have included only one key reference for each here.

¹⁶ Davies based her research in Australia but also included some students from a progressive primary school in the United States (2003b, 7).

¹⁷ A small amount of research considering masculinities has also been conducted in early childhood settings such as preschools and kindergartens (see, for example, Blaise 2005; Browne 2004; Danby 1998; Davies 2003a; Davies and Kasama 2004; MacNaughton 2000; Skattebol 2006).

¹⁸ It is also the case that there has been little research conducted with ‘pre-adolescent’ girls or about femininities in primary school (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005b, 2; Reay 2001a, 157).

marriage)'. This observation may be accurate but the adult workplace and sexual relationships are not as immediately relevant to the lives of primary age boys as they are to adolescent boys so it might be assumed that schools play a different, and possibly more significant, role in the development of masculinities of young boys (2001, 23; see also Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, 113).

Next I consider the presence and exclusion of boys in Connell's theoretical writing about hegemonic masculinity, and then examine how Connell's masculinities have been used in primary school research, before highlighting the few previous critiques of the fit between adult-centric masculinities theories and boys.

Boys and Hegemonic Masculinity in Connell's Theorising

Boys are rarely mentioned in *theoretical* writing about hegemonic masculinity in the work of Connell and others. This suggests that boys may have a precarious relationship to hegemonic masculinity such that they may even be positioned as outsiders. In other words, they are marginalised and/or subordinated due to age. On the other hand, much *empirical* research analysing masculinities in primary school and high school uses the concept of hegemonic masculinity (often uncritically): '[s]ince the late 1980s "hegemonic masculinity" has become one of the key analytic concepts through which masculinities in school-based research have been theorised' (Renold 2005, 66). Thus, it is important to address the absence of any substantial critique of the fit between hegemonic masculinity and primary school boys (Renold 2007, 276).

In their introduction to the *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities*, Connell, Hearn and Kimmel discuss the future of the field of masculinity studies, remarking that:

[t]here are other problems of which the significance has been known for some time but that have remained undeveloped. A notable example is the development of masculinities in the course of growing up (2005, 9).

Although they recognise the need for research into young masculinities, the framing of this suggests that the reason why young people are of interest is to show how they grow into adulthood. Indeed, when Connell considers boys this is generally as 'embryonic men'

rather than in the changing gender practices in the course of growing up. While the term ‘boys’ is used in masculinity studies writings, it often refers to *high school* boys without that being made clear (see, for example, Connell 2000, Chapter Nine; Martino 2007). Particularly noticeable here is Connell’s lack of attention to pre-teenage boys, even in her book titled *The Men and the Boys* (2000).¹⁹ As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Eriksson (2007) argues that writing on men and masculinities does not draw adequately on childhood studies, nor does it look at the interweaving of age and gender. In particular she draws attention to Connell’s *The Men and the Boys*:

[h]ere, a theoretical perspective previously developed to understand the position of men (gendered adults) and multiple forms of masculinities (gendered adulthoods) is used to talk about boys and young men as well, without any further discussion about the implications of meanings of age or of age-related power (Eriksson 2007, 62).

Certainly it is evident within Connell’s work that she rarely specifies that she is referring to *adult* masculinities (for an exception, see 2000, 31). Often her sole mention of primary school research relates to Thorne’s (1993) *Gender Play*.²⁰ In several places in *Masculinities* (2005b) Connell refers to the ‘moment of engagement’ with hegemonic masculinity amongst men who later resisted hegemonic masculinity. It is, however, unclear when this ‘moment of engagement’ occurred. As Nespor points out, ‘[p]readolescent boys have been relatively neglected by theorists of gender practice—Connell’s (1995) comprehensive account of masculinities, for example, takes adolescence as a starting point’ (2000, 28).

Several contradictory understandings of the relation between boys and hegemonic masculinity can be identified in Connell’s writings. First, men and boys (of an unspecified age) are presented as having *the same* relationship to hegemonic masculinity: ‘hegemonic masculinity need not be the commonest pattern in the everyday lives of *boys* and men’

¹⁹ Interestingly, Connell’s early writing about children in *The Child’s Construction of Politics* (1971) did not consider gender issues.

²⁰ Connell has referenced Thorne (1993) numerous times, often as the only mention of primary school or childhood, see Connell (2000; 2001b, 47; 2002a, 12-16, *passim*; 2002b, 91; 2003b, 21; 2008a, 135, 138; 2008b, 243; Connell, et al. 2005, 9; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 839). While Thorne’s book is a foundational text in the study of gender in primary school, Connell’s frequent reliance on this example, which draws on research from 1976-1977 and 1980, overlooks the more recent literature on primary school masculinities. Apart from *Gender Play*, Connell occasionally also mentions other research about pre-school and primary school masculinities (see in particular 2003b).

(emphasis added, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 846). Second, there is a suggested connection between *high school boys* and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2000; 2005a), although this is notably dropped in broader discussions of hegemonic masculinity in favour of reference to just men (Connell 2005b). Third, it appears from Connell's analysis that hegemonic masculinity, which provides the means to group complicity and solidarity, is not available until *after* 'adolescence':

[t]he most striking single fact about the construction of hegemonic masculinity is the length and complexity of the process. ... [I]t is *not achieved in early childhood*, nor in the oedipal period, nor even by the end of schooling, but over a span, usually, of twenty years or more (emphasis added, 1983, 30-31; see also 2005b, 135).²¹

Fourth, boys *and* young men are subordinated by hegemonic masculinity: 'others – among them *young* and effeminate as well as homosexual men – are subordinated' (emphasis added, Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985, 587). Connell does not appear to provide a consistent explanation of how the concept of hegemonic masculinity functions in relation to boys. Hegemonic masculinity works at some points in the writing in the same way for all males, but more often it appears unavailable to (young) boys. Regardless of the unclear conceptualisation, many people conducting research with young boys use the concept of hegemonic masculinity uncritically.

Connell's Masculinities in Empirical Research with Primary School Boys

Despite the mixed theorising of hegemonic masculinity and boys in Connell's writing, much empirical research with primary school students uses hegemonic masculinity without questioning the impact of age on gender constructions.²² Even those writers who note that

²¹ Hegemonic masculinity can of course never be fully 'achieved'. This is an early theoretical writing and I have used it to demonstrate the point relating to age.

²² Some writers do not use hegemonic masculinity. For example, some research draws on 'dominant' masculinity rather than hegemonic masculinity, but age is not given as a reason for using this term. Keddie (see, for example, 2001; 2005b) and Connolly (2004; 2006) use 'dominant' masculinity in their research with *junior* primary school boys, although the behaviours they refer to are similar to what is called hegemonic masculinity in other research. However, Keddie uses hegemonic masculinity in some places in relation to her junior primary research (see, for example, 2003c; 2003a) and when conducting further research with some of the boys in Year 6 (2005a; 2006a; 2007). Some writers draw on 'normative masculinity' (Davis 2001). Other writers do not replace hegemonic masculinity with a specific term and tend to discuss 'masculinity' generally (see, for example, Baker-Sperry 2007; Buckingham 1993; Epstein, et al. 2001; Redman, et al. 2002). Mac an
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there are problems with the concept do *not* relate these to age (see, for example, Francis 2000, 14; Skelton 1997, 351; 2001, 52; Swain 2006b, 332, 336-337; Warren 2003, 4-5).

A lack of critical engagement with hegemonic masculinity is mirrored in a common inclination to use the term itself in varied and often rather loose ways. The *definitions* of hegemonic masculinity given in research with boys highlight its meaning as the ‘culturally exalted’ form of masculinity (Ashley 2003, 258; Francis 1998, 133; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, 51; Renold 2005, 66; Skelton 1997, 351; 2001, 50; Swain 2006b, 336). Some also draw on ideas of domination (Davies 2003b, 100; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, 51; Keddie 2006a; Lodge 2005; McGuffey and Rich 1999, 609; Renold 2005, 66; Skelton 2001, 50; Warren 1997); high status and authority (Bhana 2008, 6; Skelton 2001, 50); physical prowess (Bhana 2008; Hasbrook and Harris 1999, 303; Thorne 1993, 86); stereotypes of masculinity (Nordberg, et al. 2006); and/or ‘rationality of the mind’ via science (Letts 2001, 188). Other research does not provide clear definitions of what is meant by hegemonic masculinity (Clark and Paechter 2007; Korobov 2006; McCaughtry and Tischler 2010; Newman, et al. 2006; Nespor 2000).

In terms of behaviours, hegemonic masculinity is often viewed as being attempted through the physical body, particularly in the form of sport (especially soccer) (Ashley 2003; Bhana 2008; Clark and Paechter 2007; Francis 1998, 166; Keddie 2003a; McCaughtry and Tischler 2010; Newman, et al. 2006; Renold 1997; Skelton 2000; 2001, 136-137; Swain 2000; 2006b; 2006c; Warren 1997; 2003). Research also suggests that physical aggression, violence and hardness are aspects of hegemonic masculinity amongst primary school-aged boys (Bhana 2008; Hasbrook and Harris 1999; Keddie 2003c; 2006a; McCaughtry and Tischler 2010, 183; Newman, et al. 2006; Nordberg, et al. 2006; Renold 2005; Skelton 1997; 2001, 108). In her research with 10 and 11 year old primary school students in England, Renold argues that ‘fighting practices as a pedagogy of violent masculinities was one of the few performances in which boys could legitimately access “older” masculinities’ (2005, 71).

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Ghail and Haywood (2007, Chapter Four; 2012) do not use hegemonic masculinity, and critique the use of ‘masculinity’ itself with boys because of age. I consider their arguments in the next section. Some studies do not draw on the concept of hegemonic masculinity and use alternative theoretical frameworks to Connell, such as post-structuralism (see, for example, Willett 2006), which I consider in the last section in this chapter.

Sexuality has also been argued as important to hegemonic masculinity in primary school (see in particular Renold 2005; 2007; Skelton 1997). Renold in particular found that heterosexuality was important in shaping masculinities and femininities, although hegemonic masculinity went beyond demonstrating heterosexuality and boys deemed romantically desirable also tended to be good at sport and ‘hard’, ‘tough’, ‘cool’, or ‘good-looking’ (2005, 121). Other studies have found hegemonic masculinity can involve sexual harassment of girls and female teachers (Skelton 1997), and the sexual objectification of females (McGuffey and Rich 1999). However, a fine line for boys between heterosexuality and the appearance of being too close to girls has been documented. For example, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill found that rather than being interested in heterosexual relationships, the boys in their research believed that ‘expressing an interest in girls was itself a sign of femininity’ (2003, 72; see also Renold 2005). Other aspects of hegemonic masculinity for boys may be the attempted denigration of, or oppositional positioning to, ‘femininity’ and homosexuality. However, it has been noted that boys may not fully understand the latter of these terms and to an extent remain locked into an unthinking heteronormativity (Hasbrook and Harris 1999, 314, 316-317 note 6; McGuffey and Rich 1999, 619; Nordberg, et al. 2006).

In sum, hegemonic masculinity has been used with primary school boys in previous studies (mostly in English-speaking countries) mainly in terms of sport, bodies, and talk about sexuality. The limitations due to age, even in the expression of hegemonic masculinity through these avenues, are generally not acknowledged by the researchers. These limitations can include modified rules of sports (making them less physically violent, reducing the required level of skills); playing sports in mixed-gender groups; the limited differences between boys’ and girls’ bodies in childhood (which, for example, challenges claims about boys having muscles and being stronger than girls); and little, if any, involvement in sexual relationships. However, it is important to acknowledge that boys can still draw on broader discourses of sport, bodies, and sexuality to present their masculinities in particular ways.²³ For example, several researchers have noted that boys draw on adult professional sport to exclude girls from playing and to position them as unskilled (Davies 2003b, 75; Warren 2003, 13). Additionally, Skattebol (2006) points out that in an early childhood setting children often spoke about themselves in terms of

²³ Adult men may also be limited, subordinated or marginalised in relation to particular aspects when constructing their masculinities, but again can draw on broader discourses (for example, discourses about men and professional sport).

'becoming', as well as attempting behaviours associated with those older than them. Similarly, young children can draw on adult concepts and gender practices in play (such as married/family life, and jobs) (see, for example, Taylor 2008). Walkerdine (1999) has also noted that childhood innocence is challenged when, for example, young girls draw on 'adult' sexuality. These examples suggest that boys (and girls) can draw on resources perceived as 'adult' to construct gender which contests the adult/child binary.

It is also necessary to question how Connell's non-hegemonic masculinities may fit with primary school boys. As outlined earlier in this chapter, within masculinity studies the most commonly drawn on non-hegemonic masculinities, as identified by Connell, are subordinate and marginalised, as well as complicit which is viewed as closer to hegemonic masculinity (2005b, 78-81). Nordberg, Saar and Hellman (2006) argue that much work about young masculinities focuses on hegemonic masculinity and neglects other constructions (for some exceptions see their paper, as well as McCaughy and Tischler 2010; Newman, et al. 2006; Renold 2004; Warren 1997). Thorne uses the idea of the 'Big Man Bias' to describe this:

[t]he literature on 'the boys' world' suffers from a 'Big Man Bias' akin to the skew found in anthropological research that equates male elites with men in general. In many observational studies of children in preschools and early elementary school, large, bonded groups of boys who are physically assertive, engage in 'tough talk,' and actively devalue girls anchor descriptions of 'the boys' world' and themes of masculinity. Other kinds of boys may be mentioned, but not as the core of the gender story (1993, 98).

The concept of complicit masculinities is rarely used with boys (for exceptions, see Ashley 2011; McGuffey and Rich 1999, 625) and is sometimes used differently to Connell's definition (Swain 2006b). Swain uses complicit masculinities more narrowly to refer to 'wannabes' (those boys deliberately attempting hegemonic masculinity but failing) rather than the broader definition of those (men) who benefit from the 'gender order' (2006b, 338-339). Ashley (2011) shows how the 11-14 year old boys involved in singing in his research remained complicit with hegemonic masculinity, despite the fact they were involved in a practice that was potentially disruptive of hegemonic masculinity. Importantly, he also shows how they engaged in multiple forms of masculinities at different times:

the boys themselves moved on a daily basis between different constructions of masculinity, some hegemonic (the playing of sport, roughhousing and having a laugh) some subordinate (singing) and some complicit (enjoying the patriarchal dividend offered by the music industry) (Ashley 2011, 64).

In empirical research with primary school-aged boys, subordinate masculinities are related to boys who are nonathletic, are physically small, have poor cultural knowledge, are different from other boys, are viewed as babyish or immature, and/or have special education needs or a disability (Hasbrook and Harris 1999, 315; Lodge 2005, 184-185; Swain 2006b, 344). Subordinate masculinities have also been related to boys who are viewed to be like girls (Keddie 2003c).

Marginalised masculinities have been considered even less frequently with primary school-aged boys than the concepts of subordinate and complicit. In Warren's (1997) research with 10 year old students in England, he identifies hegemonic patterns amongst the middle class boys and amongst the working class boys, but suggests that, overall, working class boys are marginalised in comparison to the middle class boys. The term marginalisation is not always drawn on using Connell's definition referring to the intersection of gender with other factors such as social class or ethnicity. Instead, several writers use marginalisation to refer to what Connell would call subordinate masculinities ('feminine' and/or gay) and/or the broader definition of marginalisation relating to exclusion (see, for example, Clark and Paechter 2007, 265; Davies 2003b; Keddie 2003a; McCaughtry and Tischler 2010; Newman, et al. 2006; Nordberg, et al. 2006; Renold 2004; Skelton 2001).

Critiques of Using Masculinities with Primary School Boys

There have been only a small number of critiques of the use of hegemonic masculinity as well as masculinity/ies more broadly in the study of boys.²⁴ Little attention has been paid to age or the ability of boys to engage in hegemonic masculinity. Oddly enough, these oversights are rarely acknowledged, even in empirical research about boys and masculinities. An exception arises in relation to Renold's research in England where she suggests some of the 10 and 11 year old boys attempted hegemonic masculinity but

²⁴ There are also few critiques of the fit between hegemonic masculinity and *high school-aged* boys (for exceptions see Burgess, Edwards and Skinner 2003, 202; O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000, 10).

ultimately failed because the concept is both ‘adult-centric’ and ‘elusive’ (2005, 67).²⁵ Particularly pertinent here is Renold’s argument that:

‘fighting’ and other forms of *physical violence* as signifiers of hegemonic masculinity were more easily assimilated and accessed by boys of all ages [in primary school] and thus transcended social-generational boundaries in ways that the embodiment of *sexuality* and other signifiers of adult masculinities (e.g. man as ‘*big and strong*’ or as ‘*provider*’) do not (emphases added, 2005, 72).

Some critiques of the fit between masculinities and boys do not name hegemonic masculinity explicitly. Instead, they use terms like ‘adult male’ (Thorne 1993, 172), ‘male adulthood’ (Davies 2003b, 101), ‘adult masculinity’ (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003, 72) or ‘mature masculinity’ (Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2007, 104-105). A key barrier to ‘adult masculinity’ for boys is their lack of access to the benefits of the ‘patriarchal dividend’. Connell notes that material advantages associated with the ‘patriarchal dividend’ are something that most boys can *expect* (2000, 166), implying that the advantages are not available to them as boys. Thorne argues that boys lack the resources of ‘adult male privilege’ and boys’ status as children is more significant than their position as male (1993, 172). Haywood and Mac an Ghail similarly note that:

[t]he symbolic (read also physical and economic) resources and cultural texts used to forge masculinity, such as work, family and leisure may not be available in the same way to younger boys (2003, 72).

They argue that in their research ‘boyhood identifications were made through cultural resources that appealed to childhood rather than adult codes of mature masculinity’ (Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2007, 104). In addition, they write that ‘[t]he positioning as a child often means disqualification from dominant cultural ascriptions of masculinity’ (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003, 71). It is therefore important to keep in mind that ‘[a]ge categories, like gender ones, correlate with differences in social power, status, and access

²⁵ In earlier works, Renold describes some boys in her research as ‘hegemonic boys’ and suggests that primary school boys can express a ‘hegemonic’ masculinity (see, for example, 2001; 2004). However, in some places in her writing Renold suggests that upper primary school boys attempt to engage in *teenage* masculinities (2005, 67).

to resources' (Gardiner 2002, 94). As Weaver-Hightower notes '[e]very boy, in fact, experiences some amount of powerlessness in the face of age oppression' (2003, 411).

The strongest critiques of applying the concept of masculinity/ies to boys come from Mac an Ghaill and Haywood. In particular, they argue that the concept of masculinity is not applicable to boys because it is strongly connected to (hetero)sexuality (Haywood 2008; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007, Chapter Four; 2012). While Mac an Ghaill and Haywood make some useful points about the problems with conflating (adult) 'masculinity' with boys, their argument presumes (hetero)sexuality is the *key* aspect of masculinity. I argue that instead of rejecting the concept of masculinity/ies for theorising gender in young age, masculinity/ies can be used to theorise a much wider range of practices than sexuality, such as sport.

Similarly, while some writers, including Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003, 72), argue that 'adult' masculinity is the opposite of 'boyhood' masculinity/childhood (see also Davies 2003b, 101; Renold 2005, 24), a simplistic binary between adulthood and young age does not account for similarities between the age groups, and how boys may draw on adult discourses of masculinity/ies. As Buckingham argues:

[f]or children ... age differences – and the social perception and construction of the *meaning* of those differences – are unavoidably significant: what it means to be 'male' and what it means to be 'adult' or 'childish' intersect in complex ways (emphasis in original, 1993, 111).

Thus, while the intersection of gender and age are crucially important, and adult versions of masculinities should not be unquestioningly used with boys, young masculinities should not be theorised as being completely distinct from adult masculinities.

As a final point here, a potential rationale for rejecting the use of masculinity/ies, and what Mac an Ghaill and Haywood seem to imply, is that in the field of masculinity studies, masculinity/ies are often conflated with 'men'. Some writers may view the concept of masculinity/ies as being inseparably tied up with men and therefore not applicable to boys. However, if, as Clatterbaugh argues, men and masculinities can (and should) be considered separately, then masculinities appears to be a useful concept to use with boys; it is

beneficial to be ‘talking about men [and boys], male behaviours, attitudes, and abilities, on one hand, and images, stereotypes, norms, and discourses, on the other’ (1998, 43).²⁶

Gender Relations in Primary School Masculinities Research

There are a number of important reasons for considering gender relations and femininities in research about masculinities. Gilbert and Gilbert assert that:

[t]he most useful work on boys and gender studies the construction of gender from a relational perspective, where the practice of various forms of masculinity is seen to be constantly constructed along with but in distinction from femininities, and where the focus is on both boys and girls as participants in this process (1998, 112).

Paying attention to gender relations in masculinities research also allows for an investigation of practices where girls may be subordinated by boys. Skelton argues that:

it is important that we [feminists] keep scrutinising our own agendas in terms of ensuring that all work on masculinities keeps in its sight the impact the findings have for the school lives and experiences of girls and women (1998, 224).

The absence of a considered approach to gender relations in research about primary school masculinities can sometimes be attributed to the methods used by researchers. Several key studies about primary school masculinities draw on small group interviews. When using this method girls are less likely to be included in data collection; when they are, they tend to be interviewed in separate groups from boys. For example, Swain conducted 104 group interviews – 62 with boys only, 39 with girls only, and three with mixed genders (2006a, 203). Girls’ voices are mostly absent from Swain’s writing (for an exception, see 2005b). Other studies about primary school masculinities have also tended to interview students in single-gender groups (see, for example, Connolly 2004, 101; Keddie 2004) as well as some studies exploring both masculinities and femininities (Renold 2005, 14). The rationale for single-gender groups is often related to friendship choices (Connolly 2004, 101; Keddie

²⁶ As discussed earlier in this chapter, in this thesis I use discourse to refer to both practice and ideals, unlike Clatterbaugh.

2004; Renold 2005, 14; Swain 2005b, 76-77). While friendship patterns amongst students of the same gender are important, a focus on single-gender groups does not allow for an in-depth consideration of how genders are constructed relationally (particularly in co-educational schools), and the related practices of privilege and subordination that go with this. Of those studies that do consider masculinities in relation to femininities, the importance of considering both genders together is illuminated.

Theorising Gender in Primary School: Hegemony and discourse?

Here I consider how the most useful aspects of Connell's theorising may be combined with post-structuralist approaches which emphasise the fluidity of subjects, and power as produced through discourse. Martino identifies studies about masculinities and school, including his own, which represent 'an attempt to elaborate a theoretical framework that builds on that provided by Connell by drawing on theorists such as Foucault, Anzaldua and Minh-ha' (2007, 49). Indeed, there is a tendency in empirical research about primary school masculinities to use combinations of Connell/hegemonic masculinity/hegemony and post-structuralism/Foucault/Butler/discourse (see Ashley 2003; Bhana 2008; Clark and Paechter 2007; Davies 2003a; 2003b; Francis 1998; Hasbrook and Harris 1999; Keddie 2003c; Letts 2001; Nespore 2000; Newman, et al. 2006; Nordberg, et al. 2006; Renold 2005; Skelton 2001; Swain 2006b; Thorne 1993; Warren 1997; Young 2000).²⁷ There are even a few studies which mention a discourse of hegemonic masculinity (see particularly Keddie 2006a), although how this is different from Connell's conception of hegemonic masculinity is not made clear.

For the most part, empirical research about primary school masculinities combining Connell's concepts, hegemonic masculinity, and/or hegemony with post-structuralist accounts often inspired by Foucault and/or Butler, and/or drawing on concepts such as discourse, have not acknowledged the potential conflicts between the approaches. An exception is Warren who draws on what is 'useful' from Connell and post-structuralism, noting that they 'do not necessarily sit happily together' (1997, 220). The tendency to combine elements of both approaches suggests that researchers are finding that using only

²⁷ Such a pattern of drawing on the two approaches is also evident in empirical research that discusses masculinities in early childhood (see, for example, Blaise 2005; Browne 2004; Davies 2003a; MacNaughton 2000), and high school (see, for example, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2002; Martino 1995; 1999; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Robinson 2005).

one approach is insufficient. What the studies combining the approaches highlight is that combinations of theories are possible and beneficial when theorising gender and young age. In particular, many of these studies demonstrate the usefulness of retaining a particular masculinity which is privileged (hegemonic) while also showing that fluidity in gender practices deserves attention. Thus, while there is fluidity and incoherence in gender construction, there is also a hegemonic masculinity which is influential over students which can be limiting and restrictive in how gender is constructed.

Utilising aspects of post-structuralism appears particularly useful when considering young age. Davies, one of the key proponents for post-structuralist theorising with young people, argues:

[p]oststructuralist theory allows us to recognise that what children learn through the process of interacting in the everyday world is not one single, non-contradictory language and practice—and it is not one single identity that is created through these practices ... Rather, children learn to see and understand in terms of the multiple positionings and forms of discourse that are available to them. More, they learn the forms of desire and of power and powerlessness that are embedded in and made possible by the various discursive practices through which they position themselves and are positioned (2003a, 4).

Willett's (2006) article about same-gender friendships between 8 and 9 year old students draws on post-structuralism. While not explicitly mentioning Connell, the way she frames her theoretical approach is compatible with Connell's framework, at least as a starting base, which can be furthered by post-structuralism. This is evident from Willett's arguments for the usefulness of post-structuralism:

[p]oststructuralist analysis helps to illuminate times when children take up positions but are restricted in their choices, when children do not take up dominant discourses, when dominant discourses constrain children's thoughts and actions, and when children shift between sometimes contradictory positions (2006, 441).

Connell also discusses restricted choice relating to power (see, for example, 2000, 137). ‘Dominant discourses’ may be framed as ‘hegemonic discourses’ relating to gender (Willett uses ‘dominant masculine discourses’ and ‘dominant feminine discourses’). Hegemonic masculinity may be reframed as an influential discourse rather than something to be held or possessed. Finally, the notion of contradictory positions extends Connell’s work about gender being a social construction which should not be viewed as fixed (argued particularly in relation to hegemonic masculinity, see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) to a stronger emphasis on the fluidity of gender. Thus, a combination of the two approaches allows for an extension of Connell’s ground-breaking work while also accounting more for fluidity and incoherence.

Conclusion

Research drawing only on Connell’s approach would view masculinities relating largely to four key patterns (hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalised), and would not allow for a more sophisticated understanding of the movement between these patterns, where boys can be positioned in multiple discourses. In this thesis I draw on ideas from both Connell and post-structuralism. Thus, I extend the focus from hegemonic masculinity describing particular boys or groups of boys to conceptualising a *discourse* of hegemonic masculinity, which boys can take up or support at different times and in different contexts, and where subordination and marginalisation (and resistance) are viewed as practices or strategies. I draw on Davies (2003a, xii) to theorise gender as an ongoing construction, never fixed and never unitary. I also show how a focus on young age illuminates the incoherence of masculinities. As Ellis writes:

[t]he study of boys and boyhood has much to recommend it to scholars of masculinity. ... Perhaps more than any other aspect of identity, age allows us to access the fragmented, shifting, ever-changing nature of masculine identity which scholars have been emphasizing in recent work (2008, 121).

The next chapter details the empirical research which informs this thesis, providing a background to the research approach and giving information about the research locations, participants, and methods used.

CHAPTER TWO

The Research Process and Methods

Introduction

[F]ollowing the practices of a feminist methodology (e.g. that of Stanley and Wise, 1990) should almost automatically lead researchers to include children as their research subjects, on a par with adults (mothers, teachers, etc.) and, furthermore, to respect children's knowledge, i.e. to treat children as knowledgeable.

(Alanen 1994, 35)

This thesis is based on the findings from research with students, teachers, and parents in two primary schools in Adelaide, South Australia. The research used a number of different methods to consider the participants' views and understandings of gender, giving equal value to the voices of the students as to those of the teachers and parents, as Alanen argues for above. This chapter outlines strategies for conducting research about gender across age groups, examines the challenges of undertaking research with young people, details the specificities of the research locations, participants, and methods, and reflexively considers some issues and assumptions from the research.

Considering Gender Across Age Groups: Strategies for the research

This thesis seeks to consider theoretical concepts, particularly from masculinity studies as discussed in the previous chapter, with empirical research in primary schools, and in turn to use my empirical research to build on existing theory. This can best be described as an abductive research strategy. While not often explicitly named by researchers, the abductive research strategy 'is said to more satisfactorily describe the method used by qualitative researchers than either the idea of deductive or inductive reasoning' (Davies 2007, 233), and 'is the dominant strategy in Feminism' (Blaikie 1993, 194). This process of considering theory and data together is explained by Blaikie:

in the Abductive research strategy ... data and theoretical ideas are played off against one another in a developmental and creative process.

Regularities that are discovered at the beginning or in the course of the research will stimulate the researcher to ask questions and look for answers. The data will then be reinterpreted in the light of emerging theoretical ideas, and this may lead to further questioning, the entertainment of tentative hypotheses, and a search for answers. *Research becomes a dialogue between data and theory mediated by the researcher. ...* While this dialogue could continue forever, a satisfactory explanation will have been produced when theoretical saturation is achieved and satisfying answers to the research questions have been arrived at (emphasis in original, 2009, 156).

In order to consider theory in relation to data, I use a qualitative approach to researching constructions of gender in schools. The use of qualitative research allows for investigating the meanings that people give to their lives and experiences. This approach is fundamental to understanding the experiences of students, teachers, and parents. By drawing on research from four classrooms (two age groups in two primary schools), I focus on how the students understand and construct gender, particularly masculinities. To provide a broader sense of the picture I also consider the views of teachers and parents, bringing in their comments particularly when they relate to the student responses. The empirical research was conducted in two schools to enable a consideration of a broader range of students, but my aim is not to focus on an in-depth comparison of the schools or the ‘types’ of schools.

Key to the direction of my research, both theoretically and empirically, is a consideration of gender across age groups. Thus, while this thesis focuses on gender and young age, it is important not to view childhood/youth as a homogeneous grouping (see Thorne 2008). I consider how the meaning of age is socially constructed, attempting to move away from the idea of age-based developmental ‘stages’, an approach which is particularly common in research and teaching practices influenced by Piaget (as critiqued in the previous chapter).

The most obvious, and perhaps ideal, way for studying differences in gender across age groups is to conduct a longitudinal study (for an example, see Best 1983). However, this approach requires a long timeframe which is not feasible for PhD research.

The approach which is utilised in this thesis considers gender and age differences by comparing different primary school students of different ages. This strategy allows for student voices to be heard, and for comparison of gender understandings at different ages.

Surprisingly, such an approach and focus on age differences is rare. Thorne's (1993) research in the United States included students of different ages but did not have a focus on how gender may be different for the different age groups (as Thorne herself notes 1990, 113). Some other studies have also included children or students of different age groups and made only occasional comments about age differences (see, for example, McGuffey and Rich 1999; Nordberg, et al. 2006). Renold's PhD research in two schools in England had originally included Year 2 classes (6-7 years old) and Year 6 classes (10-11 years old) but she focused on the two Year 6 classes because she found the older students easier to work with (and was interested in their discussions of gender and sexuality) (1999, 25-31). Similarly, Swain's PhD research had initially aimed to consider masculinities in Year 3 (7-8 years old) and Year 6 (10-11 years old) but due to time and the need for 'depth' he researched only Year 6 classes (in three schools) (2001, 104, 372).

The few studies directly comparing age groups illuminate the significance of age differences in primary school. Francis (1998) found differences in understandings of gender, power and adult work in a number of English primary schools with students 7-8 years old (Year 3) and 10-11 years old (Year 6). For example, the younger students were more likely to believe that girls and boys are 'different inside' compared with the older students who tended to believe girls and boys are 'just acting differently' (Francis 1998, 32). Skelton (1997; 2001), in an English study about masculinities with students 6-7 years old (Year 2) in one school and 9-10 years old (Year 5) in a different school, found that it was difficult to separate age differences from the contexts of the schools and the local culture. Her research is an important reminder that particular age groups are not universal and can vary by social class and local context.

Conducting Research with Children and Young People

Pole, Mizzen and Bolton argue that 'what counts as acceptable academic knowledge is defined in relatively narrow and conservative terms by academics who are invariably adults' (1999, 39). Morrow and Richards similarly suggest that children are seen as not having enough 'competence to provide valid sociological data' (1996, 98). This thesis follows Alanen's view that it is important 'to treat children as knowledgeable' (1994, 35). I discuss how I attempted to include the students in my research as much as possible but highlight a number of practical (and potentially legal) barriers to their full involvement in the research process.

'Gatekeeping' and Access to Schools

My initial aim had been to conduct research in three co-educational primary schools: two government schools (one predominantly white, middle class school; one mixed ethnicity, working class school), and one 'alternative' independent school (for example, one inspired by Montessori or Steiner). My rationale for this was to include schools with different demographic backgrounds to enable for a broad range of students and views. The proposal for my research was approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee.

After protracted interaction with the relevant government department, the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), my application to conduct research in government schools was finally rejected. This was surprising as DECS had granted me access to a government primary school to study gender relations for my honours thesis. In a meeting with one of my thesis supervisors, the relevant DECS manager agreed that the review process had been flawed and future applications would receive fuller consideration. Preliminary searching revealed that 'alternative' schools were located too far away for convenient access within the bounds of a PhD thesis. Thus, my research sample was ultimately a Catholic school and a Greek Orthodox school.

A Catholic school was included in the research because the Catholic education sector is the largest non-government sector in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010b). Out of the almost two million primary school students in Australia, nearly a fifth of them attend Catholic schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010b). Access to the Catholic system was straightforward and involved an ethics application and a police clearance certificate from within the past three months. After gaining approval I contacted four Catholic schools. St Catherine's Primary (all names are pseudonyms) was the only school where the 'gatekeeper', in this case the principal, expressed an interest in participating. Two teachers of appropriate year levels (Year Reception/1 and Year 6/7) were interested in having the research conducted with their classes.

I also sought to include another primary school in my research which was not Catholic, and found an interested Greek Orthodox school, Socrates Primary. Little research has been conducted in Greek Orthodox schools in Australia (for an exception, see Garas and Godinho 2009). Socrates Primary belongs to the Association of Independent Schools of

South Australia (AISSA). After telephoning the AISSA I was told I did not need clearance from them and should check with the school for their ethics process. The head of junior school gave me permission to conduct the research and found two teachers of appropriate year levels (Year 1 and Year 6) willing to have research conducted in their classrooms.

The four class teachers were given information letters about the research, and consent forms to send home with each student to give to their parents/guardians, along with a demographics form for parents/guardians to provide some background information about the student and the people they lived with (see Appendix Two). All students from the two classes at Socrates Primary were given consent to participate in the research. At St Catherine's Primary most students returned consent forms granting permission for them to participate, although these were not all returned before the first session.

Listening to and Including Young People

My research approach aimed to involve young people as much as possible. Because ethics approval is required for research proposals, it was not possible for the students involved in my research to have input into the research design. Instead, I consulted four primary school students that I personally knew (who did not attend the research schools) to provide their ideas and feedback, in an effort to ensure the research was 'age appropriate'. These girls assisted me with more specific details about how to explain the activities to the students, and how questions should be worded, particularly for the younger age group.

When designing and conducting the research I attempted to involve the participating students as much as possible. To do this I used a range of activities for the students to express their thoughts and ideas, which included asking them to design their own poster or activity for use with students their own age. I also asked students for their feedback on previous activities, for potential use in future research. To involve the students in some way in the analysis, and to fit with my abductive research strategy, I showed the students some of the initial findings and asked for their responses and interpretations. An outline of all of the research activities conducted with the students is provided later in this chapter.

In order to listen to and include students in research it is necessary to build a rapport with them. Students always called me by my given name (see also Blaise 2005; Davies 2003b; Thorne 1993; cf. Keddie 2001; Swain 2006a, 207-208), both because I encouraged them,

and also probably because of my long family name. In another study, even when encouraged by the researcher to use her given name, students often reverted to addressing her in a formal manner (Renold 2002a, 35). My relatively young age also appeared to be an advantage in building a rapport with the students (see also Renold 2002a, 35). In the anonymous feedback handout about the activities, one of the older girls commented: ‘Clare being kinda [sic] close to our age was good because she understands us and our generation’. Despite frequently reminding the students I was not a teacher, some still suspected I was a teacher (or perhaps a student teacher). For example, before one session a younger girl commented that they had three ‘teachers’ – their class teacher, me, and a Year 10 work experience student. Thus, younger students are likely to view older students, teenagers, and young adults as ‘adults’.

Research Locations: The schools and participants

In this section I provide a background to the schools, classes, and participants (details of each participating student and parent are in Appendix Three).¹ ‘Official’ data about the schools was accessed from the ‘My School’ website (Australian Curriculum 2011a)² from the year of the research (2009) (see Table 2.1, overleaf). On average, students at Socrates Primary came from more advantaged backgrounds, as indicated by the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) calculated from census data³, and the higher school fees.

¹ In order to protect the identity of the participants, I used pseudonyms for students, teachers, schools, and other people mentioned (such as siblings). I attempted to choose pseudonyms which reflected the age and ethnic background of the students. To assist with choosing age appropriate names I used the South Australian births, deaths and marriages website to find names that were common in the years most of the students were born (1997-1999 for older students and 2002-2003 for the younger students) (Consumer and Business Affairs 2010). However, names chosen to match students’ specific ethnic background could not always reflect this age appropriate strategy. Greek names were chosen with assistance from a Greek colleague. Because of the small number of parent interviews, I did not want students/parents to be easily identified. Therefore, when discussing parents’ comments, I have used a different pseudonym for their child than I have with the student and teacher data.

² This website is an initiative of the Australian federal government and contains background information to nearly 10,000 schools in Australia, and shows results from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Australian Curriculum 2011b). Essentially it allows comparisons to be made between schools.

³ The average ICSEA value is 1000 so both schools can be seen to be slightly above that.

TABLE 2.1: Background to Participating Schools from ‘My School’ Website in 2009*

	Socrates Primary	St Catherine’s Primary
Religion	Orthodox	Catholic
Sector, system or association	Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA)	Catholic Education South Australia
Location	Metropolitan	Metropolitan
Gender	Co-educational	Co-educational
Year levels	Reception to Year 12 [^]	Reception to Year 7
Number of student enrolments (rounded to nearest 20)	600	160
Full-time equivalent teaching staff (rounded to nearest 5)	45	10
Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) (rounded to nearest 5)	1040	1005
School Fees (average per student) (rounded to nearest \$100)	\$3,900	\$1,700

* To disguise the schools, a number of the figures have been rounded.

[^] While Socrates Primary is made up of students at both primary school and high school levels, I have chosen the pseudonym to reflect the age of the students that were included in the research.

Socrates Primary

Socrates Primary was made up of two campuses located within walking distance of each other (one for playgroup through to Year 3, and the other for the rest of the junior school and the whole of the senior school). The head of junior school (Playgroup to Year 6) emphasised the ethnic background and linguistic diversity of the students, and the promotion of multiculturalism at the school. She specified that, while Socrates Primary was a Greek Orthodox school, there were also students from other backgrounds with an Orthodox faith (such as from Serbia), as well as refugees (from Albania, Africa, and Afghanistan), and international students (from South Korea, China, and Greece). The head of junior school described the school as having ‘an average socio-economic class of families’, with 12% eligible for the School Card.⁴ The school did not have any explicit policies about gender or gender equity. There were two Year 1 and two Year 6 classes at Socrates Primary; one class from each year level participated in the research.

⁴ In South Australia, the School Card refers to financial assistance provided to full-time students from low income families at government and non-government schools (Department of Education and Children's Services 2011).

Mrs Searle's Year 1 class was made up of 19 students (nine girls and 10 boys), aged 6 and 7 years old. The students were mostly from Greek backgrounds and three students had one or both parents born in Greece or Cyprus. Two students were from Asian backgrounds and one was from an African background. The majority of students' parents were married and many of the students had siblings, often younger than them. Mrs Searle was in her seventh year of teaching, all at Socrates Primary. She had taught mostly Year 3s, as well as Receptions and Year 1s. She was 28 years old and married. Mrs Searle was from a non-Greek background and therefore was able to provide me with insights of how an 'outsider' viewed the Greek culture of the school. Before the research started, she had told the class that I was coming in and would be doing something about gender with them.

The Year 6 class, taught by Miss Karidis, was made up of 28 students (14 girls and 14 boys), aged 11 and 12 years old. The students were mostly from Greek backgrounds. Two students were born in China and other students were born in Greece, Korea, Serbia, and Afghanistan. Several students had parents who were born overseas, mainly in Greece. The majority of students' parents were married and many of them had siblings, some younger and some older. Miss Karidis had been teaching for five years, all Year 6 classes at this school, apart from one term. She was from a Greek background, and was 30 years old. Before the first session Miss Karidis told the students that I was doing something at university, and framed the sessions as 'workshops' to denote that they would be exciting and important. The students also referred to the research sessions as 'workshops' or 'gender workshop'.

Three mothers from Socrates Primary participated in the research. Two mothers were involved in face-to-face interviews and one mother filled out an emailed interview.

St Catherine's Primary

St Catherine's Primary was a small school so many classes were made up of composite year levels. The principal described the school as being '[s]mall, [and] family orientated'. She identified the cultural make-up of the school as '[v]ery multicultural' and students were '[o]ften 2nd generation' Australians. She also noted an increase in the number of students from African and Asian backgrounds. The principal described the students as coming from low-middle socio-economic backgrounds which 'has changed over the past 10 years, becoming more middle class.' She described the demographic as having '[f]ew

professional families' and '[m]any single parent families'. 13 students (approximately 8%) were eligible for the School Card, although the principal noted that 'many families [only] just miss out'. There were no gender policies or programs at the school. A Year Reception/1 (R/1) and a Year 6/7 class participated in the study. Unlike Socrates Primary where students came from around Adelaide to attend the school, most of the students in these classes lived locally, in the same suburb as the school or in neighbouring suburbs.

Mrs Hartley's Year R/1 class was made up of 22 students. 10 girls and 10 boys, aged 6 and 7 years old participated (two boys did not return their consent forms). Seven of the students had at least one parent born overseas (three students had one parent born in Greece, one student had both parents born in South Korea, and other students had one parent born in either the Philippines, Spain, or Yugoslavia). Only one student was not born in Australia (South Korea). The majority of students' parents were married, although one girl had a step-father and two boys lived with their mothers who were divorced. Many students had siblings, some younger and some older. Mrs Hartley was in her ninth year of teaching, and this was her first year as a Year R/1 teacher. She had taught at two other schools and had been at St Catherine's Primary for five years. She had previously taught Year 3s, Year 3/4s, and Year 4/5s. Mrs Hartley coached the mixed-gender Year 4/5 basketball team which competed in a boys' competition. She was 29 years old and married.

Daniel (students called him by his given name so I have matched this with a pseudonym) taught the Year 6/7 class which was made up of 30 students (one boy did not participate because he did not return his consent form). They ranged in age from 11 to 13 years old and included 16 girls and 13 boys. 11 of the students had at least one parent/guardian born overseas (although approximately half of these were from English speaking countries of New Zealand, Northern Ireland, or England). Three of the students were born overseas (Hong Kong SAR China, India, and Zambia). Many students' parents were married but some were divorced or separated. Most students had siblings, often younger than them, and some had step-siblings. Daniel was in his 30s and had been a teacher for nearly a decade. He had also worked in a number of other jobs including for the Catholic Education Office. Daniel had taught every year level in primary school. He had been at St Catherine's Primary for one year, and this was his first time teaching Year 6/7s. The students called Daniel by his first name which seemed to both reflect and contribute to his rapport and approach with the students. For some of the students this rapport extended to having Daniel as a basketball coach for the Year 6/7 team.

At St Catherine's Primary, four mothers participated in interviews. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and two Year 6/7 mothers were interviewed jointly to enable a discussion between them.

Multiple Voices: Teachers and parents

There has been little previous research about gender which considers the views of students, teachers, and parents (for an exception, see Paechter and Clark 2007)⁵, although a number of studies have combined the voices of young people with data collected from teachers and staff in the form of interviews (Keddie 2003c; 2006a; 2007; Lodge 2005; Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2012; Skelton 2001; Swain 2002a; 2002b), and observations and informal conversations (Renold 2005; Thorne 1993).

Rather than taking the adult voices of teachers and parents as 'fact' in comparison to the students' responses, I consider the similarities and differences in views amongst the students, teachers, and parents. This thesis is centred on student voices so I only include adult voices where they provide additional, different, or even contradictory information and ideas than that expressed by the students.

The class teachers were interviewed twice, once at the beginning of the research, and again to comment on the initial findings from the student activities. All interviews were audio-recorded. The teachers were given information letters and consent forms to sign (see Appendix Two). One-on-one semi-structured interviews with each of the four class teachers were conducted before any activities were completed with the students (apart from the Year R/1 teacher who was interviewed the week after the first session because of her availability). These interviews aimed to find out how the teachers understood gender, how they thought gender mattered to their students, and how they thought their students understood gender. The teachers were also asked how they would describe the gender issues and gender programs in their class (if any) (see Appendix Four for list of guiding questions). The interviews took between 30-60 minutes in locations chosen by the teachers (two in classrooms, and one each in an office and a staffroom). My methods for

⁵ Connolly's (2004) work has a sophisticated interweaving of the voices of boys, parents, and teachers and the 'habitus' in which boys constructed their masculinities. However, Connolly focuses on boys and educational achievement/schooling rather than masculinities *per se*, so his discussions with the adult participants focus on achievement and related topics, rather than gender.

interviewing teachers were influenced particularly by MacNaughton (1997; 2000), as well as other researchers examining teachers' understandings of and commitment to gender equity (Clark 1989a; Lee-Thomas, Sumsion and Roberts 2005), and high school teachers' understandings of gender (Martino, Lingard and Mills 2004).

I re-interviewed the teachers to discuss the initial findings from the student data, approximately six weeks after the activities with the students were completed (excluding the final session with the students). I compiled the key findings from my initial data analysis for each school and asked the teachers for their feedback. In these interviews the teachers were also asked how best to present the findings to the students for comment, and for their ideas about which findings in particular to present. The teachers at Socrates Primary were interviewed together, and the Year R/1 teacher at St Catherine's Primary was interviewed by herself. The Year 6/7 teacher at St Catherine's Primary was not available for a second interview.

On the consent form for their child, parents/guardians were invited to participate in a focus group. Parents/guardians who expressed an interest in participating were mailed or emailed information letters and consent forms (see Appendix Two). As only seven parents (all mothers) elected to participate, focus groups were not possible so I conducted four one-on-one interviews, one interview with two mothers, and one interview via email. As became apparent during the joint interview with two mothers, one-on-one interviews avoided potential competition between parents or parents holding back from talking because of not wanting to be judged by other parents. All of the participating mothers had more than one child so I encouraged them to also reflect on the siblings of the students in the research.

Similar to the initial interviews with teachers, semi-structured interviews were conducted to see how the parents understood gender, how they thought gender mattered to their children, how they thought their children understood gender, and to what extent they thought their children were knowledgeable about the gender frameworks they took up and policed (monitored) (see Appendix Five for the list of guiding questions). I stressed to the mothers that I was interested in their experiences of *their own* children. This was to avoid generalising about children/young people and gender. All interviews were audio-recorded.

Hearing Student Voices: Methods for activities

All of the empirical research was conducted in 2009 between the beginning of August and the end of November. Conducting the research in the second half of the school year meant that specific classroom dynamics, friendship groups, and particular hierarchies and groupings had already been established. During an initial meeting I showed the teachers the activities I had designed, and asked if they thought they would be suitable for that age group, and how they would best be explained to the students. A clear overview of time spent in each class can be seen in Table 2.2, overleaf (based on Renold's model in her PhD thesis 1999, 29).

TABLE 2.2: Data Collection Time Guide (Terms 3 and 4, 2009)

	Socrates Primary		St Catherine's Primary	
<i>School Dates</i>	Year 1	Year 6	Year R/1	Year 6/7
<i>Term 3 (20 July-25 September)</i>				
Wk 1	-----	-----	-----	-----
Wk 2	[Initial meeting with teachers and head of junior school]		[Initial meeting with teachers]	
Wk 3	Teacher Interview	Teacher Interview	-----	-----
Wk 4	-----	-----	-----	-----
Wk 5	Session 1	Session 1	-----	-----
Wk 6	-----	Session 2	-----	Teacher Interview
Wk 7	Session 2	Session 3	Session 1	Session 1
Wk 8	-----	-----	Teacher Interview, Session 2	Session 2*
Wk 9	Session 3	Session 4	Session 3	Session 3
Wk 10	Session 4	-----	Session 4	Session 4
<i>Term 4 (12 October-11 December)</i>				
Wk 1	Parent Interview	-----	-----	-----
Wk 2	-----	Parent Interview	-----	-----
Wk 3	Emailed Parent Interview returned	-----	Parent Interview	Joint Parent Interview
Wk 4	-----	-----	-----	-----
Wk 5	Joint Second Teacher Interview		Parent Interview, Second Teacher Interview	-----
Wk 6	-----	Session 5	Session 5	Session 5
Wk 7	Session 5	-----	-----	-----
Wk 8	-----	-----	-----	-----
Wk 9	-----	-----	-----	-----

* The Year 6/7 class had a relief teacher on this day who allowed me to conduct my research as already organised with Daniel.

The five sessions conducted with each class lasted approximately 90 minutes each. Each session was made up of two or three activities aimed to encourage the students to explore issues about gender. In order to compare age groups, I used very similar activities for the younger and older classes. This worked for most activities, although a few of the activities appeared too simple for some of the older students. To enable all students to participate and to gather a wide range of data, activities involved different tasks such as writing, small group discussions, whole class discussions, and drawing. Some activities were individual and some were paired, group, or whole class based. Table 2.3 (overleaf) outlines each activity and the form it took (the codes in the table refer to the session number (1-5) and the order in which the activities were conducted in each session (a-c)).

All data from students was collected in the view of the teacher and other students, so I assured them I would be the only person reading their written responses and listening to their recordings. Keeping activities confidential proved important for gaining trust from the students and ensuring they felt comfortable doing the activities. Some students, particularly from the older classes, were concerned with confidentiality. This was evident when some students kept their answers secret from other students; asked if I would show the teacher what they had written; and asked if I would be the only person listening to their recordings. Because I had promised the students that I alone would listen to the recordings, I transcribed all of the student recordings myself. Furthermore, each time I turned the audio-recorder on I reminded students that they would be recorded. When recording small groups I asked permission to record them (none refused, although this may reflect usual adult/student relationships rather than always a willingness to participate). Many of the students enjoyed being audio-recorded and it also seemed to highlight the importance of their involvement in the research. An illustrative example was when an older boy reminded his group '[w]e're getting recorded you know' to which another boy replied 'I know, it's hell cool'. Students, particularly from the younger classes, often asked me if I could record their groups.

