This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled

High School Masculinity and Gender Politics:

Submerged Voices, Emerging Choices

presented by

Michael Duncan Kehler

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph. D degree in Education

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Date May 10, 2000

HIGH SCHOOL MASCULINITY AND GENDER POLITICS: SUBMERGED VOICES, EMERGING CHOICES

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Teacher Education

2000

ABSTRACT

HIGH SCHOOL MASCULINITY AND GENDER POLITICS: SUBMERGED VOICES, EMERGING CHOICES

By

Michael Duncan Kehler

The problem of gender bias and sexism in high schools has had a long history. The problem of young men dominating classroom conversations and alienating girls in schools is well documented. And the problem of eliminating sexism and gender bias in schools is likewise an ongoing concern. In this dissertation I examine the problem not of sexism and gender stereotypes per se but of high school masculinity, framed within gender and education research. At the center of this study are four high school young men whose daily school experiences reveal the choices they made to reject the stereotypically sexist behavior of their peers and the gender stereotypes that hung over their classmates.

This research challenges mainstream gender and education research on several fronts. First, rather than accept "the boys" as a coherent and undifferentiated group of young men I argue that high school masculinity is best understood as a multiplicity of masculinities within a high school setting. I argue that masculinity is socially constructed. All men do not necessarily accept "scripts" of masculinity but instead negotiate ways of being young men. Second, and somewhat overlapping with the first, I argue that masculinity is about making choices between different ways of being a man in school. Through informal and formal interaction young men learn and understand what it means to be a high

school young man. As such they define their masculinity in high school through an array of expressions and social practices. Third, through daily interaction high school young men convey a series of choices that reflect a connected set of beliefs and attitudes, what I argue is their "gender politics." The beliefs of the young men in this study in particular uncover the ability of some high school young men to exercise a degree of human agency that rejects sexism and gender stereotypes.

This research brings to the foreground an alternate view for responding to sexism and gender stereotypes in high schools. In their list of forty recommendations the AAUW (1992) suggested that reform and change to eliminate sexism and gender stereotypes in education come from curricular, financial, and administrative means. This research demonstrates that while these are useful starting points to change the face of American education, the problem, deep seated in the beliefs and expressed in the behaviors of young men, must and can come from destabilizing what and how young men learn about masculinity and gender stereotypes from their peers. Young men need to be invited into a conversation for social change and accepted as allies who have the potential to contribute through a progressive gender politics.

DEDICATION

To a woman, a wife, a model of dedication, caring and loving.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the recent past days the voices of many who have contributed to my efforts embodied in this dissertation have echoed in my mind. Writing and completing a dissertation is not about one person but about a collection of people. In varying capacities and with a range of responsibilities each person has helped, prodded, and propped me up at different times. Let me offer my thanks to all those who are both near in the College of Education including support staff and faculty to those who are far but whose thoughts and support arrived via email and through lengthy phone conversations.

The four young men, David, Philip, Thurston and Hunter, whose school lives are at the center of this study are to be thanked first and foremost. They opened their arms figuratively and literally to allow me to see and become a part of their school lives. In an uncanny but heart-warming way they embraced me as one of their friends. For this I thank you.

The person with whom I shared my journey as a doctoral student and for whom I share the utmost respect and gratitude is my Advisor, Sandy Wilcox. You are a scholar whose dedication and commitment is admired and deeply appreciated. You always had space for me in your daily schedule even if we were hard pressed to find space in the recesses of your office! My gratitude comes to you for not only knowing when to push, to question, to make me uncomfortable, but for also knowing when to cheer. The sparing but ever so comforting words allowed me to direct and redirect without losing sight of my goal and purpose. You are a support like none other.

To my committee members, David Labaree, Wanda May, and Lynn Paine I offer my appreciation in different ways. Each one of you has guided with individual attention and determination. David has been a stable force that has never relinquished; never stepped back from the edge he had pushed me toward. You have shown me the demands, the challenges, and the possibilities that remain for me as an academic. After meeting early in my career as a doctoral student Wanda introduced me to the complex and troubling theoretical boundaries that bind researchers. You gave me the chance to intellectually explore and expand the horizons that I thought were bounded. I grew out of our conversations and look forward to pushing even further beyond where you have guided me. Finally, Lynn, a person for whom my appreciation is filled with richly textured notions of what it means to see, understand, and truly know what it means to be a man. Your open, caring, and endless energy for my interests moved me. I am indebted to you for the many conversations and opportunities you allowed me to see, hear, and know both about education and the salience of gender in the school lives of young men and women.

Beyond my committee members are my friends, the people who nudged me and jogged my mind when it was on hold. Among many others Pat Norman, Faaiz Gierdien, Mike Stone, and Jeremy Price will always be in my heart. The unending support was a smattering of humor, collegial bantering, and intellectual challenges that few others have managed to wrap into any conversation let alone every conversation! There is little that can be said to accurately convey my

depth of regard and respect for you as friends and colleagues. Thank you for being both, when I was not even sure who I was!

My family is like none others, or so I think. With a loving mother and two brothers I can hold no candle to the endurance and forbearance they have shown while I followed my academic adventures. To my mom, I find fewer and fewer words to express what it has meant to know that you are and always will be accepting of me as a son, a teacher, and an emerging scholar. May I never lose sight of the love, laughter, and wealth of curiosity you have instilled in me. As for Doug and Bill, my older brothers who have looked upon me with occasional disbelief and perhaps awe, rest assured I am here listening and watching as you have for me. You have heard the familiar tales of woe and even cries of relief. The distance between us has been purely geographical but the models of masculinity we express are clear windows upon which to see how we are and always will be together, three men, three sons, and three brothers forever.

The final word is for a woman whose place in my heart, my mind, and my life is forever cherished. As a confidant, friend, and wife you have filled my days with immeasurable support. There has never been a moment when you questioned, doubted or sought to relieve the burden of the task before me. You are a strong, confident, and loving woman without whom my accomplishments would have paled. I thank you for investing in not only me but in my passion and love for education and the intellectual challenges that confront me.

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Chapter One

In the shadows: Dissenting voices among high school young men

As the title of this chapter might suggest, in the shadows of our schools exist some young men whose experiences have yet to be heard. Unlike mainstream young men the individuals in the following study are high school young men whose voices differ from the rest. There is no question that historically "the boys" have been advantaged in education and "the girls," for all intents and purposes, have been unfairly served. However, what past studies have failed to acknowledge is the extent to which there are differences among and across the school experiences of both men and women. Not all the boys share common school experiences.

In the late nineteen-seventies I was a young man in my teenage years at high school. I remember distinctly looking around and noticing differences between many of my friends but particularly my male peers. They hung out with other groups of guys, played football, basketball, went to the same parties, and generally acted much the same around each other. But at the same time, from where I stood they were all doing things different from me. I was on the outside looking in. I was not one of the boys.

In grade twelve I decided I wanted to be like the rest. I wanted to be one of the guys. They had privilege and social status. They had a place within our school as athletes, student body members and the like. I walked away from my primary group of friends, Susan, Karen, Carol, and Terry and instead sought to be one of the boys. The problem was, I was not like the rest of the boys.

My views and beliefs about men and women in particular were different from my male peers. These beliefs and attitudes, what Connell (1995) has referred to as "gender politics" were imbedded in my daily interaction with my peers, men and women. My gender politics were intricately woven to what it meant for me to be a high school young man in the nineteen seventies.

I did not share the same high school experiences as many of my mainstream male counterparts. This happened for two reasons. One, I represented a competing version of masculinity. Among other things I did not play any of the major sports at the school and I did not participate in school politics. I was a young man whose position was not well defined by the standard activities and events that typically brought young men together in high school. Second, my gender politics conflicted with a hegemonic masculinity to which my male peers belonged. That is to say that my views about men and women differed significantly from those of my male counterparts. Even in light of these competing views I nonetheless struggled to be a part, to be one of the boys.

During the last two years of high school I worked at being one of the boys. I learned what it meant to be a high school young man. One version of masculinity was largely adopted in place of another. I began hanging out in different places, and going to events I had not previously attended. I observed and eventually mirrored the actions and behaviors of many of my male peers. I chose to be among the boys because of the privilege and status they had in my high school. What I did not anticipate nor understand at the time was how my own gender politics conflicted with what it meant to be one of the boys. And

though I experienced it, I did not understand the tensions that separated and divided competing versions of masculinity. Instead I accepted these tensions as part of being on the outside looking in.

Twenty years later the tensions between competing masculinities and prevailing images of the boys in high schools remain largely unchanged. Until recently, the very notion that the boys is a coherent group in and of itself has gone unquestioned. The decisions I made as a young man growing up in the seventies are similarly seen today embedded in the broader and more enduring crisis of sexism and gender stereotypes that has colored the school experiences of students, men and women, across America.

This study raises questions about a small portion of the student population, namely high school young men who routinely make choices about masculinity and gender politics during the daily interaction of their school lives. In this dissertation I examine what I argue is a three pronged issue in which masculinity is wedded to one's individual gender politics within a high school setting. More specifically I explore the extent to which four young men oppose sexism and gender stereotypes during their daily interaction in high school.

These young men represent a significant divergence from mainstream high school masculinity. In certain corners of academia such as men's studies and cultural studies research, young men such as these have been referred to as "social allies" or "countersexist men." (see Connell, 1995; Messner, 1997) The participants in this study were models of masculinity unlike the rest of the boys. At the same time these young men were among the boys. They were delicately

positioned as young men negotiating not only their masculinity but also different sets of gender politics which defined who they were as young men. This study uncovers the repertoire of ways that four high school young men a) present themselves as young men and b) reject sexism and gender stereotypes commonly reported as the norm among high school young men. (see AAUW, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994, 1986; Spender, 1989)

Submerged voices: Moving out from the shadows

The title of this dissertation refers to submerged voices and emerging choices. As I have previously mentioned, this research sheds light on a small disproportionate number of high school young men. My aim was to look beyond the shadows of "the boys" and admittedly, to hear the voices of a few. Why, after all the research that has convinced us of the aggression and domination expressed by young men, should I look beyond them? If blame need be placed and researchers want to reform education to create greater gender equity, then clearly the light has rightly been cast upon these particular young men. This view however is nearsighted. Unmentioned, unobserved, and unheard are the young men who do not share the same school experiences, or express the same views as those found in many mainstream studies of gender and education.

There are a variety of voices not being heard among high school students and particularly among young men. The voices which I have captured in this study are submerged in the sense that they have not been heard or at least not clearly. To a large extent they have been muffled. By acknowledging that there are competing versions of masculinities within any given school context we also

acknowledge the fact that making choices among and between these versions is often difficult for some young men. Boys respond to various social practices which define masculinity "in active, selective and even oppositional ways, so the effect of any discourse on the construction of masculinity is contingent, tentative and unpredictable" (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p. 51). The choices young men make about how and when they present and represent their masculinity contributes to the degree to which their voices are heard or submerged among their peers.

High school masculinity is not about one way of being a young man but as I will argue, it is about multiple voices and multiple masculinities. The voices and perspectives of some high school young men thus are submerged in a process that gives power and credibility to some perspectives and less to others. The opinion of a young man who is gay for example might be less valued and in fact not heard in a classroom. The experiences of the young men in this study have been submerged on the basis that they do not represent a more pervasive form of masculinity generally accepted and legitimated in most schools. The participants enact forms of masculinities grounded in social practices that highlight the competing and contradictory ways of being young men in high school. They also provide a much broader understanding about the basis upon which some voices among high school young men become submerged.

Issues addressed in school assemblies and taken up in classroom discussions include school violence, sexual harassment, and sexual orientation. These are telling signs of the complicated lives students lead. They are also

indicative of a growing number of tensions within and across students, men and women. They alert us to the competing social agendas that in no uncertain terms have an affect of delineating students in addition to the already racially and socially class based distinctions in American high schools.

The submerged voices captured in this study illustrate the possibility of a progressive gender politics among high school young men. This study documents the competing realities of being a high school young man unlike the rest of the boys. In this case the young men are not negotiating their sexual orientation, class, or race, but instead, the means by which they interact and express their masculinity as well as their views of gender more broadly. Not surprisingly what is largely intact is their identity as white, middle-class men.

The tensions in the lives of these students and their classmates stem from competing views about masculinity and the assumptions that frame how high school young men interact and express their views about gender as men. Conceptually this leads to another key definition freely used through out this dissertation. I will now explain more fully what constitutes opposition as a form of response to the sexist behavior and gender stereotypes that have colored the school experiences of these young men.

Opposition: Defining the terms of resistance

This study explores various forms of opposition to sexism and gender stereotypes. I have used the term opposition to signify the act of positioning oneself in contrast to pre-existing norms of masculinity. This study thus is an in depth look at the various means and degrees to which four young men resist

long standing views of masculinity and gender relations. By examining the daily interaction of the participants and their peers I illustrate how some young men actively and intentionally move against the grain of mainstream definitions of masculinity.

The term opposition in this study is a poignant reminder that the daily action and inaction of students might also be interpreted as a powerful socio-political statement. I highlight the various contexts within a school setting that frame how and when young men are likely and less likely to express their gender politics. The actions and words of these young men define competing social agendas in the wider context of schooling. Messner (1997) highlights the important position men can play in the process of contributing to movements for social justice. It extends beyond the individual and bears a significant social impact. In the closing comments to his text, Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements, he emphasizes that

> in rejecting hegemonic masculinity and its rewards, we [men] also may become more fully human. For I am convinced that the humanization of men is intricately intertwined with the empowerment of women. (p.110)

It is also worth remembering that the positions these young men express are not strictly those of the four participants. In fact they reflect on a much broader set of competing agendas.

The stance these young men take with regard to gender and masculinity in particular is defined in relation to other more familiar and deep-seated agendas. The contrast in agendas and sets of beliefs are evident on an ongoing basis. However, as this study shows, the distinctions between opposing gender

politics are overlooked and instead the attention is typically diverted toward the most powerful and glaring examples that support and maintain mainstream masculinity.

The lessons of time: Sexism and mis-naming "the students"

American education has been witness to recurring problems of sexism and gender stereotypes. During the seventies education was besieged by what appeared to be a mainly feminist agenda for improved gender equity in schools. Feminists rallied support arguing that education must provide greater opportunities for girls which, up until then, had largely been reserved for the boys. With increased political pressure at the time legislation enacted Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. According to this act "discrimination on the basis of sex is illegal in any educational program receiving federal funding" (AAUW, 1992, p. 12). The battle for improved opportunities in education and equity between boys and girls in school however was short lived. Decades later educators, teachers, and administrators continue to struggle to eliminate sexism and gender bias.

In subtle and not so subtle ways students, both boys and girls, have been the victims of an education system that has responded to them in very different ways. Gender has continued to make a difference in the type of education students receive. In a highly touted report the American Association of University Women (1992) roundly criticized current education debates in which "the students" remained just that, the students. Their point was to make clear that this lack of specificity about who these students were further "perpetuated the

invisibility of girls and compromises the education of our nation's students" (AAUW, 1992, p. 4).

The AAUW prompted renewed awareness that the progress made with Title IX was not enduring. The rhetoric of the AAUW report along with a study by Myra and David Sadker (1994) strongly suggested that girls remained on the academic sidelines while boys dominated the fields. The argument stemming from these reports is far reaching. Each report suggested that in education the "current debate is short-changing not only our daughters but our sons as well" (AAUW, 1992, p. 4). Issues of gender and sexism are deep-seated and disturbingly evident in the daily lives of many students, both young men and women. (AAUW, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994)

Unraveling the lessons of old: Identifying the problem

Nearly a quarter of a century after Title IX was implemented the problem of sexism and gender stereotypes in education remains. This dissertation examines what I argue is a three-pronged problem. I will outline the various elements of my argument. Following that I will provide further background that connects the parts together in a larger picture.

Rather than rely on categorical differences that separate and divide young men and women on the basis of sex, educators must re-examine gender as a social construct. Past arguments captured by the familiar "gender gap" debate have done little more than cement into place traditional notions of biological differences between sexes. Barrie Thorne (1990) has aptly argued that a "two

world approach" such as this simplifies student lives and remains wedded to assumptions about "the blues" and "the pinks."

Differences within and across young men and women have been denied. Instead, attention has remained focused on the similarities. This research reveals the tensions among and between masculinities. Past research has left the boys and the girls as unquestioned and unchallenged conceptual frameworks. A theoretical stance such as this fails to explain, for example, why men accept masculine roles. At the same time it does not explain contradictions within and across young men nor the possibility of rejecting traditional male roles and attitudes. As I will show in this research high school masculinity is a complicated process. This leads to the second prong of my argument.

Masculinity is fluid. Young men make choices about how and when to represent themselves as men. In different contexts and with different people for example high school young men express different elements of masculinity. In other contexts the same young men might reveal a different version of masculinity. This study sheds light on several versions of masculinity within a common high school setting. It also deepens our understanding into the means by which young men negotiate masculinities within and across their peers. This research reveals how and when young men routinely make choices that define what it means to be a high school young man. The third prong of my argument extends this by illustrating the point that high school young men have human agency.

The final prong of this argument centers on human agency. This research reveals the degree to which young men routinely express certain sets of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that run counter to the prevailing norms of high school masculinity. The participants in this study push a practical and theoretical argument by demonstrating the power to reject and or accept competing versions of masculinity in their school lives. As such their daily actions mirror specific sets of beliefs and attitudes, namely their gender politics, that underscore who they are as high school young men.

From theory to practice: The problem in context

The above mentioned reports revealed that sexism and gender bias is an issue that shortchanges both boys and girls. Educators however need to be clear about how and when students are affected by sexism and gender stereotypes. In many ways broad categorical references to "the boys" and "the girls" have set them apart as though their experiences were mutually exclusive and never the two shall meet. This clearly is not the case. It is also not the case that "the boys" and "the girls" share a collective set of common school experiences. It is the case however that the boys have been a dominating, alienating, and truly silencing force in many classrooms. (AAUW, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Spender, 1989) This point is not debated.

It is debatable however whether in fact **all** high school young men share a common set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that allow them to be categorically lumped together as one of the boys. Some young men are not like the rest. It is also debatable whether in fact the boys willingly accept what Myra

and David Sadker (1994) refer to as "timeworn scripts." In other words it is questionable to say that students act without agency. Popular literature and mainstream research however has broadly cast an image of young women "turned into educational spectators instead of players" while the boys remain the dominating force on the educational field. (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 13). The students portrayed in much of this literature are denied any sense of choice in their daily school lives. Sexism and gender stereotypes instead have become symptoms or characteristics of an American education with a disturbingly enduring history.

A familiar view: Boys being boys

Mainstream gender and education research has documented the high school experiences of a relatively familiar group of young men often referred to as "the boys." To teachers and administrators they are a familiar group of high school young men. The gender and education literature has described them as un-expressive, dominating, aggressive, and attention seeking. (See AAUW, 1992; Sadker & Sadker; 1994; Spender, 1989) Teachers have described them as disruptive and unruly. (Spender, 1989) They are the ones who take the lion's share of attention in schools and alienate women in classrooms. Their behavior and attitudes have been viewed simply as "boys being boys."

Informal peer interaction among students is a particularly powerful arena in which sexist behavior and attitudes have gone unchecked in schools. (AAUW, 1992, p. 128) Daily interaction among high school students thus offers a potent sample of the type of behaviors and attitudes accepted and unquestioned within

school settings. At the same time however it is in this arena that some young men pose a striking contrast to the typically sexist behaviors of their mainstream counterparts. Missing from the picture that has become so familiar to teachers and teacher educators are the experiences of young men who reject sexism and gender stereotypes. These are the young men in high school about whom research in gender and education has given very little attention.

Among the many high school young men documented in school ethnographies (see Connell et al, 1982; Foley, 1990; MacLeod, 1995, 1987; Weis, 1990;Willis, 1997) few if any have told of young men whose gender politics have become a diverging point in their school experiences. Instead research has focused on high school young men who have been easily identified and codified as seemingly coherent and unified entities within schools. Categorical claims have glossed over within group differences among "the students" and thereby created what appear to be clear-cut divisions along lines of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. (see AAUW, 1992)

Both theoretically and conceptually mainstream gender and education research has become complacent maintaining a simplistic and uncomplicated picture of high school masculinity. Myra and David Sadker (1994) for example have offered a very narrow view that is almost myopic in its field of vision. Central to their research is the assumption that boys "grow up learning lines and practice moves from a time worn-script" (Sadker & Sadker, 1993, p. 220). This study challenges this conceptual framework of high school masculinity by arguing that it is fluid, complicated, and often times contradictory. (see Connell, 1995;

Gutterman, 1994; Hearn & Collinson, 1994; Kaufman, 1994; Kimmel, 1994) This research builds on men's studies in ways that problematize masculinity as a construct as well as a contested terrain enacted in the daily experiences of high school young men.

In this dissertation I examine how and when four high school young men opposed sexism and gender stereotypes. The purpose of this study is threefold. First, rather than assume that the boys are a homogenized group, I argue that high school masculinity is complex and characterized by multiple ways of being a young man. Masculinity is not static but instead fluid. High school young men negotiate within and among multiple masculinities. Second, this research provides a different perspective from that already documented in the mainstream gender and education literature. Unlike previous research, which has focused on students, both men and women, as passive and willing recipients of "time worn scripts," this research conceptually refocuses attention on the human agency demonstrated by high school students but namely young men. And finally, this research extends to broader issues found within the context of schools and specifically student culture. In this sense students, and not schools, teachers, or the curriculum are the primary source for examining sexism and gender stereotypes. Daily interaction between high school young men and women become an arena in which to observe young men expressing their gender politics while simultaneously negotiating between competing versions of high school masculinity.

Responding to sexism: A renewed look at high school masculinity

For some time now mainstream gender and education research has maintained its focus on the blatantly sexist behavior typically characteristic of many high school young men. To a large extent teachers and schools have been blamed for the sexism and gender stereotypes in American schools. (see AAUW, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) Teachers and teacher educators have been led to believe that sexism and gender stereotypes can be eliminated in education by curricular and structural reforms. Curricular changes and new staffing policies for example have become responses for ridding schools of sexism and gender stereotypes. And at the school level, "equity programs concerned with gender are mostly targeted on girls, as might be expected given their 'equal opportunity' rationale" (Connell, 1998, p. 151). These approaches however have only been marginally successful.

Sexism and gender stereotypes remain to be a problem in education. Reform initiatives are but one step in the process for improving gender equity in education. As Connell (1993) has pointed out "we are still far from having a well-reasoned overall strategy in gender education, [one] within which the countercurrents in masculinity could find a clear voice" (p. 206). This research provides an opportunity for young men who hold non-traditional views of sexism and gender stereotypes to be heard by both men and women, but particularly other high school young men. By expanding research within and among high school masculinities men's studies research opens up the possibilities of creating

a broader basis from which to challenge and destabilize gender stereotypes and sexism in education.

High school young men who oppose sexism and gender stereotypes are an invisible minority among the boys. Both individually and collectively they have been overshadowed by a louder and more dominant version of high school masculinity, what Connell (1995) defined as a hegemonic masculinity. Past research has been limited in its scope in a way that has kept other young men on the margins. "One form of masculinity rather than others has been culturally exalted " (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Mainstream education and gender research has cemented into place the notion of a hegemonic masculinity while excluding the possibility of competing masculinities within a high school setting. Young men who reject the daily practices and ways of being part of a culturally dominant masculinity thus have been marginalised by mainstream conceptions of masculinity in addition to being overlooked amidst the cultural landscape of our schools.

An emerging field of research in men's studies has recently begun to look closely at high school masculinity in significantly more complex and penetrating ways. (see Connell, 1998, 1995; Messner, 1998; Martino, 1997) Long-standing beliefs about biological determinism and natural sex roles have been challenged as flat and simplistic. Men's studies has offered a new lens for understanding masculinity. As a social construct masculinity is being re-envisioned with greater depth and breadth of understanding.

Both conceptually and practically men's studies research has raised questions that shift the focus from masculinity as a coherent and unified whole to a vision of masculinity that is multi-dimensional and at times unsettling. (see Connell, 1998, 1995, 1985; Mac An Ghaill, 1995; Messner, 1991; West and Zimmerman, 1991) The conceptual and practical grasp on high school masculinity has remained staid with a narrow band for identifying and understanding high school masculinity. In Messner's (1997) words we must be attentive to "the vast differences and inequalities among men" which in and of themselves prevent us from "talk[ing] honestly about men as a coherent group" (p. 9). This research broadens the field of inquiry in gender and education by posing richer ways for seeing, hearing, and understanding multiple masculinities within a high school context.

The research that I conducted adds to the debate in education by using the often dominant voices of the boys as a springboard for seeing within group differences among high school young men. By interrupting the typically dominant male voices in schools I attempt to bring to the surface what Canaan (1991) referred to as "a textured and multivocal perspective on masculinity" (p. 123). In doing so this research invites high school young men into a conversation that critically interrogates high school masculinities by "not leaving the male voice a privileged one" but instead, making room for it to be interrupted in education, especially in their school lives (Weis, 1993, p. 245). This approach differs significantly from school efforts mentioned above in which high school students,

both young men and women, were denied any sense of agency in the process toward gender reform.

Masculinities are negotiated and constructed through daily social practices. Connell (1995) and Messner (1997) in particular have provided a theoretical foundation from which to launch a more critical and insightful exploration of masculinities. This research adds to men's studies and furthers the debate by arguing that boys are not "blank slates onto which the values of masculinity are imprinted " (Messner, 1991, p. 63). Building on feminist and critical studies, men's studies research has argued that gender is socially constructed. We need to continue questioning the belief that "masculinity is a single, uniform, and innate form" (Hearn & Collinson, 1994, p. 108). And instead make more explicit the tensions that exist for high school young men.

Educators must look closely at the very complex nature of what Connell (1993) has described as a "heterosexual masculinity [that] is not homogeneous; it is fissured, divergent, and stressed in many ways" (p. 205). Masculinity in and of itself is complicated. The choices high school young men make during their daily school interaction are a reflection of much deeper issues that underscore them. The challenge for teachers and teacher educators is to be able to see and hear how and when competing versions of masculinity are expressed in schools and most importantly, to support different ways of being young men.

Being a young man in high school involves actively choosing from among various and competing masculinising processes. Schools are but one site within which young men are forced to make both formal and informal choices that

reflect more broadly on issues of masculinity. The choices these young men made as active agents are not well understood in the gender and education literature. It is imperative that these decisions are carefully critiqued in order to develop a more robust and meaningful appreciation and understanding of what it means to be a young man in high school.

Different versions of masculinity in a cultural context such as schools give rise to relations of dominance and subordination among them. (Connell, 1998) High school masculinity thus

> must be seen as an active process of construction occurring in a field of power relations that are often tense and contradictory, and often involving negotiation of alternative ways of being masculine (Connell, 1998, p. 143).

In light of emerging research in masculinity and particularly in high school masculinities it is becoming increasingly apparent that knowing and responding to the boys poses a great deal more complexities but also a good deal more possibilities than previously thought in gender and education research. Thus while high school young men have historically detracted from the education women have received (see Tyack & Hansot, 1990), more current research has shed light on how young men are becoming agents of change invested in gender progressive politics. (see Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Kaufman, 1994; Messner, 1997)

History has left little doubt in education that generally young men have been an ongoing concern as "unruly boys bent on causing trouble" but it is increasingly clear that this is only part of the picture. (Spender, 1989) Young men who reject sexism and gender stereotypes are admittedly a minority within

high schools. Nonetheless they represent a growing number of men involved in gender work grounded in social justice. (Kaufman, 1994; Messner, 1997) Connell (1998) and Messner (1997), among others, have opened a dialogue that invites young men as social allies in the move toward gender equity and social justice.

Young men and particularly high school young men need to be seen as potential conduits for promoting change. It is the seemingly invisible minority of young men in high schools who "pass" as "normal" in Gutterman's (1994) words, and moreover have access to a group of men often excluded from conversations of gender reform. In this capacity high school young men shielded by "cultural presumptions of normalcy," have various opportunities to "reveal the rewrites they have made in the cultural scripts of masculinity, as well as encourage, challenge, and nurture other young men to rewrite the scripts of their own identity" (Gutterman, 1994, p. 230). Voices from among the boys but not of the boys need to be heard and supported in ways that allow them to carve out a niche in schools to promote non-traditional, non-sexist gender politics.

Related literature and research

This section outlines some of the research in the field of gender and education. I begin this section with an overview of the lessons learned primarily in mainstream gender and education research. Next, I follow up by surveying some of the research in men's studies. I lay the foundation for examining a particular population of high school young men who, I argue, have been overlooked in past research. I include in this section a review of previous studies for what they have

and have not said about the agency of high school young men, specifically young men who demonstrate counter-sexist beliefs through daily interaction at school. I conclude this chapter with an overview of the following chapters in this dissertation.

Gender studies: What lessons have we learned?

In gender and education studies, research has focused on identifying a problem, namely how girls are "left on the sidelines" and then suggesting responses that might eliminate gender bias in school. Very few studies have examined how and when men may also be part of the solution rather than strictly part of the problem. The following outlines the contributions of past research. The studies themselves come from a variety of fields of inquiry but together provide a sense of the issues related to gender bias in education. I begin with an outline of how and to some extent why boys have been advantaged in classrooms. I follow this by examining what the research suggests about boys and girls in schools. The final part of this section provides a summative critique of this research by raising questions about what is left unanswered in the current literature.

The AAUW report points to curricular, administrative, and financial steps that need to be taken if we hope to move girls from "the sidelines to the center of educational planning" (AAUW, 1992, p. 147). Myra and David Sadker (1994), noted education researchers, have also published their findings of sexism in schools. These studies have prompted national attention. Each of these studies has shown how girls and young women are shortchanged in education through "subtle and insidious gender lessons, micro inequities" and generally a "powerful hidden curriculum that surfaced in the way teachers treat children and the way

children treat one another" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. ix). However, what these studies have not shown and fail to attend to are the ways that students, boys, girls or both, resist sexism. Instead, study after study has shown how girls in contrast to boys, are failed, shortchanged, and robbed of a gender equitable education.

Day in and day out students are faced with an education system that better responds to boys than it does girls. In an analysis of classroom interaction between students and teachers, Spender (1989) outlines numerous problems and reasons that contribute to a gender biased system of education. Most telling perhaps is how some boys tend to respond to teacher's efforts to provide greater gender equity in their classrooms. Consider for example cases in which teachers attempt to distribute time equitably to boys and girls. In these cases the teachers found that "many of the boys are against it, they make trouble and they get results" (Spender, 1989, p. 57). Boys felt that they were being neglected and moreover, they felt the teachers were favoring the girls. In these cases the teachers had not reached equitable time for boys and girls and ironically were still responding to the boys more than girls. The fact of the matter is that the boys felt unjustly served. Such is the case. Boys have traditionally occupied a dominant and central position in many classrooms. (Houston, 1994) Attempts to alter the balance, or imbalance of power as it were, have been met with resistance from boys.

Boys have historically dominated the curricular and extra curricular domains in schools. The above example illustrates part of the difficulty encountered when trying to challenge gender bias in schools. Currents that go against traditional male dominance in the classroom are hard fought for those who take up the challenge.

The history of males as central figures and primary subjects of study in school is long-standing. (Hansot & Tyack, 1988) It is one in which "males are the authority figures, males do the talking, and lessons are designed to cater to male interests because, as most teachers acknowledge, if males do not get the attention they want, they are likely to make trouble" (Spender, 1989, p. 54). In cases when males do resist or call out for attention then, it is seemingly to be expected. That is, if teachers and students accept traditional images of males as aggressive and forceful, then they also accept and better yet, expect unruly and uncooperative behaviors from males.

Young men who express the traditional beliefs, attitudes, and behavior evident in the classes described above continue to be privileged in a gender biased education. It is these voices of male dominance that researchers continue to record and moreover, it is these voices which maintain and perpetuate a privileging of males, especially young white males whose voices are uninterrupted in the classroom. (Weis, 1993)

Men's studies: Theorizing masculinities

Age old debates that have drawn biological distinctions between the sexes have faced growing opposition within the academy. Men's studies in particular have made theoretical brakes that challenge the more static and fixed conceptualizations of masculinity. (Connell, 1985, 1993; Coltrane, 1994; Hearn & Collinson, 1994; Kaufman, 1994) While still considered a relatively new field of research in the academy, several common themes are evident in men's studies. One, the construction of masculinity in everyday life. Two, the importance of

economic and institutional structures. And finally, the significance of differences among masculinities and the contradictory and dynamic character of gender. (Connell, 1995)

The basis of my research builds on a theoretical stance which argues that not *all* young men share common experiences *as men* in school. That is to say, there is within-group variation among men's experiences. Thus it is misleading to say that one's gender, in this case being a man, means that *all* young men participate equally or similarly in a set of common school experiences. In the past, research about gender and education has inadvertently contributed to broad overarching claims about the school experiences and attitudes of *all* men.

Theoretically I draw from previous work in men's studies which uses a fluid conceptualization of masculinity in contrast to that evident in mainstream gender and education research. Connell (1985, 1993) and others have developed a persuasive argument that contributes to a much more complex and dynamic picture of masculinity.

My research builds on Connell's theoretical framework of masculinity. I provide empirical evidence to bridge, what I see as a gap between, a theoretical argument that acknowledges multiple masculinities and a mainstream perception that suggests all high school young men act, behave, and subscribe to a shared set of beliefs about gender arrangements. The former argues that there are differences between masculinities while the latter relies on a singular masculinity within a traditional view that *all* young men subscribe to and support a sexist and gender biased form of education.

The past decade has seen the emergence of research which has problematized the traditional notion of a unitary and singular masculinity. Theorists (see Coltrane, 1994; Connell, 1995; Gutterman, 1994; Hearn & Collinson, 1994) have developed a much richer and arguably more accurate picture of masculinity. Monolithic notions and categorical claims about masculinity, such as that made by Sadker and Sadker (1994) have been strongly criticized within men's studies. Theorists have argued that categorical claims about "the boys" oversimplify the complex relationships between men and in doing so, deny the possibility of within-group differences. With increased research into this field it has become more evident that "there is no single masculinity or even one experience of being a man. The experience of different men, their actual power and privileges in the world, is based on a range of social positions and relations" (Kaufman, 1994, p. 152). The experiences of high school young men are a developing field for research. As Willis (1977), Connell (1982, 1985, 1995) and others have shown, high school young men participate in what Connell refers to as "typology of masculinities" (Connell, 1993). Research has only recently begun to explore and record the lives of young men whose school experiences have been excluded from earlier studies which have concentrated on a hegemonic masculinity.

The conceptual framework I use challenges certain mainstream research, which I argue, has paid no attention to within-group differences among boys. The result has been a general impression that maintains and perpetuates categorical differences between "the boys" and "the girls." This study provides empirical data that shows differences between high school young men including different

expressions of masculinity and competing sets of attitudes and behaviors toward sexism and stereotypical gender arrangements.

Schools are social institutions within which multiple masculinities exist and co-exist. Some masculinities prevail and are legitimated institutionally while others are suppressed, silenced or rejected. (Canaan, 1991; Connell, 1993, 1994, 1996; Kessler et al. 1985; Mac An Ghaill, 1996; Peshkin & White, 1990; Weis, 1993; Willis, 1977). The multiplicity of masculinities was perhaps best captured in a well known ethnographic study by Paul Willis (1977) whose research revealed competing and conflicting masculinities co-existing within a working class secondary school in England.

Willis' study powerfully revealed how the "lads," a group of non-conformists, challenged and opposed school authority. Willis also showed how within the same milieu, a group of their peers, the "earoles," co-existed as compliant, submissive receptors of school authority. In this study students participated in varying degrees and through differing practices in ways which demonstrated a complex negotiation of power relations among young men. In this case the high school young men held separate and distinct beliefs but nonetheless co-existed within a common milieu.

Within a school setting the relationships between different kinds of masculinities are complicated and often time contradictory. Schools are not neutral institutions for the playing out of these competing masculinities. On the contrary, schools operate in direct and indirect ways via curricular and pedagogical practices that support, perpetuate, and legitimate some forms of masculinity over others. (Luttrell, 1993; Mac An Ghaill, 1994; Messner, 1988; Spender, 1989) There

emerge patterns of masculinity within schools and across varying class, race, and ethnic student populations. According to Connell (1982) "the boys themselves become the police of masculinity" (p. 95). Young men in secondary school are involved in a "gender regime" (Kessler et al., 1985) or what Connell (1993) refers to as "a process of demarcating masculinities" (p. 197).

The sense of competition between masculinities, that is men among men vying for status and territorial rights within schools, is significant. In fact the differences between young men are so striking that research has dedicated a considerable amount of attention strictly trying to identify the various factions of masculinities in schools. Earoles, lads, swots, wimps, cool guys, jocks and burnouts are but a few terms used both by researchers and students to sort out the various groups of students in schools. But these attempts to organize and codify student groups is not enough. Researchers need to go beyond this. While we need to "recognize diversity in masculinities" we must also "recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinities" (Connell (1995). Clear and distinct "borders" separate masculinities in subtle and not so subtle ways. (Thorne, 1993) Often identified by appearance, physicality or geographical location in schools, multiple forms of masculinity are visibly evident in school halls, lunch rooms, and classrooms across the nation.

