boys' bodies

sport, health and physical activity

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Note to Readers

This book draws on material which I previously published in the following articles:

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Drummond, M. J. and Drummond, C. (2012). Boys and their teeth: A qualitative investigation of boys' oral health in early childhood. *Journal of Child Health Care,* 16(3) pp. 284–292.

Drummond, M. J. (2012). Boys' bodies in early childhood. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood,* 37(4) pp. 107–114.

Personal Reflections

My Interest in Sport, Bodies and Masculinity

Sport has always been a 'natural' part of my life. While cliché, I cannot remember a time without sport. It has defined me a person and as a man. From my earliest memories, sport has been central to my identity. Much of my childhood was spent playing competitive sport; otherwise, it was playing ad hoc sports with friends using 'made up rules' or, for example, surfing, wind-surfing and jetty jumping. While other children were learning to read through age-appropriate storybooks and novels, I was reading sporting records and almanacs. A specific Christmas present that I requested each year was the Guinness Book of World Records™, such was my thirst for knowledge around sporting competition and records. Now in my early 50s, sport and competition continue to play a significant role in my life and have framed the way in which I exist. Indeed, I am a Professor of *Sport, Health and Physical Activity* at a tertiary institution educating others on the 'virtues' of sport and physical activity, and providing them with the opportunity to seek employment as professionals and educators in this field.

As I reflect on the meaning of sport to me as child, I can now see that I was different to most of the other children with whom I participated in junior sports. For many, participation was the key. While I enjoyed engaging and being with my friends, competition and winning were central to my involvement and satisfaction. I relished coaches demanding us to 'play hard', particularly when they enthusiastically raised their voices pre-game to challenge us to compete at our best. These were the exciting aspects of sport that I craved, together with the physicality and sense of belonging that came with being accomplished at an activity.

I was particularly gifted at the traditional masculinised sports of Australian football and cricket, playing both of these sports at regional representative level and then choosing cricket as my primary sport where I represented my state at secondary school level. However, following an injury, coupled with my interest in team-based sports beginning to wane, I focused my attention on an individual sport where I would become the sole destiny of my success or failure. The sport of triathlon was new and emerging and exciting. It offered me the chance to engage in a sport where I could 'reinvent' myself and find an alternative masculine identity using my body in an entirely new way. Despite the change in sports, the transition was not seamless in terms of my decision-making process. Cricket had been a major part of my life since early childhood. It also helped me forge a wonderful relationship with my father from boyhood through to adulthood. Therefore, leaving the sport behind was a pivotal point in my life, which could have only occurred at a time in my life when I felt 'adult' enough to walk away.

Cricket became my primary focus of sporting attention, but an unfortunate injury curtailed any chance of a career in that direction. As a consequence, I took up running which soon led to triathlon. Despite beginning the sport at 20 years of age, I was determined to be successful. Once again my parents were entirely supportive. However, I have never felt comfortable, nor come to terms, with giving up cricket knowing the pleasure my father gained from watching me perform well. Together we forged a strong relationship through this sport, which I initially thought might diminish on leaving. Fortunately, I was wrong and we are now closer

*than ever before, but I occasionally contemplate what might have been
had I continued and made it to national level. I did, however, make it to
national level in triathlon, which pleased both my parents, yet being such
a new sport, without tradition and without many past athletes to gauge
performances by, this new sport lacked the closeness and intimacy the
others had provided. Thus they became mere supportive observers as a
consequence of the difficulty in understanding my motives for wanting to
participate in such a demanding sport. Still, they knew it was something
in which I wanted to be involved and successful.*

(Drummond, 1996)

The extract above is a quote taken from my Ph.D. that was completed
in 1996. Since that time my father has passed away, I have been mar-
ried for 22 years and have a 19-year-old daughter and a 16-year-old son.
In 1997, I secured an academic lecturing position as a sport and health
sociologist within a sport science degree in Adelaide, South Australia.
Twelve years later, in 2009, I was provided the opportunity to establish,
and become the director of, a sport-based research centre at an alterna-
tive university in South Australia, where I have been employed for the
past 10 years. While a number of things in my life have changed since
writing this extract, I have continued to research and write in the area of
masculinities in sport, health, physical activity and body image.