TABLE 2.3: Summary of All Student Activities

Code	Activity	Individual/Pair/Group	Written/discussion/drawn
1a	Who are you?/words that describe me	Individual + Whole class	Cut and paste or written Whole class discussion
1b	Who do you look up to?	Individual + Whole class	Written Whole class discussion*
1c	Friendship Map	Individual	Written
2a	'Manly' and 'Womanly' Famous Faces	Group + Whole class	Small group discussion and written Whole class discussion*
2b	Descriptions of boys and girls	Pair (plus some groups to make up numbers) + Whole class	Written Whole class discussion*^
2c	Good and bad things about being a boy or girl	Individual	Written
3a: younger classes	Imagined Futures: 'My Life'	Individual	Written and/or drawn
3a: older classes	Imagined Futures: 'My Life' story	Individual	Written
3b	Favourite television show/movie/book	Individual	Written
3c: younger classes	<i>WALL-E</i> (2008) clip	Whole class	Viewed clip Whole class discussion
3c: older classes	'Girls Just Want to Have Sums' clips (<i>The Simpsons</i> 2006)	Whole class	Viewed clips Whole class discussion
3c	<i>Kung Fu Panda</i> (2008) clip: 'Furious Five' drawings	Whole class + Individual	Viewed clip` Drawn (option of written if they preferred)
4a	Feedback on activities	Individual (and anonymous)	Smiley faces and Written
Lead in to 4b	What they learnt from the activities	Whole class	Whole class discussion
4b	Designing own posters/activities	Pair (some worked individually) + Whole class	Drawn and/or written Whole class discussion*
5a: younger classes	Responding to initial findings	Whole class	Whole class discussion
5a: older classes	Responding to initial findings	Group + Whole class	Group discussions and written Whole class discussion
5b: younger classes only	Brainstorming things for girls and boys, boys only, and girls only	Whole class	Whole class discussion

* There was not time for a whole class discussion in the Year R/1 class for these activities

^ There was not time for a whole class discussion in the Year 1 class for this activity

` There was not time for the Year 6 class to view the clip, instead they only saw the advertisement for a related 'Furious Five' DVD when the DVD was loading. Most of this class had seen the movie previously so it did not have a significant effect on the activity.

The activities were designed to elicit responses relating to several key areas. A main focus was examining *what gender meant to the students*, and *how they compared 'boys' and 'girls'*. This information was gathered in brainstorming sessions where students from both age groups listed words that described boys and words that described girls (2b), and where the younger students brainstormed things that were the same about boys and girls, and things that were for girls only and boys only (5b). What gender meant to students was also explored by directly asking them to respond to questions such as what was good and bad about being a boy or girl, and how important gender was to them (2c), and examining gender patterns relating to characters in students' favourite television shows, movies, and books (3b). Students also drew their own 'Furious Five' (Kung Fu) characters after watching a clip from *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), to see if they were influenced by the characters in the movie which disrupted stereotypes about fighting characters (3c). What gender meant to the students was also considered when they responded to some of the initial findings from the research (5a), and when the older students discussed an episode of *The Simpsons* which 'played with' gender (3c). I was also interested in finding out *how important gender was to the students in relation to other aspects of their identities*. In particular the 'Who are you?' activity (1a) asked students to rank identity markers which described them (including gender) from the most to least important. The significance of gender was also explored in an activity where students wrote about who they looked up to, where I was particularly interested in what kinds of gender behaviours they privileged and which people provided (gender) examples for the students (1b). Students also wrote about their imagined futures (3a) to illuminate the importance of gender in their lives.

Some of the activities aimed to examine students' *awareness of variations and diversity within genders*. This was determined by brainstorming things about gender (2b, 5b), and the younger students considering a clip from the movie *WALL-E* (2008) where students described the two main characters (who both challenged gender in some ways) to see if the students reflected what they saw on screen or reverted to gender stereotypes (3c). Relatedly, I was interested in exploring *hierarchies of masculinities and femininities*. One activity specifically asked students to rank famous faces from most to least 'manly' and most to least 'womanly', giving reasons for their responses (2a). To determine hierarchies and friendships within the classes students completed a 'Friendship Map' listing their 'best' friends and 'other' friends (1c).

I also aimed to consider the *effectiveness of the activities for exploring gender*. In particular, the students were asked to design their own poster or activity to show what they had learnt during the previous sessions (4b). The messages the students portrayed on their posters were key to determining the effectiveness of the previous activities, and also further illuminated how they understood gender. The effectiveness of the activities was also considered by asking students to give anonymous feedback about the activities, and, in the older classes, to provide suggestions for how the activities might be improved for future research or use in classrooms (4a). In addition, the effectiveness of the activities was considered in relation to how the students responded to some of the findings from the initial data analysis I presented to them for their interpretations (5a).⁶

During the initial data analysis after the first four sessions, I went through each activity separately for the most frequent responses as well as any responses that stood out in terms of appearing explicitly sexist or feminist. I then sorted these findings into two broad themes of ‘gender stereotypes and restrictions’ and ‘disruptions to gender stereotypes and gender restrictions’, with a number of more specific findings under each theme and examples from the activities. During this process I also considered the differences and similarities between the age groups at each school. These were the key initial findings that I showed to the students and teachers (in different forms) for their comment and response. From this initial analysis I drew out the key themes across the activities relating to how gender was constructed by the students in broad terms, and how their own practices supported or challenged this. I went back to the data as more themes emerged, and then began to add in teacher and parent comments where they were relevant to the student data. I focused on a qualitative analysis of the participants’ specific responses to understand how they constructed meaning and made sense of the world.

Fitting with my abductive research strategy, during the analysis process I continually returned to the theory. In particular, I focused on Connell’s (2000; 2005b) multiple masculinities framework, noting where her theories were useful, and where I could not easily interpret or fit my findings into the patterns she writes about. My difficulties in interpreting my findings using Connell’s framework could be attributed to age in particular, and related to this was the need to understand gender as more fluid than Connell’s theorising allows for. I found that applying Foucault’s notion of discourse was

⁶ Detailed explanations of each activity can be found in Appendix Six.

most beneficial in theorising this fluidity, yet many of Connell's theories were still useful in theoretically framing my findings. Thus, I determined that Connell's theories were too useful to abandon, and therefore my thesis can be seen as extending and modifying her work (although without claiming that she would agree with these ideas – a point made by Beasley 2008, 95). The use of Foucault allowed for examining how students moved between or combined discourses, and how individual students provided multiple and potentially conflicting views on particular topics. However, I found that framing my analysis chapters (especially Part II) in relation to Connell's theories was most productive in being able to use, critique, and modify/extend her theories. As outlined in depth in Chapter One, I found the use of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, and a discourse of idealised femininity, the most productive ways of theorising gender fluidity while accounting for the privileging of particular gender discourses. These dominant gender discourses are used as analytical tools to examine the views and practices of the participants. The following chapters show how dominant gender discourses worked and how this theoretical and analytical framing was more useful than Connell's theories or the concept of discourse alone.

Reflexive Notes: Issues and assumptions

Research projects are inherently influenced by the researcher, from its original inception through to the dissemination of 'findings'. Researchers are influenced by their pre-existing understandings and experiences that they bring to their research (Ezzy 2002, 7). In line with not making claims to 'objectivity' or 'truth', qualitative research from feminist and/or post-structuralist perspectives emphasises the importance for researchers to be self-reflexive about their assumptions and positioning (Ezzy 2002, 153-156). In this section I examine my own positionality as the researcher including my assumptions relating to age and gender, issues relating to young age and 'competence', and the ways in which the research methods shaped the way the data was collected and interpreted.

Being a young, white, middle class woman conducting research for a PhD inevitably influenced my approach to designing the study and analysing the data, as well as going some way towards how the research participants were likely to view me. Because I am neither Greek nor Catholic, I was an 'outsider' at both schools (for discussion of a similar position, see Walford 2000). Despite my 'outsider' status, I soon became comfortable in the schools after getting to know the students and teachers. Unlike several others

conducting research in primary schools (such as Epstein 1998a; Skelton 2001; Swain 2006a; Thorne 1993), I do not have a teaching background so was able to avoid the sometimes uncomfortable position of teacher-researcher that some schools expect researchers to take up. My academic background is in the social sciences, informed particularly by feminist/gender studies, rather than education, meaning that I have different understandings of, and assumptions about, age, development, and gender than the teachers in the research who have had a particular type of training. Thus, during the research I made a number of assumptions about age based on my theoretical understandings and viewpoints. In particular, I viewed students as ‘competent’ to be able to participate in the research and explore their views and understandings of gender. I aligned my position with academics such as Alderson, who argues that, ‘[c]hildren are the primary source of knowledge about their own views and experiences’ (2001, 151), and Thorne, who stresses that adults can learn from young people (1993, 12). These views about ‘competence’ were not necessarily shared by the teachers in my research, and, indeed, were an apparent reason why my application to conduct research in government schools was rejected by the Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS) (as mentioned earlier in this chapter).

Following the lead of Thorne (1993, 8-9), aligned with my desire to treat the students as ‘competent’ research participants, and considering the connotations that the word ‘children’ has, I decided not to describe the participants as ‘children’. Thorne uses ‘kids’ but this seems too informal for a thesis. Other options such as ‘tweens’ or ‘tweenie’ which have been derived from marketing (Brookes 2009; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005a; Renold and Ringrose 2008), and ‘youngsters’ (used, for example, in high school research by Volman and Ten Dam 1998) appear to me somewhat condescending. Thus, I chose the term ‘students’ to describe the young participants in my research, which is suitable considering the research is with young people in school.

In order to more fully involve the students in the research, I shared some of the initial findings for them to comment on. Here I followed the encouragement of other researchers who advocate for the inclusion of young people in the analysis aspect of the research process (see, for example, Alderson and Morrow 2004, 90-91; Coad and Evans 2008; Morrow 2005, 159; Thomas and O’Kane 2000, 827). I viewed the students as ‘competent’ to participate in discussions about the initial findings. However, I did not consider whether they would actually *want* to be involved (for discussions, see Coad and Evans 2008, 43).

On the whole, my desire to involve the students in discussions about the initial findings was not met with a great deal of interest. This suggests that despite researchers wanting (or feeling obligated) to involve students in the research process the decision to do this should be based on the interest and desires of the participants. One positive outcome of sharing the findings was that an older girl noticed I had used one of her previous responses to illustrate a finding, highlighting that the students could see that I took their contributions seriously. In hindsight, it may have been more effective to ask students to comment on data closer to its collection. For example, it may have proven more useful to provide a small summary each week of the previous week's activities for their comments (for some useful ideas about reciprocity, see Blaise 2005, 47-49).

Despite my desire to involve students in the research as much as possible, ethical concerns meant I did not involve students in formal 'consent' giving or choosing pseudonyms. While some research about gender has asked for students' consent (Birbeck and Drummond 2006a, 242; Epstein 1998a, 35), gaining *informed* consent from young people is viewed as a very difficult issue (Epstein 1998a, 35). For my research I did not gain formal consent from the students but instead told the students that they did not have to participate in each activity if they did not want to. Most students were enthusiastic about participating in the research, and this option was only taken up by two boys in one activity during the first session. Some students who had not returned their (parent/guardian-signed) consent forms explicitly expressed a wish to participate in the research, and some of the younger students without parent/guardian consent wondered why they could not be involved with everyone else. I apologised to these students, explaining that they could not participate without parent/guardian permission, and promised them they could be involved in the next session if they returned their forms. The need for parent/guardian consent was particularly uncomfortable when it resulted in one of the older girls crying because she could not participate in the first session. While researchers may feel ethically responsible to children and young people, they are ultimately responsible to governing bodies and adults, and without parental consent children and young people cannot participate in research even if they are interested and willing (Epstein 1998a, 37; for some rare exceptions, see those referenced in Balen, Blyth, Calabretto, Fraser, Horrocks and Manby 2006, 37). I also decided not to let the students choose their own pseudonyms because I was concerned that they would tell them to each other (or their teachers, see Epstein 1998a, 37), which would compromise their confidentiality.

Some issues arose during the research in relation to the ways the activities were implemented. After the first session I realised the difficulty in capturing the students' conversations and whole class discussions due to the size of the classes and problems I had with identifying individual input through audio-recordings. Therefore, I found it useful to devise more handouts so I also had something to take away with me to analyse. While this strategy proved useful for me, some students struggled with their writing abilities (particularly in the younger classes), and/or felt that some activities required too much writing. This may have affected the depth of their responses to some questions. When required and possible, the Year R/1 teacher and I wrote on the students' behalf to save time and increase the depths of their responses.⁷ I also found it necessary to modify some of the activities with the students due to their misunderstandings relating to the way I had framed or explained the activity. For example, in one activity I had asked students to brainstorm different 'types' of boys and girls (such as 'tomboy', 'sporty', 'girly'). The first time this activity was conducted (with one of the older classes) it appeared that many of the students were not able to think in terms of 'types', so I modified the activity to ask about words that described boys and those that described girls, using a handout sheet with a column of 'Girls' and 'Boys'. Modification was also required in relation to the Famous Faces activity, where students were asked to rank male and female celebrities from most to least 'manly', and most to least 'womanly'. In mixed-gender groupings the girls tended to do the 'womanly' activity and the boys the 'manly' activity. I had originally given students all of the cards together so as not to divide them by gender. However, I aimed to get the views of boys and girls on both activities, so for the other three classes I split this into two separate tasks – 'womanly' and then 'manly'. While these changes may be viewed as relating to 'competency' because of the young age of the participants, they are also reflective of the need for activities to be more suitably formulated to enable the students to complete them as I had planned. This is not solely an issue about age, but also relates to the researcher/participant divide, and is reflective of participants not having thought about particular issues or in particular ways prior to the research. Similarly, I had to occasionally explain or reword a question in the parent and teacher interviews.

⁷ Spelling and punctuation errors in hand written responses are marked with '[sic]' or, where necessary for clarity, with the correct spelling of words. Wherever possible with the younger classes I asked students to tell me what they had written if I could not make out the words. When students used capital letters in the middle of sentences, I have left them so the students' writing is not dominated with corrections.

It is also important to consider the ways in which the different research methods present particular responses from which I, as the researcher, have interpreted and represented in particular ways. The ways in which I designed the methods, and the assumptions I brought with me to the research, influenced the kinds of data I collected and the responses I gathered from the participants. In particular, the varied ways in which the students were asked questions was important. As I noted above, I used a variety of methods including activities that were individual, paired, grouped, or whole class based. The latter three were sometimes student-chosen, teacher-chosen, chosen at random, or chosen according to classroom seating arrangements. While the teachers were always present during data collection, the contexts in which students responded to the research activities were important, and likely generated different sorts of data. For example, it is probable that a confidential individual written activity produced different responses than activities that were conducted in discussion with the class and teacher. This emphasises the importance of context when considering students' responses.

This research is influenced by the understandings that I had about the participating age groups. I presumed that students from both age groups would have some similarities relating to their young age, and their status as primary school students. That is, I felt they would share certain similarities, such as being treated as 'incompetent' or less able to do things and talk about things in comparison to adults. I also approached the research with the view that there would be some (socially influenced) differences between the age groups which would relate to: age; how long they had attended school; abilities in terms of reading, writing, and thinking through ideas; their engagement in media and popular culture; and how they were treated by adults (particularly teachers and parents). In light of these assumptions, I follow the argument of James, Jenks and Prout (1998) who emphasise that differences between age groups should be seen as *social* differences rather than 'natural' or biological differences, and that differences between age groups relate to how childhood is constructed and institutionalised in particular societies (1998, 173-174).

Despite my best attempts, it proved difficult to compare age groups in ways which completely avoided developmental discourses. As James, Jenks and Prout argue, there is a continued legacy of the 'socially developing child' model in research about childhood that is difficult to overcome (1998, 178, *passim*). However, they do not offer alternative ways in which to consider differences between age groups. It is thus incredibly difficult to conceptualise how changes across age groups can be discussed without falling into

pervasive developmental discourses, and if it is even possible to compare age groups without some drawing on of developmental ideas. I made the decision to group students in relation to age and/or gender to demonstrate general patterns, rather than to show how the students progressed through developmental 'stages'. In my research, students' lives were actually shaped quite differently for the two age groups. This is a social construction, but one which was deeply embedded in how the students, teachers, and parents viewed the students, and one in which I was also caught up.

The broader social construction of childhood which positions young people in particular ways goes well beyond an individual researcher or research participant (although is specific to context and locale). It is difficult to overcome such views about childhood. James and Prout argue that there is great difficulty in thinking about children outside of dominant discourses such as socialisation (and, I would add, developmental psychology):

[t]his is not simply a matter of habit, convenience, false consciousness or vested interests but of what Foucault refers to as 'regimes of truth' (1977). He suggests that these operate rather like self-fulfilling prophecies: ways of thinking about childhood fuse with institutionalized practices to produce self-conscious subjects (teachers, parents and children) who think (and feel) about themselves through the terms of those ways of thinking. 'The truth' about themselves and their situation is thus self-validating. Breaking into this with another 'truth' (produced by another way of thinking about childhood) may prove difficult. (1997b, 23)

Thus, considering that there is currently little theorising which offers ways of overcoming these dominant discourses, I would argue that this thesis demonstrates the usefulness of comparing age groups for feminist research, while also acknowledging how age is socially constructed. This approach generally overrides the potential problems I have discussed here.

As a final point, a note must also be made about the difficulties of avoiding dominant gender discourses. In particular, I acknowledge that some of the activities may be viewed as encouraging the students to reproduce dominant gender discourses, or at least to focus on gender as an important factor in their lives. For example, in a brainstorming activity about 'girls' and 'boys', it was apparent that a third column of 'both girls and boys' would

have made students less inclined to view girls and boys as opposites, although some of the older students overcame this by writing the same words for both genders on their lists. This experience helped form the brainstorming activity with the younger students in session five. In a bid to partially counter a presumed dichotomisation of gender, I used a mix of questions, several of which did not emphasise gender, such as the activities asking about whom students looked up to, how they imagined their lives would be in the future, and what their favourite television shows/movies/books were. On the whole, I found that it was often difficult to avoid dominant gender discourses when explicitly asking questions about gender. Viewing students as ‘competent’ to participate in the research meant that I wanted to examine the ways in which they would respond to questions directly about gender. However, even the term gender often had to be explained in the binary terms of ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ to many participants (students and adults) so they would understand my questions. In hindsight, it would have been beneficial to undertake a more thorough-going investigation of how questions may be asked about gender without falling into binary framings before conducting the research. These issues point to the need to rethink how methods which investigate practices and understandings of gender can be better framed.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how I designed my research with an original combination of elements: comparing different age groups in primary school; comparing the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents; and using a range of activities to engage students in the research and elicit their understandings of and practices relating to gender. The following chapters provide an analysis of the data, showing how gender in primary school can be most valuably theorised by expanding Connell’s masculinities framework with the use of Foucault’s notion of discourse.

PART II –
Constructing Discourses of Masculinities

CHAPTER THREE

Sporty and Strong: A discourse of hegemonic masculinity?

Introduction

School studies show patterns of hegemony vividly. In certain schools the masculinity exalted through competitive sport is hegemonic; this means that sporting prowess is a test of masculinity even for boys who detest the locker room.

(Connell 2005b, 37)

[S]porty

I[']m not acting

I am sporty

(Arthur, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, expectations relating to being a boy)

Students from both age groups frequently drew on sport and bodies to explain and construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. These themes were often mentioned by boys as well as girls, and, to a lesser extent, by teachers and parents. As Arthur's quote above shows, sport could be both an expectation and a pleasure. While clearly not every boy was interested in or skilled at sport, in this chapter I demonstrate how sport was key to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. In terms of physical bodies more broadly, a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was also constructed via strength and muscles, and violence and physicality. Two other important themes to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity were evident: (hetero)sexuality, and a division of 'boys' stuff' and 'girls' stuff' in relation to hair and clothing, and interests, activities and popular culture.

All About Sport

Whitson argues that:

[s]port has become, it is fair to suggest, one of the central sites in the social production of masculinity in societies characterized by longer schooling and

by a decline in the social currency attached to other ways of demonstrating physical prowess (e.g., physical labour or combat) (1990, 19).

Previous research in primary schools has often found that sport and bodies are the main ways hegemonic, 'dominant', or 'successful' masculinity is constructed. The significance of sport has been particularly noted in England (see, for example, Clark and Paechter 2007; Epstein, et al. 2001; Renold 1997; Skelton 2000; Swain 2000; 2006c). In my research, sport tended to equal 'masculinity' in the eyes of many of the students, thus creating a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Because the research was conducted solely in the classroom, I did not interact with the students when they were *playing* sport, highlighting the pervasiveness of the discourse. The tying of sport and boys together, and the process of hegemony, worked in a number of ways. Sporting masculinities were the most privileged when considering different masculinities in relation to each other, which was particularly evident when discussing famous athletes. Relatedly, sport was constructed as something that *all* boys participate in or should be interested in. And, finally, sport was often constructed as being for boys and *not* for girls. I examine these key points and I then consider evidence of students recognising and potentially resisting the discourse of boy equals sport.

Boy Equals Sport: Privileging sporting masculinities

When considering 'masculine' hierarchies, male athletes were often viewed by boys and girls as the epitome of 'masculinity'. This is in line with what Connell writes: 'men, such as sporting heroes, are taken as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity' (2000, 11). This was highlighted when students were given cards with photographs of eight famous faces on them, which they ranked from most 'manly' to least 'manly', giving reasons for their choices (see Appendix Six for full details). Athletes were frequently viewed by the students as the most 'manly'. To demonstrate this, Table 3.1 (overleaf) illustrates that the three sports stars included in the activity were chosen overall as the most 'manly' – Andrew McLeod (AFL player), John Cena (professional wrestler), and David Beckham (soccer player). Both age groups ranked athletes as the most 'manly' (apart from the students in the Year R/1 class who overall ranked the lead actors from *Harry Potter* and *High School Musical* higher).

TABLE 3.1: Ranking Male Famous Faces from Most ‘Manly’ to Least ‘Manly’

	Year R/1* (5 groups)	Year 1 (5 groups)	Year 6 (6 groups)	Year 6/7 (6 groups)	TOTAL (22 groups)
Andrew McLeod (AFL player)^	21	35	34	36	126
John Cena (professional wrestler)	17	30	41	31	119
David Beckham (soccer player)	16	18	40	35	109
Kevin Rudd (then Australian Prime Minister)	<i>13</i>	27	35	28	103
Daniel Radcliffe (actor in the film series <i>Harry Potter</i>)	25	23	20	27	95
Zac Efron (actor in the film series <i>High School Musical</i>)	24	27	14	17	82
Chris Brown (singer)	18	14	21	26	79
Jeff (member of children’s singing group <i>The Wiggles</i>)	21	<i>6</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>54</i>

Note: A score of eight was given for most ‘manly’, seven for second most ‘manly’ and so on through to one point for least ‘manly’. The data represent the total scores for the groups from each class. Highest scores are in bold, lowest scores are in italics.

* Because of time constraints two groups did not finish their rankings.

^ AFL player refers to someone playing in the Australian Football League. This is the national competition of Australian Rules football in Australia in which only men can play.

Notably, sport was not privileged in the same way in a related activity ranking female faces from most ‘womanly’ to least ‘womanly’, which I examine in Chapter Six.

Although athletes were often seen to portray the most exemplary form of masculinity, there were tensions and debates about this. A group of five Year 6/7 boys argued about whether then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd or AFL player Andrew McLeod was more ‘manly’. The crux of their debate was as follows:

Boy: He’s [Kevin Rudd] taking- He’s taking care of Australia, that’s pretty manly

Boy: No it’s not, that’s not manly. Manly’s like in the AFL getting tackled.

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group discussion recording – Mitch, Jack, Jarrod, Caleb and Tyson, ranking Andrew McLeod second and Kevin Rudd third most 'manly')

This debate over whether access to political or institutional 'power' is more 'manly' than being a professional athlete is reflected in Connell's own writing, where at least in the global setting she is inclined to view 'transnational business masculinity' as hegemonic (Connell and Wood 2005), whereas in the national Australian context she cites athletes (Connell 2000, 69-85).

The privileging of sporting masculinities was also evident when students wrote about people they looked up to. A number of boys wrote they looked up to professional athletes from different sports, particularly soccer, AFL, and basketball, which was second only to looking up to their parents. Girls did not write about looking up to any athletes. It was clear that boys looked up to only *male* athletes, and that these were *adult* masculinities. This is reflective of a number of other studies which have found that when primary school and high school students name 'role models' in the public sphere, boys often look up to athletes (and girls often look up to musicians and/or actors/actresses) (see, for example, Adriaanse and Crosswhite 2008; Biskup and Pfister 1999; Bricheno and Thornton 2007).

Even though boys do not have access to these adult masculinities, they can still act them out in some ways. For example, Lodge notes that '[e]ngagement in football and aptitude in the game allows young boys to participate in a game that is also a high status adult male activity' (2005, 184). In some instances, students may be on the path to a professional sporting career. As Warren notes, one of the boys in his research had, at 10 years old, already received interest from a Premier League soccer club, and had the possibility of becoming a junior trainee (2003, 14-15). For boys not as adept at sport, they can still wear replica guernseys and 'kits' of professional players, looking the part if not playing the same (see, for example, Boden 2006).

Sport tended to equal 'masculinity' for many of the students, thus links between sport and boys were made to appear 'natural'. This process included describing sport as what being a boy was or should be, and boys mentioning sport as being important in their lives. However, while alignment with sport was frequently constructed as central to being a boy, it did not guarantee status in the classroom (see Chapter Five).

A number of the older students suggested that boys are *expected* to be sporty (only the older students were asked about gender expectations). In an open-ended question about gender expectations, 43.5% (10) of boys and 16% (four) of girls wrote that boys are expected to act sporty. Notably, it was only boys that are expected to act this way:

cool, good at sport, strong, Fit

(Ivan, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

I think boys are expected to act sporty and strong.

(Mila, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

Many boys' *enjoyment* of sport possesses no contradiction to its normative status, and can even be central to it (see also Bhana 2008; Keddie 2003a, 76; Swain 2000, 101; 2006c):

It is good to be a boy because you can play soccer

(Manolis, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a boy)

Natural[ly] good at sport

(Jack, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something good about being a boy)

In an activity where students were asked to rank identity markers (such as their gender, age, year level, school, religion and so on) in terms of most important to least important, eight boys (one younger and seven older) added in words to do with sport to describe them such as 'Great spor[t]s person', 'Sport', 'Sporty', 'Soccer', 'Basketball', 'Sports Player', and 'Athletic'.

Hierarchies of sports were also used to create a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. In other words, some sports were viewed as more 'masculine' than others (see also Bhana 2008, 8; Keddie 2003a, 78-79; Swain 2006c, 325). In both schools, soccer was the most commonly written and spoken about sport, and was often constructed as being for boys. Soccer and Australian Rules football were viewed as the most 'masculine' sports. In contrast, netball was nearly always associated with girls. Some sports, such as basketball,

were often viewed by both age groups as suitable for boys and girls.¹ The division of sports into a gender hierarchy was influenced by whether more boys or girls played it, and how privileged it was broadly (at the school, in the media and so on). The physicality involved in the sport had less impact. While in South Australia² Australian Rules football would generally be considered significantly more physical and violent than soccer, the students spoke and wrote more about soccer as being central to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. This can be attributed to the school contexts, particularly the ethnic composition of the schools (in Australia soccer is often considered to be an ‘ethnic’ or European—that is, non-Anglo—sport. For discussions, see Danforth 2001; Hallinan and Hughson 2009). Football, in its differing codes and differing physicality, has frequently been identified as the most favoured sport for establishing privileged masculinities in primary school (see, for example, Bhana 2008; Clark and Paechter 2007; Epstein, et al. 2001; Keddie 2003a; Renold 1997; Skelton 2000; Swain 2000; Warren 2003).

Not all boys were interested in sport, but a boy who was sometimes subordinated, as well as some of the girls, were complicit with the boy equals sport discourse. While Connell defines complicit masculinities in distinction from subordinate masculinities (2005b, 78-80), it was evident that while those students who were sometimes subordinated occasionally challenged or disrupted hegemony, at other times they supported—that is, were complicit with—a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. This relates to Wetherell and Edley’s argument that individual men can be both complicit *and* resistant (1999, 352, 353) (see Chapter One). Thus, Christos, a Year 6 boy who was not interested in sport, suggested boys are expected to act sporty:

You[’]r[e] usually expected to act really cool and tough and sporty but in my eyes you can really be anything you want to be, considering that I[’]m not really any of these I still feel as if some people are trying really hard to be people there [sic] not so those people just really be yourself.

(Christos, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

¹ Some other studies have also considered how primary school students view sports as divided by gender (see, for example, Schmalz and Kerstetter 2006; Warren 2003, 8-9).

² As a background to the popularity of different football codes in South Australia, the spectator attendance for 2009-2010 was highest for Australian Rules football (394,700), followed by soccer (69,900), then rugby (nearly 17,000 combined for rugby league and rugby union) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010a, 17). Unfortunately these statistics only include people aged 15 years and over.

While Christos suggested to ‘be yourself’³ is more important than gendered expectations, he still drew on the concept that being sporty is something good about being a boy:

There[']s being able to catch on to things fast and usually being very sporty too!

(Christos, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

What this highlights is that even boys who are not sporty or interested in sport and, indeed, may be subordinated by the dominance of sport, still ideologically perpetuate the view that for boys sport and masculinities are inextricably linked (see also Burgess, et al. 2003, 208-209). Similarly, Warren also found that ‘[b]oys who clearly did not embody an assertive physical presence still produced statements that placed this attribute at the centre of their understanding of “What is good about being a boy?”’ (2003, 9). This demonstrates the process by which a discourse of hegemonic masculinity appears ‘natural’ and common-sense.

Similarly, some girls supported the idea that sport was for boys:

boys um are one of the sportiest people

(Helen, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, brainstorming things that relate to boys only)

Good at sorcer [soccer].

(Katerina, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a boy)

You can play more sport.

(Cara, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, something good about being a boy)

Evidence of girls supporting or upholding a discourse of hegemonic masculinity has been rarely noted in other studies, partly because girls are commonly left out of research about primary school masculinities. When girls are included, they tend to voice their concerns

³ Kehler and Martino relatedly note that some boys in a high school study found it difficult to ‘be yourself’ because of pressures relating to hegemonic masculinity (2007, 95-96). I discuss a discourse of individualism further in Chapter Seven.

about being excluded from playing soccer (see, for example, Clark and Paechter 2007; Renold 1997), rather than constructing soccer or sport as being for boys.

Sporty Boys and Non-athletic girls: Excluding girls from constructions of sport

I would not be able [be able] to play soccer

(Loukas, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, how would your life be different if you were a girl instead of a boy?)

Not that good at sport

(Aaron, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something bad about being a girl)

I think boys are expected to act like they are the best at sports.

(Madison, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, expectations relating to being a boy)

In order to construct sport as something for boys, some students claimed that sport was not for girls. Girls were viewed as not being involved in sport and, when they were, as less skilled. The construction of sport as for boys and not for girls has been found in numerous other studies (see, for example, Clark and Paechter 2007; Renold 1997, 57-61; Skelton 2000; Swain 2005b). Indeed, Holly's (1985) research with 9 and 10 year old girls in England suggests that girls' exclusion from soccer is one of the earliest encounters of sexism recognised by primary school girls.

One way in which sport was associated with boys was by drawing on the lack of women's sports shown in the media. For example, during a Year 1 class discussion, Ari stated that only men and boys play soccer which initiated the following discussion:

Girl: Yes they do

Ari: No, only men do

[...]

CB: I think Ari just said only men and boys play soccer

Katerina: No

Student: Yes

Girl: Yeah he did

Katerina: No, girls can too

Some girls: Yeah

Katerina: Because at soccer practice girls were practising

Effie: I play soccer

Ari: Only in foot[ball]/

Mrs Searle: Haven't you heard of the Matildas Ari? The Matildas are the girls' soccer team [Australian women's national soccer team]

[...]

Ari: On TV is there any?

Effie: Yeah yeah yeah there's a couple I saw one [inaudible]

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording)

A number of things are evident in this exchange. First, a claim was made that soccer was only for men and boys. Second, this view was challenged by other students (particularly girls), and examples of girls playing soccer were given. Third, even a comment from the teacher did not alter Ari's view. And, finally, in order for Ari to change his mind he needed to know that girls/women playing soccer was shown on television. Thus, while girls play soccer this is not 'real' soccer because Ari had not seen women playing soccer on television (see also Francis 1998, 65). In another session in this class, a boy suggested that 'boys like to play soccer for their job'. When I asked the students if girls play soccer for a job there was uncertainty and suggestions that this did not occur very often. When reflecting on the initial findings from the research, Mrs Searle suggested that the media was a reason for why many students put forward stereotypical views about gender such as boys being good at and interested in sport. The fact that women's sport and female athletes are little shown in the Australian media is an important factor in understanding young people's views on gender and sport. A report released by the Australian Sports Commission in 2010 found that 81% of televised sports coverage showed men playing sports compared to 8.7% showing women playing sports (Australian Sports Commission 2010, v).⁴

⁴ The dominance of men's sport in the media is not unique to Australia. For a report on gender divisions in televised sports in the United States see Messner and Cooky (2010).

Other research has also found primary school students draw on notions of professional soccer to exclude girls' involvement in sport (see, for example, Swain 2000, 104). Particularly pertinent is a comment by Davies that:

although the girls can and do play boys' sports, the fact that women are excluded from them in adult games is not just a problem for the future but something that impacts on their idea of who they are now. ... *The boys can use that knowledge of social structure to gain ascendancy over the girls and to dismiss the everyday evidence of their competence* (emphasis in original, 2003b, 75).

Even the girls who played sport rarely mentioned sport, either in written activities or class discussions. The Year R/1 class had a mixed-gender soccer team (the only school sport available to students in this class according to Mrs Hartley), but I only discovered this because a boy's mother discussed it in her interview. No student in this class ever mentioned that girls in the class played soccer until I questioned them about this in the final session.

In the older classes, Aphrodite wrote about her love of soccer as well as frustrations at how she was treated by boys when she played it:

I love to do things like play soccer, but everytime [sic] I try to feel confident, the boys will tease me if I miss the ball or something.

(Aphrodite, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, restrictions relating to being a girl)

Generally, however, sport was mentioned by girls only when provoked or challenged by boys, such as when boys made claims to be more skilful at sport than girls. The challenges to these claims may in part be attributed to the students' desire for a discourse of equality (see Chapter Seven). In contrast, Clark and Paechter's (2007) research with 10 and 11 year old students in England found that girls often expressed their interest in and desire to play soccer (see also Epstein, et al. 2001). However, in line with my findings, they suggest that girls do not always express their interest publicly because soccer is not associated with 'local concepts of femininity' (Clark and Paechter 2007, 264).

Importantly, the teachers and parents also constructed boys and sport together:

I think the girls love participating in boy things [CB: Yep] um they're definitely not shy, they love getting in there, giving it a go, especially with the soccer

(Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview)⁵

Similarly, one mother suggested that expectations in terms of gender involved sport for boys, which was not the same for girls:

I suppose you do think of them in terms of gender and what you expect of them um to behave and you might push them more towards doing things, you know, as parents um to do the girl things or to- my husband will get the boys involved in the boy things. [...] Mainly the sports side of it um but if my daughter wanted to join in, like he'll [her husband] try and get her involved in say tennis um but if she wanted to join in, she'd be more than welcome to be part of it but we um wouldn't push her to join in unless we need another team person, then it becomes critical (laughs)

(Mother of Year 6 boy, Socrates Primary)

Indeed, this mother said she and her husband would not 'push' their daughter to join in playing sports, although they seemingly expect it of their two sons. This suggests that parents too can be complicit in the construction of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity for their children (see also Messner, Dunbar and Hunt 2000; Messner 2000).

Challenges to the Notion of Boy Equals Sport: Recognition and potential resistance

While many of the participants equated being a boy with sport, thus creating and supporting a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, there were some interruptions and challenges to this. Pressure on boys to play and be interested in sport was recognised by some participants. Furthermore, some older students critiqued the boy equals sport discourse to some extent.

⁵ For other discussions of teachers' views of gender and sport see, for example, Renold (1997), Skelton (2000), and Swain (2000).

Within the younger classes, there was little evidence of recognition that not all boys like sport. One mother suggested ‘it’s a little bit hard for them to get their head around’ the idea that there are differences between boys (Mother of Year 1 boy, St Catherine’s Primary). Students from the older classes were more likely to recognise the pressures on boys to play sport:

Some people think because we are boys that we have to play music, sport etc.

(Mitch, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, restrictions relating to being a boy)

don’t have to do sporting activities.

(Despina, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a girl)

One of the mothers also spoke about how gender started to matter when one of her daughters was in Year 1, when students divided themselves by gender:

I also remember one of the boys not being so ah into soccer and feeling left out, because they were off doing their thing, and this particular boy didn’t feel- fit into the peer, or wasn’t as good, or wasn’t allowed to go and do soccer with the boys, so he felt quite left out.

(Mother of Year 1 girl, Socrates Primary)

These findings suggest that, with encouragement, older students in particular may be able to critique and deconstruct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and the related process of excluding other practices (see, for example, Davies 2003b).

I provided the students with one particular avenue for them to show their gender awareness and challenge gender stereotypes. This activity asked students to design their own poster to show what they had learnt during the previous sessions (the older students were also given the option of creating an activity) (for a full description see Appendix Six). A key theme in these posters was that both boys and girls can play sports. For the Year R/1 students this was partly influenced by Mrs Hartley who gave the students some suggestions to assist them (for example, a boy who wears pink, a girl who plays soccer, a girl who is good at football). The theme of boys and girls playing soccer was particularly taken up by students from the younger classes and boys from the older classes. While this activity provided an

avenue for students to express gender equality, the link between boys and sport was not broken – girls were simply added in. I discuss these posters further in Chapter Seven.

Perceptions of Physicality and Bodies

Linking with sport, physicality and bodies were also drawn on to construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. In this section I consider how a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was related to strength and having muscles, and specific versions of violence.

‘I am going to get muscles’: Strength and muscles

Regan: Oh, I hope Taylor Lautner [actor of Jacob in *Twilight*] is in the- in the male thing [‘manly’ famous faces activity], I hope so, he’d be the most manly, like all muscles, he’s buff

Girl: He has his arm like this it looks like he’s flexing

Girl: That’s how muscly he is

Girl: If they had Edward [vampire character in *Twilight*] he’d be the most girly

[...]

Girl: But that means the same thing if, to be- to be more manly, he [Taylor Lautner] has to be like at the top and then the weakest goes down the bottom

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, small group discussion recording – Regan, Tash, Bec, and Fiona)

Strength and having muscles was commonly drawn on as a positive descriptor of boys and men. As evident in the above exchange, girls were also influential in privileging strength when discussing what constituted being ‘manly’. Notably, strength and muscles were mentioned only by the students, and not the teachers or parents, highlighting the influence of age on views about gender.

When asked what was *good* about being a boy, the most frequently given answers by boys in all classes was sport and/or being strong. Relatedly, a quarter of the older boys wrote that boys are *expected* to act strong, a view also given by some girls:

Sporty, energetic, fast[,] strong

(Jarrod, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

All manly and strong.

(Bec, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

While strength and muscles were used to construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, the boys rarely wrote about their own bodies or being strong themselves.⁶ Only one boy (Sean, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary) labelled himself as '[s]trong' in the activity where students chose words that described them. Students were more likely to relate muscular strength to adult masculinities (athletes and fathers) or 'masculinity' defined in opposition to 'femininity'. Some students wrote about being strong or having muscles in their imagined futures, or looking up to their fathers because they were 'strong' (a quarter of the students who looked up to their fathers used this descriptor):

So I can be stronger and braver like Dad.

(Sean, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

I think my dad is the best. Because his [he's] strong.

(Toula, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

Boys were viewed as superior to girls in terms of strength. The view that boys are stronger than girls could be something students learnt from the adults around them, as evident from Gregory's point that boys rather than girls are asked to assist in moving heavy objects:

we always have to help our sisters. Every time there is something that is heavy to lift or push, it[']s either '(Dad) come out side [sic] (boys name) and help me move the trampoline.' e.g[.]

(Gregory, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, expectations relating to being a boy)

Other research has noted the construction of girls as weak in order to sustain the desired view that boys are strong, in some cases even when students understand that boys are not

⁶ Instead, the younger students often discussed their bodies in relation to boys being dirty/stinky/sweaty and girls being clean. This construction may relate to the students' views that boys are more likely to play sports and be active than girls.

stronger than girls (see, for example, Bhana 2008, 8-9; James 2000, 33). This construction was drawn on more by the older students, but there were examples from both age groups:

I will be strong.

(Helen, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, how would your life be different if you were a boy instead of a girl?)

because I wodent [wouldn't] be s[t]ro[n]g.

(Ari, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, how would your life be different if you were a girl instead of a boy?)

most of us (girls) are much weaker than boys.

(Mila, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something bad about being a girl)

being stronger than girls

(Ivan, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a boy)

At some ages in primary school, girls are likely to be physically larger than boys. Thus, there is a visible and literal tension between the perceived strength of boys (as males) compared with their actual strength in relation to their young bodies (see also Renold 2005, 81; Swain 2005b, 88). Boys overcame tensions between their own strength and their constructions of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity by discussing their fathers, athletes, and boys generically, rather than themselves. They did this despite the evidence that many boys are in fact likely to be physically smaller and weaker than girls in primary school. As Bhana (2008, 7) notes, regardless of the physical bodies of boys, it is important to recognise that strong, sporting *adult* bodies help shape discourses around gender for boys.⁷

'If you're manly you should bash a boy not a girl': Violence and physicality

Violence was sometimes drawn on when constructing a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, more often by students in the older classes. Violence was often accepted and admired when relating to films and television, and occasionally sport. Several boys liked

⁷ Of course, adulthood does not ensure a strong, muscular, or large body, yet such a form is still considered to be the ideal 'masculine' body by many men (see, for example, Grogan and Richards 2002; Wienke 1998).

violent films and television shows, although some girls also enjoyed these (see also Gilbert 1998). Wrestling was also discussed and liked by several boys (and, again, some girls). However, interestingly wrestling, which might be viewed as an overtly violent ‘sport’, was derided by some of the older students because it was *‘fake’* violence. Because of this, these students did not view wrestling as particularly ‘manly’.⁸

There was little mention of violence amongst boys when constructing their masculinities, although there were a few examples of ‘play’ violence in the classrooms between some boys. However, according to Daniel, the boys in his class were sometimes concerned that wrestling and other physical contact with boys breached heterosexual norms:

the boys are probably starting to be along that line a little bit more macho, trying to be, you know, tough and, you know, getting into the huggy sort of wrestly, sort of thing at the moment as well

[...]

I suppose they’re just *touching on like homophobia* as well and so, their gender places, especially with the males, like, you know, they’ll be hugging and wrestling and things like that and all of a sudden it like- it will be like, *‘argh don’t touch me’*

(emphases added, Daniel, Year 6/7 teacher, St Catherine’s Primary)

Thus, there are precarious links between physically touching other boys and being perceived as gay (see also Renold 2002b, 425).

Some girls mentioned that something good about being a girl was that they were less likely to be involved in physical fighting:

Less physical bullying and consequences are less harsh.

(Bec, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary)

we don’t start punch ups like boys do.

(Marika, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

⁸ This awareness of ‘fake’ violence is not always acknowledged in other research which has argued that televised wrestling portrays strong messages about masculinity and ‘manhood’, impacting on ‘gender role socialization’ (Soulliere 2006).

Importantly, violence against girls and women was mostly considered unacceptable and was excluded from a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Violence against girls and women tended to be viewed as not ‘manly’ and extreme. In other words, it was seen as an expression relating to hyper masculinities. Discussions about such violence arose in the older classes in relation to Chris Brown assaulting his then girlfriend Rihanna.⁹ Overall, the older students who referred to Chris Brown and violence against girls/women ranked him in the bottom half of their most to least ‘manly’ lists.¹⁰ The common reason given was because ‘he’s a girl basher’, or ‘he punched/hit/bashed Rihanna’. One group explicitly noted that this influenced where they ranked him:

he would have come at least 3rd but after he bashed Rhianna [sic] we don[’]t think he is that manly.

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, Nikoletta, Toula, Stella, and Christos, ranking Chris Brown fifth most ‘manly’)

The following exchange reveals several different discourses relating to the violence where Chris Brown was: disliked yet still considered ‘manly’; viewed as ‘manly’ (although this seemed to be used provocatively); and viewed as not ‘manly’ because of the assault:

Boy: Chris Brown

Boy: Arsehole but manly

[...]

Boy: No, no, we can put him manly cos he bashes girls (laughs)

Boy: That’s not manly to bash girls

Boy: Yes, it is, girls don’t bash up themselves do they? (laughs)

Boy: It’s not manly to bash up girls. That’s unmanly/

⁹ In February 2009, media reports surfaced that the United States singer Chris Brown had physically assaulted his then girlfriend singer Rihanna. Central to the media coverage, and popular speculation, was a photo of Rihanna with her eyes closed and visible swelling and bruises on her face. Chris Brown was charged with assault: ‘Brown pleaded guilty on 22 June 2009 in a plea bargain reported to include 5 years probation, 180 days (1,400 hours) of “community labor,” “52 weeks of domestic violence counseling,” and an order of protection requiring Brown to remain at least 50 yards away from Rihanna (10 yards at “music industry events”)’ (Projansky 2010, 73 note 1). In my research, the student discussions about the assault occurred on 27 August 2009 (Socrates Primary) and 9 September 2009 (St Catherine’s Primary).

¹⁰ Unlike some internet postings (Hopson 2009, 108), none of the students suggested that the assault was Rihanna’s fault. The only negative attitudes towards Rihanna were not about the assault *per se* but the suggestion that Rihanna and Chris Brown had reconciled, with one group of girls (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary) believing she was planning to marry him. See also Projansky (2010, 72) for other examples of anger at the supposed reconciliation.

Boy: That's assault

Boy: That's unmanly. That's assault

Boy: Yeah

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group discussion recording – Jarrod, Tyson, Mitch, Jack, and Caleb, ranking Chris Brown fourth most 'manly')

These boys highlight the negotiation of discourses about gender and violence. In this case, the strongest discourse is that violence against girls/women inhibits being 'manly'. Previous research has found that boys at the beginning of 'adolescence' have higher levels of support for violence against women compared with those in late 'adolescence' (for a brief overview, see Flood and Pease 2009, 132), although my findings show that there was little support for violence against women at the beginning of 'adolescence'.

Some of the boys in the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary made comments that violence against women is 'manly'. One boy said his group had ranked Chris Brown as most 'manly' 'cos somehow he managed to bash Rihanna'. In a later session, when discussing the finding that many students believed Chris Brown was not 'manly' because of his violence against Rihanna, one group of boys suggested that being 'manly' was shown by 'bashing' boys rather than girls. However, while some of the boys put forward these ideas when working in groups their presumably 'joking' manner became uncomfortable when they came under pressure from Miss Karidis. These boys' comments highlight that boys are viewed as stronger than girls and therefore boys need to 'bash' other boys rather than girls to prove they are tough (see also Mills 2001, 39-41; Renold 2005, 130-131).

While Miss Karidis was directly involved in challenging and monitoring the students' comments in relation to violence against girls/women, when asked to explain why she thought the students generally reacted so negatively to such violence, she removed the gendered element, possibly because of the strength of a discourse of 'equality' when discussing gender issues:

Miss Karidis: I guess it's just- it's a society thing, they know that it's not cool to [CB: Yep] beat up your, whether it be your husband or your wife, I think it goes both ways. Yep.

(Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher and Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, second interview)

Some students' views relating to violence against women were also influenced by the law:

you can hurt guys and it's illegal to hit you back.

(Zach, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something good about being a girl)

I honestly don't think boys have any restrictions. But they are not allowed to hit girls because it[']s against the law.

(Lucinda, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, restrictions relating to being a boy)

Future Sexualities

Discourses around sexuality contributed to the students' construction of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The older students drew on discourses around sexuality more often than the younger students. One of the older boys, when discussing the findings of the research in a small group, even suggested the only gender difference was related to sexual bodies: '[t]he only difference about girls and boys is the downer parts, that's the- that's the only difference'. However, as with being strong, sexuality was usually discussed in the abstract – about famous people and in the students' imagined futures. A discourse of hegemonic masculinity was constructed by the students as being heterosexual as well as *not* being gay.

'Happily married with four children': Girlfriends, marriage, and heterosexuality

There was evidence of equating having a girlfriend with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity in both age groups. However, this was mentioned less often by the younger students, and having a girlfriend was not necessarily part of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. A notable exception occurred during the activity where students ranked famous faces from most 'manly' to least 'manly'. A group of four boys ranked Zac Efron as the most 'manly', writing 'because he has a girl frends [girlfriend]'. However, in their discussion Jordan was teased for claiming he had a girlfriend. The following exchange was initiated by a reflection on the reasons why this group ranked Zac Efron as the most 'manly':

Boy: Cos he has a girlfriend called Gabriella [the Vanessa Hudgens character in *High School Musical*]

Boy: Because he's in love

Boy: Oh yeah!

Boy: [worried noise]

Boy: Do you know his real girlfriend is um Gabriella?

Boy: Did you know he- this girl- this other girl he's like 'oh, you're so cute Zac and your cute cheeks' (laughs)

Boy: It's Gabriella that was

Boy: I know and then- and then he kissed them on the lips

[...]

Boy (silly voice): I love girlfriends

Boy: People think I have a girlfriend but I don't

Boy (silly voice): I love girlfriends

Boy: Ew! Are you serious?

Boy: No, well, who is it?

Boy (silly voice): I like girlfriends

Jordan: Cos I have a girlfriend (giggles)

Boy: Oh yeah

Boy (teasing voice): Who is it Jordan?

Boy (teasing voice): Girlfriend!

[inaudible]

Boy: Ooh Jordan's girlfriend is [name of girl not in class]

Boy: Yeah Jordan's g/

Jordan: Stop! Stop teasing me I have a girlfriend

Boy: Jordan is- doesn't have a girlfriend

Boy: I'm telling your mum

(Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group discussion recording – Jordan, Kwan, Ethan, and Michael, ranking Zac Efron most 'manly')

Here it appears as though Jordan tried out mentioning having a girlfriend to see if it would gain him status amongst the other boys in the group. It did not, so he tried to take it back and turned the discussion around to argue that the other boys were teasing him. From this it appears that liking girls does not gain young boys status. Furthermore, one boy referred back to his mother as a threat to get the other boys into trouble. In contrast, Keddie's

research found that such boasts of having a girlfriend were looked on favourably by the friendship group of 6-8 year old boys in her study, reflecting the importance of heterosexuality in these boys' constructions of masculinities (2003b, 10-12), although this could be contradictory (for example, boys claimed they did not like girls, yet wanted lots of girlfriends) (Keddie 2004; for other writing about heterosexuality being contradictory for boys, see Buckingham 1993; Nesper 2000, 38-39; Redman, et al. 2002, 181-183; Renold 2005, Chapter Six). When conducting further research with one of these boys, Keddie suggests engagement in heterosexuality changed from boasting about having a girlfriend when he was 8 years old to 'sexually explicit behaviour', such as looking at girls' breasts, when he was 12 years old (2007, 187, 189).