Young men experience power and privilege differently because of varying social locations in high school. In a study by Connell et al. (1982) they examined the varying relations between school, family, and social divisions. Competing masculinities and femininities were evident in students' everyday school

experiences. This study, along with others that have examined men's relationships of power, does not in any way deny that

> men, as a group, have social power, or even that men, within their subgroups, tend to have considerable power, but rather that there are different forms of structural power . . . and that there is not a linear relationship between a structured system of power inequalities, the real and supposed benefits of power, and one's own experience of these relationships of power. (Kaufman, 1994, p. 153)

High school young men often demonstrate their masculinity through formal and informal means of expression. According to Kaufman (1994) we learn as adolescents "that our peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us as feminine, as sissies" (p. 132). The threat posed by ones' peers consequently leads many young men in high school to exaggerate or at least routinely emphasize their masculinity through forms of expression that reveal traditional rules, beliefs, and attitudes about masculinity. Traditional forms of masculinity thus, not surprisingly, have remained center stage in much of the research surrounding gender and education.

Men with countersexist beliefs: A window of opportunity?

The public has been lead to believe that school lessons are so engaging and persuasive that students are unable to resist or challenge them. In essence students are depicted as passive receptors. And even though Sadker and Sadker (1994) themselves acknowledge the fact that students are aware of sexism and gender bias in school, there is no mention of how students react or respond to sexism in schools. The bulk of their research suggests that sexist lessons are taught by teachers and accepted by students. "They grow up learning lines and practicing moves from a time worn script" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 220).

However, other research has shown that not *all* young men accept social inequalities of gender with such complicity. Connell (1995) for example, has shown that some men actively challenge gender inequities. Various forms of anti-sexist politics among men in Canada, England, and the United States has demonstrated the possibility that some men are willing to challenge sexist beliefs and behaviors.

The impact of modern feminism, such as the emergence of a "profeminist men's movement" according to Kaufman (1994) has helped "focus on the social and individual expressions of men's power and privilege" (p. 156). My research contributes to feminist and critical traditions in education research by examining a narrow piece of the debate surrounding multiple masculinities among high school young men. Situated within critical and men's studies research (Connell, 1996, 1995, 1985; Messner, 1998, 1997; Thorne, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1991; Willis, 1977) this study problematizes masculinity as a social construct in addition to re-envisioning men exercising human agency invested in a progressive gender reform (Connell, 1995; Gutterman, 1994; hooks, 1998; Kaufman, Kessler et at, 1985; 1994; Messner, 1997). As Connell (1993) has pointed out, "if research has shown anything, it is that heterosexual masculinity is not homogeneous; it is fissured, divergent, and stressed in many ways" (p. 205).

Anti-sexist efforts of high school young men have not been closely examined as a point of inquiry in education research. There is no shortage of evidence to indicate how and why young men oppress, silence, or alienate women through schooling. However, there is very little research that sheds any light on how and when some high school young men reject sexism in school. We have long since

known of the evidence demonstrating why some young men reject schooling as a social class institution. Willis (1977), for example, has shown that certain groups of working class youth, namely "the lads," resist or reject schooling and all that it represents because of what amounts to as ideological differences. "The lads" defy authority and reject all that resembles middle-class values and beliefs. MacLeod (1987) likewise has shown how competing ideological beliefs in schools contribute to social class tensions that further alienate working class students from a middle class education. However, there is no evidence to explain how and why some high school young men reject sexist beliefs and behavior that might be rooted in school curriculum, interaction, or classroom practices.

Drawing lines: A field divided

The above illustrates the lines that divide the various camps of research in gender and education. What appears most striking about this research is that none of the studies have tackled how and when students, girls or boys, challenge sexism. Ironically, Sadker and Sadker (1994) only gave brief mention to a seemingly powerful force, namely, "daughters [who] circumvent sexist gender lessons [and] know the need for constant vigilance" (p. xi). Their study overlooks the agency students have to promote change for gender equity in school. Rather than call on students as agents of change, the alarum bell that has rung so often has called to arms parents, teachers, school administrators, law makers and civic leaders, "to transform our educational institutions into the most powerful levers for equity" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 280). The following reviews several studies to demonstrate how and why students mobilize themselves as human agents.

The most apparent gap in these studies is the degree of human agency expressed by many students but which has never been examined as a political force per se, with regard to gender equity. Instead, in these cases student agency has been framed by cultural differences, namely class and racial divisions. The backbone of my study relies on students demonstrating their agency and political commitment to social justice. Some may call me naive but I consider myself optimistically hopeful. This section reveals the various forms in which students have shown agency for class and race issues.

Popular literature has repeatedly created an image of students who appear to be docile, passive, and generally complicit in a gender biased education. Other research in education however has portrayed compelling images of students as human agents, actively engaged in challenging contradictory ideologies of femininity and masculinity. In fact, in a study of fifth grade children, Anyon (1984) found that "most girls are not passive victims of sex role stereotypes and expectations" (p. 44). In this case girls were involved in a form of resistance and accommodation which, according to Anyon, powerfully conveys "a form of organized responses--as organized non-conformity." (p. 43). Studies such as this have shown the significant influence that schools, teachers, and peers, along with various other institutions have in the lives of young men and women. Most striking about these studies are the types of relations students have within and across milieus.

A study by Connell et al. (1982) examined educational inequality by looking at the various relationships secondary school students had in school, at home, and

among their peers. Part of their findings showed how schools were implicated in the production of a specific masculinity and femininity. Masculinising and feminizing practices such as sport, for example, have been mainstays in many schools for producing particular kinds of masculinities and femininities. Schools thus are active agents in the construction of femininities and masculinities. (see Hansot & Tyack, 1988) At the same time, it is worth noting that students, both young men and young women, are likewise involved in accepting and rejecting certain masculinities and femininities.

High school young men and women negotiate competing and conflicting masculinities and femininities. Connell et al. (1982) have shown that while schools produce a dominant pattern of masculinity, some young men struggle trying to "make their own peace with the competitive, physically aggressive, space-occupying form of masculinity which dominates their schools" (pp. 95-96). In essence young men operate within a "hierarchy of masculinities" in which some emerge as winners and some do not. We can take from this the fact that men, and I suspect women, become akin to brokers in a gendered system of education. In this sense the social relations men and women have in school are "organized in the interests of some groups over-riding the interest of others" (Connell et al., 1982, p. 173).

Gender relations in secondary schools were problematized both conceptually and practically in an Australian study by Kessler et al (1985). Their research posed a significant challenge to conventional theories of masculinity and femininity in terms of accepted roles and socialization. In their words

> role theory underestimated what it was up against. The schools are an arena in which a complex, often contradictory, emotionally and sometimes physically violent politics of gender is worked out. (Kessler et al., 1985, p. 35)

Kessler et al (1985) examined the relations among students via various school practices. In doing so they uncovered the messy and tense relations between gender and education. Their research revealed the powerful ways in which the school, as an institution,

> is characterized at any given time by a particular gender regime. This may be defined as the pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power . . . the gender regime is a state of play rather than a permanent condition. (Kessler et al, 1985, p. 42)

In this context schools operate to legitimate some forms of masculinity while de-legitimating others. Gender is a complex social structure which their research clearly demonstrated involved "a complex differentiation of people around the axes of masculinity and femininity" (Kessler et al, 1985, p. 44). This study, along with Willis' research has contributed to an ongoing examination of school masculinities and femininities. The neatly organized, arguably simplified constructs of mainstream gender and education research have offered but one lens for seeing gender in a school setting. Competing theoretical research traditions have provided a much more robust and layered way for understanding high school experiences of both men and women.

Mairtin Mac An Ghaill (1994) also captures the complicated matrix of domination evident among daily expressions of high school masculinity. His study of English high school Afro-Caribbean men revealed emerging tensions evident in the social practices, beliefs, and self-representations of masculinity

during their daily encounters at school. The "Rasta Heads" expression of anti-authoritarianism was a response to underlying tensions in school curriculum. Differentiated masculinities were grounded in assumptions about Afro-Caribbean young men. This study powerfully showcased how multiple black masculinities were formed within a school context. It adds significantly to the literature by demonstrating that masculinity is a complicated process contextualized by a series of racial, cultural, and institutional relations.

Through the various forms of rejection, acceptance or reshaping gender identities, these studies shed light on a much more textured and multi-vocal perspective of student's school experiences than previously acknowledged. A matrix of domination centering on race, class, and gender underscore the multiplicity of relations simplified by mainstream education research. The conceptual framework in each of these studies centers on a fluid notion of gender. Second, they illustrate how masculinities are contextually grounded within a school, in different locations, and in relation to differing curricular and interpersonal interactions. And finally, these studies demonstrate the competing ways in which high school young men enact their views and beliefs, which often run counter to a prevailing set of beliefs about masculinity.

Kessler et al (1985) along with others (Connell, 1996; Messner, 1998; Thorne, 1990) have developed a persuasive argument revealing how the discussion about gender and education has been guided by a pervasive determinism rooted in sex-role theory. These studies add to this dialogue by suggesting that young men enact ways of being men that are not accurately

captured by the broader more generalized pictures preserved in mainstream literature and perpetuated in public media accounts.

The study I conducted focuses on what Connell (1995) refers to as a "project of masculinity." This study will uncover the conditions under which a non-traditional masculinity emerges as well as the conditions it produces. By looking more closely at the non-sexist behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of four high school senior young men, this study contributes to a growing field of education research that seeks to eliminate sexism in our schools.

Social change will hopefully come from mobilizing students, both women and men, in ways that contribute to a "new, more equitable kind of social arrangement" in schools. (Anyon, 1984, p. 46) With this as a motivating factor for my research into gender equity in education, I hope to contribute by more rigorously examining how some young men in high school are as Segal (1990) points out, capable of change. Further research into the countersexist lives of young men and women can hopefully bring about the fundamental changes needed in student's attitudes and behavior regarding sexism. My primary reason thus for examining these men's' lives, ones which I have argued have been silenced, is emphasized by what Segal (1990) sees as a need to nourish a sense of social activism. As she points out:

> The stronger and more confident the pressures from women (and I would add men!) for men to change, both at the personal level and through the collective political struggle, the more the men will be forced to question the unthinking presumptions and unexamined prerogatives of 'masculinity'. (Segal, 1990, p. 294).

Summary

Historically boys have maintained a privileged position in the American education system. And although boys have been variously disadvantaged, the sort of systemic gender bias and sexism noted above is unparalleled in the school experiences of most boys. Boys have received the greatest amount of in-class attention. They have remained the central subjects of study in school. And they are, unquestionably "the favored gender, heirs apparent to all society's rewards" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 197). Overstated? Perhaps, but the point remains, boys and girls receive different types of education. However, it is misleading, as this study will show, to suggest that *all boys* are complicit in a gender biased system of education.

Mainstream research has unjustly denied human agency to those affected by gender bias in schools. Students, both boys and girls, have been relegated to unquestioning automatons. "Sexist lessons transform girls into second class students" while boys are destined to become "troubled men . . . unable to communicate with women as equals" (Sadker & Sadker, p. 225, 1994). This study challenges the assumption that **all** students, and for the purposes of this study boys, are complicit in a gender-biased system of education.

Numerous studies have shown that multiple masculinities exist in the everyday lives of students. The tensions that emerge out of competing factions present in school practices that legitimate some and de-legitimate other masculinities are striking. Research needs to look more closely at how and why some masculinities occupy the limelight while others are overshadowed.

To some extent the study I conducted looks beyond the limelight. I attempt to bring into focus and provide some clarity about the lives of men who express non-traditionally sexist beliefs and behaviors in school. And while to many it may seem unrealistic or better yet unbelievable to think that there are young men who have a vested interest in gender equity, it is likewise unrealistic to assume that **all** boys are sexist.

Overview of the text

This chapter has set the stage for the remaining chapters. I have outlined the problem identifying several theoretical and practical elements within gender and education research. The gap I seek to fill involves developing a different angle from which to probe into the school lives of young men. I have not debated the position, privilege, and power white, middle-class men have in high school. Instead I have proposed another dimension that repositions the observer so that beyond seeing and hearing the voices of the boys, we are better able to hear and understand the school experiences and voices of other young men less well documented in gender and education research.

My objective in this chapter has been first to illustrate the significance of gender as an organizing principle in the daily school lives of students and particularly high school young men. By way of introduction I began with a glimpse at my school recollections as a high school young man. My experiences as a young man did not differ significantly from what I saw and heard transpiring among the participants in this study. The remainder of this chapter laid the foundation and set out the framework for the following chapters.

Chapter 2 is a look from beyond the data. I begin this chapter by opening up the window to see the various complications involved in conducting qualitative research such as this. From positioning myself among the boys to defining my role within the larger school community I describe and share with the reader the intricacies of trying to gain authentic and accurate data. The latter part of this chapter details the type of research methods used. The next section outlines more fully the theoretical framework. I close this chapter with an introduction both to the school and the four young men involved in the study. This chapter provides both the theoretical underpinning and the practical aspects involved in forging ahead with this research.

In the next chapter I examine the actual school experiences of each of the participants. The primary focus of Chapter 3 is on identifying how and when these young men negotiated their masculinity as well as their gender politics. The analysis raises to the surface recurring patterns or themes apparent in the daily interaction among these students. The young men shed light on different and at times similar ways for being young men. They also reveal the repertoire of ways they have for expressing social identities constructed out of competing definitions of masculinity. Their vantage points in social groups that occasionally overlap but generally remain distinct is important to bear in mind. The differences between groups again highlight the difficulty of understanding all boys when one's focus is restricted to some boys. Nonetheless the primary aim of this chapter is to show how four young men in varying degrees, opt to reject the norms and attitudes of masculinity most prevalent within their high school.

Chapter 4 explores several reactions and responses emerging out of the school experiences of the four participants. The aim of this chapter is to reveal some of the tarnish as it were from the shine of the efforts of these young men. That is to say this chapter attempts to respond to the nagging question: But what are the costs for these young men? I examine some of the remarks, slurs, and suspicions that other young men used to define the boundaries of masculinity. I also explore what these young men described as a primary benefit for opposing sexism and gender stereotypes. Their level of comfort with themselves, their peers, and the various means by which they communicate with others forms the core of this discussion. This chapter closes on a note that reveals the assumptions of masculinity embedded in the interaction of these men and their peers. Ranging from peer rejection to outsidedness I provide a thumbnail sketch for each to suggest possible explanations why many high school young men cling to the norms and attitudes with which they are already most familiar.

The final chapter ties together the various sections of this dissertation. I string together the findings as a way of fastening down the theoretical and practical components that I argued were far from connected. In the second section of Chapter 5 I identify some of the limitations to this study. I share with the reader the various weaknesses that might have hampered or influenced how and what I collected as data. After all, as I see it, this too is part of the research process. This is the place in my research where I turn the light on the decisions I made as a researcher.

I shift the focus slightly following this by revisiting a conceptual argument for considering high school young men as social allies. In doing so I propose a more careful fleshing out of the research on young men in high school. I argue that high school young men can be a resource for eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes. Who better to question high school masculinities then young men themselves?

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODS

Gender and education has shared both a tenuous and tumultuous relationship. For decades its enduring history has been played out in the daily lives of school children from the elementary to the secondary level. The following study is a snapshot of this history during a brief moment in time. The research I conducted examines the daily interaction of four young men whose masculinity and gender politics were intricately woven together in the daily interaction of their high school experiences. In Chapter One I provided an explanation for conducting ongoing research into the lives of students and specifically the experiences of high school young men. In this chapter I offer my analysis of the process for collecting the data for this study. This section draws attention to the methods and theory that have informed the research. The main aim of this chapter then is to invite the reader to see both the mechanics of conducting qualitative research and the theoretical framework that runs throughout.

I begin by defining a set of research questions that focus on both masculinity and the enacted views and attitudes of high school young men who reject sexism and gender stereotypes. I refer to these views as their gender politics. The second section of this chapter focuses specifically on the fieldwork. Subsections within this part outline issues of access, relationships within the broader school community as well as among the students, the data collection process, the theoretical and analytical framework and finally, an introduction to the school site and the participants.

The primary focus: Knowing which questions to ask

When I began this research one of the greatest struggles was knowing how to frame my interests. For the most part this meant knowing how to talk about the issues of gender within education. Years of study had allowed me to read widely, extensively exploring the complicated nature of gender and its embeddedness in education. With an undergraduate degree in Sociology, a Masters degree in Education, and recently being enrolled in a doctorate programme in Teacher Education, my academic grounding appeared solid. This was complemented or perhaps contrasted by teaching experience that spanned six years in both private and public education and in both a boys' school as well as mixed sex classrooms. Even with this array of experiences the challenge before me was daunting.

The questions seemed endless and the answers not always clear. I fumbled, initially wondering: How could I turn my interest in gender and education into a research question? What was it about gender that I wanted to examine? Was my interest come research question even worthwhile in the education community? These were but a few of the questions that I was awash with before leaving my desk! Of course the much larger question still yet to be answered at that time was why was it important to ask this question? This question like the others always had several parts. For example, What did I hope to add to the research community? What and how did I see this research contributing to the understanding teachers and teacher educators already had about gender in education? What was I providing different from what we already knew? The list

was ongoing. And there was no shortage of probing from my committee members. They diligently pushed me to the limits to clarify my thoughts and tighten my theoretical and practical grasp of the task before me as a doctoral candidate completing the final stage of the program, namely conducting original research. They also prepared me in a much broader sense as a new member entering a community of scholars within the education research field.

None of the courses, teaching experience, or studies I had been exposed to had prepared me for the difficult task of learning how to talk about my research. To this day I am still mindful of how I frame my research, the way I pose questions, and the way that I present my findings. The questions that follow were points of entry for examining a narrowly defined aspect of gender in education. Individually and collectively these questions define what I see as part of the research niche I have carved out for myself within the broader field of gender and education studies.

The primary question directing this study is:

> **How and when do some young men oppose sexism and gender stereotypes via curricular, extracurricular and interpersonal relationships in high school?**

The subsidiary questions are:

I. What knowledge, views, and beliefs do these high school young me have about sexism and gender bias?

What qualities do young men consider masculine, feminine, neither?

What qualities do young men value in their relations with young men, young women, and mixed relations?

What qualities of masculinity/femininity are valued among the peers of these young men?

How do young men describe their relations with other young men, young women, and mixed-sex relations? Through what experiences?

II. How do young men express countersexist views through high school curricular and extracurricular activities?

What views of masculinity/femininity are most prominent in a student's understanding of the official school curriculum?

What venues are available via the curriculum for students to express their views about sexism, masculinity, and femininity?

What views of masculinity and femininity are expressed by peers? By teachers?

To what extent do students' high school experiences influence their views of masculinity/femininity?

What range of masculinities/femininities are evident in young mens' high school lives?

What image of masculinity/femininity is valued? Most? least? Why? By whom?

How and why are high school young men affiliated with or distanced from mainstream masculinity in school?

III. How do young men express countersexist views through peer and teacher interaction at school?

What reactions to sexism do these young men exhibit in school?

To what extent do reactions to sexism vary in different settings? How?

What factors do young men consider before expressing opposition to sexist practices or incidents?

IV. Why do young men challenge sexism and stereotypical gender arrangements in high school?

What benefits/costs do young men experience as a consequence of their public expression against sexism?

Fieldwork: Gaining access to a familiar culture

Previous researchers have labored to hear the voices of students. (see Mac An Ghaill, 1994; MacLeod, 1987, 1995; Weis, 1990; Willis, 1977) They have struggled trying to gain access and maintain the authenticity of student voices. They have likewise struggled to set their own limits, defining their own place, role, and relationship amidst the cultural setting about which they wrote. (see Eckert, 1989; Foley, 1990; MacLeod, 1987, Thorne, 1993) As a doctoral student and a university liaison within a teacher education program I likewise juggled and attempted to manage my role and position within the school where I conducted this research.

Schools offer a unique setting in which to conduct qualitative research. The tensions I felt as a young man, a researcher, and a university liaison were never far from my mind. And even though I, like other researchers, worked to manage impressions and the role I played as a participant observer, I nonetheless was constantly aware of the allegiances and responsibilities I had to different people. Several researchers have reported the ways in which they performed a delicate balancing act while being attentive to various factions within a school community.

While conducting ethnographic research in a South Texas town Foley (1990) described a public persona he managed while in the field. From being suspected as a "narc" to more accurately identified as an "ex-college player," Foley experienced the process of gradually gaining acceptance among his subjects by carefully defining his role. Penelope Eckerts' ethnographic study

took her into Belten high school where she focused "on the social polarization between class-based social categories, the Jocks and the Burnouts" (1989, p. viii). She described a type of "impression management" in which she actively constructed a role. One of her primary concerns as an ethnographer was managing how students saw her. She limited her interaction to students in an effort to stifle any questions of allegiance to school figures. She preferred to be an "outsider with no great status" (Eckert, 1989, p. 30).

Jay MacLeod (1987) likewise experienced a familiar journey as an ethnographer seeking access to a new cultural setting. Weekly games of pick-up-basketball gave him the opportunity he needed to develop status among his subjects. He worked to become a member of two groups, namely the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers at Claredon Heights. His speech, physical appearance, and the way he carried himself with an "air of cocky nonchalance" were "the unstudied products of his increasing involvement with the Hallway Hangers" (MacLeod, 1987, p. 278).

Finally, in a study of girls and boys at two elementary schools, Barrie Thorne (1993) described how her gender, age, and daily interaction became significant factors framing her data collection. As a woman she "felt closer to the girls" . . . knowing "more about their gender-typed interactions" (p. 26). She also commented on the status she had as an adult in an institution that drew sharp generational distinctions grounded in power and authority. Each of these researchers highlights the complicated work involved in becoming participants in

addition to gaining access to the inner social world of students in various school settings.

Researcher relationships

Researchers who conduct ethnographic research do so within a web of complicated relationships, some of which are not easily managed or foreseen. I will explain some of the unforeseen complications I experienced in the section about relationships within the school. For now it is clear that ethnographic research is conducted at different levels, in different ways, and within different groups of people. How cumbersome or complicated gaining entry to the field depends on a series of factors, some of which are described above. I turn now to look at how I managed to gain access to different groups of high school young men while conducting research at Central High.

Prior to conducting this research I entertained several possibilities for potential school sites. Central High was not my first choice as research site. The final decision to approach Central High for this study was based on a pre-existing relationship I had with the administration and staff at the school. In my capacity as a university-school based liaison I had worked for four years in close association with both the administration and numerous teachers at Central High. In a sense I had a history with the teachers and the school. My familiarity with the staff as well as my own professional credentials as a past high school English teacher gave me a particular "in" with these teachers. These connections were at one and the same reassuring but admittedly also reason for concern. I describe the tension and conflicts that arose later in this section.

Gaining support and fitting in with the boys

During the initial stages of writing the proposal for this study I was able to draw on the support and intrigue shown by numerous teachers. Their willingness to allow me in their classrooms and more broadly into their school community was crucial in gaining access. The administration likewise supported me by allowing me to be a "student" among twelve hundred other somewhat younger ones! I was furnished with a parking pass and given the schedule of my participants. The parking pass in itself was a significant way for increasing my presence among the students. I parked alongside the students, walked to our cars together, and exchanged end of the day stories. Our daily experiences were shared, as was the common knowledge we had of the events that took place each day in school. In small but significant ways I was becoming immersed in their social worlds. I had found my way both into the lives of students and more importantly, into the school lives of four senior young men upon whom this study is based.

On several levels I intentionally distanced myself from the school authorities. The connections I had to the school as a university liaison with practicing Intern teachers was minimized. I conducted meetings and formal conversations with Collaborating Teachers and Interns outside of school time. In a sense my relationships as a liaison went underground during the seven months that I conducted this research. I never denied these relationships to the participants but at the same time my liaison work never became part of our daily conversations either.

Researcher come high school student

I worked hard to adopt the persona of a typical high school young man. As a young man my age became of secondary importance after some initial curiosity. I focused my energies in learning what was important to talk about among high school students. I generally listened and contributed after conversations were initiated among the group. At times it was difficult to passively listen. I recall numerous conversations where the talk turned to sexual encounters. There were no inhibitions among the boys but I felt a curious sense of bewilderment on my own part. The experiences of these young men contrasted sharply with my virginal experiences as a high school young man some twenty years earlier. I stifled my surprise and appeared eagerly interested while taking mental notes.

Consumed by my role as one of the students I found myself engaged in conversations that supported and maintained a number of different school experiences. At times I was conflicted. My "adult" views and attitudes often fell to the wayside. My voice was muted in an effort to better hear and understand the social world of the students. I found myself treading lightly, doing more listening and probing than outright supporting specific options the young men had chosen. David for example disagreed with the Mardi Gras theme of the prom but nonetheless explained he would attend. Thurston, who rejected the "Cancunian experience" common for many seniors during spring break, opted to spend time at a cabin on a lake in Kentucky. And Hunter, totally absorbed with the exploits of Cancun, shared and regaled me with his experiences of drinking and "getting

with" girls. Given the fact that each of the young men belonged to different social peer groups I was mindful of what and how my responses might be interpreted. By straddling several social worlds I was in a curious predicament negotiating between friendships and crossing paths that generally would never have met. The complicated nature of this became increasingly evident as I developed bonds within the different groups.

One of my main concerns during these conversations was to establish rapport while building a sense of trust among different peer groups. In the early stages of entering the field I was uneasy. I began reading the actions of the students and learning what was involved in being among the boys. This was an ongoing process that initially highlighted how far removed I was from understanding student life. At the same time my knowledge of students and how to become one, or at least assume the role of one again increased substantially with time.

The early days of this research perhaps found both the students and myself a little unsure of our relationship. One incident in particular stood out during the first month. While hanging out between classes with Hunter one of his friends approached us. I recognized the familiar exchange of heads nodding and then "Hey, what's up?" Then there was a sudden furtive glance at me. I felt uneasy, stepping back from Hunter and his friend. They whispered briefly and then Hunter turned to me saying, "Oh, him. He's cool." A sense of relief broke the air and his friend introduced himself. With a nod from Hunter and the affirmation that I was cool, the conversation opened up. His friend immediately

started talking about the weekend. "How much schwag do we need? Do you want to go do a bowl now?" Hunter later let me in on the lingo-schwag meaning marijuana and bowl being a joint. His friend had accepted me. This took me further into Hunter's circle of friends.

It became increasingly clear from this point on that I would hear, see, and eventually know more about these young men than I ever anticipated. For some reason I had not expected the additional work involved in being accepted by my participant's extended peer relationships. These young men casually accepted me as a member of their group. But they also allowed me to penetrate further to a point where I was party to some of their more intimate conversations.

Complications in the field

Doing ethnographic research involves operating in different contexts and with different people. A key element of this type of research is being able to negotiate and manage oneself within different social contexts. This becomes complicated particularly when images and previous histories of the researcher might become inserted into the setting. I went into this setting knowing full well the baggage I carried. As my relationship evolved among the students there was also potential for compromising my integrity as a researcher.

Hunter's friends repeatedly prompted me to go with them during their lunches. This translates into going out with them when they got high. They wanted me to have the full experience. In a not very graceful way I managed to back out of several invitations. On one occasion I commented I had to remain lucid while taking notes and added I disliked second had smoke. The latter only

prompted a stronger invitation to participate! I staved off their invitations further by jokingly reminding them that as a Canadian I might be deported and ousted from the university. For the most part they accepted these responses. I received the following email from Hunter a day after his peers attempted to drive off with me in their car. They were going to "smoke some schwag at cloud nine"--a parking lot not far from the school.

> Michael,
>
> Rubbish! If you were truly dedicated to your research you wouldn't let the law get in the way. No, I'm just joking. That's a little too harsh. I do really wish that you could come out and chill with us. There ARE always ways around the legal implications, and if you're worried about me or someone else driving while we are high, you could drive separately. I seriously think you miss a lot. I mean, just like today, we got donuts, looked at plants, sword-fighted with sticks, ran and frolicked in the woods, played frisbee, climbed trees, sunbathed, and sat around and talked. It was a lot of fun. Outside of school we can relax more, be ourselves. We don't have to worry about being quiet or doing what we are told. We can just run around and do whatever we want. That's why I think you should come out with us.
>
> Your friend, Hunter

My relationship with the participants as well as their friends had seen considerable growth after the first month of this study. Casual remarks, high fives, shared lunches, intimate conversations of sex, drugs and drinking, and eventually open embraces were some of the clearest signs I had been accepted and trusted within their social circles. My image as an adult and outsider had changed significantly from first appearing on the scene months earlier.

As a member of four almost distinctly separate peer groups I walked carefully between each. There were instances for example when I would be hanging out with Thurston in "the corner" and friends of Hunter's would make contact in what appeared to be an almost intrusive manner. And though no one

said anything, his presence in the corner was clearly unusual. As they talked with me they did so without looking around at the others in the corner. Our conversation was fast and focused. Moments like this revealed the different social spheres of which I had become a part. They also made me uncomfortable. My discomfort came from knowing that I was intentionally negotiating between different ways of being a young man in the different groups. During our interviews David and Hunter commented about the entree they had provided me into their social worlds.

> I wanted to like, introduce you to some of my friends instead of having you just following and writing. You know like, 'This is Mike. You guys should get to know him.' . . . It wouldn't be right to keep you like, just as some guy.

Halfway into the semester Hunter reflected on our relationship. He sent the following email.

> In the beginning of your study I thought you were just going to observe me and not really talk much. I thought you would want to keep things on a professional level so to speak. But now, it's different. I don't see you as someone who is studying me. In fact, I would consider you as one of my friends. When you're not around, people ask me why you follow me and why I'm letting you but I always just say how cool you are. And you are. It's weird I guess, but to me, you no longer seem like this adult who is following me around, but actually my friend. I like it better this way too because I feel much more at ease and I can talk to you, even if you don't ask me a question. Before I used to just wait until you asked me something, but now I know I can just tell you whatever, and talk to you as though you're just 'one of the guys' so to speak.

The relationships I shared with these young men evolved over the course of the semester. I moved from being referred to as "the shadow" to just being one the guys. I successfully positioned myself among the boys in an effort to push the relationship dynamic we shared. To a large extent the participants shared the

power of developing our relationships. They could have adopted a very distant stance but as they explained above they embraced me as one of their friends.

Reciprocity between the researched and the researcher promotes a relationship in which "the researcher moves from the status of stranger to friend and thus is able to gather personal knowledge from subjects more easily" (Lather,1991, p. 57). The intimate relationship we shared as students and friends was apparent in my developing knowledge of these men. On the surface I knew their daily routines and at any given hour during the day I knew where each of my participants might be and with whom. If I had to find them I knew who to ask and where to go. And if they were not in school I generally knew where they might be. Our school lives had become closely intertwined in many ways.

Maintaining relationships and connections to the participants required extra work since generally none of these young men shared similar social spheres. Aside from David and Philip who had some friends in common and two classes together, the crossing of paths between the participants was rare. During the weeks that I was not with the other young men I kept in touch through emails or more casually by head nods in the halls. Admittedly we rarely had time to talk on these off weeks. I tried to keep in touch more casually. I was able to have more infrequent contact by dropping into the school library, hanging in the halls, or walking with them out to the parking lot at the end of the day.

Towards the close of the school year the crossing between and belonging to different social groups was more publicly acknowledged. I received twenty-

seven invitations to open houses. On several occasions the invitations were given to me while I was in other social groups. The reactions from within the groups echoed marked distinctions about the different types of students I knew at the school. My membership in different groups prompted some surprise and a degree of curiosity. The exchange of open house invitations for example prompted some to ask "How do you know her?" and "How come I am not invited?" My friendship with the students had been cemented into place over a period of months. I had established trust and a solid rapport with not only the four young men, but their peers as well.

Distancing myself from any role of authority within the school was a complicated process. For the most part the students had developed an impression of me as a student from the university. At the same time, their specific knowledge of my research was relatively vague. Rather than explain in detail I responded to inquiries about the study by offering a broad overview of my interests in gender and education. Students accepted this explanation often reiterating "Oh, so you just want to hang out with us to see what we do." For the students this did not appear to be a problem. There was some initial concern about my connection to authority but that passed as I became accepted as a member within different groups.

When teacher/adult turns student

The teachers at Central High never expressed any concerns about me as a member of their classes. There was an understanding that I was in these classrooms to observe and record the interaction of my participants. I attended

classes, study halls, and abided by school rules (as much as the participants did!), showing hall passes and admit slips when required. I was a shadow following these students when they went to class as well as when they did not. When any of the young men skipped classes I was alongside them. Likewise if they were called to the office I went with them. There was very little time during the weeks that the participants were not saddled with me at their side. At the same time I also assured teachers that I would be punctual and as unobtrusive as possible. I was not involved in doing the classroom work but merely there to listen and record my observations. There were times however, as one teacher chided me, jokingly saying, "You're as bad as the students." Being among the students thus put me in situations where my behavior became indistinguishable from an outsider perspective such as the teacher. Several other teachers had observed and acknowledged how well I had been accepted among the students. This was reassuring but also posed a problem for one teacher.

My field relationship in this instance was muddied by my previous history as a teacher and university liaison. Four months into the study the familiar role I had negotiated as a researcher and "student" became a contentious point for one teacher. The event leading to this was unforeseeable. I had been in other classes with substitute teachers and had no reason for concern. In this situation however the teacher thought I had crossed a boundary by refusing to use my authority as a past teacher.

> The scenario unfolded one April day during the regular teacher's absence. The class was unruly and generally hard to manage for the substitute in charge. Prior to the beginning of class the next day, Mr. Krantz remarked to me "I am not pleased with yesterdays' class. You're an adult. You

should have stepped in." I was somewhat blind-sided by his comment. I responded "I don't have any authority to step in and besides it would have jeopardized my research." He persisted saying, "Would you have let that go on if you were up there?" I replied "No, I would have made different choices if I were the teacher in charge." Before closing the conversation he remarked, "I'm going to talk to the boss and have you removed from here." To settle the waters I responded "Do you want me to leave now?" He allowed me to stay saying, "No, I will talk to them in the office first."

The tension that had arisen was unfortunate. However it was a situation that clearly could have had a potentially damaging effect on the relationships I had established among the students. I could not risk changing roles at this stage in the research. And while Mr. Krantz had hoped I would have taken charge from the substitute teacher, I refused to jeopardize the credibility, trust, and relationships at the core of my research. For the remaining several weeks left of school our relationship was cool and distant. We had no occasion to talk any further. I extended my thanks to him through a letter at the end of the year.

Ethnographic methods

Ethnographic studies have provided powerful lenses for gaining insider insight to the cultural context of education. In order to learn about the cultural meanings, behaviors, and more generally, the way of life, ethnographers need to be immersed in the cultural setting. In education this means entering a school and to some extent becoming a participating member. This section outlines several techniques used to gather data in the process of developing a specific perspective for interpreting and understanding the school experiences of four young men.

In addition to gaining access and being accepted in a school, part of the ongoing task of the ethnographer is to truly develop an accurate picture and

interpretation of the lives about which s/he has studied. While conducting this research I attempted to capture the daily interaction among high school students by intentionally narrowing my focus. In the following I will explain how I chose these participants. Second I will describe the techniques I used to gather data. Third, I will explain the decisions I made to include some data while excluding other data. I conclude by providing my theoretical and analytical framework

The sampling

The participants in this study were chosen specifically because they presented and represented a particular model of behavior and views atypical of mainstream high school young men. In other words I chose the four young men in this study because they offered a perspective about which education researchers know very little. Few researchers have explored the school lives of young men who have not fallen into a range of familiar social categories. This research moves us further by examining the school experiences, patterns of behaviors, and attitudes or beliefs of young men who are exemplary because, in many observable ways, they are unlike the rest of the boys.

The participants were taken from a purposeful sampling of senior high school young men. Four young men were approached for this study because they were exemplars demonstrating an array of behaviors atypical of mainstream young men. I began looking for these young men in the face of considerable cynicism from several teachers. "You actually think they are out there?" "Don't you mean you want to examine the young men who are sexist?" After talking with thirty teachers I had complied a list of eighteen students who were suggested as

possible candidates for this study. In the 6 weeks prior to the end of first semester I began visiting twenty-one different classes. The classes varied including Fiber class, Mathematics, Jewelry and Metal Art, Organic Chemistry, American Government, Spanish, Economics, Statistics and Probability, and Psychology. While in these classes I observed the routine interaction and listened to the conversations of the recommended students.

From the list of names provided I approached 6 students. One declined because his parents thought being a part of this study would be too time consuming in his final semester and the other declined because he was concerned about privacy. The other four young men volunteered enthusiastically. None held any reservations but were assured nonetheless they could withdraw from this study at any time. The participants, David, Hunter, Thurston, and Philip are all white, middle-class, heterosexual males[1]. I provide a much more detailed account for each young man in the final section of this chapter.

In the previous sections I described the types of relationships I nurtured while being what Wolcott (1988) described as an "active participant." During the second and final semester of the high school year I shadowed the four participants. I gathered data at Central High from January 1998 until the June

[1]It is arguable if in fact the participants were heterosexual, however I accepted their admissions and introductions to girlfriends as some indication of their orientation nonetheless. The appearance as a heterosexual man is significant. I agree with Gutterman (1994)who argued that "whereas women and gay men are often forced to seek to dismantle the categories of gender and sexuality from culturally ordained positions of the 'other,' profeminist men can work to dismantle the system from positions of power by challenging the very standards of identity that afford them normative status in the culture" (p. 229). During the six months of this study each of the participants was dating for a period of time. This presented itself as evidence on one level of the heterosexuality of the participants.

graduation ceremonies of that academic year. During this time I attended classes, hung out in the hallways, shared lunches, and generally blended with the rest of their friends. The participant's schedule became my schedule. I recorded their daily interaction, conversations and routine patterns of behavior. At the end of each day I revisited my notes adding and clarifying any details I missed. Generally however I was able to keep detailed descriptions while the students worked in class.