During discussions with my postgraduate students about their future,
or with early career researchers about their ongoing research, I often
suggest to them that they establish a core around which their research
career can be built. In my instance, I would argue that masculinity is
the key element that binds all of the work that I do, together with qual-
itative research methods. Therefore, since beginning my research career
by undertaking a Ph.D. investigating the social construction of mascu-
linity within elite level sports, I have been able to delve into a variety
of areas that relate to masculinities. For example, emerging from my
Ph.D., a number of years ago now, I was able to recognise that despite
being elite level athletes, the majority of men involved in my research
were not necessarily 'happy' with the way their bodies 'looked' aesthet-
ically. Bear in mind, the sports in which these men were involved were

those of triathlon, surf-lifesaving and bodybuilding. Some might suggest that these sports reflect the epitome of masculinised bodies in terms of both how these bodies 'look' and the activities in which they can partake. Despite doing a Ph.D., which was essentially underpinned by sport sociological theories, I was able to reflect on the tangential findings of body image issues and explore these further as my career progressed beyond the Ph.D. once I had settled into a full-time academic position at a university.

   The area of men and body image became a focus around which I developed the basis of my early career. With very few academics working in this space, I was able to quickly develop a national and international standing in a niche area that had remained largely unexplored. Men's body image was also an area of passion for me given that I had previously been involved in elite level endurance sports while witnessing first hand, and experiencing, the level of anguish associated with male athletes and their bodies. Conceptually, I began to question how men involved in sports, where aesthetically appealing bodies were a related 'bi-product', came to develop body image concerns. Indeed, if these men were concerned about their own personal body identity, then how must other men be feeling about their bodies? Such was my passion in this area that I undertook a number of unfunded research projects to assist me in developing some answers to this question. I quickly learned that a number of men were struggling to come to terms with the way in which their bodies were 'displayed' in a world that was increasingly becoming fixated on appearance. It was also at this stage that the Internet was beginning to emerge as a social phenomenon and social networking sites were increasing in popularity. The potential for bodies to be on display and gazed upon had never been greater than at this point. This, coupled with the changing social ideals associated with women's roles in society together with a backlash towards traditional masculinised ideologies, created a wave of change for men the likes of which had not been previously experienced.

   After several years of research and seeking clarity around the issues of body image for men, I was invited to join the board of the South Australian Anorexia Bulimia Nervosa Association (ABNA). At the time this association received grant funding from the State Government of

South Australia. However, it was only enough funding to fill one full-time manager position and another part-time administrative assistant role. Volunteers conducted the bulk of the work in terms of answering calls from vulnerable people with body image concerns and eating disorders. At the time I was invited to join the board there was quite a spike in the number of males making contact with ABNA for assistance. There were also a number of females making contact 'on behalf of' boyfriends, brothers, sons or young males in their lives that were dealing with body image and eating disorders. With a dearth of leaders in this field, and very little data or 'best practice models' available for working with men and young males with body image concerns and eating disorders, I was invited to assist the organisation in this area. Once again, I used this opportunity to undertake research in order to build my knowledge in this field. After a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews with males who were currently dealing with eating disorders, including anorexia and bulimia nervosa, I was able to understand the area in a far more comprehensive manner. Masculinity was the core around which I chose to focus recommendations for interventions with men and young males as this was the point of difference between males and females and the way that the body image concerns and eating disorders were manifested.

The early 2000s was an interesting period in the scholarly field of male bodies. There was very little information on men, body image and eating disorders. Over a period of just a few years, I conducted in excess of 200 media interviews for television, radio, newspapers and magazines, such was the level of interest. On almost every occasion, the interview began with 'I didn't know men could develop eating disorders'. In many ways, it was good to be able to provide the information to the audience. However, after 5 or 6 years of doing these types of interviews, I was concerned that the message was not being heard given that the same questions were continually being raised at the beginning of the interview. Over a period of time, the level of social and cultural interest began to wane where men, body image and eating disorders are concerned. I suspect there is now a general awareness of the issues. However, it is no longer the 'sexy' new issue that it once was. Every so often a major news organisation will seek to undertake a substantial expose on the topic in a more exploratory or nuanced manner.

