

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

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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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