Part of the data for this study was gathered using structured and unstructured interviews. These interviews were conducted twice during the course of the year. I wanted to encourage a relationship between us that was respectful and in doing so upset what might be seen as a power differential between us. One way to do this was to invite the participants to choose the interview locations. We had the interviews at locations they had chosen. These included local cafes, a park and a hamburger joint. I used their insight about "good buddy type talks." Briefly, according to them the honest open conversations, the ones that I hoped to capture, occurred between guys when they were just hanging out on an informal basis. During the interviews we drank coffee, walked in the woods, and had a cigarette. These were activities they had chosen as events around which we could talk freely and openly.

The primary aim of my initial interview was to develop a picture of the student's beliefs and views that informed their daily interaction. These interviews were broadly structured to elicit more general insight into the events and relationships these young men shared in schools. The first interview read a bit

like a rambling documentary. Having said that however it is worth noting that my primary objective was to allow the participants a chance to tell me what they noticed, heard, and possibly saw as important aspects of their daily lives. I wanted then to tell me what I should be attuned to as I entered the field with them. I directed the conversations but I gave considerable room in my questioning. For example I asked the students to take me on an imaginary walk with them as we went from one class to the next. The descriptions became a source of insight into their individual observations. They provided me with an opportunity to familiarize myself with their surroundings, their friends, and their perspectives on school events.

The final interview was significantly different from our first ones. These occurred after graduation. And though I attempted to have the interviews during the latter part of the school year, it became virtually impossible. Time restraints and various end of the year events left little time for much one on one time together. The interviews were structured around a series of events, what I refer to as vignettes, that I had captured during field observations. For each interview I had described specific situations and conversations during the year. The primary objective of these interviews was to create an opportunity for the participants to provide me with a reflective commentary on their school experiences. It also had the potential for providing insight into how the participants behaved in certain situations.

The real life scenarios offered a window for seeing how the participant's beliefs were implicitly or explicitly embedded in the scenarios, if at all. This was

also another way that I attempted to hear their voices and at the same time ensure a level of accuracy in the depiction of their school experiences. I intentionally developed an interview process that I hoped would be empowering. My aim was to invite the participants to provide their interpretation and explanations of events. The meaning of events ultimately were negotiated between the researcher and the researched. In this study I offer my interpretation of the students' social lives but I did this largely in collaboration with the participants. They provided a set of meanings and a lens for seeing their school lives. I tried to avoid what Lather (1991) has described as the researchers attempt to "impose meanings on situations rather than constructing meaning through negotiation with research participants" (p. 59). Their beliefs and daily interaction in school represent what I argue are atypical ways for being young men. More boldly stated I argue that the data these young men provide demonstrate a distinctly different perspective--one that runs counter to prevailing gender stereotypes and sexism, commonly expressed by high school young men.

As I have described above the data for this study came from several places. From the students own words the to the snapshots of their daily interaction, I tried to look at the cultural experiences of these young men and faithfully share what and how they participated as members within specific contexts. While conducting this research one particular question stuck with me. "What is going on here?" Wolcott (1988) has argued that in a fundamental way

ethnography involves answering that very question. I attempted to answer this question by developing a form of inquiry that would allow me

> some understanding of how one particular instance, or event, or case, or individual, described in careful detail, is not only unique but also shares characteristics in common with other instances or events or cases or individuals (Wolcott, 1988, p. 203).

The participants in this study became the source of insight for better understanding both masculinity and gender politics within the cultural context of a high school setting. Much like past cultural studies that provide a window on the school lives of students, this study does that while moving one step closer. The view in this study centers around a set of conversations and interactions among students and more specifically among young men who routinely constructed and reconstructed the gendered lives they led.

To this point I have explained the mechanics of conducting qualitative research. From knowing which questions to ask to the complications in the field, I have developed a map that guides one through the procedural steps and decisions I made. The next section closely examines the process involved while analyzing the data.

Emergent Data: Hearing and seeing from within

As the previous sections have shown I struggled on several levels as a researcher. The decisions were complicated. I ambled about trying to define my own role while also gathering data that was authentic. The evenings of sifting through the data were no less complicated. This section discusses the various decisions I made as I probed deeper into the data that filled one journal log after the next. In essence this section is my way of unlocking the filing cabinets that to

this day are filled with data, some of which still remains the unheard experiences of these students. There are several sections. First, I begin briefly with a comment on the process of organizing the data. Second, I discuss the lens I used for categorizing and arranging the data. This section outlines the process of choosing some vignettes and conversations while omitting others. These earlier sections unpack the process of analysis and organization of the data. The latter sections however explain more pointedly the decisions I made to include data that centered primarily on male-male interaction to the exclusion of other forms of interaction.

In order to see and hear themes or recurring patterns in conversations and in the daily interaction between the participants and their peers, I looked for elements of organization in a social world of conflicting pressures and demands of four high school young men. Broadly speaking the descriptions of the daily accounts that form the core of this study became points of inquiry and analysis. In order to find these vignettes I sifted through the data, including field notes, and audio tape recordings of the formal and informal interviews. Gradually I developed a series of analytic memos that helped in the process of organizing emergent theories. It became abundantly clear that, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggested, "there are in no sense pure descriptions, they are constructions involving selection and interpretation" (p.176). As such the data included in this study was chosen specifically because of what I interpreted as its theoretical and practical significance. I will later explain the basis for determining the theoretical and practical significance of this data.

Listening to the data and seeing the patterns

The events, upon which this study is based, ranged from conversations to daily vignettes taken from the school lives of the four high school young men. As high school young men they were typical in a manner that was both familiar and yet puzzling. The everyday nature of the events suggested how unremarkable and indeed commonplace they were among "the boys" and within the general student population overall. At the same time they highlighted something peculiar. Though they appeared much like their classmates, the pattern of interaction and set of beliefs that informed these interactions were noteworthy.

As I began piecing together the data the utility of certain events or moments of interaction was largely unclear. I was unsure how this data would become a window on some "theory" connecting the seemingly disparate pieces. I nonetheless began organizing the data by using broad conceptual categories as a foundation for my initial interpretations. With fresh eyes on a setting that was still new to me from the perspective of student lives, I moved forward, carefully and tentatively. My primary goal was

> to see whether any interesting patterns can be identified; whether anything stands out as surprising or puzzling; how the data relate to what one might have expected on the basis of common-sense knowledge, official accounts, or previous theory; and whether there are any apparent inconsistencies or contradictions among the views of different groups or individuals, or between people's expressed beliefs or attitudes and what they do. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 178)

As such the data allowed me to both hear and see different sets of beliefs or gender politics which I later argue informed the daily conversations and school interaction characteristic of each of the four young men in this study.

While sifting through the data I felt compelled to look at two levels namely, the surface level, and a second deeper level. At the surface level the social interaction I witnessed struck me as typical of many students but high school masculinity in particular. They were familiar events or conversations given what previous studies had identified as patterns of conduct, conversations, and general social interaction among students, men and women. (see Connell, 1998; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Walker, 1998; Messner, 1997; Thorne, 1993, Willis, 1977) These and other studies were central to developing an understanding that defined schools as a cultural context and gave a specific lens for seeing various versions of masculinities and femininities within this setting.

At a second, more textured level numerous conversations and field notes appeared more contoured in a seemingly very familiar cultural landscape. The data was both common and yet uncommon. I considered incidents and conversations that were representative of the typical interaction among high school students. In addition to the past research of high school masculinities I conceptually mapped out what I saw as a pattern of behavior and attitudes among the young men in this particular school setting. On the one hand then the vignettes in this study were chosen because substantively they were not unusual. On the other hand though what was unusual and made them stand out was the type of response expressed by the participants. I will explain further. In one vignette Hunter acted much like one of "the boys." He did not reject the standard behavior of his male counterpart, which I viewed as a sexual representation, or

display of a specific form of high school masculinity. Instead he supported a typical version of high school masculinity.

The practical and theoretical import of this data came first, from its ability to highlight standard normative behavior among these high school young men and second, from the stance that it allowed me as the researcher to see a tension between a set of beliefs and the adherence or lack of adherence to those beliefs in any visible way. The power of the aforementioned vignette was in identifying it as a moment when Hunter did not respond in a way that I anticipated based on my understanding of his gender politics.

The above reveals how I organized the data using conceptual categories. I also briefly explained how some vignettes and not others became the topic of conversation and analysis. In summary, conducting this research forced me to straddle two worlds in order to capture what I saw from the perspective of these young men as typical interaction. Yet, as a researcher I also sought events or vignettes that carried import for developing theory about high school masculinities.

The data that is front and center to this research emerged out of the lives of these young men. Wolf (1992) described the data collection process this way:

> Experience is messy. Searching for patterns in behavior, a consistency in attitudes, the meaning of a casual conversation, is what anthropologists do, and they are nearly always dependent on a ragtag collection of facts and fantasies of an often small sample of a population from a fragment of historical time. (p. 129)

She went on to say that

> As ethnographers, our job is not simply to pass on the disorderly complexity of culture, but also to try to hypothesize about apparent

> inconsistencies, to lay out our best guesses, without hiding the contradictions and the instability. (p.129)

I chose specific vignettes and portions of conversations to highlight consistencies and inconsistencies in the expression of both masculinities and the gender politics that informed them. The participants were involved in ensuring I was accurate and clear in the details I had captured. In addition, they were the ones who provided the explanations and insight. Rather than impose meanings, I attempted to "construct meanings through negotiation with [the] research participants" (Lather, 1991, p. 59). The next section addresses further questions about why I chose data that centered primarily on male-male interaction but did not include data of male-female interaction.

Men interacting with men: But where are the women?

When I began this research I was mindful of the types of relationships I saw unfolding before me. The relationships among high school young men and women are complicated. Cultural studies however have allowed outsiders to see the patterns and regularity with which these relationships develop both within and across settings. The types of high school relationships captured by mainstream studies often appear simple and uncomplicated, to a point of familiarity. Readers are easily lured by a familiarity that allows them to freely see themselves represented in the data.

Past education studies have looked at masculinities and femininities by drawing on experiences that range from young men in the company of women to looking at young men in the company of other young men, to looking at young women among other young women. (see Canaan, 1991, Connell, Kessler et al,

1985; Mac An Ghaill, 1994; Martino, 1997; Willis, 1977) Each of these studies posed important theoretical and practical questions with regard to gender in education. The conundrum for many researchers is in determining how to theoretically frame an argument that emerges out of the data in front of them. There is a tendency to rely on familiar theories and overlook other possible explanations. New researchers such as myself often fall prey to this trap. As such some researchers have been accused of myopia, a narrow field of vision that has limited the scope and depth of their analysis.

Researchers who have explored gender relations are frequently attacked in academia for underdeveloped theories and narrowly conceived studies that deny alternate possibilities. Barrie Thorne (1993) for example, has argued that gender and education researchers must remain skeptical and cautious of accepting long standing theories. Her research of playground interaction among boys and girls was not immune to the temptation to "light up" familiar patterns of interaction that collectively isolated boys and girls. In her words

> *a skew toward the most visible and dominating---and a silencing and marginalization of the others--can be found in much of the research on gender relations among children and youth*" [emphasis hers] (p. 97).

Neatly organizing and aggregating data by gender differences and overlooking similarities of interaction or times when the boys and girls are together as opposed to apart leaves the full story untold.

By aggregating data that dichotomizes the social world of boys and girls, researchers exaggerate gender differences and overlook or neglect within gender variation. In these cases conceptual frameworks and theoretical

arguments become boxes for already determined routes of analysis. It is often the case that

> Large bonded groups of boys may get more than their share of attention because their talk and actions fit prevailing images of masculinity. And here the literature moves in a circle, carting in cultural assumptions about the nature of masculinity (bonded, hierarchical, competitive, 'tough'), then highlighting behavior that fits those parameters and obscuring the varied styles and range of interactions among boys as a whole. (Thorne, 1990, p. 100)

We are left largely unfulfilled because the data does little more than reaffirm pre-existing theories. The study I conducted does not examine the development of gender conceptions across young men and women. Rather, this research concentrates on the moments when young men, often times in the company of other young men, construct and challenge conceptions of masculinity through daily interaction in high school. The data is primarily restricted to conversations, or incidents of men among men. This was not by design but by circumstance. I will explain further in the next section. The question begging to be asked then--Where are the women?

Defining moments: Interactions and conversations among young men

The absence of any data that might suggest when and how these young men constructed definitions of masculinity while among women is striking. Before addressing this issue I will discuss how the micro-context of men among men in a high school setting became the premise for examining specific forms of interaction, namely physical affection and conversations. Following this I will elaborate further on how this precluded my intellectual framework which clearly

supports the notion that gender is relational, but at the same time is presented here largely, though not exclusively, without the voices of young women.

I filtered through my field notes looking for patterns much as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggested. I found two patterns. Each of these carries powerful import for understanding the actions and attitudes of a particular group of men, namely those who reject sexism and gender stereotypes. The data was representative of a regularly occurring type of social interaction among these particular high school men. I will describe each of these. First, there emerged a series of male-male interactions that relied on physically affectionate contact such as touching or hugging between men. And second, a set of conversations that were gender exclusive by the very nature of the substantive issues with which they dealt. These conversations thus were among young men because they would not and could not have occurred elsewhere. The level of intimacy, the substance, and the type of exchange that characterized these vignettes demonstrated dis-confirming evidence that challenged previous mainstream theoretical frameworks for explaining high school masculinity. Though my choice of data may raise some eyebrows since it is heavily grounded in male-male interaction and conversations, this does not in and of itself deny the argument put forth by Thorne (1993) and others, that gender is relational.

Social practices and forms of interaction are a medium through which masculinities are modeled on the basis of competing views about gender relations and masculinity specifically. Interaction among students goes beyond social divisions traced to a class, race, gender, and sexual matrix. It

encompasses a deeply embedded set of beliefs, namely one's gender politics, in the subtly and nuanced expressed ways we engage as young men and women. The perspective these young men brought to the fore reflect a range of responses, which in and of themselves challenge the assumption that young men share common school experiences. Masculinities and the social practices that define them need to be more broadly viewed. As Thorne (1990) has pointed out

> Looking at social context shifts the analysis from fixing abstract and binary differences to examining the social relations and contexts in which multiple differences are constructed, undermined, and given meaning" (p. 112).

The construction of differences among and across young men may also be "undermined" and challenged. Gender relations need not be seen strictly as a set of disparate social world experiences. It is also worth noting the ways that young men and women interact together supporting, maintaining and, undermining conventional forms of gender expressions and relations. The fact that the research I conducted does not reveal mixed groups constructing gender definitions is more a reflection on the degree to which these young men in particular and possibly high school young men more broadly interact among men than a theoretical claim or omission.

High school young men and women routinely exchange and enact ideas that sustain competing versions of masculinity and femininity. Social interaction among students thus is a public means by which different forms of masculinity are expressed on a daily basis. Schools provide one of many contexts in which gender is worked out among students, both men and women.

> To construct and maintain a sense of who they are, boys must draw on the available terms, categories and ways of thinking, acting and interacting

> which these various contexts provide, including the specific forms of masculinity associated with them. (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p. 51)

The daily conversations and social practices that become a part of being among the boys or among the girls mirror different patterns of masculinity and femininity.

Displays or expressions of one's gendered identity become opportunities for showing allegiances among competing masculinities and femininities. It is not uncommon to find the conversations or physical interactions among young men focusing on sexuality. Terms such as "fag," "wimp" and "queer" are echoed among students to delineate a hierarchy among masculinities. (see Connell, 1996) The frequently sexualized banter that fills the school halls or is whispered behinds one's back is done in a way that further defines differences within and across masculinities and femininities.

The interplay between masculinities is evident not only in schools but also in the media and the portrayal of desirable forms of masculinity. "Masculinities are far from settled" (Connell, 1996, p. 210). On the contrary masculinities are constantly being constructed and re-constructed. Students are bombarded with competing images of masculinity that prompt them to affirm or reject specific models of masculinity. As such peer interactions become a powerful context for examining and understanding how and when masculinities evolve.

The affirmation or challenge to different versions of masculinities occur both within and across single and mixed gendered gatherings of students. (see Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Kaufman, 1994; Thorne, 1993) In this study the social context for observing how and when the participants rejected sexism and gender stereotypes was defined by the students. It was the lack of sexism witnessed

within mixed gender settings which lead to the considerable emphasis on sexist remarks and behavior in single sex gatherings. At the same time discussions or public expressions of masculinity that competed with other versions of masculinity were more likely to occur in cross sex gatherings. In my analysis of the data in Chapter Three I offer some possibilities to explain how the context and specifically the audience may bear on these expressions of masculinity.

Working definitions: Masculinity among men

The study I conducted focused on interaction among young men while largely omitting the moments when they constructed and reconstructed conceptions of masculinity along side young women at Central High. In doing so the research illuminates the intensity and degree to which, at least in this context, definitions of masculinity were heavily influenced by male-male peer interaction. The relative absence of data revealing how these high school young men and women co-constructed masculinities is powerful in itself. Rather than flawed for its inattention to how high school young men and women constructed definitions of masculinity and or how young men rejected sexist behavior and gender stereotypes, this research strongly suggests that men do much of their gender work in the company of other young men.

The relationships the participants had in mixed gendered gatherings were less likely to be characterized by sexist moments. The times when these young men and women commingled however, often became a forum for expressions of gender stereotypical behavior. During an interview Philip explained.

> I think issues of sexism are more widely known and talked about. And they are still sexist but I think that a lot of the sexism in school is kind of

> under the table. . . . It's kind of that under the table covert sexism as opposed to right out in the open.

He later added that

> Some of the girls just kind of accept this under the table sexism. . . . A lot of the girls are kind of passive even though there is all this sexism going on, they just kind of laugh it off. This whole, 'boys will be boys' attitude about it.

The process of constructing gendered identities occurred in a more active and public manner in gatherings where high school men gathered together. In mixed gendered gatherings on the other hand, students were either more subtle in their sexist remarks or their behavior was chocked up to "boys being boys."

Analytic and theoretical framework

Gender and education debates have had a well charted history. The issues are clear. Questions of funding, resources, and equal opportunities have been central to the many discussions for improving equality in education and ultimately eliminating sexism and gender bias. The emphasis has been on promoting change to a system of education that has favored boys and disadvantaged girls. Change has been directed primarily from a structural level. However, this research reveals that change can also occur at a different level, namely from among the students. The following research demonstrates whether and how high school young men challenge sexism and gender stereotypes through daily interaction with their peers.

Students are central to the process for eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes in schools. In this study four high school young men illustrate the potential they have as young men to challenge and discourage sexism and

gender stereotypes among high school students. Their experiences reveal the possibilities for enlisting and supporting young men as allies invested in social change. In a sense, these young men were change agents. By this I mean they operated intentionally and thoughtfully. They acted as individuals whose gender politics became a type of social agenda. Amidst the daily interaction with their high school peers these young men rejected sexist beliefs and gender stereotypes in ways unlike many of their mainstream peers.

This study widens the range within which young men are seen as social agents. Previously studies have examined the views and attitudes of young men after high school, during college or while in the work force. The following study forces us to look at young men before they reach college age, before they are introduced to college level feminist courses and before they are introduced to formal movements or organizations that ostensibly confirm or locate men as agents for social justice.

I begin this study by outlining my theoretical lens. First, perhaps most central to this research, is my argument that sex role theories which have long claimed students, young men and women, have willingly accepted time worn scripts of femininity and masculinity are insufficient. Previous theories of socialization do not explain the complicated and contradictory experiences of students' lives. For all intents and purposes I restrict my argument to explaining how masculinity in particular has been simplified by these previous theories. The data suggests on the contrary that masculinity is complex involving an array of differences among high school young men. These differences have been

overshadowed because past theories have assumed that *all* young men willingly accept sex roles. The theoretical arguments have emphasized similarities and shared experiences while overlooking differences among and between high school young men.

Second, I build on recent critical theory and men's studies research by arguing that gender is a complicated process involving choices and possibilities influenced by, but not restricted to a preordained set of standards for masculinity. I extend the theoretical and practical debate in gender and education by revealing how and when masculinity is negotiated as a fluid construct---one that is neither static nor fixed. In other words, gender is what one *does* by carefully managing specific ways for being in high school. These young men thus express and display masculinities plural through courses of action and interaction among their peers. In doing so each of these young men represents specific versions of masculinity that are similar but different from mainstream masculinity.

Third, this study builds on previous arguments in men's studies research by claiming that high school young men are engaged in a social process of defining their own gender politics. These four young men hold a set of well defined gender politics that contrast significantly with those commonly reflected and documented in mainstream studies. I add to men's studies by showing that the choices young men make while expressing their masculinities are as much about their gender politics, namely their views, beliefs, and attitudes about sexism and gender stereotypes, as they are about being a man. One informs the other. In light of this I argue that high school young men represent a dynamic

countercurrent of diverse ways of being within and among masculinities. In other words as high school young men they present and represent a strikingly powerful stance that runs counter to the prevailing beliefs and attitudes common among mainstream young men.

Finally, this study is anchored in what I argue is the routine expression of masculinities. Social practices and conventional norms of behavior among students and specifically young men are central as an arena in which to observe the process of choosing one masculinity while rejecting others. The process is complicated and involves overlapping ways of being young men. Daily social practices among high school students thus become the vehicle for conveying individually competing and conflicting gender politics. In a variety of contexts and situations these young men expressed a repertoire of ways for displaying their masculinities while also emphasizing their individual gender politics. The social context of a high school provided multiple contexts within which these young men operated intentionally accepting and rejecting various conventions of masculinity. The participants demonstrated what was involved in adhering to a set of beliefs about gender relations that frequently challenged and at times supported traditional masculinities within high school.

Central High

Central High is a public high school in a mid-western city that borders a Big Ten university. In and beyond the immediate community Central is widely respected both academically and athletically. Its student body is likewise well known for the high energy and enthusiasm exhibited on a regular basis. While

the student body is predominantly white, it does reflect a vast and rich multicultural livelihood in its students and school programming. Of the almost 1200 students 24 percent are from minority backgrounds. Three hundred of the total school population is seniors.

The school sits nestled amidst the local community with a grove of trees bordering it to the north. At the front of the school several contemporary style benches and tables sit with small clusters of students gathering on and around them. A meandering sidewalk leads to the front doors. To the side is a well planned garden bursting with a variety of brilliantly colored flowers and wild grasses. The parking lot is filled with a variety of cars, and jeeps, many of which sport school stickers advertising athletic and academic involvement. The student parking lot runs parallel in length and width to the school football field. The surrounding neighborhood is a mix of student homes, fraternity houses, sorority houses and established homes. The closer you get to the high school the more evident the high school presence appears.

Upon entering Central High you are immediately struck by either a rush of human activity or semi-deserted hallways, depending of course on when you enter the school. The school halls are welcoming. The administration has spent considerable time and effort hanging inspirational banners, signs and posters. Show cases of student work dot the halls. At the center of the school is a meeting place called "the crossroads." During a five-minute passing time between classes many students, but not all, stop and chat with friends. Other students fill the halls, stopping at lockers, standing in corners or stopping in the

office. The school is alive with energy flowing from the bodies bustling in the halls. In the crossroads there is a noticeable presence and common look among both boys and girls. Name brand clothing and accouterments are the norm. L.L. Bean, Jansport, Abercrombie and Fitch, Birkenstocks, Polo, Nautica and the like are visibly displayed designer names of choice. Not all students, but many share this fashion. The school year book in fact suggested the importance of fashion by including a six-page spread of "Your guide to what's in style and what it will cost you."

Choosing names: What shall I call you?

In an earlier section I described several ways that I attempted to challenge the researcher/researched dynamic in this study. I intentionally nurtured relationships that positioned the participants along side me as collaborators in a process of documenting their school lives. One other means of empowering the participants was by not naming them. Instead I asked them for names. I wanted them to be responsible for naming the self. In each case the name was either agreed upon collaboratively or chosen from several names offered by the participants.

The names these young men chose generally reflected something about each of them. Thurston chose his name from several. He gave me a list of names, all of which were musicians. His passion for music was evident in his choice of names, which included Miles, Nels, and Archer. We agreed upon Thurston. He recently explained via email that

> Thurston Moore is the guitarist of Sonic Youth, and Sonic Youth is a pretty good band. Also, I just like the name. It has a nice ring to it, but it's not

very common. It just reminds me of someone like me (or how I picture myself).

As a researcher I invited the participants to name themselves. The reasoning for each varied. Whether grounded in childhood memories or special interests it was the participants who assigned the names and not me as the researcher.

Hunter's name was chosen for several reasons. Along with recollecting a boyhood memory of his dog named "Hunter," he also connected his name to a crazy journalist, Hunter S. Thompson, with whom he was familiar. He emailed saying "He did a lot of drugs and is from the 60s and 70s and is just an amazing/funny/talented person." During a conversation Hunter also pointed out that it is "like, a twist" on his character since in his words "I detest hunting. It is ironic that I would call myself Hunter when the total opposite is true. It's like, people look at guys one way but with me I can be the total opposite to what they expected." David's name came from the biblical tale of David and Goliath. His religious background made this name fitting. Philip's name came about after several email exchanges. The name was more or less one that seemed to work. There was no extensive reasoning for this name.

David: . . ."so I gave him a hug."

David stands tall in the halls. He is strong academically and juggles his many responsibilities with the help of a school daily planner he carries everywhere. Assignment due dates, hockey practices, and the like are all carefully entered. Most recently his contribution as the Co-Captain of the school hockey team has gained him notable attention as he walks the halls. However, he is a humble young man and often downplays the accolades from peers and

teachers. As he flows through the halls he frequently shares his warm personality and smile with his friends. He is genuine in his concern for his classmates, often stopping to actually hear how they are doing. " I like to find out what's really wrong or to find out what's going on in people's lives as opposed to just 'Hey, how's it going?' His affection for his peers is evident in his unabashed physical expressiveness toward his male friends. "We used to be in freshman biology together so I gave him a hug." Often embracing or simply physically reaching out to his fellow classmates, David presents a striking image of a young man through his caring and understanding manner. He is well received by his peers and indeed provides many with a model for his unfailing character.

Hunter: "I am not ashamed of anything I do."

As he stands in the corner of the crossroads Hunter appears to be like many of the other boys around him. In fact he is closer to a mainstream youth than any of the other participants in this study. At the same time he demonstrates how a thoughtful and sensitive young man can carve out his own niche and be accepted by the prevailing mainstream youth. Whiling time away with his friends his charisma and energy are evident in the seamless flow of conversation. He talks in an almost fluid jovial manner among his peers. When he is not surrounded by his close peers Hunter assumes the role as Student Council President. Perhaps evident of youthful naiveté or an unfettered ambition he often remarks smiling, "I will be President before I am thirty-five." His youthful liveliness is invigorating and at times disarming when he finds himself in a jam. He is confident and honest in his approach saying "I'm not ashamed of anything I

do." Hunter is daring and at times brazen. Skipping classes and boldly greeting teachers in the hallway as he does so, is only one example. At the same time Hunter is a young man who will share his deepest feelings in class during a poetry reading. He is also a young man who will freely embrace another young man when "he is down and just needs a hug." He is a counselor, a listener, and a man with compassion for others.

Philip: From the halls to the stage

As he walks through the hall carrying a coffee to his morning class Philip flashes a smile. His jovial, rather carefree attitude is evident in his voluminous voice. Beyond the classroom his enthusiastic zest in life and professional passion appears on stage in school productions like "Cinderella." He admits he is not outstanding academically but he nonetheless is committed applying to and attending a Big Ten university. He is a young man whose contributions in class reflect an element of risk on his part because he does not know or assume to know the right answer. "I may be wrong but" or "I'm not sure about this" are common entries into discussion as he offers his thoughts and ideas in class. There is little pretence in his interaction with his peers. He opens his arms and often embraces his close friends with little if any reserve. His presence in his classes is not dominating but tends to be more reserved than not. He knows his responsibilities and tries to fulfill them even if without the help of a school planner which he says is "too much work." Philip stands along side many friends in school but he does so in a transient manner. He often floats in on conversations and groups and steps away from them in the same unobtrusive way. It is the

open and honest expressive manner of Philip that sets him apart from many other young men.

Thurston: An 'alternateen' in "the corner"

Thurston, drawing from a popular cultural definition, refers to himself as an "alternateen." He looks different from the mainstream youth described above. For Thurston, his appearance is not dictated by current fashion trends commonly worn by mainstream youth. He meets his friends, most of whom are girls, in "the corner," an out of the way corner located at the end of the English wing. Geographically and socially then he is situated and connected in the school very differently from the other boys. He is thoughtful and attentive to his peers. He interrupts a young man to invite a girl to continue what she was saying. He invites his girl friends to his house where they can share lunch. He is a bright young man and academically is well directed in his pursuit of a university education. Thurston's expression is apparent in the venues he has chosen to be a part of in school. He is musically inclined and invested in projects that in his words he is "passionate" about. He is also an Editor with the school newspaper, a member of the Editorial Board for a poetry publication, and performs as a bass player in both his own band and a school band. He provides a different perspective from many other young men his age perhaps because of his willingness and ability to invest himself in ways in school that are arguably non-traditional for many other young men his age.

CHAPTER THREE

Four cases: Masculinity, choices, and gender politics

In the previous chapter I outlined the methodological details for conducting qualitative research as well as my theoretical and analytical lens. This chapter takes us into the center of a high school and more specifically along side four young men who arguably represent a new wave of high school masculinity. The data I provide for each participant demonstrates how both masculinity and gender politics are intricately woven together. Furthermore, the vignettes I include reveal the extent to which individually and collectively school experiences become powerful contexts within which young men exercise varying degrees of agency to oppose sexism and gender stereotypes. I turn now to outline the three main themes I have used to organize this chapter and the aim of each section.

First, masculinity is fluid. It is not static but instead being a high school young man is about choosing from among multiple ways of being a man. In any given situation such as a high school context, there is an array of ways for being a man. This multiplicity of masculinities is not always evident because of the power and status that often upholds and overshadows some forms of masculinities over others. Each of the participants was surrounded by different types of masculinities, some more valued than others.

This section provides data that illustrates how and when different masculinities are played out in a high school. The evidence I provide in this section demonstrates that in varying degrees each young man is directly and indirectly connected to a variety of masculinities. The primary aim of this section

then is to challenge a stagnant and unidimensional concept of masculinity that overlooks the complex lives of young men choosing to be different from the rest of boys.

Second, gender is a process. Being a high school young man means making choices about how and when to express certain elements of masculinity. The process of defining one's masculinity is at times coherent while at other times contradictory. In other words the way one presents and represents the self, as a man is not always consistent. This section offers evidence that reveals how and on what basis young men make choices about defining particular forms of masculinity. I illustrate how, for example, different contexts (shared experiences, mood) levels of friendships, levels of openness-or receptivity from friends bear on the extent to which these four young men stray from traditional norms and attitudes common among mainstream young men. The data further illustrates that being a young man in high school involves a complicated process of reading people, knowing what the norms of behavior represent, as well as operating within a broader social context that defines and informs one's behaviors and attitudes. And finally, the evidence in this section illustrates that the ways these young men represent themselves as high school young men is occasionally contradictory. This aspect of socially enacting one's gender as a man highlights a process of negotiation that occurs within and across high school masculinities.

The primary aim of this section is to further a debate in gender and education by arguing that high school masculinity is layered in meanings both

conceptually and practically. It is not unidimensional. Being a young man is about making choices. It is about knowing how and when to express the self as a man in high school. It is about delineating forms of expressions that reflect clear and powerful images of specific masculinities. It is about choosing from among a spectrum of masculinities by variously expressing different elements that contribute to what it means to be a man within a high school.

Finally, the beliefs and attitudes, or what I refer to as gender politics of these four young men shed light on how differences among young men are manifest in their daily interaction at high school. In other words then the conversations, interaction, and nuanced forms of expression among young men reveal an array of attitudes and beliefs underscoring how and what men do as high school young men.

By narrowly defining my focus to four young men, this research provides an intense view on a set of beliefs and attitudes hitherto not documented let alone acknowledged as possible among high school young men. With each situation in this section I reveal a) the different forms of masculinity and b) a response that explicitly or implicitly reflects on the participant's views or attitudes toward sexism and gender stereotypes. Generally the data centers on a specific situation-a vignette taken from the field. In light of the incident or scene I then turn to the insight or reflection of the participant as a way of interpreting and understanding how the scene is a representation of the playing out or silencing of one's gender politics. In a sense I unravel the scene to identify the gender politics and the ways they are intertwined together with other issues.

In each case the primary aim within this section is to develop an argument that sees young men as social allies. It is an effort that conceptually and practically moves us beyond seeing *all* the boys as the source of the problem. Moreover this section pushes us to conceptually and practically re-envision masculinity. In doing so the data reveals the possibility of seeing young men as potential allies for eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes.

DAVID

> I am sure you could sit down and trace this [hugging] back to my childhood and like, blah, blah, blah. You might think David didn't get hugged by his parents enough or something. But I think really what it is, is that we really draw from each other for a lot of strength . . . . Those kinds of relationships mean a lot to me where I know I am there for somebody.

Introduction

Standing among his friends as he so often does between classes, David looks much like the other young men that flank him. Clad in the latest styles of American Eagle or Abercrombie and Fitch, these high school young men share a common fashion as high school youth. The surface is telling perhaps of a shared commodity of fashion sense. But beyond the style and fashion David is a young man whose physical closeness and sense of appreciation for his friends is almost uncanny among his mainstream male counterparts.

David represents a striking contrast as a young man who, though he may reflect a similar outward appearance, possesses an attitude toward gender and sexism that bears listening to and closely observing in his daily interactions with his school peers. It is here, at school, with his friends that David presents a set

of views that run counter to prevailing mainstream beliefs among his male counterparts. He explained his perspective with thoughtfulness and maturity.

> I think there is something that has not even to do with the women themselves but what is important is my attitude towards them. . . . It comes from more of like, who I want to become. I mean you could trace it back to 'Oh well, I grew up with my mom and, you know, [he laughs]. You can do that and I am not sure it has a lot to do with it.

David has no clear explanation for how these attitudes have evolved. His actions however offer compelling insight into the nature of these views and the struggles for a young man such as David who is routinely surrounded by peers whose ideas and beliefs mirror mainstream masculinity.

A hockey player with an attitude?

With little pretense David stands tall among his peers. As the co-captain of the high school hockey team he was highly regarded and well respected. His attitudes toward women reflect none of the bravado or machismo one might expect caught up in being a star hockey player. He did not succumb to the pressures his coaches might have hoped he would. Rather than try to hurt people and fight to appease his coaches' calls, David remained calm and unbending. David recalled the type of attitude that not only did he harbor earlier as a young man growing up, but it was promoted and sought after by coaches on the hockey team.

> I'll admit, in eighth grade I was a pretty mean kid. I was bitter. I came from a broken home. I used to be pretty bitter about a lot of things. And so I would get mad and I would get angry and I would try to hurt people and fight in hockey.

After some tumultuous years however David's commitment, energy, and attitude as a hockey player and a young man had changed substantially. What had not

changed however were the demands of the coaches. The expectations that players be aggressive and violent prevailed. To their dismay David explained "the coaches would get so furious that I couldn't get mad." David rejected the typical sports image as an aggressor. Instead he expressed his commitment in different ways. In contrast to what was expected of him as a hockey player and a young man, David offered a different version of masculinity rarely acknowledged or legitimated within a sports arena such as this. He explained;

> I would feel that wasn't right. . . . He [the coach] was trying to get that from me just because it's hockey, you know, blah blah blah. And I would be like, helping people up who were checked down. If they got hurt, I mean you don't have to hurt them, you just got to knock them and keep them out of the way really. But the coaches would get so furious that I couldn't get mad.

As a young man then David presented an alternate version to the prevailing and more highly valued images of an athletic masculinity. His beliefs and attitudes not only to sports but also to relationships in general distinguished David among his peers.

It was not easy to adopt and adhere to a set of values that challenged mainstream masculinity. Expressions of masculinity thus were not only contested during the daily interaction among David's peers, but the struggles and tensions between masculinities extended to the formal sports arena as well. Definitions of masculinity were both formally and informally woven into the daily fabric of David's school life.

Masculinity: Beyond a unidimensional concept of the boys

David took up a particular version of masculinity different from his mainstream male counterparts. In the process of defining his own masculinity he

rejected different aspects of mainstream masculinity, namely various attitudes and typical behaviors common among his male counterparts. In this section of my case study I lay out several vignettes to showcase the competing masculinities within David's own peer group in addition to a broader sweep at Central High as a high school context in which to observe these masculinities.

During routine school interaction David used various forms of expression and conversations that ran counter to a long standing prevailing image of masculinity. The school interaction between David and his peers was a powerful context for observing how this young man framed and became framed as a high school young man attempting to define a particular masculinity within a specific school context.

In many ways the school arbitrates between different kinds of masculinities. There emerges in schools what Kessler et al (1985) have described as a "gender regime." Schools are one of many institutions in which young men and women either accept or reject different forms of masculinity and femininity.