However, the initial line of enquiry is once again based along the lines of 'so, you don't really hear a lot about men and eating disorders or having body image issues'. Therefore, the response is often a new take on an old version of the previous response.

In the process of accessing men with eating disorders and body image concerns for my research projects, I developed close connections with a number of wonderful organisations that dealt with young men and body image despite it not being their 'core business'. For example, Second Story, which is an Adelaide-based youth health and counselling service, was pivotal in accessing participants for my research. The organisation assisted me through a variety of networks including the Bfriend email network, which supports LGBTIQA+ communities. Through these networks, I was able to access a number of young males dealing with body image concerns. Of the 14 young males that I originally engaged with to be involved in the research, all of them were gay. Additionally, 6 of these men were Asian. Therefore, my research took an entirely new turn and I began focusing on gay men's bodies as well as Asian gay men as a subcohort within this group given the participants that I was presented. This was a fascinating turn of events and I was intrigued with the new direction that my research was heading. It was from this point that a variety of areas opened up to me. For example, given that I was dealing with predominantly young males, I started to think about older men and body image and the dearth of information that was available to understand these groups of men with respect to bodies and body image. Therefore, I was able to access older gay and straight men through the extensive networks that I had now made. Some of the older gay men that I interviewed were also dealing with comorbidity complications associated with being HIV-positive as well as the body image concerns they harboured through their HIV status and the regime of drugs that they claimed to be influencing their physique. Several of these HIV-positive men were also confronted with prostate cancer as their immune system was struggling to ward off a variety of tumours within their bodies. Their stories were incredibly revealing and impacting. As a consequence of writing a paper based on this research, I was offered the opportunity to undertake a larger piece of research with a team that was investigating gay men and prostate cancer on a broader

scale. It was clear that all of my research was co-related in some way and that one piece of research continued to influence the next line of enquiry. It was also clear that masculinities, as a theoretical and conceptual framework, remained central to all of this work.

Boys' Bodies

After a period of 10–12 years conducting research with elite male athletes and sport, men, body image and eating disorders, young gay men and body image, Asian gay men and body image, ageing heterosexual and gay men and body image as well as adolescent boys, sport and physical activity, I was now at the stage of my career where I could begin to question how, and where, all this emerges. Therefore, from my perspective, the most appropriate place to start was to investigate cohorts of boys from early childhood through to adolescence in order to explore how boys come to view their bodies within the context of sport, health and physical activity. Exploring the early years and the years prior to puberty and adolescence was a key element of this exploration. There were a number of ways that I could have organised for this to occur. Previously, it has been very difficult to attain funding in the area of male body image, particularly from an exploratory and sociological perspective. Much of the funding in these types of areas are directed more towards developing services using psychological frameworks that can be implemented in primary healthcare services such as hospitals as well as body image and eating disorder units. While I have previously given presentations to hospitals in relation to male body image and eating disorders, the recommendations provided have been based on the way in which we should deal with males in terms of understanding masculinities more so than creating something akin to 'a 10 point plan' on working with men with eating disorders.

Rather than developing a research proposal that would seek to attain interviews with boys aged from 5 through to 13 from a variety of settings and locations, I sought to explore the voices of the same cohort of boys and follow them through the ageing process from early childhood through to adolescence. In essence, this was a longitudinal study where

I would interview the boys each year for 8 years from Reception (5–6 years of age) through to Year 7 (12–13 years of age). This provided the opportunity to gain a sense of meaning and understanding associated with the changes that were occurring among the group of boys by having the capacity to reflect back on aspects of their lives from previous interviews.

The History of My Body in Sport

The issue of male bodies, and the significance of sport within the lives of boys, has intrigued me for years. Even when I was young I suspected there was a symbiotic relationship between bodies and sport, and not just in terms of performance. For many years, I conceptualised the relationship and was inquisitive about the role of the body beyond the physical component of performativity. The following is an extract from an autoethnography that I had published a number of years ago that outlines the conceptual relationship that I have had with my body from childhood.