Another group in my research viewed boys liking girls negatively. Unlike the group above, they perceived Zac Efron as *not* 'manly' because '[h]e likes girls':

Cosmo: Zac Efron – a young, fat loser

(laughs)

Katerina: He likes girls

Cosmo: and he is disgusting

(laughs)

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, small group discussion recording – Cosmo, Katerina, and Yolanda, ranking Zac Efron third most 'manly')

This exchange shows how girls help to construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity – Katerina viewed boys liking girls as something to be ridiculed. Also in this class, Loukas and Theo repeatedly told each other to 'kiss the brides' in a teasing way, both of them refusing to give in (the boys eventually revealed that they had taken this line from the movie *Madagascar 2*). From this it appears that heterosexuality is a threat to be avoided.

The older students were more likely to view girlfriends as positive and part of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity compared with the younger students. Heterosexuality tended to be regarded as an unmarked norm for constructing a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. In other words, the students worked in a lens of heteronormativity. For example, when discussing words describing boys and girls, 'gay' and 'lesbian' were sometimes mentioned, but 'straight' was named only once (by Tyson and Jack, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary). Tyson held heterosexuality so centrally that he wrote 'Straight' as

the second most important word that described him, ranked even above ‘Sports Player’. One girl wrote that something good about being a boy would be they can ‘have girlfriends [sic]’ (Abbey, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary). Two other girls wrote that boys are expected to act kind towards their girlfriend. However, some students mentioned age restrictions on heterosexual relationships:

Parents, stop you having a girlfriend.

(Jade, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, restrictions relating to being a boy)

You can’t have a boyfriend when you[’]r[e] a teenager, my dad restricts my sister.

(Caleb, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, restrictions relating to being a girl)

While girlfriends in the present were tenuous in constructing masculinities, they were still important. Lambros (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary) used the idea of never having a girlfriend to insult another boy: ‘[o]h, Stavros, you would never find a girl’. Similarly, girlfriends and relationships were mentioned when imagining their future lives, often in the form of marriage (see also Renold 2005, 139). Approximately 60% of older boys and girls mentioned marriage as part of their imagined futures (see Table 3.2).

TABLE 3.2: Mentions of Marriage and Children in Imagined Futures Activity

	Younger boys (19)	Older boys (21)	Younger girls (18)	Older girls (28)
Marriage	10.5% (2)	57.1% (12)	16.7% (3)	60.7% (17)
Children	10.5% (2)	38.1% (8)	5.6% (1)	75.0% (21)
‘Family’	-	14.3% (3)	-	14.3% (4)

Marriage was discussed in some form in the younger classes. For example, when considering the movie *WALL-E*, the Year 1 students at Socrates Primary spoke about weddings and marriage. Neither was mentioned in the movie, although *WALL-E* was shown to have a ‘crush’ on EVE and wanted to hold her hand. Students linked romantic notions with the ‘female’ character. Cosmo said EVE was a ‘girl’ ‘[b]ecause um she wanted to marry WALL-E’. Elias also suggested she was a girl ‘because she watched a wedding’, although this was refuted by Katerina who said ‘[o]h, boys and girls can watch weddings’.

While heterosexuality was generally viewed as important for constructing masculinities, it was little discussed, and there were some complexities and contradictions. Renold's (2005) research with 10 and 11 year old students in England found heterosexuality to be a commonly talked about topic, although there were not straightforward links between heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. Importantly, she notes that 'being a boyfriend and engaging in a more sexualised masculinity wasn't the expected or main route to being a boy' (Renold 2005, 124). From their research findings, Mac an Ghail and Haywood state that: 'we suggest that pupils do not necessarily draw upon an adult version of heterosexuality as a key constituent of their gendered identities' (2007, 105). Korobov's (2006) research with 10, 12, and 15 year old boys highlights how boys' engagement with heterosexuality changed between the age groups but was also flexible. While my findings were not as strong as those of Renold's, it was still clear that heterosexuality had a role in constructing a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Dancing, Singing, and Using Too Many Hair Products: Gay as not 'manly'

In the older classes the rejection of homosexuality was important to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, and was mentioned more by boys than girls. For some boys, at its most fundamental, a discourse of hegemonic masculinity equated to not being 'gay'.

A group of boys in the Year 6/7 class frequently equated being (perceived as) 'gay' with not being 'manly'. They ranked Zac Efron (who sings and dances in the *High School Musical* movies) least 'manly', ultimately concluding that: '[n]o straight guy can be in High School Musical' (Tyson, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary).

This same group of boys debated how 'manly' the soccer player David Beckham was.¹¹ Despite his relationship with his wife Victoria, Beckham was viewed as 'gay' because of his use of hair products:

Boy: Okay, him, pretty boy

Boy: No/

Boy: David Beckham

¹¹ David Beckham's image has been much discussed in terms of the diverse and changing gender images he projects (see, for example, Whannel 2002).

Boy: No, he's a stuck up poof

[...]

Boy: But he's going out with Victoria

Boy: Uses too many hair products

[...]

Mitch?: Yeah, he does take too many hair products, but personally I think he's a poofter [inaudible]

Boy: And he advertises sport

Boy (into audio-recorder): Did you hear that? Beckham's a poof (laughs)

(laughs)

Caleb? (into audio-recorder): Mitch said that by the way, not me

Jarrold?: This is all their plan, I swear, I had nothing to do with this

[...]

Boy: Uses too many hair products.

Boy: Yeah

Boy: That's like girls they use lots of conditioner and shampoo in their hair and everything

[...]

Boy: Well if we get in trouble we can just say we were being honest about what we think

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group discussion recording – Jarrold, Tyson, Mitch, Jack, and Caleb, ranking David Beckham seventh most 'manly')

While one boy implied that David Beckham was 'manly', or at least not a 'poof', because 'he's going out with Victoria', this was ignored by the other boys who instead focused on Beckham's use of hair products as a reason for him being 'gay'. Here the boys also demonstrated some fear of getting into trouble for discussing such things – attributing comments to other boys; claiming they had nothing to do with it; and, finally, being prepared with the reason that they 'were being honest about what we think'. What is particularly interesting is that Beckham's status as a professional athlete was not discussed here. This exchange also highlights that involvement in professional sport does not ensure access to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

The discussions about sexuality in relation to Zac Efron and David Beckham were not the only evidence of using ‘gay’ as an insult. During this activity some of the boys directed such an insult towards other boys in their group. These insults were often directed at Jarrod, particularly by Tyson, with Jarrod sometimes retaliating against Tyson. Such persistent ‘insults’ of being called ‘gay’ and ‘spanking’ other boys escalated into verbal attacks. These attacks were also evident in some of the other activities. While Swain suggests in his research using the word ‘gay’ was not directly related to sexuality (2003b, 319-320), in my research, boys who used ‘gay’ were aware of its links to sexuality (see also Renold 2005, 133), although they also used it to refer to gender – being ‘feminine’ or ‘unmasculine’ – as Swain suggests (2002b, 63).¹²

Girls were also occasionally active in policing boys’/men’s sexuality. For example, one girl concluded that Robert Pattinson (who plays the lead male character in the *Twilight* film series which these girls enjoyed), was ‘gay’ if he liked girls who rode motorcycles and wore the latest trends:

Girl: In the *Girlfriend* magazine he likes a girl who likes to ride motorbikes and sits on the latest trends, like you know, not sits on them but like wears the latest trends [...]

Girl: Yeah, exactly, cos he’s gay if he likes that sort of girl

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, small group discussion recording – Regan, Tash, Bec, and Fiona)

One girl recognised that boys could be called ‘gay’ if they liked ‘girl stuff’: ‘[t]he bad thing about being a boy would be that if you liked girl stuff you would be called “Gay” but girls don’t get called “Gay” for liking boy stuff’ (Madison, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary). Madison recognised the threat of being called ‘gay’ if boys were not in line with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

¹² As McGuffey and Rich note in their research, ‘the threat of being labeled gay is used as a control mechanism to keep boys conforming to the norms of hegemonic masculinity’ (1999, 619). Other research has also found that ‘gay’ is used as an insult, sometimes in the form of ‘poofter’, ‘fag’, and like terms in primary school and high school (see, for example, Epstein 1998b; Frosh, et al. 2002; Keddie 2003a; Martino 1998; Pascoe 2005; Plummer 2001; Swain 2000, 105; 2002b, 62-65).

‘Boys’ Stuff’ and ‘Girls’ Stuff’

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, boys were often constructed in relation to girls. There were constructions of binaries concerning hair and clothing, and interests, activities, and popular culture which assisted in making particular items and practices appear to be ‘natural’ for boys. Francis argues that ‘visual *signs* of gender, involving stereotypically gendered accessories, clothes and behaviour, play a crucial part in children’s construction of gender identity’ (emphasis in original, 1998, 33). Gender binaries were most frequently drawn upon by the younger students.

‘Boys don’t have long hair’: Gender divisions in hair and clothing

Helen: Girls and boys are the same. They’re- they’re just the same but there’s nothing different about them. They’re both little and they always have the same thing but they just look different

CB: Look- how do they look different?

Helen: Because boys get short hair girls get long hair, girls wear dresses boys wear shorts

Boy [while Helen is talking]: Some boys get long hair. Some boys get long hair

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion, brainstorming things that are the same about boys and girls)

For the students, particularly from the younger classes, hair and clothing were important signifiers of gender and discourses of gender difference. In a brainstorming activity, 41.2% (seven) of the pairs in the younger classes wrote that boys have short hair or do not have long hair, and 70.6% (12) wrote that girls have long hair. This relates to Paechter’s argument that ‘[c]hildren’s bodies in school are especially salient; so many of their ideas about gender are related to outward bodily manifestations such as clothing, hairstyles and physical style’ (2006, 132). In the above quote, Helen proposed that the *sole* difference between boys and girls were that they ‘look different’ (although only in relation to hair length and clothing). This comment is striking when compared to the older boy discussed above who claimed the only differences between girls and boys were the ‘downer parts’, likely highlighting a shift in how gender is understood between the age groups. A potential

challenge to Helen's binary view was that some of the students suggested boys can have long hair:

Petros: Girls um tie their hair

Girl: Up

CB: Tie their hair up?

Student: Yep

Student: So does some boys

Effie?: Boys have long hair. Some boys have long hair

Boy: No we don't, we don't have long hair

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion, brainstorming things that relate to girls only)

As Ethan (Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary) told me, 'most kids [children who are girls] have long hair'. It was true that most students' hair in all of the classes reflected the construction of short hair for boys and long/longer hair for girls. The younger students mentioned hair length more frequently than the older students, and the parents and teachers did not discuss it at all. The younger students viewed hair as fundamental to the body rather than a social construction.

Being a boy was also tightly constrained in terms of wearing (and not wearing) particular items of clothing, as Mila noted:

I think boys are restricted to wear certain clothes. e.g[.] pants, shorts, and t-shirts.

(Mila, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, restrictions relating to being a boy)

Certain clothes were often identified as being for girls (and therefore not for boys) rather than being for boys. Interestingly, one girl suggested something good about being a boy would be 'that nobody cares what you wear or how you look. Boys have it easy in that sort of stuff' (Krista, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary). However, Daniel (Year 6/7 teacher, St Catherine's Primary) suggested that clothing meant gender was likely to be more restrictive for a boy than a girl: 'because he wouldn't come to school dressed in female clothing, people would, like, you would have a social outcry'. As students were required to wear school uniform, the schools themselves endorsed particular versions of gendered

clothing, although the gendered nature of this varied for the different classes. The Year 6/7 class at St Catherine's Primary was the only class in the research where boys and girls wore very similar clothes (polo shirts, shorts/long pants, and sometimes windcheaters). In the other three classes girls usually wore dresses or pinafores.

The younger students gave few examples of what 'boys' clothes' might be: pants, singlets, belts, 'boy clothes', 'boy costumes', and AFL guernseys. The older students provided more ideas about what clothes were 'appropriate' for boys, although this was still limited: pants, not having to wear a shirt, and wearing cups (for playing sport). When I asked the Year 6 class how they would teach someone to be a boy (after watching an episode of *The Simpsons*), the first response came from Gregory who said to '[d]ress like a boy' which resulted in a number of suggestions including hats, earrings, long hair (someone else corrected this to short hair), caps, pants, jeans ('and make sure not skin jeans'), denim jackets, and singlets. Here jeans, which might be viewed as a neutral clothing item, were specified as 'not skin [tight] jeans'. This reflects what was considered to be 'masculine' within the class, and what was fashionable at the time.

The key process to creating a discourse of masculinity in terms of clothing related to marking some clothes as being for girls and thus *not* for boys. This was done by both age groups and helped to construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity as well as a discourse of idealised femininity (discussed in Chapter Six). 'Girls' clothing' was frequently mentioned in the form of dresses, skirts, jewellery (particularly earrings), and high heels. Younger boys mentioned wearing skirts, dresses, and earrings of examples of how their lives would be different if they were girls (the older boys were not asked this question).

Mrs Hartley noted some exceptions to the gendered division of clothing. She suggested when playing 'dress-ups' sometimes the boys wore 'girly stuff' '[be]cause most of the clothes in dress-ups are my old clothes, so there's not a lot of boys' stuff in there'. Playing with gender during 'dress-ups' highlights the ability for more fluidity with gender at a young age than in adulthood or even at the end of primary school. Mrs Hartley also recounted a previous discussion with her class about gender and clothing, focusing on her teaching of 'choice theory' to the students, where she convinced them that boys can wear dresses 'if they really want to'. While some students seemed to be influenced by Mrs Hartley's teaching of 'choice theory' – 'I think that boys can also wear dresses and skirts, if they want to' (Hayley) – other students suggested boys cannot wear particular clothes.

For example, Sienna said she liked being a girl because of the different clothes she could wear, and if she was a boy she would not be 'able to have a dress on'.

Unlike other studies, the boys in my research did not view specific hairstyles or paying attention to hair as important for constructing their masculinities (cf. Renold 2005, 81; Swain 2002a, 102), and clothing was framed in terms of avoiding anything deemed to be for girls, rather than particular clothes for boys being privileged over other clothes (cf. Renold 2005, 80-82; Swain 2002b).

Sport, Wrestling, Cars, and Videogames: Interests, activities, and popular culture

It[']s important to me because I can do boy things.

(Spiro, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, how important is being a boy to you?)

very important [because] I can do girls['] stuf[f] and not boy[s'] stuf[f]

(Poppy, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, how important is being a girl to you?)

The thing [that] is good about being a boy is that you can do different thing[s] than girls do.

(Tony, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something good about being a boy)

can do girl stuff

(Philip, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a girl)

Apart from sport, only a narrow range of interests, activities, and popular culture were viewed as 'appropriate' for boys. It is the distancing of boys' and girls' interests and activities from each other that constructs a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Philip's comment above was one of the rare examples where boys looked positively on 'girls' stuff'.

Sports, wrestling, cars, and videogames were called 'boys' stuff' by younger and older students as well as teachers and/or parents (for a summary see Table 3.3, overleaf).

TABLE 3.3: 'Boys' Stuff': Activities, interests, and popular culture for boys

	<i>Labelled by younger students</i>	<i>Labelled by older students</i>	<i>Labelled by teachers/parents</i>
Sport	Sports Soccer AFL/Australian Rules football Cricket	Sports Tennis	Sports Soccer AFL/Australian Rules football Cricket Basketball
Fighting/violence	Wrestling Watch fighting shows Fighting	Wrestling Guns	Wrestling Fighting games Violent things
Transport	Cars Bikes Motorbikes Rocket ships	Cars Motorbikes Skateboarding	Cars Trains
Technology	Videogames (Playstation, Nintendo) Watching DVDs	Videogames Technology Music Watching television, watching sport Computers, MSN [online instant messaging]	Videogames (Wii, Playstation, Gameboy) Playing on the computer with dad
Other	Playing guitar and drums Light sabres Hip hop dancing	Girls	Being in the shed with dad Going for walks with dad
Television/movies	<i>Ben 10</i> <i>Go, Diego, Go!</i>		<i>Ben 10</i>

The recurrent use of the categories of ‘boys’ stuff’ and ‘girls’ stuff’ by the younger students showed how a singular ‘masculinity’ was constructed in direct relation to a singular ‘femininity’. To demonstrate this it is useful to consider an example from the Year R/1 class. Mrs Hartley asked Kwan ‘is being a boy important to you?’. In the exchange that ensued, Kwan said that if he changed gender he would lose his identity. Tellingly, Kwan’s first response to whether being a boy was important to him was to say ‘I don’t actually wanna change to a girl’. Through the construction of a gender binary, it was more worrying to Kwan to have ‘girls’ things’ (which were named as long hair, dresses, skirts, and doing ballet) rather than losing ‘boys’ things’ (which were not named):

If I were a girl I would lose my things what I had and I would have s- girl things instead of boy things and- and if I was um a girl my life would change to a bad um- a bad life because um I don’t wanna have girl things

(Kwan, Year R/1 class, St Catherine’s Primary, whole class discussion, discussing research findings)

Kwan did not name anything specifically about being a boy that was positive.

Saying boys like ‘girls’ things’ could be used as an insult, as illustrated in the following exchange where Cosmo suggested Katerina’s four year old brother ‘loves girl things’:

Cosmo (laughing): And Katerina’s brother loves girl things!

(laughs)

Cosmo: I hope your brother doesn’t find out

(laughs)

Katerina: I’m going to tell him and he’s going to give you a big smack. I’m gonna tell my brother so then I- so he can give you a big smack

Cosmo: I can give him a smack and tell him do you have anything to say for yourself sir? Blargh!

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, small group discussion recording – Katerina, Yolanda and Cosmo)

Katerina seemingly tried to assert her brother’s masculinity by introducing violence (notably from her brother not her) – ‘he’s going to give you a big smack’ – which was returned by Cosmo.

The younger students proposed that girls *want* to do ‘girls’ things’ and boys *want* to do ‘boys’ things’. It was also suggested that boys do not like ‘girls’ things’, and want to do the same things that other boys do. A similar view was drawn upon by Mrs Searle, the Year 1 teacher, who suggested students chose particular toys to play with because of individual interest rather than gender (for a related discussion about teachers discussing the individual over gender, see Korth 2007). In contrast, Mrs Hartley, the Year R/1 teacher, suggested that the gender divisions in toys the students liked was influenced by their parents, who bought all of their children’s toys, as well as marketing.

Popular culture in the form of televisions shows and movies were also often divided by gender. In the younger classes in particular, television shows or movies with male protagonists were frequently viewed as for boys and those with female protagonists or protagonists of both genders were viewed as for girls. For example, in a Year R/1 class session there was a reoccurring discussion about the television show *Dora the Explorer* and its spin off show featuring Dora’s cousin Diego called *Go, Diego, Go!*. It was clear that many of the students thought that *Dora the Explorer* was for girls and *Go, Diego, Go!* was for boys because of the genders of the protagonists. The gendered marketing of popular culture is also an important factor. *Dora the Explorer* and *Go, Diego, Go!* are clear examples where associated marketing (such as merchandise) influences whether girls or boys watch the show.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that sport was key to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity in my research, and demonstrated the process of hegemony which made links between sport and boys appear ‘natural’. However, age is a barrier to accessing a broader discourse of hegemonic masculinity for primary school boys, even to those who embrace sports and associated aspects of physicality. As Coles (2008) notes in relation to adults, men may value only the aspects of ‘masculinity’ which they themselves can live up to. So too it seemed that many students drew on aspects of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity that they could engage in. Thus, primary school boys may be seen as accessing a *local* discourse of hegemonic masculinity. An emphasis on sport in constructing a discourse of hegemonic masculinity by many of the participants in my research can be related to two key factors – age and the Australian context. Connell suggests that sport ‘is the central experience of the school years for many boys’ (1983, 18), yet upon leaving school most

men find other body practices to assert their masculinity: work, sexuality and/or fatherhood (1983, 22-26). While sport can also be important for a discourse of hegemonic masculinity for men (see, for example, Connell 2000, 69-85), it should be noted that the specifics of sports such as soccer may be different for students compared with adults (as well as students of different ages¹³), including modified rules, different games tactics, mixed-gender teams and so on. Such findings regarding the place and significance of sport in relation to masculinities are also specific to location and culture.

The centrality of sport in constructing a discourse of hegemonic masculinity in my research is also reflective of the dominance of sport in Australian society. As Cashman argues, '[f]or better or worse, sport is central to the business of being Australian and appeals to many Australians' (1995, vii). More specifically it should be stated that it is *men's* sport that is so prominent in Australia, evident in the media coverage of sports as discussed earlier in this chapter. The privileged place of sport in Australian society has a double effect of both continuing the strong influence of sport in constructing Australian masculinities and ensuring Australia's male-centricity. All the same, it should be acknowledged that it is not just in Australia that there are strong ties between national identity, sport, and gender (Ward 2009). Connell and Messerschmidt highlight that in (many) Western societies constructing hegemonic masculinity relates to sport. They argue that the influence of sport at the regional level can also be seen at the local level (they give examples from high school studies in the United States and Australia):

[i]n Western societies, practice at the local level—such as engaging in professional sporting events—constructs hegemonic masculine models (e.g., 'star athletes') at the regional level, which in turn affect other local settings. ... [R]egionally significant exemplary masculine models influence—although they do not wholly determine—the construction of gender relations and hegemonic masculinities at the local level (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 850).

¹³ For example, Messner notes that in his research with parent volunteers in youth soccer and baseball/softball in the United States, most women and some men coaches had a more 'feminine' coaching style (including being nurturing, caring, and focusing on having 'fun') in the younger teams, which changed to a focus on skill, competition, and winning when coaching older teams (2009, 19-20).

The privileging of soccer in English primary schools also reflects its significance within the broader national culture. As Warren notes in relation to his research with 10 year old students:

[t]he high profile and culturally privileged position that football enjoys in British society give these boys' local practices legitimacy, but also constitute the cultural conditions of their emergence as significant practices in the construction of masculine identities. ... It gives legitimacy to a gender order predicated on a primary distinction between maleness and femaleness, of identity instituted in the body, and of a particular physical and public masculinity as the normative gender (2003, 13).

Similarly, in the South African context Bhana highlights that '[s]port has a very significant place in South Africa and is often viewed as a national religion' (2008, 4).

As well as sport *per se*, bodies and physicality, demonstrated through strength, muscles, and violence were drawn on to construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Ideas about bodies and socially constructed differences were often more influential than actual physical differences between boys and girls. Even young boys can be aligned with hard, sporting bodies despite their actual bodies. As Davies writes:

[i]t seems that boys know before they have discovered *how* to harden their own bodies that their own (male) being is equated with a hardness essential to heroism (emphasis in original, 2003b, 95).

While sport and physicality were important in both age groups, some of the older students were able to challenge the discourse of boy equals sport, and they were also involved in discussions and rejections of violence against girls and women. Sexuality was focused on more by the older students, and the view that being 'gay' is not 'manly' was drawn on exclusively by the older students. Gender binaries involving hair, clothing, and particular interests, activities, and popular culture were drawn on more by the younger students to construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. What these differences indicate is that the students tend to move from simple gender binaries (relating to hair, clothing, interests and so forth) to more complex ideas about gender. In addition, the older students were able to challenge particular discourses. It was also the case that several things the students viewed

as key to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity were rarely discussed by the teachers or parents, including strength, muscles, sexuality, and hair.

Despite the pervasiveness of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, there were also challenges and tensions to the discourse. The next chapter examines how the process of hegemony worked to incorporate other practices, as well as how these other practices sometimes posed a challenge to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Not the Traditional Boy Mould: Plural practices of masculinities

Introduction

If people focus on the dominant pattern, or the dominant definition of masculinity, they can fail to see the alternative patterns that also exist.

(Connell 2008a, 133)

- Went to high school - Got good grades
- Became an Artist - Drew Painting [sic]
- Had a good house (Double stor[e]y) – Was kind of rich
- Enjoyed my life - Was well mannered
- Didn't have a car - Rode a bike because hated Pollution

(Raj, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, imagined future story)

This chapter considers alternative, potentially transgressive, practices and shows how they can work alongside or present challenges to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity that I presented in the previous chapter. Many of the practices I discuss in this chapter fit within Connell's concept of subordinate masculinities (see Chapter One) because they are often or traditionally associated with 'femininity'. However, as I demonstrate, these practices were not necessarily subordinated. Age, school, culture, classroom, and context all provided differing circumstances for alternative practices. What I discuss in this chapter follows the work of Davies. Not only can boys engage in plural practices, individual boys engage in a number of different practices to construct their masculinities in ways which are likely to be incoherent (Davies 2003a, 4), and can combine elements of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity with other practices. Furthermore, this chapter emphasises the importance of the *process* of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, rather than just its content.

This chapter discusses the three themes that stood out in my research as the main practices which differed from a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. These also differ from how hegemonic masculinity has often been theorised by Connell and others. The themes are: displaying 'intelligence' and being studious; involvement in traditionally 'feminine'

activities (dancing, cooking, sewing, and knitting); and being caring, loving family and friends, and engaging in cross-gender friendships. I utilise these themes to explore how practices could appear as an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity; be combined with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity; be viewed as practical investments; be engaged in at home; be divided internally by gender; and be acceptable because of culture or young age. As a background, I first highlight how some participants recognised differences between boys.

Rough Boys and Quiet Boys: Recognition of differences between boys

When you said ‘how would you teach someone to act like a boy?’, there are different types of boys

(Christos, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, discussing an episode of The Simpsons)

Christos, aware that he did not fit with many of the suggestions the class offered in response to the question ‘How would you teach someone to be a boy?’, pre-empted my follow-up question about whether all boys act the same. As Thorne notes, ‘[k]ids of various ages themselves recognize varied, albeit stereotyped, ways of being a boy or a girl’ (1993, 100). In my research the recognition of differences between boys was frequently based on particular boys who participants knew. Furthermore, participants more often recognised differences *between* boys rather than suggesting that *each boy* engaged in plural practices (a theme which I take up in the next chapter).

The younger students expressed little knowledge of differences between boys. In a brainstorming activity, some students used words such as ‘neat’ and ‘quiet’ to describe boys, which were not used to construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Some sort of variation was also understood by including words that mean almost contradictory things – such as describing boys as both ‘skinny’ and having ‘muscles’. Some students also explicitly noted differences amongst boys, often drawing on their knowledge of actual boys. For example, Poppy (Year 1 class, Socrates Primary) recognised that ‘some boys like the monkey bars and skipping but some boys don’t’.

One mother suggested that her daughter was aware that the boys in her class were not all interested in the same thing:

I think some of the boys are into different things in her class, so she's probably um- can see that

(Mother of Reception girl, St Catherine's Primary)

However, another mother said her son had trouble understanding a male cousin who was not 'sporty' like her son, but was instead 'arty'. She suggested 'it's a little bit hard for them to get their head around' differences between boys but:

he does understand to a degree. He does understand that sometimes they don't want to be out doing sport or sometimes they don't want to be doing the things you want to do

(Mother of Year 1 boy, St Catherine's Primary)

Many of the older students were aware that there are differences between boys, and that sometimes individual boys may engage in multiple practices. Again, this was often related to actual boys who participants knew. In an activity where students brainstormed words describing boys and words describing girls, some pairs presented an array of differences – such as 'Greek', 'Chinese', 'Korean', 'Aussie'; 'Emo', 'Goth', 'Jock'. A number of pairs named descriptions which can be classified as binaries such as 'quiet' and 'loud', although some of these might be practised by the same boy at different times (see Table 4.1, overleaf).

TABLE 4.1: Plural Ways of Being a Boy: Binaries evident in words describing boys

Masculine	Feminine
Bad	Good
Mature	Immature
Tall	Short
Fat	Skinny/anorexic
Ugly	Beautiful
Quiet	Noisy
Smart/intelligent/nerd	Dumb
Happy	Sad
Poor	Rich
Cool	Uncool
Mean	Nice
Girly	'Boyy'
Gay	Straight
Responsible	Irresponsible
Crazy	'Un-crazy'/serious
Strong	Weak
Shy	Confident

As might be expected, the parents and teachers were more likely to recognise differences between boys than the students. However, acknowledging or being aware of such differences was something that could also be difficult for them to articulate. Differences between boys tended to be related to behaviour and, as was often the case with the students, were discussed using boys the teachers and parents knew (perhaps influenced by the questions I asked them). The examples below sort boys into two groups: the boy with behavioural problems who is gruffer, rough, and 'running around a bit more' (relevant to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity), compared with the placid, quiet, and considerate boy:

there's definitely a variant. You get some boys that are more placid and more easy going, um and have those conflict resolution skills, or know how to just ignore poor behaviour, um but yeah, there are some that don't.

(emphasis added, Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview, do all boys in the class act the same?)

for my observation – it's only my observation – at child care centres etcetera [CB: Yeah] there seems to be – and even at ah kindergarten – *there seems to be two generalising sorts of boys*. There's a bit more gruff – a rougher, you know, can't sit still, running around a bit more, um whatever, and then there tends to be the quieter boy, and I certainly can see that in

Sophia's class also [CB: Oh yeah?] and it tends to be the quieter boy, a little bit more gentle, they still do it, but not as much.

(emphasis added, Mother of Year 1 girl, Socrates Primary)

if I compare him to his brother, he's more gentle than his brother, um he's not a real rough [CB: Mmm] you usually think you'd associate boys with being rough and um... um not bullyish[?] but you know, considerate, he's considerate

(Mother of Year 6 boy, Socrates Primary)

Considering students receive many of their messages about gender from their parents and teachers, how adults understand differences between boys is important. Therefore, if parents and teachers do not acknowledge, understand, or have the ability to articulate that there is variation amongst boys, then these narrow messages will likely be influential on students. Despite this, teachers and parents did appear to be generally supportive of boys engaging in a range of different practices¹ (although at the same time they helped to create and perpetuate a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, as discussed in Chapter Three).

The older students had some facility in pitching *a discourse of individualism* against a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. This allowed them to challenge the idea that there is only one way to be a boy. After watching an episode of *The Simpsons*, I asked the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine's Primary how they would teach someone to be a boy. Their response was that one *cannot* teach someone how to be a boy (or a girl) and some instead suggested the need to 'be yourself'. Similarly, Christos (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary) said 'I just think to act like yourself', although he then suggested 'still like try to be a boy'. A discourse of individualism was also used by some of the parents and teachers to explain, and often support, differences between students of the same gender. A discourse of individualism is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

¹ I emphasise this point here because some other studies have found that teachers more directly police students for their behaviour. A striking example comes from Newman, Woodcock and Dunham's (2006) research with 10 and 11 year old students in England. They found that a boy who did not like sport, was friends with girls, and was bullied (mostly by boys) was viewed by some teachers as somewhat responsible for the bullying because he was not a 'proper boy' and needed to 'toughen up'. In contrast, another boy who was skilled at soccer and was disruptive was supported by the school, to the extent that a suggestion to exclude him from the school soccer team because he continually broke the school rules was rejected by the deputy head of the school, because this boy was too good at soccer.

What these findings suggest is that the participants drew on knowledge about specific boys (and perhaps men) that they knew to build up ideas of what being a boy entails. However, for the older students there was a stronger sense of individualism which allowed them to reject and challenge a narrow discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Previous research has noted that differences between boys have been recognised by students (see, for example, Frosh, et al. 2002; Hey, Creese, Daniels, Fielding and Leonard 2001), and teachers (Bhana 2009, 333-337). However, boys are also commonly spoken about homogeneously, including by teachers who may draw on a 'boys will be boys' discourse (see, for example, Bhana 2009). While boys were discussed as a group by the teachers and parents in my research, it was clear that variations were also noted – either by identifying differences (such as the categories of rough/quiet) or by drawing on a discourse of individualism.

‘Muscular Intellectualness’: An alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity?

While sport was key to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, there were times when presenting oneself as 'intelligent' was accepted and even valued. This is similar to Renold who, drawing on the idea of 'muscular intellectualness' named by Redman and Mac an Ghail (1997), suggests that masculinities constructed through 'intelligence' are not necessarily a challenge to hegemonic masculinity, but a different (perhaps 'older') form of hegemonic masculinity (Renold 2004, 261).

At St Catherine's Primary, sport was not always a key definer of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, and drawing on 'intelligence' appeared to be a different way masculinities could be established. A particularly illustrative demonstration of an investment in 'intelligence' was shown by Zach who was interested in reading and writing. In his 'imagined future' story he wrote about becoming an author:

- At 20 years old, I became a Fantasy Author. I sold 50 million copies in the first week worldwide.
- As I grew more popular, and movies were made, I was afraid to leave the house for fear of screaming fangirls and reporters.

- By age 40, and being a multi-billionaire, I retired having written over 200 titles.

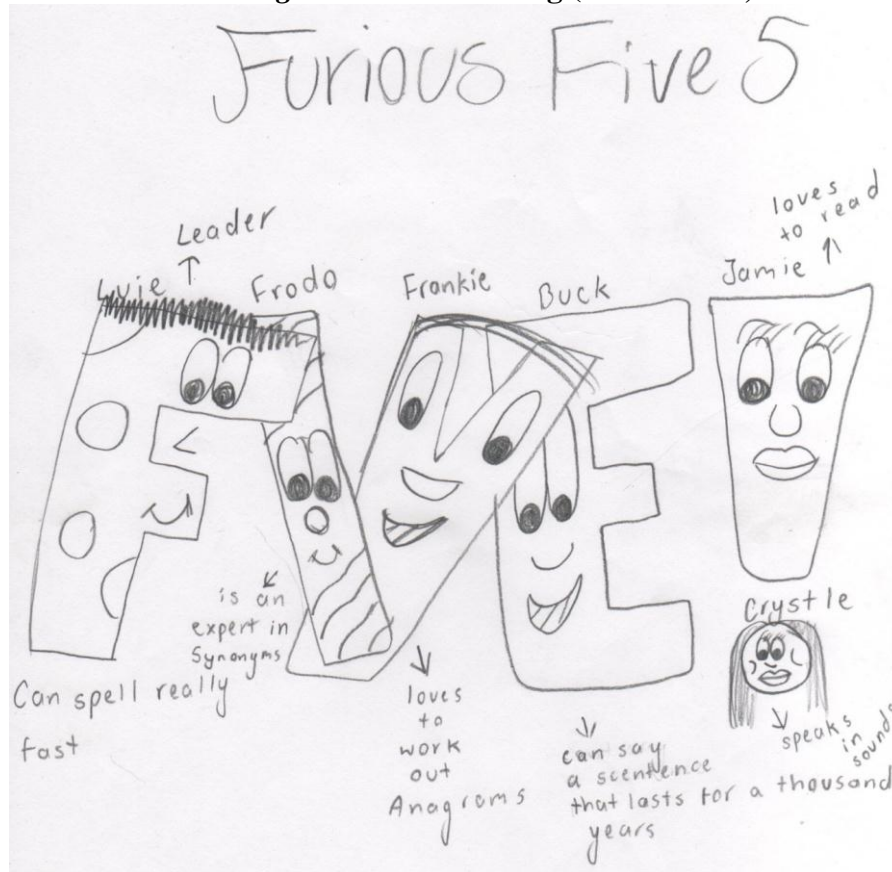
(Zach, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, imagined future story)

Here Zach combined what might be called an alternative masculinity with what are often viewed as validating aspects of (adult) hegemonic masculinity, such as money, career success, fame, and girls/women as sexual objects, showing complicity with the current 'gender order'. The mother of another boy in the class told me that Zach was 'very unusual' yet a 'really good friend' to her son, whom her son called 'eccentric'. This may have given him a legitimate avenue to construct a masculinity which involved an interest in reading and writing. In fact, Coles's (2008) term of 'mosaic' masculinities may be applicable to Zach, where he drew on what are often viewed as aspects of hegemonic masculinity accessible to him, which allowed him to have some influence over other boys, yet he remained subordinated by a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, Zach may be viewed as engaging in an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity ('muscular intellectualness'), in which he used an investment in 'intelligence' to establish privilege and assist in upholding the 'gender order'. This alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity is at least partly supported in this classroom and school. Furthermore, Zach may be viewed as engaging in a 'masculine' version of story writing (compared with Manolis from the Year 1 class at Socrates Primary, who I discuss below, whose desire to be a children's story writer may be seen as a 'feminine' pursuit). Such internal gender divisions help increase the 'masculine' status of activities not deemed 'masculine'. Similarly, as Connolly notes, the middle class 5 and 6 year old boys in his research tended to equate 'masculine' texts with 'a limited range of factual and fantasy-action forms' (2004, 160-161).

In the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary, what might be called 'muscular intellectualness' was also demonstrated, although this was not necessarily an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity in this classroom. Christos drew on 'intelligence' to subvert a discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on physicality. This was particularly clear in an activity where I asked students to draw their own 'Furious Five' (a team of Fung Fu experts) after watching a clip from the movie *Kung Fu Panda*. While most boys and girls drew animals or people, commonly fighting and/or sometimes using weapons, Christos based his characters on language and grammar skills: 'Luie' 'Can spell really fast'; 'Frodo' 'is an expert in synonyms'; 'Frankie' 'loves to work out Anagrams'; 'Buck' 'can say a

scentence [sic] that lasts for a thousand years'; 'Jamie' 'loves to read'; and 'Crystle' 'speaks in sounds' (see Figure 4.1).

FIGURE 4.1: Christos's *Kung Fu Panda* Drawing (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)



At Socrates Primary, a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was more strongly linked with sport than at St Catherine's Primary and, therefore, there was little room for the construction of an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The examples above highlight that while it was possible to read an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on 'muscular intellectualness' in both of the older classes, the context of the school was important as to how this discourse was regarded. While Zach may be viewed as engaging in an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity, supported in part by the school, Christos may be seen as *challenging* a discourse of hegemonic masculinity linked with physicality. These differing experiences highlight the process of hegemony, where practices outside of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity had different implications in the local context of the particular schools.

Some research in primary schools has found that 'intelligence' and/or being studious can be a part of hegemonic (sometimes called 'dominant') masculinity, particularly in middle

class settings (Connolly 2004; Warren 1997), yet is more likely to be denigrated in working class or lower income school settings (Connolly 2004; Hasbrook and Harris 1999; Warren 1997). Interestingly then, in my research, displaying ‘intelligence’ existed as a possible alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity in St Catherine’s Primary, which had a *lower* socio-economic demographic than Socrates Primary (see Chapter Two).

Sporty and Smart: Combining a discourse of hegemonic masculinity with other practices

Some students combined a discourse of hegemonic masculinity with other practices, illustrating how the process of hegemony worked. In the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary it was only when displaying ‘intelligence’ and being studious was teamed with other things – notably sport – that it did not negatively affect boys’ constructions of masculinities. The potential difficulty of boys being studious was highlighted in a whole class discussion. I asked the students if clips from an episode of *The Simpsons* we watched reflected what it was like to be a boy or girl at school (see Appendix Six for an outline of the episode). Stavros responded by saying:

Stavros: Oh, ah, because if you think of it cos you- you saw that the geek boys they were just having their maths books open, true boys- ah, true geeks ah (a few stifled laughs) and the like real boys like Nelson or Bart they were also like- they were bashing everyone up/

[...]

Stavros: No. Alexi- Alexi’s not a geek/

Miss Karidis: I’m not using anyone’s name

Stavros: Alexi’s not a geek

Miss Karidis: Exactly, he’s nowhere near it

Stavros: He’s nowhere near it

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording)²

Here Stavros explicitly put forward a binary of ‘geek boys’ who are attentive in class, and ‘real boys’ who draw on physical violence to establish their masculinities. Alexi, who was

² The specific part of the episode that Stavros referred to portrayed one boy as dominant in the mathematics class, yet this was not a legitimating hegemonic masculinity (hence he was not one of the ‘real boys’).

labelled ‘not a geek’ in the exchange above, was considered to be ‘intelligent’ and hard working in class by the other students.³ The teacher pointed Alexi out not only to me in the interviews but also constructed him as a ‘leader’ when talking to her class. The only ramification I observed from this was that occasionally some of Alexi’s friends would ‘jokingly’ tease him about being smart and doing schoolwork. Similarly, Yannis was not afraid to show an interest in the research (he asked if he could do the research activities he had been absent for), and therefore he showed a commitment to work in the classroom. Both Alexi and Yannis played sport (and often wrote about it in the activities) and were part of a large friendship group of boys in the class.

The status Alexi and Yannis were able to maintain through sport and friendships was not achieved by Christos and Sean. As discussed above, Christos’s investment in ‘intelligence’ could be viewed as a challenge to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on sport and physicality. Both Christos and Sean loved reading, wrote about becoming writers when they were older, and looked up to female authors. Christos was not interested in sport and Sean rarely mentioned it. Similarly, in the Year 1 class at Socrates Primary, Manolis, who liked reading, and in his ‘imagined future’ wanted to be ‘A story writer like Mem Fox’ (a popular Australian children’s picture book author), did not have as much status in the class as the boys whose interests focused on sport.

As others have found, aspects of hegemonic masculinity such as sport need to be drawn on in order to establish an acceptable masculinity for boys who invest in ‘intelligence’ and/or are studious. Renold noted in her research:

[t]here were boys who could blur gender boundaries, so long as they engaged in some masculinity-making activity. ... Boys could also locate themselves as ‘studious’ and ‘pro-school’ if they were also ‘high flyers’ on the football pitch (2005, 89; see also Frosh, et al. 2002, 209-210; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, 136; Swain 2006c, 321).

³ Unlike in other studies in primary schools where words such as ‘boffs’, ‘geeks’ and so on are frequently used (see, for example, Renold 2001; Swain 2002b), this was one of the few times negative descriptors or names relating to displaying ‘intelligence’ or being studious were used in my research.

Education and Cooking Skills: Practical investments

While not fitting with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, an investment in education and knowing how to cook were sometimes viewed as necessary and practical for boys.

In the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine's Primary, Daniel, the class teacher, was focused on pushing his students to achieve academically because they were preparing to start high school soon. Daniel told me that 'being academic would be valued' by the students in his class, after I asked him if it would be considered as something relating to girls. Best friends Lawrence and Aaron both regarded 'intelligence' as important (for example, by looking up to people they described as 'intelligent'), and wrote about attending university in their imagined futures. This valuing of 'intelligence' can be at least partly related to the fact that they were in their last year of primary school, and that an investment in education was supported by Daniel.

Relatedly, academic achievement and education were discussed positively in some boys' imagined futures. Some boys wrote about finishing school and/or attending university. There was only one mention of this in the younger classes, when Theo (Year 1 class, Socrates Primary) wrote that when he grew up he would be able to 'go to university'. 38.1% (eight) of boys and 21.4% (six) of girls from the older classes wrote about education in their imagined futures:

After I finish school I want to get an accounting degree.

(Arthur, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

I think once I finish year 12 I will go to University S.A[.] and study for 4 years to become a pal[a]eontologist.

(Caleb, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

Interestingly, the boys who wrote about education were not necessarily those who constructed themselves or were viewed by others as 'intelligent' or studious. This included a boy who wrote that if his sporting career did not succeed he would stay at high school for longer:

I think I will finish year 10 atleast [sic] and continue if I am not in a high enough division [in tennis].

(Tyson, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

Age differences can be accounted for by the fact that older students are much more likely to be encouraged by teachers and parents to think about their educational futures than younger students, as well as the slightly different method used for this activity for the different age groups (see Appendix Six for a description of the activity). This commitment to education is similar to Gilbert and Gilbert's finding that while rhetorically boys may reject school, and call people 'nerds':

most of them [boys] were quite accepting of and even committed to the notion that school meant doing work and that that was important. When asked about this they invariably pointed out that you needed to do the work for pragmatic reasons—the need to prepare for high school and careers (1998, 135-136).

Social class was also important here, where students showed awareness of middle class values of education (see Connolly 2004, Chapters Five and Six) including attending university, which are likely to be important for constructing acceptable middle class adult masculinities.

Cooking was also viewed by some parents as a skill that boys needed to learn, despite it not being a part of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity:

Year 6 mother: Brad really likes cooking, and I'm not- I mean males- there's so many male chefs out there now, you know, it's cool to be/ [CB: Mhm, yep] Cool to be a chef. But like he said he wants to do Home Ec[onomics] at high school [CB: Mhm] and he doesn't really care if not many boys are doing it. He's gonna do it anyway, so I said 'that's great, *it's good to know how to do things around the house*' (laughs).

Year 7 mother: And I think *this is where we've lacked here, in this school* [CB: Mhm] [...] I think [name of single-sex high school Declan planned to attend the following year] would be- I'm sure I heard the other kids say that

they're learning that, they're learning how to cook. Now Declan will cook, he likes cooking and he doesn't- I don't think he thinks it's a gender thing.

[...]

Year 7 mother: I would like him to know, as I've said to him, when you're out on your own, whatever age that's going to be [...] *you need to know* how to put the washing on, *you need to know* how to iron something, sew something, cook something.

(emphases added, Mothers of Year 6 boy and Year 7 boy, St Catherine's Primary, how would you encourage your child to participate in things not usually associated with their gender?)

[his father is] quite happy for him [their four year old son] to be in the kitchen and cook and that sort of thing so he sees that as being *important for boys* [CB: Mhm] *to learn to do things like that.*

(emphasis added, Mother of Reception girl, St Catherine's Primary)

In relation to the second quote, this mother told me that her husband would be 'horrified' if their four year old son expressed an interest in dancing (see also Kane 2006), yet he viewed cooking as both acceptable and useful for their son to learn. Thus, some parents considered cooking to be a necessary practical skill to learn, which is part of the reason why they were supportive of their sons' involvement in it. Similarly, Penha-Lopes (2006) discusses the 'socialization for competence' in her study about Black men in the United States and their involvement in family life, including their recollections of participation in housework in childhood. Mechling (2005) argues cooking is practical and even 'manly' in relation to the Scouts in the United States.

'You go for it': Doing 'femininity' at home

Some boys were involved in traditionally 'feminine' practices at home but not at school. While this demonstrates the plurality of practices that boys engage in, these practices did not challenge a discourse of hegemonic masculinity at school. One mother in particular discussed her son's involvement in cooking, sewing, and knitting at home:

I thought of Con and my other son is a real boy-boy but you know Con, he could go either way, um in terms of um being interested in um things that

girls are interested in [CB: Mhm] like um the traditional- you know, your cooking [CB: Yep] like he wanted me to show him how to sew [CB: Mhm] and if I'm knitting, 'mum can I do a bit of knit- Can I try some of that?'

(Mother of Year 6 boy, Socrates Primary)

When I asked this mother if Con thought about what his friends would say if they knew of his involvement in craft things, she suggested that he 'wouldn't brag about it' but 'I don't think it would bother him', although she noted that 'his brother might tease him about things'. Con never mentioned an interest in sewing or knitting or anything relating to craft in his responses in the classroom activities. As discussed above, mothers of boys in the Year 6/7 class also spoke about their sons cooking at home. Importantly then, these boys cooked (or were at least encouraged by their mothers to cook) in a home context where they were not constructing their masculinities in relation to other boys their age.

However, there could also be limits to doing 'femininity' at home. As the mother above stated, 'his brother might tease him about things' such as doing craft. This mother also said Con's (older) brother teased him and called him a 'school nerd' for his interest in school and receiving high grades. Thus, masculinities are also policed at home, showing that in this private context there is pressure to conform to particular kinds of masculinities. Parents too can be restrictive in relation to what their sons engage in at home or outside of school. For example, while mothers of boys from the Year 6/7 class discussed how they would encourage their sons to participate in things not usually associated with their gender, giving the example of ballet, they were also amused at the thought of it:

Mother of Year 6 boy: If Brad said 'I wanna go and learn ballet' I'd say 'you go for it' (laughs).

Mother of Year 7 boy: We'd think it's funny.

Mother of Year 6 boy: No! I don't think/

Mother of Year 7 boy: And his mates might but I would support that too.

(Mothers of Year 6 boy and Year 7 boy, St Catherine's Primary)

These findings suggest that while engaging in 'feminine' activities at home or outside of school may be easier for boys than at school, parents and siblings rather than classmates (and teachers) may be a source of policing of these practices.

Hip Hop Dancing versus Ballet: Internal gender divisions

While some boys engaged in practices which might be viewed as ‘feminine’, gender divisions were constructed within some of these categories. For example, the students in the Year R/1 class at St Catherine’s Primary noted gender divisions within the category of dancing. As Jordan explained: ‘girls dance different to boys cos girls dance ballet and boys dance like hip hop and stuff’. Both Jordan and Kwan liked hip hop dancing:

my j[ob] will be hip hop dancing [sic]

(Jordan, Year R/1 class, St Catherine’s Primary, when I grow up my job will be...)

a danser [sic]

(Kwan, Year R/1 class, St Catherine’s Primary, when I grow up I will be...)

Jordan also discussed his involvement in hip hop dancing outside of school. Although Jordan is likely to be involved in a modified version of hip hop dancing due to his age, it is evident that this form of dancing was associated with males rather than females. Thus, hip hop may be dance but it is ‘masculine’ dance: ‘hip hop dance has provided the arena for the expression and affirmation of masculinity’ (LaBoskey 2001, 112). Ballet, on the other hand, was often viewed by the students as being exclusively for girls.

Another internal gender division that I have already discussed in this chapter is that of wanting to be a story writer – where writing fantasy may be viewed as a ‘masculine’ version, and writing children’s books may be viewed as a ‘feminine’ version. Cooking could also be viewed as divided internally by gender where male chefs are dominant in the media, and girls and women do most of the domestic cooking at home (see Chapter Seven). However, the view that cooking is a practical skill to be learnt by boys, as discussed above, complicates this internal gender division.

Greek Dancing and Family: Culture overrides gender

At Socrates Primary, sometimes the influence of Greek culture outweighed the significance of gender. Mrs Searle suggested that Greek dancing was something that both boys and girls in her class enjoyed, where culture overrode gender:

if we're doing Greek dancing, the whole notion of Greek dancing is probably more important than boys and girls, that everyone knows that you're doing Greek dancing, everyone participates, so the boys don't say 'oh it's dancing I'm not going to do this', [...] the culture takes over the gender side of things, whereas typically if it was just a dance, may- possibly boys could be less um enthusiastic or willing to participate

(Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview, does culture matter more in some settings and gender in others?)

The cultural setting of the school was important here, where both boys and girls were encouraged to participate in Greek dancing. However, when I asked Mrs Searle if there were different roles and costumes for girls and boys in Greek dancing, she agreed there were but suggested it was not something the students particularly noticed.

Expressing love of family was particularly noticeable at Socrates Primary, which is likely to be a reflection of the significance of family in Greek culture (see also Garas and Godinho 2009; Kaldi-Koulikidou 2007; Tsolidis 1995). The importance of family in the students' lives was evident when they did an activity choosing identity words that described them. Several of the students added in the word 'family': 30.4% (seven) of older boys and 29.6% (eight) of older girls (and 7.1% (one) of younger girls). Most of the students who added in the word 'family' ranked it as the most important word that described them.⁴ None of the students at St Catherine's Primary added in the word 'family'.

These findings show that culture can override gender in some cases, here in terms of Greek dancing and the importance of family. The context of the Greek Orthodox school is vital in encouraging and supporting these practices.

⁴ It should be noted that one boy and two girls who included 'family' were not from Greek backgrounds.