> It [school] provides a setting in which one kind or another becomes hegemonic . . . It produces other masculinities but marginalizes them, while giving most honor and admiration to a tough and dominant virility . . . the school as an institution is characterized at any given time by a particular gender regime. This may be defined as the pattern of practices that construct various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, [and] orders them in terms of prestige and power. . . . The gender regime is a state of play rather than a permanent condition. It can be changed, deliberately or otherwise, but it is no less powerful in its effects on the pupils for that. It confronts them as social fact, which they have to come to terms with somehow. (Kessler et al, 1985, p. 42)

The tensions between staking a claim and knowing where one stands have significant implications that are played out implicitly and explicitly among high school students and boys in particular. There is very little neutral ground or open spaces in a high school that is not bound by conventions of masculinity. Be it formally or informally young men are frequently confronted by challenges that push them to know what it means to be a man and "make the masculine grade" (Kaufman, 1994, p. 159).

Physical prowess: Athleticism, "python guns" and muscle magazines

Casual conversations or comments among students allow us to hear which aspects of masculinity are most important and valued. In class one day David's peer for example grabbed his arm and remarked "Oh man! You got some python guns!" His comment was said in jest. The underlying message however is telling. Physical prowess was important. On different occasions students could be overheard commenting and occasionally comparing one another. This aspect of masculinity as a form of daily expression is taken up in a later discussion with some of David's other peers.

Physical prowess and competition was broadly supported at different levels within the school. Teachers, for example, could be heard supporting student participation but specifically participation within the sports arena. Casual in-class comments brought many athletic events into the classroom. The frequent and good-natured inquiries about last night's hockey game or the lacrosse game inadvertently showcased certain aspects of being a high school young man over others. Rarely was there any discussion for example about the

successes of the debating team, the numerous displays of senior artwork, or the contributions students made to the literary publications at Central High.

On one level these types of casual conversations encouraged school involvement but at another level they conveyed messages about which type of masculinity was valued as a model for others. In one class David's teacher enthusiastically asked, "Are we celebrating a victory yet?" Another teacher offered congratulatory praise. Daily conversations contribute to the sense students make about an athletic masculinity and its place within the gender order of a school.

Students are aware of the significant place athletics have in a school community. In many cases the shaping and re-shaping of masculinities pivot around sports as a social organizing agent in schools. (see Bissinger, 1991; Messner, 1988, 1991) "The meaning most men give to their athletic strivings has more to do with competing for status among men than proving superiority over women" (Messner, 1991, p. 72). And while teachers support and legitimate certain forms of masculinity through daily informal conversations, students likewise are a part of an "informal peer-group life [in which] much of the politics of gender is worked out" (Kessler et al, 1985, p. 42). The posturing among young men in school sports evolves within a sports arena. In addition the legitimacy of some masculinities over others is played out in classroom and hallway conversations in a way that cements into place the differences between young men.

High school young men such as David are constantly engaged in the process of taking up different versions of masculinity. Along with an emphasis on athleticism at Central High, media images were also a point of reference for defining masculinity for some students. In the following vignette David talks with his peers during contemporary math class. The discussion was prompted after a young man left a "Muscle Magazine" at one of the desks in the cluster of tables where David was seated. David's classmate, Kevin, was not in the class at the moment so another student dropped the magazine at his desk.

> David picks up the magazine as the young man walks away. The glossy covered magazine depicts numerous sculptured, extremely muscled young men. As he looks at the cover David inquires "What's this?" The girl next to him looks on curiously and comments "That's gross!" David smiles responding, "I know. I don't think I'd really want to look like that.

Both David and his classmate rejected the image of masculinity depicted by the magazine. It was "gross" and David clearly did not "want to look like that." Their comments revealed a sense of curiosity about one version of masculinity portrayed by the media. Centered on one representation of masculinity this conversation also sheds light on perspectives that do not support a more highly valued image of masculinity portrayed by the magazine. When Kevin returned to his seat to find the magazine, a more enthusiastic and supportive response surfaced.

> Kevin sees the magazine slipped under his knapsack. As he pulls it out he barely contains his excitement. "Oh sweet! Is this from Trevor?" "Yeah" He smiles, dropping the magazine into his lap and fingering through the pages. As he beams with excitement he remarks "Merry Christmas to me!" The teacher's voice is heard in the background as she explains the homework for next class.

Kevin was remarkably animated about the significance of this magazine. He was absorbed in the images he saw. David and the young woman next to him looked on. No conversation ensued. Kevin was immediately transfixed, ignoring class discussion and carefully hiding his magazine just below the table so he could continue to see the pictures. His enthusiasm was a striking contrast to the earlier reactions of disgust and curiosity.

Each of these students responded differently to these images of masculinity. As such masculinity and how it was portrayed in this magazine became a point of difference between these students. David did not disagree with it being a "gross" representation. He rejected it, as an image of masculinity depicted in terms of sheer physicality and moreover added that he did "not want to look like that." His remark was a statement about what he valued and chose to represent in terms of his own masculinity. He did not subscribe to nor did he express his masculinity by displays of physical prowess or brute strength. In fact David presented quite the opposite. During an interview he commented that "a lot of people are surprised I can play hockey . . . People, like Kevin, they want to hear like 'did you hurt anybody?'" The emphasis on physical strength and aggression prevailed among David's peers. It was a powerful framework within which David tried to maintain his own version of masculinity in striking contrast to that of Kevin and his male counterparts.

Informal exchanges among young men at Central High became opportunities for defining masculinities. David explained the extent to which

physicality and strength were a part of a defining rubric among high school men. David described the aspects of fitness valued among his friends this way.

> Not be[ing] huge but to be bigger would be encouraged, just by what's attractive maybe. I think it is just the way guys compare one another against each other. It's like how much they can bench press . . . It's different ways of you sizing people up.

Differing notions of masculinity co-existed at Central High. The above vignettes followed by David's insight illustrates how one version of masculinity in particular dominated the cultural landscape for these young men. Differences existed in how and what expressions of masculinity were embraced by these young men. Classrooms and the weight room were only a few of the places that young men defined for themselves how and what it meant to be a man at Central High. Broadly speaking then high school young men like David and Kevin are routinely engaged in making different and opposing claims about what was representative and by extension, what they valued in terms of their own masculinity.

Telling jokes: Displays and affirmations of sexual prowess

Telling jokes among men is but one way masculinity is socially constructed through informal interaction. As a social practice, telling jokes operates in different ways ranging from exaggerating gender differences and degrading women to prompting conformity among other men. (Walker, 1998) In the following situations at Central High several young men in different classes could be heard telling jokes or focusing attention on their physical endowment. This sort of emphasized masculinising social practice was demonstrated on numerous occasions.

In the following situation one high school young man showed how jokes became a medium through which he expressed his view on masculinity. Jokes operate to "ritually affirm heterosexuality among men whose social circumstances create a level of physical and emotional intimacy culturally regarded as unmasculine" (Walker, 1998, p. 230). In this situation David was party to such an event in which his friend approached us and shared a joke. This joke was prompted by his observation that the corner of my t-shirt was embroidered with JAMAICA.

> As Tyson approaches our table David greets him saying "You want to work with us on these problems? Tyson responds "No," glancing toward me; "the reason I came over was I saw Michael's Jamaica T-shirt. I got this joke to tell you." David and I look in anticipation. I ask cautiously, "Do I want to hear it?" He assures us "Yeah, wait till she leaves," pointing to the teacher. He begins. "So there is this American guy and he's got his girlfriend's name, Sarah, tattooed on his dick. But when it gets limp all you can see is the S H. So when this guy goes into the bathroom he's standing there and he notices this guy next to him with a W Y on his. The American guy says 'Cool, I've got my girlfriend's name tattooed on mine too. Your girlfriend's name must be Wendy.' The Jamaican guy turns to him and says 'No mon, mine says 'Welcome to Jamaica, mon. Have a nice day.' David glances up from his work expressionless and then returns to his homework problems.

The joke served as a means of broaching a topic not often discussed among men. The focus on penis size is one aspect of sexuality among men that allows them to express and emphasize their virility and masculinity. David was not engaged in the joke but instead continued working. I, on the other hand, listened attentively. I provided Tyson with an audience. The topic is striking. It illustrates how and when fundamental components of high school masculinity, specifically physical endowment as a characteristic of masculinity, are played out in routine conversations and expressions among high school young men. David was not

interested in or willing to support this form of joke telling. Tyson however expressed his masculinity and virility via joke telling.

In another class several men routinely made gestures using their books. The phallic symbolism represented by raising their books above their crotch was played out in this class on three separate occasions during the same week. It became a standing joke among these boys. The ritual initially started after a conversation in which several boys spoke of "uncontrollable urges." Much like the practice of telling jokes these young men used humor as a forum in which to express their heterosexuality. In this situation their masculinity was attributed to their "uncontrollable urges" and the uncontrollable, perhaps "natural" urges they had as young men.

Public displays of heterosexuality among young men are often couched in common social practices such as joke telling. Jokes and public displays served a clear purpose among David's male friends. In his words

> I think it is easier for guys to communicate like that. Like especially with things that are wrong. Or like when girls walk by and guys are like, 'David, I would really like to have sex with that girl.' So they kind of like, say it as a joke and other guys go [he changes his voice to a deeper, gruffer sound] 'Yeah, yeah! I can relate to that!'

Several of David's peers emphasized various elements of their masculinity such as their heterosexuality and virility. They set the norm of masculinity by defining for themselves as well as others what was most valued for young men at Central High.

Scoring goals and an academic masculinity

The degree of public expression about competing masculinities at Central High was evident in their daily interaction. At different times and in different contexts different versions of masculinities came to the foreground. Willis' (1977) research, for example, showed the sorting out of varying masculinities that took place. Likewise this study illustrates that within the participant's peer groups some forms of expression and displays of a specific version of masculinity were given more "air time" and in a sense, were more strongly legitimated than others. An alternate form of masculinity, namely one of being studious, received less public expression and acknowledgment.

Relations of power structure the process of negotiating between multiple masculinities. The tensions that underlie these masculinities strike at the degree to which they became broadly accepted or rejected within Central High. Young men who valued and publicly displayed their commitment to their academics were often on the fringes of conversations or formal acknowledgment in schools and generally struggled to be recognized. The powerful interplay between competing ways of being young men in high school arises as "a contest for hegemony between rival versions of masculinity" (Connell, 1998, p. 145). David for example stood on interesting grounds as a young man. He was the co-captain of the hockey team while also being dedicated to his studies. In a conversation with a young woman in his class he raised the question of future plans.

> David asks his classmate, "What are you doing next year?" Trisha replies "What do you mean, studying?" "Yeah," he responds. Trisha explains

> "Veterinary School. What about you?" David is thoughtful. "I don't know what I'll do. I'm thinking about Dental School but I don't know. Six years is a long time and that's after the first two years.

Alongside this conversation David expressed his waning excitement about school sports and then followed up with a conversation about his enthusiasm for physics.

> Trisha asks, "Are you excited about your last game?" In a lacklustre tone David responded " I kind of am. I want to score a lot of goals but I want to be done. You know what I mean? Trisha appreciates his remarks saying, "Yeah, I understand completely! I feel that way in tennis."

As Ms. South walks by, she stops and talks with David.

> 'I really enjoy physics," says David. Ms South agrees saying; "You can see the application of it." David agrees drawing a comparison, "Yeah, it's like literature." Ms South smiles "I got enough problems of my own, I don't need other peoples." Trisha chimes in as Ms. South walks away. "Do you like physics?" David reassures her saying, "Yeah, it's cool!"

This string of three conversations reflects a richness about how and when students, and David in particular, have the opportunity to express their commitment and valuing of their academic studies.

This series of brief conversations is significant. First, in a broader context it revealed that some conversations did in fact promote and encourage an academic masculinity to survive even amidst a prevailing voice valuing athleticism. That is to say then that an academic masculinity was a possible alternative though not often publicly acknowledged in casual conversations among students. The conversations above are poignant examples of the possible intermingling of masculinities framed in daily peer conversations. They importantly demonstrate that an academic masculinity is a viable option, one

which in this case was not overshadowed or completely marginalised by a highly valued athletic masculinity.

The above conversations show a marrying of different interests that dominate the lives of students, both men and women. They also are an important source for understanding what interests informed the choices David was making about where and how he directed his energies in school. In a separate conversation David was asked to play volleyball after school. The choices he expressed in this brief conversation illustrate the tensions between what students valued individually and collectively. These tensions are captured by seemingly disparate academic and athletic masculinities within a high school. David explained that he had other commitments and could not play volleyball. "I have to review the stuff for the Physics AP test." His peer was less supportive saying; "You always have homework!" Divisions between masculinities took hold in subtle ways during these casual conversations between David and his peers. In addition, shortly after hockey season ended David was encouraged by a classmate to join the track team. His classmate encouraged him saying, "You would be good." I heard you were fast." David however refused to participate. Unlike some of his peers David chose to invest himself in a less valued but more career oriented masculinity. David's interest in the hockey season was tempered somewhat as he stated "I want to be done." This contrasted significantly with his enthusiasm for studying physics, which according to him was "cool."

The jostling of conversations above draws attention to the way in which students support and maintain different versions of masculinities via daily

conversations. The casual and taken for granted quips over what students choose to do or not do in school raise important questions about the process of informal gender construction in high school. For example, What aspect of school sports-athleticism is important or valued by students? How do students support different forms of masculinities? How and when do conversations among students sanction various masculinities and femininities?

The tensions between rival versions of masculinity are often times subtle. Among David and his friends the discussions were not tense. And though Messner (1991) has argued that there emerges a sort of jockeying for position or a competition of sorts, these young men demonstrated that some masculinities co-exist without necessarily being threatening to one another. What was also clear however was that the dominating presence of some masculinities, specifically an athletic masculinity, become a significant framework among young men because it was so pervasive and at times overshadowing and dominating the cultural landscape at Central High.

Young men like David are surrounded by multiple representations of masculinities. Some are manifested within the school organization both formally and informally while others are supported or challenged in informal peer group discussion and interaction. David posed a striking figure amidst this polyphony of voices representative of differing versions of masculinities. His way of being a young man is more fully explored in the following section. It is evident from the examples above that high school masculinity emerged in the halls and classrooms in various forms and through competing voices.

High school young men: Making choices to be unlike the boys

Social norms and attitudes about how young men ought to interact are deep-seated. For example, among high school young men physical displays of affection prompt an array of questions tied to masculinity. Kimmel (1994) reminds us of the significant way in which "as adolescents . . . our peers are a kind of gender police constantly threatening to unmask us as feminine, as sissies" (p. 132). It follows then that for young men like David, Hunter, and Philip, whose gender politics included non-traditional forms of daily interaction, they represented a significant challenge to mainstream masculinity. They rejected the social conventions of a high school masculinity that involved for example, rough housing in the hallway, horseplay in the classroom, and more common forms of masculinised practices.

The participants routinely exhibited non-traditional forms of interaction. And although their public displays of affection were not always consistent, their behavior nonetheless posed a challenge to the more traditional male greetings such as hand shakes and "high fives" witnessed among many of these young men. They openly and freely expressed more public displays of affection among their peers which, as Kimmel (1994) has argued, goes against "the traditional rules of masculinity" (p. 133).

Public displays: Physical closeness among men

Like a public stage open to the critics, high school young men such as David are constantly under the watchful eyes of their peers. Daily interaction in the halls, the classrooms, and the school parking lot thus became contested

terrain. Expressions of masculinity were accepted, rejected, and challenged. Social practices among students were interpreted as expressions of masculinity. David for example, explained that he was careful about how he expressed himself among some of his male peers.

> For some people like Rick, you just don't encourage them in that way (using physical contact such as putting his hand on his shoulder) just because, you know, they don't take it as an encouragement type thing. It's like I never, like I don't really touch Rick at all. You know what I mean. Because everybody's different, you know.

David identified physical contact as a form of support. At the same time he was aware that his expression of support might be mired in questions of masculinity. He went on in the interview to say, "Rick cracks me up because he's always like, if anyone smells him, he's like, 'Man, that guy's a homosexual.'" Physical closeness among men like Rick was taboo. Rick described this interaction as common among "a touchy feely type of guy." Young men like David thus were named and categorized in a sense. They were different because they represented competing models of masculinity. And while Rick identified people by their behavior David likewise shared his observations and interpretations of young men like Rick. The interview continued, "Rick cracks me up because no matter what's wrong, he would never tell you anything's wrong. He's that kind of person." David's remarks provide a powerful image of Rick as a familiar model of mainstream masculinity. His observations and understanding of Rick adds to an overall picture about how masculinity was presented and represented among these high school young men. It also suggests the various ways in which expressions of masculinity competed with other versions of masculinity.

David rejected a stereotypical form of interaction among many of his male counterparts. Rather than adhere to traditional social practices such as hand shakes, he embraced his male peers. By doing so David challenged the masculinising social practices commonly accepted and practiced among his peers. He judiciously used various forms of expression in different contexts and among different other young men. While he knew Rick would mis-interpret his physical contact, he also knew that in other contexts close physical contact was better than talking. I asked David to explain further.

> Sometimes like, being reassuring and hugging them [guys] that way can mean so much more than what I can ever say. I am saying 'I am here for you' and it's just like, that [the hug] helps them to feel that.

He was clearly aware of the rules and traditions of masculinity he witnessed in young men like Rick. Physical closeness, for example, was one aspect of masculinity that crossed the boundaries. According to David "they don't' take it [physical closeness] as an encouragement type thing." He added that for young men like Rick physical closeness was interpreted as a sign of being a "homosexual." His final comment pulled together an all too familiar picture of the type of masculinity David challenged in his daily interactions. His remark struck at Rick's inability to openly express himself. "He would never tell you anything's wrong."

David was a poignant reminder of the differences among masculinities. He offered this story during an interview in which he recounted a relationship he shared with a close friend "He [Josh] started crying. I was just like, driving and holding Josh's hand. It's just like, something we have." His intense ability to both

openly express himself and share this concern for his male peers provides a powerful contrast of masculinities. But it also goes beyond that in the way in which he not only represented a different version of masculinity but he enacted this via his opposition to gender stereotypes that potentially limited the many ways of being young men.

"High-fives" and 'hattrick hugs"

Conceptually high school masculinity is fluid but its representations and demarcations are clear and concrete. The various forms of expression and interaction among young men further highlight the reality that in high schools, "heterosexual masculinity is not homogeneous; it is fissured, divergent, and stressed in many ways" (Connell, 1998, p. 151). Young men like David negotiate their masculinities via daily interactions. Social practices such as daily greetings among young men was just one of the subtle and nuanced ways that masculinities were negotiated among competing versions. Consider the following greeting in the school halls.

> As David walks down the hall he notices a friend leaning against the wall. David walks toward him. As he approaches him the other young man raises his hand. At the same time David extends his hands and places them on his friend's waist.

David attempted to embrace his peer while his friend offered a more typical "high five" greeting. The collision of bodies would have been humorous had it not been for what it represented. Drawing from their understanding of common social practices each young man clumsily expressed himself. The clumsiness came in when their norms for communicating as young men were misread.

Public forms of expression among high school young men are layered in meanings. On a separate occasion David and another young man similarly worked out competing displays of masculinity.

> As David approaches math class he hears his name called out. "David, David, stop! David turns to see his friend Ross approaching him. He reaches out to David and fully embraces him saying "Hattrick hug!" They smile and part.

This brief and almost fleeting exchange captured one way that public expressions such as hugging among young men might become legitimated in a masculinist framework. In this vignette David challenged traditional social practices by accepting the embrace. He did not back away or verbally express any opposition to this form of interaction. Instead he accepted the hug as another form of greeting. Ross attempted to legitimate their public affection by framing his hug as a congratulatory "Hattrick hug." He verbally defined their embrace in an effort to legitimate their closeness within a sport's context. The open embrace without any contextualization thus would have been naked and unspecified in an arena where anything remotely feminine might have raised questions about masculinity. (Kimmel, 1994)

Gender politics: Degrees of opposition

Gender politics are often times expressed publicly in the daily lives of students. My observations of and routine interaction with David and his peers opened the door to a world in which he was frequently bound to and yet torn from his views and beliefs regarding gender. David's daily interaction revealed a pattern of behavior and views that were seamlessly woven together. He

displayed his gender politics in the everyday taken for granted set of relations he held with his classmates.

The following illustrates how David's gender politics surfaced amidst his daily conversations and interaction with his peers. As I attempted to see and hear his politics I was forced to look both at the actions as well as the undercurrent that informed his behaviors. Seeing and hearing the gender politics of these young men involved knowing where to look and how to make the participants' views an explicit part of our follow up conversations.

Jokes: Knowing when and how to say "no."

Telling jokes was one social practice among others that brought David together with his male counterparts. At the same time practices such as these also gave rise to divisions between David and his peers. His views and attitudes created a noticeable distance because of competing perspectives that prevailed among other young men. In general David's views came to light as aberrations from the norm. Exchanging jokes became a way for these young men to "just be boys" by specifically expressing their heterosexuality. It became a place for the familiar "boys being boys" while they engaged in jokes that were specifically sexual in nature. (see Walker, 1998) The following scene, captured while David was in class, reveals opposition on two levels.

> Six young men sit in their chairs awaiting the teacher's instructions. Idle chatter breaks out. One young man pipes up "Hey, I have a joke." The boys lean in slightly. "What's the difference between the Titanic and President Clinton?" A brief pause and he blurts out the answer. "We know how many went down on the Titanic." Laughter erupts but David stares, showing no expression. Another student offers his joke. David immediately rises from his chair. "No, no, no, don't say it." He walks away as the other student begins a joke. "What did the President say about

> Lewinsky? Now, she opens her mouth." David in the meantime sits with some other students, a group of girls sitting in another corner of the room.

Subtle though it was, David rejected the humor his male counterparts shared. His lack of expression and refusal to laugh was his way of rejecting a conventional social practice of one version of masculinity, namely one that valued sexualized expressions of manhood. He opposed both the nature of the joke and the context by leaving the other young men and in a very striking manner, sitting with a group of his peers, all of whom were girls.

Rather than remaining quiet amidst the shadows of his peers, David chose an alternative response. His decision to leave his male peers and sit with women was a strong and clear indication of his views about what it meant to be a young man, namely one that did not support or encourage sexual jokes.

For David, like the other participants, his gender politics were intricately woven into the fabric of his daily relations with his peers. His public display of both his politics and an alternate version of being a young man became an explicit part of his everyday interaction at school. In a follow-up interview David shared his views about being a man and the sexual jokes he heard among his classmates. Again what he offered is a partial glimpse at a connected and thoughtful set of beliefs about gender and masculinity. He explained how his views underscored his behavior.

> When you laugh at jokes you have to be careful of what you're supporting. When you know things are inappropriate just like, you shouldn't really tell dirty jokes or laugh at them. So this is when you have to use judgment, even though by nature you think it's funny.

David rejected one version of masculinity by disengaging from the social norms associated with telling jokes among mainstream men. In the above comment he explained that "dirty jokes" elicit supportive laughter because "by nature you think it's funny." David's perspective is double edged. On the one side he suggested that men laughing at sexual jokes is "by nature . . . funny." On the other side he suggested that judgment or in other words, rationale had to prevail even in the face of what by nature might be funny. His comment powerfully illustrates a dichotomy between what men arguably do naturally such as telling jokes and what by reason can be rejected because it is inappropriate. David had poignantly captured a dual perspective almost assumed to be inherent in the choices available to young men opting to be unlike the rest of the boys. The possibilities were counter-posed on the basis of nature and rationale.

David's comment draws our attention to a competing and much more pervasive framework of high school masculinity. He pointed out that some practices such as telling dirty jokes among young men elicit an almost natural response that supports a specific model of masculinity. David however rejected that model and in his words, "used judgment." In doing so he did not support a common masculinising practice evident among mainstream young men. He refused to passively accept or maintain this typically male sexist joke-telling interaction. He opposed both the typical male behavior of joke-telling as a social practice as well as the more substantive, denigrating nature of the joke.

David's opposition was apparent on another level. He later approached one of his classmates who told the joke. David voiced his opposition again but this time in a more intimate context.

> As he walked out of class David turned to his peer " I was really sad you said that joke." His classmate, looking rather sheepish, acknowledged David's feelings saying, "I'm sorry."

This brief interaction revealed the extent to which David willingly expressed his opposition. His daily interaction with his peers became an arena for observing the principles that grounded his gender politics. His decisions to challenge or destabilize the conventions of a hegemonic masculinity were informed by an overarching principle. During an interview he summed up his approach to expressing his gender politics by saying, "I wouldn't keep like, beating a dead horse. I would just kind of not really react to it that much, just so they know I don't condone it." Although his opposition was strongly stated and openly expressed in some situations, David pointed out that there were times when his gender politics were less forcefully expressed. David, like the other participants in this study, demonstrated a range in degrees of opposition to sexism and gender stereotypes.

Daily vignettes like the above reflect the seemingly sound byte interactions among high school students. They also indicate the subtle and casual way in which sexism and gender stereotypes are allowed to remain a part of the everyday discourse among students. As David mentioned above there were times when he did not express his opposition but instead allowed more traditional views and behaviors to prevail and go uninterrupted. His gender politics were

stifled by a stronger and deep-seated set of views and attitudes that supported these jokes. By not interrupting the prevailing voices of a hegemonic masculinity it further encourages and props up the power young men have to both dominate other young men as well as women. It is amidst the din of students that a pervasive and dangerously so accepted voice prevails. Rarely are these voices challenged but instead they are left uninterrupted and intact as a symbol of a highly valued masculinity.

Dissenting voices amidst the clamor of others

It was difficult in the best of situations for these young men to register their opposition. In the shadow of prevailing mainstream voices and attitudes some of the participants could be seen struggling to be heard. The following vignette between David and his classmates reflects one circumstance in which his gender politics were almost understated. In this scene David was seated with a couple of classmates during an in-class study hall.

> Sitting in a cluster of four tables, David, Jeff and Melanie are working quietly. David cocks his head as he looks around the room. Miss Drake's words of help echo across the room. Staring at his teacher, David comments "Miss Drake's really smart." Melanie looks up from her work, "Yeah, I heard she's brilliant." Jeff smiles as he glances towards Miss Drake and then back at David and Melanie. "But I bet she's never been whooped!" David looks at Jeff and shakes his head saying, "Ohh, No, no, no!"

In this conversation David praised his Contemporary Math teacher for her intelligence. His admiration for her was grounded in her ability as a Math teacher. Jeff 's remark on the other hand posed a striking contrast. His comment focused on wagering whether Miss Drake had been "whooped" or in other words, had sex. He did not acknowledge her ability as a Math teacher but

instead degraded her by specifically casting aspersions about her sexual appeal. He equated her being "smart" and "brilliant" with a loss of sexual allure. David spoke admiringly of Miss Drake's abilities as a professional but his male counterpart degraded her and furthermore, negated her accolades and intellectual prowess as a woman. The opposing stances by these two young men are noteworthy.

The above situation revealed how dissenting voices among students were muted by others and specifically that of a mainstream young man. An outsider's attention is immediately drawn to the disparaging remark. David's opposition is almost lost in the scene however it is important to consider the broader context. The discussion between these students began by acknowledging and praising the abilities of the teacher. The emphasis and tone of the conversation however shifted when Jeff degraded the teacher's abilities calling into question her sexuality.

David reacted to this remark with a subtle, almost negligible response. He expressed his disdain by shaking his head back and forth while simultaneously saying, "Oh, no, no, no!" His opposition to this remark was evident in both verbal and non-verbal forms of expression however it failed to dissuade Jeff. He neither recanted nor apologized for his comment. David clearly opposed the remarks Jeff had made but it was also evident that not all opposition was equally as powerful or meaningful in different contexts. This should not imply that David's opposition was meaningless. In fact his attempt was significant as a part of a broader pattern of behaviors related to his gender politics.

The difficult decisions and making choices

Deciding when to oppose sexist remarks or stereotypical behavior and in what contexts was complicated but not impossible. As David has already shown, he was thoughtful about how he registered his opposition to the sexist joke made in his other class. In the study hall however David responded differently. His repertoire of responses for rejecting sexism and gender stereotypes was tempered by other factors. The above situations revealed how and when David purposefully enacted counter-views that challenged mainstream attitudes among young men. The level of opposition was differently expressed because the events were differently contained in each of the situations.

David's responses need to be contextualized more broadly. His efforts are a reminder that young men have choices in their daily expressions of their masculinity. He also reminds us that although he subscribed to a clear set of gender politics they were not always openly or ardently expressed. Even for a young man like David whose beliefs and attitudes were firmly seated, it was not always easy to abide by them.

David's gender politics were framed by his masculinity. David's struggle to voice his opposition is not uncommon among high school young men. His efforts remind us of the difficult work involved in rejecting a typically mainstream gender politics and the way in which some masculinities and gender politics are more strongly supported than others. (see Kaufman, 1994; Kessler et al, 1985; Kimmel, 1994; Mac An Ghaill, 1994; Messner 1997, 1989)

David expressed his gender politics through various degrees of opposition. In the earlier vignette David could have remained silent and sat by as yet another sexist joke was told. In doing so his actions could be interpreted as silent support for the views underlying those jokes. David did not however. During an interview David elaborated, explaining further how he made choices about whether and how to voice his opposition among his peers.

> It's so hard for me not to laugh at Jeff because, as you know, he is just so hilarious . . . so this is when you have to use judgment . . . With me and Jeff, because he's so funny, I am just like [He grows solemn looking, shaking his head to and fro.] 'Jeff!?' I don't know how to put that into words . . . It's that feeling I think. [Laughs] What can you do?

David almost resigned himself to Jeff's remark as though it was typical and perhaps beyond his repertoire to register any opposition. In this situation David acknowledged the difficulty in trying not to laugh at his male counterpart. Again David was mindful of the meaning of certain behaviors such as laughing at his classmate as a sign of support. During the interview he struggled, trying to explain his reaction. David shook his head saying "Jeff!?" The difficulty for David was in trying to articulate *his* response. He understood Jeff's remark as part of a different set of beliefs and views grounded in an alternate version of masculinity. David struggled to explain how he had reacted. Upon reflecting on the scene I had described to him perhaps David had been struck by the lack of response he had registered. And although his response was faint at best he might have simply said nothing. What message do young men like David send by not interrupting these remarks? What views and attitudes are harbored in the daily conversations among students if no one questions them? David's opposition

was not as strong as it could have been. He did however interrupt the conversation and in doing so rejected the sexism expressed by Jeff.

Enacting gender politics that were atypical among the mainstream young men at Central High was a complicated process. This process occurred mainly on two levels. First, David presented and represented an alternate form of masculinity that was most visible in daily expressions that ran counter to more traditional beliefs and ways of being a young man. On several occasions during class David's peers remarked, " I don't understand how David can be so good. Like if you want to tell him a joke, he'll say 'no' and walk away." Another student similarly remarked "Your such a nice guy. I don't see how you do it." Being unlike the rest of the boys in their terms translated into being "good" or being "a nice guy." His ability to reject mainstream ways of being a young man was looked upon with admiration and disbelief. On another level David 's expression of his gender politics went beyond being unlike the rest of the boys. It involved a careful and clear set of non-sexist views demonstrated in his daily interaction. This process of enacting his gender politics was woven to his masculinity.

David did what not many young men would do by challenging the often uncontested sexist remarks of his male counterparts. His response to Jeff was subtle yet it reflected David's discomfort with the remark Jeff had made. Efforts such as this are valuable starting points for high school young men to begin interrogating their own masculinities and that of their peers. (see Gutterman, 1994; Kaufman, 1994)

For a young man like David, rejecting views and attitudes commonly held and supported among his peers was not always easy. He had options whether to reject or accept the competing gender politics of his classmates. For most high school young men the options generally appear to be limited. David however has shown that being a young man and investing in one's own gender politics does not have to be about being like the rest of other boys. The decisions he made were informed by a clear set of gender politics that underscored his daily interaction. David shed light on whether and how he made those decisions while also maintaining membership within his peer group. He was not ostracized by his classmates but looked upon with admiration and occasional disbelief.

PHILIP

> There's definitely sexism in school. (He chuckles) I'm sure it's been there as long as school has been around. . . . you know, the guys that tell jokes about keeping the women barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. And a lot of guys joke about that kind of stuff but they don't actually believe that women should be kept in that kind of position. They kind of act that way around their friends. They kind of, try to impress their friends

Introduction

In an almost matter of fact tone Philip's words reflect on a history of gendered experiences in schools. His remark was emphatic and unwavering. Sexist behaviors, attitudes, and remarks have become familiar undercurrents to many high school students. Gender stereotypes have likewise become commonplace, often overshadowing the daily school experiences of students from an early age, through high school, and into university. As Philip pointed out sexism has seemingly been a part of the cultural landscape of many students'

school experiences. Particularly striking about his remark is his candid ability to name what and how young men express their sexist views. Equally provocative is the explanation Philip offered for the typically sexist jokes bantered about among his peers.

Philip's remark points out what might be a period of transition among young men in school. On the one hand his observation was contextualized historically by suggesting that sexism was an age old problem. On the other hand he pushed beyond the historical context to explain sexism in school. He drew attention to an emerging sense that though young men make these remarks, they do not actually believe them. According to Philip then, there appears to be a dissonance between the actions of young men and their beliefs about gender and sexism. Philip's remarks highlight a possible shift in attitudes among some high school young men. However, the sexist behavior rooted in the past nonetheless lingers in an often veiled manner that shadows the daily interactions of many students.

The use of jokes that degrade or belittle women among these young men reveals only a minute part of the work still to be done to eradicate sexism and gender stereotypes in schools. According to Philip however these views and beliefs are not deep seated. Rather, high school young men act certain ways and express these opinions as a means of gaining status and impressing their male counterparts.

In high school the façade of being one of the boys provides a powerful context for understanding a dynamic which supports sexism and gender

stereotypes, and one, that Philip has refused to accept. He is a young man unlike many of his mainstream male peers. In the shadows of the typically sexist remarks of his male counterparts Philip abided by a different set of beliefs and views. His school experiences, though not completely devoid of sexist remarks or gender stereotypical behavior, were not typical of many high school young men. His behavior, actions, and attitudes reflected a relatively newly emerging set of beliefs, what Connell referred to as "gender politics," characteristic among countersexist young men.

Philip's emerging beliefs: From girl friends to family

As he finishes his senior year at Central High Philip offers a refreshing perspective on high school masculinity. Recorded in report after report the familiarity with which Philip commented on mainstream young men was not surprising. What is surprising however is the contrast between his perspective and school experiences and those typically pictured in gender and education reports. Not often documented to date, Philip expressed a view that embraced a much more liberal understanding of masculinity and a far broader perspective on gender within the context of schooling. Philip explained that his views about gender were partially informed by his parents but also through his school experiences among girls.

> . . . I have been friends with girls . . . . and my parents have just raised me to be very open, to question things, and not just accept things at face value, which I thank them for because it's given me a perspective on life.

The choices Philip made about with whom to socialize in school were only partially explained by the his parents prompting him to "question" and "not just

accept things at face value." Being a young man particularly in high school is much more complicated than simply following the urgings of one's parents. The expression of masculinity and the means by which a student such as Philip conveys a set of beliefs are complicated by various factors beyond the control of parents. In other words, though his parents may have contributed to Philip's very open views, it is Philip himself who is responsible for adhering to or rejecting those beliefs in situations beyond his parent's earshot.

Philip made choices about the type of interaction he supported and was party to at school. And though he admittedly traced his perspective on gender to his parents, he also made choices about whether or not those beliefs would be demonstrated in school, a context separate and often times uninformed by his parents. His experiences were framed by a set of beliefs perhaps connected to his parents but it was Philip who chose if and how he would demonstrate this commitment to a more liberal perspective on gender and masculinity which ran against the views of his mainstream male counterparts. His school experiences were a time when he alone decided how and when to display his views. His beliefs were linked to earlier times in school:

> I think I have been pretty much, for a long time, like since, middle school I guess, kind of pretty open as to gender and understanding girls. I've hung out with girls for a while since seventh or eighth grade and I think that has helped me form ideas about gender in high school.

With this as the backdrop Philip shed light on both the importance of his parents and his school peers as two different contexts in which his views and attitudes were shaped and possibly re-shaped.

At seventeen years of age Philip stood at the doorway of his high school relatively unencumbered by the gender stereotyped bonds of his peers. The stark reality of sexism and gender stereotypes in high school that he so aptly captured in the opening comment reveal a facet of the history of education that has not yet been eradicated in current school halls or classrooms. In fact the problem of sexism and gender stereotypes are perhaps more troubling in the nineteen nineties. As Philip pointed out:

> I think the issues of sexism are more widely known and talked about. And they are still sexist but I think that a lot of the sexism in school is kind of under the table. Kind of like, not overt, like archetypal sexism, but like the teacher not calling the girl as much as they call on guys. It's kind of that under the table covert sexism as opposed to right out in the open.

Sexism remains an issue in education but most disturbingly it is a reality as part of the everyday experiences of students, both men and women. Philip was not distanced from nor unmoved by the familiar images and voices that perpetuated and maintained sexist behavior and gender stereotypical attitudes among his classmates and teachers. The following experiences in high school however do reveal the manner in which he as a young man negotiated his non traditional views and behavior regarding sexism and masculinity among and across his peers, both men and women.