I was a big child. Never fat, I was told. The term 'solid' was mostly used by family members when describing my pre-adolescent physique. After all, 'he was ten and a half pounds born … poor mother, had to have a caesarean'. I struggled to wear the fashion of the time, Levis jeans, due to my large thighs. Fortunately, I was gifted at the highly masculinised sports of Australian Rules football and cricket. I would always be the first player chosen and invariably captained these teams such was my talent and my size. Sport offered me a way of expressing my identity. My excellence in masculinised sports provided me with social and peer acceptance. For most of the time, I forgot about my body. It was a vehicle for expressing my masculine identity but was never consciously analysed in terms of its social inscription. I grew very quickly and dominated sports with my superior eye–hand coordination, strength and muscularity over smaller less coordinated boys struggling to come to terms with their gangly arms and legs as puberty was emerging. As a consequence, my masculine identity created through sports was positive, given its somatic compliance (Connell, 1990) with what a large masculinised body should be able to achieve in sports. However, a problem for me emerged once these boys, originally far inferior to me,

eventually caught up and then surpassed in height, strength and muscularity. All that was left was a solid young male who could no longer dominate the sporting arena in the same manner as before. Therefore, my body in terms of its somatic compliance, as Connell (1990) has suggested, was at odds with the social definition thereby creating 'trouble' (p. 89).

As I stand on the football field that I once completely dominated, I now feel like a foreigner not knowing my role where I am supposed to fit in. Where once I roamed the entire field given free licence by my coaches to attain as many possessions as possible, I am now in a defined position clearly delineated by boundaries set up within the structures of the game. Not only do I feel like a foreigner to the ground but also to the game itself. Sport had always been an uncomplicated pleasure for me and now this sport was a chore. It was one that I was beginning to detest as a consequence of my physique. No longer was I providing the physical presence with my body to assert authority on the field. I felt demeaned and humiliated.

(Drummond, 2010)

This extract indicates the tension that existed between my identity, my body, my sport and myself. Clearly, there are inextricable links between all facets and one area can undoubtedly influence the other. It also provides evidence of the level of critique surrounding my own body, which has, in turn, led to a level of intrigue and critical inquiry surrounding bodies in society more broadly. In another article, a few years later, I attempted to articulate the relationship between bodies, sport, and heterosexuality given the seemingly implicit 'natural' relationship between the three where masculinised contact sports are concerned. The following extract provides further evidence of my cerebral association with the sporting male body.

Being an openly straight man, I have had the opportunity of growing up and becoming a man without having to question what my heterosexuality means to me and how my body is positioned within the broader cultural context. That does not mean to say that at times throughout my life I have not attempted to understand my sexuality. On the contrary, the middle years of adolescence at school were challenging in terms of understanding why I was attracted to girls and what the implications might be for young males attracted to boys. Given that I was captain of both the

> highly masculinised school football and cricket teams during this time, I originally took my heterosexuality as implicit and these roles within such masculinised sporting domains as vindication of this heterosexuality. Sport offered the ideal medium through which my heterosexual body could be portrayed. I needed to provide a visual representation of muscularity and physicality, particularly through masculinised sport, since any adolescent perception of a 'fag', or a 'poofter', or being a 'gay boy' was that of a skinny, non-athletic male. Looking and 'being' masculine was just as important as 'doing' masculinity (Connell, 1983; Drummond, 1997). Indeed, not doing masculinity within a sporting context has implications for one's heterosexuality (Gard and Meyenn, 2000; Messner, 1992; Pronger, 1990; Whitson, 1990).
>
> (Drummond, 2011)

The Male Body: Then, Now and the Future

Given that I am now in my early 50s, I have had the opportunity to witness, and live through, a variety of 'eras' where bodies and body image are concerned. Being troubled in relation to body image is not a new phenomenon. I can attest that as a young male I was concerned with aspects of my own body and struggled at times to come to terms with the changes that were occurring as a consequence of puberty. I watched as girls around me at secondary school subscribed to diets that were incredibly unhealthy all in the name of losing weight with the goal of attaining a desirable, thin, body. I also watched boys in my peer group begin the process of strength training as they scoured the latest monthly *Muscle and Fitness* or *Flex* magazines that were sold at news agencies. Prior to the Internet, these magazines were the primary source of global exposure to masculinised, muscular bodies. Certainly, there were movies and television programs that we could watch to provide us with vindication for our belief that muscularity was a key to manhood. However, it was the bodybuilding magazines that allowed us to pore over, time and again, to justify this ideology.