Caring Relations: Age challenging a discourse of hegemonic masculinity

Good Heart

(Manolis, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, words that describe me)

Other practices challenging to and/or differing from a discourse of hegemonic masculinity involved caring for others, showing emotions, and expressing love for one's family and friends. For example, Manolis added in 'Good Heart' to words that described him in the identity markers activity. Caring behaviours and showing emotions were demonstrated by younger boys more often than older boys, suggesting these expressions were less acceptable at the end of primary school. Young age was also important for students from both age groups in allowing them to show love towards friends and family, and having cross-gender friendships.

'It's your turn': Caring and showing emotions

Evidence of caring and being considerate of others in the younger classes included encouraging others to speak, supporting each other's ideas, and taking it in turns. It was clear in the classroom that some of the students helped each other out. This included making room for other students when sitting in a circle on the floor, and encouraging others to participate in class discussions. Some of this is a reflection of the general ideas of fairness, sharing, and turn-taking that are encouraged in junior primary classrooms (see, for example, Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen 2010), and that are less evident in older classrooms. This behaviour is advocated by teachers. For instance, Mrs Hartley (Year R/1 teacher) sometimes contributed to class brainstorming activities by telling students they had already had a turn, or had been dominating the turn-taking, so they should let someone else contribute. Mrs Searle (Year 1 teacher) suggested that polite behaviour and manners were encouraged by parents and teachers of girls and boys. Caring, 'politeness', and helping others may be encouraged in (and practised by) both genders at this age. In her preschool study in the United States, Kane found that in terms of their sons, '[p]arents accepted, and often even celebrated ... an orientation toward nurturance and empathy' (2006, 158).

Caring and helping were less evident amongst the boys in the older classes, and were not clearly demonstrated in the classrooms. However, Sean (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary), in his imagined future story, expressed his desire to help people: '[i]n My future I will win a lottery and give some to poverty', and Raj (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary), whose imagined future story I included at the opening of this chapter, wrote that he '[w]as well mannered' and '[d]idn't have a car - Rode a bike because hated Pollution'.

The mother of one Year 6 boy suggested that her son in the research was more 'giving and caring' than his older brother, whom she described as 'selfish':

Year 6 mother: Tyler [older brother] has always been a lot more um... selfish and a lot more 'it's about me'. Whereas Brad's a lot more caring [...]

Brad is very um- he's very giving and caring and he- of course he likes to have things his way but he's a lot easier to negotiate with.

(Mothers of Year 6 boy and Year 7 boy, St Catherine's Primary)

Furthermore, caring about animals and pets was acceptable for both genders and age groups. This involved a desire to have pets in the future, wanting careers with animals (such as being a zoo keeper), and one boy looking up to Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin.

The ability to show emotions, such as being upset, was present for some of the younger boys. Connell writes that hegemonic masculinity includes a 'tight control over emotions' (2005b, 128 see also 64). Showing emotions is not usually associated with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity (for adults at least). This, as Bird writes, is because '[t]o express feelings is to reveal vulnerabilities and weaknesses; to withhold such expressions is to maintain control' (1996, 122). Some previous research with preschool and primary school students has found that a control of emotions was valued by boys and/or was a part of a hegemonic, 'dominant', or powerful masculinity (Connolly 2004, 197; Davies and Kasama 2004; McGuffey and Rich 1999, 610). However, links between emotions and masculinities are not always clear-cut, and some studies with men have found that showing emotions can be valued for constructing masculinities (Coles 2008, 241-242), particularly in the context of fathering (see, for example, Lupton and Barclay 1997).

In my research, one mother discussed encouraging her sporty and active son to show his emotions, although this related to the context of the home rather than school:

[p]robably um I have made sure for me as a parent that um he can show emotions. You know, I feel that's very important. Boy, girl, whatever. You know, if he wants to cry or he wants to – it's not about saying 'oh you can't cry because you're a boy' or whatever.

(Mother of Year 1 boy, St Catherine's Primary)

This mother also recognised that her son's behaviour had some fluidity: '[I]ike I said he's rough, he's sort of- but he has his gentle side as well'.

In the Year 1 class at Socrates Primary, there was an instance of a boy (Loukas) crying because a girl had 'told on him' to the teacher. The fear of getting into trouble with the teacher seemed to immediately spark tears for Loukas, highlighting that while he was attempting to construct his masculinity in particular ways, he was still only six years old, and this could falter with his largely powerless position in relation to the teacher. The importance of age is also noted by Keddie (2006a), who found that a boy who was often involved in fighting at school also cried frequently. She suggests that this crying should be viewed as 'associated (rather than inconsistent) with issues of masculinity and power[lessness] and as arising from the tensions, contradictions and emotional turbulence of "being a 12-year-old boy"' (Keddie 2006a, 531).

While the boys in my research did not talk about showing emotions or crying, some did express emotions relating to their love of family and friends.

'I love you': Love of family and friends

when I am 60 I will go to my country and I want to be in my plune [plane] in my country and I wish to be with my family even [sic] and my seocand [second] wish is to be die where my family is die [sic].

(Amin, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, imagined future story)

A caring attitude was shown by the students when they expressed their love for their family and friends. For example, Amin wrote of his love for his family and home country

in his imagined future story (above). The importance of love for and from their family was particularly evident when students wrote about who they looked up to. Loukas (Year 1 class, Socrates Primary) wrote that he looked up to his brother ‘because he is fun’ and described him as ‘he loves me’, and Dylan (Year R/1 class, St Catherine’s Primary) wrote ‘I loc [look] up to mum[.] She loves me’. Mentions of love in relation to family were, perhaps surprisingly, referred to more often by older boys than younger boys. For example four boys described their mothers as ‘loving’, and one boy also described his father as ‘loving’. When explaining why they looked up to their mothers, Gregory (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary) wrote ‘I look up to my mum because she helps me in every way possible. She is kind and caring’. While some boys did write about love for their family, girls from both age groups were more likely to express this. Furthermore, describing mothers as ‘loving’ is less challenging to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity than boys expressing their love for others or describing themselves as loving.

Some mothers discussed their children’s love for their family. For instance, one mother (Year 1 boy, St Catherine’s Primary) discussed her son saying ‘I love you’ to his mum/family ‘pretty much every day or every night’, which is something which she and her husband had encouraged. The context of home versus school is important here, but age was also another factor in the students’ abilities to show love for their families. Similarly, a mother at St Catherine’s Primary suggested families and feeling safe and loved were very important to her daughter in Reception and her four year old son – and were more significant than gender.

Caring about friends was also shown by some of the boys, particularly in the younger classes. These involved simple, caring statements such as writing ‘I like him very much’ about their best friend, which differed for the older boys who did not use the same kind of language:

A good friend of mine.

Accepts jokes.

Manupulates [sic] and clever.

(Lawrence about Aaron, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary)

Differences in friendship amongst boys can be related to both age (Thorne and Luria 1986, 182) and context (see, for example, Renold 2004, 256-257). Redman, Epstein, Kehily and

Mac an Ghail (2002) discuss an ‘intimate’ best friendship between two 10 year old boys and suggest that this kind of friendship is specific to children and is not available in the same ways for teenagers. However, they caution that while ‘intimate’ friendships between boys may be transgressive, they can involve ‘a misogynous and highly defensive version of masculine identity’ (Redman, et al. 2002, 190).

Both teachers of the older classes suggested friendship and acceptance were the most important things to their students (boys and girls) above anything else, including gender:

belonging and friendships and knowing that they’re accepted by others. They- they would die if they didn’t have that, I probably would rate that one higher than oxygen.

(Daniel, Year 6/7 teacher, St Catherine’s Primary)

Acceptance... You know, being liked by peers, um, that’s a big one at this age, you know, you’ll do anything to sustain friendships and to be, you know, popular and fit in. Um, I think that’s more important than- than gender yeah.

[...]

I guess in acceptance comes friendships and all- all of um relationships, you know, with- with teachers, with family, with friends.

(Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview)

My findings show that boys occasionally wrote about their friendships with other boys in a caring and emotive way. These findings tend to differ from constructions of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and were likely influenced by the young age of the boys.

‘Girls and boys can be friends’: Cross-gender friendships

You’re cool and you’re a good friend

(Rigas to Krista, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, student-designed ‘Friendship Wheel’ activity)⁵

⁵ This quote is taken from an activity designed by Christos and Lela, which they called the ‘Friendship Wheel’, where students were required to say nice things to classmates.

Boys' friendships with girls was another way in which gender relations were played out differently to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, with young age being important in allowing this. Cross-gender friendships can be seen as a challenge to misogyny and homosociality, which are often viewed as important for constructing hegemonic masculinity (Bird 1996; Flood 2008). My findings differ from previous research in primary schools, where cross-gender friendships are rarely found or discussed. The tendency towards same-gender friendships is well-illustrated by studies interviewing friendship groups of primary school students. As discussed in Chapter One, in many studies of primary school masculinities, student-chosen⁶ groups are made up of only boys or only girls (Keddie 2004; Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2012, 484; Renold 2005, 14), with some including a very small number of mixed-gender groups (Connolly 2004, 101; Swain 2003a, 301). This method limits opportunities for considering cross-gender friendships. The patterns of cross-gender friendships I found were often more complex than research discussing girls labelled 'tomboys' who play with boys (see, for example, Paechter and Clark 2007; Reay 2001b), because students did not attempt to be the other gender.

The existence and nature of cross-gender friendships varied for the different classes and age groups. When naming who their friends were in the class, on average the older students were more likely to have cross-gender friendships. Cross-gender friendships made up nearly a third of all friendships noted (see Table 4.2).

TABLE 4.2: Friendship Map Activity Divided According to Gender

Class and gender (total number of friends named)	Cross-gender friendships	Same-gender friendships
Year R/1 Boys (65)	20.0% (13)	80.0% (52)
Year 1 Boys (77)	35.1% (27)	64.9% (50)
Year 6 Boys (153)	27.5% (42)	72.5% (111)
Year 6/7 Boys (176)	43.8% (77)	56.3% (99)
Boys' Total (471)	33.8% (159)	66.2% (312)
Year R/1 Girls (27)	22.2% (6)	77.7% (21)
Year 1 Girls (85)	24.7% (21)	75.3% (64)
Year 6 Girls (186)	28.0% (52)	72.0% (134)
Year 6/7 Girls (255)	32.9% (84)	67.1% (171)
Girls' Total (553)	29.5% (163)	70.5% (390)
Total (1024)	31.4% (322)	68.6% (702)

Note: Some columns do not equal 100% due to rounding to one decimal point.

The table combines the students' naming of 'best' and 'other' friends and includes only those named friends who were other students in the class.

⁶ Keddie (2004) determined friendship groups by asking the students to choose who they would invite to their hypothetical birthday party using a 'birthday invitation list', rather than students choosing their own groups.

Both teachers of the younger classes suggested that cross-gender friendships and interaction were common at this age. This was evident from Mrs Searle's views on when she thought gender started mattering to children:

in Year 1 you could easily find girls and boys playing together and it really wouldn't be seen as a big deal, whereas in Year 2 and Year 3 you start- they start going their own separate ways and you get your girls sitting down talking and the boys off playing sport and those sorts of things, whereas in Year 1 it's a lot more cohesive, do a lot more things together.

(Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview)

Mrs Hartley's (Year R/1 teacher, St Catherine's Primary) discussions of cross-gender friendships and interaction were more complex. For the most part she suggested that, while boys and girls in her class tended to mostly separate by gender when they had a choice, they did not mind when she put them into mixed-gender groupings. Mrs Hartley also noted the importance of context: in sport lessons students were more likely to divide themselves into all girl or all boy teams; at recess and lunch some boys played with girls; and in the classroom some students worked in mixed-gender groups by choice. Mrs Hartley also discussed some specific boys in the class who played with girls, suggesting this occurred because they had sisters or were 'sensitive'. At Socrates Primary, the mother of a Year 1 girl said her daughter was friends with some of the boys in the class who were 'nice', 'kind' and 'gentle'. It might be suggested that in junior primary school, girls are most likely to be friends with boys who are more placid (see also Adler and Adler 1998, 164).

In the Year 1 class there were some discussions about boys and girls playing together. For example, some students spoke about a game of girls chasing boys:

Katerina: Poppy and I play at recess with the boys because we chase boys too [pointed to some boys]

(some laughs/murmurs)

[...]

Katerina?: We chase Petros and Loukas. Me, Aaliyah and- me, Aaliyah and

Student: Yolanda

Yolanda: Me

[Loukas was smiling, pink in the face, and looking pleased but embarrassed]

Ari: They chase me

Poppy?: You usually go in timeout

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, discussing research findings, why girls mostly named girls as friends)

This exchange suggests several things. First, it should be noted that a girl raised the point of girls and boys playing together – not a boy. Second, while Katerina’s claim caused some laughter and murmuring, she continued with her story and others joined in. Third, Ari, a boy who was often disruptive in class, claimed he was part of this too, only to be rejected by Poppy. Even though this exchange implies the existence of friendships between boys and girls, it also suggests some kind of heterosexualised teasing. Furthermore, the genders were clearly divided – girls chase boys.

Clearer patterns of cross-gender friendships emerged from the older classes. In the ‘Friendship Map’ activity in the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine’s Primary, 23 girls were named as ‘best’ friends by boys, and *all* boys named girls as friends. This contrasts to the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary, where no boys named girls as ‘best’ friends and only half of the boys (seven out of the 13 taking part in the activity) named girls as friends. Some research conflates cross-gender interaction at this age with romantic attachments, which does not allow room to discuss cross-gender friendships. For example, Adler and Adler (1998) wrote about cross-gender relations as *friendship* in the early years of school but their examination of the middle and later years quickly evolved into a discussion about *heterosexuality*. This difference may be a reflection of how such interactions were treated by students – as Renold found, at 10 and 11 years old, cross-gender friendships were difficult to maintain because of the pressure for students to become heterosexual couples (2005, 103-107; see also Mellor 2007, 11-14).

I identified three key patterns of friendships in the older classes: boys viewed as ‘effeminate’/‘feminine’ with ‘high status’ or popular girls; students with a ‘low status’ in class (no one else to talk to, already marginalised); and students with a ‘high status’ in class (these seemed to be often heterosexualised).

First, there were a few boys labelled as ‘effeminate’/‘feminine’⁷ who were friends with girls. The boys I discuss here were described as ‘effeminate’ or ‘slightly feminine’ by their teachers. These boys were often friends with more girls than boys, enjoyed some things girls tended to be interested in, and were not interested in sport,⁸ although there were differences between the boys. In the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine’s Primary, the teacher spoke about Peter’s close friendships with three girls, suggesting that he was accepted by other students because he was an ‘absolutely outstanding student’. Peter was also friends with other girls in the class and was often the only boy sitting on a table of all girls. Conversely, one mother spoke about her son thinking that Tony, who was close friends with a different group of girls to Peter, might be gay when he is older because of his friendships with girls:

[a]ctually, they do notice things like [speaks more quietly] there’s one particular boy [Tony] in that class who hangs around with the girls all the time [CB: Mhm] Brad has said to me – this is for your thing [CB: Yeah] I wonder if he grows up to be gay (laughs). Things like that so I said look he may just not feel comfortable being with um some of the boys because maybe some of the games you play are a bit rough for him and he may not be interested in that sort of thing

*(Mother of Year 6 boy, St Catherine’s Primary)*⁹

Here the idea that being friends primarily with girls was linked to homosexuality. Interestingly, the students did not necessarily exclude boys viewed as ‘effeminate’/‘feminine’ from heterosexuality. In the imagined futures activity, Tash and Regan played a game to randomly select their futures, and chose four potential husbands including Tony and Peter. Peter wrote in his imagined future story ‘I will be marrying a famous celebrity’, and Tony wrote about having children but not marriage or relationships.

⁷ This may relate to McInnes’s writing about ‘sissy boys’ (see, for example, 2008), although I prefer not to use this term because of its negative connotations.

⁸ This is similar to the behaviours Thorne suggests parents push their ‘good’, ‘quiet’, and therefore ‘feminine’ sons away from: ‘some push their sons into sports programs and urge them away from playing with girls or engaging in female-typed activities’ (1993, 168-169).

⁹ This was a joint interview but the mother of the Year 7 boy had not yet arrived. After she joined the interview the mother of the Year 6 boy did not provide me with any more interesting insights like this about specific boys.

Kai also maintained friendships with girls but was also friends with boys. According to Daniel, Kai referred to himself as an 'it' rather than being a particular gender, although Daniel suggested he did this as a joke:

one student claims to be an 'it'. He likes a little joke and say, 'nope I'm an it, I don't do this and I don't do that' and so, (scoffs/laughs) but I think that's more out of, acting out, being silly but he's aware of the- those roles that each plays

(Daniel, Year 6/7 teacher, St Catherine's Primary)

Kai's attitudes towards gender are potentially interesting, and I think Daniel downplayed this. However, Kai was absent for some of the sessions so it is difficult to build a picture of how he actually constructed his gender.

In the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary, Christos was the only boy who was friends with many girls. He was described by his teacher as 'effeminate':

he's right into movies and he/ [CB: Yeah, yeah] he actually hangs out a lot with the girls, um... is not the traditional boy mould like he um, he loves art, he loves drama, um, as I said he hangs out with the girls, doesn't get involved in the boy sort of stuff, doesn't like sport, isn't very good at it, um, he's quite effeminate in his ways

(Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview, discussing how gender might matter more to some students than others in the class)

Unlike Peter and Tony at St Catherine's Primary, these friendships were less solid, and Christos was not part of a friendship group with particular girls. Christos was friends with both 'high status' and 'low status' girls, whereas the three boys at St Catherine's Primary were all friends with 'high status' girls. In contrast to my findings, Renold found that 'girls of a high heterosexual ranking would use their sexual status to sexually tease and denigrate other less desirable and often effeminate boys' (2005, 108).

The second key pattern involved friendships between boys and girls who had a 'low status' in the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary. This pattern was not as evident in the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine's Primary. Christos also fits here, in that he sometimes worked with

girls because he was left out of boys' groups. Sean, as I mentioned earlier, was marginalised by most other students. In the 'Friendship Map' activity, Georgina, who Sean was seated next to in class (by the teacher), was the only student in the class Sean named as a friend. Here I suggest their friendship occurred because they both had a 'low status' in class and few friends, although Georgina was good friends with two other 'low status' girls.

The third key pattern of cross-gender friendships I identified was heterosexualised friendships between boys and girls who enjoyed a 'high status' in class. This pattern was evident in both classes, and the same 'high status' girls tended to be named as friends by a number of the 'high status' boys. It appeared that because these girls were 'high status' and popular in class it was acceptable for boys to be friends with them (and vice versa). These heterosexualised friendships between students appeared to be based on an underlying potential for relationships between the students, and could be seen as a stepping stone for romance between girls and boys.

It is also important to consider that at this age (what might be called the beginnings of 'adolescence') friendships between genders may not always be looked on enthusiastically by parents. Esther wrote that her mother discouraged her from 'hanging around' boys¹⁰:

I am not real[l]y alowd [sic] to ha[n]g arown [around] boys but I do enyway [sic] because they are my friends and I trust them. My mum say[s] i sh[o]uld not because she is afrade [sic] but some times [sic] she Lets me Just hang arownd [sic] boys

(Esther Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, restrictions relating to being a girl)

As I have demonstrated in this section, age influences the existence and acceptability of cross-gender friendships. While friendships between boys and girls can challenge a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, there were particular avenues for this to occur. However, friendships with girls were sometimes looked upon with suspicion – as with the suggestion that Tony might be gay because he was friends with girls.

¹⁰ Interestingly, Esther was the *only* student in the Year 6/7 class who did not name a member of the other gender as a friend in the 'Friendship Map' activity.

Conclusion

Boys engaged in plural practices which could sometimes be combined with or were sometimes challenging to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The examples of positive acceptance of practices that undermine or differ from a discourse of hegemonic masculinity supports Renold's findings that '[b]oys who invested in Other (i.e., non-hegemonic) forms of masculinity were not always subordinately positioned' (2004, 250). This is in contrast to Connell's theorising which suggests that subordination is distinct from hegemony (2005b, 81). The interplay and overlap between practices relating to hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities, and the significance of age in allowing this, has been largely overlooked in other studies. While Stavros may have set up a binary of 'real boys' and 'geek boys' in relation to an episode of *The Simpsons*, the actual behaviours of the boys within the classes were more fluid. Rather than just identifying the content of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities in particular settings, this chapter demonstrates how the process of hegemony functions to incorporate or exclude other practices. I continue this theme in the next chapter, showing how individual boys' practices could often be related to more than one of Connell's multiple masculinities 'categories'.

Plural practices were often supported within the classes, although this acceptance was not always straightforward, nor did it extend to all boys or behaviours. Displaying 'intelligence' and being studious could be more accepted when combined with sport or when engaged in by a boy labelled 'eccentric'. It was also evident that drawing on 'intelligence' could be a positive contributor to masculinities at St Catherine's Primary, possibly even an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity ('muscular intellectualness', Redman and Mac an Ghail 1997), whereas it was a negative one at Socrates Primary. In some cases, boys were encouraged to invest in education and learn skills such as cooking for pragmatic reasons, overriding how these practices related to gender. 'Feminine' interests were engaged in, although gender distinctions were still drawn on – such as hip hop for boys in distinction from ballet for girls. Other interests only took place in the home such as cooking, sewing, and knitting, and therefore did not challenge a discourse of hegemonic masculinity at school. Sometimes the Greek culture at Socrates Primary overrode the significance of gender, particularly in relation to involvement in Greek dancing and demonstrating a love of family. There were also a number of ways in which young age interweaved with gender. Caring and showing emotions could be acceptable for constructing masculinities which was more common amongst younger boys, suggesting

older boys may be more aware of ‘acceptable’ gender behaviours. Friendships between boys and girls were evident in various forms and subverted a discourse of hegemonic masculinity to some extent.

My findings are similar to Renold’s (2004) research which found that alternative behaviours can be practised by who she calls ‘hegemonic boys’, as well as those boys who experience subordination. In other cases, while these practices may not have been part of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, they did not challenge the ‘gender order’ (for example, when boys engaged in them in the context of the home). As Gilbert and Gilbert write, ‘while boys may not all share the same hegemonic form of masculinity, different masculinities are not necessarily more resistant to traditional gender divisions and stereotypes’ (1998, 128). For example, an involvement in the arts does not necessarily mean that a discourse of hegemonic masculinity is challenged, as others have found in relation to dancing (Blume 2003, 98), and singing (Ashley 2006; 2010; 2011). Furthermore, Wetherell and Edley (1999) argue that practices which appear to be resistant (such as knitting, cooking, and crying) need to be examined closely. They suggest that such practices are not resistant because they are private and individual and, in their research, men focused on these activities as demonstrating their individual strength, which reinforces hegemonic masculinity rather than being alternative to it (Wetherell and Edley 1999, 350).

In the next chapter I further examine the fluidity and range of practices engaged in by the boys in each class. I consider both how individual boys could engage in plural practices, as well as how the process of hegemony worked in each classroom, where some boys benefited from a discourse of hegemonic masculinity more than others.

CHAPTER FIVE

Top of the Herd?: Mapping patterns of practices and hierarchies

Introduction

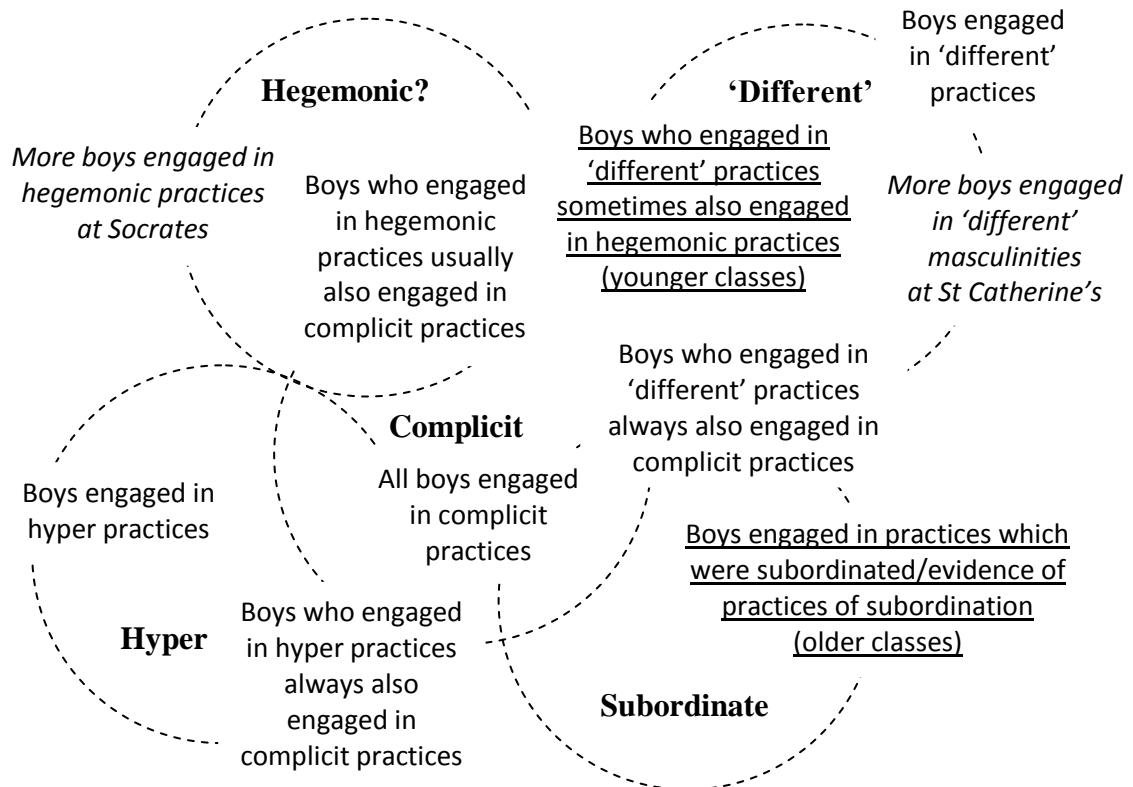
[I]t would be more useful analytically to see complicity and resistance not in either/or terms. It is probably more useful to reposition complicity or resistance as labels to describe the effects of discursive strategies mobilized in contexts as opposed to labels for types of individual men.

(Wetherell and Edley 1999, 352)

[Y]ou get teased [sic] or you are not the top of the herd as in boys are Like Lions they Fight to be at the top of all boys.

(Esther, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something bad about being a boy)

In the previous two chapters I considered the construction of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and how plural practices of masculinities could be combined with or challenging to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. In this chapter I bring these themes together to consider patterns of practices and hierarchies amongst the boys in the research. I examine both how boys could be viewed as engaging in more than one 'category' of Connell's multiple masculinities, while also considering how this impacted on boys' overall status in the context of the specific classrooms. The latter relates to Esther's notion of boys fighting to be at the 'top' (in the quote above). Similar to what Wetherell and Edley argue for above in relation to complicity and resistance, I relate Connell's multiple masculinities in the form of hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and hyper to *patterns of practice which overlap*, rather than fitting each boy into a single 'category' or 'type'. These may be described as 'contingent clusters of practices'. In other words, while I am referring to patterns of masculinities I intend these to be more mixed and fluid than this language often suggests. A visual guide to the patterns of practices in the research is illustrated in Figure 5.1 (overleaf). Broken lines in the figure emphasise that boys moved across groupings and engaged in plural practices.

FIGURE 5.1: Contingent Clusters of Practices: Mapping masculinities as practices in the classes

Note: Plain text = patterns evident in all classes; Underlined text = age differences; *Italicised text* = school differences

While there may be the beginnings of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity at work in the classrooms, this was not always influential over all boys, and practices outside of this discourse could also be accepted. Engagement with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity often overlapped with complicity, highlighting that boys' positions within the privileged discourse were tenuous. All boys demonstrated some complicity with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Alignment with the 'content' of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity (see Chapter Three) did not ensure a privileged status. While hyper masculinities may not appear applicable to primary school-aged boys in relation to how Connell describes it with her participants (2005b, 118, 147) (see Chapter One), this mode was relevant in that some boys engaged in practices that went 'too far' to ensure legitimation. Thus, in my research I relate hyper masculinities to being too disruptive in class, and being what was deemed overzealous in attempts to construct masculinities via sport, violence, and/or arguments about boys being better than girls. Hyper masculinities may be understood as practices which were constituted by the students themselves as 'over-doing' an idealised masculinity. This involved 'over-doing' the subtleties needed to ensure the legitimation of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. There were examples of practices relating to hyper masculinities in all four classes, and boys engaging with these

practices also at times engaged in a more toned down complicity with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Connell's theorising does not fully account for practices which may be neither hegemonic/complicit nor subordinate (nor marginalised). I refer to these as 'different' practices which were potentially transgressive or resistant.¹ Young age is important in allowing for these 'different' practices. 'Different' practices most commonly related to an interest in reading/writing and displaying 'intelligence', not supporting the view that boys are better than girls, and at times being gentle, caring, and quiet. While I argue that there were boys in all four classes who engaged in 'different' practices, these boys also demonstrated complicity, emphasising that despite the fluidity of practices, boys were still often bound by a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

The above figure also outlines some specific contextual patterns influenced by age and by school. Within the younger classes there was a general acceptance of most boys, regardless of how they fitted with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. There was also room for greater flexibility and movement in boys' practices. This occurred so much that some boys could move between engaging in 'different' practices and practices relating to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Within the older age group, there was more derision and/or ostracism of boys not fitting with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. In my research, practices of subordination were rare, and occurred only in the older classes. What Connell (1996) calls the 'gender regime' of the schools was also important.² In particular, sport was more significant for constructing a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and gaining status at Socrates Primary than at St Catherine's Primary. Thus, there was more pressure to conform with this pattern of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity at Socrates Primary. At

¹ The idea of 'different' practices has some similarities with Swain's concept of 'personalised masculinity', which he devised in his research with 10 and 11 year old students. He describes 'personalised masculinity' as 'made up from the majority of boys who appeared content to pursue their own types of identity and did not aspire to, or imitate, the leading form' (Swain 2006c, 317). Swain uses this term to refer to friendship groups of boys with similar interests (2006b, 341). However, he views 'personalised masculinity' as uninfluenced by a hegemonic form and essentially outside of any masculinities hierarchy (although it appears that boys fitting into this concept of 'personalised masculinity' would likely demonstrate some complicity with hegemonic masculinity, as defined by Connell). Considering these differences and my desire to move away from describing boys using one 'type' of masculinity, I have found 'different' practices to be more useful.

² Within schools, the 'gender regime' may involve gender divisions relating to uniforms, toilets, sports, timetables and curriculum, knowledge (for example, viewing English as a 'feminine' subject), how students are treated, and labour and authority patterns amongst teachers. Other aspects of the 'gender regime' include academic streaming, discipline, and heteronormativity (Connell 1996; Kessler, Ashenden, Connell and Dowsett 1985, 42).

St Catherine's Primary there was more room to move amongst the 'contingent clusters of practices', and more boys engaged in 'different' practices than at Socrates Primary.

For the rest of this chapter I examine how patterns of practices and hierarchies played out in the different classrooms to demonstrate how the process of hegemony worked. I emphasise the importance of context in possibilities for engaging in certain practices, with particular attention to the influence of classrooms, school, and age.

Socrates Primary: Sport, sport, sport

Both classes at Socrates Primary had similar patterns of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on sport, although hierarchies were stronger in the older class. For this reason I examine the Year 6 class first. In both classes there were large groups of boys whose practices could (often) be aligned with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity based particularly on sporting interests. This reflected the ethos of the school. As the Year 6 teacher Miss Karidis said, 'soccer is a huge thing at this school'. Other aspects of the 'gender regime' of the school, or at least aspects that were similar amongst these two classes, included the monitoring of students' behaviour by teachers; the more frequent disciplining of boys than girls; the attention paid to a gender-divided formal school uniform (see Chapter Three); and the seating of most students girl-boy. Overall, Socrates Primary appeared to be more formal than St Catherine's Primary, a potential reason for the stricter control on constructing masculinities.

The Year 6 Class: 'It's a bit hard to fit in'

The Year 6 class had the clearest pattern of hierarchy in any of the classes. A large grouping of boys maintained a 'high status' in class and engaged in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, and a few other boys were sometimes subordinated (similar to Swain's findings 2003b, 316). In addition, two boys regularly engaged in hyper and complicit practices. Sport was key to establishing a discourse of hegemonic masculinity for this class, although while most boys mentioned liking sport, it did not guarantee them a privileged status.

Homosociality and strong friendships between boys was particularly important in the maintenance of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity in this class (although some boys were also friends with particular ‘high status’ girls as discussed in the previous chapter):

I find that in my- with my particular group the boys are very easily influenced by each other. The girls not so much but the boys yes. Um... they often get easily led into bad behaviour or doing what they know is wrong because their mates are doing it basically

[...]

there’s that mateship that goes on and they, you know, that whole camaraderie when they [boys] play sports together

(Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview, the main difference between boys and girls in her class)

Two girls also identified homosociality as an important part of being a boy:

Mila: Hanging out with other boys

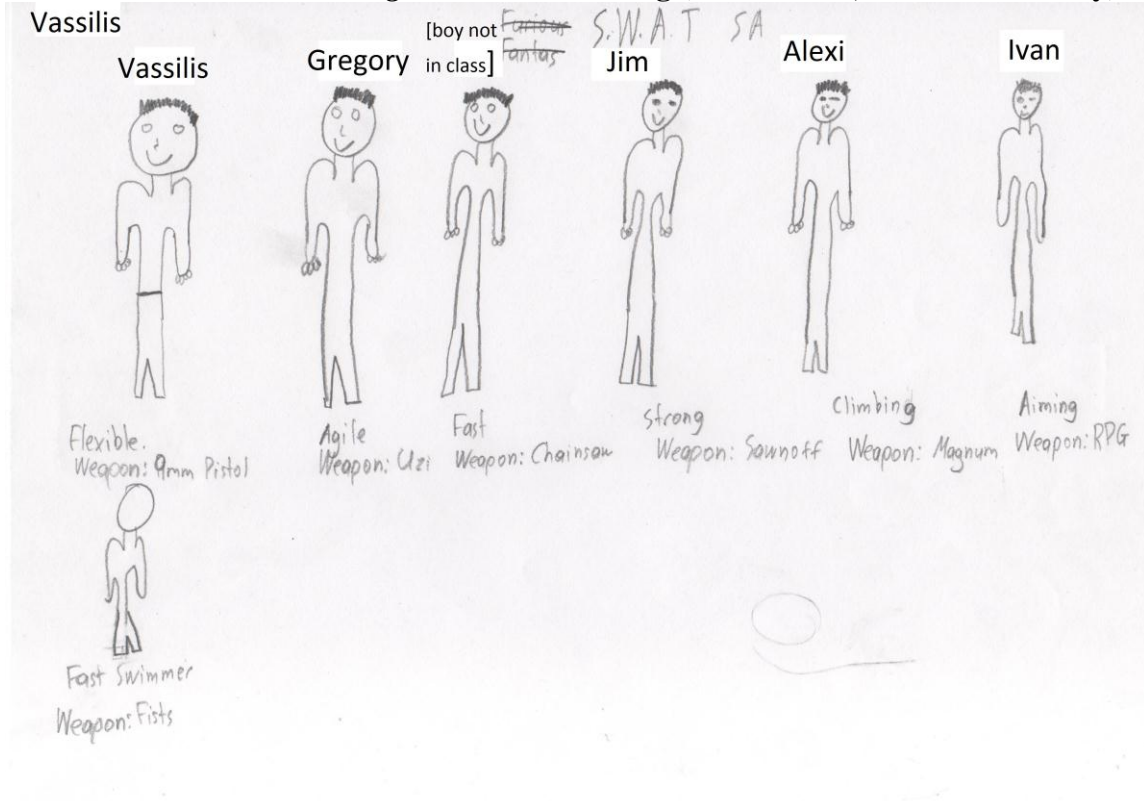
Teacher: Yep, that’s a good one

(Year 6, Session 3, Activity 3c, whole class discussion, discussing an episode of The Simpsons, how would you teach someone to be a boy?)

That when there [sic] friends are arand [around] they act cool and ignore the teacher and the conciquience [sic] is worst [sic] than there [sic] behavio[u]r.

(Georgina, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something bad about being a boy)

The group of boys who often engaged in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity had strong friendships which ensured their status and excluded others. This demonstrates how a discourse of hegemonic masculinity is maintained via exclusionary practices. The influence of friendship was clear from some of the boys’ *Kung Fu Panda* activity drawings. Vassilis and Gregory drew themselves and other boys who had a ‘high status’ in class as their Kung Fu characters (for Vassilis’s drawing see Figure 5.2, overleaf). This camaraderie helped to construct an ‘in’ group and an ‘out’ group, with some boys being part of the ‘in’ group only some of the time. Other boys in the class did not draw themselves or class members as characters. Homosociality also influenced the collective construction and understandings of masculinities (see also Keddie 2003d).

FIGURE 5.2: Vassilis's Kung Fu Panda Drawing (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

A discourse of hegemonic masculinity was often abided by in paired, grouped, and whole class activities. In individual activities boys were more likely to include other views (although often alongside views which were complicit with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity). Particularly illustrative of this were the boys in the two groups who joked about violence towards women (see Chapter Three), who gave more considered and reflective responses about gender in the individual activities (see also Frosh, et al. 2002). This highlights the significance of the context in which students construct their masculinities (see also Keddie 2003d).

Two boys (Lambros and Stavros) were complicit with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, but their fervent attempts to gain status often resulted in a display of hyper masculinities. Additionally, they both played up that they were not academically inclined. For example, Stavros, when choosing identity words that described him, added in '[d]on[']t Like to reed [sic]'. While drawing on 'intelligence' to construct masculinities was not privileged in this class, attempts at distancing oneself from academic work did not appear to enhance status either. The connections between a lack of academic ability and causing disruptions using humour (playing the 'class clown') has been noted in relation to other primary school and high school studies (see, for example, Hobday-Kusch and

McVittie 2002, 204; Jackson 2003). Gilbert and Gilbert argue that boys who engage in disruptive behaviour may find it difficult to negotiate how they are viewed, and other students may see them either as ‘trying too hard’ or as ‘funny and popular’ (1998, 170). Lambros and Stavros moved between these two positions.

During the activities Lambros disrupted some of the whole class discussions, which he appeared to do in an attempt to get the other boys to notice him and think he was ‘cool’. However, his behaviour was found annoying by some students, particularly girls, although was sometimes enjoyed by other boys. To create a reaction in class, Lambros also used the word ‘wog’, which quickly sparked getting into trouble with his teacher. He was often reprimanded by Miss Karidis for disrupting, which only seemed to encourage him to try to get the other students to notice him. Miss Karidis said that:

[t]he boy [Lambros] that is the- is the most troublesome has been throughout his schooling and um the kids are aware of it, yep, because *they actually get annoyed with him after a while* when enough is enough, they um- but the- the thing is, and I’ve spoken to them about it before and so have other teachers and so has [head of junior school], when he plays up they laugh with him and they actually encourage his behaviour without realising it. Some of them have become more aware of it now and they don’t do it but that’s because we’ve told them time and time again ‘he’s getting a reaction from you, he’s only going to continue’

(emphasis added, Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview)

Stavros’s attempts at engagement with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity often resulted in a display of hyper practices similar to Lambros’s. Stavros put forward ‘sexist’ or controversial views in class, seemingly to gain approval from other boys and to get a reaction from the class. However, this approval was not always forthcoming.

One boy in this class (Amin) liked sport but was often rejected or ignored by other boys. Amin was from Afghanistan and was the only boy in the class who was not born in Australia, and this appeared to be why he was often marginalised. Similarly, Sean was marginalised by most other students in the class, in part because he was not from a Greek background. However, his status was not completely fixed. In one activity, Sean’s response to a question was copied by several boys who had a ‘high status’ in class.

Sean and Christos were sometimes subordinated and sometimes engaged in ‘different’ practices (such as enjoying reading and writing), but could also be complicit with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The ostracism of Sean by other students highlights how exclusionary practices work to sustain hegemony. Christos argued it was more difficult to live up to being a boy than a girl ‘because if you don’t like soccer or if you don’t like football, you know, and you don’t like boyish things, it’s a bit hard to fit in’ (whole class discussion about findings from research). Even though Christos told me he did not have any ‘best’ friends in the class, there was a high degree of acceptance of him, and four students (two boys and two girls) named him as one of their ‘best’ friends. Miss Karidis explained that Christos’s acceptance in the class was due to the fact that the students had ‘grown up with him’, and that he had ‘lovely friendship qualities’, highlighting the importance of context (and age) for acceptance.

The Year 1 Class: Sporty but generally inclusive

Sport was also important for the construction of masculinities in the Year 1 class. However, there was not a strong sense of hierarchy, and behaviours outside of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity could be accepted. In this class there was no clear evidence of practices of subordination, although one boy’s overzealous attempts to fit in with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity meant he engaged in hyper practices. Some boys participated in ‘different’ practices, although these boys also sometimes engaged with practices relating to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and complicity.

All boys in this class mentioned liking and/or playing sport, thus showing some alliance or complicity with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, an expressed like of fighting in popular culture (in television, movies, and videogames), and an interest in wrestling (including talk of personally wrestling) helped to establish boys’ masculinities (see Chapter Three). Views that boys were superior to girls were evident, and some boys argued that boys were stronger than girls. ‘Sociability’ was also important for gaining status, and a few boys in particular appeared to benefit from good relations with other students in the class. While there was evidence of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, the process of hegemony in excluding and subordinating other practices was weak. Furthermore, many boys demonstrated fluidity by engaging in plural practices. For example, Cosmo, who often expressed views associated with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity such as when he told Katerina her brother ‘loves girl things’ (see Chapter

Three), also expressed other views such as stating that boys can have long hair. Loukas said he would not be able to play soccer if he was a girl, yet he cried when he was in trouble (see Chapter Four), showing complexity in young masculinities.

Manolis and Danny also revealed the ability to move between the ‘contingent clusters of practices’ and engaged in ‘different’ practices as well as demonstrating complicity with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Manolis wanted to be a children’s author in his imagined future, and described himself as having a ‘Good Heart’. Both he and Danny often appeared to be gentle and quiet. When the class was asked if they thought it was true that boys were better at soccer and stronger than girls (when reporting back the initial findings to the students), all boys present put their hands up in agreement except for Manolis and Danny. Furthermore, Manolis wrote that his life would ‘be the same thing’ if he was a girl, and when asked if being a boy was important to him, wrote ‘[t]here is nothing important to be a boy’. These boys did not appear to be subordinated, even though some of their behaviours were outside of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. However, they could still be complicit in the construction of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Manolis, along with his mixed-gender group, described several things as being ‘for boys’ (football, soccer, blue, black) when ranking famous faces from most to least ‘manly’, and Danny liked the violent television cartoon *Ben 10* which was enjoyed by a number of boys.

One boy (Ari) was excluded from a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, but because of hyper displays rather than subordinate or ‘different’ practices. Ari attempted to engage in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity but failed in his vigorous endeavours to establish his masculinity via sport. Furthermore, his disruptive behaviour interfered with his efforts to gain an accepted status in the class. In one instance his attempts to establish himself as playing sport were rejected. Another student told him ‘Ari you don’t play it [soccer] that much’ to which he responded ‘[b]ecause no one will let me’, acknowledging his disliked disruptive behaviour. Some students took up the position of teacher in relation to Ari’s disruptive behaviour, and both boys and girls reprimanded him for roughly handling the audio-recorder used for the research. Ari was often in ‘time out’ (usually sitting facing the wall at a designated ‘time out’ desk) which caused him to be isolated from other students. The repeated pattern of being placed in ‘time out’ by the teacher and being disruptive interweaved with each other and exacerbated Ari’s engagement in hyper practices. Thus, while Ari played and enjoyed sport, the perception that his behaviour was excessive in this

area, along with his disruptiveness, denied him access to a legitimating discourse of hegemonic masculinity. However, fluidity in Ari's behaviour, and the importance of context, should be acknowledged. For example, in one session Ari got along well with Helen, who he was seated next to in class (by the teacher), and both students wrote that they would live with each other in their imagined futures.

St Catherine's Primary: Sport and displaying 'intelligence'

At St Catherine's Primary, while sport was a way in which a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was constructed, other things such as displaying 'intelligence' could also be valued and possibly related to an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity, as discussed in the previous chapter. St Catherine's Primary had a more relaxed atmosphere than Socrates Primary, and Daniel (Year 6/7 teacher) said that 'this school is the most social school I've ever been in'. The 'gender regime' was less strict than at Socrates Primary. For example, sporting teams were often mixed-gender due to the small number of students at the school, and in the Year 6/7 class boys and girls wore the same school uniform. At St Catherine's Primary there was often room for more diversity of, and movement between, practices than at Socrates Primary.

The Year 6/7 Class: 'A cruisey bunch of kids'

Boys in the Year 6/7 class engaged in a wide variety of practices and there were potentially two discourses of hegemonic masculinity – one relating to sport and the other to displaying 'intelligence'. However, no boys in the class fully benefited from either of these discourses, although some boys appeared to have more status than others. One of the key reasons that such a diversity of practices and masculinities were evident, and largely accepted, in this class can be attributed to the class teacher and the school. Daniel described his class as 'a cruisey bunch of kids'. Daniel had a large influence on many of his students and was well liked, evident when over half of the students present (six boys and seven girls) named him as a friend in the 'Friendship Map' activity (in a different activity four of these students also named Daniel as someone that they looked up). Two key things that Daniel encouraged in his students were an interest in playing sport *and* the need to achieve academically for pragmatic reasons (see Chapter Four). The mother of a

Year 7 boy spoke about Daniel having a large influence on her son, both as a teacher and as a basketball coach.

Sport was not as important in constructing masculinities at this school compared with both classes at Socrates Primary. This is likely to be a reflection of the school culture and the 'gender regime' of the school. Only six boys explicitly mentioned liking and/or playing sport, and none of them discussed playing soccer or Australian Rules football, which were viewed as the most 'masculine' sports by students (see Chapter Three). Instead, some boys in this class played on the school basketball team. This included Aaron and Lawrence who both appeared to have a 'high status', or at least were well accepted in class, which linked to their involvement in sport and a pragmatic commitment to school.

A number of boys demonstrated complicity with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and also sometimes engaged in 'different' practices, although the extent of these 'different' practices varied. For example, Zach liked violence, action, and crime in popular culture, and wanted to be a fantasy author. As discussed in the previous chapter, he could potentially be viewed as aligning with an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity relating to 'muscular intellectualness' (Redman and Mac an Ghaill 1997). Daniel commented that his class was quieter in one of the sessions because Zach was absent. He said that Zach stirred up others in the class – especially Tyson and Jarrod. However, Zach also put across some 'different' views, such as being a boy was not important to him, and that he did not feel restrictions relating to being a boy (I discuss the theme of gender restrictions further in Chapter Seven). Raj was sometimes influenced by other boys, but also engaged in 'different' practices and his behaviour could often be viewed as soft and caring. His Indian background may have had an influence on this. Raj was friends with Jarrod, who was not well accepted by some other boys in the class.

One boy (Tyson) engaged in behaviours often associated with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, yet these practices were viewed as excessive and made him at times unpopular with the other boys—that is, they were hyper practices. The mother of a Year 6 boy in the class spoke about how Tyson 'likes causing trouble' and 'picking fights', but wanted to 'hang around' her son and his friendship group. She noted that although Tyson called these boys his friends, he actually 'gives them a hard time'. Tyson appeared to monitor other boys for 'masculine' behaviour, and felt the need to assert his 'masculine' status. For

example, as mentioned in Chapter Three, he was the only student to explicitly label himself as ‘Straight’ in the identity marker activity.

Practices of subordination were only evident in relation to one boy (Jarrod). Jarrod enjoyed playing basketball, and wrote about being a professional basketball player in his imagined future, but was still not always accepted by the other boys. Jarrod’s active attempts to draw on aspects of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity seemed to spark teasing from some boys. To this extent he may have been included by other boys for the purpose of having someone to deride. For example, while Jarrod was included in a group of boys for one activity, he was also actively denigrated and some of the boys said things to him such as: ‘[s]top like being so annoying Jarrod you retard. Jarrod get a life, actually help or just like go sit in the corner, nobody likes you’. Jarrod’s physical appearance may have contributed to him being targeted. He was short, skinny, wore glasses, and had red hair, the last of these inspiring jokes about being a ‘ranga’ (a derogatory term for someone with red hair). One boy wrote that something bad about being a girl would be ‘you have a chance of being ginger’, presumably a reference to Jarrod.

There were three boys (Peter, Tony, and Kai) who, using Connell’s (2005b, 78-79) definition, enacted subordinate masculinities because they were viewed as ‘effeminate’. However, they were not subordinated by other students in the class. As discussed in the previous chapter, Peter and Tony were friends primarily with groups of girls, and Kai was also friends with girls. However, in this class cross-gender friendships were a frequent occurrence, and boys who were friends with girls tended to also be well liked by other boys in the classroom. Daniel discussed some boys in his class as being ‘slightly feminine’. According to him, ‘[a]t the start of the year, they would not be interested in the sports that the other boys would play’. However, as a result of Daniel’s encouragement, he noted that Peter in particular was becoming more involved in sports: ‘recently he’s been really participating in all the sports and really trying to get into it and loving it’. Thus, in this class, ‘effeminate’ did not equate to subordination.

The Year R/1 Class: Smart, ‘cool’, sporty

The Year R/1 class had similar patterns of practices to the Year 6/7 class, but there was more fluidity and movement between practices, making hierarchies difficult to determine. The process of hegemony was weak and there was little evidence of subordination.

In this class academic skills were valued and other students looked to two boys (Jordan and Kwan) for help with writing. The large discrepancy in the academic abilities of the students in this class (compared with the Year 1 class at Socrates Primary) was a likely reason for Jordan's and Kwan's status. Mrs Hartley said that being on a higher reading level, and being good at things, was more important to both boys and girls in her class than gender. Furthermore, a discourse of 'cool' allowed the expression of masculinities via things other than sport. Both Jordan and Kwan drew on the notion of being 'cool' or things/people being 'cool' several times. Jordan and Kwan also enjoyed hip hop dancing (a 'masculine' style of dance discussed in the previous chapter) which might be viewed as 'cool', and linked to not being white (both boys were from Asian backgrounds). Their privileged status in class was also reflected in the *Kung Fu Panda* drawing activity when some of the boys (and girls) named them as characters for their 'Furious Five'. They were also the only boys in the class who were named as leaders in the 'Furious Five' drawings (once each). Interestingly, while Jordan liked violence in popular culture (such as *Star Wars*), Kwan expressed a distinct dislike for violence. He named *Harry Potter* as his favourite movie, but he liked Harry 'you sing wonds [using wands]' and *disliked* Harry 'yousing weponds [using weapons]'. Both boys experienced a 'high status' in a class where many other boys were interested in sport.³

Sport was central to many of the boys' constructions of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, however, for the boys in this class it related to an accepted rather than a privileged status. Six boys in the class mentioned liking sport, and these boys all played in the school soccer team (along with two girls and a boy not in the research). Despite the common interest of sport, there were differences between these boys, as well as contradictions in masculinities that directly related to age. For example, Joshua was heavily interested in playing sport, and had a focus on superheroes and wanted to become one in his imagined future. However, according to Mrs Hartley, Joshua was scared of (baby) animals and contributed little to a whole class discussion because he was afraid of talking into the audio-recorder used for the research.