Masculinity: Beyond a unidimensional concept of "the boys"

A high school provides a unique social context in which young men like Philip are increasingly faced with multiple versions of masculinity. During their daily interaction in high school young men participate in social practices that legitimate and de-legitimate certain masculinities. With the evidence these

young men provided from their daily school lives I argue that different masculinities emerge to varying degrees in school depending on the choices they made to support some and not others. (see Connell, 1998)

Marginalised masculinities: "I was trying to think of something to say"

Differentiated masculinities often surfaced in the content of the conversations the young men at Central High had in school. Philip was on the outside of many conversations that echoed among his peer group. He explained at one point that the conversations with some of his male counterparts were not meaningful to him. His lack of investment and participation in these conversations reflected how he became an interloper, a young man finding his place among other young men. He elaborated:

> They [conversations about cars and sports] are conversations that I guess are short, kind of like, not important conversations, just kind of like small talk . . .. Like the first one was about junky cars and the third one is just about sports that I played for a while but I don't really play anymore and I don't have much interest in. And I guess they're about conversations that I was kind of listening in on. I was trying to maybe think of something to say but not really having anything to say. . . in some of these I wanted to say something but I don't know what to say or how to say it. . .

His struggle to become a part of the conversation even though he was not invested in it was a powerful indictment of the degree to which casual peer conversations became a point of entry or membership among his peers.

Philip's struggle to say something was an effort to be accepted and acknowledged as one of the boys. Daily conversations such as these provided opportunities for these young men to express what they knew in a variety of subjects. In a sense these conversations became a public arena for displaying certain aspects of masculinity valued at Central High. By focusing on topics

typically considered male in nature such as cars and sports these young men demonstrated a very specific type of knowledge as men. Philip did not have the same interest or investment in these topics but eavesdropped almost with anticipation that he might have something to say. The fact of the matter was in Philip's words "I wanted to say something but I don't know what to say or how."

Philip's struggle to be a part of these conversations illustrated the way in which "small talk" though substantively not terribly important, nonetheless operated in an exclusionary manner. Among these high school young men casual conversations became grounds for playing out their masculinities. The topics, some of which emerged in later conversations included: cars, engines, football, JV soccer, and driving around with the guys. They were typically "masculine" in content. That is to say they were primarily about traditionally male centered activities. Their investment and contribution to the conversations were a display of what they knew and how they were connected to the events at hand.

Contrast the above conversations with the topics that Philip found more meaningful and the subtle boundaries and means of differentiating masculinities become clear. In the following interview Philip elaborated on the conversations to which he freely contributed with his other friends.

> We talk about the play. Just, you know, chatting about college. He asked me if I got into Michigan. . we talk about English. I like talking to them [my friends] about religion because I like to question my beliefs . . .and so we talk about religion and choir . . .and about school, you know, the stuff in class and that typical stuff.

He went on adding that

> We have good discussions about how everything's going and sometimes we carry over our English discussions into the play or about philosophy.

The conversations Philip described above present a striking contrast to the daily "small talk" he heard among his classmates. The list of topics included college, English, religion, choir, the play, and philosophy. It is not surprising then that the typical male conversations seemed somewhat foreign to Philip. He struggled to say something but as he later explained was "reluctant to" because talking meant asking himself "Should I risk being wrong or what should I do?"

At Central High the casual conversations among the students were a testing grounds in which young men showcased what they knew and understood as young men. Particular voices among these high school young men were more highly valued and prevalent than others. Philip, for example, showed how he tried to find a way of including his voice in the conversations. On another occasion Philip remained on the fringes of a mainstream discussion among several young men in his Pre-calculus class. The conversation centered on a fight that had erupted during lunch hour. In this situation Philip attempted to interject asking, "Wait, what's going on?" His query was not even acknowledged. Instead, the other young men continued describing the details of the fight, the location, the people, and the altercation that led to the fight. Philip left the recounting of the fight midstream and went to the teacher's desk to pick up an assignment. His failure to "enter" into the conversation again left him as an outsider. Young men dominate conversations among and between each other. There is a process of valuing among men that occurs in the ways that some voices carry more weight and ultimately social value over others.

The legitimacy of certain masculinities, such as the rough, fighting, aggressor involved in the scuffle the day before was supported in another class the next day. As the young man entered class, minutes after the buzzer had sounded, his peer called out, "Oh you're back." The attention of the class shifted to his arrival. He nonchalantly sat in his seat and turned to his classmate saying, "Yeah, I fucking killed him. I hit him in the head." The class continued. In this case neither the event of the fight nor the disruption caused by being late was addressed. Shortly after the class was underway the teacher distributed some assignments. He struck up a conversation with the young man from the fight asking "Why were you suspended? Were you one of the dukors yesterday?" The young man's participation in the fight was legitimated by being named by the teacher. He was given a title which the young man then appropriated for himself saying, "Yeah, I was one of the dukors." The conversation was about a young man's involvement and status that had surfaced from a fight. The status was granted by the teacher who named his involvement. The actual event was not challenged but instead given attention and left as an accepted and legitimate form of behavior among some young men.

The young men in this class spoke of a mainstream event, one that happened at the heart of the school. The teacher gave attention to both the event and the young man involved. Philip however was not aware of the fight. He also became excluded from the conversation even though in this case he was interested. Philip's exclusion from specific topics of conversation was witnessed repeatedly. His position on the fringe, the teacher's contribution, and the

student's conversation sans Philip, further demonstrated the different ways that some masculinities were affirmed and others marginalised at Central High.

The struggle for power over conversations between men adds to the distances between masculinities. Access and membership thus become features that separate young men. (Kaufman, 1994; Kimmel, 1994) The topics of conversation such as sports, cars, and fights contributed in a subtle way to isolating and differentiating these young men. Not only did they talk about different topics but also their experiences and relation to them further demarcated the boundaries between competing versions of masculinities.

High school young men: Making choices to be unlike the boys

Philip and the other participants framed their responses differently within the context of different types of relationships. In other words their expressions of masculinity were fluid and partial depending on specific contexts. Certain aspects of masculinity were more fully displayed in different places and with different people within the school context. More broadly then it is understandable how, within a school, competing versions of masculinities are either rejected or accepted.

Straddling two worlds: The difficulty of "just being yourself."

Curricular and extra-curricular activities are difficult terrain in which some high school young men negotiate between the standard beliefs about masculinity associated with each. From academic success to athletic prowess, young men make choices about the type of masculinity that eventually defines them. Students and young men in particular see these activities in terms of social

power. (see Connell, 1998, 1993) The most striking contrast evident in many high schools is the differentiation between young men who pursue an academic path, often seen as effeminate and the "cool guys" who ultimately define masculinity. (see Foley,1990; Messner, 1998) Both types of activities reflect and maintain dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Philip negotiated between rival versions of masculinity. He was active as a football player in the athletic arena and at the same time he felt conflicted because he was "not being himself." His interests remained elsewhere, namely in theater. During Choir class his teacher commented about the rich experiences offered in the arts program. Philip reflected on that moment.

> You know when he says 'you can't get this kind of experience in sports,' he's right. I'm not dissing sports because I was a football player and we had some good experiences but a lot of sports is competition. A lot of sports play up the macho angle of things. They play up this thing that (changing his voice-being gruff sounding) 'You have to be tougher than the other guy is. Raggggghhhh!'

Philip confirmed his own feelings about the differences between the arts' and sports' arena at Central High. His differentiation however was more pointedly about the type of masculinities that were presented and represented by each of these curricular programs. And while he began delineating the different experiences each activity offered he quickly narrowed his definition to the individual as a context. In other words he spoke less of the collective experiences of each activity and instead referred to the emphasis on competition and toughness between men.

Philip made an important distinction about the differentiated types of experiences young men chose from at Central High. He offered a contrasting

image that also introduced a crucial element which informed his final decision for directing his energies in school. In much broader terms his comment illustrated the degree to which young men like Philip not only chose between venues for participation in school but they also made significant choices between specific versions of masculinity.

> And the arts . . . you don't get the macho aspects in the arts. You can be who you are. You don't have to feel like you have to portray this image in front of people. Like sometimes when I played football I felt like I had to project this image of myself, at least while I was on the field. But in the arts I can be who I am. I can do what I want to do. And not feel like I have to answer to anybody.

As a football player Philip struggled trying to project a specific image. He contrasted his involvement on the field with his arts' experience in which he was able to be who he was, not an image of something else more valued. The tension Philip described pointedly affirms a polarity that exists between competing masculinities that have become entrenched and sustained in school activities.

In the sports program Philip operated under a traditional set of definitions of masculinity. He identified several distinctions between the types of masculinities produced and supported in each of the programs. In particular he made the distinction that in the athletics arena he had a specific image to portray whereas the arts allowed him to be himself. As a football player he acted in ways that were expected of him. He added that these expectations extended in more informal settings as well.

> Some girls I have a problem being myself in front of because I feel like I have to live up to some expectations. I kind of feel I like, have to act in a

> certain way. . . Part of it might be the expectation of how they think we [guys] are going to act and part of it is just some girls.

The differentiation between masculinities was both formally and informally supported. The expectations to which he referred were narrowly about what it meant to be a man within a sports context but more broadly they were about competing definitions of masculinity within his peer group. The difficulties he experienced being himself were exacerbated when not only was he dealing with the formal structures of curricular and extracurricular activities but he also felt compelled to behave in certain ways in daily school interaction.

Gender Politics: Degrees of opposition

The more public and openly displayed some masculinities are, the stronger the reaction and form of legitimation or de-legitimation. This led to demarcations and boundaries between and among masculinities. In Philip's case he accepted a wider range of masculinities than "a lot of typical guys." He explained.

> There are a lot of typical guys that will say 'oh he's gay if he's acting a certain way.' That's a big thing. I don't quite understand it. I don't think it's a big deal if someone is gay. I think it [people's response] is just (pause) ignorance and comes out of society.

Philip's gender politics involved embracing multiple masculinities by rejecting stereotypes about young men. His comment reflected two aspects of his gender politics. First, he expressed an openness toward public affection among young men and second, an acceptance of alternate versions of masculinity such as being gay. This attitude was rare among many of his male counterparts. Traditional norms of behavior such as the type of physical closeness described

above were common indicators used by mainstream young men to differentiate masculinities.

Rejecting male stereotypes: Physical closeness among men

Philip expressed a conceptual framework of masculinities that was much more encompassing than the "typical guys" at Central High. Among his close friends in particular he revealed how he commonly rejected certain aspects of male interaction. These relationships allowed for a type of "physical closeness" to replace the more typical high-five hand gestures common among many of his peers.

> We greet each other with a hug a lot of the time. We have a really close relationship like that where I am not afraid to hug him or pat him on the back or you know, give him a little back rub or something. And it's that kind of physical closeness, I mean that is part of our relationship . . . I just think it's good that as guys we are able to avoid that male stereotype of 'Hey, he's hugging that guy. He must be gay.' You know, that kind of attitude.

Philip was frequently aware of and involved in challenging male stereotypes through a kind of public demonstration. His observations and understanding of the social norms which defined one form of masculinity did not generally limit how and when he redefined those norms. As a matter of his way of being as a young man, Philip freely expressed himself through close physically affectionate contact with his male peers.

Unlike his male counterparts Philip displayed a much broader repertoire of ways for interacting with other young men. His male-male relationships were openly affectionate. In this regard Philip delineated how his relationships were unrestricted by standard norms of behavior. With his attention on his friendships

he described a richness in the daily greetings he shared among some men. In doing so he also highlighted what it meant to reject the traditional norms of behavior modeled by his male peers. Central to his opposition of gender stereotypes in this situation was his willingness to courageously reject the attitude that being physically affectionate was not acceptable among young men. Instead in retrospect Philip saw this as an opportunity to reject prevailing male stereotypes.

Hanging with the boys: The struggles to be yourself

The tension between being one of the boys and opting to be apart from them is a struggle for young men involved in non-sexist politics. While looking at two groups of men who were in different ways distanced from the dominant mode of masculinity Connell (1998) described what he referred to as a "typology of masculinities." In essence young men were "choosing a masculinity" (p. 145). Much as was the case for Philip, being one of the boys meant membership and acceptance among a broader social group of young men.

Philip grappled with being one of the boys or being on the outside, that is, not being a part of the mainstream young men. These choices between masculinities are strongly structured by relations of power (Connell, 1998). During an interview Philip reflected on what he called "a cool guy moment." His interpretation of that event highlights several aspects of masculinity and what it meant to be one of the boys. It was his eighteenth birthday. He recalled the event and his feelings.

> I felt good . . . this crowd of guys circled around me and they said 'Philip we got something for you.' And they passed me this brown paper bag and

> I looked inside . . .You know it was like one of those things out of the movies and the guys are standing in a circle congratulating each other and like slapping each other on the back and like (deepened, louder voice) 'Yeahhhhhh' It was just a very cool guy moment . . . It was just a great feeling. I felt, (pause) loved. And (he nervously laughs) I mean, I know it was just a cheap porn but it was still, you know, like getting a porno on your eighteenth birthday.

Feelings of male bonding and typically sexist behavior became entangled in his more sensitive and non-traditional views as a young man. The brown paper bag contained a Playboy magazine. Philip likened the event to a sports huddle with back slapping and husky voices! His reflection on this event ironically juxtaposes competing versions of masculinities. The back slapping celebration of men is overlaid with a more sensitively contrasted version. His description of the physical closeness in this scene involved a striking mixture of male bonding and male love. The remarkable contrast was between what symbolically represented a right of passage for young men and the atypical feelings of love that this event evoked for Philip.

Philip's relationships with some of his male peers was another arena in which he rejected male stereotypes. His relationships with his school friends, both men and women, became a powerful context in which he negotiated amidst a range of gendered forms of interaction from high fives to hand shakes to hugs and back rubs. In an interview Philip described his feelings for some of his male peers.

> I will say without hesitation that I love each and every one of them. I mean, a lot of guys are scared to use that word. But I mean friendship, ahhh I love them, each and every one.

In the earlier situation above Philip was consumed by his birthday and the gathering of his friends. The substantive issue of what the magazine represented was overlooked. Rather than regard this gift as an affront on his beliefs, Philip embraced his peer's efforts as a sign of friendship and love. His desire to be a part of the boys outweighed any possibility of refusing their gift. In the interview he emphasized the loving relationship he held with his male friends. He further highlighted a distinction about his masculinity in terms of an ability to both show and express his love for his male peers.

As a young man Philip posed an alternative masculinity characterized by a significant degree of physical closeness and open expression that in many ways contradicted the typical norms of behavior among mainstream high school young men. He rejected that which many of his male counterparts feared--close male relationships that were supportive both physically and emotionally.

Philip negotiated between prevailing norms and social practices that defined his masculinity among his high school peers. His daily interaction in high school revealed several challenges in the process of rejecting more stereotypical ways of interacting as a young man. In particular Philip explained that his everyday greetings among his peers became contested terrain. As an openly expressive young man Philip shared what he described as a physical closeness not common among high school men. He was also aware of the fact that this type of a close physical relationship ran against what was commonly accepted among high school young men.

> There's definitely some people that I just won't attempt to like, hug or whatever. Well, I mean, of course there are a lot of backward thinking

> people in this school. A lot of people that I know take a hug as a homosexual gesture. There are some people, I know that I would go to hug and they'd be like, 'What the hell are you doing? Get away from me you freak.'

Many of Philip's peers were less than accepting of his physical affection. In his view they were "backward thinking" and likely interpreted "a hug as a homosexual gesture." This type of response from young men reflected what Kimmel (1994) argued is an effort by young men to distance themselves from anything remotely feminine. For the most part David, Hunter, and Philip have highlighted the recurring difficulty of publicly challenging typically masculine social practices. For each of these young men the closeness they shared with their peers, both emotionally and physically, was guided by what they knew about the broader context of masculinities within which they defined themselves and others.

Philip expressed himself in a way atypical of many high school young men. In order to nurture and maintain these atypically close physical and emotional relationships among his male peers Philip carefully read his peers. He challenged stereotypes about male-male contact by carefully reading and interpreting the responses of his classmates. His approach resonates with the similar strategies both David and Hunter used when they likewise were physically affectionate toward their male peers.

> I think I read these people pretty well. And I guess it's just a matter of like, sensing it. I think there was one time with Kevin when I said 'Okay Kevin you have to give me a hug now.' And he did. I guess with Kevin we never really. We were always cool with each other. We were always kind of friendly, but we were never like, friends friends. We never like, hung out or spent extended time together. . . So I just look for it in the sense of trying to feel it out.

The art of reading people, sensing it, or feeling them out allowed Philip to challenge the gendered framework in which handshakes and hugs have become dichotomized as masculine and feminine greetings respectively. He described this ability to read people as almost a science in which some people he just would not hug and others he would.

Philip operated on the basis of what appeared to be a set of rules for determining whether or not to push the standard norms of interaction among his male counterparts. He identified a) the contextual relationship of a friendship, b) the social context surrounding the interaction, and c) the receptiveness of their peers. With this set of rules in mind Philip interacted in very specific ways that either maintained traditional social practices or allowed him to cross the gendered boundaries that separated them At the same time, the wrong decision or mis-reading other young men was not uncommon.

> I mean I don't always know. Sometimes I mis-read it. There are times when I go to shake their hands and they want a hug or I go to hug somebody and they walk away. I know there have been times when I have gone to slap him high five and he's gone ' Come here.' I guess there are times when I just know. He looks like he needs a hug. I want to give him a hug and I walk up and give him a hug.

Daily interaction for Philip was complicated. While he suggested that there was a way of just knowing he also acknowledged the potential for mixed communication. Why did Philip not adhere to a more traditional form of interaction? Philip was aware of the consequences for stepping beyond typically male interaction. His decision to engage in ways typical and atypical of young men left him yet again negotiating between competing versions of masculinity.

Philip's gender politics were complicated by design. That is, he played by two sets of rules that at times were at odds with one another. Philip nonetheless chose these politics that made his every day interaction challenging. He exercised human agency reading people and enacting his gender politics via extra-curricular and curricular activities as well as through more informal, casual greetings.

THURSTON

> I had all female teachers up to high school and maybe they were good role models. Like, they weren't ditsy or whatever. They all had strong opinions and everything. . . . But the way I was brought up was like, everyone was the same; maybe it was the uniforms [at the Catholic school]. I'm sort of surprised that I turned out like, not playing into gender roles because my dad and my mom are very much in gender specific roles. My dad works. He works, he makes the money, he comes home and like, sits there and my mom does the housework, she makes dinner. It is like, so fifties nuclear family type of things. They're not unfair to each other. They both voice their opinions. My mom has very strong opinions. That might have something to do with it. Like, they're very into the gender roles because of how they were raised because they are really old. So they're from the old school of gender roles.

Introduction

For Thurston both the educational context and his family offered possible windows on his emerging views of gender and sexism. His opinions about women for example, might have stemmed from the experiences he had with female teachers at his Catholic school. But his explanation of how he viewed women was also connected to his family. His home life reflected very traditional gender-typed roles between his parents. The irony is that Thurston himself did not subscribe to the views and beliefs that might have been more typically maintained in the days of his parent's childhood during the nineteen-fifties.

On the threshold of entering his university career, Thurston has not mirrored the beliefs and behaviors that support the gender roles he saw displayed in his home. On the contrary Thurston's high school experiences revealed a much broader repertoire for understanding women and masculinity. His experiences as such were a far cry from the ones that might have underscored his parent's schooling. Thurston developed a set of beliefs and views regarding sexism and gender that was broader in its scope and breadth of understanding typical of many of his male counterparts. He commented:

> I think I am normal . . . They [his peers] treat girls differently. And I think I don't. I give everybody the same chance and I make my opinions of them based on their personality, not on the fact that they are girls or guys. . . So I don't know. I will try to give them [women] the same chance that I would give everybody. I am to the point where I don't even think about whether they are a girl or a guy anymore. It's just a person.

Thurston's views contrast significantly from those often assumed to be typical of high school young men. The standard behaviors of his peers in response to women hint at a broader conceptual framework among these high school students. Unlike his peers Thurston set himself apart by suggesting that he viewed his classmates as persons. This contradistinction powerfully marked a difference in his views of men and women compared to his peers.

Thurston co-existed within a school setting that was characterized by a multiplicity of masculinities. Though many of his male peers treated girls differently, Thurston adhered to a seemingly uncommon set of beliefs that made no distinctions between "girls" or "guys." By his estimation Thurston was "normal." At the same time Thurston hinted at the fact that he had shifted in his views. His gender perspective had evolved, in his words, "to a point where I

don't even think about whether they are a girl or a guy anymore. It's just a person." This perspective powerfully conveys the emerging voice often unheard in classrooms dominated by the attitudes and behaviors of mainstream young men.

Competing models: A perspective of understanding

Thurston's views and opinions emerged elsewhere, beyond the views and habits modeled by his parents. His understanding of his own masculinity and the relationships he nurtured in school were traced to informal interaction.

> . . . Maybe because I've been hanging out with girls for so long or maybe that has something to do with the way I was born. But in general, since that guy part is so there, as well as the girl part is also there, that I guess, like, it's easier for me to understand both sides as opposed to a guy who has hung out with guys and who is always with guys. . . So mine's like, more even I guess.

In large part Thurston's explanation of how his views emerged were caught between a model of socialization and a model of bio-determinism. On the one hand he suggested his experiences among girls might explain his views but on the other hand he linked his perspective to his birth and upbringing. Neither one was completely convincing. His perspective was reduced to understanding and having a more balanced view than his peers.

High school young men such as Thurston have rarely been found in the limelight of gender and education research. Rather these young men have been overshadowed. There voices have been submerged and instead the much louder prevailing voices of their male counterparts have been allowed to dominate and silence others. In the process the voices of these few young men have gone unheard. The choices about how and when to express countervailing beliefs and

behaviors that challenge the traditional views of masculinity have rarely been noticed because of the attention directed to mainstream young men. Ironically, even beyond the classroom the popular and the familiar boys continue to dominate the limelight in the gender and education research. "Other kinds of boys may be mentioned, but not as the core of the gender story." (Thorne, 1993, p. 98). Thurston, like the other three participants in this study, offers insight into the choices he made to reject the traditional norms of behavior he saw both in his home life and among his high school peers.

Masculinity: Beyond a unidimensional concept of the boys

"Boys will be boys"

The beginning of a semester involves new daily routines and the gradual process of getting to know classmates. In the following scene, Thurston and his keyboarding neighbor had both adopted a routine to the beginning of class. Seated not by choice but by height along side two other young men at the back of class, Thurston had been relatively quiet showing no interest in his peers. The following conversation surfaced out of nowhere and consequently took Thurston by surprise because of the lack of history they shared.

> The bell has rung. Like clockwork Thurston sits at his computer, looks to the board and reads the warm up assignment. He begins the exercise. Eric, his neighbor is a burly junior with an imposing figure. Several students are still settling down to work. As Thurston is typing, eyes fixed on his monitor; Eric interrupts him saying, "Hey, did you see Karen's tits?" Surprised by the interruption, Thurston glances up from his computer, remarking "What?" Eric repeats his question; "Did you see Karen's tits?" Stunned Thurston responds "Uhh, no."

The exchange between Eric and Thurston revealed a significant division between high school masculinities. In many ways Eric represented a typical high school

young man. His remarks were common according to noted researchers Myra and David Sadker (1994). Comments such as these are "tolerated under the assumption that 'boys will be boys' and hormone levels are high in high school" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 9). The picture of the boys is vivid and familiar. At the same time however it is unidimensional and flat. Missing from this picture are the voices of young men like Thurston who are silenced or overshadowed by mainstream young men.

Masculinities are constructed through daily interaction and grounded in power relations that divide different types of masculinities in a context such as a high school. There is, what Connell refers to as, a "gender politics within masculinity" (Connell, 1995, p. 37). The vignette above hints at the diverse politics these two young men held regarding gender relations.

"It's just weird and incomprehensible"

The opening vignette illustrated what Kaufman (1994) referred to as "gender work." Thurston made decisions about his response and interaction with Eric. Those decisions were partially informed by his own gender politics. Gender is not static but instead involves an ongoing struggle embedded in the above vignette. For Thurston his daily interaction with his peers involved conflicting pressures, demands, and possibilities. (Kaufman, 1994, p. 147). And while in this situation Thurston's opposition seemed faint at best, it is worth noting that he did not outwardly support the remark either.

Thurston's attitude and interaction with women is different from many mainstream high school young men. He did not subscribe to or participate in

behaviors typically characteristic of high school young men. He looked upon his male counterparts with considerable distance and particular insight. Take for example his impression of Eric. The following commentary reveals where Thurston saw himself in relation to a more traditional and typical masculinity generally supported at Central High.

> He's this big stereotypical jock football player . . .And I guess there must be a whole group of people like him. People who would say like 'Dude, did you see her tits?" And not even think anything about it. It's just weird and incomprehensible to me that there are people like that.

His view of Eric involved organizing him and his peers into distinct groups. In this case he explained that Eric must belong to "a whole group of people like him," a "stereotypical jock" as he called him. Viewpoints regarding gender and sexism thus were cast as disparities between groups of people.

Thurston voiced discomfort both with Eric's comments and more broadly with the masculinity that he represented. He spoke of Eric as though he and people "like him" were an anomaly. To this extent his observation may have sounded naïve but at the same time it revealed the degree to which Thurston was socially removed from the "big stereotypical jock football players." His perspective was socially informed by his daily peer interaction. As we left the classroom Thurston smiled and commented almost surprisingly "It's interesting to know stereotypes do exist." During an interview Thurston reflected on Eric's remarks.

> I would guess they picked it up from their parents or grandparents that they really treat women more as like, prizes or something than as people. Like they don't really treat them like they could be any sort of equal.

Thurston suggested that Eric's attitude toward women was learned. So while he thought it was weird he nonetheless explained it as a legitimate attitude. Sexist attitudes were framed in terms of what Eric learned at home. Ironically Thurston himself admitted that his parents were very traditional in their roles but offered no explanation for his own non-traditional viewpoints. The explanation he offered to excuse Eric's attitude did not hold in his own situation.

Thurston's opposition to Eric's sexist remark was faint but important nonetheless. He did not ogle or conjoin with Eric. He made a cursory glance at Eric and returned to his work at hand. Why did he not express his opposition more forcefully or out-rightly? If this is opposition to sexism is there much hope for a change in attitudes among young men? Thurston behaved in an atypical manner. He did what not a lot of young men would do and that was, he rejected the stereotypical behavior of "a whole group of young men" like Eric. The opening scene revealed two competing masculinities underscored by a set of vastly different gender politics.

High school young men: Making choices unlike the boys

High school peer relations operate in powerful ways to define and re-define behavior and attitudes among students. Different contexts emphasize different ways for being men in school. The daily interaction witnessed among the participants and their peers illustrates how governing conceptions of masculinity were expressed during daily informal conversations. Predominant roles and values of masculinity are either altered or maintained depending on the extent to which they are challenged or supported. (Gutterman, 1994)

In the following conversation Thurston explained the decisions he made about working among his peers. In this and other situations Thurston revealed how he intentionally shaped and re-shaped elements of his masculinity by emphasizing some aspects and downplaying others. His relationships were central as an arena for defining an alternate version of masculinity often overlooked in schools. Thurston revealed how his relationships with his girl friends both comforted him and isolated him at the same time. The process involved in being a young man and sharing friendships among a group of women, unlike many of his male counterparts, sheds light on several tensions.

"All my friends are girls"

Girls figured prominently in Thurston's definition of masculinity. Thurston's way for seeing himself in relation to others, both other men and his girl friends, provided him with a way for affirming or challenging his behaviors and attitudes. In a casual conversation Thurston explained that upon entering Central High he "had to make all new friends." While reflecting on his friendships he added "It's weird, all my friends are girls." He paused, almost qualifying this statement saying, "Well, not really weird." The conversation continued as he elaborated that he only knew a few people from his previous school.

Like many students Thurston's primary group of friends played a significant part in his daily routine. He met with these friends throughout the day, exchanging stories and sharing a running commentary of their school experiences. As his comments above suggest, Thurston was aware of the fact that his group of friends was different in terms of the gender composition. He

was one of two young men in this group of seven people. The imbalance between the numbers of boys to girls was a feature that Thurston identified on the basis of what he knew of other young men and their peer relations. In light of that his relationships stood out for him as slightly different and even "weird."

The peer group experiences Thurston shared were an anomaly from the relationships he witnessed among his male counterparts. Thurston's acknowledgment of gender as a conceptual framework of his daily relations emerged as an explicit part of a conversation during a break between classes with his friends. The following vignette from my field notes captures a minute but conceptually significant point within Thurston's gendered relations. As he met several of his friends he initiated the following conversation. Both Thurston and I had arrived at "the corner," a meeting point for his friends, before the rest of the group.

> As Ellen and Trina arrive Thurston greets them saying "Hi girls!" He pauses, "Does that bother you when I say 'girls?'" Ellen quickly replies "Yes." Thurston thoughtfully inquires "What should I say? I realized that all my friends are girls so I can't just say 'hi guys.'" Trina agrees suggesting that Thurston just say 'hi.'

The above briefly introduces the way that Thurston had conceptually problematized his daily interactions with his peers. He had observed and realized the extent to which his routine friendships, primarily with young women, had become a significant but subtle framework within which he defined his gender relations at school. It is arguable whether my presence prompted this realization. What is significant however is the fact that Thurston identified gender as a conceptual framework and moreover, raised it for discussion among his peers.

He actively challenged his own gendered conceptualization of his female peers. He was concerned that his collective reference to them as "girls" might "bother" them. The alternative greeting of "just say[ing] hi" changed the conversation so it was no longer a gender marked greeting.

The intermingling of young men and women in school offers an often-missed social context for examining differences among and between masculinities and femininities. Thorne (1993) has argued that the times when boys are together as well as apart from girls are powerful moments during which gender arrangements are played out in schools. During our interview Thurston described the significance of his primary relationships at school within a group dominated by young women.

> I think the fact that I hang out with all girls, I think, I don't know if this is true or not, but I could see it making me more approachable as a friend. They can see that I am not afraid. . . . If all the girls think I'm a nice guy and I hang out with them (girls), they hang out with him, then he must be a nice guy. So I'm probably more approachable that way. I might also be able to understand their points of view on things better. . . . By hanging out with girls I can also see what their points of views are and just by experiencing that I can broaden my horizons.

Thurston's comments revealed how a social context such as his primary friendships with young women provided valuable opportunities for deepening and broadening his understanding of gender relations. Perhaps this is not surprising but what added a deeper level of complexity to these relationships not common among young men was the dual way in which Thurston's friendships functioned for him.

He described the above relationships in terms that set him apart from other young men who might be afraid to hang out with girls. The potential

outcome he saw was in becoming more approachable than other young men. Unlike most young men his relationships were not restricted by traditional gender divisions. Thurston also highlighted the importance of his relationships in terms of developing an understanding of different perspectives. The relationships he shared with young women allowed Thurston to broaden his horizons. Moving beyond single sex relations allowed him to better understand

> not only the social relations that uphold but also those that undermine the construction of gender as binary opposition . . . and the complex understanding of the dynamics of power. (Thorne, 1990, p. 108)

Peer relations both in and outside of the classroom informed Thurston's definition of gender and specifically how he interpreted and defined competing masculinities. Relationships such as these were moments of growth in how and what Thurston understood not only about his own masculinity but more broadly about gender relations.

In-class relationships were another arena in which Thurston's made decisions that challenged gender stereotypes that often define young men. During our final interview Thurston reflected on his choices for working with women instead of his male counterparts during class. Of particular interest is how he described the relationships and the outcomes of working with girls different from what he gained from working with boys.

> I wasn't afraid of working with five girls. I'm completely comfortable with that. . . . We can all really talk and nobody is afraid of talking or whatever. And they can all throw out ideas. . . . everybody is comfortable with each other . . . So it's easier like, to get along with them [girls]. And I can feel comfortable talking to them and I don't necessarily feel as comfortable talking with a bunch of guys.

Thurston later elaborated about these in-class relations.

> If there's all girls and then there's a guy. I mean you're going to feel just a little bit of outsidedness. But then if there's another guy then the girls won't necessarily be apt to talk about things that we can't relate to, sort of. . . . Like I said, I am more comfortable with girls.

The relationships Thurston shared with his female classmates were preferred over working with men. Most striking about his reflection is the recurring references he made to levels of comfort in contrast to notions of fear that presumably steered men away from working with women in class. Beyond this Thurston also draws out what he saw as a more genuine and invested relationship coming from his in-class relations with young women. His dedication to his studies contrasted with other young men in class who he suggested were more concerned with being cool.

Thurston intentionally worked along side girls in his classes because of the differences he saw in terms of their gendered behaviors. His comfort level with girls was a key factor in his decision to work apart from the boys. And though he preferred to work with girls Thurston explained that there were times when he felt a "just a little bit of outsidedness."

Thurston worked among women in his classes in ways that mainstream men would not. His choice to do so illustrated how multiple contexts and multiple ways of being a young man provided and allowed for different gender relations to be nurtured and supported in school. He rejected specific displays of masculinity witnessed among "a bunch of guys" that made him feel uncomfortable. Thurston's experiences with other young men in school raises the specter yet again on what is seen as a broadly cast prevailing masculinity that has been allowed to if not encouraged to dominate the cultural landscape.

Thurston's peer relations were but one arena in which he recognized the dynamics of being a young man within a group of predominantly women peers. He saw himself in relation to both women as his friends and in contrast to the men as his counterparts with whom he was less comfortable. The context in which young men like Thurston view themselves and their relationships with their peers is powerful because of what it suggests about differences between and among masculinities and femininities.

It is crucial to see boys and girls not only apart but together as well. (Thorne, 1993) As I have mentioned before previous research has left the boys and the girls as distinctly polarized categories. This is not the case given the pattern of interaction for Thurston, not to mention the other participants in this study. Thurston's experiences reveal a more complex understanding of gender relations. He occupied a different standpoint as it were. Thurston had "a regular place in the other gender's social networks" (Thorne, 1990, p. 110).

His experiences thus help us see "the multiple standpoints, complex and even contradictory meanings, and the varying salience of gender" (Thorne, 1990, p. 111). Thurston captured the value of his experiences working with and hanging out with girls by saying "Since the guy part is there, as well as the girl part, I guess, like, it's easier for me to understand both sides as opposed to a guy who has only hung out with guys." As a young man Thurston revealed how standard ways of being masculine meant, "trying to act cool" and "not really trying."

For young men like Thurston they negotiate within a context where trying and not trying in school is also wedded to issues of gender relations. His primary interaction with women both in and outside of class might not have been viewed as cool by his mainstream peers but Thurston nonetheless rejected this typical framework common among his male peers. He represented an alternate version of masculinity that was underscored in a broader context by feeling comfortable but at times being on the outside. These tensions among and between masculinities are significant in terms of what is valued and not valued in different gendered contexts within a high school.

Gender politics: Degrees of opposition

Sexism: "Caught off guard" and "knowing the person saying it"

Deciding to reject stereotypes and sexist remarks among high school young men involved a series of calculated responses. In the opening section Thurston's comments about how Eric learned to see women as prizes and not equals showed how a broader context of masculinities framed his response. Within this framework Thurston interpreted his own masculinity along side that of Eric's. When Thurston reviewed the vignette from his keyboarding class he made the following remark.

> I was really caught off guard. I couldn't believe he asked. It was like, (he laughs) 'What?' Like, that would never occur to me just to say to somebody next to me. . . I wouldn't say it anyway. . . I wouldn't even notice something like that. . . It really showed the different kinds of people . . . I'm not going to be friends with this kid. We don't share any interests. I just don't care, you know. It doesn't even matter to me."

Through casual interaction Eric and Thurston enacted competing sets of beliefs that defined their masculinities. For Thurston, Eric represented a stereotypical

masculinity. He displayed this through his interaction and comment. Exchanges such as these contributed to what Thurston understood about the different kinds of people and moreover the gender politics that divided them.

Thurston explained his almost negligible response to Eric in two ways. First, he was "caught off guard." Second, Thurston pointed to their differing perspectives in terms of how they viewed the world. Thurston pointedly remarked "that would never occur to me" and moreover, "I wouldn't even notice something like that." Their masculinity coupled with their gender politics was grounded in their experiences as "different kinds of people."

The level of friendship shared among these high school young men was a primary consideration for determining when and how to reject sexism and gender stereotypes. As I mentioned above Thurston ignored rather than challenged Eric mainly because they were "not going to be friends." In its simplest terms opposition boiled down to how well he knew Eric. In the following reflection Thurston expanded on how he decided to oppose sexism in situations when he was among friends.

> It might have to do more with the person who's saying it, more so than the comment maybe. Because I mean like, of course in the context that it's in and how well I know the person and how well like, I think it might be a valuable asset to be friends with them sort of, like, how much I want to be friends with them.

Thurston further clarified how this situation differed from others.

> If it was somebody else that I didn't really know and the context was sort of different and things like that, I probably just wouldn't say anything. I would be like, 'Yeah, whatever.' I'd just like, look away.

In other situations and with people who might become friends Thurston introduced a different approach for enacting his politics.

> You can take it as an off remark and just go along with it and then maybe like, when you are better friends with them you can say like, 'Yeah, I don't know.' or just not give the same response. You would feel very self-righteous but you'd be really lonely.