In my adolescent years during the late 1970s and early 1980s, both men's and women's bodybuilding was developing enormous popularity,

while a number of the bodybuilders were gaining notoriety beyond the realm of their sport. However, it was predominantly the men who were crossing over to mainstream culture into domains such as movies and television. Lou Ferrigno paved the way in his role as the *Incredible Hulk* in 1997 to 1981. However, it was Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was seen as the epitome of masculinity through his significant bodybuilding career that heavily influenced Western cultural ideologies around hyper-muscular masculinities. Through his incredibly popular roles as *Conan the Barbarian* and *Conan the Destroyer*, he 'normalised' hyper-muscularity as being essential to the archetypal male physique. This had a significant global influence on the ideologies of young males with respect to their view of the perfect man. Schwarzenegger continued to play similar roles throughout the 1980s and 1990s, thereby continuing to influence and reinforce masculine stereotypes based on hyper-muscularity. Other masculine superhero characters emerged as well, such as Sylvester Stallone as *Rambo*, further solidifying the cultural perception that masculinity was clearly linked to muscularity.

The early 2000s was a period where the representation of men's bodies was changing, particularly in popular press magazines. The bodybuilding phase, while certainly prevalent, was gradually being taken over by strong, athletic-appearing male physiques. Contemporary men's health magazines were a major influential factor in this transformation with the magazines espousing a variety of forms of physical activities to complement the strength training that men 'should' be undertaking. The covers of these magazines were also assisting in this transformation with muscular, athletic-looking males adorning them. It should also be noted that all of these men were hairless. Therefore, the normalisation process of men ridding their bodies of hair was beginning to take place, similar to the manner in which women have been shaving and waxing various parts of the body for many years. The other interesting note associated with these men's bodies on the covers of magazines lies in the perception of their sexuality. Whereas bodybuilding magazines tended to create a perception of heterosexuality given the covers are presented in such a manner where there is an incredibly large, male bodybuilder 'adorned' with a smaller, thin sexualised woman, the men's health-oriented magazines tend to use an athletic-looking male by himself. I had the opportunity of discussing

this with a friend who was on a panel that selected covers for such magazines. There was an overarching understanding that the image of the man chosen for the cover needed to be aesthetically appealing to both straight and gay men alike. Therefore, there is an argument to suggest that men's bodies in the 2000s began to take on a more 'homogenous look' more so than any period previously. While these magazines may not have created this homogeneity, the use of such images assisted in the perpetuation of these body types through cultural endorsement.

Over the past decade, we have seen the rise and rise of social media. The impact that this has had on body image cannot be underestimated. Whereas previously we would have had to wait for magazines to be published either monthly or bi-monthly to view the various bodies on display, the ease at which we can now access bodies is unprecedented. The ubiquity of these images is alarming and disassociating ourselves from them is difficult. It also provides the opportunity to compare and contrast our bodies too often. However, from a positive perspective, having access to a variety of bodies allows us to develop a conversation around what is 'normal' and debate what is seen to be the archetypal physique. Without having access to a range of bodies, we are somewhat misguided with respect to understanding our own bodies.

I would argue that the array of bodies that exist within contemporary Western culture have never been as diverse as they are now. Once again, the Internet has provided a rapid process of globalisation, whereby individuals can access 'looks' and trends from one society to be easily transported to another. The ease at which people can physically travel the world has also provided the opportunity to access different regions where certain body types and physiques may be revered. These bodies might be the antithesis to the archetypal bodies and physiques in Western culture.