Two boys did not fit into the patterns relating to displaying 'intelligence' or enjoying sport. Marko was often preoccupied with violence, fighting, and guns, particularly from

³ This is similar to Reay's finding that the two boys who were the most popular and had the most status in class did not fit with the 'dominant' pattern of masculinity within 'the male peer group' (2001b, 157).

videogames, and imagined himself as fighting characters. His engagement in hyper practices based on an interest in violence was not rejected by the other students *per se*, but was not taken up as much by them, and was therefore outside of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. John also appeared to be outside the two key patterns. He did not mention sport in any of the activities, although, as with many of the boys, he liked violence in popular culture (such as *Star Wars* '[b]ikos [because] i[t] has fi[gh]tin[g]'). His engagement with 'different' practices was evident in the *Kung Fu Panda* drawing activity, where he was the only boy in any of the classes to have a girl character as the leader of his 'Furious Five'. Despite these two boys being outside the two main patterns, they were not subordinated and were largely included by other boys.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have used Connell's multiple masculinities as *practices* to emphasise the fluidity of gender and to consider how boys moved across and combined elements from these different groupings. As suggested at the beginning of this chapter in relation to Figure 5.1, these may be called 'contingent clusters of practices'. I also identified overall patterns relating to the process of hegemony to consider how some boys had a higher degree of acceptance or status than others in their class. Age and school influenced the acceptance of different practices. The process of hegemony tended to be weak, and boys, particularly from the younger classes, could engage in practices outside a discourse of hegemonic masculinity without necessarily being subordinated. A discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on sport was strongest in the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary, although a weaker version of a similar hierarchy could also be seen in the Year 1 class. Similarities relating to the school context were illuminated by examining classes near the beginning and end of primary school.

Sport was a key factor in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity for most of the classes, but this could work in different ways, and was more important at Socrates Primary than St Catherine's Primary. At St Catherine's Primary, displaying 'intelligence' and being skilled at reading and writing could assist in gaining status in class. At both schools a diverse range of boys enjoyed violence and fighting in popular culture (television, film, and videogames), and this was not restricted to boys who were sometimes aligned with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. All boys were complicit with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity at least some of the time, but this was often combined with other

practices. In each class there were boys who engaged in practices relating to hyper masculinities where their efforts to align with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity were viewed as too extreme to influence others' behaviour. The rejection of hyper practices relates closely to age and context. Hyper practices may be seen as an expression of (young) boys' fervent attempts to demonstrate their masculinities at an age at which they are uncertain of exactly what is privileged for masculinities. Furthermore, such practices may be disliked because of age (and may be more acceptable in high school) but could also be viewed as reflective of the middle class settings of the schools (and such practices may have more status in working class schools). Engagement with 'different', and potentially transgressive or resistant, practices was evident in all of the classes, yet no boys were completely outside of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Attention to the influence of age on the strength of hegemony shows that there was a higher acceptance of boys engaging in a wider range of practices in the younger classes than in the older classes. Practices of subordination were much more evident in the older classes. Two older boys (Amin and Jarrod) actively aspired to and attempted to engage in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity by drawing on sport, yet they were unable to gain full acceptance from other boys. The pattern of actively attempting to engage in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity but failing in this way was not evident in the younger classes.

Being from a non-dominant ethnic group was more likely to inhibit acceptance and status in the older classes than the younger classes. The dominant ethnic groups were Greek at Socrates Primary⁴, and Anglo at St Catherine's Primary. In the younger classes, boys from a non-dominant ethnic group (all from Asian backgrounds – Danny, Jordan, Kwan) appeared to be well accepted.⁵ The interaction of non-dominant ethnicities and masculinities played out in a number of different ways in the older classes, with some boys experiencing marginalisation (Sean, Amin), others being well accepted in class (Ivan⁶, Lawrence), and others being somewhere in the middle (Raj). It is difficult to draw broader

⁴ This emphasises the importance of the context of the schools. Because Socrates Primary was a Greek Orthodox school Greek students did not encounter the racism and stereotyping that they may have faced in non-Greek schools (as found in high school studies, see Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003, Chapter Six; Tsolidis 2001; Walker 1988).

⁵ This finding differs from Connolly's research with 5 and 6 year old students in England where 'South Asian' boys experienced practices of marginalisation (1998, Chapter Seven; 2006). For example, boys from the dominant ethnic groups excluded 'South Asian' boys from playing soccer because they were perceived as weak and less skilled.

⁶ Ivan's acceptance in class may be related to his Serbian background, which ties in with the Orthodox religion at Socrates Primary.

conclusions from the small number of boys in the research from non-dominant ethnic groups. It was also hard to determine patterns relating to the particular ethnic groups that the boys were from. How boys from non-dominant ethnic groups are treated highlights how ethnicities and masculinities interweave (see, for example, Connolly 1998; 2006), although can also relate to broader issues about ethnicity and acceptance at school (see, for example, Riggs and Due 2010).

The next part of the thesis broadens from a focus on boys and masculinities to a consideration of girls and femininities and a closer examination of gender relations. The following chapter explores the construction of femininities and shows how a discourse of idealised femininity was often viewed as distinct from a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

PART III –
The Broader Gender Picture

CHAPTER SIX

Beautiful and Nice: Discourses of femininities

Introduction

We consider that research on hegemonic masculinity now needs to give much closer attention to the practices of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities.

(Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 848)

CB: How would you teach someone to be a girl?

[...]

Marika: Be nice

[...]

Student: Be helpful

[...]

Stavros: Yep. Okay n- I- I know every girl was thinking about this now – shopping

[...]

Student: They're more careful

[...]

Student: More organised

Amin?: Look nice

Gregory?: Less ah, what do you call it? They immature- they mature faster

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion, discussing an episode of The Simpsons)

This chapter contributes to this thesis by situating boys and masculinities in the broader context of how girls and femininities were constructed. The consideration of femininities highlights practices that masculinities are often defined against (and thus what boys cannot engage in), as well highlighting some aspects of femininities that are not in direct opposition to masculinities. As I discussed in Chapter One, masculinity studies often overlooks the theorising of femininities. To overcome this, I draw on the notion of a discourse of idealised femininity to mark out the practices which had an honoured status and helped to support a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

In my research, while a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was frequently constructed in relation to sport and physically strong bodies, a discourse of idealised femininity was often discussed in terms of appearance and aesthetic presentation. Being a girl was more about a greater self-regulation of bodies, appearance, and behaviour than for boys. In relation to appearance, the students constructed a discourse of idealised femininity in two key ways: *acceptable* notions of appearance in regards to clothing, make-up, and jewellery, and ‘looking pretty’; and *unacceptable* notions of appearance (which sometimes overlapped with practices and behaviour) relating particularly to viewing the singer Pink as ‘masculine’, and by denigrating female athletes. A discourse of idealised femininity also related to displaying particular personality traits (such as being nice, responsible, and ‘mature’) which were little discussed in relation to boys. In addition, awareness of particular interests and popular culture examples were important. Despite the construction of a discourse of idealised femininity, the students also understood diversity amongst femininities. I also argue that there were hierarchies amongst the girls in the classes, although these did not always fit neatly with how the students constructed a discourse of idealised femininity. An interesting discrepancy arose from discussions about sport, where students often made negative statements about female athletes, compared to girls describing sport in their own lives in positive terms.

The Beauty Code: Delimiting acceptable appearance

Boy?: Ah, first is Miley Cyrus cos she’s very beautiful

(laughs)

Student: Oooh

Student: Grrr

Student: He wrote she’s hot

[...]

Miss Karidis: That’s alright, she’s hot

Student: Who’s second hot?

Krista?: I wish I was her

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, discussing famous faces are ‘womanly’)

A discourse of idealised femininity was frequently constructed in terms of appearance, which also related to heterosexuality and attractiveness to boys/men (a ‘male gaze’). A

discourse of idealised femininity was often linked to clothing, make-up, and long hair, as well as notions of attractiveness. In contrast, unacceptable versions of femininities were related to appearance and practices perceived as ‘masculine’, which I discuss below in relation to the students’ views on the singer Pink and female athletes.

The most frequent words which students brainstormed to describe girls often related to appearance (see Table 6.1, below, words about appearance are italicised). For the older students, the overwhelming expression of a discourse of idealised femininity related to being good-looking, whereas for the younger students this was often done in terms of appearance in the form of long hair and jewellery. In contrast, in the same activity, boys were most often described as being sporty or playing sports (63.4%, 26 mentions in total for all of the classes); being strong or having muscles (43.9%, 18); looking hot, handsome, and like words (39.0%, 16); and being ‘cool’ (29.3%, 12).

TABLE 6.1: Words Describing Girls

	Younger classes (17 pairs)	Older classes (24 pairs/groups)	TOTAL (41 pairs/groups)
<i>Pretty, beautiful, hot, gorgeous, good-looking</i>	35.3% (6)	70.8% (17)	56.1% (23)
Smart, intelligent	17.6% (3)	58.3% (14)	41.5% (17)
Nice	17.6% (3)	50.0% (12)	36.6% (15)
<i>Long hair</i>	76.5% (13)	4.2% (1)	34.1% (14)
<i>Fashionable (or like words)</i>	-	58.3% (14)	34.1% (14)
Girly	5.9% (1)	50.0% (12)	31.7% (13)
<i>Jewellery, earrings, ring, necklace, bracelet</i>	52.9% (9)	-	22.0% (9)
<i>Cute</i>	-	33.3% (8)	19.5% (8)
<i>Dresses</i>	29.4% (5)	4.2% (1)	12.2% (5)

Pretty Women: Appearance and presentation

A discourse of idealised femininity was often discussed in terms to appearance, most of which related to *socially constructed* gender practices. This focused particularly on clothing, make-up, and hair, and appearance in terms of ‘looking pretty’ which included being skinny. Five of the ten most frequent student responses naming something good about being a girl related to appearance (see Table 6.2, overleaf, words about appearance

appear in italics).¹ These responses about appearance were most often named by girls, particularly from the older classes.

TABLE 6.2: Good Things about Being a Girl

	Younger Girls (13)	Older Girls (27*)	Younger Boys (19)	Older Boys (23)	TOTAL (82)
Nothing	-	-	26.3% (5)	21.7% (5)	12.2% (10)
<i>Dress pretty, looking nice (and like words)</i>	7.7% (1)	18.5% (5)	-	8.7% (2)	9.8% (8)
Play sports (including netball, football) ²	7.7% (1)	22.2% (6)	5.3% (1)	-	9.8% (8)
<i>No restrictions on clothing</i>	-	18.5% (5)	-	4.3% (1)	7.3% (6)
Shopping, shopaholic	-	18.5% (5)	-	4.3% (1)	7.3% (6)
Not as violent as boys, do not get bashed up by boys, can hit boys	-	18.5% (5)	-	4.3% (1)	7.3% (6)
<i>Wearing dresses, skirts</i>	-	18.5% (5)	-	-	6.1% (5)
<i>Wearing make-up</i>	7.7% (1)	14.8% (4)	-	-	6.1% (5)
<i>Long hair, style hair</i>	7.7% (1)	14.8% (4)	-	-	6.1% (5)
Playground activities (hopscotch, monkey bars, hula hoop)	-	-	26.3% (5)	-	6.1% (5)

* Two girls worked together so I have counted them as one person

‘The most fashionable girl’: Clothing, make-up, and long hair

a real girl, lipstick[,] long hair

(Year R/I class, St Catherine’s Primary, small group written activity – Kwan, Jordan, Michael, and Ethan, ranking Vanessa Hudgens most ‘womanly’)

because she likes to wear make-up, she likes styling her hair

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, small group written activity – Georgina, Mila, Arthur, and Lambros, ranking Miley Cyrus most ‘womanly’)

¹ Sport, shopping, and playground activities are discussed later in this chapter. Chapter Three also discusses sport and includes some comments about girls being less violent than boys.

² The naming of sport as something for girls is a challenge to some of the other arguments students made about a discourse of idealised femininity. I discuss this later in the chapter.

The most fanishable [fashionable] girl.

(Poppy, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, when I grow up I will look like...)

As I discussed in Chapter Three, the key way in which clothes figured in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was by boys distancing themselves from ‘girls’ clothes’. Students in the younger classes often described girls in terms of particular clothing – such as dresses, skirts, and high heels, which created a narrow version of femininity. The older students, particularly girls at Socrates Primary, also frequently discussed particular clothing as being ‘appropriate’ for girls. Girls were viewed as being more likely to be ‘fashionable’, having more of an interest in clothes, and spending more time getting ready than boys.

Girls from the older classes often recognised that girls have more freedom in their choice of clothes than boys, which they viewed as a positive aspect of being a girl:

The good thing about being a girl is we get to wear the same things boys wear. If a boy was wearing a dress, he would get teased. I also enjoy wearing make-up and jewel[l]ery.

(Aphrodite, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a girl)

This freedom was noted by only one boy:

You can wear different clothes etc [e.g.] skirts and dresses

(Vassilis, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a girl)

However, despite Aphrodite’s positive comments above, she also lamented the expectations on girls to dress ‘fancy’:

sometimes I just want to feel free and wear comfortable clothes, but people expect you to be fancy all the time.

(Aphrodite, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, restrictions relating to being a girl)

Similarly, Bec (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary) suggested that girls are expected to act ‘[a]ll girly and caring which sucks because if you wear punk-rock clothing then everyone says “she should be a guy”’. Other research has discussed girls who have

multiple presentation styles as well as girls who consciously choose 'resistant' styles (Blaise 2005; Currie, et al. 2009; Reay 2001b, 162; Renold 2005, 41-57).

While girls were often constructed in relation to particular clothes, girls did not necessarily wear them. Daniel gave a particularly interesting example of girls in his class feeling uncomfortable wearing dresses in a school context because they usually wore the same school uniform as boys:

I'm just going to talk about with our school play, when it came time for the- a lot of these girls to wear dresses, they were actually really embarrassed to wear dresses in- in the class [CB: Okay, yeah] and in front of all the other boys and um something that they've not readily done obviously is wear a dress at school, some of them have never worn a dress at school [CB: Yep] and all of a sudden they were dressing like females and looking like females and they were a little embarrassed about it in front of the boys [...] when they came to dress up, the- that gender, like, 'oh I'm wearing a dress, I'm a little bit different now' really hit home and they were- were embarrassed

(Daniel, Year 6/7 teacher, St Catherine's Primary)

Daniel implies that in the setting of the school where sameness and equality is privileged, the girls were marked out as different because they were wearing dresses.

Make-up was discussed by both age groups. Some younger girls discussed occasionally wearing lipstick and perfume (see also Blaise 2005, 69-77). For the older girls, make-up could more legitimately be a part of their life because of their age. For example, one girl said something good about being a girl was 'girls get to go shopping and wear make[-]up' (Abbey, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary), compared with a younger girl's response about her imagined future where she wrote that when she grew up she would be 'wearing make[-]up' (Min, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary). Thorne found that 'cosmetic culture' was evident in her research, suggesting that in primary school 'there is still ambiguity about whether the use of cosmetics is "pretend" or "real,"' (1993, 149). Aspiration to adult versions of a discourse of idealised femininity involves the increasing use of make-up in a similar, although less often mentioned, way for girls as sport functions as an aspiration to adult versions of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity for boys.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, a binary of short hair for boys and long hair for girls was often drawn on, particularly by the younger students (although this binary was sometimes challenged). The older students mentioned hair less often, suggesting that by this age the students are drawing on more subtle gender ideas to define discourses of hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity.

A discourse of idealised femininity relating to clothing, make-up, and long hair was sometimes trivialised by older boys:

Doing your hair all the time for hours

(Aaron, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something bad about being a girl)

We don[']t go shoe shop[p]ing 24 7

(Arthur, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a boy)

Not only were girls often narrowly constructed, practices which many girls enjoyed were viewed by some boys as being of no importance. This positioned girls as inferior to boys. This is similar to research with high school students where boys viewed boys/men as normal or 'the norm', and girls/women were viewed as too concerned with their appearance (Frosh, et al. 2002, 101-102; McLeod and Yates 2006, 195-196, 215).

'Very, very pretty': The aesthetics of appearance

Girls and women were often discussed by the students in relation to their physical attractiveness. In both age groups appearance was rated as something important for a discourse of idealised femininity. For example, appearance was often drawn on when choosing which famous face was the most 'womanly', and was also sometimes used when discussing people they looked up to:

cos [because] she looks pretty

(Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group written activity – Hayley, Sienna, Isabella, and Alicia, ranking Emma Watson most 'womanly')

Vanessa is really girly, [a] pretty girl, dresses in dresses, fashionable.

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group written activity – Lucinda, Mikayla, Madison, and Tony, ranking Vanessa Hudgens most 'womanly')

She is nuys [nice] and bitfe [beautiful].

(Aaliyah, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, why she looks up to Mrs Searle)

she is a great rollmodell [sic] to girls. She is really pretty and outgoing. She means alot [sic] to me.

(Nikoletta, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, why she looks up to singer³ Demi Lovato)

The older girls were much more likely to describe the people they looked up to as good-looking than the younger girls. This is surprising because the older students usually drew on more complex explanations when answering questions than did the younger students. It demonstrates the powerful purchase of attractiveness at the core of a discourse of idealised femininity. Even a boy suggested to '[l]ook pretty' would be something good about being a girl (Lawrence, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary).

Hayley (Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary) sang the chorus of the song 'I Kissed A Girl' sung by Katy Perry several times throughout one of the sessions (getting most of the words correct), and ended by saying 'I'm a little sexy girl'. Here Hayley was engaging in a sexualised femininity reflecting popular culture. The other girls in her group for this activity encouraged her by asking her to sing the song again, and laughed when she said 'I'm a little sexy girl'.

A concern with being 'skinny' was another aspect relating to appearance. In the younger age group, three girls wrote that when they grew up they would look 'skinny'. This is similar to findings by Birbeck and Drummond who found that girls' concern for being skinny was evident at 5 years old (2006b, 428-430). Some of the older girls were also concerned with weight. For example, Despina (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary) wrote that she would be 'skinny' in her imagined future, after writing in a previous activity that she was expected to act 'skinny' because she was a girl, and a restriction of being a girl was

³ Demi Lovato is also an actress but Nikoletta described her only as a singer.

‘my brothers tease me from [sic] being fat’. Similarly, the necessity not to ‘get fat’ was thought to be something bad about being a girl: ‘do not eat too mach [much]. (get fat.)’ (Eileen and May, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary). None of these girls appeared overweight. The desire and/or need to be skinny, in light of a ‘male gaze’, was evident in both age groups. However, in the older age groups this had expanded more to include how not to get fat – by not eating too much.

While appearance was viewed as highly important to a discourse of idealised femininity, there were boundaries as to what this entailed. Self-respect and not being naked or wearing ‘revealing’ clothing in public or in the media was viewed as important⁴:

Christos: from all of them we think she’s [Ada Nicodemou’s] the most womanly because she hasn’t really gone and taken her clothes off like other ones have. She’s really, really like um proper. She hasn’t done anything

Girl: She’s very ladylike

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording)

I think it is very important. I hate when I see commercials or advertisements with women with hardly any clothes on. What[’]s the point? If you don’t respect yourself who will?

(Krista, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, how important is being a girl to you?)

A discourse of idealised femininity I have discussed in relation to appearance and presentation were not just expectations about being girls, but were often enjoyed and viewed as positive aspects of being a girl (just like some boys and sport, see Chapter Three). My findings support Connell’s suggestion that things relating to fashion and beauty can be pleasurable:

girls and young women enter the world of fashion and beauty because they want to, because it delivers pleasures, and because the regulation and discipline are bound up with the identity they are seeking (2002a, 59).

⁴ Other studies have found criticism of girls within classrooms for being too ‘tarty’ – a word often used in the English context (see, for example, Clark and Paechter 2007, 270; Paechter and Clark 2007, 348; Renold 2005, 49-52).

Similarly, Currie, Kellie and Pomerantz state that ““doing femininity” through “adult” (read: sexualized) ways of dressing and doing makeup can be pleasurable for girls’ (2009, 205).

The ways in which girls can ‘try on’ older/adult femininities can be done via concern for appearance and use of beauty products. The girls in my research drew on this sometimes in their own lives but mostly in relation to famous women and ideas of girls/women in theory. Age in particular influenced their engagement with practices relating to appearance. This is similar to the ways in which boys often drew on famous men or boys in general to discuss notions of physical bodies, sexuality, and sometimes sport.

Punk Singers and Muscly Athletes: Unacceptable appearance (and behaviours)

The appearance and behaviours of girls/women were policed when they were not in line with a discourse of idealised femininity relating to appearance. Students from both genders and age groups referred to some girls/women as being ‘masculine’, highlighting their narrow constructions of a discourse of idealised femininity. This occurred particularly in the activity ranking famous faces from most ‘womanly’ to least ‘womanly’. I focus on this activity here in terms of the two key ways this was done – viewing the singer Pink as ‘masculine’, and generally denigrating the appearance and behaviours of female athletes. Overall, Pink and the two female athletes (Stephanie Rice and Sharelle McMahon) were viewed by the students as not very ‘womanly’ (see Table 6.3, overleaf). In all of the classes ‘masculine’ *appearance* was rated higher than ‘masculine’ *behaviour* as a reason why the women were not ‘womanly’, again highlighting the centrality of appearance to acceptable femininities.

TABLE 6.3: Ranking Female Famous Faces from Most ‘Womanly’ to Least ‘Womanly’

	Year R/1 (5 groups)	Year 1 (5 groups)	Year 6 (6 groups)	Year 6/7 (6 groups)	TOTAL (22 groups)
Miley Cyrus (singer/actor)	34	30	39	32	135
Vanessa Hudgens (<i>High School Musical</i>)	28	29	36	36	129
Emma Watson (<i>Harry Potter</i>)	34	28	26	35	123
Ada Nicodemou (<i>Home and Away</i>)	20	19	28	37	104
Stephanie Rice (swimmer)	19	24	27	22	92
Rihanna (singer)	18	20	24	25	87
Sharelle McMahon (netballer)	22	<i>13</i>	25	19	79
Pink (singer)	5	17	<i>11</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>43</i>

Note: A score of eight was given for most ‘womanly’, seven for second most ‘womanly’ and so on through to one point for least ‘womanly’. The data represent the total scores for the groups from each class. Highest scores are in bold, lowest scores are in italics.

‘Does and wears stuff that usually a man would’: Viewing the singer Pink as ‘masculine’

Pink epitomised many things excluded from a discourse of idealised femininity, such as having short hair, not being ‘pretty’ (as determined by the students), not being ‘girly’, being a tomboy, being active, and having an attitude. The students frequently ranked Pink as the least ‘womanly’ of the eight famous faces. The many reasons given for this were often negative and occasionally insulting, highlighting the strong policing of those girls/women not fitting with a discourse of idealised femininity.

The older students, unlike the younger students, went beyond appearance (short hair and tattoos), to also discuss Pink engaging in practices associated with men, dressing like a boy, being ‘manly’, looking like a boy, and being a punk/singing punk music. A group of five boys ranked her least ‘womanly’ because she is ‘completely manly and is a[n] idiot’ (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, small group written activity – Aaron, Lawrence, Ryan, Zach, and Raj).

Interestingly, Miss Karidis suggested her students had a narrow view on what being ‘womanly’ entailed, which was disputed by some students:

Miss Karidis: Because she’s [Pink’s] got attitude they think that she’s not womanly

Boy: I like- I love women who have att-attitude

Miss Karidis: And cos she hasn’t got long hair, I bet you

[...]

Boy: That’s not true. [inaudible] doesn’t have long hair

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, discussing which famous faces are ‘womanly’)

Although some students ranked Pink as least ‘womanly’, some said that they liked her, thus showing they were able to distinguish between privileged gender practices and who they liked (this was not always as clear in the younger classes). Some of the students did not like that Miss Karidis perceived that they had limited or narrow views about gender.

Pink’s behaviour was sometimes viewed positively. In particular, a group from the younger classes liked Pink’s behaviour:

Pink is a good singer and kowns [knows] how to do difficult things. (e[.]g. upside down tricks)

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, small group written activity – Katerina, Yolanda, and Cosmo, ranking Pink fourth most ‘womanly’)

The discourses surrounding Pink are similar to what Francis (2010) describes as ‘female masculinity’ relating to aggression, independence, rebelliousness, defiance, having an attitude, and being interested in ‘traditionally masculine pursuits’. Pink may be said to engage in things relating to ‘female masculinity’, causing students to be uncomfortable with, and even spiteful about, how she practised gender. However, Pink also engages in some things considered to be part of a discourse of idealised femininity – such as calling herself Pink (and previously having pink hair), wearing make-up, and wearing ‘revealing’ clothing (although this is not necessarily passive, allowing for a ‘male gaze’ and is sometimes done as a parody of other celebrities. Furthermore, wearing ‘revealing’ clothing displays her muscular physique).

‘No proper girl has large muscles’: Views on female athletes

Pretty girly, but also sporty.

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, small group written activity – Lucinda, Mikayla, Madison, and Tony, ranking Stephanie Rice fifth most ‘womanly’)

In Chapter Three I argued that one of the ways in which the students constructed a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was by constructing girls as unskilled at sport. Here I examine the interplay between sport and femininities more specifically, where some of the students, such as in the quote above, viewed being ‘girly’ as not being sporty. Sport was not key to the construction of a discourse of idealised femininity, and could in fact be negative for gender construction for girls/women. As Paechter writes:

[f]or many girls, however, femininity is demonstrated by a resistance to PE and sports, though there are some specifically feminine-labelled activities, such as aerobics and keep-fit, that are considered acceptable and practised outside of school (2003, 50).

Unlike boys, no girls looked up to athletes (other studies have found only a very small number of girls name athletes as ‘role models’, see Biskup and Pfister 1999; Bricheno and Thornton 2007). Although netball was generally viewed as not appropriately ‘masculine’ and not for boys, females who play sport professionally (including netball) were often viewed as not fitting with a discourse of idealised femininity. However, there were some exceptions to this. Very few girls discussed their own involvement sport and therefore the focus of this section is on how the student viewed female athletes.⁵

While male athletes were considered to be exemplary of their gender (Chapter Three), the two female athletes were often viewed by both boys and girls as not very ‘womanly’ (as evident from where students ranked female athletes on average – see Table 6.4, overleaf).⁶

⁵ In most cases girls only alluded to playing sports (in particular netball, soccer, tennis, and gymnastics), so it is difficult to determine what percentage of girls actually played sport, and which sports they played. However, within the classes girls who played sport often had some status, which I discuss in the hierarchies section of this chapter.

⁶ The views about female athletes and being ‘womanly’ were also of course influenced by which athletes I included. I chose the famous faces because I believed that they would be people the students would most likely know (see Appendix Six for full description). The sports themselves (swimming and netball) were not viewed by the students as relating to boys in other activities. Female athletes were not mentioned by the
(continued on next page)

The athletes discussed in the famous faces activity were Stephanie Rice (Australian swimmer who won three gold medals at the 2008 Olympics) and Sharelle McMahon (captain of the Australian national netball team). On the student groups' lists, athletes were sometimes ranked as the *most* 'womanly' (Rice three times and McMahon twice) and sometimes as the *least* 'womanly' (McMahon twice and Rice once), highlighting the complex views about the femininities of female athletes.

TABLE 6.4: Overall 'Womanly' Ranking of Female Athletes

	Year R/1	Year 1	Year 6	Year 6/7
Stephanie Rice (swimmer)	6	4	4	6
Sharelle McMahon (netballer)	4	8	6	7

Note: As with Table 6.3 above, the average rankings were calculated using a score of 8 for most 'womanly' through to 1 for least 'womanly'. This table shows where the female athletes were ranked overall by combining each group's scores for each class.

The younger students sometimes downplayed female athletes' involvement in sport rather than viewing their gender practices as unacceptable. For example, a group of four boys (Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary) suggested that medals relate to 'mostly boys' and ranked swimmer Stephanie Rice as seventh most 'womanly'. Again, as I argued in Chapter Three, 'real' sport – as seen on television – was viewed as being for males.

The older students made more comments about the unacceptable femininities of female athletes than the younger students. Being strong and muscly was viewed by some older students as not 'womanly':

No proper girl has large muscles.

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group written activity – Jarrod, Tyson, Mitch, Jack, and Caleb, ranking Stephanie Rice seventh most 'womanly')

because she has a strong body build.

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, small group written activity – Georgina, Mila, Arthur, and Lambros, ranking Sharelle McMahon sixth most 'womanly')

(continued from previous page)

students in any of the other activities. Even the girls who liked and/or played sports tended to mention male athletes or girls/women they knew who played sport, rather than female athletes.

Girl: Cos she's a netball player, that's why/

Girl: Yeah, and she's like in the Olympics⁷ and you- you picture them as like, you know, a lot of the people are like women- men-women/

[...]

Girl: Yeah, but they're like men-women/

[...]

Girl: You see they're like half men half woman, you see they have the woman's parts but they're like man/

Girl: Okay

Girl: Stephanie Rice. I reckon she would've gone above the netball thing cos/

Girl: Nah but, nah cos she looks like heaps more manly than her

Girl: Yeah

Girl: Even though she's pretty still

Girl: Yeah she is, she's pretty

Girl: Swimmer and what else? Um

Girl: No, because she just has really big arms, like muscle arms and they're like boys'/

Girl: It takes a lot of muscle to swim. To swim like a lot

Girl: Yeah, and it takes a lot of man to be a swimmer

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group discussion recording – Regan, Tash, Bec, and Fiona, ranking Sharelle McMahon sixth and Stephanie Rice seventh most 'womanly')

Surprisingly, the comments in the last exchange were made by a group of girls, at least some of whom were keen sports players themselves. There are several themes running through this debate. First, female athletes were viewed as 'men-women'. This is related to having 'the woman's [reproductive] parts' but performing like a man in sport. Second, female athletes can be pretty but still not 'womanly'. Third, big arms and muscles were associated with boys and were therefore not seen as 'womanly' or deemed to 'suit' girls. Overall then, these girls appeared to argue that to be good swimmers women have to be like men. Perhaps some fluidity of gender is accepted though, when they suggested that

⁷ Netball is not an Olympic sport. The girls in this group debated whether netball was played at the Olympics, with most of them arguing that it was.

while Stephanie Rice has big muscles ('like boys') she is still 'pretty'. Similar to my findings, a study with 11-14 year old students in England found that muscles were generally disliked in girls/women but were viewed as a necessary aspect of being an elite female athlete (Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk 2003).

Strength and muscles in women were occasionally viewed positively by some girls and, much less often, by boys. Female athletes were viewed as fit and healthy, and netball was seen as an 'appropriate' sport for girls and women to play:

girly eyes[,] plays sports – netball

(Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group written activity – Narissa, Matt, and Marko, ranking Sharelle McMahon most 'womanly')

because she is a swimmer and very strong and she looks mature.

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group written activity – Tori, Esther, Abbey, Cara, and Jade, ranking Stephanie Rice most 'womanly')

is a very muscly netball player

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, small group written activity – Gregory, Stavros, Amin, Despina, and Vicky, ranking Sharelle McMahon most 'womanly')

This last group ranked Sharelle McMahon as most 'womanly' *because* she is muscly and a netballer. What also occurred here was that the perceived female sport of netball outweighed the fact that she is muscly, which was generally associated with 'masculinity'. Thus, McMahon's athletic status is somewhat accepted because the sport she plays is viewed as for girls/women⁸, and Rice's femininity seems to be sometimes redeemed because she is 'pretty' (a number of photographs of Rice which appear in the media are 'glamour' or underwear modelling shots, rather than images relating to swimming. The photograph used for this activity pictures Rice in a tracksuit and wrapped in an Australian flag, holding a gold medal. See Appendix Seven.).

⁸ Netball was developed especially for females to play, originally as a modified version of basketball (Taylor 2001).

The policing of femininities in relation to unacceptable appearance and practices was evident for both age groups, although was stronger with the older students. A discourse of idealised femininity was also constructed in relation to personalities, interests, and popular culture.

How to be a Girl: Personalities, interests, and popular culture

Discussions of particular personality traits were commonly drawn on to construct a discourse of idealised femininity, which was not as common for boys and therefore did not figure in Chapter Three. Girls and boys were often distinguished using notions of ‘maturity’ and ‘immaturity’, and girls were also viewed as having closer friendships than boys. Interests, activities, and popular culture viewed as being for girls differed significantly from the interests viewed as being for boys, although gender differences were less stark in practice.

‘She has a good personality’: Personalities and ‘maturity’

Good, nice, resposnerble [sic], mutuer [mature], loving, caring

(Stella, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, expectations relating to being a girl)

Stella, above, summed up the particular personality traits and behaviours which were part of a discourse of femininity. While boys may practice some of these things, they were not part of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

The most common responses that older students gave about expectations on girls related to being girly⁹, ‘mature’, nice¹⁰, and responsible (see Table 6.5, overleaf, words relating to personalities are italicised). (Boys were most often viewed as expected to be sporty and strong – see Chapter Three.) Girls were much more likely than boys to mention being responsible, pretty, and clean as expectations about being a girl. This suggests that these expectations are felt more strongly by girls, which boys are less aware of.

⁹ I discuss what being ‘girly’ entailed later in this chapter.

¹⁰ Paechter notes that ‘[a]lthough what constitutes niceness varies between groups of girls, it seems to be a theme that runs through many accounts of schoolgirl femininities’ (2007, 87).

TABLE 6.5: Expectations about Being a Girl

	Older Girls (27*)	Older Boys (23)	TOTAL (50)
<i>Girly</i>	29.6% (8)	26.1% (6)	28.0% (14)
<i>Mature, maturely</i>	18.5% (5)	21.7% (5)	20.0% (10)
<i>Nice, nicely</i>	25.9% (7)	13.0% (3)	20.0% (10)
<i>Responsible</i>	22.2% (6)	4.3% (1)	14.0% (7)
Pretty, beautiful, looking nice	22.2% (6)	-	12.0% (6)
Fashionable, love clothes	14.8% (4)	8.7% (2)	12.0% (6)
Clean	18.5% (5)	-	10.0% (5)
<i>Polite</i>	11.1% (3)	4.3% (1)	8.0% (4)

* Two girls worked together so I have counted them as one person

In a brainstorming activity, girls were often described in terms of personalities, with the most frequent mentions being girly, nice, emotional, bitchy, caring, and funny. Personalities were less often used to describe boys and, when they were, tended to be negative with the most frequently mentioned being annoying, rude, ‘immature’, mean, scary, and silly. Often then, girls and boys were defined in relation to one another. For example:

Being a girl is very important to me because I feel that some girls are much more sensitive and caring

(Mila, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, how important is being a girl to you?)

The older students were much more likely to use personality words than the younger students. The older students also described some personality traits as pertaining to both boys and girls, including nice, funny, angry, artistic, bad, creative, girly, happy, and scary.

Acting ‘maturely’ was also important for a discourse of idealised femininity. Participants often constructed this in terms of girls being ‘mature’ and boys being ‘immature’ (as has often been found in both primary school and high school, see Frosh, et al. 2002, 137-138; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005, 149-150; Reay 2001b; Swain 2005b, 79).¹¹ ‘Maturity’ was perceived to occur earlier in girls, giving the boys in the older classes an excuse to behave ‘immaturely’. In the older classes, a number of students reflected the view that girls at this age are more ‘mature’ than boys. This was considered to be both an expectation and

¹¹ Francis suggests that in her research ‘the sensible-selfless (female) and silly-selfish (male) constructions represented the hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity amongst primary school children’ (1998, 41). This categorisation appears similar as to what was meant by ‘maturity’ and ‘immaturity’ in my research.

a reality. The younger students did not draw on such a discourse, although the mother of a Reception girl at St Catherine's Primary suggested that girls 'mature' faster than boys.

The ideas of 'maturity' and 'immaturity' were something the older students appeared to have picked up from adults such as teachers (see also Allard 2004, 356-357; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007, 100-104).¹² In particular, Miss Karidis, the Year 6 teacher, seemed to have a strong influence in reinforcing the idea that girls are more 'mature' and 'mature' more quickly than boys. Her views on this were reflected both times I interviewed her:

obviously research shows and we know that boys mature, you know, a lot later than girls so I put it down to their inability to actually make a good decision and realise what's right from wrong. [...] My girls are very mature in my class, most of them, um, and often they'll be saying to the boys 'oh be quiet' or, you know, um, 'stop doing that' or they actually did find it annoying at times when the boys engage in immaturity and immature behaviour and things

(Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview, discussing the differences between boys and girls)

What the participants meant by 'maturity' and 'immaturity' was not always made clear though. Miss Karidis related 'maturity' to making good decisions, but her usage of this definition was not consistent. Generally it appeared that 'maturity' related to behaving 'sensibly' and being able to engage with others like an 'adult'. Boys viewed as 'mature' (such as Christos, whom Miss Karidis described as 'very mature') thus may be viewed as not 'real' boys because 'maturity' is often related to girls. I discuss the constructions of 'maturity' further in the next chapter.

'The best of friends': Girls' friendships

Close friendships were viewed as important to being a girl, particularly by girls in the older classes. Girls were more likely to discuss and write about close friendships than boys, yet

¹² However, Mac an Ghaill and Haywood suggest that the teachers had different views of 'maturity' and 'immaturity' than the boys in their study, where teachers 'deployed the categories to identify good and bad pupils', in distinction from boys who sometimes related immaturity to things like helping out teachers (2007, 102-103). In my research, the students' and teachers' views of 'maturity' were similar to each other.

they were also more likely to mention difficulties and tensions with friendships and other girls. Having friends was an important part of many girls' lives. When considering words that described them, one younger girl (7.1%) and seven older girls (25.9%) added the word 'friends' (compared with two (8.7%) older boys). Some of the older girls wrote that positive aspects of being a girl included friendships:

[Boys] don't have a friendship that's as trusting as girls['] friendship.

(Aphrodite, Year 6 class, Socrates primary, something bad about being boy)

You can go shopping with friends and gossip

(Cara, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something good about being a girl)

Girls mentioned their friendships with other girls more often than their friendships with boys (for the discussion on cross-gender friendships see Chapter Four). Many of the girls wrote that they looked up to their friends. Nine (64.3%) younger girls and eight (29.6%) older girls wrote about at least one friend.¹³ Describing why they looked up to their friends ranged often from singular words by the younger students (sometimes influenced by their writing skills and/or vocabulary) such as 'cool', 'fun', 'funny', 'play', 'super', 'kind', 'nice', and 'loving', to more lengthy and specific explanations by the older girls:

She taught me how to like different types of things.

(Cara about Ashlee, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

She is funny and fun to be around, she has a good personality.

(Tori about Lily, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

Because if their [sic] is something wrong their [sic] always there if I need them.

(Lily about her friends, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

¹³ This percentage may have been higher for the younger students because some had difficulty understanding the activity. Younger boys also sometimes wrote about their friends in this activity.

Similarly, many older girls wrote about friends and friendship in their imagined futures story. 46.4% (13) of older girls¹⁴ mentioned friendships or names of friends (compared with only 14.3% (three) of older boys). Some girls wrote about working, living, and travelling with friends in their imagined futures.

Although girls were often thought of in friendship terms, it was more common that girls had friendships issues than boys:

girls it's more a friendship sort of issue, you know 'she said this' or 'he- she won't let me do this' whereas boys it's more um 'he's not my friend because he kicked the ball over the fence' or you know, it's not so much friendship, but it can be as well, you know they are sensitive to the friendship things too, um but girls is predominantly friendship based, more than anything.

(Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview, discussing behavioural issues in her class)

[Boys] don[']t have to worrie [sic] about friend ship [sic] (you play with someone diff[e]rent everyday [sic])

(Stella, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a boy)

people always talk about you badly and you always get into fights for stupid [reasons?]. And other girls can be really mean to you and get angry at you For werid [sic] reasons.

(Mikayla, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something bad about being a girl)

The numerous mentions of friendship by girls shows how significant they are in their lives, and how having friends and being a friend are aspects of a discourse of idealised femininity. Friendships are also important sources for learning about gender and what is 'appropriate' for girls, as well as co-constructing femininities (see, for example, Willett 2006). The significance of friendships in primary school girls' lives has also been found in

¹⁴ Although it should be noted that one of these responses was negative: 'I won[']t have as much [sic] friends but I[']m shore [sic] I[']ll cope' (Georgina, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, imagined future story).

other studies (see, for example, Kehily, Mac an Ghaill, Epstein and Redman 2002; Mellor 2007).

Dancing, Shopping, and Gossiping: Interests, activities, and popular culture

In Chapter Three I discussed the students' constructions of 'boys' stuff' and 'girls' stuff', noting that for boys there were not a great deal of ideas about what may constitute 'boys' stuff', apart from sports, wrestling, cars, and videogames. Things named as 'girls' stuff' were viewed as not 'appropriate' for boys. However, as Clark writes, "[g]irl things" are not necessarily things that most girls do, they are things that boys *don't* do' (emphasis in original, 1989b, 35). The key to this section then is that while a number of interests and activities were viewed as being for girls (more than for boys), they were not necessarily practised by the girls in the research.

A number of things were mentioned as being for girls or labelled as 'girls' stuff' in different activities (see Table 6.6, overleaf). Many of these things appear to be stereotypical, although some girls in the research did enjoy things included in the table. Shopping was one activity which was part of a discourse of idealised femininity. Shopping was often constructed in relation to friendship and as something that boys do not like or do:

Being a girl isn't that important but it is because if you[']re a boy you don[']t really like shopping and if you are a girl you usually go shopping

(Tash, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, how important is being a girl to you?)

Talking and gossiping was also viewed as something girls liked to do and, again, interweaves with building friendships (see also Kehily, et al. 2002). This was particularly the case with the older girls, but Mrs Hartley spoke about the inaction/stillness of girls in junior primary during break time and said that 'even at this age they will just sit down and chat'. In contrast, she suggested that 'mainly the boys try to scoff their food down, so they can go and play'.

TABLE 6.6: 'Girls' Stuff': Activities, interests, and popular culture for girls

	<i>Labelled by younger students</i>	<i>Labelled by older students</i>	<i>Labelled by teachers/parents</i>
Playground/sport	Skipping Monkey bars Hula hoop Hopscotch Scooters Bicycles Netball	Netball	Skipping Netball
The arts	Colouring, drawing Playing the piano, clarinet Ballet	Dancing Singing	Dancing
Other	Shopping Fairies The colour pink Diamonds	Shopping Butterflies Boys Diaries Hearts Talking/gossiping Fashion	Dolls Kitchen Sets
Television/movies	<i>Hannah Montana</i> <i>High School Musical</i> <i>Dora the Explorer</i>	<i>High School Musical</i> <i>Twilight</i>	<i>Hannah Montana</i> <i>Twilight</i>

Some teachers highlighted gender norms when suggesting particular activities were *not* gendered:

I'd like to think most of the things that I do are non-gender specific, um, and even if someone did perceive them as to be gender specific I'd like to break down that barrier, like, I don't- if it is dancing, I don't want to say 'oh we're going to do dancing, dancing's for girls' or skipping, you know, 'girls are really good at skipping' I don't try and use that sort of terminology, you know, I think we can all learn to turn a rope and skip quite well, you don't have to be a girl or boy.

(Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview)

Even though Mrs Searle said she would not associate dancing and skipping with girls when talking to her students, it appeared that she herself viewed these activities as being for girls.

In addition to interests and activities, particular popular culture examples were related to girls. There were a number of United States movie/television/book franchises that were both liked by some girls and viewed as being for girls. A number of girls enjoyed watching and reading the same things and constructing a collective identity around them. For example, *High School Musical* (movie series) was liked by girls from both age groups and it was overwhelmingly viewed as not for boys and, indeed, detrimental to boys' masculinities:

If boys watch HSM [*High School Musical*], they will get teased by there [sic] friends and others.

(Mikayla, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, restrictions relating to being a boy)

Highly inportanot [important] [be]cause half the things I've done would have had a bad outcome if I was a guy. I sang a hsm [*High School Musical*] song in the talent quest. If I was a boy I would have been teased.

(Bec, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, how important is being a girl to you?)

When combining the findings from all of the classes, Vanessa Hudgens (Gabriella from *High School Musical*) was viewed as second most ‘womanly’, whereas Zac Efron (Troy from *High School Musical*) was viewed only as sixth most ‘manly’.

Even the younger boys distanced themselves from *High School Musical*. An expressed *dislike* of particular popular culture that was viewed as being for girls helped to construct a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The most striking example of this was when a boy stated ‘I’m not watching a ladies’ movie’:

Aaliyah: Have you seen this movie [*High School Musical*]? Gabriella’s movie? If you came over to my house you can watch it

Loukas: I’m not watching a ladies’ movie

Aaliyah: You know Troy’s in this movie.

Loukas: Huh?

Aaliyah: You know Troy? It’s for boys and girls even

Loukas: Troy in um *High School Musical*?

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, small group discussion recording – Aaliyah, Loukas, Eleni, and Theo, discussing which famous faces are ‘womanly’)

Aaliyah had originally framed the movie as ‘Gabriella’s movie’ (the lead female character played by Vanessa Hudgens). When Loukas said he would not watch it, Aaliyah told him that actually there is a boy in the movie – Troy (the lead male character played by Zac Efron) – and therefore it is for both boys and girls. The view that *High School Musical* is for girls was also put forward by some of the older students: ‘[h]e isn’t that “manly” because he play’s [sic] in girl movies’ (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, Lily, Sarah, Deanna, and Peter, ranking Zac Efron fifth most ‘manly’).

The interests, activities, and popular culture examples I have discussed here were viewed as being for girls (constructing a discourse of idealised femininity) *and* not being for boys (constructing a discourse of hegemonic masculinity). In some cases, things that were related to girls were more about what boys should *not* do, rather than what girls should do. Furthermore, girls’ interests were more diverse than a discourse of idealised femininity, which I consider in the next section.

Diversity and Hierarchies amongst Girls and Femininities

So far in this chapter I have covered what was commonly constructed as important for a discourse of idealised femininity, which often involved aesthetic appearance, and particular personalities, interests, and popular culture. Despite the construction of a discourse of idealised femininity, variations amongst femininities were sometimes acknowledged by the students and were evident within the classrooms. After considering this diversity I show that there was evidence of varying status amongst girls in the classrooms, although this did not always directly relate to a discourse of idealised femininity. I also highlight that the exclusion of particular girls was more visible than the privileging of some girls at the top of a hierarchy.

‘Most girls aren’t like that’: Diverse femininities

The good things [sic] about being a girl is that you are able to be like a boy for some girls who do not like ‘barbies’ etc.

(Madison, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, something good about being a girl)

As evident from the above quote, some of the students recognised differences between girls, although Madison still drew on a binary of girls/girls’ interests and boys/boys’ interests. Some of the older girls in particular rejected the need to align with a discourse of idealised femininity, and some students suggested there were different ‘types’ of girls (and boys). In addition, some girls demonstrated that practices relating to discourses of idealised femininity and hegemonic masculinity could be combined.

While the students often drew on a narrow discourse of idealised femininity, a quarter of the older girls (25.9% – four from Socrates Primary and three from St Catherine’s Primary) wrote that girls in general were different to expectations placed upon them and/or they themselves did not align with expectations relating to being a girl. These girls argued that girls are expected or presumed to be girly or like a girly girl; be pretty; enjoy make-up, clothes, shopping, and material things; be sensitive, nice, polite and caring; be scared of everything; over-react to things; not like ‘play[ing] rough’; be perfect; and be worried about things like nails, hair, pimples, and which boys like them. Three of the girls

suggested ‘people’ expected them to act in particular ways, and a further two girls wrote it was ‘people’, but mostly or mainly boys, who did this. Some illustrative responses included:

I think that people, (mostly boys) expect us to act very over-reactive and think we don’t like to play rough sometimes. That really offends me.

(Aphrodite, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

Well..... most people think of girls as sensitive and girly girls and scared of everything. That[’]s how people EXPECT us to act when really where [sic] a whole different person. Girls are dare devils. Girls are strong. Girls are rude! Where [sic] not afraid to be these things and also girls do have an ATTITUDE and where [sic] all proud of it! :)

(Marika, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

People expect all girls to be all girly and love make-up. People always expect girls to be in love with clothes and be really pretty, but not everyone can be perfect.

(Mikayla, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary)

These girls suggested that girls are actually dare devils, strong, rude, have an attitude, occasionally get angry for no reason, do not want everything to be perfect (in terms of hair and nails), and enjoy playing sport and climbing trees. Some girls also provided reasons for their responses, such as gender: ‘[i]f boys can [behave in particular ways] why can[’]t girls?’ (Krista, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary), and age: ‘honestly we do not care about boys and pimples we[’]re only 11’ (Nia, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary). While these girls recognised narrow constructions of being a girl in terms of expectations and appeared to be drawing on feminist discourses, they tended to have an individualised view of gender restrictions. I discuss the discourse of individualism further in the next chapter.

Narrow constructions of femininities were also something that concerned one of the mothers in relation to her daughters. This mother expressed her anxiety that she could not control the messages that her children received about girls/women:

I worry about them mixing with children from families where women are not um as progressive let's say, or- or women are seen down on or not encouraged [CB: Mhm] to- to further themselves, so I- I have thought of that on a couple of occasions, that issue has- has bothered me, and I'm thinking, 'oh, who do they mix with? And what are they getting from their home?'

(Mother of Year 1 girl, Socrates Primary)

While some of the participants were concerned with narrow constructions of femininities, some students, particularly from the older classes, brainstormed what might be called different 'types' of girls and boys such as 'Fashionable', 'Girly', and 'Tomboy' (see Table 6.7, below). Some studies have categorised groupings of girls with labels such as 'Spice Girls', 'Nice Girls', 'Girly', and 'Tomboys' (Reay 2001b), 'girlie' and 'not-girlie' (Renold 2005), 'tomboys' and 'girly-girls' (Paechter and Clark 2007; Paechter 2010), and 'girly girls' and 'cool girls' (including 'fashion girls') (Blaise 2005, 61-65, 84, *passim*). As I argued in relation to masculinities earlier in this thesis, drawing on 'types' can mask the fluidity of gender practices (see Chapter One). In any case, actual evidence of groupings of girls was not clearly apparent in my research, and the girls did not describe themselves in terms of 'types'.