These differing approaches reveal the complicated nature of a) high school masculinity and b) enacting gender politics among high school young men.

Among friends Thurston's response to sexism and gender stereotypes was much more gradual or veiled to some extent. By initially going along with an off remark Thurston indicated the importance of opposition from along his peers. His approach emphasized a type of opposition that both allowed his voice to be heard and at the same time allowed him to sustain and maintain his connections with his peers. As Thurston put it "you would feel very self-righteous but you'd be really lonely."

His approach resonates with what Connell (1998) argued is the need to bring men into social alliances such as a progressive gender politics. Thurston's approach to rejecting sexism among his peers was calculated. He observed the context, the people, and then decided on the strategy if any for responding. In this final vignette Thurston went one step further to reveal when he was willing to speak out more forcefully against sexism.

Subtle opposition

Thurston opposed sexism and gender stereotypes with various levels of intensity. On one level he ignored a sexist remark. On another level he gradually voiced his rejection and in this the final level, he openly and without

hesitation would express his opposition. Again, he starts by defining the group in which he frequently found himself. It is not the person next to him in class, nor the person he might want as a friend, but in this scene it is somebody with whom he already shared a history. They were friends from a group he routinely met with at a local Denny's restaurant.

> There aren't many people in my group that do sexist things I guess. There's not anybody who is just like, 'Oh, that girl is fine. I want a piece of her' or whatever. Like that never happens. And if it does, which it might happen with some of the kids that we hang out with at Denny's restaurant, who dropped out of school and just skateboard for a living. If they say something like that, it's not something that's like, accepted. It's like (he laughs) we just laugh at it 'like that was so dumb.'

Among Thurston's close friends there were few that would make a sexist remark. But he acknowledged that it could happen on occasion. He stipulated by identifying who would likely make a sexist remark and went on to say that it was not accepted. In this situation Thurston identified both the context and the means of opposing sexism among his friends, namely by laughing at them. He clarified how his opposition became more direct in this situation than in others.

> I don't think I would do it [react] with a stranger or somebody I didn't know. But like people I know really well. If we're just hanging out and they say something like that I would be like 'Oh man, that's not cool.' Yeah, like when it's something that like, guys would say and they'd all laugh about it. But then I could say something like 'That's not cool' and it would sort of be like, obviously that's not cool but then like, these guys would be thinking it's not cool . . . I don't know if I would ever go all out and just say like 'You shouldn't say that, that's not cool.' Just because I don't know if I would change anybody's mind with that.

During the six months of this study his reaction and manner of opposition to sexism was sharpest among his friends. Thurston's opposition to sexism was partly connected to how much he thought he could change a person's mind. He

was also concerned about how he expressed his opposition vocally. He made a distinction saying "I would be like 'Oh man, that's not cool' but qualified his response by saying that he would never go all out and just say 'You shouldn't say that, that's not cool." The subtle difference is in how he voiced his opposition. Again Thurston considered the people and the approach. Even with his closest friends Thurston used an approach that would leave his friends "thinking it's (sexism) not cool" rather than more forcefully telling them "you shouldn't say that."

HUNTER

> I think my mom; she has always encouraged me. I think she has always felt kind of bad that we didn't have a male role model because like, she wouldn't let me be in Boy Scouts or anything. Because like, they had dad-son things all the time and because my dad wouldn't show up for any of that she didn't want me to get hurt. But I don't know she took me out camping and stuff like that. She always tried to fill that in, you know. She just never shied away from anything that I would want to do you know, as long as I didn't get hurt. Like, she let me play football and that kind of stuff.

Introduction

Hunter's home situation is increasingly common for many students in American schools. In Hunter's case his parent's divorce left his mother to care for him, his younger sister, and older brother. The effort to provide an array of experiences while being mindful of his emotional well-being was evident in Hunter's comments. Today, a young man heavily involved in the school student Congress and plans to go on to university, he mirrors the aspirations and career direction of many of his classmates.

Hunter's awareness and developing understanding of social relationships in school straddled several social spheres. He identified his daily relationships at

school as well as the relationships he witnessed in his own home as significant models for his emerging understanding of what it meant to a be a young man.

> I guess it [reading people] probably started just like, with my parents getting a divorce and like, you know, trying to figure people out. I think it's really important to figure people out. . . I can read people well. And I think it is just because it is something that I find important in terms of making people happy or like, if you're pissed off at someone, you know how to express it to them.

The process of reading and interpreting the relationships around Hunter was central in his daily interaction. Not unlike the other participants in this study, Hunter was mindful of the types of relationships he supported and maintained among his peers. The considerable attention he gave to understanding and reading people in many ways allowed Hunter to develop a broader repertoire of ways for communicating among his peers. As a young man he drew on his observations of others to nurture different forms of interaction and communication that went against the typically gender bound norms of masculinity.

Hunter was a young man who was more at ease communicating with girls than boys. "Like for me, my best friends have always been girls. I have always just found it easier to talk to girls before like, guys." There was little question according to Hunter that he was better adept at talking with girls. His experiences as a young man however were also framed by what he saw as noticeable divisions among boys and girls at different levels in school.

> I think high school is the big divider of like friends. Like in middle school and elementary school I mean you weren't really like boyfriend/girlfriend with anyone. I mean you kissed girls and stuff but that was it. And so it didn't matter if who you hung out with was a guy or a girl. You all did basically the same thing, four square. . . And so it didn't matter but in high

> school, I don't know I guess it kind of matters more just because you start hanging out with girls and all of a sudden you are talking about relationships and all that kind of stuff. And you didn't worry about that before.

As Hunter described, relationships between students became more complicated by the types of activities and the shift in attention to relationships between young men and women. Young men are gradually inducted into various social practices that directly and indirectly define and affirm specific forms of masculinity.

Social norms and gendered expectations within a school setting gradually become the standards by which one is routinely assessed as being a young man or woman. The concern or "worry" that went along with adhering to certain rules of masculinity were less rigid in the earlier years of Hunter's schooling. In part Hunter saw emerging definitions of masculinity arising out of a process of socialization.

Sport images, relationships, and the mushy stuff

Competing images of masculinity proliferate in school settings. Whether supported formally or informally, images of aggressive, virile, and highly competitively oriented masculinities tend to dominate the cultural landscape, particularly at the secondary school level. (see Messner, 1998) Dominant conceptions of masculinity thus are connected to the organized sports most valued in given school settings.

In the following comments Hunter reveals several tensions within the sports arena that further organized and legitimized specific forms of masculinity at Central High.

> Swimming is looked down upon. All the football players and stuff will call them gay. I don't think they really mean it, like gay as in homosexual. It's more like that's gay, like retarded, that kind of thing. I think some people look at, like guys should be playing physical sports and swimming is not like, as physical in the sense of contact. I mean swimming you have to be extremely strong for it but football is more physical contact.

The images masculinity often associated with being a jock for example were losing staying power according to Hunter.

> I would say that football is supposedly the masculine sport but I think that is kind of dying down. And actually some of the people who are, or come across as 'arggggghhhh' [Hunter growls] are actually really nice. . . .And so he opened up and kind of relaxed . . . . He [a friend] always used to come across as a big rough and tough guy but he actually wasn't as big and as tough as I thought. . . . I think soccer is kind of masculine but you not only have to be rough and tough but you have to have brains, which kind of lowers the big and tough look.

Hunter's insight illustrates the lines that define different forms of masculinity even within a single domain such as sport. At the same time his remarks reveal how images of masculinity, constructed within specific contexts, can be deconstructed in other contexts. Though his friend adhered to a typically "big rough and tough guy" image as an athlete, Hunter's comments suggest that these images of masculinity operate as masks or facades removed in other settings.

His insight into athletic masculinity suggests that several key elements contribute to prevailing conceptions of high school masculinity. One, being an athlete in and of itself does not ensure high status. Students hierarchically organize different versions of athleticism among high school masculinity. Two, status among athletes is heavily connected to the level of physical contact. That is to say that even though physical strength is important, aggressive displays of masculinity such as that demonstrated in football and hockey is most valued.

And finally, athletic versions of high school masculinity remain firmly rooted in long standing images of aggression that continue to be at odds with alternate versions that combine intellect with physical ability.

Masculinities are valued differently in various school contexts. The distinctions Hunter made highlight a competing set of norms and standards that though they overlap in some cases nonetheless have considerable weight in influencing how and what is defined masculine among high school young men. The tensions described above are played out in the more complicated contexts of daily relationships. Young men negotiate between masculinities. And as Hunter explains, negotiations between masculinities are rarely easy. Among his male counterparts Hunter saw differences in the types of conversations and level of honesty they shared together.

> I think it depends on them. Like, my relationship with Doug differs from Kevin, just because Kevin doesn't like to talk about certain stuff and kind of keeps stuff a secret. He just kind of doesn't like to talk about the mushy stuff so much and how he really feels. . . . Doug and I can pretty much talk about anything.

Attempts to be honest and open rather than bring young men together might also divide them. Close and intimate conversations about feelings and emotions were taboo for some of Hunter's peers but more of a regular occurrence with others. Divisions among high school men thus are not only formally inscribed in their school activities but they are also routinely expressed informally during the everyday interactions among students.

Hunter is a contradistinction as a high school young man. The qualities he most routinely expressed such as honesty, openness, and closeness among his

peers were juxtaposed with a standard of masculinity that appeared almost unbending. He did not fully subscribe to what Kimmel (1994) referred to as "the rules of masculinity." Instead, Hunter rejected several of the cultural norms and practices of masculinity at Central High. His daily school life reflected the negotiations of a young man who was both with and yet apart from his male counterparts. He struggled to be among "the boys" while at the same time adhering to a competing set of gender politics that challenged traditional conceptions of high school masculinity.

Masculinity: Beyond a unidimensional concept of "the boys"

Hunter displayed competing elements of masculinity both formally and informally. In two separate situations Hunter reveals how different versions of masculinities are wedded to routine behaviors such as being verbally expressive and showing feelings. In a formal context, namely that of his Creative Writing class, Hunter made a decision about sharing his writing with his classmates that again revealed a non-traditional view about being a young man.

In this situation he read a personal, more serious piece of writing in contrast to his classmates, both men and women, who had previously shared "light pieces." As he listened to the support evident in the laughter and cheers for his classmates before him, he wavered in his decision about which piece to read. He read the following piece and later explained what lead to that decision.

Walking down a deserted highway, trying to find his way back home

A disillusioned boy,
Travelling through a scorched desert.
No food, no water, just sand and heat.
A picture of a lost brother and dad float in his head.
Pain comes from mysterious places.

Stumbling around a bend, saying to his self
"I can make it, just up the hill . . . ."
Only when he reaches the top of that hill, he finds another.

And then, the hallucinations begin.
It's like a TV set, getting fuzzy around the edges,
Pretty soon things melt and more spots appear in his twisted vision.
Blurred and slowed, objects lose their meaning.
Connections are not being made.

His tongue is sandpaper, saliva stopped a day ago.
He is no longer walking, just a stumbling bag of bones.
Only small shrubs and dessolation [sic] surround him,
What a lonely place to die.
The closest help is miles away,
They would never hear you shout.

The past is back to haunt the boy, he feels almost drunk.
His dad abandoned him, his brother too,
He aches to know them both. . .
Before he is grown and it is to[sic] late.

His mind flashes from those memories of them,
to the skull of the coyote.
"Is this real?" the boy asks.
"Of course," a voice replied.
"What is it?"
But no one answered back. So the boy picked it up to show the others,
But dropped it due to its weight.

One foot in front of the other,
That's all he has to do.
But he is exhausted, frustrated, deteriorated.
Life has suddenly become hard, difficult, and this adds weight upon his shoe.

Memories of a dad.
A dad who was never there to see him fail,
Never there to see him win,
Never there to take him fishing,
A dad who was never there.
Memories of a brother.

A brother who left him alone,
Left him with no one to talk to,
No one to stick up for him.
All this floods his head, making it harder and harder.
Pain comes from mysterious places.

Out in the desert of southern Utah,
on a sun scorched afternoon. Sand is
so hard to travel through, his bones ache
through and through.

Crystal clear emotions. Nothing to cloud his mind.
People are far from reaching him, there is no such thing as time.
No money, no gossip, no TV, no cars, no friends, no smokes,

Nada you'll find here.
Just try to stay a live.

He can't quit, can't give up, must face his obstacle with strength.
His fat is gone, and soon his muscle, it feels as though he'll die.
His skin is blistered, his lips are gone, his hair is falling out.
His feet are numb, his nerves are shot, a plane flies by high above.

Frustration, guilt, confusion, pain. These are just words to him.
He's known them all his life, can feel them all, but the words could never do justice to his state.
So there he goes, he keeps on trudging, on to meet his fate.

Pain comes from mysterious places.

His reading of this poem is a compelling example of the type of raw emotional expression possible among young men. However, it occurred very rarely among the young men at Central.[1] At the same time his reading also highlights the rarity of such occasions occurring in classrooms. During an interview he described both his feelings and the decision he made to share this poem.

> I started writing that poem for the class and like, once I got into it, it was no longer like, for the class, it was for me . . . it really became vivid . . . I wanted to share it . . . I was about to cry. No. [pause] I was nervous about reading it just because everyone else was reading light pieces and nothing serious. Everyone was having a good time . . .and then reading it, it kind of got me a little bit. It's just, I don't know, really personal.

Hunter wrote the poem primarily because it was required as an assignment however his motivation changed as he continued writing. The impetus for reading that poem was his desire to share it. He was not stifled or limited by the norms of other young men. His decision to share the poem aloud with his peers reflected a willingness to openly express his emotions, not common among high school young men. In light of what he knew and understood about young men

[1] Part of this reluctance to share feelings and be openly expressive might be explained more broadly by a comment by Thurston. In his words "boys are afraid to express their feelings, that type of thing, because poetry is a very feelings sort of thing." He extended his commentary to extracurricular activities saying "less guys are willing to be in plays and sing unabashedly and

expressing their feelings he nonetheless went forth sharing some personal and intimate thoughts on his own life. The decision to openly share his emotions in a public forum reflected his ability as a young man to go against certain norms of masculinity commonly displayed by his mainstream peers.

Hunter's decision to be open about his feelings in the context of this classroom contrasted sharply with his peers. In a follow-up interview he described his Creative Writing class as "crazy. There was a lot of goofing around; a lot of people blurting out weird stuff at odd times." In this situation the uncertain nature of the classroom was overridden by his need to share this poem. The context of the classroom became secondary in deciding whether or not to read this piece. By reading this poem Hunter demonstrated that being openly expressive and honest about feelings is a legitimate manner of behavior even though it was not common among his male classmates.

Being creative or expressive was not always valued during classroom assignments. Creative and non-traditional presentations were offered as an option in numerous classes including American Government, Anthropology/Sociology, Contemporary Math, and English. At the same time that teachers allowed for these creative assignments, there was a distinct undercurrent evident in the comments of various people. In one class, for example, a young man looked on while his male classmate presented a mobile strung with current events. As he listened to the presentation he commented, "I guess homosexuality allows for more creativity than I have." In a similar vein a

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write and express their feelings." The norms for behavior among man thus were such that many did not go beyond the prescribed gendered boundaries with which they were most familiar.

teacher explained the requirements for an assignment. "Some people can get real cute and be creative to do a skit, but I don't know . . . This is for the artsy, craftsy people. You can do a visual." Students, both young men and women, were not strongly encouraged or supported to act in non-traditional ways via their education. In fact the teacher relegated "creativity" to the "artsy, craftsy people" while the student cast aspersions about male sexuality as indicative of an ability to be creative.

Creativity and being expressive in non-traditional ways was not valued. Nonetheless Hunter showed that being creative and open among his peers was a possibility. He showed particular courage and indifference to both the cultural context of the classroom and the standard norms typical of his male counterparts. He chose his piece of writing intentionally. Even with the knowledge that his openness was atypical of many of his male peers, Hunter nonetheless disregarded those norms by later explaining that he "wanted people to hear it" and "wanted to share it."

High school young men: Making choices unlike the boys

Generally Hunter did not adhere to or accept the standard attitudes echoed by his male counterparts. Hunter, for example, openly shared his feelings and in doing so challenged typical behavior among mainstream young men at Central High. This type of open resistance was not uncommon behavior to the participants. It was at times masked and muted but these young men nonetheless offered striking models of alternative masculinities, each one enacted slightly differently. In varying degrees each of these young men resisted

typical male behaviors and attitudes. During an interview Hunter explained the difficulty of rejecting the common attitudes and behaviors of his mainstream peers.

> It's like you have to come up and say the right things and do the right things in order to be cool . . .You can't just be yourself and you can't just goof off in being cool, basically.

Thurston echoed a similar sentiment. He described a type of strangle hold specific models of masculinity have for informing how young men interact and behave in high school.

> . . . the typical male. Like, what they've seen since they've been growing up of what guys are supposed to be like. You see guys on T.V. who are afraid to express their feelings. So they're [most young men] sort of afraid to break from that. Like, they feel the need to be normal. And I think they are just afraid to because they feel they might be ostracized from some community of friends.

Both Thurston and Hunter described a tension young men felt while trying to be accepted as a member of their peer groups. This underlying need to belong and do all the right things bears heavily on young men as they attempt to fit into high school peer groups. Hunter and Thurston's remarks reflected their understanding about why others accepted and abided by the norms of masculinity. At the same time, and what makes them somewhat remarkable, is the fact that they nonetheless rejected these stereotypes by going against the standards defined and commonly accepted by many of their peers.

For the most part these four young men actively constructed versions of masculinity not typically mirrored around them. As a context for observing masculinities these young men did not draw from their surroundings for support. In other words, the versions of masculinity that they embodied and enacted were

not versions well represented among their peers. On the contrary, they stood out from other young men who not surprisingly maintained and sustained traditional male behaviors and attitudes. The typical models of masculinity depicted on television became a type of mould that mainstream young men commonly replicated in their daily interaction. To some extent popular culture offered a powerful model of masculinity for these high school young men. From muscle magazines to sit coms, the traditional terms of masculinity prevailed.

The tension underlying competing models of masculinity not surprisingly was grounded in "the need to be normal" and a fear about "being ostracized from some community of friends." The real tension for many of these young men boiled down to issues of being cool and not being ostracized. The unfortunate aspect of this is that for many young men they opt for a masculinity and set of views and beliefs that is more in line with being cool than being themselves.

Flirting with masculinities

Hunter's masculinity was entangled with his gender politics. On the one hand he opposed sexism and gender stereotypes and on the other hand he often wanted to be one of the boys. Hunter's participation in different types of conversations emphasized and legitimized different ways of being a high school young man. For Hunter, this meant negotiating between different forms of expression. At times his daily interaction appeared to contradict his atypical gender politics. In the next scene Hunter participated as one of the boys but in doing so his gender politics were muted. The contradiction between Hunter's beliefs and his actions are striking.

> While the teacher talks to the class Hunter's friend, Josh, stares across the room at us. Hunter stares back looking at Josh and the girl next to him. As they look back and forth Josh begins making sexual gestures by pressing his tongue against the inside of his cheek, imitating oral sex. Hunter responds using his tongue in the same fashion and placing a clenched fist against his face, alternating sides for effect. The exchange of facial expressions continues while the teacher is talking. The teacher glances at them occasionally but they carefully hide their actions.

Hunter's behavior was typical of high school young men on two levels. On one level it was disruptive and attention seeking and on another level it was a kind of performance to display their sexuality as men seeking oral gratification. Hunter did not reject the disruptive and sexual behavior expressed by his male counterpart. Instead he participated alongside. His actions supported a familiar version of mainstream masculinity, namely one that centered on heterosexuality. Rather than reject the typically male behavior in this situation, Hunter acted as one of the boys.

Hunter's actions were not atypical but instead imitated the behavior and attitudes of mainstream young men. As Hunter has shown above, he did not always consistently enact his gender politics during his daily interaction. Instead he flirted with competing masculinities, one more valued than the other. The tension for Hunter was knowing when and how to enact his gender politics while still being accepted among his male peers.

Hunter made choices about when to enact his gender politics during daily interaction with his peers. These choices reflected not only his gender politics but also how competing versions of masculinities were aligned and realigned within the school context. His decisions were as much about his gender politics

as they were about competing versions of masculinity and how he struggled to negotiate between them.

Hunter demonstrated what it meant to reject the prevailing norms and behaviors commonly associated with being one of the boys. His particular school experiences revealed the difficulty of trying to "make their own peace with the competitive, physically aggressive, space occupying form of masculinity which dominates in their school" (Connell et al., 1982, p. 95-96). As active human agents these high school young men were able to enact a counter-sexist politics not often acknowledged, supported or understood by many teachers and teacher educators.

Hunter challenged several traditional norms that typically guided and defined high school masculinity at Central High. Routine interaction with his peers, including casual conversations, physical exchanges, and his individual forms of expression became a platform for displaying his gender politics. In different contexts and in competing ways his masculinity was an expressed part of his daily interaction with his classmates. In a series of situations he expressed himself as a young man representing a specific version of masculinity. At the same time his representation conveyed a much deeper set of beliefs and attitudes about gender relations. These beliefs or gender politics as I refer to them are embedded in his choices about how and when he displays various aspects of his masculinity. I examine each of these as a mirror on both his masculinity and his gender politics.

Hugging among men: Knowing when and how

Physical contact among high school young men is generally aggressive and usually played out to assert territorial rights or some form of "pissing contest." That is, high school young men symbolically defend their territory as men and also exert their power by formally and informally flexing their masculinity. At Central High for example, some men taunted other young men belittling them and making disparaging remarks about their masculinity. This type of interaction among young men is not uncommon in high schools.

Some forms of behavior among high school young men however operate to challenge and reject more traditional interaction. In most cases these non-traditional behaviors are described from the vantage point of the aggressor. These behaviors or reactions are framed as forms of aggression or "machismo." At the same time these incidents reflect an interesting countercurrent among high school young men.

Competing displays of masculinity are significant on two levels. First, they highlight the tensions between different versions of masculinity within a high school. And second, they represent a more profound sense of an underlying set of views that run counter to the long standing beliefs held by mainstream men.

Hunter displayed one aspect of his masculinity and his gender politics by being publicly affectionate toward several of his male counterparts. Rather than abide by traditional rules of masculinity that would deny this type of human contact between men, he demonstrated that hugging was a viable form of expression. By doing so Hunter presented and represented a competing version

of masculinity "involving negotiation of alternative ways of being masculine" (Connell, 1998).

During an interview Hunter offered his insight into being physically affectionate with other high school young men.

> You can always hug guys when they're having bad days. That's just a given. Like I remember one time when Curt was walking through the hall and his girlfriend had just broken up with him and he was all like, about to cry . . . and I'm not like, great friends with him or anything but I saw him and I was like 'What's wrong?' and he was like, 'Cathy broke up with me.' And so I gave him a big hug. You know. Like I wouldn't usually do that with him but since he was in a down mood, you know.

Hunter's interaction with Curt reveals two guiding principles that informed his choices about whether or not to challenge gender stereotypes. First, context was key. He crossed the boundaries of typical male-male interaction in specific contexts. In the above vignette the emotional context gave license for rejecting standard forms of interaction. Hunter extended himself to Curt both emotionally and physically in what he perceived as a time of need. Similar to David, and Philip, Hunter rejected what was considered "normal" interaction among his male peers.

Hunter identified social context as a fundamental aspect that informed his decisions to step beyond masculine social practices that might otherwise avoid any physically affectionate contact between men. He displayed a way of being both supportive and caring toward his classmates and particularly toward another young man. As I explain later, in other contexts this form of expression among young men carried with it considerable costs. Most striking about this situation is

the option available to a young man like Hunter to willingly extend himself physically and emotionally.

The level of friendship Hunter shared with people was a primary factor for determining when and how he challenged typical behavior and attitudes among his peers. In the above situation he qualified his behavior by identifying the level of friendship as a basis upon which he decided whether or not he would hug Curt. His description of the relationship with Curt was a way of identifying with whom he challenged gender norms. He was not close to Curt but given the social context he openly embraced him with considerable disregard for standard social practices among men.

His politics about masculinity and gender expectations for interaction were woven into routine and public expressions with his peers. The decision he made about interacting with his male peer was carefully chosen. This type of non-traditional male-male interaction however, was not always well received.

The decision to be physically and publicly affectionate among high school young was guided by a clear set of parameters. Hunter explained that there were times that you could give hugs to people but some restrictions applied as well. On two separate occasions during our final interview Hunter made the following comments about hugging.

> Or like, sometimes when you are really happy, you want to give a good hug. And then like certain people you can just kind of tell and sometimes you just try it out. . . . I think some people can't hug, like Jason. He has to be big rough and tough, like he's a man. You know what I mean? That type of stuff. Those are the people who right away I would see wouldn't want to hug someone. And I think that is part of the reason; they're trying to be all rough and tough.

> I know who to give hugs to and who I don't. Certain people you just don't give hugs to unless it is just a total joke. Like I'll run up to Rick and it's just like farting around and there are other people that I can really give a hug to and like, mean it.

In addition to context such as being happy or in a down mood Hunter's behavior was also informed by his ability to read people. He routinely gauged how his peers, specifically other men, would respond to non-traditional interaction such as hugging. Hunter made distinctions between the type of interaction he had with his friends. Hugging was reserved for some young men but not others. And even though he knew some young men might reject his physical closeness, Hunter occasionally pushed the boundaries. In these riskier situations Hunter was able to hug other guys in a manner that almost poked fun at their inability to reciprocate.

The danger of hugging among men is embedded in the meaning people attach to it as a social practice. A prevailing model of masculinity that emphasized being rough and tough at Central High posed a counter image to Hunter's more openly expressive and affectionate forms of interaction with his male counterparts. In light of this Hunter exercised discretion about when and how he displayed alternate forms of expression as a young man. In doing so both his masculinity as well as his gender politics were negotiated. In a sense they were masked by a much stronger and more highly valued masculinity. The decision then to interact in unconventional ways among his male peers was carefully executed.

Hunter gauged his peer's receptiveness to his non-traditional behaviors. His willingness and ability to behave in non-traditional ways as a young man was

based on a set of prevailing norms he saw played out among his male counterparts. In concrete terms then hugging, as an alternate form of expression used by Hunter, was only used in certain circumstances. His decisions about when and how he could hug other young men were grounded in what he knew about his peers and specifically about different versions of masculinity.

Hunter drew from prevailing mainstream definitions of what it meant to be a man. There were times when he knew his peers would reject any physical contact and other occasions when he took a more haphazard approach and "just tried it out." He contrasted his masculinity with others identifying some that needed to be big rough and tough. Alternate versions of masculinities were frequently defined in terms of their limitations. The big rough and tough guys are the ones who could not hug. Hunter posed a contrasting image of masculinity in his ability to reject the means and efforts of others to uphold and sustain the rough and tough type of masculinity so familiar in high schools.

Hunter negotiated his masculinity by rejecting social practices commonly associated with being one of the boys. In doing so he routinely opted for different ways of being a high school young man. He generally rejected a familiar hegemonic masculinity represented by Jason and characterized by Hunter as "be[ing] big rough and tough" and "unable to hug." It is young men like Jason who Hunter later explained in an interview "are sensitive but they try not to be. They try to build up a wall." Hunter's gender politics challenged what it mean[t] to be a man combined with [the] deep-set securities about making the masculine grade" (Kaufman, 1994, p. 158). Each of the participants carefully and cleverly

enacted a gender politics that went against standard beliefs and attitudes about masculinity commonly expressed by mainstream high school young men.

Gender Politics: Degrees of opposition

Conversations among men: When can a man be honest and open?

Daily interaction and the various forms of expression among high school young men operate as part of a masculinising process. In the above I explained how physical interaction operated as a vehicle for demonstrating competing forms of masculinity. In this section I examine both formal and informal conversations that ring among high school students. These conversations similarly operate as a specific medium through which certain models of masculinity are affirmed or rejected.

During daily conversations with his male counterparts Hunter sheds light on both what is expected and the norm for talking among men but also the possibility for rejecting those conversational norms. His conversations showcase the tensions between traditional male-male interaction and the alternate forms of expression he had chosen.

Unlike many mainstream young men, Hunter openly expressed his emotions among his classmates. His openness and ability to express himself contrasted significantly with his male counterparts. In an interview Hunter explained that most young men "don't talk much about feelings." He however rejected this way of being a young man. He was openly expressive and demonstrative both in school and privately among his male friends out of school. He explained. "I mean, I'm not really afraid to tell people how I feel or anything.

In fact I think I am quite open about it." Hunter's remark highlights an element of fear among young men who openly express their feelings. Unlike his peers he was not "afraid" to tell people how he felt. Hunter refused to abide by the prevailing standards of masculinity with which he was most familiar and instead intentionally expressed himself in more intimate and openly expressive conversations not common among high school young men.

Hunter's rejection of the standard norms of conversations among young men was inconsistent. His struggle to engage in or display alternate ways for expressing himself was heavily influenced again by the overarching context. In the following he reveals how different contexts provide different opportunities for young men to accept or reject typical forms of expression among young men. The types of conversations ranged, as did the ways in which he opposed or supported them. Hunter's choices significantly reflected on different versions of masculinity and the extent to which certain ones were supported and under supported.

Many of the young men at Central High were reluctant to openly share their feelings because of the questions that doing so would raise about their masculinity. In a school that valued a tough, virile masculinity more than being openly expressive it was rare to find the opportunities or the inclination among these young men to be openly expressive about their feelings. Hunter explained that classrooms were "too open" for talking about "real emotions and real like, what's going on." These remarks seemingly contradict the behavior he displayed in his Creative Writing class. Nonetheless he painted a picture of the school

context as one that did not promote or support open and honest communication among students. His opposition to being closed and un-expressive which was typical among his male peers was apparent on numerous occasions.

Hunter expressed an attitude toward being openly expressive and publicly demonstrative that was atypical of mainstream high school young men. He challenged a common gender stereotype by routinely showing that a young man can be verbally and physically expressive in supportive and caring ways. Hunter provided a sharp contrast as a young man engaged in two types of conversations with other young men. I will elaborate on these.

Open expression among young men was connected to the broader context in which relationships developed among these young men. In the following he recounted the conditions under which some young men were inclined to be honest and open about their feelings.

> Like when we talk I wouldn't laugh at him or for something more serious I wouldn't go and tell other people. Like, he knows he can trust me and that I am there for him and I am his friend and I'm not trying to screw him over.

Hunter's comments reflected what was involved in developing open relationships with other young men at school. He described an ability to empathize and "not laugh at him" as well as a level of trust. And finally he remarked that he was "there" for his friend. Supportive relationships of this nature were rare particularly among young men according to Hunter. The rarity of these relationships and what Hunter sharply described as "good buddy type talks" occurring in school is significant. Hunter explained that generally conversations of this nature did

> Not [occur] much in school. At least not in the classroom, maybe in the car. Actually, I wouldn't even say, I would almost say not at all in school except maybe at lunch time if you're lucky. . .

If these young men were not having "good buddy type talks" based on trusting relationships then what type of conversations were they having? Hunter went on to explain that for the most part the conversations he engaged in with his peers at school were basically what he referred to as "small talk, "like little gossip" or what basically amounted to as "a bunch of guys shooting the shit."

Young men together: "Good buddy talk" and "shooting the shit"

The distinction between the types of conversations supported among high school young men provides a lens for seeing how and when Hunter's gender politics were woven to issues of masculinity. That is to say that these two distinct types of conversations are compelling because they provide a sketch of both the typical dialogues and atypical dialogues among young men. In doing so they highlight the significant ways that young men like Hunter routinely negotiate between prevailing masculinities and his own set of gender politics during daily peer conversations.

In the following interview Hunter provides a detailed description that speaks broadly to issues of masculinity as well as his manner of resisting a gender stereotype that defined young men as closed and non-communicative. Describing good buddy type talk:

> . . . with Drew asking about sex you know, we weren't joking around anymore, it was serious. . . It was like, if I am in his shoes I would want to know. I mean, like, I was there once. I am going to tell him seriously . . . but usually it's alone, either one on one or like, with Drew it was three people who are really good friends. Almost always when you are in those situations you are not afraid to really talk about anything. And the same

> thing with when Doug is depressed. We will always do something like go out for dinner or just go and sit.. Like we used to go up to Daffy Duck hill and just sit up there and talk or go for walks over at the woods. And we would just sit back and talk and there are no distractions. Like, we're not going to go play basketballs and start talking about it. . . . You know, like you're not going to have a good conversation with someone like, playing basketball.

Hunter provides a useful look into the rare occasions when young men talk to each other openly and honestly about "serious" issues. The issues were substantive ranging from sex to depression. Powerful though these conversations were, they did not occur in school. That was where the other conversations happened. Good buddy type talks were vehicles for what Hunter later described as "being a friend" and a need to have someone to "listen" and "just like, help him." Hunter was unlike many of his male counterparts in the ways that he became a type of support and listener.

Hunter became a unique type of "counselor" and "friend" in ways that were uncommon among these high school men. He described the role he played with another young man.

> So like he would call me up and say 'Hey, can we go talk?' . . . and he would just tell me his life. Basically I was kind of like, his counselor, you know. Like, and his friend, because he could tell me everything and I wasn't just like one of his other friends, like smoker friends which is like, 'Yo, let's get high.'

Being supportive and a good listener as a young man was valued even though there were seemingly few opportunities for these relationships to be nurtured in school. Particularly disturbing about this is the fact that young men like Hunter who challenge these typical ways of being young men are rarely supported. As I explain in the next chapter these young men run great risks for acting in ways

atypical of their mainstream peers. The following looks at another type of talk which was perhaps most common among these young men.

Hunter's male counterparts commonly participated in what Hunter called "shooting the shit" or "stupid guy talk." It occurred primarily in school, during passing time between class, and mainly among friends. The content varied as Hunter explained in the following portion of an interview. He offered examples of this type of conversation.

> Okay, oh, one example would be if it's a nice day outside. 'Let's go play Frisbee.' Or 'Man it's a shitty day outside.' and 'This sucks.' or like 'I hate school, I'm tired.' All that usual stuff. . . like, 'Guess what happened to me today?' or 'I got a fifty percent on my test.' Or like, 'I'm flunking.' You know, that kind of stuff . . that kind of small talk.

Hunter later elaborated with a broader sweep to explain this kind of conversation.

> . . . like, guy talk stuff is when we are in the car all shooting the shit around, you know. And I don't know who it was but they were like 'Yea, I would fuck her and they were like, 'Yeah, I would rape her and tear her up.' And all that kind of stuff. But like none [raising his voice] of us would do that. It's just like, stupid guy talk that we all laugh at. It's kind of how I would say [he deepens his voice] 'Jack's drinking beer and shooting deer.' It's like it's true that people do that but I'm not one of them and none of my friends are so we kind of just like mock them. It's almost like making fun of them.
>
> MK: Who are you mocking?
>
> H: All the womanizers. . . . It is like mocking hicks and stuff. It's kind of like; you can't change them so you might as well have some fun.

Beyond the daily chatter shooting the shit was also grounded at a deeper and more troubling level. The above distinctions between conversations showed a type of talk among young men that swayed dangerously and arguably beyond simply "shooting the shit." The level of sophistication with which these young

men interpreted these conversations can not be assured. When left uninterrupted then, the "stupid guy talk" type of conversations operated in two ways. First, they emphasized a disturbing model of masculinity centering on sex and rape and second they surreptitiously operated, according to Hunter, as a form of protest with their primary aim being to mock "the womanizers."

The above is compelling evidence that suggests that young men express their masculinity and gender politics via different types of conversations. On different levels and in different contexts a young man like Hunter is torn between adhering to his own gender politics while also being a part of a hegemonic masculinity.

Across the faces: A renewed vision of masculinity, choice, and gender politics

This chapter has brought to the foreground a variety of voices and experiences of four high school young men. Their responses to sexist remarks, comments or attitudes span the gambit. Likewise their responses to the standard norms of masculinity that define how and what it means to be a high school young man, also varies. Though there is overlap in how and what these young men responded to, it is abundantly clear from this data that high school masculinity is not confined to either or choices. In their daily school interaction these young men illustrated that masculinity is about a series of choices that are played out, negotiated, and let go in different and competing contexts.

Through informal interaction with their classmates, David, Philip, Thurston, and Hunter revealed a set of beliefs of their own. These, in large part, stem from

a range of places and influences beyond the scope of this study. This study was not designed to explore why these young men chose to express their masculinity different from the rest of the boys. This study set out to discover how and when four young men expressed their masculinity in high school. At the same time it was designed to identify the sets of beliefs that informed their choices as young men who opposed sexism and gender stereotypes of masculinity. As such this study has identified contexts, people, conditions, and considerations that shaded the process for young men involved in rejecting standard norms of masculinity and opposing typically sexist behaviors or attitudes of their male counterparts.

In the following section I provide a cross-cutting look at the experiences of these four young men. I have framed this section using the three major themes around which this study is organized. For each theme I pull together the strands that bind these cases together along the lines of their differences as young men unlike the rest of the boys.

Masculinity: Beyond a unidimensional concept of the boys

Both conceptually and practically speaking this study has widened the lens for seeing how and when young men expressed different elements of masculinity through their interaction among their peers. Not surprisingly, when it comes to high school masculinity, young men make a series of decisions that are more broadly connected particularly when it comes to a context such as a school setting.