As a father of both a girl and boy, and being an academic, I would argue that education plays a key role in understanding bodies and body image. In order to present educational material, and programs to assist, research must first be conducted to understand the issues at hand. Given there is very little information surrounding young males and their bodies, the research that underpins this book will provide invaluable information to assist in the development of educational tools and programs for parents, educators, researchers and policymakers.

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Contents

1

Surveying the Landscape
of Male Body Image

Introduction

This is a book about boys' bodies. While this book attempts to explain the relationship between boys' bodies and that of sport, health and physical activity it is also about boys and their lives. It seeks to explore the meaning of boys growing up and developing into adolescent males as they navigate a range of issues within contemporary Western society. Understanding masculinities will be key to this process.

Every year, over a period of eight years I had the pleasure of talking with and interviewing the same group of boys on topics that relate to sport, health and physical activity. I have been able to watch these boys grow up in front of me as they have moved from early childhood, through to boyhood and now as emerging adolescents. It has been a wonderful experience for me, as the father of a boy in the same age range and a daughter who is slightly older.

As an academic who has devoted much of his time to research in the area of masculinities and sports and masculinities and health, all of my previous research data had been collected on specific male demographic cohorts based on either, age, race, ethnicity, sporting involvement or

health condition. Therefore my published research papers tended to focus on a specific issue for the men or boys in question. Alternatively, these papers focused on a specific time in their lives. However, this research is different. This research is fundamentally about understanding boys and their lives, how they have navigated and continue to navigate, and issues relating to sport and physical activity involvement, together with personal health, changing bodies and masculinities to name a few. This book is essentially about a group of boys emerging from early childhood to adolescence that places sport, physical activity and bodies at the forefront of discussion and analysis. However, it is the boys' voices that are most important in all of this and therefore key issues raised beyond the central focus of the book will also be discussed throughout.

Background

I have been writing and researching male bodies and male body image for the past two decades. During that time, I have written in excess of 100 peer-reviewed papers, book chapters and conference proceedings, with at least 50 on this topic alone. My first published paper on men and eating disorders, and specifically anorexia and bulimia nervosa, was published in 1999. I distinctly remember opening the letter of acceptance sent by the editor of the journal. My memory is acute because I opened this letter while I was at the hospital with my wife, the day after my daughter, and first child, was born. That was 20 years ago. Given that this early research and subsequent publications have developed a 'niche' area of expertise, I have also provided over 200 media interviews on the topic, including television, radio, print and electronic media. Interestingly, the one question that I am still regularly invited to answer today is 'do men have body image problems'? This question is often followed up with, 'can men develop eating disorders'?

While the public perception of men, body image concerns and eating disorders reflects that of a relatively new phenomenon for males, the reality is that it is not. There is evidence of male body image and eating disorders as far back as 1873 (Zhang, 2014). The difference, however,

appears to be that women have historically bore the brunt of having to live up to societal expectations of maintaining a slim body. In my early writings, I spoke of women having to 'conserve' space in light of these societal norms while men were socially expected to 'occupy' space (Drummond, 1996). Interestingly, it appears that up until recently, particularly with the advent of the 'obesity discourse', the ways in which men occupied space did not appear to matter too much. Being a larger male had a form a cultural capital more so than being small and skinny (Drummond, 1996). Certainly in times of famine and poverty larger men, and women, were seen as being wealthy because it reflected their ability to afford food and, as a consequence, their social standing in the community (Ferris, 2011). However, in contemporary Western society size attained through muscularity, and in particular athletic pursuits, has become the basis for cultural capital among men where archetypal body physiques are concerned (Drummond, 2011).

Concerns around males and body image have been increasing over the past few decades. At the extreme end of the spectrum, most notably eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa, the research literature indicates that few men (5–10%) seek professional assistance for eating disorders (e.g. Drewnowski, Kurth, & Krahn, 1995; Drewnowski & Yee, 1987). Compared to women, these statistics are not significant in terms of problematic health concerns. However, these statistics do not provide a true indication of the extent to which eating disorders and body image concerns affect contemporary Western men.