TABLE 6.7: Words Related to 'Types' of Girls and Boys

	Girls only	Boys only	Both
Fashionable (or like words)	24.4% (10)	-	9.8% (4)
Girly	24.4% (10)	-	7.3% (3)
Tomboy/tomboyish	17.1% (7)	-	-
Sporty/very sporty/sport(s)	12.2% (5)	19.5% (8)	22.0% (9)
Emo	2.4% (1)	4.9% (2)	7.3% (3)
Goth	2.4% (1)	-	4.9% (2)
Boyish/'Boyy [sic]'	-	9.8% (4)	-

Note: 41 pairs/groups did this activity

The students in my research, as well as in all of the studies above, drew on a concept of 'girly'. In my research 'girly' was often related to appearance and presentation, and occasionally other factors such as being nice. In other studies the concept of 'girly' is often denigrated and looked down upon. In my research, 'girly' was often drawn on to describe girls or expectations about being a girl, and could be viewed as either positive or negative. Thus, being 'girly' did not equal a discourse of idealised femininity, even though it was sometimes viewed positively. The students used 'girly' to refer to a number of things:

appearance (clothing, eyes, hair), being pretty, not being 'goth', worrying about breaking nails, not being sporty, playing netball, personality, interests, and speaking in a particular way. Sometimes 'girly' was used to refer to apparently contradictory things such as not being sporty *and* playing netball. However, this inconsistency may be explained by the fact that netball was viewed as a female sport and therefore not a 'real' sport.

Several of the girls expressed interest in things that related both to a discourse of idealised femininity *and* a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. For example, the vampire book and movie series *Twilight* was enjoyed not just for the male protagonists and romance storylines, but also for the violence. While in this chapter I have detailed that a discourse of idealised femininity was often constructed in relation to appearance and as separate from sport, several girls combined the two. It appeared that sport could be part of a discourse of idealised femininity or at least it was not always negative for constructing femininities. Effie (Year 1 class, Socrates Primary) mentioned she enjoyed aesthetic appearances, celebrity, and Miley Cyrus, *and* was interested in soccer. The combination of appearance and sport was more evident from many of the older girls' responses about their lives:

Things that are good about being a girl are you can wear anything and you can do all kinds of sports.

(Mikayla, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something good about being a girl)

- you get to dress really pretty.
- Buy what you want.
- I can play sports I Love.

(Lily, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something good about being a girl)

I look up to [name of friend] because she is my rollmodell [role model]. To me she is my sister. I love her soo much! She has the same taste in clothes as me! She loves soccer and so do I.

(Nikoletta, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, why she looks up to her best friend who she plays soccer with)

Thus, as with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, a discourse of idealised femininity could incorporate other elements rather than always rejecting them. While there was

evidence of variations of femininities in the classes, not all femininities or girls had the same status.

Contradictions and Exclusions: Hierarchies of femininities?

Their [sic] is one girl in my class who tries to tell me what to do

(Vicky, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, restrictions relating to being a girl)

The theorising of femininities, particularly in Connell's work, does not provide sufficient ground to fully consider the relations between femininities. As discussed in Chapter One, Connell argues that femininities do not have an equivalent to hegemonic masculinity (1987, 183-188). In this chapter I have used the idea of a discourse of idealised femininity to highlight that there were practices relating to a privileged femininity which could be seen as working in tandem with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. In Chapter Five I argued that there were some hierarchies constructed amongst the boys in the classes, but there was also fluidity and contradictions. It was more difficult to relate patterns of status within the classrooms to a discourse of idealised femininity. Constructions of hierarchies amongst the girls could often be related to friendship groups, but these did not reflect practices of different kinds of femininities in any discernible patterns.

Several patterns can be seen across the classes, although the construction of hierarchies was stronger in the older classes. The importance of appearance, while central to discussions of a discourse of idealised femininity, was difficult to determine in practice. There were girls from all four classes who displayed some interest in clothes and/or make-up. Girls' personalities did not necessarily align with the nice and responsible construction of a discourse of idealised femininity. However, being 'nice' did garner more status in the younger classes compared to the older classes where not being nice to, or excluding, other girls assisted in creating hierarchies. As Reay (2001b) found, the 'Nice Girls' in her research were often looked down upon by girls and boys. 'Maturity' did appear important in gaining status in class, particularly for the older girls, but also for the younger girls who needed to distance themselves from what might be viewed as 'babyish' behaviour. A demonstrated interest in 'girls' stuff' or popular culture viewed as being for girls was not crucial to gaining status in class, and was less important than boys' need to distance themselves from things perceived as 'girls' stuff' (as discussed in Chapter Three).

While being athletic seemed to be excluded from a discourse of idealised femininity, in all four classes sport appeared to be played mainly by girls with a ‘high’ or accepted status. This was strongest in the older classes. Some girls in the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary mentioned playing sport, including soccer which was privileged at the school. However, some of these girls explicitly wrote that liking sport was different to expectations about being a girl. This highlights that sport was outside of a discourse of idealised femininity. Girls who had a ‘high status’ often played sport (including basketball and netball) in the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine’s Primary. A group of five girls who were largely excluded from the rest of the class did not mention playing sport. Daniel’s support of girls’ involvement in sport likely influenced the status that these girls had in class. The linking of sport with ‘high status’ girls was not as clear in the younger classes, although some girls who played sport were well accepted by others. In Australia, although it is often male sports and athletes that are privileged, in some cases the centrality of sport overrides gender and is viewed as important for both genders. In my research, involvement in sport did not have a negative impact on constructing girls’ femininities compared to how female athletes were viewed, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In contrast, others have discussed girls and sport in relation to ‘tomboys’ who are not always accepted by others, and ‘tarts’ – girls viewed as only being interested in playing soccer because they are seeking male attention (Clark and Paechter 2007).

As discussed in Chapter Four, there were a number of different views on displaying ‘intelligence’ and being studious in my research. When writing and discussing broadly, girls tended to be viewed as smarter than boys. As I noted, the influence of displaying ‘intelligence’ and being studious on boys’ status varied by age and school, with a negative impact on constructing masculinities most evident in the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary. In contrast, for girls it appeared that *difficulties* with school work were generally negative for constructing femininities and acceptance in class, particularly in the older classes (although not having English as a first language was usually an accepted excuse for this). However, it was not evident (or I could not determine) that high academic achievers had a ‘high status’ in class, and girls did not draw on ‘intelligence’ as a way of constructing their identity and increasing their status (unlike attempts at ‘muscular intellectualness’ made by Zach and Christos, as discussed in Chapter Four).

In the younger classes there was certainly diversity amongst the girls, yet patterns of status and hierarchies were not particularly clear. There were no distinct leaders amongst the girls

in the classes. However, there were groups of girls in both of the older classes who were excluded by other girls. In the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary, as with boys in this class, there was a large group of girls who were friends and interacted with each other, and a small number who were ostracised or at least not included. In particular, five girls were excluded from the larger friendship group (three girls who were friends, and two girls from China who were friends). These girls differed from most of the other girls because they appeared to have a lower academic ability. In the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine's Primary, a group of girls were ostracised but I could not discern any clear patterns about this being linked to their gender practices.

The intersection of numerous factors such as school, classroom, teacher, age, and ethnicity provided particular avenues for acceptance of different femininities. As discussed in relation to boys in Chapter Five, not being a part of the dominant ethnic group at the school (Greek at Socrates Primary, and Anglo at St Catherine's Primary), could interfere with acceptance by others, although this also overlapped with other factors. Girls in the younger classes from non-dominant ethnic groups were more likely to be accepted (Aaliyah), although students with English difficulties (Min) or learning difficulties (Narissa) had some trouble being fully involved with other students.¹⁵ Similarly, some of the older girls (Lela, Eileen, May, Cara, Esther) were not fully accepted by others, which, for some of these girls, could be related to English language skills. However, Mila enjoyed a 'high status' in the Year 6 class. Her ability to fit in with the Greek student majority may be related to the Orthodox religion which is also relevant to her Serbian background (as with Ivan, see Chapter Five).

As with boys, it was often easier to identify which girls or groups of girls were marginalised rather than those who had a 'high status' in each class. The constructed hierarchies in the classrooms I have been able to distinguish did not always correlate with a discourse of idealised femininity, as discussed in this chapter. In particular, sport was often excluded from a discourse of idealised femininity in theory but could be seen as either assisting some girls to gain/maintain status in class or, alternatively, was able to be engaged in by some girls *because* of their 'high status'. Similar to boys (see Chapter Five), there was more acceptance of all girls in the younger age group than in the older age group.

¹⁵ Boys with learning difficulties, such as Matt from the same class as Narissa, were more likely to be accepted by other boys, suggesting that learning difficulties may impact less negatively on constructing masculinities than femininities.

Conclusion

A discourse of idealised femininity was frequently constructed in relation to acceptable modes of appearance and presentation, displaying particular personality traits such as being nice, responsible, and ‘mature’, maintaining close friendships, and engaging in particular interests and popular culture viewed as being for girls. However, especially for the older girls, a discourse of idealised femininity was recognised yet rarely abided to in full. Students tended to reject both appearance and practices outside of a discourse of idealised femininity (such as Pink and female athletes), *and* being ‘girly’. Thus, femininities practised within the classrooms may be viewed as somewhere in the middle. In addition, femininities could be fluid and incoherent.

There were similarities and differences between the age groups in terms of constructing a discourse of idealised femininity. While appearance was drawn on by both age groups to construct a fairly narrow discourse of idealised femininity, the younger girls tended to speak about such behaviours relating to appearance in a distant future. For the older age group attention to appearance was more something that the girls were more likely to engage in (such as wearing make-up). Both age groups policed unacceptable femininities often relating to appearance, which I discussed in terms of the singer Pink and female athletes. The older students did this more often and with more menace than the younger students. It was more extreme for older students, where some almost despised certain women who they perceive to be too ‘masculine’. Furthermore, the older students mentioned muscles as being part of unacceptable femininities, which were not discussed by the younger students. Personality traits were used to construct a discourse of idealised femininity, drawn on particularly by the older age group. Friendships were important for girls from both age groups, although had more significance in the lives of the older girls.

A discourse of idealised femininity seems to be about *looking* a particular way and the appearance of being inactive (although there is considerable action that goes into presenting a particular look), whereas a discourse of hegemonic masculinity is action, it is defined as *doing*, although also includes appearing a particular way (‘masculine’) and not appearing ‘feminine’. This is a view that influenced the students when constructing their gender in the present as well as in their imagined futures.

Examining how girls and femininities were constructed in relation to boys and masculinities in this chapter gives a background to understanding gender relations. In the next chapter I focus on the students' understandings and constructions of gender privilege, discrimination, and equality.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Boys are Better than Girls: Gender privilege, discrimination, and equality

Introduction

[T]he project of internal hegemony gets dissociated from external hegemony and from the feminist principle and it becomes an end in itself. ... Hegemonic masculinity is defined through its negation of subordinate elements (black, non-Western, irrational, effeminate, or non-violent) rather than by its ability to subordinate women. Connell's empirical and historical account of hegemonic masculinity is thus substantially inconsistent with his theoretical articulation of the concept.

(Demetriou 2001, 347)

Every time Stelios says 'boys are better than girls'

(Aaliyah, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording)

The effects of hegemonic masculinity on girls and women have dropped out of focus in masculinities debates, particularly in empirical work. The lack of attention to women and femininities in relation to men and masculinities has been noted by Connell and Messerschmidt (among many others) as something that needs to be addressed (2005, 848), and yet any in-depth discussions of the subordination of girls and women still remain relatively absent from writing about hegemonic masculinity. This chapter examines how the students in my research privileged boys over girls, and viewed gender discrimination and equality. I consider how a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, as it relates to women's subordination (what Demetriou (2001) calls 'external hegemony'), was revealed and understood by the students in the research. It is clear from Aaliyah above that some students were aware of such discourses of subordination and inequality.

Some previous research has found that primary school students view their own gender as superior to the other gender (see, for example, Smith and Russell 1984). In my research, comments about one's own gender being superior could often be related to male privilege

(see also Francis 1998, Chapter Four).¹ From this finding I argue that theories about ‘external hegemony’ (Demetriou 2001) were applicable in my research—that is, there was some kind of ‘gender order’ supported by the students. When students place boys and girls in a hierarchy it is likely to be done by elevating the male and/or denigrating the female. While these concepts are related, my findings suggest that the latter was the more common response. It was also clear that being a boy was sometimes viewed as ‘the norm’, further highlighting how boys are privileged. I show how some of the students recognised structural and social gender disadvantages for girls and women in relation to domestic work, and the Australian Football League (AFL). I then further consider students’ views about gender discrimination and equality, including examining how they took up the activity of designing their own posters displaying messages about what they had learnt during the previous sessions. Finally, I consider that despite claims about gender discrimination, older students, as well as several teachers and parents, frequently drew on notions of individualism to make arguments about students being free from gender restrictions.

Boys as Superior, Girls as Inferior

Boys are better than girls and that is important because we are better.

(Peter, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, how important is being a boy to you?)

we ar[e] just to[o] Go[o]d for Girls

(Lambros, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a boy)

Not being a guy.

(Aaron, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, something bad about being a girl)

As I discussed in Chapter Three, boys were often viewed as superior to girls in terms of sporting ability and physical strength. There were also some broader comments claiming

¹ For a more unusual finding (although from over 30 years ago), see Silvern (1977) who found that girls privileged their own gender more than boys did.

that boys were superior to girls, as evident from those above.² Other studies have found that primary school students draw on discourses of male superiority and female inferiority (Francis 1998, 140-141, 144; Thorne 1993). Keddie found in her research that ‘boys can variously be seen to mark difference from, and position themselves as superior to, “femininities”’ (2005b, 437). However, in my research it was more often the case that girls were viewed as *inferior* to boys. In addition, some students privileged boys by constructing boys as ‘the norm’.

‘I would not be a girl’: Constructing girls as inferior to boys

Renold writes that ‘all the boys in the study engaged in some form of “anti-girl” talk in which femininity and the category “girl” were synonymous with weakness, incompetency, lack, inferiority and disease’ (2005, 84). In her research she found that it was boys who were marginalised that were most likely to view girls as inferior to boys (Renold 2005, 159; see also Reay 2001b, 157), although such a pattern was not evident in my research. In my research I found a number of instances where students viewed girls as inferior to boys. In the younger classes this rejection of girls included refusing to discuss girls, and putting forward negative views about girls:

BAd – I wouldn’t like being a girl

(Dylan, Year R/I class, St Catherine’s Primary, how would your life be different if you were a girl instead of a boy?)

I do not Like any thing [sic] if I whrer [sic] a girl.

(Kwan, Year R/I class, St Catherine’s Primary, something good about being a girl)

In both the younger and older classes some boys wrote that there would be nothing good about being a girl and ‘everything’ about being a girl would be bad (fewer girls wrote either of these statements in relation to boys). This supports other research which has found that boys ranging from early childhood to high school-age often reject the thought of being a girl or have very negative views about what their life would be like if they were a girl instead of a boy (see, for example, Browne 2004, 63-64; Lowe 1998, 217-218;

² There were only a few examples of girls writing that girls were better than boys, with Helen giving the reason ‘[b]ecause we are prityer [prettier]’ (Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, how important is being a girl to you?).

O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000, 116-119; Sadker and Sadker 1994, 83-89, 208; Young 2000, 322). Even some younger boys in my research had strong reactions against girls, evident particularly from a pair of boys who described girls as 'useless' (Marko and John, Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary) (see also Francis 1998, 153).

Another example of the denigration of girls was evident from calling boys or men 'girls' as an insult.³ Both boys and girls from the older classes drew on the concept of calling someone a 'girl' (or 'womanly') when they did not deem them to be 'manly', particularly during the famous faces activity. For example, one group suggested that Zac Efron 'sings like a girl' and Daniel Radcliffe 'casts spells like a girl' (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, small group written activity – Krista, Aphrodite, Rigas and Sean). In some cases, calling these men 'girls' was because their behaviours could be aligned with 'femininity'. In particular, Zac Efron's singing (and dancing) occurred in the *High School Musical* films which were often associated with girls by the students.

In my research, boys rejecting 'femininity', and calling boys/men 'girls' as an insult, clearly demonstrates discourses of male superiority and female inferiority. While not related solely to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, this is an example of how 'external hegemony' works to subordinate girls and women. Another way in which boys were privileged was by students viewing boys as 'the norm'.

'If she was a girl then she would have a bow': Boys as 'the norm'

In my research there were a number of examples where students constructed boys as 'the norm'. McLeod and Yates found in their longitudinal study with high school students that girls were seen to work *too* hard at school, and be *too* concerned with their body image compared with boys (2006, 193-196, 215). Davies argues that because maleness is unmarked and female is marked, young boys are 'more likely to define themselves as *persons* and as not-girls, rather than as male' (emphasis in original, 2003b, 92).

³ However, unlike other research (such as that by Keddie, Renold, and Swain), there was less evidence of students calling boys in the class 'girls', which was likely due to the fact that my research involved activities with students rather than focus groups or observations.

In the younger classes, the students watched and discussed a clip from the movie *WALL-E* (2008). When they tried to determine the genders of the main characters WALL-E and EVE, most students said EVE was a girl. However, Joshua (Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary) proposed that EVE was a boy because '[i]f she was a girl then she would have a bow'. His comment suggests that boys are viewed as 'the norm' and girls are marked by difference. This seems to reflect that (non-human) female characters, when in children's movies, often have a bow or other markers that distinguish them as 'feminine' (Abel 1995, 189). For example, the character of Minnie Mouse uses Mickey Mouse as a base, with 'feminine' additions (such as a bow, long eyelashes, a dress, and high heels).

In the older classes, a clear example of viewing boys as 'the norm' was evident when I asked students to design their own posters. Esther and Abbey's poster originally had the message 'you don[']t Have to be a boy to be able to do anything'. However, these girls recognised their construction using this message positioned boys as 'the norm' and privileged boys over girls, so they changed their message to 'difference dosent [sic] matter!' (see Figure 7.1, overleaf):

Esther: Well, we drew a picture of a girl and we wrote doesn't- 'difference doesn't matter'. It's um sending- sending a message out saying that it doesn't matter if you're different that you can do anything if you set your min- mind to it and if you try hard to reach your goal

CB: You had a different slogan underneath before didn't you?

Esther: Yeah but I changed it cos it was kind of like- like kind of like sexist

CB: Yeah, that's what I thought

Student: What did it say?

Jarrold?: What did it say?

CB: I think it said- what did it say? Before?

Esther: It said 'you don't have to be'/'

CB: Yeah, I think it/

Esther: 'a boy to do- be able to do anything'

CB: Yeah, yep, and you changed it because it was sexist, yep

[Daniel nods in approval]

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, whole class discussion recording, explaining their posters)

While these girls recognised that their original message was ‘kind of like sexist’, it is interesting that to them gender equality meant girls can do what boys can do – a form of old-fashioned liberal feminism. Their new slogan was less obviously ‘sexist’ but still drew on the idea that girls and boys are different.

FIGURE 7.1: Esther and Abbey’s Poster (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary): ‘difference dosent [sic] matter!’



There were two key themes demonstrating the students’ views of boys as ‘the norm’: a framing of female reproductive bodies as negative and different (in the older classes), and the frequent drawing of males characters when creating their own ‘Furious Five’ relating to *Kung Fu Panda*.

‘You’re bleeding your period everywhere’: Negative and different female reproductive bodies

Male bodies were often viewed as ‘the norm’ in comparison to female bodies by the older students. As Gardiner writes:

[p]opular culture emphasizes biological markers more for female than male aging. Menarche, childbearing, and menopause, all related to reproduction,

are treated as significant milestones in the female life cycle. In contrast, there are no such socially recognized markers for men. Men retain the advantage of having the male life cycle privileged as normative and conceived of as unimpeded by the abrupt biological changes attributed to women (2002, 98-99).

Four aspects relating to female reproductive bodies were drawn on by the older students – periods⁴, puberty, pregnancy, and childbirth. They were often mentioned together so I discuss them as a group in this section. These reproductive bodily practices, particularly periods and childbirth, were generally seen in negative terms by both girls and boys. In the older classes, 55.6% (15) of girls and 29.2% (seven) of boys commented negatively on female reproductive bodies at least once. What puberty meant for boys was little discussed apart from it being viewed as easier and occurring at an older age than puberty for girls.

The top four things the older students viewed as bad about being a girl were related to reproductive bodies (see Table 7.1, overleaf)⁵:

- We get pregnant/carry a baby in your stomach for 9 months
- We have our periods
- Our boobs hurt when we[']re developing
- Giving birth
- You have to shave

(Lucinda, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

The bad thing about being a girl is during puberty you go through[h] different things that [sic] boys go through.

(Krista, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

Having your period/having a baby

(Mitch, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

⁴ To stay close to the students' voices I use the word 'periods' rather than 'menstruation'.

⁵ Only one student viewed reproductive differences as something good about being a girl: '[g]irls give birth which means they have a daughter or son of their own! (He he! :))' (Marika, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary). Here Marika presumably means that girls/women will know if a baby is theirs biologically whereas boys/men may be unsure if a baby is theirs. Her use of '[h]e he!' and smiley faces seems to suggest that she views girls as superior to boys and is laughing at boys.

TABLE 7.1: Bad Things about Being a Girl

	Older Girls (27*)	Older Boys (23)	TOTAL (50)
Periods	29.6% (8)	17.4% (4)	24.0% (12)
Giving birth/having a baby	22.2% (6)	17.4% (4)	20.0% (10)
Pregnancy	29.6% (8)	4.3% (1)	18.0% (9)
Puberty (including different for girls than boys, before boys)	22.2% (6)	4.3% (1)	14% (7)

* Two girls worked together so I have counted them as one person

Similarly, some of the students wrote that something good about being a boy would be *not* experiencing such reproductive bodily functions. This was written by four (14.8%) girls in relation to periods, three (11.1%) girls in relation to puberty, and one (3.7%) boy in relation to pregnancy:

I think boys['] lives are much easier than girls[']. because of period[s].

(Mila, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

The good thing about being a boy would be that you don't go through puberty early.

(Madison, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

Not getting a baby. (Not being pregnant)

(Peter, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

Miss Karidis (Year 6 teacher) said she was not surprised that the students viewed reproductive aspects of being a girl negatively, and said that this reflected her own views: 'I've thought that ever since I got boobs I reckon'. She said that 'we're [females] always hard done by'. It is possible that the students picked up on these negative views from their teacher, even if Miss Karidis did not explicitly express these opinions to them. Miss Karidis also highlighted that girls having periods and experiencing their bodies changing was 'very relevant to them now, because it's happening to their bodies now. They look around them, nothing's happening to the boys'. What Miss Karidis reflected here is that girls in her class had started to experience bodily changes relating to puberty, whereas puberty had not, at least visibly, begun for boys. The different age at which puberty commonly begins for girls compared with boys is also likely to exacerbate the view that female reproductive bodies are different from 'the norm'.

It appeared unacceptable to *discuss* bodily processes such as periods (as opposed to writing about them in activities done individually):

Boy?: I thought you said periods

Marika: I said appearance. Appearance

Boy: I thought she was gonna say periods

Marika: Yes I did

Boy: Are you sure?

Marika: I said appearance. That's what it says here/

Boy: Oh, thank God

Marika (reading): 'worried about their appearance'

Boy: I thought she said worried about their periods. I thought she said periods

Boy: So did I

(Marika scoffs)

Boy: Marika!

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, small group discussion recording – Marika, Krista, Rigas, and Yannis, responding to research findings)

That periods should not be mentioned publicly reflects the idea that girls' and women's bodies are negative and are not to be spoken about (Kehily, et al. 2002, 173). Young people may learn that periods are secret, shameful, and negative from a number of sources such as sex education provided by schools (Diorio and Munro 2000; Thorne 1993, 147); teachers (Burrows and Johnson 2005, 239); mothers (Costos, Ackerman and Paradis 2002); and the advertising and packaging of sanitary products (Merskin 1999; Power 1995). Other research in primary school and high school has found that boys are often interested in girls and periods, although they commonly use this information to tease girls, positioning girls as negative and abnormal (Burrows and Johnson 2005; Fingerson 2005, 98; Kehily, et al. 2002, 172-173; Power 1995, 17-18; Prendergast 2000, 114-115). In my research, negative views about periods were also evident from some boys using the idea of a boy getting his period as an insult – similar to being called a girl or 'gay': 'Jarrod, stop it, you're bleeding your period everywhere' (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group discussion recording – Jarrod, Tyson, Mitch, Jack, and Caleb).

In contrast with girls, there was little discussion of male reproductive bodies or boys' bodies changing during puberty, even in connection to height. The only things mentioned relating to puberty for boys were about wearing cups when playing sport, shaving, and underarm hair, and these were mentioned significantly less often than puberty for girls. Voices breaking, something often considered to be key to puberty for boys, or at least most noticeable in public, were not mentioned or evident in the classrooms. The relative silence of discussion about boys and puberty highlights that girls' bodies are seen as changing and abnormal.

'Fighting is for boys to do': Kung Fu Panda character drawings

The students also constructed boys as 'the norm' in their drawings relating to the movie *Kung Fu Panda*. The students were asked to invent their own 'Furious Five' characters (a Kung Fu fighting team), naming the skills and gender of each character as well as choosing a leader of the group (see Appendix Six for full explanation of activity). Often boys and girls drew more boy characters than girl characters, and many students drew boy characters as 'leaders' of their 'Furious Five'.

When considering both age groups together, boys drew over five times more boy characters than girl characters. While it was also the case that girls more often drew characters of their own gender, they drew proportionately more boy characters than the boys drew girl characters. (See Table 7.2 for a breakdown of the gender of the characters.)

TABLE 7.2: Gender of Characters in Students' *Kung Fu Panda* Drawings

Class and gender (characters drawn labelled girl or boy)*	Boy characters	Girl characters
Year R/1 Boys (47)	80.9% (38)	19.1% (9)
Year 1 Boys (21)	100.0% (21)	-
Year 6 Boys (34)	79.4% (27)	20.6% (7)
Year 6/7 Boys (17)	82.4% (14)	17.6% (3)
Boys' Total (119)	84.0% (100)	16.0% (19)
Year R/1 Girls (57)	38.6% (22)	61.4% (35)
Year 1 Girls (18)	38.9% (7)	61.1% (11)
Year 6 Girls (25)	40.0% (10)	60.0% (15)
Year 6/7 Girls (35)	57.1% (20)	42.9% (15)
Girls' Total (135)	43.7% (59)	56.3% (76)
Total (254)	62.6% (159)	37.4% (95)

* Each student was asked to draw five characters. Many of the students drew five characters with some drawing less or more. Not all characters were given genders. I have focused on the characters with identified genders here to highlight the gender imbalance.

The key explanation for why boys (and girls) often drew boys as characters was because fighting was for boys.⁶ This reason was given in the Year 1 class at Socrates Primary, although some girls protested so a distinction was made between ‘real’ (boys) and ‘pretend’ (girls) wrestling:

Theo: Um because some boys lik- some boys think of boys is like to fight a little more than girls cos I fight with my cousin and we play wrestling
[...]

Elias?: Girls don’t really fight that much and boys like fighting [inaudible]
(small laughs)

Girl: Yes I do

Cosmo: Girls- girls like to pretend wrestles, um girls like to wrestle pretend sometimes and um boys like to some- sometimes play- play real

Helen: I do like to wrestle. With my cousin

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, responding to research findings)

The idea that boys fight more than girls – and that boys ‘play real’ whereas girls only *pretend* wrestle – were used as explanations for why more students drew boys as Kung Fu characters. Mrs Searle (Year 1 teacher) suggested that ‘in general my kids would think Kung Fu’s a boy’s thing’. The linking of fighting with boys was also reflected in some of the older students’ responses. In the Year 6 class one group suggested that girls drew only slightly more girl characters than boy characters because:

the Kung Fu means fighting and fighting is for boys to do.

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, small group written activity – Eileen and May, responding to research findings)

The characters the students chose as ‘leaders’ were also gender divided. Boys chose boy leaders 15 times (93.8%) compared with only one girl leader. Again, while a preference for one’s own gender might be expected, girls drew 13 girl leaders and 10 boy leaders. Even

⁶ Another reason given for why boy characters were frequently drawn was because boys like boys. This explanation was given by some students from both age groups, as well as Miss Karidis. However, the view that girls like girls, which was also given, does not hold because girls often drew boy characters. That both boys and girls often drew boy characters likely relates back to the view that fighting is for boys.

girls in the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine’s Primary, many of whom espoused some kind of ‘feminist’ values, were more likely to draw boys as leaders than girls (six to two). (See Table 7.3, below, for a breakdown of the gender of the leaders.) The girls in the Year R/1 class at St Catherine’s Primary were the only group to draw significantly more girl leaders than boy leaders (eight to one), which increased the total for all classes (Mrs Hartley was pleased with this when I mentioned it to her in the second interview). A possible reason why girls in this class drew so many girls as leaders may be related to the fact that they were less aware of the gender of leaders in the ‘real world’ (such as politicians) than students in the other classes.

TABLE 7.3: Gender of Leader Characters in Students’ *Kung Fu Panda* Drawings

Class and gender (number of students naming gender of leaders)*	Boy leaders	Girl leaders
Year R/1 Boys (9)	88.9% (8)	11.1% (1)
Year 1 Boys (4)	100.0% (4)	-
Year 6 Boys (1)	100.0% (1)	-
Year 6/7 Boys (2)	100.0% (2)	-
Boys’ Total (16)	93.8% (15)	6.3% (1)
Year R/1 Girls (9)	11.1% (1)	88.9% (8)
Year 1 Girls (3)	66.7% (2)	33.3% (1)
Year 6 Girls (3)	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)
Year 6/7 Girls (8)	75.0% (6)	25.0% (2)
Girls’ Total (23)	43.5% (10)	56.5% (13)
Total (39)	64.1% (25)	35.9% (14)

* Not all students named leaders or the gender of leaders. I have focused on the characters with identified genders here to highlight the gender imbalance.

The centrality of males in everyday life may be one explanation for why boys (and girls) tended to draw boys as leaders. When discussing the finding that in the Year 6/7 class boys mostly drew boy characters and girls drew half boy characters and half girl characters but often named boys as leaders, one group of boys explained the inequality by highlighting the prominence of men in the media:

Mitch: Well our group thought most guys look up to male figures

Student: And females look up to female figures

CB: And how come the girls then wrote mostly boy leaders?

Mitch: Well, that would be because on TV and the media men are portrayed as higher authority roles like Prime Minister, doctors, etcetera

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, whole class discussion recording, responding research findings)

This same group suggested that girls mostly named boys as leaders because '[g]irls think that every guy is a stereotype guy (tough, handsome) so they think men are leaders' (small group written activity – Mitch, Raj, Jarrod and Tyson, responding to research findings). Thus, these boys demonstrate that they were able to articulate *and* critique the dominant discourse (see also Francis 1998, 146). Their response also highlights that age is important – the older students were more likely to be aware that males are often leaders in the 'real world'. Relatedly, a United States study by Neff, Cooper and Woodruff found that perceptions of gender inequality increased with age – with students' knowledge that men 'have more power' than women growing steadily from the ages of 7-8 years old to 13-15 years old (2007, 693). They argue that their '[f]indings buttress the assertion that awareness of male dominance stems largely from understanding and awareness of the social world—which is not equal in actuality' (Neff, et al. 2007, 695). Young people's awareness of such a gendered dimension to power and leadership is not discussed in Gill and Howard's (2009) book about South Australian primary school students' understandings of power, identity, and citizenship. These different findings highlight that students' understandings are likely to vary even if they are of a similar age.

Relatedly, some students claimed that while fighting is linked with boys they did not necessarily agree with this:

Because people imagine that boys are stronger so they think that they are better at fighting or in this case Kung Fu.

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group written activity – Zach and Caleb, responding to research findings, why did boys draw mostly boy characters?)

Because boys are expected to be stronger, and you must be strong to be a good leader.

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, small group written activity – Zach and Caleb, responding to research findings, why did girls mostly name boys as leaders?)

As with the group above, Zach and Caleb showed that they can identify dominant and sexist discourses without aligning themselves with them. In fact, they even use the words ‘imagine’ and ‘think’, which suggests they are differentiating themselves from other ‘people’ who support these discourses. Furthermore, in the second quote, Zach and Caleb used the phrase ‘expected to be’ rather than stating that boys *are* stronger than girls. This ability to identify dominant discourses *and* distinguish oneself from them is similar to the girls who described and rejected a discourse of idealised femininity, as discussed in Chapter Six.

The different ways in which boys were constructed as ‘the norm’ and as superior to girls, and the ways in which girls were viewed as inferior to boys, highlight that ‘external hegemony’ (Demetriou 2001) was clearly evident in my research. These findings were apparent in both age groups, although some of the older students critiqued ideas of male superiority and female inferiority.

Understandings of Social and Structural Gender Disadvantages on Girls and Women

Generally the students had little knowledge of gender disadvantages on girls and women. In this section I focus on when the students did recognise such inequalities. Very few students had anything like a structural lens to explain female disadvantage.

As a background, it should also be remembered that both schools in the research were religious schools. Any direct reference to religion in the activities and discussions with the students⁷ as well as in the interviews with the parents and teachers was rare. However, one mother did suggest that religion, in the context of the Greek Orthodox church, provided her daughter with particular gender messages:

Mother: She does view gender differently with um her grandfather and the church treats gender differently. So, she probably, I should say, with this sort of school and our religion it does treat boys and girls differently [...]

⁷ The first activity (when students chose and ranked identity words that described them) asked students explicitly about religion. Here religion tended to be ranked quite highly, particularly at Socrates Primary. Eight students from Socrates Primary ranked being ‘Christian’ or ‘Greek Orthodox’ as the most important word that described them compared with one student from St Catherine’s Primary naming ‘Christian’ as the most important word.

Mother: Um, so she sees that differently, because ah the church obviously are- the priests etcetera are male [CB: Mhm] and the- the women don't um don't, you know, participate the same way in- in the church.

[...]

CB: Do the priests have to be male?

Mother: Yeah, yeah, so it's only men. So, they- they probably get quite a bit through the Greek Orthodox church with that [CB: Mhm] so they do have to be male and ah where, behind the, you know, blessing table and all of that it's only men allowed, sort of thing. So, she would get ah the difference there. Yeah the church plays a big role in that.

(Mother of Year 1 girl, Socrates Primary)

Although such practices quite clearly privileged males, it is interesting that none of the students mentioned them.

For the students, their understandings of gender disadvantage for girls and women were most prominent in terms of the gendered division of domestic work, and structural restrictions of the Australian Football League (AFL). I suggest that these two things were drawn upon because domestic work was relevant to students' home lives and gender in relation to sport was an often discussed topic.

Cooking, Cleaning, Washing, Ironing...: The unequal distribution of domestic work

For the younger students in particular the gendered division of household labour appeared to be a direct reflection of what they witnessed at home. Some girls from both age groups noted the unfairness of domestic work on girls and women. The younger students from Socrates Primary also discussed a division of labour in which girls/women did the domestic work inside the house (cooking, cleaning and so on) while boys/men worked outside the house (mowing the lawn):

Wludent [wouldn't] have to cook

(Poppy, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a boy)

I wood [sic] have to cle[a]n the house.

(Spiro, Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, something bad about being a girl)

Yolanda: Girls have to do everything when boys don't

Boy: Yeah right

CB: What kind of everything?

Yolanda: Like when- when- um like boys don't like want to like um

[Background mentions of dishes, and washing clothes]

Student: Girls do- boys do things too

Yolanda: No like don't clean their- um no not clean

Katerina: Boys don't do their beds

Yolanda: Don't do their beds

CB: So like housework? Jobs at home?

Yolanda: Yeah like when they don't

Boy: Yeah, yes they do

Yolanda: Not always

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, brainstorming things that relate to girls only)

In the above exchange Yolanda in particular argued that it was unfair that girls are expected to do all of the domestic work compared with boys who do little, although this was refuted by one boy.

Students in the Year 1 class elaborated on their understandings of domestic work in the session where they responded to some of the findings from the research. Here it became clearer that they had learnt these gender patterns from their home life:

CB: Do you think this is what it will be like when you're adults? Do you think girls will feed babies and wear make-up and cook and clean?

[lots of 'yeah' and 'yes']

Rosa: What? What? I wanna cook [Effie said this too] I wanna cook. I already cook anyways

[...]

CB: Do you think any boys will do that when they're older?

(laughs) [lots of 'no']

Student: My dad does

[...]

Poppy: My dad cooks um and it's been ten years til he didn't um til he cooked and yesterday he cooked spaghetti bona- bolognaise for us

CB: And he hadn't cooked before?

Poppy: Um he- he hasn't cooked for ten years and- and he's only cooked twice now

[...]

Rosa: Um because my dad has been divorced and he's been cooking for us and my year because they've been separated

[...]

Katerina: I think that is what's gonna happen so the mum is always gonna look after the baby and the boys are gonna do all of the jobs for outside and everything

CB: Okay, why do you think that?

Katerina: Because/

Cosmo?: The boys are the outside people

Katerina: Yeah

(laughs)

[...]

Katerina: Because the boys usually go outside and do things because that's what my dad did when he- when I was born and my sister was born and- and my mum did work. Feeding the baby and all the jobs inside

CB: Okay. Spiro?

Spiro: And boys do all the things like mowing the lawn while the mother looks after the baby

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, responding to research findings)

In this discussion domestic work was viewed both positively⁸ and as an accepted practice – there are particular forms of work for boys and particular forms for girls. What is also interesting is how the students discussed their fathers cooking. Poppy claimed her father

⁸ Paechter suggests that the enjoyment some young girls gain from domestic work may be related to them viewing this as a powerful role to which they have access in domestic play (2007, 70; see also Clark 1989b, 86-87).

had only cooked twice whereas Rosa highlighted that her parents' divorce had caused her father to cook (she also mentioned he cooked with their class). Cleaning was not associated with fathers or males.

The older students discussed domestic work less often than the younger students, but were much more likely to see it as unfair to females. It appeared many of these girls had taken up a feminist or gender equality driven approach, which is that girls and women should not be solely responsible for domestic tasks. However, the girls' future burden of domestic work was still largely viewed as inevitable:

girls have to cook, clean, wash, wash the dishes, dry, even [iron]

(Georgina, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something bad about being a girl)

people expect you doing [sic] jobs in the house like cleaning. I can't stop being jealous

(Despina, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something bad about being a girl)

you Have to do chor[e]s and Look after your baby brother or sister.

(Esther, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, something bad about being a girl)

it's always girls that do things and the boys get the easy way out. Like in married life. Girls always do the cooking and cleaning.

(Aphrodite, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something good about being a boy)

Thus, despite some boys participating and or/being interested in cooking and sewing/knitting (as discussed in Chapter Four), girls were viewed as being responsible for domestic work. Two girls at St Catherine's Primary accounted for how they would overcome the burdens of domestic work in their imagined future. Abbey wrote 'I would not have a family because it would be to[o] much work' (although she also added '[i]f I cha[n]ged my mind about kids I would like to have one boy and one girl' and gave names and ages of her children), and Bec wrote she would have two children and a 'friend does free day-care work'.

The discussions in the classes likely reflected what students saw in terms of domestic work within their own homes (see also Francis 1998, 149-150; Lowe 1998, 209; Paechter 2007,

53-58). In my research, percentage wise nearly twice as many mothers of older students (26.0% – 13) worked full-time than mothers of younger students (13.9% – five). Mothers from both age groups were most likely to work part-time (50.0% – 18 for younger classes and 42.0% – 21 for older classes). From the demographic information given for fathers in my research, only four (6.3%) out of 63 (biological) fathers did not work full time.⁹ However, the students' views of who should be responsible for domestic work could not be easily attributed to the occupational status of their parents.

Although there was likely to be a gendered division of labour amongst parents, some of the mothers stressed that chores were divided equally between their children, and that their daughter(s) did not do more domestic work than their son(s):

now that they're getting older, like things like setting the table, cleaning up the table it's like, you know, both of you- all-, you know, you should all three be doing it [CB: Yeah] it shouldn't just be the- a girl- a girl thing and um so you- you consciously try when they're older not to differentiate in terms of chores, um in terms of what they should be doing [CB: Yep] around the house.

[...]

but when they, like I said, get older, it'll then start influencing their chores, like my husband will be pushing the boys towards mowing the lawn, we won't get my daughter mowing- mowing, we'd never think of asking her to do the lawn but we'll get the boys to do- to do the lawn.

(Mother of Year 6 boy, Socrates Primary)

What was interesting about this mother was that she also spoke about chores becoming more gender divided as her children grew older. Her comments about only boys being taught to mow the lawn mirrors the division of inside/outside domestic work made by some of the younger students.

⁹ While only a small sample, these figures about parent work status are reflective of families Australia-wide. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2006 couple families with children under 15 years old tended to have fathers who were employed full-time, with mothers being employed part-time (41.5%), full-time (21.3%) or not in paid work (24.4%). Mothers not in paid work did more than three times as much household work as fathers, whereas mothers in paid work did over twice as much household work as fathers (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009, 23).

Students are likely to be exposed to different discourses about gender at home and school. Daniel, the Year 6/7 teacher at St Catherine's Primary, said he had previously taught a class where one boy expected girls to clean up (see also Francis 1997, 526). Daniel said he corrected this situation so students cleaned up their own mess and if boys said that girls should clean up 'I would personally slam it pretty hard'. Interestingly, when I asked Daniel about gender being different depending on context, he proposed that some students' home lives were more gender divided than at school. He said that for Italian and Greek boys the gender messages they learnt at home, particularly from their fathers, about 'how their race [ethnicity] would portray their gender' would be different from those about equal opportunity valued at school. Here Daniel indicated that there is a discourse of equality at school compared with inequality at home.¹⁰ Domestic work was discussed more often at Socrates Primary than St Catherine's Primary, possibly supporting Daniel's suggestion that domestic labour was more gender divided in Greek families.

'Are girls allowed to play AFL football?': The Australian Football League

Structural restrictions were occasionally discussed by students in relation to the Australian Football League (AFL). Girls/women are structurally restricted from playing in the AFL (the professional pinnacle of Australian Rules football), although girls and women can play in lower levels of competition football (for more discussions about girls playing Australian Rules football, see, for example, Hindley 2006, 289-305). As discussed in Chapter Three, some students drew on discourses that only men play 'real' sport, relating this particularly to male dominance in professional soccer.

A discussion about the restrictions of the AFL took place in the Year R/1 class, although some of the younger students found it difficult to understand gender inequalities relating to structure:

CB: Football? For who?

Mrs Hartley: Did we put that on there for both [boys and girls]?

CB: Yeah I think we did

Student: No

¹⁰ Connolly (2004) also discusses competing discourses at school and home in relation to education. He suggests that discourses about education in working class homes often differ from the discourses in schools.

Mrs Hartley: What about AFL football? Are girls allowed to play AFL football?

Several students: Yes!

Student: No

Student: No

Mrs Hartley: No

CB: What about in the actual AFL?

Mrs Hartley: Like in Essendon and the Crows and all them. Are there any girls in those teams?

Several students: No

Student: Yes

Mrs Hartley: No, there's not

CB: How come?

Ethan: Because boys- cos girls aren't as much at running[?]

Girl: But they're not like- they're not- they're not strong enough

(Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary, whole class discussion recording, brainstorming things that relate to boys only)

Multiple things occurred in this exchange. Football was initially put forward as something just for boys (although earlier in the session it was named as for both genders). Mrs Hartley and I then asked the students who was allowed to play AFL football. After initial confusion (in Australia 'AFL' is frequently used to refer to the sport of Australian Rules football in general, rather than specifically to the national competition), the consensus was made that 'girls' cannot or do not play in the AFL. It was from here that reasons relating to running and strength were given for why AFL is for 'boys'. The students understood there must be a reason why girls/women cannot or do not play in the AFL so they attempted to explain it. What is also important here is that at least some of the students appeared to be predicting what answer the teacher wanted them to say, as well as perhaps what answer they thought I was looking for: an 'adult-pleasing discourse' (Francis 1998, 143-144). Thus, the students who said girls/women can play in the AFL may have been offering the gender equality viewpoint they thought Mrs Hartley and I expected.

Three girls wrote about the structural restrictions of the AFL for females:

that I wolud [would] playing aFL [sic]

(Sienna, Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary, something good about being a boy)

Some restrictions that girls have are not being able to play some sport professional[ly] like footy. The people who restrict girls are the people who organise the sports.

(Mikayla, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, restrictions relating to being a girl)

Playing Football

(Sarah, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary, restrictions relating to being a girl)

Thus, even a six year old girl (Sienna) recognised that only 'boys' are allowed to play in the AFL.

These direct mentions of restrictions in terms of 'footy'/AFL were the only clear institutional barriers relating to gender noted by the students. For the most part, the students were unaware of structural gender restrictions and, therefore, boys' and men's privilege often went unnoticed.

Gender Equal World?: Conceptualising discrimination and equality

Several different themes relating to gender (in)equality arose from the research. There was some recognition of gender discrimination against girls and boys; many students were able to design their own posters showing what they had learnt during the previous sessions, with different messages; and older students, teachers, and parents often drew on a discourse of individualism to argue that gender does not cause restrictions.

Neither school had specific policies relating to gender, although St Catherine's Primary was governed by Catholic Education South Australia which has a 'Gender Equity Policy' (Catholic Education South Australia 2001). The 'Gender Equity Policy' is '*based on the principle that all students have a capacity to learn which should not be constrained by gender*' (emphasis in original, Catholic Education South Australia 2001, 4). Other research

has found that even if schools have formal gender equality policies or statements about equal opportunity this does not necessarily translate to gender equality in everyday life (Swain 2005b, 81), even when teachers attempt to enforce these policies (Jordan 1995; Skelton 2001, 128).

The contexts of the schools and/or particular education systems appeared important in shaping individual teachers' views on gender, and how these were articulated within their classrooms. The teachers involved in the research at St Catherine's Primary were more aware of gender (in)equality and issues relating to gender than the teachers at Socrates Primary. For example, Mrs Hartley (Year R/1 teacher) believed that 'if you allow gender stereotyping once [...] the kids will remember that, and they'll- so they'll think it's okay. [...] If you don't allow it then they won't do it'. She also claimed to be 'non-sexist' when she had the opportunity, saying she used 'he' or 'she' to describe, for example, God, nurses, and relief teachers. Daniel (Year 6/7 teacher) highlighted similar ideas, such as telling students that both genders can be nurses. He also suggested he would address any comments about gender stereotypes: 'if there was the broad comment or anything, you'd say "oh no, that's like not how it is, males and females can do this and that"'. Although these views were put forward, there was also a complexity in the teachers' understandings and actions where they were not always 'non-sexist'. The teachers at Socrates Primary did not make comments like these. Mrs Searle (Year 1 teacher) in particular believed that gender was not an issue in her class and, when asked about students feeling gender restrictions or restricting others, she said 'I don't really feel like I have to tear down those barriers because they're not there'. These teachers' views are an important background to the setting of each classroom.

That's Sexist!: Recognising gender discrimination

In the older classes there was some recognition of gender discrimination against girls/women and boys/men. When discussed in relation to girls/women this was sometimes framed as 'sexism', although this word was only used by older students at St Catherine's Primary. In the younger classes it was evident that the vocabulary of 'sexism' was not available to the students (see also Francis 1998, 83-85). In the older class at Socrates Primary there were some claims that girls were privileged over boys. Unlike other studies (see, for example, Keddie 2009; Renold 2005; Skelton 1997; 2001), I was not aware of

issues of sexual harassment in the classes during the research and hence do not discuss this here.

In my research, students never explicitly explained what they meant by sexism but their examples often fitted with the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition:

[t]he assumption that one sex is superior to the other and the resultant discrimination practised against members of the supposed inferior sex, esp. by men against women (Simpson and Weiner 1989, 112).

In Francis's (1997) research, she found that primary school students' discussions of sexism could relate to verbal abuse, teasing, physical abuse, discrimination and sex-stereotyping of activities, and exclusion from activities.

Explicit mentions of 'sexism' occurred particularly in relation to discussions about *The Simpsons*. For example, when I asked the Year 6/7 class at St Catherine's Primary what the clips we watched said about girls, Lucinda suggested that the episode underestimated girls. She tried to think of the word 'sexist', and it was then stated by other students. In addition, I had two informal discussions with Bec where she told me she thought *The Simpsons* was 'sexist'. To justify her position, in one of these discussions Bec referred to Malibu Stacy, the show's equivalent of Barbie (Henry 2007, 293).¹¹ In the session the week after viewing *The Simpsons* clips, Bec told me she thought the episode was good but still 'sexist' because it showed 8 year old girls who were starting puberty being taught about feelings in mathematics. When I suggested to Bec that perhaps the episode was making fun of expectations about gender (indeed, the reason for my choice to show the episode to the students), she replied that they should make it more obvious that they are being 'anti-sexist'. This shows that Bec and I understood the episode differently, and, from my perspective, Bec did not understand the subtleties of the episode. Furthermore, it appeared she did not have the vocabulary to be able to explain her frustrations for the 'sexism' she viewed in the episode.

¹¹ Bec appeared to have taken this position from a particular episode of *The Simpsons* in which Lisa Simpson denounces Malibu Stacy as sexist (*The Simpsons* 1994, 'Lisa vs. Malibu Stacy', 1F12, Season 5, Episode 14). What is particularly interesting about the episode in light of the discourses around gender and individualism within my research, is that when Lisa creates her own doll (Lisa Lionheart) to counter Malibu Stacy, the message her doll speaks emphasises individualism: '[u]ltimately, the phrase that is settled upon—and repeated twice in the show for emphasis—is "Trust in yourself and you can achieve anything!" an apt summation of Lisa's own feminist philosophy' (Henry 2007, 296).

Not all students had the vocabulary of ‘sexism’, or at least did not use the term, although some were still able to recognise it. For example, when students completed an anonymous survey about what they thought of the activities, two girls wrote that they disliked activities because of mean or rude things said about girls:

I liked sharing my thoughts but the thing that spoilt it was boys were saying mean things about girls. :|

(Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, about the brainstorming activity)

Some people said rude things about girls.

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, about the good and bad things about being a boy or girl activity)

When considering the research findings, a Year 6/7 group discussed the comments about boys and girls thinking they are superior to each other. They were asked why boys and girls set themselves up against each other and whether this was serious or sometimes a joke:

most times it[?]s serious but sometimes it[?]s a joke.

why boys & girls against each other

Because they haven’t seen the other point of veiw [sic].

(Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, small group written activity – Ashlee, Cara, Jade, Abbey, and Esther)

Some boys did not think sexism occurred very often. For example, when responding to comments about boys and girls constructing themselves as the superior gender, two boys negated this by writing ‘most of the people we have ever encountered hav[e]n’t been much sexist [sic]’ (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary, small group written activity – Kai and Ryan). Interestingly, Zach, also from this class, implied that sexism was something he *had* encountered, suggesting that something good about being a girl was ‘you don’t get in trouble for being sexist’.

There were also claims of gender discrimination against boys by boys in the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary. Their responses were related to how they felt they were treated in the

classroom/at school. This is similar to other studies which have also found that some boys believe that girls are favoured in class (Francis 1998; Frosh, et al. 2002; Swain 2005b, 82):

girls get favoured

(Arthur, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, something bad about being a boy)

Teachers treat boys differently to girls. E.G[.] People say girls mature faster than boys. (since when did that become a fact). So when some thing [sic] needs to be done and people thing [think] girls are better 95% of the time girls are chosen.