Masculinity is fluid and constantly changing according to competing definitions within a given cultural milieu. The young men in this study

demonstrated that multiple masculinities emerged out of the daily and taken for granted conventions inscribed in school interaction and conversations. Gender thus is always in transition. It is at rest only until it is tested, challenged, and called into question. As this study has shown, the difficulty for many high school young men is in accepting that there are alternate versions of masculinity that are equally as legitimate as that which is commonly displayed and heralded within schools. The conceptual divide that has maintained a narrow definition of high school masculinity is currently under scrutiny but this time not from the academy, but rather from young men themselves.

During informal interaction and conversations in school young men take cues and learn to "read" or "sense" from one another what it means to be masculine and what it means to be un-masculine. According to these young men the differences among their peers is sometimes as simple as being "cool" and "fitting in." At other times masculinity and the territory surrounding it is much more complicated. Being masculine meant carefully constructing "a wall" to hide what is most evident, that is, "though young men are sensitive, they try not to be." Of particular note then is how and when young men purposely emphasize various elements of their masculinity that adheres to a coherent set of rules and norms. While the mainstream young men at Central High were concerned about keeping their masculine images intact they were also concerned with intentionally portraying images of masculinity that could not be misinterpreted or called into question.

Masculinity was framed by relationships. Young men opened up and shared the un-protected and unrehearsed sides of masculinity in private, close encounters with male counterparts that they could trust. In these contexts young men were able to see each other as supportive and caring rather than threatening and untrustworthy. They did not fear being unmasked as sissies. And though historically "masculinity has become a relentless test by which we prove to other men, to women, and ultimately to ourselves, that we have successfully mastered the part" (Kimmel, 1999, p. 138), the four young men in this study have demonstrated an ability to rewrite how and what they defined as elements of masculinity.

In most situations these young men resisted the rules of male-male interaction. In particular they supported and opened themselves up by allowing for intimate interaction with their male counterparts. They expressed themselves affectionately by using verbal as well as physical means of reaching out to their close friends. Philip captured a type of evolving relationship among these men saying, "it's that physical closeness that is part of our relationship." The closeness, the honesty, and the unquestioned respect for sincere communication allowed these young men, in Philip's words, "to avoid that male stereotype of 'hey, he's hugging that guy he must be gay." In an unusual way these young men redefined the types of relationships and types of masculinities they supported in school.

These young men stood in opposition by rejecting the conventions of prevailing images of a high school masculinity. Rather than support the norms of

interaction that kept men distant from one another they modeled alternate versions of masculinity. Close intimate physical contact among these boys was but one means by which they pushed the boundaries of the masculinised ways of interaction. Instead of subscribing to the rules of masculinity well accepted and defined as a hegemonic masculinity, these young men extended themselves and found a broader repertoire of ways for displaying their masculinity not restricted by stereotypes. Thurston illustrated that the veneer of masculinity was often times a question of "trying to say the right thing" compounded by the threat of being "ostracized" by their male counterparts for not being like "what guys are supposed to be like."

Competing versions of masculinity involved a give and take relationship. Men learned through daily interactions and conversations that being a young man meant different things in different contexts. The contexts and competing relationships I have described above revealed how men constructed masculinities among and across their male counterparts. At the same time the experiences of these young men also suggests a degree of intent. Masculinities are presented and represented by an array of expressions and daily social practices. In the following section I pull together the types of choices these young made in the process of redefining high school masculinities while also maintaining a position among their mainstream peers.

High school young men: Making choices unlike the boys

Decisions to oppose sexism or reject standards of masculinity are connected and often grounded in well organized sets of beliefs. Much like the

decisions young men make routinely to emphasize their masculinity as a way of fitting in and being accepted among the boys, David, Philip, Thurston, and Hunter similarly made choices to be unlike their mainstream male counterparts. Their decisions were situated in a set of beliefs that reflected concerns with what they supported as young men. As I have outlined above masculinity is constructed intentionally and enacted in varying contexts. "Gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction but is constructed in interaction" (Connell, 1995, p.35).

The choices these young men made were informed on different levels by what they knew and understood about masculinity as it was played out within a high school setting. Choices about what and when to oppose sexism or stereotypes of masculinity were based on mutual respect, concerns over gender expectations, and a more general disregard for a façade of masculinity that held little weight with these young men. This section adds to the above by summarizing the framework these young men used for moving against the public conventions of masculinity while in the process rejecting sexism among their peers.

Mainstream definitions of masculinity are powerful contexts framing what it means to be a man in a high school. From the "stereotypical jock football player" to the glossy images portrayed in Muscle Magazine to the sexualized context of masculinity captured in sharing a Playboy magazine, there emerges a clear picture of what it means to be a man. The decision to reject these images is noteworthy.

Through their daily encounters among their peers these young men have shown a repertoire of ways for opposing sexism. In his most compelling and public expression David displayed the possibility for walking away from sexist remarks and jokes. His opposition was evident in both large groups of friends, close and otherwise, as well as in smaller groups. He thoughtfully rejected sexist jokes for example, stating that "you need to be careful of what you are supporting." At the same time decisions to challenge the typically masculinised or sexually degrading banter among men was not clear-cut.

David and Thurston drew attention to the fact that their opposition was not always consistent but often negotiated. The choice to forthrightly challenge their peer's sexist or typically masculine expressions was linked to the potential for change in other's views. Though largely defined in degrees of friendships or closeness to their peers, these young men made refined distinctions about with whom they expressed their opposition. For example, they were less inclined to challenge some young men whose attitudes were not likely to change. At times sexist remarks or expressions were left uninterrupted. They would "let it go" because to constantly challenge these people would be to no avail. And though efforts to reject sexism are admirable, it is important to remember that these are high school young men and in this context as Thurston points out "you would feel self-righteous but you'd be very lonely."

Masculinity and sexism was replaced with a range of images unfamiliar to many mainstream high school males. An athleticism that valued aggressiveness and competition was challenged by both David and Philip who sought to "just be

themselves" even though the expectations within the sports arena required otherwise. David was compassionate and caring on the ice while Philip was uncomfortable and torn by the tough image demanded of his role as a football player. And rather than being distant and unsympathetic to their male peer's emotional needs, these young men were sensitive and supportive. Their approaches went against prevailing views of masculinity. And though they were aware of the conventions of masculinity in which according to Hunter "young men don't talk much about feelings," these young men were often affectionate and sensitive toward their male peers. They comforted their peers through "good buddy type talks" and in "times of need" by "not laughing at them," but instead listening to them and being publicly expressive.

The traditional norms of masculinity provided a stark contrast to the behaviors and attitudes displayed by David, Philip, Thurston and Hunter. Their choices were informed and orchestrated on the basis of what they knew about high school masculinity. These young men took risks opposing sexism and gender stereotypes but at the same time were mindful of the broader social context. For these young men their opposition was connected first to their definitions of masculinity and second, to a deeper seated set of beliefs, namely their gender politics. The final section follows up with a look to young men as agents or social allies.

Gender politics: Degrees of opposition

As this study has shown there is a strong connection between competing definitions of masculinity, the decisions to reject sexism and various stereotypes

of masculinity and the approach these young men expressed via their gender politics. The data from this study has noticeably highlighted the times when young men were with other young men. As I have mentioned previously, gender is relational and not constructed in isolation. The experiences of these young men has shed light on the multiple contexts in which masculinity was wedded to their sets of beliefs and approaches to rejecting more traditional views and social practices associated with mainstream high school young men. This section briefly suggests the possibilities young men in a school setting have for repositioning themselves as allies for a progressive gender politics.

These young men variously expressed oppositional responses. It became increasingly evident that the choices to reject a sexist comment or challenge conventional social practices were complicated on several levels. Each of these young men at one time or another compromised their own sets of beliefs. They either let comments go, did not intervene at all, or actually supported typically masculinised practices. Their responses suggest that though they appear as valuable social allies modeling behavior more desirable than that of their mainstream male counterparts, the effort to be unlike the rest of the boys was not easy. As I later discuss, there were consequences for their actions.

As young men with competing sets of politics these four showed that opposition to sexism and masculine stereotypes is in fact a possibility. Not all the boys are the same. Their definitions of masculinity as well as the approaches they took to displaying alternate versions of masculinity to some degree set them

apart. The teachers who helped identified them for this study noticed this and it was well supported in their daily social interaction recorded in this study.

The difficulty in opposing sexism and gender stereotypes for these high school young men in particular appears in their broader framework of reference. For instance, these young men suggested that some boys grow up learning about sexism, and traditional norms of masculinity. In a sense they excused the behavior and attitudes of some men. In some cases they accepted it as a social fact that you can not change some people's minds. In these situations they turned a blind eye. Having said all that these young men nonetheless took a position that leaned towards eliminating sexism and various stereotypes. Along these lines their behavior and attitudes were unique, setting them apart from the standards and norms of many of rest of the boys. A final note is worth mention before turning to Chapter Four in which I describe the consequences for opposing sexism. Thurston's earlier remark in which he said "You would feel very self-righteous but you'd be very lonely" is telling. It reminds us all that these four were high school students. They were young. They had values that were linked to and grounded in the specific context of which they were integral members. This can not be forgotten. Opposition among young men is a possibility but it is risky and indeed though a "righteous" approach, if unsupported it could leave one "very lonely."

CHAPTER FOUR

Reactions and Responses: What happens when young men embrace competing gender politics?

In the previous chapter I examined the various ways that the four participants expressed specific elements of high school masculinities. I also examined how and when each young man conveyed his gender politics. In the broader picture this meant looking closely at the familiar landscape of a high school setting to better understand the complexity of student lives and particularly the school experiences common or uncommon among young men. Each demonstrated how and when his masculinity contrasted with his male counterparts and how he managed to negotiate competing sets of gender politics.

The aim of this chapter is to describe more fully the reactions and responses expressed when the participants rejected a mainstream masculinity in addition to, or along with, demonstrating their own sets of gender politics. This chapter speaks specifically to what is traditionally referred to as the costs and benefits chapter. And while it might be construed as such, I have intentionally framed this chapter in terms of reactions and responses. These terms reflect more accurately how the participants interpreted their peers' comments and behaviors. In other words, the four young men did not see their specific gender politics as beneficial or detrimental per se. Their behavior nonetheless evoked responses and reactions that were less than supportive. These reactions, I argue, convey a sense of both the broader context for defining masculinity at

Central High as well as the specific consequences for going against the masculinised norms and prevailing gender politics of other young men.

Up until this point I have painted a picture of four high school young men who have chosen to be unlike their male counterparts. I have argued that they have purposefully acted in ways that have defined their social identities as high school young men. I have shown that high school masculinity involved constructing the self through a range of daily expressions. I have also shown that these young men drew from a repertoire of ways for opposing sexism and gender stereotypes.

What I have not yet shown is the fall-out, or what I refer to as the reactions and responses for being unlike the rest of the boys. Some questions remain unanswered. For example, What is the threat, if any, for rejecting mainstream masculinity? How do high school young men respond when traditional values and attitudes commonly reflected within mainstream masculinity are challenged?

With the sense that high school young men can be change agents it is worth noting that this decision did not come easily. Knowing whether or not to reject a sexist remark or act in an unconventional way as a young man involved an orchestrated approach within clearly defined conditions and contexts. The reactions were not always predictable. In addition to the negative reactions there were some benefits as well. On the surface the benefits I describe in this chapter appear to be overshadowed by negative responses. In the bigger picture however the negative reactions were relatively few.

Not all four boys experienced the same reprisals. The level or degree of response from other young men was inconsistent. The range of responses varied from more subtle forms of verbal ridicule to a case of outright mimicking. The benefits on the other hand were not observable per se. Rather, the four young men each described and alluded to a sense of being comfortable with himself, a feeling uncommon among many of their male counterparts. The benefit then was a general sense of being authentic and true to oneself as a young man. This contrasted significantly with how other young men evidently felt and behaved according to the participants. I will explain more later.

By presenting a competing version of masculinity as well as a different set of gender politics from their mainstream male counterparts, the actions and attitudes of these four young men evoked a clear and tangible set of reactions or costs as it were. The benefits were less tangible, less apparent, and less concrete in comparison.

The following is divided into three sections. I begin by outlining several types of reaction including ridicule, verbal derision, and mimicking. For each type of reaction I provide incidents from the participants school experiences. Not all of the young men experienced the same types of reaction from their peers. Peer reactions varied across the participants for a variety of reasons including different social locations and the different forms of expression of masculinity and opposition described in Chapter 3. The second section describes the positive aspects of rejecting mainstream masculinity and the traditionally male attitudes. I explain in detail what the participants understood to be as an increased level of

comfort and overall ability to "just be themselves." The final section of this chapter touches on several underlying assumptions about high school masculinity that according to the participants were relatively common among their mainstream male peers. These assumptions help explain what I argue is a reluctance among high school young men to move beyond traditional boundaries of mainstream masculinity. They also fill out a broader context within which to better understand the challenges these young men faced while expressing a competing masculinity as well as an alternate set of gender politics among their peers.

Reactions and responses: Ridicule, verbal derision, and mimicking

Ridicule prevailed across all four of the participants as a major means by which mainstream young men attempted to reinforce traditional norms and attitudes of masculinity. As such this type of common response sheds light on how some high school young men routinely sought to maintain and perpetuate mainstream masculinity while denying possibilities across and among masculinities. Within this framework one form of masculinity was valued and emphasized through daily interaction. This type of reaction also explains in part why many of the participant's mainstream male counterparts were generally less willing to openly express any level of countersexist politics. In most of the following situations ridicule was used to embarrass, cajole, or belittle people. It was an attempt to affirm or re-assert one form of masculinity over other less valued forms.

Ridicule and verbal derision

Mainstream high school masculinity was ardently defended by several forms of ridicule and derision. In varying degrees the four participants directly and indirectly saw the consequences of rejecting the standard conventions of a high school masculinity. The conventions including casual greetings, informal guy talk, and public expressions of creativity were gender marked. In other words these were activities, events or ways of being men that were typically precluded by a set of expectations or understandings about masculinity among these high school young men. These conventions of masculinity marked the boundaries for defining what it meant to be a man or "act manly" as one student commented, at Central High.

Through various events and informal types of interaction high school young men actively construct multiple definitions of masculinity. Within this high school context these moments or occasions provided a forum in which other young men operated as what Kimmel (1994) described as "gender police." As I mentioned earlier, anything remotely feminine became a source of ridicule. In many situations the ridicule need not have been sharp or abrasive. Subtle or nuanced remarks were used among these young men in backhanded ways to leave open the interpretation and instead raise suspicions. The male counterparts to the four participants thus sought to enforce or at least alert others to the boundaries in place that defined high school masculinity at Central High. (see Connell, 1993; MacLeod, 1987; Thorne, 1993; Weis, 1993)

Physical closeness: "Touchy feely type of guys" and heterosexualised masculinities

Classrooms provided a public forum in which certain conventions of masculinity were reaffirmed and other less traditional manners were rejected. In the following vignette David was mimicked because of the close affectionate contact he expressed among his friends. This scene unfolded just prior to the beginning of Physic's class.

> David's friend, Sam enters the classroom and walks toward his seat. Mary is seated next to David. As he nears Mary he extends his hand and gently places it on her shoulder. "Hi Mary." Mary physically recoils as Sam touches her shoulder. Sam smiles at Mary and remarks "You're the only one that went ballistic on me." He turns to Drew who is seated off to the side of Mary and directly behind David. "Hi Drew!" As he greets Drew he begins to massage his shoulders. Drew glances up at Sam and laughingly remarks "You're just a touchy-feely kind of guy."
>
> David glances over his shoulder to me and says "See, they're making fun of me." Sam turns to David and begins massaging his shoulders. Smirking, he remarks to David "We're not making fun of you!" Drew smiles. Mr. Smith interrupts the conversation by asking students to direct their attention to the chalkboard.

This display was a public way of defining and delineating the rules of masculinity among these men. Sam drew attention to a manner of interaction that was uncommon among high school men. In doing so he acknowledged the way David expressed himself but did so in a backhanded way to discount this type of interaction. Drew's remark further demonstrated how different ways of being young men carried a price. In this situation Drew relegated close physical contact among men to the touchy feely type of guys. David acknowledged the fact that his peers were making fun of him. His friends mocked him because he

did not abide by the traditional norms, such as handshakes or high fives, most common among these high school men.

The above occasions illustrate the subtle use of ridicule. In situations where the participants expressed their gender politics openly and publicly among their peers, the ridicule appeared to be more severe. The following scene occurred a week after the choir class returned from a trip to Chicago.

> Class has not yet begun. Several students stand milling about a bulletin board where an array of photos is on display from a recent trip to Chicago. The pictures are arranged thematically with a caption under each small collection.
>
> Of the many pictures there is a black and white of David lying on the bed in a hotel room along side a classmate. The two boys have their pillows pressed up under their chins and look as though they might have returned from a day in the city. Under this picture is a caption, that reads "Things that make you go mmmmmm."
>
> While I stand looking at this picture Paul, a friend of David's, comes up beside me. I remark, "That's a good shot of you two." He looks at the photo and responds "You can say what you want, I don't mind." I look to Paul "Pardon?" He adds, "Actually David doesn't have to worry, he has a girlfriend. He doesn't have to defend himself." We look at other photos as Paul retells some stories of the trip.

The photo described above captured the casual and close relationship these two young men shared. It depicted a type of physical closeness between these two young men that was atypical for most of their male counterparts. David showed no inhibitions and was often openly demonstrative of his affection for his friends. Paul's comments however revealed how one's gender politics were mired in broader issues. The ridicule that ensued largely resulted from other students rejecting David's manner of male-male interaction. In this situation his public

display of affection was connected to questions of sexuality. Paul later elaborated in an email.

> As far as defending that picture goes, I'm not sure to whom specifically I would have to defend it. Generally though, David and I are uncommonly affectionate, I guess I could say, in our friendship as far as typical male-male relationships go. Therefore it is possible that people who would see that picture would put two and two together, but they would not get four, if you know what I am saying. But they would think possibly that we are gay and David, having a girlfriend, would quell some suspicion. However, I don't have a girlfriend so it wouldn't be unreasonable to assume that I am gay so I would have to defend my heterosexuality.

A week later the following was scribbled under the picture of David and Paul.

> Sick, sick, sick, Faggety.

The open affection these young men demonstrated became a point for deriding their masculinity. David's interaction with Paul was ridiculed because it did not fit within a prevailing traditionally heterosexist framework that defined masculinity at Central High. As I mentioned previously, anything remotely feminine such as the uncommon physical closeness between two young men was frequently challenged. The above illustrates how some students voiced their opposition to what was a potentially threatening model of masculinity captured in the photo of David and Paul.

David was safeguarded by the fact that he had a girlfriend. His public heterosexual relationship might have provided David with greater possibilities for rejecting traditional forms of interaction among his male classmates. David 's sexuality was not directly questioned in the above scene. His peers questioned the social norms Paul and David had breached as young men. The physical closeness depicted in the photo was not typical among these high school young

men. As such this type of interaction represented a challenge to prevailing definitions of masculinity. The reaction, perhaps the most severe form of ridicule, was yet another way that these mainstream young men emphasised the rules of masculinity.

Physical closeness among men emerged as a significant point defining male-male relationships. The recurring focus on displays of physical affection across these young men was striking. In the following conversation between Thurston and a classmate social norms, masculinity, and sexuality are pieced together.

> Todd, a man sitting next to Thurston, looks up from his notebook and peers around the room. He notices Eric is not here today. As he glances at Thurston and then back across the way to Eric's empty seat he comments "I thought the atmosphere was a little less gay today." Thurston looks up from his work and over to Todd. He sees him nodding toward Eric's chair. Thurston comments "Yeah, every time he says 'hi' he grabs my arm." Todd responds adding, "Yeah, you have to be careful of a guy touching you." The two return to a worksheet at hand, working quietly, individually at their desks.

Though brief the conversation represented how the minutiae of daily interaction contributed to and supported broader definitions such as masculinity. In this scene it was tied to sexuality. Unlike the rest of the participants Thurston did not typically express his affection through any physical displays with his friends. In the above scene the remarks between Thurston and Todd reflected a stigma attached to physical closeness between young men. While reflecting on this scene during our interview he explained the inner workings of his relationship with Eric as well as the broader contextual framework.

T: I think it was just kind of weird, what he [Eric] did. He just like grabbed my arm and sort of grabbed my muscle. And like, I'd feel

uncomfortable anybody doing that when I say 'hi.' Girl, guy, it would just feel like, what are you doing exactly, like whatever. Of course I didn't get mad at him when he did it, because again, it's not worth it and like, I don't care that much.

MK: It sounds like what I heard was that Todd interpreted this type of physical greeting differently.

T: Yeah, he is like a GUY (raised voice) touching me instead of a person touching me.

To a lesser degree than Todd, Thurston expressed a similar discomfort with physically affectionate contact between young men. In this case the accusation of being gay was a heavy cost generally extended to any men who displayed this type of physical closeness. The derision came in the form of suspicions planted amidst casual, innocuous conversations.

The above exchange followed by Thurston's reflective comments highlighted a very specific type of reaction commonly expressed among these young men. Physically affectionate contact such as this was equated with homosexuality. Thurston did not deride this behaviour but allowed the assumptions about male-male contact to prevail. His perspective differed from Todd's. Thurston was uncomfortable primarily with any human contact. Todd, on the other hand, connected the behaviour to a form of expression reserved for men who were gay.

Todd and Thurston drew from a common understanding about social norms among men. Out of this shared understanding emerged at least part of the reason young men at Central High were reluctant to stray from the unwritten rules of masculinity embedded in the informal interaction common at this school. The cost for challenging social norms stemmed from how these young men

made sense of this behaviour. The social cost then was subtle but nonetheless emerged out of the observable daily interaction that rejected the social conventions of masculinity.

Verbal ridicule surfaced as a common reaction among and across these young men. Philip described the reactions he experienced in response to his public physical closeness with his male counterparts.

> A lot of people that I know take a hug as a homosexual gesture. There are some people that I would go to hug and they'd be like 'What the hell are you doing?' Get away from me you freak.'

Philip's experience reflected a set of beliefs prevalent among his male counterparts. The following illustrates a contrast between his perspective and that of many of his male peers. It also fills in the distinctions he made between different groups of men.

> I just think it's good that as guys we are able to avoid that male stereotype of 'Hey he's hugging that guy, he must be gay.' You know, that kind of attitude. . . . he's not the typical guy, you know. Like a lot of the guys at our school are like, jocks. . . .he's not afraid of being physically, like, hugging other guys.

Long-standing social practices were tied to definitions of masculinity. In situations when Philip mis-read his peers, their reactions were strong. He was immediately castigated for his behavior. This type of verbal ridicule influenced but did not completely deter Philip from sharing what he described as a "physical closeness that kind of defined his relationships." Philip made distinctions between different men by drawing partially on the basis of daily interaction and the relationships that transpired in school. He managed to avoid much of the verbal ridicule by gauging his classmate's openness to alternate forms of

interaction. He became acutely aware of the differences between young men and the cost for overstepping boundaries between these masculinities.

Rather than be ridiculed Philip surrounded himself with friends that shared a similar set of gender politics or at least mirrored similar ways of being a high school young man. In a sense he insulated himself from the threat of derision. He described his friends in terms of their abilities to be "accepting." He valued these relationships because he was "able to communicate openly" and "not be afraid to tell them anything." These types of relationships contrasted with others in which he felt there were parameters that defined for example what could and could not be talked about among men.

Philip had developed a strategy for managing his way of being a high school young man within a much broader framework of masculinity. For the most part he avoided being derided or embarrassed by other young men. But this was only possible because Philip intentionally avoided young men who he described as "classic sexist guys" that would say "Oh he's gay if he's acting a certain way." Philip was not alone in the type of reaction he experienced. I turn now to examine the type of reaction Hunter's physically affectionate manner prompted among his peers.

Questions about Hunter's masculinity were an underhanded reminder of the costs involved in being openly affectionate with his male counterparts. In the following Hunter unmasks several issues that invariably became connected to masculinity. The costs in this case were subtle, imbedded in casual conversations and the ways that students made sense of the remarks.

H: There's so much stuff about gay that it doesn't mean anything anymore, or at least I hope it doesn't. I don't know, that is where I am. Like today, like the Frisbee, Dennis wrote HUNTER LOVES MEN and you know, it's like (Hunter makes his voice deeper)"Oh, shut up." But it's nothing. Of course it's not true. I mean everyone knows that, like I feel comfortable where I am and I know I'm not gay. So it's like if anyone really calls me gay it's just kind of like "OK whatever." I think most of that is like what goes around. It's like 'gayboy.' You know it's kind of taken over like, 'retard.'

MK: You said you felt comfortable where you are. What do you mean by that?

H: (He lowers his voice.) "Um, that I like girls." (He laughs)

MK: Oh okay, I thought you meant in terms of being yourself.

H: That too. I mean I'm not really afraid to tell people how I feel or anything. In fact, I think I'm quite open about it. I think some people can't hug, like Rick. He has to be big, rough and tough, like he's a man. You know what I mean? That type of stuff. Those are the people who right away I would say wouldn't want to hug someone. And I think that is part of the reason; they're trying to be all rough and tough.

In a second interview Hunter revisited the above scenario. He clarified and deepened some of his thoughts about what had happened.

MK: How did you feel when he wrote HUNTER LOVES MEN on the Frisbee?

H: Actually I didn't care too much. At times it will bug me, not in that incident, but at other times. Like, just sometimes people say it and it sounds like they mean it. And you are like, 'Hey!' like (he laughs) 'That's not cool.' But I think where he wrote it on the Frisbee, it is just kind of like, 'Thanks Dennis, thanks a lot.' (He laughs). I know he knows I am not gay but maybe he was a little frustrated with me or mad at me or maybe he thought it was funny, like a joke. He might not even tell me if I ask him. He might say it was a joke and really, maybe he was mad at me and he was like, that is how I can get him back, to say he's gay. . . . I think because we all know we're straight then you know that like, they might try to defend themselves. It's like an automatic button that you can push or just make fun of people.

The Frisbee incident illustrates how subtle remarks operated at different levels. Hunter was comfortable with both his masculinity and sexuality. Among these young men however, it was a chance to raise questions and attack his ways of being a young man. In the earlier part of the interview Hunter discounted the use of the term "gay" suggesting it was hollow and carried little weight. However, he later explained that perhaps this term had more significance then he was willing to admit.

> I don't know if they resented me and the way I am or what. . . . You know. I am not mad at him for thinking I am a jerk or gay or anything like that. I don't think he knew me.

Individual masculinities and how they were expressed among these men prompted a variety of reactions. The cost, from resentment to being thought of as being gay, was significant for these young men. Sexuality became a front from which to launch an attack on ones' masculinity. And though Hunter generally disregarded these remarks, he nonetheless was concerned with the times when he thought his peers were not joking.

The accusation of being gay or the mere suggestion was a common vehicle for arousing suspicions that invariably forced some young men to defend their masculinity. Verbal derision such as this effectively put other men on notice. It was used in Hunter's words as "an automatic button" and a way "to make fun of people." Hunter was secure with his own masculinity but nonetheless he was alarmed by the suggestion that he might be gay.

The greatest reaction or at least the most visible response to these young men was some type of verbal attack. In each case the ridicule drew from a

heterosexualised version of masculinity. In doing so the mainstream male counterparts contrasted standards of masculinities by pitting one against another. For the most part the participants challenged the narrow confines of masculinising practices that denied close physical affection among men. The risk involved was substantial. As each has shown challenging traditional norms of masculinity carried a high price, namely having their own sexuality scrutinised. The reactions did not however significantly deter or dissuade the participants in their daily expressions with their peers. As I described in Chapter 3 these four young men learned how and when to express their masculinity and with whom. They negotiated both their masculinity and their gender politics rather than sacrifice them completely.

Venues ridiculed: Gender politics, creativity, and conversations

The gender politics of the participants were an integral part of their daily social lives with their peers. Woven into their daily interaction and expressed through conversations, these young men demonstrated a fairly consistent set of beliefs that eventually framed who they were individually as high school young men. In the following interview Thurston elaborates on the difficulty involved when a young man rejects one set of norms and views and adopts another. His insight explains in part the reaction other young men had when a male counterpart adopted a set of gender politics different from those previously expressed or more widely valued.

> And then like, if you had been doing that [being expressive] all along. It seems like, the guys that are sort of, are the stereotypical kind, they like, still respect that for some reason, as opposed to if you had changed like, in the middle from being a tough guy and then started to do things that

> weren't respected by that. . . . they would make fun of you, but if you've always been like that, then it seems they have more respect for it for some reason.

According to Thurston young men could express themselves with no reprisals if how and what they expressed about themselves was consistent with their prior politics. The cost for many young men apparently came into play when they made any significant shift toward a liberating or embracing gender politics that in seemingly contradicted past habits and attitudes. In this case the reaction was prompted by what might have appeared to these young men as a type of betrayal to an already established set of beliefs. A prevailing conceptual framework of masculinity prevented or inhibited many of these young men from drawing on a broader repertoire of ways for expressing their social identities.

The complicated nature of masculinity and the competing manners in which it was expressed evoked several reactions from mainstream young men. Within the classroom gender politics were played out, seamlessly woven to the various expressions of masculinity. A case in point is the valuing of creativity in the classroom. At Central High for example, creativity was an element of open expression generally undervalued among the mainstream young men. For young men who were publicly creative in class for example, the reaction was often searing.

In Thurston's Government class being creative was equated with being gay. As one of his classmates sarcastically put it, "I guess homosexuality allows for more creativity." Ridicule was often used as a means of maintaining traditional views of masculinity. As Thurston pointed out the transition or change

away from conventional gender politics was not easy. Competing versions of masculinity and various forms of expression were mimicked and ridiculed as a way of asserting and defending a hegemonic masculinity.

During daily conversations among students ridicule was commonly used as a means to define and delineate the value of different models of masculinities. By using ridicule mainstream young men attempted to set up barriers and cement into place differences between masculinities. These conversations operated as commentaries about what was important to know and understand as a high school young man. They were also pointed reminders of what it meant to be a man because of the power they carried as ports of entry into groups of other young men. This aspect of membership between young men was described in Chapter 3.

The following comments by David reveal how routine conversations often became a means by which young men were ridiculed because they did not share the same values or experiences as their male counterparts. They also highlight the costs or consequences for not supporting or contributing to a prevailing version of masculinity. David reflected on a type of conversation in which his peer 's comment set him apart from some men.

> But he is not one of my closest friends . . . but just to get a rise out of me he'll be like . . . 'Hey, David did you get some this weekend?' He'll just say something like that, but I don't get mad, I just shake my head and say 'Chris, come on buddy.'

David's remarks illustrate how his friends used ridicule to promote and maintain one version of masculinity that emphasized heterosexual relationships. Chris highlighted one of the differences between the competing versions of masculinity

each of these young men represented. The discussion of sexual exploits, in their words, "get[ting] some" was one arena that separated two versions of masculinity. For young men like Chris then ridicule became a vehicle for drawing these boundaries and to some extent creating differences based on differentiated experiences as high school young men.

Ridicule between these young men usually occurred in public forums among other peers within the school setting. David accepted this ridicule but still attempted to dissuade Chris from making such remarks. And as David later explained, there was a different side to his peers in more private, one on one situations.

> . . . When I am around Chris, for example, he acts differently. He has a more sensitive, caring side around me. But I noticed how a lot of guys are just interested in you know, maybe hanging with the girls for maybe one night and stuff like that.

David's description above revealed that without an audience, without a broader public context, norms of masculinity were less likely to be enforced. Thus, different norms of masculinity were played out in different contexts. Informal conversations akin to what Hunter described as "good buddy type talks" were times when the rules of masculinity among these young men were less rigidly enforced. These types of conversation contrasted significantly with the "guy talk" that occurred in the public forum of the high school halls or corners of the classroom.

The benefits: Being comfortable and being yourself

The four young men in this study benefited from adhering to and expressing a set of gender politics different from their mainstream male

counterparts. Most evident from watching and listening to the comments and insight of these young men is their individual and collective sense of comfort with who they were as high school young men. In broad terms the participants experienced what they described as a level of comfort with just being themselves. They recounted experiences or drew comparisons with their peers. They described abilities or ways of being young men that made them comfortable with who they were and how they expressed that among their peers. I will explain how this contrasted with their male counterparts who, according to these young men, were more concerned with being cool and living up to prevailing images and expectations of masculinity at Central High.

Each of the boys was confident about using multiple forms of expression atypical of many high school young men. They openly displayed levels of sensitivity, caring, and affection that challenged past norms of masculinity. They described a striking degree of openness and ease with being themselves. In contrast their male counterparts struggled with peer expectations and generally being accepted by their classmates.

David was a strong and independent character. The louder more dominant voices echoed from amidst his mainstream male counterparts posed a challenge to his convictions. Nonetheless David remained comfortable with who he was. In light of this he was able to reject the prevailing attitudes of many other young men. In an excerpt from our interview David describes his approach for maintaining his beliefs and attitudes toward women.

> . . . but what is important is my attitude towards them (women). And if I know that I have an attitude of disrespect towards people or I am being

> demeaning toward people it's bad and . . . it comes from who I want to become.

He went on to explain that his attitudes and ways as a young man were tested in several different contexts. In the following interview segments David reveals his response to competing viewpoints in sports as well as casual conversations.

> I couldn't deal with him (the coach) always wanting me to be mad. This was right at the first game of the season and he wanted to get me kicked off the team and not be Captain anymore. I mean, I did it my way . . . I ended up scoring a lot of goals and I got my picture in the paper. It made me feel good like, to show kids on the team that he doesn't have to be that way.

David revealed how his own comfort with being who he was posed a challenge to others. In the above he refused to change his attitudes and instead strongly asserted his beliefs.

His attitude remained strong in private conversations as well. In the following David explains how competing viewpoints co-existed. His viewpoint remained intact in the face of a prevailing set of beliefs held by his male counterparts.

> If your goal is to get a girl home and you know, have sexual intercourse with her, I mean, nice guys are going to finish last. It's sad, that's the way our world works.

> I had a guy try to tell me in sophomore. He was a senior. He was telling me like, if you want a girl to like you, you just have to treat her like crap. . . But those aren't my goals and I don't subscribe to them. But I mean nice guys are going to finish last. But you know, it's not my goal to win the race. That's not my goal so it's easy to give up when you think about the perspective, you know, when you put things in the right frame.

David expressed a remarkable conviction to his beliefs. His perspectives were grounded alongside a much broader framework. He managed to adhere to his ways of being a young man. He also modeled for his teammates that there were

rewards and benefits for going against the grain. In the bigger picture perhaps David presented an anomaly. He was not interested in winning a "race" and without question his goals were different from many of his peers. For David being himself allowed him to remain true to his convictions.

Philip benefited from knowing that there were times in school when he could be himself. Unlike many of his male peers who were preoccupied with what he described as trying to impress their friends or act cool, Philip explained that we was comfortable with being himself at certain times, places, and with certain people. He benefited mostly through the close relationships he shared with his peers. He described his relationship with his male counterparts in terms of an ability to "communicate openly . . . And not be afraid to tell them anything." His relationships among most young women likewise allowed Philip to "sit back and be a guy" and in his words "let me be me . . .and not feel intimidated." Philip also explained that in part his understanding about women came from previous school experiences.

> I think I've been pretty much . . . open to gender and understanding girls. I've hung out with girls since seventh grade or eighth grade and I think that has helped me form ideas about gender in high school.

His school experiences were informed by the different sets of relationships he shared. Philip's relationships were opportunities to grow in his own ideas. He elaborated on the value of the experiences he shared with his female friends in school. In this situation he recalled a meeting of the senior students from the play. He was the only young man at this meeting that night.

> I showed up and I was the only guy . . . I spent the whole night with girls. . . Women give you a different perspective. I feel like I can totally be myself around them.

Philip expressed a genuine sense of belonging and being able to share openly and freely among female classmates. He was a young man that took chances by expressing a countersexist politics. He gained a great deal of comfort from his friendships in school, ones in which he was able to be himself and be accepted as a guy, out from under the burden of what he described as "past judgments based on experiences with other guys." His unique set of gender politics and experiences as a young man provided Philip with the chance to see different perspectives. He acknowledged however that his position as a young man with non-sexist gender politics was not easy. He pointed out that "yeah, women have been exploited in this country and all over the world, but there is no reason to hate all men."

Philip identified an emerging sense of himself as a young man. His sense of being who he was and just being himself stemmed from school experiences, conversations, and informal interaction. He also recognized that there were times when he was not true to himself. He acted in ways expected of him as a man. As such Philip experienced an array of competing and conflicting tensions similar to many high school young men. In Philip's case he managed to negotiate between multiple masculinities and emerged as a high school young man whose gender politics reflected insight and courage.

Thurston was a young man resolute in his views. He acknowledged his own social position among his senior classmates. His peers respected him but

rarely did he cross paths with many people beyond the close knit group of girls he met in "the corner" each day. On this note, Thurston commented admittedly that

> I seem to have more in common, like personality with girls . . . and like, my ideas are a little different than what they (boys) usually think of. So they'd probably look at me weird.

Regardless of how his male counterparts looked upon Thurston, he remained committed to his gender politics. His way of being a young man stood in contrast to his mainstream male peers but he nonetheless abided by his own norms, views, and beliefs. Thurston found strength in knowing that his female classmates accepted him. He did not find the same acceptance among his male counterparts. Thurston benefited from knowing first, that he was accepted among his female classmates and second, that he would be accepted for being himself, not a reflection of his mainstream male counterparts.