Arguably, men may be under-represented with respect to statistics on eating disorders (Andersen, 1990; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). They may also minimise the impact of eating disorders, and body image concerns, on their lives (Jankowski, Gough, Fawkner, Halliwell, & Diedrichs, 2018). The way in which masculinity is socially constructed within contemporary Western culture may underpin such a lack of information. This is particularly so with regard to the non-disclosure of the illness (Whitaker, Gough, Fawkner, & Deighton-Smith, 2019), the non-use of health services and problems associated with a lack of self-care for some men (Griffiths, Mond, Murray, & Touyz, 2014; Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek, 2007; Seidler, Dawes, Rice, Oliffe, & Dhillon, 2016). Moreover, the common view that illness is more often associated with

women and, in particular, the notion that eating disorders are predominantly a female condition (Drummond, 1999, 2002; Griffiths et al., 2014; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992), may be factors that contribute to why so few men who suffer from eating disorders seek help (Pope et al., 2000). Therefore, fear associated with being labelled weak and/or feminine are possible reasons that account for this phenomenon (Drummond, 1999, 2002). Given that eating disorders are categorised as being mental health conditions; this type of labelling and associations with weakness are commonplace for males with a majority of mental health concerns, which is closely aligned to traditional masculine ideologies (Evans, Blye, Oliffe, & Gregory, 2011; Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005). When discussing this misconception with my undergraduate students at the university in which I teach, I often provide the example of a man being lauded and applauded in the days after breaking his arm while playing a masculinised sport such as rugby or football. He may be happy to discuss the physical problem and the manner in which it occurred on the field. He might also be comfortable with taking days off work to deal with this physical injury. Conversely, a man who has a mental health issue, and specifically an eating disorder, may have difficulty in coming to terms with his mental health issue. There is potential for this man to struggle to talk to others about his eating disorder given it is not acknowledged, nor well understood in society (Drummond, 2002). It is likely to be difficult to explain to work colleagues that he needs time off work for something that is not overtly visible, such as a broken arm.

Sport and Physical Activity: A Masculinised Approach to Masking Obsessive Behaviours

Physical activity, particularly sport, is a highly masculinised domain (Drummond, 1996; Eitzen, 2012; Messner, 1992, 2002; Robertson, 2013). Boys are taught from a young age that to be a male is to be involved in some form of sport or physical activity. Without delving too heavily into social constructionist theories that help to explain this phenomenon, some of the early scholars in masculinities and sport

identified that sport is often perceived as being a rite of passage for boys into manhood (Eitzen, 2012; Messner, 1992, 2002). Those boys who do not participate in masculinised sports or physical activities are often marginalised and possibly subjected to damning accusations by their peers (Whitson, 1990). These accusations are often levelled at their worthiness of being male and questioning surrounding their sexuality (Messner & Sabo, 1994; Pronger, 1990). (Note that discussion surrounding sport and the social construction of masculinity as a highly masculinised domain within contemporary Western culture will be discussed in greater detail in the ensuing chapters.)

The development, maintenance and perpetuation of masculinised ideals within sporting subcultures are noteworthy. Therefore, the importance that men, from a variety of age groups and perspectives, place on sport is considerable. In addition to the social respectability that accompanies male involvement in physical activity, men who have a desire to lose weight and body fat often come to view this as a primary means of weight and fat loss (Drummond, 1999; Yates, 1991). The feminised stigma that is often linked to dieting may deter some men from food restriction or diet modification (Yates, 1991). Alternatively, it is possible these men may partake in forms of partial food restriction or diet modification (Drewnowski et al., 1995). However, when males are simultaneously partaking in sport and physical activity, such regimes are not generally acknowledged as the primary weight loss method (Drewnowski et al., 1995; Yates, 1991). It appears men tend to acknowledge exercise rather than food restriction and diet modification as a more masculine model of weight loss (Drummond, 1999; Yates, 1991).