(Gregory, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary, restrictions relating to being a boy)

According to Miss Karidis, Gregory often expressed such a view:

Miss Karidis: one boy I've got in particular in my head, he- he thinks girls are treated differently to boys at school and I'm constantly giving him examples of, 'well look at the four people whose names are on the board, they are all boys' names, that is not a coincidence, boys take longer to mature, boys carry on'

(Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher and Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, second interview)

Although students often commented that boys are more disruptive than girls, the disciplining of such behaviour was still viewed as unfair treatment on the basis of gender. As evident in Miss Karidis's response, boys' disruptive behaviour was linked to notions of 'maturity' where, as discussed in Chapter Six, boys were often associated with 'immaturity' and girls with 'maturity'.

There was one explicit example of what could legitimately be labelled as gender discrimination against boys instigated by Miss Karidis. She explained to me that when names were randomly drawn for class jobs each week she had previously asked that the whiteboard monitor be a girl because 'generally they're neater' than boys. After some boys proved to her that they could be neat when tending to the board she removed this rule:

this morning when someone was actually doing- pulling the names out he said to me ‘oh does the whiteboard [monitor] have to be a girl?’, I said ‘you know what, no it doesn’t any more’, I said, ‘because the last couple of weeks I’ve seen that boys actually can- when they put their mind to it, they can actually write neatly on the board’ [...] they’ve proven me wrong so that’s good.

(Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview)

While boys may have a stronger argument about gender discrimination here than in relation to disciplining, it still appears as though Miss Karidis based her initial decision for the whiteboard monitor to be a girl on boys’ behaviour. However, what this can do is cause a cyclical effect where, as Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman found, ‘[f]or some boys, this perception of unfairness bolstered their opposition to teachers and to getting on industriously with their work’ (2002, 220). Perhaps more importantly here, the perceived discrimination against boys should be viewed not as disadvantaging all boys, but as disadvantaging those who are neat, do their work in class, and are not disruptive.

Other research has also shown how primary school girls identify and challenge ‘sexism’ or gender discrimination against girls/women (see, for example, Francis 1998, Chapter Four; Holly 1985; Renold 2005, 57-61; Skelton 2001, 155). My research shows that as the students grow older they are more likely to be able to recognise and critique gender discrimination. However, what should be made explicit is that students are likely to know that gender equality discourses are expected and encouraged in schools. As Buckingham notes, recognising sexism can be seen as a mode of pleasing the teacher (1993, 95).

Supporting Gender Equality?: Student-designed posters

In the research students were asked to design their own posters or activities (in pairs or individually) to show what they had learnt during the previous sessions, and how they would teach students their own age about gender (see Appendix Six for full description).¹² From this a number of interesting themes appeared, highlighting how the students understood gender and gender equality. The themes on the posters included views that supported gender equality; that girls and boys are the same; that gender does not matter;

¹² This section examines only the posters because most of the students chose this option and they were more directly related to gender than the activities.

that boys and girls are equal but different; that gender equality related to broader notions of equality; that girls and boys are different; that boys and girls can like or do the reverse of what they usually do (for example, boys can wear pink); that girls and boys can exist in co-harmony (they can be friends, play sport together, go into a house together, and should be nice to each other); and that both boys and girls are strong (see Table 7.4, below). Francis argues that the students in her research drew on two main equity discourses: ‘innate equality between the genders’ (using terms like ‘equal’, and ‘the same’), and ‘genders should have equal opportunity’ (based on ideas about individualism, ‘fairness’, and what is ‘right’) (1998, 143, *passim*). In my research the student-designed posters generally fitted into the former category, whereas responses in other activities were more likely to fit with the latter category.

TABLE 7.4: Gender Messages on Student-Designed Posters

	Younger classes (16)	Older classes (21)	TOTAL (37)
Gender equality	-	19.0% (4)	10.8% (4)
Same/not different	-	14.3% (3)	8.1% (3)
Gender does not matter	-	23.8% (5)	13.5% (5)
Equal but different	-	9.5% (2)	5.4% (2)
Broad equality	-	14.3% (3)	8.1% (3)
Different	12.5% (2)	14.3% (3)	13.5% (5)
Reverse	37.5% (6)	-	16.2% (6)
Girls and boys can be friends	12.5% (2)	9.5% (2)	10.8% (4)
Girls and boys can play soccer together	25.0% (4)	9.5% (2)	16.2% (6)
Boys and girls going into houses together	18.8% (3)	-	8.1% (3)
Boys and girls should be nice to each other	-	4.8% (1)	2.7% (1)
Boys and girls are strong	12.5% (2)	-	5.4% (2)

There were two key messages drawn on by the younger students. First, posters displayed girls and boys doing things together. For example, students drew girls and boys playing soccer together (although often the boys and girls were drawn standing apart) (see Figure 7.2, overleaf). Second, posters framed activities and interests in the reverse of which gender they are usually associated with (see Figure 7.3, p. 212 – this particular example also includes the message that boys and girls can both be strong). These two key messages highlighted the students’ desire to hold onto ideas of difference. Both of these ideas can be

seen to stem from the students' understandings of gender and how the poster designing activity was described to this age group (see Appendix Six).

FIGURE 7.2: Stelios and Spiro's Poster (Year 1 class, Socrates Primary): 'Boys playeind [sic] Soccer with gills [girls]'



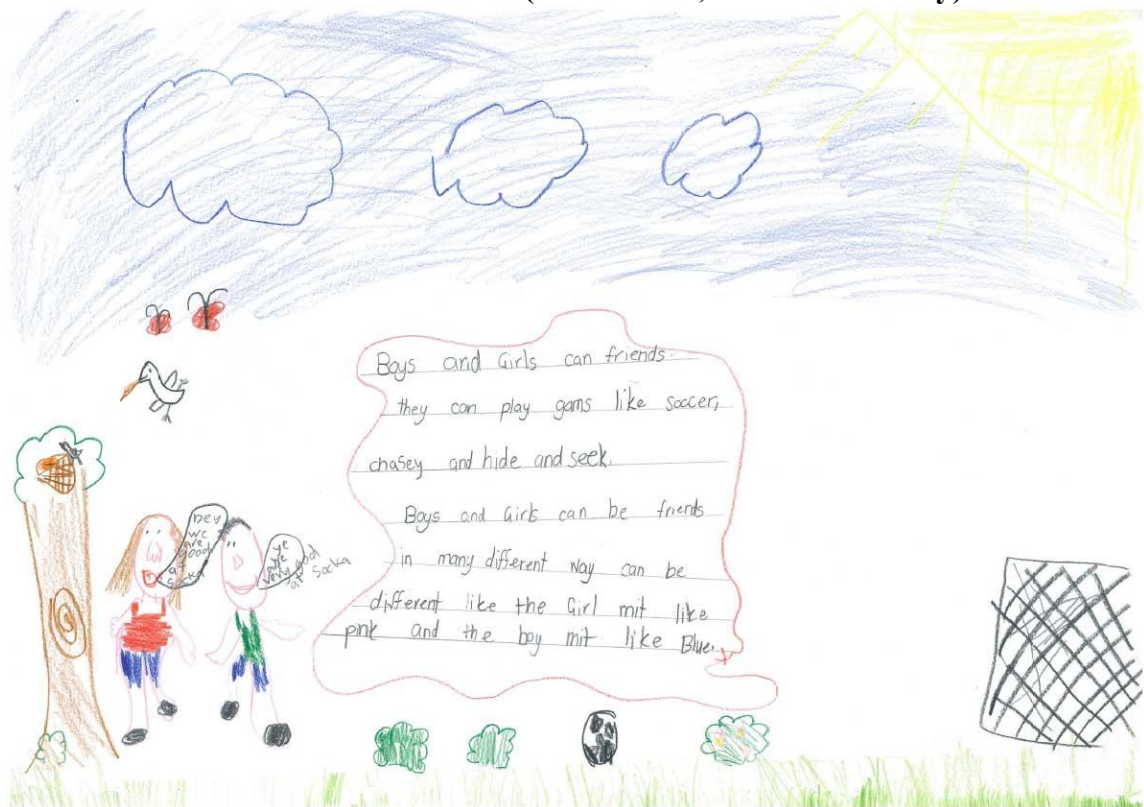
What was particularly interesting about some of the posters was that they portrayed mixed messages. Some of the students included a number of different messages on their posters. Particularly illustrative here is Effie and Rosa's poster which included the messages that boys and girls can be friends, can play together, *and* can be different: '[b]oys and Girls can [be] friends they can play gam[e]s like soccer, chasey and hide and seek. Boys and Girls can be friends in many different way[s] [and they] can be different like the Girl mi[gh]t like pink and the boy mi[gh]t like Blue' (see Figure 7.4, overleaf).

FIGURE 7.3: Jordan and Michael's Poster (Year R/1 class, St Catherine's Primary)

Boys and girls are strong
also watch Star Wars. ~~girls~~ girls
boys watch Bratz



FIGURE 7.4: Effie and Rosa's Poster (Year 1 class, Socrates Primary)



Some students had difficulty portraying their intended messages on their posters. For example, Katerina and Yolanda drew a picture of themselves playing on the monkey bars and two boys playing soccer (see Figure 7.5, overleaf). As evident in the exchange below, I was confused as to how their poster related to the activity. Despite their intention or claim that their poster showed ‘[t]hat boys and girls can do the same things’, their poster actually pictured girls and boys doing different things:

Katerina: We made a poster of boys and girls. Me and Yolanda and Loukas and Manolis. And this is our [inaudible] (reading) ‘the boys are playing soccer’ and

[...]

Katerina (reading): ‘Katerina and Yolanda is on the monkey bars’

CB: Oh. So what were you trying to show in your poster?

Katerina: That boys and girls can do the same things

CB: But they’re doing different things

[silence]

Katerina/Yolanda (sounding disappointed): Oh

(Year 1 class, Socrates Primary, whole class discussion recording, explaining their posters)

It was evident that when designing their posters the younger students found it hard to move away from ideas that boys and girls are different. As Davies argues in relation to Year 5 and 6 students writing group stories that resisted dominant (gender) discourses:

[t]heir embeddedness in *binary* forms of thought ... had to be constantly struggled with. Resisting the dominant discourse seemed to them to involve *simple reversals*, the use of whatever is opposite. The meaning of what a discourse of *resistance* might be had therefore to be established as something much more subtle and complex than this (emphases added, 2003b, 6).

FIGURE 7.5: Katerina and Yolanda’s Poster (Year 1 class, Socrates Primary): ‘the boys are playing soccer’ ‘Katerina and Yolanda is [sic] on the monkey bars’



The older students drew on a broader range of messages about gender for their posters. The most common theme was that gender does not matter. However, some of the students portrayed messages that boys and girls are equal but different while others, like in the younger classes, focused on ideas of gender difference.

Some posters had the clear message of ‘gender equality’, although even these could be seen as divided by gender – often with the use of pink and blue (see Figure 7.6, overleaf, for an example).

As with the younger students, some older students used the message that girls and boys can be friends on their posters. Kai and Tony designed their poster with this message and shared their ideas with a pair of girls in the class, demonstrating cross-gender friendships in action (see Figure 7.7, overleaf).

FIGURE 7.6: Aphrodite and Nikoletta's Poster (Year 6 class, Socrates Primary): 'Roses are Red, Violets are Blue, Girls and Boys are equal too'

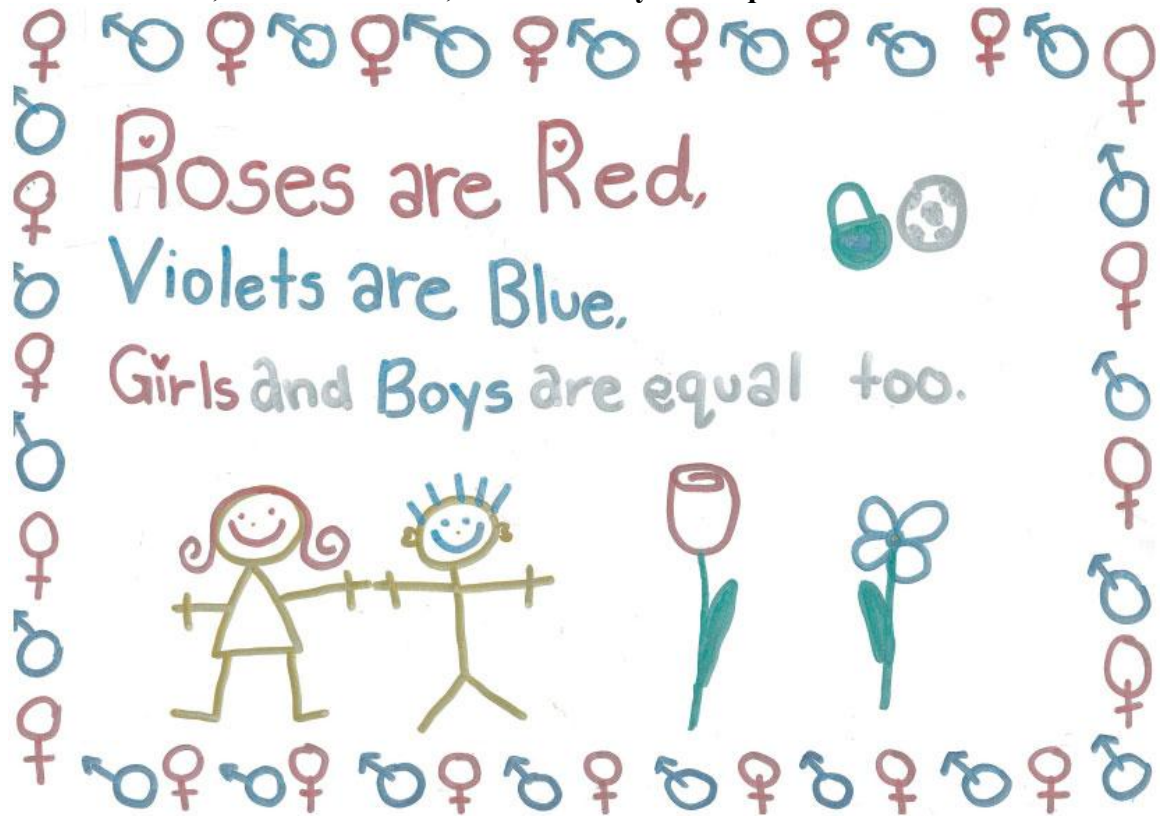
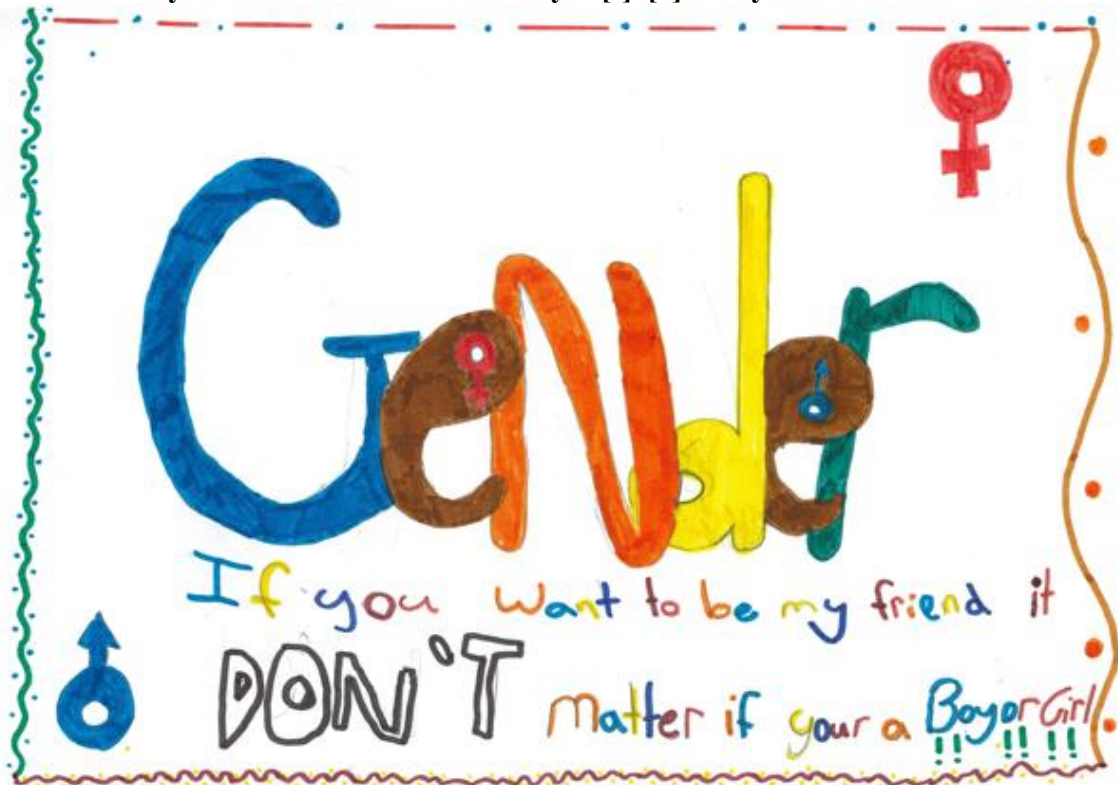


FIGURE 7.7: Kai and Tony's Poster (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary): 'If you want to be my friend it DON'T matter if you[r] a Boy or Girl!!!'

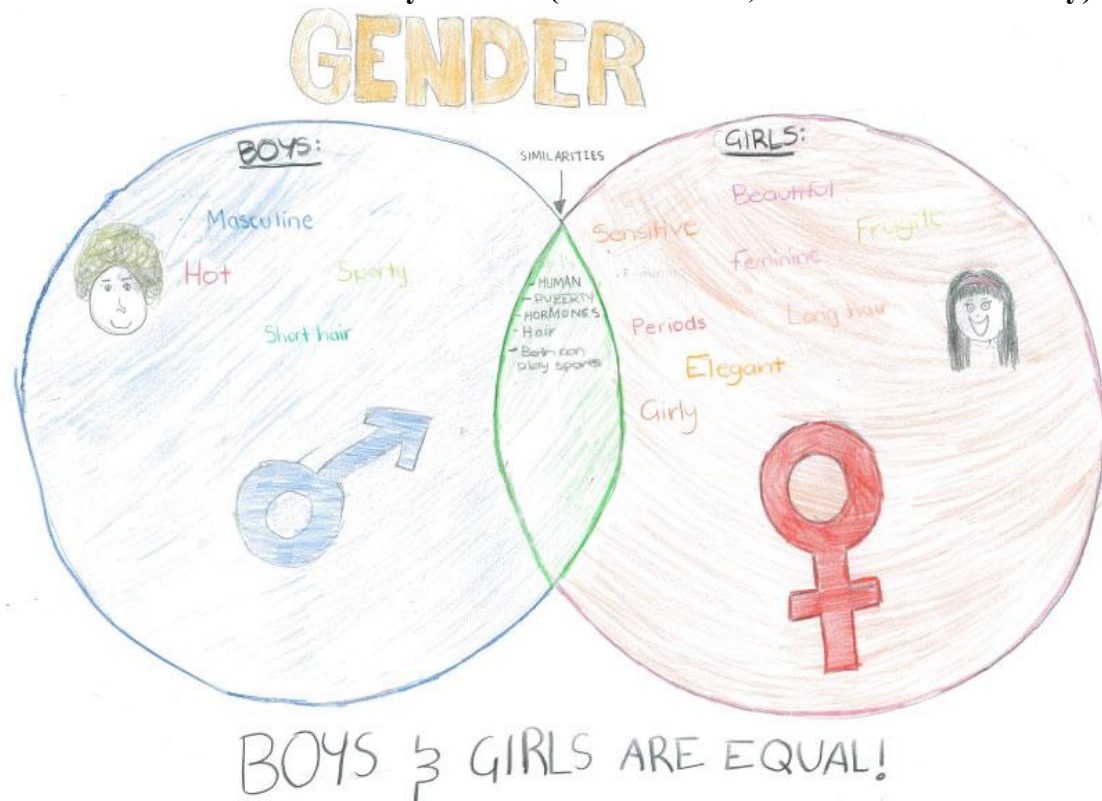


Some students related messages of gender equality to broader equality. For example, Regan and Tash on their poster included that ‘[g]ender’, ‘[c]olour’, ‘[p]ersonalities [sic]’, and ‘[s]hape it doesn’t matter’ (see Figure 7.8).

FIGURE 7.8: Regan and Tash’s Poster (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine’s Primary)



Despite the fact that many of the older students were more likely to understand and take up the ideas in the activity than the younger students, some still drew on notions of gender difference. This was sometimes done by simply drawing ‘boys’ stuff’ and ‘girls’ stuff’ whereas others coupled this with the view that boys and girls are equal but different. For example, Lucinda and Lily drew a Venn diagram of boys and girls with similarities between them in the middle, and the message that ‘BOYS & GIRLS ARE EQUAL!’ (see Figure 7.9, overleaf). Similarities between boys and girls they identified were ‘HUMAN’, ‘PUBERTY’, ‘HORMONES’, ‘Hair’, and ‘Both can play sports’. However, they described boys as ‘Masculine’, ‘Hot’, ‘Sporty’, and ‘Short Hair’, in contrast to girls who were described as ‘Sensitive’, ‘Beautiful’, ‘Feminine’, ‘Fragile’, ‘Periods’, ‘Elegant’, ‘Girly’, and ‘Long Hair’.

FIGURE 7.9: Lucinda and Lily's Poster (Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

Overall, the students provided some interesting and diverse ideas on their posters. The posters themselves further illuminated how the students understood gender and how they conceptualised gender equality. They demonstrate how the students struggled to combine ideas about difference, equality, *and* choice. An activity like this would be further enhanced with teaching or intervention like the work in Davies (2003b) where primary school students learnt about discourse, deconstructed gender, and created ‘non-sexist’ stories.

Being Yourself: Individualism as freedom from gender constraints

While in some cases students recognised gendered restrictions on girls/women (and occasionally on boys/men), and several were able to design their own posters, there was also a common view put forward that individuals did not have any restrictions relating to gender. There are some key things that occurred here. First, gender problems were individualised and therefore not seen as a legitimate issue or disadvantage. Second, some of the students claimed that they did not feel gender restrictions when asked explicitly. However, less direct questions (such as naming things that were bad about being a girl) did receive responses relating to gender restrictions.

Approximately 40% of older girls and boys wrote that their own gender had no restrictions (the students in the younger classes were not asked explicitly about gendered expectations):

I don't think I am restricted from anything. I think everyone is able to do what they want.

(Krista, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

No one tells me how to be a girl.

(Regan, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

I don't feel any [restrictions]. I do what I want.

(Zach, Year 6/7 class, St Catherine's Primary)

As can be seen by these responses, not being affected by gender restrictions was linked to the strength of individuals. While nearly half of the students wrote that there were restrictions because of gender (related to, for example, sport and clothing), a large percentage wrote that boys and/or girls had no restrictions because of gender (see Table 7.5).

TABLE 7.5: Perceptions of the Existence of Gender Restrictions

	Older Boys (23)	Older Girls (27*)	TOTAL (50)
Boys have no restrictions	39.1% (9)	14.8% (4)	26.0% (13)
Girls have no restrictions	17.4% (4)	40.7% (11)	30.0% (15)
Boys - No response/do not know	26.1% (6)	29.6% (8)	28.0% (14)
Girls - No response/do not know	43.5% (10)	3.7% (1)	22.0% (11)
Boys have restrictions	34.8% (8)	55.6% (15)	46.0% (23)
Girls have restrictions	39.1% (9)	55.6% (15)	48.0% (24)

* Two girls worked together so I have counted them as one person

What was also evident was that although 40.7% (11) of girls said there were no restrictions on them because of their gender, some still listed bad things about being a girl, which could be viewed as restrictions. This included puberty (as discussed earlier in this chapter) as well as other things:

- Everyone expects you to be girly and polite and nice even though the truth is some of us aren't like that.
- And also many people believe [sic] you're weak and can't do anything (especially boys again) – but we are just as capable and as strong as boys, even more maybe.

(Nia, Year 6 class, Socrates Primary)

Statements such as these may not be viewed as restrictions *per se* by students because they are expectations constantly breached by practice. As Nia wrote 'the truth is some of us aren't like that'.

Gender restrictions were largely viewed as personal, and able to be overcome. There was an individualised view of gender which suggested that strong people do not *feel* restrictions and everyone is able to be 'themselves'. When responding to some of the findings in the research, a pair of older girls at Socrates Primary suggested feeling gender restrictions related to not being confident: '[s]ome people feel [feel] restrictions because they are not confident and others are confident', while another group of older girls in the same class suggested the need to 'be yourself': '[s]ometimes it's just not about other people, you just need to be yourself'. Here there is a collision between structural inequality and the unquestioned belief in individual freedom. Things such as puberty may be viewed as 'natural' and therefore not a social restriction. Overall, it appears that the students believe there are gendered expectations which have consequences, yet some individuals are able to resist them. The costs of resistance are not mentioned and the view seems to be that girls can behave in alternative ways without consequences.

A discourse of individualism was also expressed by a number of the teachers and parents, which likely influenced students' views. Mrs Hartley (Year R/1 teacher, St Catherine's Primary) was teaching her students 'choice theory', which emphasises individualism and personal choice, although her students drew on individualism less than older students when discussing gender. Some teachers and parents utilised discourses of 'being yourself' and individual strength to downplay the significance of gender:

Miss Karidis: If they're a sort of secure kind of kid and they just- they're comfortable with who they are, I really don't think it matters what gender they are.

(Mrs Searle, Year 1 teacher and Miss Karidis, Year 6 teacher, Socrates Primary, second interview, is gender important to the students in your class?)

No I think she has a very st[r]ong personality and wouldn't let stereotype[s] stand in her way.

(Mother of Year 1 girl – emailed interview, Socrates Primary, do you think your daughter ever feels restricted by expectations about what a girl or boy should be like?)

Sexuality was also deemed important, where one mother suggested that young people might feel gender restrictions if they were unsure of their sexuality (presumably inferring if they think they might be gay):

Year 6 mother: I think that would be an issue for children that aren't sure of their sexuality/

Year 7 mother: Yes

Year 6 mother: that would be very very/

Year 7 mother: Hard

Year 6 mother: hard for them to fit in. Where do I belong? What should I be doing? But if- I think if your child's happy with who they- he or she is I don't think that causes any issues.

(Mothers of Year 6 boy and Year 7 boy, St Catherine's Primary)

Thus, gender restrictions, and the importance of gender in students' lives, were viewed as concerning only insecure people. Blaming gender for restrictions or disadvantages was considered to be unreasonable. This was again reflected by Miss Karidis when I asked her why some of the students in her class did not think the activities were relevant to their lives. She suggested that some of the 'mature' girls in her class would not have found the activities relevant because 'they've got their heads screwed on'. Miss Karidis thus implicitly suggested that gender is an individual problem that does not impact upon the 'mature', strong, and 'intelligent' girls in her class.

Relatedly, Mrs Searle discussed how she addressed comments about one gender being superior to the other:

CB: Do they think like their gender enables them to do certain things, or be good at certain things?

Mrs Searle: Um, like 'you're a girl you can skip', those kind of things?

CB: Yeah.

Mrs Searle: Not really... no.

CB: Or like 'I'm a boy so I'm better at sport than you'?

Mrs Searle: Yeah, you possibly hear that from time to time, especially with running or some skills, but, yeah, I mean I tend- I try to encourage a supportive environment so, things like that get shut down very quickly.

(both laugh)

CB: So what would you say if a child said something like that?

Mrs Searle: Um, it depends, possibly um *'that's not a very nice thing to say to someone'*, *'we're here to support each other'*, um, *'you need to encourage'*, *'as long as you're trying your best'*, um, *'some things- some people are better at some things than others'* and give examples. Um, yeah, *'work on your strengths, you know, we've all got different strengths'* and highlight that. Um, persistence is a big thing for us *'always persist and keep trying, it doesn't matter if you're not good at something keep persisting'*.

(emphases added, Mrs Searle, Year 1 Teacher, Socrates Primary, first interview)

Thus, when Mrs Searle responded to claims about gender superiority made by boys, she did so without addressing the gendered dimension of these comments. Instead, she drew on ideas of individualism, and told her students that everyone was different and good at something, and that they should keep persisting and trying. Students were reprimanded for saying things that were simply not 'nice'. Notably then, the idea that boys are better at sport is left unchallenged by the teacher. Mrs Searle's response appears to reflect the lack of strategies teachers are equipped with to deal with such comments about gender, and is also reflective of the current education context where feminist-informed work about gender equity has been overtaken by concern for boys (see, for example, Lingard and Douglas 1999), masking the gender element of such comments about girls.

Discourses of individualism fail to account for structural and social gender inequalities. Arguments for individualism were put forward not only by the students but also several of the teachers and parents. Thus, students do not have access to 'social literacy' offered by the adults around them. Although a discourse of individualism does not account for

structure (see, for example, Bacchi 1999, Chapter Five), it is interesting to consider how the notion of individualism was sometimes combined with feminist views. An individualist feminist approach is easy to critique,¹³ yet it does offer some kind of ‘you can do it’ and ‘be yourself’ discourses for the students to feel ‘empowered’ by. Alternative ways for students to be able to critique and reject gender restrictions and discrimination are difficult to imagine considering the messages they receive from their broader environment.

However, a discourse of individualism does not necessarily equate to equality and can be used to defend positions which are sexist or racist (Bulbeck 2009, 37). In the Year 6 class at Socrates Primary, a boy made a negative comment about girls, which offended one girl in particular. Rather than addressing the boy’s comment, Miss Karidis instead told the girl ‘you’re taking it personally sweetie. Just ignore what they’re saying, everyone’s entitled to their opinion alright’. Miss Karidis stressed that ‘everyone’s entitled to their opinion’, and asked the girl to ‘ignore’ the boy’s comments, both of which highlight an individualised approach to gender problems.

While some students recognised gender discrimination, it was more often the case that gender was viewed as an individual issue. This further helped to privilege boys and made structural restrictions for girls and women invisible. It seemed that students were aware of the need not to position themselves as victims of gender, instead drawing on discourses of being confident and strong to avoid gender restrictions. Furthermore, these discourses of individualism were supported by teachers and parents.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered how the participants in the research viewed gender relations, focusing on their constructions of privilege, discrimination, and equality. While at times the students had fragmented and contradictory ideas about gender, for the most part ‘external hegemony’ (Demetriou 2001) was evident in my research. This could be seen from many students privileging boys, often by viewing girls as inferior to boys and by

¹³ Goodkind (2009) refers to this as ‘commercialised feminism’ and critiques the influence of neo-liberalism on some forms of feminism. While there were no gender programs or policies at either school, Miss Karidis discussed the girls in her class being involved in a program called *Enlighten Education* (Enlighten Education n.d.), an illustrative example of the individualist, commercial approach to feminism. In the words of Miss Karidis, ‘it was about promoting um, um, self-esteem in girls and making them feel good about themselves and what makes you individual and all that’.

constructing boys as ‘the norm’. This ‘external hegemony’ also had some effect on how the students understood gender inequality. While there was some discussion and critique of sexism and gender disadvantages on girls and women (in relation to domestic work and the AFL), these were sometimes accepted practices. Despite some recognition of gender discrimination, and some clever ideas for designing posters, a discourse of individualism was often drawn on by the older students, parents, and teachers to downplay gender inequalities. This individualist approach was akin to ‘victimology’ increasingly found in critiques of feminism, welfare recipients and so on, but expressed here by claiming that only weak individuals would be subject to restrictions relating to gender.

Girls were much more likely to recognise and critique gender disadvantages and inequalities than boys. Renold suggests that the 10 and 11 year old boys in her research did not ‘see how boys and men benefited from the patriarchal dividend in education and society more widely’ (2004, 261). My findings indicate that some of the older boys were able to recognise male privilege, including that leaders are likely to be male.

As might be expected, the older students had a stronger understanding of many of the gender issues discussed in this chapter. However, a lack of awareness due to age is not necessarily negative. As Neff, Cooper and Woodruff consider (although they draw on the concept of ‘development’):

given that perceptions of greater male power and status may negatively impact girls’ developing sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and/or occupational aspirations, perhaps it is beneficial that there is at least some early time period in which development is not so constrained by the knowledge that men have superior standing in society (2007, 697).

Conversely, an awareness of gender inequality at a young age teamed with relevant teaching at primary school and high school about gender relations may help develop a stronger sense of gender justice amongst young people (Neff, et al. 2007, 697). While some of the students in my research were aware of gender disadvantages and inequalities, they did not have the frameworks to fully critique and understand them or the teachings to legitimate their views and experiences.

For the most part there was a lack of intervention from teachers and parents in terms of discourses of boys as superior/girls as inferior, and a lack of ability to adequately address issues of gender disadvantages and restrictions. Thorne argues that:

[s]ome adults excuse boys' displays of masculine superiority because they detect a defensive edge in the contempt for things feminine and because they figure it's just a stage, in spite of obvious links to adult male privilege and sexism (1993, 168).

There were a variety of responses from the teachers and parents in my research in relation to the issues discussed in this chapter. While it would be misleading to say that the teachers and parents explicitly privileged boys over girls, it was certainly the case that some of them were unaware of gender inequalities in their classrooms and society at large. This may be seen as a reflection of the current dominant discourses about gender and schooling in Australia, where a focus on boys' 'disadvantage', low academic achievement, and a call for male role models has overtaken the concern for gender equity in relation to girls (see, for example, Lingard and Douglas 1999). Teacher and parent understandings and actions are an important factor in influencing students' views. The ways in which teachers and parents supported 'external hegemony', and the difficulties that they had in recognising inequalities, is reflective of the 'gender regimes' of the schools and the larger 'gender order'. From this it is little wonder that a number of students viewed gender as an individual issue, and often had difficulty in understanding male privilege as relating to structure.

Next, in the Conclusions chapter, I tie the thesis together and focus on the two key arguments of the thesis relating to the influence of age on gender constructions and the fluidity of gender. I also provide suggestions for practice as well as consider some potentially fruitful areas for future research.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding Masculinities and Gender Relations in Young Age

Introduction

[T]he reproduction of hegemonic masculinity is not automatic. This pattern of social conduct has to be learned, and in the learning there are many opportunities for tensions and alternatives to appear.

(Connell 2003a, 15)

This thesis has aimed to advance understandings and theorising of the intersection of young age and gender, with a focus on masculinities. I argue that a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was frequently constructed in the classes in terms of sport, physicality and bodies, sexuality, and divisions of ‘boys’ stuff’ and ‘girls’ stuff’. While a process of hegemony was evident there were diverse and plural practices which could be accepted or subordinated depending on context and age. Furthermore, such practices could be combined with or challenging to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. While there was evidence of constructed hierarchies in the classrooms, these were fluid and changing, although more so for some boys than others. In contrast to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, a discourse of idealised femininity was constructed in terms of appearance and presentation, and particular personality traits, interests, and popular culture examples. As with boys, there was both acceptance of and engagement in a diverse range of practices. There was some evidence of hierarchies relating to practices amongst girls, although these were weaker than those amongst boys. A consideration of gender relations revealed how boys were sometimes privileged over girls. While some students recognised gender discrimination (against girls and occasionally against boys), and several designed posters relating to ideas about gender equality, a discourse of individualism was often drawn on to downplay gender inequalities. These findings illustrate the value of examining gender relationally and reveal both what Demetriou (2001) distinguishes as ‘internal hegemony’, where some boys/masculinities were privileged over others, and ‘external hegemony’, where boys/masculinities were privileged over girls/femininities.

Age Influences Gender

The ways in which age intersects with gender can be seen in terms of the similarities and differences between: primary school masculinities and adult or high school masculinities, age groups in primary school, and the views of the students compared with the teachers and parents.

This study supports the contention that, in Australia at least, it appears that a discourse of hegemonic masculinity begins with sport. As I argue, other aspects that Connell suggests are key to hegemonic masculinity, such as work, sexuality and/or fatherhood (1983, 22-26), are largely unavailable to primary school boys. While in this thesis I have shown the existence of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity amongst the students, this appears to be a form of *local* hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), because it is evident on a small-scale and is contextually specific. As Connolly argues, ‘the particular dominant form of masculinity ... is only made possible by, and actually only exists in, the context of the school’ (2006, 149). However, connections to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity at the ‘regional’ level were evident in my research in the form of privileging sport. The benefits gained from a broader discourse of hegemonic masculinity are not fully accessible to primary school boys because of their age. As a result of this, more attention needs to be paid to practices outside of this discourse, and to what might be referred to as non-hegemonic masculinities or practices. Because of their status as children/young people, boys are likely to be positioned as subordinate and/or marginalised in relation to adults and teenagers.

The fluidity of gender in young age is evident from the range of different practices that boys in my research moved across. An examination of the existence of hierarchies in each of the classrooms highlights that, while there were patterns of practices relating to masculinities, movement between these was more fluid than Connell’s theorising allows. Thus, the process of hegemony is often weak. This finding can be seen as a reflection of age as well as revealing ways to advance Connell’s theorising more broadly (I discuss this further below). A discourse of hegemonic masculinity has less strength for young boys and may not significantly influence all boys. Boys engage in diverse practices outside of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity (such as caring and showing emotions). However, despite this fluidity, such practices do not necessarily challenge a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, and instead may be combined with or exist alongside it.

Unlike a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, a discourse of idealised femininity was frequently constructed in terms of appearance and presentation, engaging in particular personality traits (such as being ‘nice’), maintaining friendships, and demonstrating an interest in ‘girls’ stuff’. Because of their young age, girls did not have access to all aspects of a discourse of idealised femininity, particularly practices relating to appearance and presentation. Therefore girls can be viewed as ‘trying on’ teenage or ‘adult’ femininities through, for example, the use of make-up. The negative views on female reproductive bodies evident in the older classes also highlights the importance of ‘adolescent’ or adult bodies to understandings of gender in young people’s lives. Girls are perceived as becoming abject and passive through ‘feminine’ bodies (including a central focus on appearance and reproduction), whereas boys are perceived as growing into powerful ‘masculine’ bodies (focusing on athleticism and strength).¹ However, as with boys, while many girls recognised a discourse of idealised femininity, they did not necessarily abide by it in full. This can be attributed, at least in part, to the greater freedom in gender practices that young age may allow. The younger students in particular were not always aware of what constituted discourses of hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity.

Despite their young age, when discussing gender the students often drew on aspects of adults’ lives relating to domestic work, bodily differences, and reproduction (in the form of pregnancy and childbirth). Thus, students are often looking to the future and are influenced by their perceptions of gender in adulthood, not just in young age. Young people are ‘encouraged to cast life in the future and subjunctive tenses’ (Thorne 1993, 17).

Comparisons Between Age Groups

While I have argued that constructions of gender in primary school are likely to differ somewhat from those relating to high school students and adults, primary school students are not a homogeneous group. This thesis has sought to consider similarities and differences between students near the beginning and at the end of primary school. Rather than theorising age in terms of a developmental psychology or socialisation framework, where gender is viewed as developed in ‘stages’ and as becoming increasingly fixed, this thesis has shown that the construction of gender in young age is diverse and fluid. However, as I noted earlier in this thesis, concepts of *social* development relating to age

¹ A striking example here is that girls’ participation in sport drops significantly when they begin to go through puberty or start high school (Slater and Tiggemann 2010).

were inextricably tied up in how the students constructed themselves, and how the teachers and parents discussed the students. Thus, I have made comparisons between the age groups, which can be seen as reflective of the construction and institutionalisation of childhood (James, et al. 1998, 173-174), rather than implying set stages of psychological development.

For both age groups, sport and physical bodies were highly important to the construction of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. All boys showed some complicity with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, at least some of the time. Some boys engaged in practices of hyper masculinities, often relating to behaviour which was viewed by other students as excessive, such as being disruptive and being overzealous in attempts to construct their masculinities via sport, violence, and the denigration of girls. Thus, hyper practices 'over-did' the subtleties required for a legitimating discourse of hegemonic masculinity. 'Different', potentially transgressive, practices outside of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity were taken up by some boys, although no boys were completely outside of the discourse. In terms of a discourse of idealised femininity, appearance was drawn on and policed by both age groups.

There were also a number of differences between how gender was constructed for the two age groups. Overall, the younger students were more likely to accept all boys and all girls regardless of their engagement in different gender practices. For boys this can in part be related to the context of junior primary school classrooms, and the finding that caring relations were more common amongst younger boys than older boys. In contrast, boys in the older classes not fitting with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity were more likely to be policed and were sometimes ostracised. Hence practices of subordination were more evident in the older classes. For girls there were less clear hierarchies than amongst boys, but there was still evidence of the marginalisation of particular girls or groups of girls.

Despite accepting a greater diversity of practices, the younger students more frequently drew on gender binaries ('boys' stuff' and 'girls' stuff') to construct dominant gender discourses relating to hair and clothing, and interests, activities, and popular culture than the older students. This highlights the younger students' simpler understandings of gender as a dichotomy. The younger students also showed less awareness of differences amongst boys and differences amongst girls than the older students. The older students more often focused on a discourse of hegemonic masculinity as relating to heterosexuality and the

rejection of homosexuality than the younger students. In terms of a discourse of idealised femininity, older students were more likely to be engaged in practices relating to working on presentation (such as wearing make-up), and more strongly policed aesthetic appearance than the younger students. The older students frequently drew on personality traits as part of a discourse of idealised femininity, which may reflect their advanced language skills and vocabulary compared with the younger students.

However, changes relating to the intersection of age and gender were not always linear, and older students were much more able to actively question dominant gender discourses. For example, older students more often than younger students critiqued the linking of boys with sport. This suggests that once students are more aware of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and how gender is constructed, it can be challenged more actively. Similarly, some of the older girls argued that expectations about being a girl were far removed from how they constructed – or wanted to construct – their genders. The older students were more able to challenge privileged gender discourses via their posters than the younger students. This included being able to take up more complex gender equality messages rather than reversing gender binaries. Furthermore, some of the older students drew on a discourse of individualism to argue that gender restrictions and inequalities could be overcome by the strength of individuals. Thus, while gender may be more restrictive at the end of primary school, at the same time these students have more strategies to directly challenge it than at the beginning of primary school because they tend to have more of an understanding of gender as a social construction.

Age differences were sometimes overridden by the contexts of the specific schools. While this thesis has not aimed to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis of the two schools, it is important to highlight the influence of context in understanding available gender discourses. The key distinction between the two schools was that a discourse of hegemonic masculinity focusing on sport was stronger at Socrates Primary. While sport was important at St Catherine's Primary, drawing on 'intelligence' could also be a positive contributor to constructing masculinities, to the extent that 'muscular intellectualness' (Redman and Mac an Ghail 1997) may be viewed as an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity. While sport is often key to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity in primary school research, the range of gender discourses available to students are dependent on the context of specific schools, which are often influenced by factors such as social class, ethnicity, and religion

(for masculinities research that explicitly compares different primary schools, see Bhana 2008; Connolly 2004; Epstein, et al. 2001; Skelton 2001; Swain 2006b).

Masculinities are Fluid and Incoherent

This thesis has emphasised the fluidity and incoherence of gender in young age. In particular, my findings demonstrate that masculinities (and femininities), in primary school at least, are messier than Connell's theorising can account for. Rather than using Connell's masculinities as 'types', I related them to overlapping *patterns of practice* and illustrated how students could move between what I described as 'contingent clusters of practices'. Importantly, this movement is exacerbated by young age where there is likely to be more allowance for freedom and flexibility in gender practices. It is also the case that students are only starting to learn about gender and dominant gender discourses and, therefore, they may not always be aware of gender hierarchies.

In order to be able to theorise the fluidity of masculinities, I have used Foucault's concept of discourse. I have followed the lead of others (see, for example, Beasley 2008; Elias and Beasley 2009), and drawn on the notion of a *discourse* of hegemonic masculinity. In addition, a discourse of idealised femininity was used to be able to articulate a privileged femininity which helped support a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The use of a *discourse* of hegemonic masculinity was more beneficial in understanding masculinities in my research than a static definition of hegemonic masculinity. Importantly, it better allowed for theorising movement between discourses and combining hegemonic and non-hegemonic practices. It also enabled a clear distinction between a discourse of hegemonic masculinity related to practices and ideals, as opposed to viewing power as 'held' by particular boys. Such a theoretical framing meant I could direct my analytical gaze at the plural discourses that boys engaged in, moved across, and attempted to combine rather than trying to fit each boy into (or explain each boy's practices using) a single pattern. This theoretical understanding illuminated the messiness and incoherence of masculinities amongst boys, while also accounting for the privileging of a particular discourse of masculinity.

However, as I have argued, even by reframing hegemonic masculinity as a discourse, the concept was not fully applicable to primary school students because of their young age. In particular, there was often a gap between how the students constructed a discourse of

hegemonic masculinity and the resources that boys had available to them to engage in the discourse.

Suggestions for Practice and Future Research

From this thesis a number of suggestions for both practice and future research can be proposed. How boys and girls understand, construct, and are influenced by dominant (and alternative) gender discourses are crucial to exploring the impact of gender in young age. Furthermore, a focus on practices in young age may illuminate possibilities for social change.

A deeper consideration of findings from feminist-informed studies of young masculinities is needed to counter popular psychology perspectives and the influential discourses around boys relating to notions such as ‘male role models’. There is already a large body of existing work in Australia advocating for feminist-informed teaching and education from early childhood through to high school (see, for example, Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert and Muspratt 2002; Blaise 2005; Clark 1989a; Davies 2003b; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Jordan 1995; Keddie 2006b; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore and Rennie 1997; Lingard and Douglas 1999; Lee-Thomas, et al. 2005; MacNaughton 2000; Martino, et al. 2004; O’Donovan 2006; Tsolidis 2001). Thus, here I build onto this work by providing some suggestions for practice that arise out this thesis.

The findings from this thesis highlight some strategies for practical intervention with primary school-aged people that could be used by teachers. However, the current education context in Australia should be acknowledged, where feminist-informed work about gender equity has often been overtaken by concern for boys in regards to their ‘disadvantage’, low academic achievement, and the suggested need for ‘male role models’ (for discussions see, for example, Gill 2005; Lingard and Douglas 1999; Mills, et al. 2007). Thus, there are likely to be difficulties for individual teachers and schools to implement gender equity programs and activities in the current context. This thesis demonstrates a continued need for finding ways to challenge such dominant discourses.

Several of the activities used with students in this thesis may be useful for teachers to explore issues about gender in their classes. In particular, designing posters aimed at illuminating ideas about gender equality highlights the advantages of such a strategy. What

this thesis suggests is that such activities need *teaching* to accompany them and could be used as lessons alongside learning about critical literacy and deconstructing gender. This supports previous work by Davies (2003b) in primary schools and Martino (1995; 1998; 2000a) in high schools which has also demonstrated the potential effectiveness of using activities to deconstruct texts and ideas about gender, and even assisting young people to create alternative texts. In addition, the media and popular culture are frequently discussed by primary school students and interact with how they negotiate, construct, understand, and even critique gender.² Therefore, critical literacy in relation to the media and popular culture also appears to be useful for deconstructing gender (see, for example, Woodcock 2008; Young 2000).³ However, as noted in relation to a study of numerous Australian high schools, deconstruction alone is not enough for gender reform in schools and must be combined with ideas for, and support of, alternative discourses about gender:

the most successful programmes ... assisted students and staff to draw out some positive counter-narratives, helped them to build both alternative sources of strength and status and new communities of support for other ways of being male and female (Kenway, et al. 1997, 210).

As argued earlier in this thesis, while there are no inherent differences between age groups, *social* differences relating to schooling and the construction and institutionalisation of childhood (James, et al. 1998, 173-174) mean that students often discuss themselves, and are positioned, in particular ways relating to their age group. Thus, specific attention should be paid to how gender equity strategies would work best for different age groups considering that these constructions influence students, especially in the school context. This thesis suggests that for students near the beginning of primary school a focus on breaking gender binaries would be useful. In addition, because of their young age, students are not necessarily aware of dominant gender discourses; hence, ways of disrupting this learning could also be implemented. Later in primary school students could be given strategies and avenues for challenging and critiquing dominant gender discourses (see Davies 2003b). This would be particularly useful to assist students to resist dominant discourses and legitimate their own practices. The students in the research, particularly

² Aside from this thesis, the links between young people's engagement with the media and popular culture and negotiations of gender is evident from numerous other studies (see, for example, Aasebø 2005; Brookes and Kelly 2009; Buckingham 1993; Myers and Raymond 2010; Willett 2006).

³ Although, as Buckingham warns, it is important not to oversimplify young people's engagement with the media, or to denigrate popular culture and people who gain pleasure from it (1993, 112).

from the older classes, relied largely on a discourse of individualism when justifying their own behaviours outside of dominant gender discourses (as well as when discussing notions of equality). Supporting alternative practices and expanding ways of ‘doing boy’ (and ‘doing girl’) are necessary for greater acceptance of every student in primary school (Nordberg, et al. 2006). Students, teachers, and parents all showed some awareness that they were expected to conform to a gender equality discourse. Therefore, the challenge is to actually engage students in showing how gender equality is relevant to them, particularly to boys who may not see the benefits of ‘anti-sexist’ work. Ideas about gender equality could be linked in with broader discourses of fairness and equality, which students from both age groups in this thesis showed some support for. Future research may further illuminate the suitability of practical interventions to deconstruct dominant gender discourses for the different age groups.

The findings in this thesis also highlight the need to adapt interventions to the particular classrooms/schools and the local forms which dominant gender discourses take. To do this it is crucial to identify the content and process of a *local* discourse of hegemonic masculinity in specific schools before considering how this may be deconstructed. Considering that sport is often key to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity in primary schools, in English-speaking countries at least, a school focus on ways in which this can be deconstructed could be beneficial. In other words, ‘a critical sociology of sport’ is likely to be useful in many schools (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003, 256-261).

There are likely to be difficulties for teachers to conduct such activities and interventions with students, and the frameworks within which they teach need stronger commitments to gender equity to allow them to do this. Teachers require the support of their schools to implement teaching about gender equity, and a whole school approach is likely to be necessary for interventions to be successful. There is also a broader need for education systems to have strong policy commitments to gender equity based on research in schools examining the socially constructed nature of gender, which, in turn, will allow teachers a better space to be able to deconstruct gender with their students (for related arguments see, for example, Allard 2004; Martino, et al. 2004). In addition, it appeared from my findings that there is a need for enhancing teacher knowledges about the social construction of gender (see also Keddie 2006b; Martino and Berrill 2003; Martino, et al. 2004). Following Keddie’s approach, there may be advantages for teachers in the provision of training specifically in relation to ongoing gendered impacts within classrooms:

[i]n terms of pedagogy as transformative practice, a gender justice perspective that draws on feminist principles to focus on valuing difference and diversity provides a platform for teachers to begin articulating affirmative 'ways of being' with boys and, within this framework, to begin questioning and challenging rather than reinscribing the narrow or dominant versions of gender and hierarchical constructions of masculinity that constrain boys' (and girls') academic and social outcomes. (2006b, 102)

There are already some teachers and educators who do implement (or attempt to implement) feminist-informed teaching (see, for example, Blaise 2005; MacNaughton 2000). On the other hand, not all teachers will be willing or enthusiastic to engage in training and teaching relating to disrupting dominant gender discourses. As several others have noted, teachers' views about gender, including how they construct their own gender, influence their approaches to teaching students and often reproduce dominant gender discourses (see, for example, Bhana 2009; Martino 2008; Martino and Frank 2006; Martino, et al. 2004; Skelton 2001, Chapter Six).