Thurston was comfortable with the many aspects of his masculinity that were tied to his gender politics. His perspective as a young man was broadened in several ways because of the array of experiences he shared with a considerably different group of people than his male counterparts. Thurston acknowledged that his perspectives were different from most his male peers.

> I think I am pretty open about people . . . I think that because I have been hanging out with girls for so long . . . it's easier for me to understand both sides as opposed to a guy who has only hung out with guys and who is always with guys.

He elaborated by describing how his views were changed in the process of hanging out in different social groups.

> It's probably innate to see where guys are coming from on most points of views since I am a guy. And so by hanging out with girls I can also see what their points of views are and just by experiencing that I can broaden my horizons. . . that guy part is so there, as well as the girl part is also there.

Thurston's experiences with girls in school allowed him to broaden his perspectives. During an interview he described the contrasting level of comfort he experienced when working with other young men and women. In the first part he described the open dialogue he shared in group situations with young women in school.

> We can all sort of talk and nobody's afraid of talking . . . everybody is comfortable with each other.

He then explained the feelings he had about working with his male counterparts.

> I can feel comfortable talking to them (girls) but I don't necessarily feel as comfortable talking with a bunch of guys . . . They just don't' seem as like, honest. They seem like they're really trying to act cool all the time. Like mainly in a group they'll all try and act tough and act cool. . .They just don't seem as intent on working as girls do.

Thurston was not inhibited by gender differences or social norms that generally framed many of his peer's relations in school. Unlike many of his male counterparts, who rarely worked with girls in class, Thurston embraced these opportunities as moments for expanding his horizons and learning about alternate views. He was more comfortable with young women who accepted him as he was. Thurston summed up his in-class relationships with young women saying, "When I work with girls, I don't feel like, as outside."

Hunter was a young man with a fairly sophisticated understanding both of himself and his peers. He expressed his own masculinity and gender politics in several distinct ways. He was physically and emotionally comfortable with other

men and women in a manner not often demonstrated by his mainstream male counterparts. As I explain in the closing section, there were numerous reasons for which many of his friends continued to abide by traditional male norms and attitudes in their daily school relationships. Hunter on the other hand chose alternate ways to display different versions of his masculinity. He negotiated his politics and his masculinity but at the same time grew as a young man learning and understanding more about himself and others.

Hunter developed unusually close relationships through open dialogues with other men. He developed a strong sense of trust and honesty with other young men that provided a foundation for more open and caring relationships to emerge. He admitted that these relationships were not always easy but stemmed from his ability to "be able to lay everything out and say this is who I am" while at the same time acknowledging "it's hard to just be totally open." His following remarks reflected the unusually close relationships he nurtured with his male counterparts. During our interview Hunter commented on one friendship in particular.

> . . . he trusts me and he doesn't think you know, I 'm going to go (Hunter changes his voice and instills a ridiculing tone) 'Oh Kevin cried during a movie' or something like that. He knows I would never do anything like that. Like when we talk I would never laugh at him or for something more serious I wouldn't go tell other people.

Hunter was entrusted by many of his male friends. He responded to their needs by being a trustworthy listener. Hunter enjoyed being a friend and what he described as a counselor to some of his male counterparts.

As a high school young man surrounded by competing versions of masculinity Hunter was able to be himself. And though the pressures to be like the rest of the boys were substantial, Hunter nonetheless went beyond many young men by being open and honest about whom he was as a man. He did however add a cautionary note saying, "you try to expose yourself a little bit and either someone is going to pry or make fun of that and so you kind of like to hold it back." Regardless, Hunter took social risks through his daily relationships in school. By doing so Hunter demonstrated a remarkable and somewhat atypical approach for enacting both his masculinity and his gender politics.

Powerful assumptions holding back the possibilities of change

Much of the reactions described above are cloaked in a familiar guise of masculinity. Herein lie the assumptions of masculinity that typically have deterred high school young men from rejecting a traditionally male defined set of gender politics. Peer rejection was the greatest fear commonly assumed among other young men who held on to more traditional ways of being high school young men. Ironically the four participants did not experience any outright rejection from their peer groups. The assumption that a young man might be rejected by his peers or "a community of friends" according to Thurston was powerful enough to dissuade other young men from choosing to be unlike the rest of the boys.

Concerns over peer rejection and feelings of outsidedness emerged as a potent means of allowing a hegemonic masculinity to go unchallenged. These potential threats however were only experienced marginally by these young men.

They were fears and concerns nonetheless that inhibited other young men from challenging a standard set of sexist and gender stereotypical beliefs and attitudes among high school young men. I close this section by including what both Thurston and Hunter respectively summarized as a set of beliefs or fears that operated unquestioned and uninterrupted among these high school young men.

> They feel the need to be normal. And I think they are just afraid to because they feel they might like, be ostracized from some community of friends that they have. So other guys will think they are weird or think it is dumb what they are doing.

> I think they are afraid from all different angles. I think they're afraid that they'll get rejected or the girl won't think they're man . . . all the way to their friends making fun of them. . . . he is afraid kind of whether he's saying the wrong things or just doesn't know what to say. I think it is out of fear either that she's just not going to accept him. And if he keeps his distance then it doesn't really matter because he's not, he doesn't have to expose himself so he doesn't have to get hurt or lose anything. But if he does then she actually knows him.

CHAPTER FIVE

High school masculinity: Choosing a progressive gender politics

Schools, like the youth who attend them, are complex. The cultural milieu of a high school in particular provides a rich and dynamic setting for examining some of the most compelling problems of our education system today. Students, girls and boys, young women and men, mirror an array of complicated and puzzling problems in the everyday interaction of their school lives. Among the many problems educators have identified, gender has remained a salient feature.

For decades gender has colored the lives of students' school experiences across the nation. (see Tyack & Hansot, 1990) But not until the last quarter of a century has sexism and gender bias in education been formally and legally acknowledged through legislation. The implementation of Title IX brought the issue into the limelight. The women's movement of the nineteen-seventies brought significant weight to influence and enforce a recognition of gender within the American education system. This study has provided a fresh perspective for examining not only gender but specifically masculinity within a high school setting and more broadly, its emergence as a possible point of entry for responding to sexism and gender stereotypes.

This study draws attention to the many differences among the experiences of high school young men. In particular this study sought to bear out the claim that masculinity is socially constructed in the daily school lives of students. I have argued that alongside their peers, young men routinely negotiate, define, and redefine various elements of masculinity. Within a high school context I

have argued that this process of gender construction is vividly displayed in the formal and informal interaction witnessed among students. I have argued that the decisions high school young men make about how and when to express their masculinities are informed by specific contexts, friends, levels of comfort, knowledge of social norms and masculinising practices that invariably bear on the versions of masculinity displayed publicly and privately among high school students.

In addition to the process of defining their own masculinity I have argued that the high school young men in this study expressed a strong set of gender politics. Their views and beliefs about sexism and gender stereotypes were imbedded in the daily social interaction typical of many high school students. These young men however demonstrated their views and beliefs in a much more public manner than previously acknowledged in past gender and education research.

I have examined gender unfettered by dichotomized notions of him/her and he/she. Instead I have broadened my conceptual lens in a way that has looked beyond the rigid boundaries of what Thorne (1990) referred to as the "separate worlds approach." High school young men have not been looked at as separate entities unto themselves but as people among others. The processes by which they have become high school young men has become the conduit for seeing the fluidity of masculinity and the complexity of gender politics in students' lives. Not only have I argued that masculinity is socially constructed but I have furthered this position by arguing that woven to images of masculinity are

competing sets of views and beliefs. The gender politics of these young men raise an important aspect of what and how high school masculinity is presented and represented in the daily lives of young men.

In conjunction with this I have argued that gender involves choices and a process that more broadly acknowledges the social fact that students, and these high school young men in particular, have agency in their school lives. That is to say that these young men have demonstrated the possibilities for men to construct a social self that involves competing and at times contradictory elements of masculinity. Unitary notions of masculinity are inadequate. Conceptually then speaking of masculinity, singular, overlooks and denies the multi-layered and poly-vocal dimension of masculinity prevalent in high schools today.

Gender has served as an organizing principle through which I have examined the school experiences of a particular population of high school young men. I showed how four young men challenged masculine gender stereotypes through social practices such as casual greetings and conversations. In doing so I showed that as young men these participants saw options and were not restricted by a prevailing hegemonic masculinity. I showed that though powerful, images and definitions of masculinity were not prescriptive and without option. High school masculinities are complex and often in tension with other versions.

The sense of a unitary and highly valued masculinity was only as strong as the voices that perpetuated that image. When legitimated through classroom activities that might for example belittle creativity and open expression among

students, and particularly young men, these practices posed a significant boundary. These young men challenged these boundaries but did so generally knowing and understanding the potential reactions of their peers. Nonetheless these young men illustrated that alternative ways of being young men were possible within a high school setting.

I have built on recent arguments emerging out of men's studies research, cultural studies, and feminist theory that has aptly claimed that men can be allies in an effort toward eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes in education. In light of this study it is evident that opposing sexism from among high school young men is not only possible, but also fundamental as part of any broader strategy for eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes among high school students.

Opposition to sexism and the ongoing need to challenge gender stereotypes hinges on the efforts of many, both men and women, on numerous fronts. The fact that previous research has not considered men as potential allies should not overshadow the significant part they can play in the process. Clearly, changing curricular content to include the voices and experiences of women is but one front. The employment of women in positions of power within schools is yet another front. And providing increased resources to encourage girls to enter non-traditional fields of study in school is but another front. Students' school lives however remain as one front upon which little research and little effort at all has been focused to promote change in attitudes or ways of being that might eliminate sexism and gender stereotypes. Teachers and teacher educators must

begin entertaining the possibilities by embracing and supporting the behaviors and attitudes of young men in particular who go against the mainstream current of "the boys."

This chapter is composed of several sections. First, I outline the findings of this study. In this section I draw on my theoretical framework to set up specifically what and how some high school young men opposed sexism and gender stereotypes. My primary aim in this section is to give a synopsis of the major points emerging from the research data. Second, I provide what are arguably some of the limitations of this study. This section both acknowledges and cautions us to several aspects of this study. And finally, the closing section discusses the future of ongoing research such as this. I suggest the need for more research that moves beyond the boys and instead hears and sees the actions of others but particularly young men who are currently under-supported and overlooked because they have been consumed or completely alienated by the boys.

The findings

The basic findings of this research--that masculinity is fluid both conceptually and practically and that some young men enact countervailing sets of beliefs in contrast to mainstream masculinity, is a challenge to previous theories and arguments in gender and education research. The young men in this study have demonstrated that differences exist within and across men. Within a single school setting these young men have demonstrated that masculinity is a process in which they socially construct themselves in relation to

others. Masculinity was defined both with and apart from their mainstream counterparts. They shaped and reshaped their social identities while maintaining membership among various factions of the boys. The choices these young men made to reject specific versions of masculinity and moreover, to openly resist typically sexist behavior common among their male peers poses a challenge to research that has generally denied agency to students.

The four young men in this study did not willingly or passively accept traditional roles or viewpoints but instead variously interrupted them. But having said that it is important to acknowledge that this research focused on the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of four particular high school young men. If these young men are representative of a certain proportion of high school populations, then the outcomes of this study bear significantly. If this is the case and these four young men are not simply anomalies, then teacher and teacher educators need to be mindful of what and how the school experiences of these young men might cast a broader light on the issue of sexism and gender stereotypes in high schools.

The findings of this study reveal a potential alliance that an admittedly small portion of a high school population of young men might offer as they go against the grain of their mainstream male counterparts. This section outlines several major points first, with regard to masculinity as a fluid concept, second, with regard to masculinity as a process, and finally, with regard to the manner in which these young men enacted countervailing beliefs and ways of being men in high school.

Masculinity: Definitions from a polyphony of voices

Central High was awash with competing models of masculinity. The young men in this study were surrounded with competing and varying models that defined what it meant to be a high school young man. These models of masculinity were both distinct and yet at times overlapping. The young men at Central High represented a broad range of ways for being young men. In other words they were not simply surrounded by one dominant set of definitions for masculinity. Instead, masculinity was fluid both conceptually and practically. Directly and indirectly these young men showcased multiple definitions of what it meant to be a man. Their school experiences were an arena out of which not one, but numerous masculinities emerged.

Teachers and students alike drew from definitions of masculinity rooted in daily interaction. Conversations and casual greetings provided public forums in which boundaries between and across masculinities emerged. In a classroom for example one teacher referred to a young man as a "dukor." In this situation the teacher formally acknowledged and legitimated this student's involvement in a school fight from the day before. The teacher gave status to the student by naming him as a "dukor." He also provided a forum, namely the classroom context, in which to discuss the event as a legitimate activity. Other students such as "the typical jocks" were firmly entrenched in commonly used definitions that delineated different manners of expression among high school young men. Students also identified their peers by drawing on a range of definitions from being friends to best friends. The distinctions between young men however were

more sharply defined among these students on the basis of views and informal interaction. Some were defined as "touchy feely types of guys" while others were labeled as homosexuals. Teachers added to these definitions by legitimating some ways of being a young man while denying other ways. In-class conversations for example frequently propped up male athleticism. The informal as well as formal acknowledgments in this school contributed to various definitions of high school masculinity.

High school provided a context in which the young men in this study defined their own masculinity in relation to others. Mainstream definitions of masculinity were prevalent. Toughness and virility for example were central attributes that separated young men within and across groups of their male counterparts. At the other end of the spectrum masculinity was captured in the uncommon expression of sensitive and public outpourings of affection among some men. These young men were defined by casual references. Different forms of expressions and manners of being young men in and outside of the classroom lead to broader distinctions that isolated young men for example as gay, rough and tough, or nice guys. The definitions varied and were specific to particular social, curricular, and extra-curricular contexts.

High school masculinity was connected to a set of understandings and meanings shared across these young men. They associated certain ways of being a young man with particular types of masculinity--some more valued than others. These young men drew on a common set of meanings for knowing what it meant to be a high school young man. At the same time these meanings were

not always consistently enforced. Some young men for example skirted prevailing sets of understandings. Close physically affectionate exchanges such as hugging for example were recast in a way that allowed young men to give "hattrick hugs." Uncommonly close interaction among these men thus became legitimated at times because it was connected to more traditional athletic models of masculinity.

Other sets of meanings related to being creative similarly revealed the extent to which high school masculinity was informed by a variety of deep-seated traditional norms and view points. In this context high school masculinity was underscored by what young men knew and understood of various norms of interaction and attitudes directly connected to prevailing images of masculinities. The young men in this study were aware of the different sets of meanings that informed and defined different masculinities. The array of competing definitions of masculinity informed the choices these young men made about how and when to express their social identity as high school young men.

Choices: Masculinities in a high school context

High school masculinities emerged out of a complex set of principles and choices about what and how to demonstrate elements of the self as a high school young man. This meant that the participants were routinely engaged in making decisions that directly and indirectly mirrored first, their individual masculinity and second, their gender politics. Each of the four young men acted in ways that highlighted a broad scope for seeing and hearing what it meant to be

a man at Central High. They also showcased what they individually valued as important features of specific versions of masculinity.

Competing elements of high school masculinity were evident in the routine expressions of these young men. Social conventions ranging from joke telling to casual greetings to informal conversations were subtle points and processes for accepting or rejecting particular versions of masculinity. A joke that emphasized sexuality or degraded women for example was one way of demonstrating one form of masculinity tied to a traditional heterosexist framework. Daily conversations among these men likewise became points of entry and membership. Participation was centered on what one could say about cars, sports, and sexual exploits for example. Competing versions of high school masculinity were supported and legitimated based on the level to which young men upheld some and undermined specific models of masculinity. Openly embracing young men was but one way that the participants rejected a traditional version of masculinity that denied close physical affection among young men. Honest emotional discussions likewise demonstrated a different version of masculinity prevalent among the four participants.

Daily and subtle forms of interaction in school became a vehicle for defining and redefining an evolving repertoire of ways for being high school young men. In this study masculinity was not strictly and exclusively limited but instead showed signs of expansion and growth. High school masculinity was dynamic and multi-layered. The participants actively chose to represent themselves in specific ways in differing contexts. Among some friends for

example different choices were made based on what manner of expression was likely to be accepted or rejected. These choices were informed by the cultural definitions of masculinity supported within these contexts. Some situations allowed for and supported being non-conventional as a young man while others involved various risks such as ridicule.

These four young men carefully surveyed the cultural landscape within different school contexts. In doing so they gauged the reactions of other young men. They determined with whom and when to challenge the attitudes and behaviors of their peers. Through reading the responses of their male counterparts these young men were able to enact competing versions of masculinity. This practice of gauging others' responses while enacting different ways of being young men allowed them to expand and broaden their definitions of high school masculinity. Being creative for example thus could not simply be relegated to young men who were gay. The participants displayed creativity in ways that gave greater depth and breadth to what it meant to be a high school young man. This meant that rather than creativity being attributed to being gay, these young men demonstrated that it was an alternate form of expression among these heterosexual men. Their displays of creativity contribute conceptually and practically by challenging previously narrowly defined norms of high school masculinity.

Gender politics: Views and displays unlike mainstream young men

In a pervasive way choices about gender relations and the views expressed to oppose sexism and gender stereotypes were related to how these

young men defined their high school masculinities. The participants displayed a complicated process in which they purposefully defined their own masculinities. At the same time they defined a set of gender relations that extended far beyond their immediate definitions of what it meant to be a high school young man.

Masculinity was a type of springboard. They launched their own definitions of masculinity, some of which did not always concur with long standing images. They also went against the prevailing wave of conventional gender relations that many of their male peers supported. These young men rejected different versions of masculinity as well as the broader foundation upon which they were established. In other words they opposed assumptions about masculinity and equally as important, they rejected the views and beliefs that supported and upheld sexist ways of being young men.

These high school young men made calculated decisions to reject sexism and gender stereotypes. First, what they knew and understood about mainstream masculinity informed their choices. Because of their insight into what it meant to be a young man in high school, the participants generally were unscathed, but not entirely, by the ridicule of their peers. Second, the social contexts, namely the level of friendship these young men shared with their classmates influenced the degrees of opposition expressed. Third, different forums in particular became sites of opposition. Daily conversations operated to maintain or perpetuate sexism among these students. The participants reacted in varying degrees to reject the tenor of these conversations. Both verbal and non-verbal forms of interaction also provided a means by which these young men

resisted the conventions of mainstream masculinity. Public and private exchanges between these young men and their peers showcased the variety of contexts and varying degrees to which opposition was expressed on a daily basis. Fourth, gender expectations operated at subtle and not so subtle levels. As such the participants as well as their male counterparts grappled with underlying assumptions about high school masculinity and what it meant to be a man. And finally, the costs for these young men were mixed. Mainstream young men attempted to defend traditional versions of masculinity. The manner in which they did this varied. The more general response to the participants and their daily expression of a gender politics unlike many of their peers was mixed. Some reactions were more acerbic than others.

Non-traditional displays of masculinity meant that these young men had rejected the norms of mainstream masculinity. This type of opposition powerfully opened the door on masculinity by demonstrating that not all young men subscribed to a common set of rules for interaction. Instead, these four young men took a certain license among their peers by interacting for example with open embraces and the outpouring of support and raw emotions. In this manner they crossed certain gender boundaries not generally stepped beyond among young men. The fears of their peers told of the many reasons that high school young men often times maintained traditional norms of masculinity.

Levels of friendships among high school young men were a common foundation upon which different degrees of opposition to gender stereotypes were expressed. Considerable attention was given to the type of relationship,

long term or otherwise, before these young men would display any opposition. The views of some young men simply were not questioned because of a distant relationship to the participants. Other male peers however were challenged once the participants had gained confidence and membership along side their peers.

A range of venues characteristic of the daily school lives of these young men allowed for different types of opposition to emerge. Some venues such as off-campus breaks for example were not included in this study. The main venues for these young men included the daily informal conversations they shared in and outside of the classroom. Momentary pauses in classes for example, allowed for passing remarks, typically disruptive male behavior, and sexist jokes to surface. Physical relationships that moved beyond rough-housing were another venue in which the participants rejected standard ways of being high school men. Routine social exchanges that generally were more distant such as head nods and hand shakes were contrasted with open displays of affectionate touching between men. Unconventional forms of contact thus alert us to the social norms being challenged among these high school young men. And finally, public and private exchanges between young men highlighted a series of masculinised practices that the participants rejected. The open sharing of poetry or the caring supportive conversations among these men demonstrated that mainstream norms of behavior that guided and upheld hegemonic masculinity could be resisted.

Gender expectations had a subtle influence bearing on several of the decisions these young men made to reject gender stereotypes. The participants'

peers, both young men and women, expressed typical gender expectations. There was a backdrop of sorts that broadly defined how and what was expected of these young men during their daily interaction. These young men were expected to behave and interact in a manner typical of their male counterparts. In other words they were supposed to be like the rest of the boys. This meant that in situations when the participants did not act "manly" as it were, their peers looked askance, occasionally commenting or mimicking them to emphasize specific rules of masculinity. Generally the participants rejected the standard conventions of masculinity. Whether they did so by routinely reaching out to their peers in caring and supportive ways or were more vocal rejecting the typically disruptive and sexist behavior of young men, the participants did so as part of a concerted set of gender politics.

The study: Its limitations

The main impetus for this study came from assumptions past research and studies made about high school young men as a unidimensional and coherent entity. The research I conducted posed a conceptual and practical challenge. I began with questions that conceptually problematized a monolithic definition of masculinity. I followed up with an examination of the daily interaction evident among four particular high school young men. These young men were chosen purposively because they demonstrated non-conventional beliefs and ways of being high school young men. The four participants provided an alternate perspective for seeing and hearing sexism and gender stereotypes different from past research because of the social location and views of these

young men. They revealed a set of ways for being young men previously not well understood. They also shed light on a set of gender politics rarely acknowledged or identified among mainstream high school young men. This study however was not without its own shortcomings. In this section I outline several of these.

Conducting qualitative research into the school lives of these students was complicated. In Chapter Two I identified and discussed several of the complications that arose while in the field. One aspect underscored by this particular study was the fact that in broad terms the students knew of my interest in gender and sexism. They were told up front that my research focused on the school experiences of young men who were not typical of the rest of the boys. The explanation I gave them was intentionally vague. I did not mislead the students but rather attempted to control the extent to which my research interests might have informed their daily interaction. I did this as an effort to capture the authentic and routine experiences typical for these students.

The fact that the students knew of my research interest might have contributed to what I saw and heard. However, I am not convinced of this. I became a permanent member among several different peer groups at Central High. This allowed me to become immersed and well connected to the daily routines of these four young men. I was increasingly accepted into the fold of these students' daily school experiences. The students were increasingly less concerned with my research as the first month passed by. The mystique of a student doing research subsided as I gradually became accepted by different groups of friends. Initially there was a flurry of questions, mainly of an inquisitive

nature. These tailed off after the first month. Occasionally students asked to see my field notes. The curiosity centered on what I wrote. My field notes were descriptive accounts of events. Again these inquiries dissipated once students generally knew what I was doing.

Social class and ethnicity was not examined in this study. I borrowed from previous research as the foundation from which I conducted this study and chose four white middle-class high school young men. Researchers such as Sadker & Sadker (1994) and the AAUW (1992) have either focused on white middle-class students or blurred racial and ethnic lines. And even though in its report the AAUW (1993) "attempted to be sensitive to changes in racial terminology and the differences between various ethnic groups" (p. 6), the researchers were less attentive in the actual reporting of specific racial differences. The primary emphasis was more generally on gender bias evidenced among the girls and the boys. It was less about African American boys and girls or Hispanic girls and boys.

Gender and education research has focused primarily on white middle-class young men. They are at the core of this study mainly because it has been this population that has been most widely reported upon in mainstream gender and education research. This portion of school populations, both in terms of race and social class, has historically occupied a position of privilege and power as white, middle-class men. As such I argue that the school experiences of these students need to be questioned and interrupted. Hearn & Collinson (1994) have pointed out that "'men' are talked of and about . . . and simultaneously 'men' are

relatively rarely talked on. They are shown but not said, visible but not questioned." (p. 97). My study re-centers young men. In this study however I did so in an effort to shed light on and listen to the voices of a particular group of young men. Their school experiences revealed a process in which they attempted to challenge the voices and actions of their peers while enacting their own set of gender politics.

This study examines sexism and gender stereotypes by interrupting the routine school experiences of four white middle class high school young men. I took issue specifically with questions of masculinity within a narrowly defined portion of the general school population at Central High. Researchers including Mac An Ghaill (1994) and Peshkin & White (1990) have provided thoughtful analyses of issues of ethnicity for African American young men. Other researchers who have conducted cultural studies in particular have used social class analysis as a central framework with which to examine the school lives of students, both men and women. (see Connell, 1993; Kessler et al, 1985; Weis, 1990) I have not attempted to unravel issues of social class or race in this study. Instead I have used these as starting points for identifying a specific population of students about whom gender and education research has made some broad and simplistic generalizations. My research questions several generalizations made about this group of students but particularly about white middle-class high school young men.

This study raised questions about the social practices and views of a portion of the school population presumed to be representative of the boys. I

problematized gender and specifically examined the complexity of masculinity as a theoretical and practical construct. In doing so this research looks beyond a single frame of reference for understanding students and specifically white middle-class high school young men. Within group differences and across group differences drew our attention to the complicated school experiences of these young men. The experiences among and across these young men were at times similar and dissimilar. In other words, among other things these high school young men revealed that they did not all share typically masculinised school experiences.

One further limitation to this study is the fact that it re-centers young men within gender and education. Unlike previous research that has worked to hear the voices of school girls and see the struggles they experience as girls in school, this research shifted the focus back to the boys. Critics might argue that I have omitted the very people about whom I need to be most concerned, namely young women. However, the study I conducted intentionally filtered out the voices of many in order to hear the voices of a few. In this study the "few" are white middle class young men.

The attempt to question masculinity in and of itself might be interpreted as yet another chance for boys to steal the focus of attention in education. Most important to bear in mind is that this study is not about the boys or at least not about the boys with which teachers, and teacher educators are most familiar. Still, with a renewed sense of interest in masculinity does this not send a signal that threatens again to push girls to the sidelines in gender and education

research? By re-examining masculinity I attempted to delve deeper into what educators arguably already know about the boys. Rather than narrowing or limiting the dialogue in gender and education research, this study sought to open up the conversation. I looked in different places among the boys as an opportunity to hear more fully what it means to be a high school young man with an unconventional set of gender politics. Researchers need to be wary of the way research such as this might threaten the voices of others. At the same time by not interrupting the voices of young men and examining masculinity we allow men's voices in school to remain strong, unquestioned, and intact.

Time was also a consideration that might have shaped the data in this study. The research was conducted during the final academic semester of the participants' senior school year. I gathered data for six months. The time I spent with these students was not as prolonged as I had anticipated. It was an intense period nonetheless. And though I was not able to observe them for an entire academic year, the semester provided a natural time span across which I was able to see patterns of interaction emerge and evolve. I entered new classes along side the participants and became a member of different in-class groups. There were of course previous connections and friendships that I learned of as a newcomer to the social scenes. The aspect of the friendships between the participants and their peers was managed as I became accepted among the peer groups.

Finally, this research was limited conceptually by focusing on male gender stereotypes. The data I provided illustrated how and when these young men

rejected traditionally male stereotypes. The research in this study did not address efforts to reject stereotypes of women. I do not mean to imply that these young men did not reject those stereotypes. They offered powerful examples as men rejecting traditional norms of masculinity. Their experiences strongly reflect how prevailing stereotypes of masculinity, uninterrupted in high school, have contributed to how and when these young men acted as agents of social change.

Re-writing and re-thinking: Young men as social allies

This study broadens the scope for understanding high school masculinity as a social construct. It also adds significantly by posing an alternate view with which to address the theoretical and practical elements involved in eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes from within education. According to bell hooks, (1998) "men who actively struggle against sexism have a place in feminist movement. They are our comrades" (p. 586). The position of responsibility and being agents for change among men is compelling. There is a myriad of ways that young men can take up the struggle against sexism. It is not beyond the realm then that within a high school context young men can engage in this struggle by "exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers" (hooks, 1998, p. 578). This study offers an alternative perspective which pushes us to rethink and begin rewriting how and when men might be considered advocates for social justice, namely the elimination of sexism and gender stereotypes.

The views and experiences of these young men are a testament to the possibilities that exist among high school masculinities. In the past these possibilities have been limited by a conceptual and practical definition of what it meant to be a high school young man. For the most part in education the definitions of masculinity have remained static. However, this study has revealed a more fluid and a more encompassing definition. In varying degrees the participants showed that they were able to interrupt the conversations, the interactions, and the subtle and disturbing ways that sexism and gender stereotypes held a place in the cultural landscape of these students' high school lives. Being a high school young man thus was not about simply being like the rest of the boys. Instead high school masculinity was connected to broader social issues grounded in the competing sets of beliefs and views these young men held about gender.

The daily interaction of the young men in this study brought to the foreground what it meant to be a high school young man but also a man who rejected sexist beliefs and gender stereotypes commonly found among mainstream students. I began this dissertation by arguing that change must not only come from a series of systemic reform efforts mandated in reports but it must also be spearheaded from within the system of education.

Students can and will be agents for change if they are invested in the goals that propel and justify change. The young men in this study enacted gender politics that were not always coherent or necessarily consistent. They did however enact ways of being young men and importantly, ways of opposing

sexism and gender stereotypes in degrees that interrupted a fixed gaze on the mainstream young men who have previously dominated our attention in gender and education. It is worth reiterating the importance of

> acknowledg[ing] the alternatives to this form [aggressive masculinity] for there are other ways in which boys can deal with the demands of schooling and masculinity. The conspicuousness of the macho form, which has been romanticized and vilified, has led to a neglect of those boys who do not practice this strong form of masculinity. (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p. 126)

These young men demonstrated that among the boys there are those who choose not to be like the rest. The agenda they held and expressed during their daily interaction offered a glimpse at how and when high school young men became dissenting voices amidst more traditional masculinities.

Students are savvy enough to identify sexism and gender bias in their classroom textbooks but to what extent have teachers encouraged them to challenge it in their daily school relationships? What opportunities are there in school for students, especially young men, to raise critical questions about masculinity? Wherein do issues of masculinity take root in our schools and which cultural definitions prevail? A more supportive and directed approach that includes students in this process of interrogation of masculinities and gender relationships is likely to gain greater support if students' lives become the starting point for the discussion. Teachers and teacher educators need to begin a process that raises gender and sexism to the surface rather than skirts around it or avoids it altogether. Sexism and gender stereotypes remain an ongoing problem in our schools.

The possibilities these young men have shown in their daily interaction are promising. Research into the lives of countersexist high school young men has potential for allowing teachers and students, boys and girls, to better understand how to oppose sexism and gender stereotypes from a different angle than previous research has suggested. It is essential that teachers and teacher educators develop an orchestrated approach for encouraging and supporting countersexist views and attitudes among young men. If teachers overlook young men like David, Hunter, Thurston, and Philip and instead continue to listen to the louder voices that have historically dominated their classrooms, educators risk losing a valuable ally in the process.

Gender reform and the ongoing struggle to eliminate sexism and gender stereotypes in our schools requires a collaborative approach that includes students, men and women, invested in social justice. Teachers and teacher educators can not afford to allow the disruptions and dominant voices of typical young men to be the norm for all the boys any longer.

These four young men are a part of the countercurrents in masculinity struggling to find a clear voice. (Connell, 1993) They have agency as high school young men and increasingly their gender politics reflected that they too had a voice even though it was muted at times. These young men also illustrated how tensions surfaced among and between masculinities. If instead they had accepted the normative way of being a young man at Central High they would have remained in the shadows, their voices would have remained muted, and to some extent, sexism and gender stereotypes would have gone uninterrupted.

Conclusion

A renewed call for change: Embracing high school young men

Previous gender and education research has focused primarily on women and specifically how women have been dominated, alienated, and silenced in school. (see AAUW, 1992; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) The emphasis has been on explaining how, for example, "gender lessons infiltrate the school environment" and "sexism sabotages girls at school" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. xi). The AAUW likewise has called for change. In fact they have argued that "the system must change" (AAUW, 1992, p. 147). The 40 recommendations at the end of the AAUW report called for ongoing "assessment," "investigation," "teaching requirements," "evaluation," and a focus that demands that "teachers must help girls," "schools and communities must encourage and support girls studying science and mathematics," and "policies" must be developed.

According to the AAUW report, How Schools Shortchange Girls, agencies, women teachers, administrators, governing bodies, and teacher-training courses are the primary source of the problem. Students and young men in particular, men teachers, and boys are not an explicit part of this strategy. Unexplored then are the ways that education can be a forum within which the other part of the gender equation, namely young men, can address sexism and gender stereotypes.

The call for change has centered primarily on women and secondly, on structural elements to "help them." No where in this list of recommendations has the report given serious attention to how educators and teachers might promote

change and challenge from among students, both men and women. And no where in this report is there the suggestion that change might come about from engaging students in ways that would question or destabilize sexism and gender stereotypes via their daily education. Instead, sexism has been framed as a systemic problem in American education. In other words sexism and gender stereotypes are viewed as issues that could be addressed at an administrative level involving curricular reform, human resources, and finances.

The approach in gender and education reform has been to change some *thing* in education. Efforts to revise the curriculum or provide teacher in-service training to raise awareness of gender bias is useful but does not go far enough. This approach stops at the surface. I agree that many of the AAUW recommendations are worthy but I would add that the students, both boys and girls, are key to the process for promoting change from within the system of education. That is to say that change and the gradual elimination of sexism and gender stereotypes can come about if and only if educators re-envision boys and girls as change agents.

High school young men in particular can play an important part in this process of gender reform. As Connell (1998) has pointed out "we are still far from having a well-reasoned strategy in gender education within which the countercurrents in masculinity could find a clear voice" (p. 152). It is important that these voices, voices that support countersexist behavior and attitudes, be heard and acknowledged as legitimate. The potential for change can come

about if teachers and teacher educators begin to acknowledge the real and apparent differences among boys and girls.

The possibilities these young men modeled during their daily school experiences were striking. They were striking for two reasons in particular. One, these young men demonstrated ways of being high school young men that previously have not been identified or acknowledged. Two, they modeled behaviors and attitudes that generally are not well supported among high school students. The potential these young men illustrated as allies for social justice was considerable. What is also powerful is the fact that educators have rarely if ever looked to young men as human agents invested in eliminating sexism and opposing gender stereotypes. Instead many respond to the possibility by asking why would they be interested in questioning their own privilege and status as men?

One fundamental aspect of high school masculinity is the need to re-envision masculinity along the lines of individual choices. Teachers and teacher educators need to push forth by problematizing the formal and informal ways young men accept gender roles that define and limit masculinity. The school experiences of many young men are colored by the daily conversations and forms of interaction that often rest on unquestioned assumptions about what it means to be a high school young man.

Teachers as well as students need to begin interrupting what and how students are learning about masculinity. Schools are but one context within which social practices for example can be challenged. Daily conversations

among students likewise provide another context in which young men can begin interrogating their own ways of expressing the social self as a young man.

The fear for these young men was not in challenging or rejecting conventional norms of masculinity but instead it was in not knowing how others would accept an alternative version of masculinity. The participants often threw caution to the wind when they were unsure of how others might react to a public embrace for example. At the same time they tempered their ways of being young men with the knowledge that their male counterparts may be un-accepting. More young men however need to see that there are options available for how and what a young man conveys about his masculinity. Narrowly defined and prescriptive models of masculinity need to be seen as just that, models of which there are many from which to choose.

The research I conducted looked at part of the gender equation. I attempted to fill out what we already know about high school masculinity. There is much more that can be gleaned from the lives of high school young men. The foundation upon which this research was launched argued that masculinity is not coherent and unidimensional. Within and across group differences thus open the door for ongoing research into the many differences that divide and bring young men together in school. The boundaries are constructed and played out in the real lives of young men who make decisions to accept and reject a myriad of ways for being high school young men.

Qualitative research provides a means through which the stories of competing versions of masculinity might be heard. Out from the shadows of a

prevailing hegemonic masculinity emerge the actions of young men different from the boys. Out from the distance come the voices of young men who have not been heard because of the misplaced attention that other young men have received for silencing those less powerful.

Further research into these young men and their peers holds possibilities for better understanding how and when young men can become members and social allies invested in eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes. If the four young men in this study represent a countercurrent within high school masculinity, then it is a powerful sign that high school young men can change in socially progressive ways. The questions that guided this study were ones that centered on examining the missed possibilities among men. It behooves teachers and teacher educators to continue looking and to continue hearing the differences among men. To suggest that all the boys are "just being boys" is to deny the possibilities young men have as human agents for social change.

The school experiences of these four young men demonstrate the complicated and rich dynamic of high school masculinity and the emergence of a progressive gender politics. There are a multiplicity of ways that students, both men and women, can contribute to a change in attitudes and behaviors that frame what it means to be a man in high school. Students, young men and women, must be acknowledged and supported in the process. The possibilities for changing attitudes from among the boys are provocative but only if teachers and teacher educators allow themselves to see the differences within and across high school masculinities. By seeing those differences and hearing the voices of

this invisible minority of young men, educators can forge new ground toward eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes in schools.

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