Further research concerning the interaction of gender and young age is necessary. A key way to develop more sophisticated understandings and theorising of gender and young age is to conduct further empirical research with young people, and the people central to their lives. As I have shown in this thesis, research focusing on masculinities needs to also include girls to understand the broader gender picture. In addition, listening to the voices of young people, and not privileging the voices of adults, is crucial to improving understandings of gender in young age. This thesis has shown how the inclusion of multiple voices illuminated *differences* between how students, parents, and teachers understood gender. Multiple voices also provided a broader understanding of students' lives. For example, parent interviews *added to* student contributions, particularly in relation to revealing diverse practices amongst boys. Further empirical research comparing student and adult voices is necessary, both to reduce the adult-centricity of thinking about young people, and to ensure that gender equity work is relevant for students. Additionally, strategies for improving gender equity work and understandings of gender in young age could be added to by more detailed consideration of the impact of students' home lives on their constructions of gender at school. In other words, it is necessary to pay attention to the multiple and conflicting discourses about gender to which young people are exposed.

Alongside age, closer attention to how ethnicity, social class, and other contextual factors influence the constructions of masculinities and femininities is also needed. This thesis showed that a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was slightly different in the two schools. In addition, while only a small sample, there appeared to be differences in the acceptance of students outside the dominant ethnic groups at the schools. This acceptance related to the age of the students and the context of the junior primary school classroom (younger students were more likely to be accepting), and potentially the specific ethnic backgrounds of the students. Research focusing on intersectionality and the context of schools would be useful in understanding how other social factors interweave with gender and influence possibilities for resistance to dominant gender discourses.

A consideration of broader influences, such as the media and popular culture, would also further understandings of how young people learn about gender discourses. In my research young people's understandings of gender were influenced by the media often in the form of popular culture from the United States and representations of sport on Australian television. Thus, attention to the media may reveal how students form their understandings about gender outside of their own experiences. Importantly, the focus should be on how young people understand gender in relation to forms of the media and popular culture, and the meanings they make from these, rather than textual or content analyses by adult researchers.

Finally, further research requires a deeper consideration of how masculinities theorising may be improved to understand the intersection of age and masculinities and, relatedly, to account for the fluidity of masculinities. The findings from this thesis highlight the need for more sophisticated sociological ways of understanding the impact of young age on gender. Rather than viewing gender as becoming increasingly cemented in age, a deeper consideration of how gender changes in less linear ways is vital. Further research comparing gender constructions across different age groups from sociological perspectives is necessary, as well as rethinking how comparisons of different age groups may be theorised in ways which do not reflect developmental discourses. One way of doing this would be to conduct longitudinal research (for an example, see Best 1983). Following the same group(s) of students across primary school would help to illuminate the *social* changes in gender for different age groups, and how this is influenced by particular factors (such as specific teachers, popular culture, and extra-curricular activities). More broadly, research examining gender constructions and understandings in primary school compared

with the social context of high school would also extend knowledge about the intersection of gender and young age.

The tensions caused by young age with conforming to dominant gender discourses illuminate the fluidity and incoherence of gender. Examining the understandings and practices of primary school students highlights the socially constructed nature of gender and questions the stability of taken-for-granted norms. As James, Jenks and Prout argue:

[a]lthough adults themselves have to be constrained into social order, in true Durkheimian fashion children offer living exemplars of the very margins of that order, of its volatility and, in fact, its fragility (1998, 198).

Thus, by examining gender in the lives of young people, possibilities for social change become apparent. A focus on young age and gender, and how this intersection may illuminate ruptures in or challenge dominant gender discourses, is crucial for feminism.

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Appendix One: Studies of Masculinities and Primary School-aged Boys

Publication	Country	Gender Focus	Age(s)													
			?	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15		
Ashley (2003)	England	Mascs														
Baker-Sperry (2007)	US	Gender														
Bhana (2008)	S. Africa	Mascs														
Buckingham (1993)	England	Mascs														
Clark and Paechter (2007)	England	Gender														
Connolly (2004)	N. Ireland	Mascs														
Connolly (2006)	England	Mascs														
Davies (2003b)	Australia	Gender	Yrs 5, 6													
Davis (2001)	US	Mascs														
Francis (1998)	England	Gender														
Gilbert and Gilbert (1998)	Australia	Mascs	Primary and High													
Hasbrook and Harris (1999)	US	Mascs	Yrs 1, 2													
Keddie (2003c)	Australia	Mascs														
Korobov (2006)	US	Mascs														
Letts (2001)	US	Mascs	Yrs 1, 4, 6													
Lodge (2005)	Ireland	Mascs														
Mac an Ghail and Haywood (2007)	England	Mascs														
McCaughy and Tischler (2010)	US	Mascs	Yrs 6-8													
McGuffey and Rich (1999)	US	Mascs														
Nespor (2000)	US	Mascs														
Newman, Woodcock and Dunham (2006)	England	Gender														
Nordberg, Saar and Hellman (2006)	Sweden	Mascs	+ 3-4													
Redman, Epstein, Kehily, et al. (2002)	England	Mascs														
Renold (2005)	England	Gender														
Skelton (2001)	England	Mascs														
Swain (2006b)	England	Mascs														
Thorne (1993)	US	Gender	K, Yrs 2, 4, 5													
Warren (2003)	England	Mascs														
Willett (2006)	England	Gender														
Young (2000)	US	Mascs														
Total				4	7	8	8	10	16	11	5	3	1	1		

Appendix Two: Information Letters and Consent Forms

Student Participation Letter and Consent Form



GENDER, WORK & SOCIAL INQUIRY AND POLITICS
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

CLARE BARTHOLOMAEUS
Postgraduate Research Candidate

XXXX, XXXX
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
SA 5005
AUSTRALIA
TELEPHONE +61 8 XXXX XXXX
clare.bartholomaeus@adelaide.edu.au

[date]

Dear parent/guardian/caregiver,

My name is Clare Bartholomaeus and I am a PhD student at the University of Adelaide in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. My research is about identity and how children understand being girls and boys. This research is important to gain a greater understanding of how boys and girls experience gender during primary school, and what pleasures and/or restrictions children feel by being girls or boys. My thesis has the working title of *Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender*. I have the approval of your child's class teacher and the Junior Years Head of School [for St Catherine's Primary this was changed to principal] to work with the class.

This letter is seeking your permission for your child to participate in the research project. After reading this letter please fill out the attached consent form and demographics form and return them to your child's class teacher **before [date]**. The research in your child's class will commence on [date].

What activities will my child be involved in?:

The research involves activities with children which will be spread out over four sessions. Each session will take approximately 1-1½ hours and will be comprised of two short activities. There will be one session per week over four weeks in an appropriate lesson time organised with the class teacher. Your child will be involved in:

- Discussing what parts of their identity are important to them (eg gender, age, nationality etc).
- An individual written activity and related whole class discussion session about who children look up to. (Children will have assistance reading and answering the questionnaire if needed.)
- Looking at pictures of famous people to see what children understand as 'manly' and 'womanly'.
- A whole class brainstorming session about different 'types' of boys and girls.
- An individual written activity about children's favourite TV show, movie or book and the character they like the best and least.
- A whole class session of viewing and discussing clips from (age appropriate) movies to talk about being girls and boys. The clips provisionally chosen for viewing are from *Wall-E* (G) and *Kung Fu Panda* (PG). [for the older classes this was listed as *Kung Fu Panda* (PG) and *The Simpsons* (Episode HABF12 'Girls Just Want to Have Sums')]
- Following on from these activities children will be asked to design their own activity or something of their choosing (eg a drawing) about being boys and girls either individually or in pairs. This will be done to give children a change to present their own views and to see how they understood the other activities.

The research will also involve the views of class teachers and interested parents/guardians/caregivers to compare child and adult views (see the attached form if you would like to express your interest in attending a focus group).

Possible benefits to your child:

Possible benefits to your child include improved skills in brainstorming, group discussion and discussing texts. Further possible benefits to participants include being critical of how gender is portrayed in popular culture, and being aware of how gender is constructed. At the conclusion of the research findings will be reported back to the class teachers and the school. Doing this may also benefit your child

Issues of confidentiality:

All information will remain confidential and there will be nothing in the writing about the research which will allow identification of the names or responses of any student who participates. Similarly, the name of the school will not be identified. The activities will be audio-recorded. All research records and data from this research will be kept securely in a lockable filing cabinet at the university for the duration of the research project. Data will be kept for writing the PhD and related publications for a minimum of five years after publication in line with university policy. The results of this research will be published in a PhD thesis and possible related publications. Your child's privacy will be protected by the allocation of a pseudonym or by referring only to their age, year level and sex.

What do I do now?:

In seeking your consent for your child to participate it is understood that you may decide to withdraw your child from the project at any time. Your child will also be asked if s/he would like to participate in the research and is free not to answer questions or withdraw from the project at any time. If you are happy for your child to participate in the project please sign the attached consent form and fill out the demographics form and return them to the class teacher before [date]. You can also express your interest in attending a parent/guardian/caregiver focus group on your child's consent form. Your support of this research would be appreciated. If you do not give consent for your child or your child chooses not to participate then they will go into another class as decided by the class teacher.

Further enquiries:

If you have any questions or concerns with the research you can contact me on XXXX XXXX or clare.bartholomaeus@adelaide.edu.au. This project has been approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee [for the Catholic school approval by the Catholic Education Office South Australia was also noted]. The Secretary of the University Committee can be contacted on XXXX XXXX if you would like to discuss the project with an independent person. My primary supervisor, Associate Professor Chris Beasley (Head of Politics Discipline) can also be contacted should you need further information on XXXX XXXX or chris.beasley@adelaide.edu.au. There is also a complaints form attached which you should keep along with this letter.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Clare Bartholomaeus

CONSENT FORM FOR CHILD

To be Completed by Parent/Guardian/Caregiver

I have read and understood the information letter about the research *Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender*.

I am aware that:

- the information my child provides will be kept anonymous
- the sessions will be audio-recorded
- my child is free to withdraw from the research at any time
- the information gained in the research may be published
- I should retain a copy of the Consent Form, when complete, and the attached Information Letter and Complaints Form

I _____ (your name)

DO/DO NOT give consent for my child _____
(child's name)

to participate in the research being conducted by Clare Bartholomaeus.

_____ (Parent/Guardian/Caregiver signature)

_____ (Date)

PLEASE ALSO FILL OUT AND RETURN THE ATTACHED BACKGROUND DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

* * * * *

PARENT/GUARDIAN/CAREGIVER INVOLVEMENT – Expression of Interest

As mentioned in the cover letter, the research will also involve focus groups aimed to explore parents'/guardians'/caregivers' experiences of their own children in terms of being boys and girls. The focus group will involve you participating in discussions about your views on how being a boy or girl affects your child(ren), whether you think gender matters to your child(ren), and how you think your child(ren) understand gender. All views will be appreciated.

Focus groups will be used to enable discussion amongst parents/guardians/caregivers. The number and size of focus groups depends on the interest of parents/guardians/caregivers of children in this class. Focus groups will be audio-recorded. They will likely take place at the school and convenient times will be arranged to suit the most people and will take approximately one hour.

If you are interested in participating, please fill out the details below. These details will be used to provide you with more information and to contact you with the details of when the focus group will take place:

Your Name(s): _____

Email address: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

Postal Address (optional): _____

The times that would best suit me/us are (please circle all possible times):

During school Directly after school After 6pm
Mondays Tuesdays Wednesdays Thursdays Fridays

Please return *this page* and the *background demographics form* only to the class teacher before [date].

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Document for people who are participants in a research project

CONTACTS FOR INFORMATION ON PROJECT AND INDEPENDENT COMPLAINTS
PROCEDURE

The Human Research Ethics Committee is obliged to monitor approved research projects. In conjunction with other forms of monitoring it is necessary to provide an independent and confidential reporting mechanism to assure quality assurance of the institutional ethics committee system. This is done by providing research participants with an additional avenue for raising concerns regarding the conduct of any research in which they are involved.

The following study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee:

Project title: **Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender**

1. If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the project co-ordinator:

Associate Professor Chris Beasley
Head of Politics
School of History and Politics
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
XXXX, XXXX
The University of Adelaide
SA 5005

Or by email chris.beasley@adelaide.edu.au
Telephone: XXXX XXXX

2. If you wish to discuss with an independent person matters related to
 - making a complaint, or
 - raising concerns on the conduct of the project, or
 - the University policy on research involving human participants, or
 - your rights as a participant

contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretary on phone (08) XXXX XXXX

Background Demographics Form

BACKGROUND DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

The background information you provide is basic demographic information about participants and their families in order to more fully understand the contexts of children's lives. It is confidential and no one will be identified.

Please fill out some background information about your child who is participating in the study:

Age (in years) (please circle one): 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

Year Level (please circle one): R 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Sex: _____

Country of Birth: _____

What suburb does your child live in?: _____

Who does your child live with most of the time? (please fill out one line for each person):

Relationship to Child: eg. biological mother, brother, step-father	Age: eg. 39 years old	Country Born: eg. Australia	Work/Study Status: eg. full-time job, part-time job, Year 4 student	Occupation (if employed): eg. lawyer, high school teacher, plumber	Marital Status: eg. married, single, divorced, de facto

Please return this page and the consent form only to the class teacher before [date].

Teacher Interview Letter and Consent Form



**THE UNIVERSITY
OF ADELAIDE**
AUSTRALIA

GENDER, WORK & SOCIAL INQUIRY AND POLITICS
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

CLARE BARTHOLOMAEUS
Postgraduate Research Candidate

XXXX, XXXX
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
SA 5005
AUSTRALIA
TELEPHONE +61 8 XXXX XXXX
clare.bartholomaeus@adelaide.edu.au

[date]

Dear teacher,

Thank you for involving your class in the research *Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender*. As part of the research informal interviews with teachers will also be conducted.

Your participation will involve:

- An initial interview before any activities with students in your class. The purpose of this interview is to find out your views about children and gender. In particular you will be asked about the behaviour of boys and girls in your class and how you think gender matters to children. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour and will likely be done after school or whenever is most convenient to you.
- A follow-up interview approximately one month after the activities with your class. Ideally the Year One and Year Six [this was substituted for Year 7 at St Catherine's Primary] teachers involved in the research from each school will be interviewed together to reflect on the key findings from the research from a teachers' perspective. If this is not possible you will be interviewed individually. The purpose of the follow-up interview is to allow you to contribute your understandings and opinions of the findings to the analysis of the data. This will also be done in order to enable a form of collaborative relationship between teachers and researchers. This interview will take approximately one hour and will likely be done after school or whenever is most convenient to both teachers.

All information will remain confidential and there will be nothing in the writing about the research which will allow identification of the names or responses of any participant or the school. The activities will be audio-recorded. All research records and data from this research will be kept securely in a lockable filing cabinet at the university for the duration of the project. Data will be kept for writing the PhD and related publications for a minimum of five years after publication in line with university policy. The results of this research will be published in a PhD thesis and possible related publications. In seeking your consent it is understood that you may decide to withdraw from the project at any time and that you are also free not to answer questions.

If you have any questions or concerns with the research you can contact me on XXXX XXXX or clare.bartholomaeus@adelaide.edu.au. This project has been approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee [for the Catholic school approval by the Catholic Education Office South Australia was also noted]. The Secretary of the University Committee can be contacted on XXXX XXXX if you would like to discuss the project with an independent person. My primary supervisor, Associate Professor Chris Beasley (Head of Politics Discipline) can also be contacted should you need further information on XXXX XXXX or chris.beasley@adelaide.edu.au. There is also a complaints form attached which you should keep along with this letter.

Thank you for your involvement,

Clare Bartholomaeus

CONSENT FORM

Class Teacher Interviews

To be completed by the class teacher.

I have read and understood the information letter about the research ***Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender.***

I am aware that:

- the information I provide will be kept anonymous
- the focus group sessions will be audio-recorded
- I am free to withdraw from the research at any time
- the information gained in the research may be published
- I should retain a copy of the Consent Form, when complete, and the attached Information Letter and Complaints Form

I _____ (your name)

consent to take part in the research being conducted by Clare Bartholomaeus.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Document for people who are participants in a research project

CONTACTS FOR INFORMATION ON PROJECT AND INDEPENDENT COMPLAINTS
PROCEDURE

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The following study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee:

Project title: **Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender**

1. If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the project co-ordinator:

Associate Professor Chris Beasley
Head of Politics
School of History and Politics
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
XXXX, XXXX
The University of Adelaide
SA 5005

Or by email chris.beasley@adelaide.edu.au
Telephone: XXXX XXXX

2. If you wish to discuss with an independent person matters related to
 - making a complaint, or
 - raising concerns on the conduct of the project, or
 - the University policy on research involving human participants, or
 - your rights as a participant

contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretary on phone (08) XXXX XXXX

Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Interview Letter and Consent Form



GENDER, WORK & SOCIAL INQUIRY AND POLITICS
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

CLARE BARTHOLOMAEUS
Postgraduate Research Candidate

XXXX, XXXX
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
SA 5005
AUSTRALIA
TELEPHONE +61 8 XXXX XXXX
clare.bartholomaeus@adelaide.edu.au

[date]

Dear [name of parent],

Thank you for your interest in attending a parent/guardian/caregiver focus group for the research project *Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender*. As determined by the expression of interest forms from the parents/guardians/caregivers from your child's class, the details of the focus groups are below.

When will the focus group take place?

As determined by the expression of interest forms, there will be two focus groups times with parents/guardians/caregivers from your child's class [for the Year 6/7 class there was one time organised from parent preferences]. These will be held on:

- [dates]

Please let me know which focus group you will be attending (on the attached consent form). The focus groups will take place at the school. Please meet [place to meet at school]. The focus group will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

How many people will be in each focus group?

Due to interest and when parents/guardians/caregivers are available, the focus groups will likely have 1 to 4 participants in each. This means that there is a chance that you may be involved in an individual interview. Please let me know if this does not suit you and we can try to make a different arrangement. The small size of the focus groups will allow for relaxed, informal discussion.

What questions will be asked in the focus group?

The focus groups will be informal and I am interested in your own experiences of your children in terms of gender. This will involve general discussion questions such as:

- Where do you think your child learns about being a girl or a boy from?
- How do you feel children learn about being boys and girls at school?
- Do you think being a boy or a girl is important to your child(ren)?
- At what age did being a girl or a boy start mattering to your child? (if it does)

Confidentiality and Ethics:

All information will remain confidential and there will be nothing in the writing about the research which will allow identification of the names or responses of any participant or the school. The focus groups will be audio-recorded. Data will be kept for writing the PhD and related publications for a minimum of five years after publication in line with university policy. In seeking your consent it is understood that you may decide to withdraw from the project at any time and that you are also free not to answer questions.

If you have any questions or concerns with the research you can contact me at clare.bartholomaeus@adelaide.edu.au or on XXXX XXXX. This project has been approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee [for the Catholic school approval by the Catholic Education Office South Australia was also noted]. The Secretary of the University Committee can be contacted on XXXX XXXX if you would like to discuss the project with an independent person. My primary supervisor, Associate Professor Chris Beasley (Head of Politics Discipline) can also be contacted should you need further information on XXXX XXXX or chris.beasley@adelaide.edu.au. There is also a complaints form attached which you should keep along with this letter.

What do I do now?

To confirm your participation please fill out the consent form and post to me, Clare Bartholomaeus, at: XXXX. XXXX, North Terrace, The University of Adelaide, SA 5005. On the form please specify which focus group you will attend. Alternatively, you can reply via email at clare.bartholomaeus@adelaide.edu.au to let me know which focus group you will attend.

Thank you for your involvement and I look forward to meeting you at the focus group,

Clare Bartholomaeus

CONSENT FORM

Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Focus Groups

To be Completed by Parent/Guardian/Caregiver.

I have read and understood the information letter about the research *Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender.*

I am aware that:

- the information I provide will be kept anonymous
- the focus group sessions will be audio-recorded
- I am free to withdraw from the research at any time
- the information gained in the research may be published
- I should retain a copy of the Consent Form, when complete, and the attached Information Letter and Complaints Form

I _____ (your name)

consent to take part in the research being conducted by Clare Bartholomaeus.

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

I will be attending the focus group on (please tick one):

[date]

[date]

Please either:

post this form only to:

Clare Bartholomaeus
XXXX, XXXX
North Terrace
The University of Adelaide
SA 5005

or

email me at clare.bartholomaeus@adelaide.edu.au to confirm your attendance and specify which focus group you will be coming to

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

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The following study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee:

Project title: **Gender Matters?: Primary school students and gender**

1. If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the project co-ordinator:

Associate Professor Chris Beasley
Head of Politics
School of History and Politics
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
XXXX, XXXX
The University of Adelaide
SA 5005

Or by email chris.beasley@adelaide.edu.au
Telephone: XXXX XXXX

2. If you wish to discuss with an independent person matters related to
 - making a complaint, or
 - raising concerns on the conduct of the project, or
 - the University policy on research involving human participants, or
 - your rights as a participant

contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretary on phone (08) XXXX XXXX

Appendix Three: Participant Details

The participant details are represented in tables over the next few pages. The data in all of the tables has been based on the demographic forms filled out by parents/guardians. Some forms were incomplete or not returned so where possible I have used information from student activities to fill in missing data. Question marks indicate where no data was available. Ethnic background specifies where students and/or parents were born in countries outside of Australia, as well as more broadly denoting the ethnicities that the students expressed in the activities (particularly the identity activity from the first session, see Appendix Six for details). Students were unlikely to name their ethnic background if it was 'Anglo'. However, several students described themselves as 'White' in the identity activity so I have included this in the table if they had not been identified specifically from an ethnic background. The mothers interviewed at Socrates Primary were from Greek backgrounds, and the mothers interviewed at St Catherine's Primary could be identified as 'White'.

Mrs Searle's Year 1 Class, Socrates Primary

Name	Year Level	Age	Gender	Ethnic Background
Aaliyah	1	6	Girl	Ethiopian (born?, parent)
Ari	1	6	Boy	Greek
Cosmo	1	6	Boy	Greek
Danny	1	7	Boy	Korean (parents)
Effie	1	6	Girl	Greek
Eleni	1	7	Girl	Greek
Elias	1	6	Boy	Greek
Helen	1	6	Girl	Greek (parent)
Katerina	1	6	Girl	Greek
Loukas	1	6	Boy	Greek
Manolis	1	7	Boy	Greek, Cypriot (parents)
Min	1	7	Girl	Asian (Korean?) (born?)
Petros	1	6	Boy	Greek
Poppy	1	7	Girl	Greek
Rosa	1	6	Girl	Greek
Spiro	1	7	Boy	Greek
Stelios	1	6	Boy	Greek
Theo	1	6	Boy	Greek
Yolanda	1	7	Girl	Greek (parent)

Miss Karidis's Year 6 Class, Socrates Primary

Name	Year Level	Age	Gender	Ethnic Background
Alexi	6	11	Boy	Greek
Amin	6	12	Boy	Afghan (born)
Aphrodite	6	11	Girl	Greek
Arthur	6	11	Boy	Greek
Christos	6	11	Boy	Greek
Despina	6	11	Girl	Greek (parent)
Eileen	6	11	Girl	Chinese (born, parents)
Georgina	6	12	Girl	Greek, Cypriot (parent)
Gregory	6	12	Boy	Greek (parent)
Ivan	6	12	Boy	Serbian (parent)
Jim	6	11	Boy	Greek
Krista	6	11	Girl	Greek
Lambros	6	12	Boy	Greek (parent)
Lela	6	12	Girl	Korean (born)
Marika	6	11	Girl	Greek
May	6	11	Girl	Chinese (born, parent/s)
Mila	6	12	Girl	Serbian (parent), Croatian (parent)
Nia	6	11	Girl	Greek
Nikoletta	6	11	Girl	Greek
Philip	6	12	Boy	Portuguese (parent), Greek
Rigas	6	11	Boy	Greek
Sean	6	11	Boy	English – Irish national (parent)
Stavros	6	11	Boy	Greek
Stella	6	12	Girl	Greek
Toula	6	11	Girl	Greek (born, parent)
Vassilis	6	11	Boy	Greek
Vicky	6	11	Girl	Greek
Yannis	6	12	Boy	Greek

Mrs Hartley's Year R/1 Class, St Catherine's Primary

Name	Year Level	Age	Gender	Ethnic Background
Alicia	1	6	Girl	Spanish (parent)
Blake	R	6	Boy	'White'
Chloe	1	6	Girl	?
Dylan	1	6	Boy	?
Ella	1	6	Girl	?
Ethan	1	6	Boy	?
Gracie	R	6	Girl	'White'
Hayley	1	6	Girl	'White'
Isabella	1	6	Girl	?
Jess	1	7	Girl	'White'
John	1	6	Boy	Greek (parent)
Jordan	1	6	Boy	Filipino (parent)
Joshua	1	6	Boy	'White'
Kwan	1	6	Boy	South Korean (born, parents)
Marko	?	?	Boy	Yugoslavian (parent)
Matt	1	7	Boy	?
Michael	R	6	Boy	Greek (parent)
Narissa	1	6	Girl	Greek (parent)
Scout	1	6	Girl	'White'
Sienna	R	6	Girl	'White'

Daniel's Year 6/7 Class, St Catherine's Primary

Name	Year Level	Age	Gender	Ethnic Background
Aaron	7	13	Boy	?
Abbey	7	12	Girl	?
Ashlee	7	13	Girl	'White'
Bec	7	12	Girl	'White'
Caleb	6	11	Boy	New Zealander (parent)
Cara	6	11	Girl	Vietnamese (parents)
Deanna	7	13	Girl	English (parent)
Esther	6	11	Girl	Zambian (born), African (parents)*
Fiona	6	12	Girl	Northern Irish (parent)
Jack	?	?	Boy	?
Jade	6	11	Girl	Italian
Jarrold	7	13	Boy	'White'
Kai	6	11	Boy	French (parent)
Lawrence	7	12	Boy	Hong Kong (born)
Lily	7	12	Girl	'White'
Lucinda	7	12	Girl	?
Madison	6	11	Girl	?
Mikayla	6	11	Girl	'White'
Mitch	6	12	Boy	'White'
Peter	7	12	Boy	Vietnamese (parents)
Raj	7	12	Boy	Indian (born, parents)
Regan	7	13	Girl	New Zealander (parent)
Ryan	?	?	Boy	?
Sarah	7	13	Girl	'White'
Tash	6	12	Girl	Italian
Tony	6	11	Boy	Italian (parent)
Tori	7	12	Girl	'White'
Tyson	6	12	Boy	'White'
Zach	7	12	Boy	?

* I have not specified where Esther's parents were born because it may make her identifiable.

Interviewed Parents

Parent/guardian	Age*	Work Status	Gender of Child	Year Level of Child	Age of Child	Siblings of Child
<i>Socrates Primary</i>						
Mother	40	Casual	Girl	1	6	Older sister, younger brother
Mother (via email)	40	Part-time	Girl	1	6	Older sister
Mother	50	Part-time	Boy	6	11	Older sister, older brother
<i>St Catherine's Primary</i>						
Mother	35	Part-time	Girl	Reception	6	Younger brother
Mother	45	Part-time	Boy	1	6	Younger sister
Mother (joint interview)	45	Home duties	Boy	6	12	Older brother
Mother (joint interview)	40	Part-time	Boy	7	13	Younger sister

* The ages of the mothers have been rounded to the nearest 5 years so participants are not identifiable.

Appendix Four: Teacher Interview Questions

1. Different behaviour of boys and girls
 - a. Have you noticed any differences in behaviour by the boys and girls in your class? (*school work, how they treat others, activities/games/sports they do?*)
 - b. If so, what differences have you noticed? (*aggression, interest in things e.g. sport, academic success*)
 - c. When does this occur? (*setting, with who*)
 - d. How would you explain these differences? (*i.e. biology, socialisation/up-bringing, expectations*)

2. Differences amongst boys and amongst girls
 - a. Is this different behaviour the same for all boys and girls? (*i.e. are there differences amongst boys and amongst girls?*)
 - b. What kind of range of behaviour is there for boys and for girls?
 - c. Do the children seem to be aware of this range? (*different ways of being a girl or boy?/different 'types' of boys and girls?*)

3. Gender mattering to children
 - a. Do you think gender matters to the children in your class?
 - i. Are they conscious of it in their everyday behaviour?
 - ii. When does it matter? (*i.e. in which settings, with who*) Different in all boy or all girl settings?
 - iii. Does it influence the way they act? In terms of –
 1. expectations, - feel they are expected to act in certain ways
 2. restrictions, - feel restricted in what they can and can't do by their gender (and are they restricted/monitored by other children?)
 3. enjoyment, - feel their gender enables to them do certain things or be good at certain things
 - b. What do you think matters to children more than gender? (*e.g. age, culture, interests*) When?
 - c. How important is gender compared with these other factors?
 - d. When do you think gender starts mattering to children? (*age*)
 - e. What kind of changes in gender behaviour and awareness take place across primary school?
 - f. Does it become more flexible or more restrictive?

4. Where gender information comes from
 - a. Where do you think children get their information about being a boy or a girl from?
 - i. How important is school? (and what parts of school – curriculum, teachers, peers)
 - ii. How important are other places? (*including parents, siblings, friends, media – TV shows, movies, music, books, newspapers, magazines, role models*)
 - iii. Do you think children learn about gender from role models?
 1. Who might these role models be?
 2. What do they learn about gender from these people?

5. Non-gender stereotypic class materials
 - a. Have you implemented or would you like to implement any non-gender stereotypic activities or materials in your class?
 - i. If so, how have these worked?
 - ii. Like you thought they would?
 1. how,
 2. why/why not,
 3. what could be improved upon,
 4. what influences could have counteracted this
 - b. Do you have any gender equity programs or guidelines in your school?
 - i. Have they informed your activities/materials? If yes, how?
6. Involvement in study
 - a. What are you interested about in this research?
 - b. Why did you agree to have you and your class participate?
 - c. What are some of the things you think might be found in the study?
7. Overview
 - a. Anything else you would like to share? (while I go over questions to make sure I've asked them all)

Additional information:

- What year level(s) do you teach? How old are these children?
- What do students call you?
- How many classes with students the same year level as your class at the school?
- How long have you been teaching for? Which schools? Which year levels?
- How long have you been at this school for?
- How old are you?
- Do you have children? If so, what ages and gender? (as background and to know if they might include experiences with their own children in it)

Appendix Five: Parent Interview Questions

Ask participant(s) the age and gender of the child in the class as well as any other children they have.

Please answer in terms of your own children, particularly the child in the class involved in the research.

- Where do you think your child(ren) learn about gender from? (*get their ideas about how to be a boy or a girl from?*) (school, parents, siblings, TV etc)

How do you feel your child(ren) get ideas about being girls and boys at school?
(*whether by teachers, rules, peers, lessons etc*)

How important is school compared to other influences? (*e.g. home, media*)

- Do you think being a boy or a girl is important to your child(ren)? (*does gender matter to them?*)

Do you think it influences the ways they act/their behaviour?

Do they feel they are expected to act in certain ways because of their gender?
(*activities/sports, clothes, who they're friends with*)

Do they ever feel restricted by expectations about what a girl or boy should be like?

Do you think they feel pressured to live up to stereotypes or what they think a boy or girl should be?

Do they enjoy being their gender?

What do you think matters to your child(ren) more than gender? (*e.g. age, culture*) (*i.e. being a girl is more important than being b/a child?*)

- Does your child understand that there are different 'types' of boys and girls? (*different ways of being a girl or boy? that not all girls/boys have to act the same?*)
- At what age did being a boy or a girl start mattering to your child(ren)? (if it has) (*when do you think gender starts mattering to children?*)
- Have you shown your child(ren) any books or TV shows that are deliberately non-stereotypical in terms of gender?

If so, how have these worked? Like you thought they would? (*How, why, why not, what could be improved upon, what influences could have counteracted this, etc.*)

How would you encourage your child to participate in activities not usually associated with their gender?

- Finally, I wanted to ask what interested you about the research to come to this interview/focus group?

Parent Interview Questions (emailed version)

Please answer in terms of your own child(ren), particularly the child in the class involved in the research.

1. **Where do you think [name of child] learns about gender from?**
(i.e. where does she/he get her/his ideas about how to be a boy or a girl from?)

2. a.) **How do you feel [name of child] get ideas about being girls and boys at school?**
(i.e. from teachers, rules, peers, lessons etc)

b.) **How important is school compared to other influences in getting ideas about gender?**

Which do you think is the most important?

(e.g. home, media)

3. a.) **Do you think being a girl/boy is important to [name of child] or not?**
(i.e. do you think gender matters to [name of child]?, does it influence the way she/he acts or perceives her/himself?)
- b.) **If yes, how?**
- c.) **Do you think [name of child] feels she/he is expected to act in certain ways because she/he is a girl/boy?**
(e.g. activities/sports, clothes, who they're friends with)
- d.) **Do you think [name of child] ever feels restricted by expectations about what a girl or boy should be like?**
(i.e. Do you think they feel pressured to live up to stereotypes or what they think a boy or girl should be?)
- e.) **Do you think [name of child] enjoys being a girl/boy?**
(is being a girl/boy a proud part of her/his identity?)
- f.) **If yes, what do you think she/he likes about it?**
- g.) **What do you think matters to [name of child] more than gender?**
- h.) **Do you think being a girl/boy is more or less important to [name of child] than being a child? Why?**

4. **Do you think [name of child] understands that there are different ‘types’ of boys and girls?**

(i.e. that there are different ways of being a girl or boy; that not all girls/boys have to act the same or have similar interests?)

Please explain your answer.

5. **At what age did being a girl/boy start mattering to [name of child]? (if it has)**

(i.e. from your experience when do you think gender starts mattering to children?)

6. a.) **Have you shown [name of child] any books or TV shows that are deliberately non-stereotypical in terms of gender?**

If yes, how has [name of child] responded to them?

b.) **How would you encourage [name of child] to participate in activities not usually associated with their gender?**

7. **Finally, what interested you about the research to participate?**

Thank you for your time and thoughts.

Appendix Six: Student Activities Descriptions

This appendix provides detailed descriptions of all of the activities conducted with the students across the five sessions.

Session One: Identity, Looking up to People, and Friendship

The first activity in this session, ‘Who are you?’, explored which aspects of the students’ identity they considered important (inspired by a similar card activity used with students for the purpose of examining nation and identity, see Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford and Davies 2006, 33). The main aim of this activity was to determine how highly the students rated gender compared to other aspects of their identity. The students were each given a set of identity word cards (relating to gender, age, year level, school, religion, and so on), as well as five blank cards for them to write additional descriptors. Cards were read out to the younger students by me or the teacher. The students were asked to choose the cards which described them and then arrange these cards in order from most important to least important. A brief whole class discussion was conducted to explore why students chose the most important and least important card.

The second activity was designed to determine the people that students admired or looked up to (for related activities, see Bricheno and Thornton 2007; Carrington, Francis, Hutchings, Skelton, Read and Hall 2007). In particular, I wanted to find out which people provided (gender) examples for the students, and what kinds of gender behaviours were privileged. Each student filled out a survey sheet to record the names of three people they looked up to and were asked to give a description of the person, and why they looked up to them. This was followed by a brief whole class discussion where students considered which kinds of people were chosen as role models (such as if they knew the person or if the person was a celebrity).

The final activity aimed to understand the social arrangements in the classes by determining which students were friends with whom, and which students were named the most and least times as a friend. In particular I was interested in who might be identified in each class as likely to influence others’ behaviour and/or to mark one’s behaviour against. A ‘Friendship Map’ was used where students named their ‘best’ friends and their ‘other’ friends. Other research has also conducted activities to determine friendship patterns (see,

for example, Keddie 2004; Warren 2003, 16 note 4). Such an activity is not uncommon in primary school classrooms, particularly in junior primary. An eight year old girl who provided feedback on the activities told me her class were required to do a similar activity to assist the school in assigning students into classes for the following year.

Session Two: ‘Manly’ and ‘Womanly’ Famous Faces, Descriptions of Girls and Boys, and Good and Bad Things about Being a Boy or Girl

In the first activity in the second session students considered hierarchies of masculinities and femininities. This activity aimed to allow students to reflect on the diverse expressions of gender. In groups of three to five, students were given cards with the names and photographs of famous people (eight men and eight women) (inspired by an activity used with high school students, Horton 2007). Using a sheet of twelve well-known men, Horton (2007) asked his participants to choose the three most ‘masculine’ and the three least ‘masculine’. I adapted this activity for a younger age group and therefore used the terms ‘manly’ and ‘womanly’ rather than ‘masculine’ (and ‘feminine’). I also wanted the students to consider gender as a continuum so asked the groups to organise the faces from most to least ‘manly’ and most to least ‘womanly’, providing explanations for their decision. Before starting the fieldwork, I asked two 11 year old girls that I personally know to assist me with choosing famous faces students would likely be familiar with. The famous faces were chosen to represent different areas (such as sports, music, and politics)¹, ages (although notably students are likely to be mainly familiar with young adults, particularly young women), nationalities, and an attempt at different ethnicities (although this was difficult because they had to be people the students knew). While I included famous faces from mostly English-speaking nationalities, including Australia, it was clear that students were most likely to be familiar with Americans (see also Beasley, Bulbeck and McCarthy 2010), and students commonly discussed non-Australian athletes, celebrities, films, and television shows during the research. Because Socrates Primary was a Greek Orthodox school, it was necessary to include at least one famous face with a Greek background, although choosing someone who most students would know proved difficult. Ada Nicodemou, an actress on the popular Australian soap *Home and Away*, was the only person with a Greek background I thought a large number of students would know, although ironically most of the students were not aware of her Greek background. A whole

¹ I was particularly aware that female politicians would not be well known to many students. Unfortunately Julia Gillard was not yet Prime Minister of Australia so the students were unlikely to be familiar with her.

class discussion about the most and least ‘manly’ and ‘womanly’ famous faces, and why they were chosen, followed this activity. For descriptions of famous faces see the two tables overleaf, and for photographs of the famous faces see Appendix Seven.

The second activity asked students to brainstorm adjectives or words that described boys and those that described girls, using a handout sheet with a column of ‘Girls’ and ‘Boys’. This activity was conducted in pairs followed by a whole class discussion.

The third activity encouraged students to examine gender in their own lives, in terms of what was good and bad about being a boy or girl their age (inspired by a number of other studies, see Reay 2001b; Short and Carrington 1989; Warren 2003; Westland 1993), and how important being a boy or a girl was to them. Younger students were also asked how their lives would be different if they were the other gender, and older students were asked questions about expectations and restrictions relating to gender, and where they got their ideas about gender from. All students were asked questions about boys and girls. I anticipated that some students would find this to be a personal activity so I used handouts for students to complete individually. Younger students were given assistance with reading the questions when needed.

Background to Famous Faces: ‘Manly’ activity*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Ethnic Background</i>	<i>Age (approx. at time of research)</i>
David Beckham	Soccer player	English	White appearance [^]	Early 30s
Chris Brown	Singer	American	African American	Early 20s
John Cena	WWE wrestler	American	White appearance	Early 30s
Zac Efron	Troy from <i>High School Musical</i>	American	White appearance	Early 20s
Andrew McLeod	AFL footballer	Australian	Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, White	Early 30s
Daniel Radcliffe	Harry from <i>Harry Potter</i>	English	White appearance	Early 20s
Kevin Rudd	Then Australian Prime Minister	Australian	White appearance	Early 50s
Jeff	From <i>The Wiggles</i>	Australian	Chinese	Mid 50s

Background to Famous Faces: ‘Womanly’ activity

<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Ethnic Background</i>	<i>Age (approx. at time of research)</i>
Miley Cyrus	Singer and actor	American	White appearance	Late Teens
Vanessa Hudgens	Gabriella from <i>High School Musical</i>	American	Mixed including Filipino, Irish, and Native American	Early 20s
Sharelle McMahon	Netballer	Australian	White appearance	Early 30s
Ada Nicodemou	Leah from <i>Home and Away</i>	Australian	Greek	Early 30s
Stephanie Rice	Swimmer	Australian	White appearance	Early 20s
Emma Watson	Hermione from <i>Harry Potter</i>	English	White appearance	Late Teens
Pink	Singer	American	White appearance	30 (approx.)
Rihanna	Singer	Barbadian	Mixed including Afro-Bajan, Barbadian, Afro-Guyanese, and Irish	Early 20s

* The information in the two Famous Faces tables has been compiled from my own knowledge as well as a number of online sources (‘Wrestler Profiles’ 2007; ‘Ada Nicodemou returns to theatre to increase ethnicity’ 2009; ‘About Us – Jeff’ 2010; ‘Celebrity Ethnicity’ 2011; ‘The Internet Movie Database’ 2011; ‘Player Profile: 2010 Holden Netball Test Series: Sharelle McMahon’ 2011; ‘Ada Nicodemou’ 2011; ‘David Beckham’ 2011; Blake 2007).

[^] Not all of the famous faces had an easily identifiable ethnic background. The category of ‘White’ often goes unmarked, which makes it difficult to determine some people’s ethnicity. I have used this category here as a way of identifying how the students may have viewed the photographs.

Session Three: Imagined Futures, and Gender in Television, Movies, and Books

The first activity in this session aimed to determine what impact gender had on how students wrote about their imagined futures. This activity was based on Bulbeck's (2005) research with Year 11 and 12 high school students and clients of youth services (based on a study by Anne Summers in 1970). The older students had an open-ended question to write a story or dot points about their imagined futures with the instructions: 'Imagine you are 70 or 80 years old and reflecting back on your life. Describe your life as you think or imagine it will be.' I also included some ideas to get them started: 'For example, you might want to write about having a family, work, travel, achievements, where you'll live'. A modified version was used for the younger students. The younger students had seven boxes with questions asking them about particular things in their future. This method was suggested by the Year R/1 teacher so the students would understand the activity. These questions asked what students would look like, where they would live, who they would live with, what their job would be, what they would be able to do, what they would not be able to do, and, broadly, what they would be when they grew up.

The next activity in this session asked students to write about their favourite television show, movie, or book. The purpose of this activity was to see what kind of gender examples their favourite character set, and why they liked this character. Students were asked to write why they liked the television show/movie/book, and to write about their favourite and least favourite character. This was done using a handout modified from the *Schools Work Towards Gender Equity* website (Butorac and Lymon 1998).

In the final activity both age groups viewed two movie or television clips I selected which challenged or problematised gender. Using popular culture is a strategy to encourage students to critically engage with media that they are likely to already be familiar with. Such an approach has been recommended in boys and literacy debates, alongside the need to pay attention to the discourses of gender and power (see, for example, Alloway, et al. 2002; Martino and Berrill 2003). It was important not to choose clips that simply reversed genders stereotypes or framed challenges to gender stereotypes as abnormal. While popular culture is more likely to engage students than 'preachy' gender equity clips, it was very difficult to find examples of current, well-known movies or television shows targeted at children and young people that were not laden with gender stereotypes and that had a progressive gender message.

All classes were shown a clip from the DreamWorks animated movie *Kung Fu Panda* (2008). *Kung Fu Panda* is about a panda named Po who wishes he could be a Kung Fu champion, and idolises the ‘Furious Five’, a group of five Kung Fu fighters with different skills. The gender, skills, and appearance of the ‘Furious Five’ characters are diverse, which was my motivation for choosing the movie. In particular, Tigress, one of two female characters, is portrayed as powerful and strong, and appears to be the leader of the ‘Furious Five’. Angelina Jolie, who voiced Tigress, said she looks for films that send a good message and have strong characters:

I loved that in a film like this, that I knew my children would see, and my daughters would see, that the boys would think it was really cool and love the whole movie but that also my daughters would, of course, have a good role model as a girl (At the Movies 2008).

The other female character is Viper, a viper snake who represents a more ‘stereotypical’ femininity than Tigress; she has pink flowers behind her ‘ears’ and is flexible and fluid. The male characters are Monkey who is acrobatic, Crane who is graceful, and Mantis who is quick and calculating (‘Characters’ n.d.-b). The students were shown the Dragon Warrior Ceremony (Scene Five), a tournament to find the Dragon Warrior. This clip in particular showed the different members of the ‘Furious Five’ and implied that Tigress was their leader. After watching the clip the students were asked to invent and draw (or write about) their own ‘Furious Five’ characters with specific skills. They were also asked to identify if their characters were girls or boys, and decide upon a leader of the group. This activity aimed to determine how much of an influence *Kung Fu Panda* had in disrupting stereotypes about fighting characters.

The younger classes were also shown a clip from the Disney Pixar animated movie *WALL-E* (2008). This movie is based around two central characters who are robots – WALL-E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class) and EVE (Extra-terrestrial Vegetation Evaluator). While not stated directly in the movie, the creators view WALL-E as male and EVE as female, and these two characters are discussed using ‘he’ and ‘she’ respectively on the official website (‘Characters’ n.d.-a). I selected this movie because the character of WALL-E was a good example of a ‘non-stereotypical’ masculinity. The students were shown the clip when WALL-E and EVE first meet (Scene Eight) because it shows their differences in behaviour. WALL-E is shown as careful, quiet, loving, enjoying dancing,

and trying to impress EVE with his collection of things. On the other hand, EVE is shown as being technologically advanced, shooting things with a gun, business-like, and rough (although she also giggles). Following the viewing of the clip, there was a whole class discussion where I asked the students to describe both of the characters. I then went through a list of words (such as 'kind', 'strong', 'loving', 'clever' and so on) and asked the students if the words described WALL-E, EVE, both, or neither, and why. This activity aimed to explore if the students could describe the characters they actually saw on screen or if they reverted to gender stereotypes to describe the characters. Along this line I also asked about the gender of the characters. I asked if they thought WALL-E was a boy robot, girl robot, or just a robot and why, and if EVE was a boy robot, girl robot, or just a robot and why.

The older classes were shown clips from an episode of *The Simpsons* called 'Girls Just Want to Have Sums' (*The Simpsons* 2006, Production Code: HABF12, Season 17, Episode 9). I chose this episode because it challenges gender (or at least can be read in this way), and because it was set in an 'elementary' school so was relevant for the students. Briefly, the episode shows how 'Springfield Elementary' is divided into a boys' school and a girls' school, with differing academic and social cultures. Lisa Simpson (an eight year old girl) is at first overwhelmed by how great the girls' school is until the mathematics class for girls turns into a discussion about 'feelings'. On the advice of her mother, Lisa disguises herself as a boy and sneaks into the boys' mathematics class where she learns difficult mathematics as well as how difficult it is to be a boy. Following the suggestion from her brother Bart, Lisa (still disguised as a boy) is accepted by the boys in the school after she punches 'the most harmless kid in school'. After viewing the clips a whole class discussion was held based on my questions about the message of the episode; if Lisa found it hard to be a boy; what the clips said about being a boy and girl; whether the clips accurately portrayed what it is like to be a boy or girl at school; how students would teach someone to be a boy or girl; and whether all boys or all girls act the same.

Session Four: Feedback on Activities and Designing Own Posters/Activities

In the first activity for this session, the students were asked their opinions about each of the previous activities, using handouts with a smiley-face scale with the options of 'I liked the activity', 'I didn't like it or dislike it', and 'I disliked the activity' (using a more straightforward scale than previous studies such as Davies and Brember 1994). The same

scale system was used for both age groups, but the older students were also invited to make comments about each activity and were asked additional questions including whether the activities were relevant to their lives, and how the activities could be changed to make them more relevant or more fun. The students were reminded of the activities by showing them the handouts used and re-describing each activity to them. Most students had a good memory of the activities (evident as they recalled details of particular activities and their responses) and this turned out to be a valuable exercise. The handouts were anonymous to allow the students greater freedom in their responses.² The reason for anonymity was explained to the younger students that by not putting their names on their sheets they would not hurt my feelings with their answers. The responses were particularly useful to determine which activities might be used by teachers in classrooms to discuss gender. After giving this anonymous feedback, there was a short whole class discussion where I asked the students what they learnt from the activities. The older students were also asked how much they had thought about gender prior to doing the activities.

The feedback activity led into an activity where students were asked to design their own posters or activities. This activity gave students a chance to show what they had learnt during the previous sessions, with the view that these posters might be useful for deconstructing gender with students their age. While this was my own idea, other researchers have involved students in their own learning. For example, primary school students have been asked to develop their own questions about picture books (Simpson 1996, 123) and to construct their own 'non-sexist' stories (Davies 2003b). This was an experimental activity but one which I thought was important to see how students would discuss gender with other students. I explained this activity to the younger students by asking them to create a poster about girls and boys being good at something, or girls and boys being friends (in addition, some ideas were mentioned beforehand, particularly by the Year R/1 teacher, such as girls and boys playing soccer together, girls and boys being friends and other related ideas). I described the activity to the older students similarly, but also used the word 'gender', suggesting they might want to teach other people their age about gender and issues arising from previous activities. The older students were given the option of making a poster or designing their own activity similar to those from the previous sessions. Most students worked in pairs.

² Thank you to Sally Gibson for this valuable idea.

Session Five: Responding to the Initial Findings

In the final session (approximately seven weeks after the fourth session) each student was given a letter with some of the key initial findings from their class that I wanted to discuss with them. I addressed the letter and findings to the students so I was not effectively giving some findings ‘over their heads’ to their parents. This session was run differently for the different age groups. In the younger classes the findings were discussed as a whole class, where I read out the findings and asked the students specific questions about each finding. In the older classes I chose not to use a whole class discussion method because it was not particularly effective for the previous activities (they often resulted in silence or with responses from only a few of the students). Instead, I allowed the older students to pick their own small groups of three or four and gave each group two findings to discuss and write down their responses.

During this final session the younger students were also involved in a brainstorming activity. Whole class discussions were centred on brainstorming things that were the same about boys and girls, and things that were for girls only or boys only. I included this activity to supplement data I had collected earlier, because I was concerned that I did not have enough responses specifically about gender from the younger classes.

Appendix Seven: 'Manly' and 'Womanly' Famous Faces Activity Photographs

NOTE:
These images are included on page 272 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

David Beckham
(soccer player)

Chris Brown
(singer)

John Cena
(WWE wrestler)

Zac Efron
(Troy from
High School Musical)

Andrew McLeod
(AFL footballer)

Daniel Radcliffe
(Harry from Harry Potter)

Kevin Rudd
(Australian Prime Minister)

Jeff
(from the Wiggles)

NOTE:

These images are included on page 273 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Miley Cyrus
(singer and actor)

Vanessa Hudgens
(Gabriella from
High School Musical)

Sharelle McMahon
(netballer)

Ada Nicodemou
(Leah from Home and Away)

Stephanie Rice
(swimmer)

Emma Watson
(Hermione from Harry Potter)

Pink
(singer)

Rihanna
(singer)

Note: All photographs used in the research were sourced through Google Images.

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