Given the association between masculinity, sport and physical activity, the use of sport and physical activity as a means of weight loss for certain groups of men must be taken into consideration (Yates, Leehey, & Shisslak, 1983). For example, some men who suffer from eating disorders may be attracted to certain sports and physical activities due to their highly controlled lifestyles (Drummond, 1996, 1999; Pope et al., 2000; Yates et al., 1983). Their chosen sport offers these men the opportunity to legitimately engage in large amounts of aerobic activity for the 'sake of their sport'. A good example is endurance events such

as marathon running and triathlon. By claiming that they are training for a particular event or competition, these men's training and devotion to physical activity can be legitimised. Like most endurance sports, the by-product of training means burning large amounts of calories in training and a resultant body devoid of fat. Essentially, the sport is assisting these men to mask their body image concerns where they can lay claim that their body is not a result of dietary practices. Rather, it is a consequence of *having* to train for their sport and not having the capacity to consume enough calories. Given that sport plays a pivotal role in the lives of men, this ideology can be seen as a man's devotion to succeed in a chosen sport. One can only wonder what people might think if the same situation were to occur with a woman, particularly within the fitspiration environment in which we now exist, and to which many women adhere? (Robinson et al., 2017).

A similar type of situation can also occur for men involved in muscle-building regimes, including bodybuilders and men employed in physique-based occupations such as models and actors. The engagement in excessive amounts of weight training all in the name of *being* a bodybuilder or *being* a model is ultimately legitimised and therefore these men can regularly and excessively engage in high levels of weight training and body-conscious activities for the sake of their sport or occupation. Once again, Western society's ideology of not questioning men's excessive involvement in sport and physical activity provides the opportunity for these men to continue and reinforce their engagement, potentially leading to obsessive behaviours.

The relationship between that of men and sport and body image begs the question as to whether it is the men who gravitate towards sports that demand a degree of body consciousness (such as weight or appearance-based sports). However, it also invites us to reflect on whether these sports ultimately change the way in which a man thinks about his body and therefore influences his body perception while changing behaviours around body maintenance. As an academic having researched the area and studied the literature for many years, I am aware of the debates that surround this question. However, I have also lived through the experience of trying to understand my own body in an endurance sport, having moved from a masculinised team sport that

I had played all through my childhood and early adult years. The following is an extract from a paper I wrote identifying the meaning of my body in a new sport (Drummond, 2010, p. 378). It highlights my excitement and enthusiasm surrounding my initial engagement, as well as the emergence of confusion as a result of others' expectations of me, and my body, and what it should look like.

Distance running was one of the sports I had consciously decided upon as being an appropriate sport to change my physical and body identity. However, it was triathlon that was going to change me as a man and impact on my masculine identity. I had a preconceived notion that this emerging sport was going to reconceptualise me as a man and redefine who I was. Despite my newly found autonomy there remained a need to find like-minded individuals to share sporting experiences and learn from others. Therefore I sought out running clubs to learn the "art" of running. I was still too intimidated to enter the worlds of swimming and cycling and would remain this way for a number of years. Running, it seemed, was a natural expression of one's physicality. For me it appeared to be an easy field of entry into the emerging sport of triathlon.

A group of men, and some women, routinely stretching and chatting prior to a ritualistic evening training run, surround me. A variety of body shapes and sizes emerge from underneath training jackets and tracksuits warding off the chilly evening air. Noteworthy for me is the thinnest men congregate at the front of the pack appearing most eager to begin, constantly looking at their watches as the sun fades and streetlights take over. Several men wander over to me and introduce themselves. Immediately they begin the runners' interrogation by asking me my best times and "what I do for 10k" all in the name of maintaining a subcultural hierarchy. The problem for me is that I have never done a 10k road race and simply run for fun. This will change. I mutter something back to them along the lines of "not very quick" to seem humble if I do happen to be as quick as them, or honest if it happens that I am not. We are about to set off for a leisurely 12-kilometre training run through city streets. I have positioned myself several rows back from the front. This will change. I soon find that my running ability is comparable to most of the men. I feel pleased that my isolated running in the months prior has positioned me well in terms of fitness and physical capacity. I side up to an obviously seasoned runner. He is short, small framed, emaciated in appearance with

an unusual high-pitched voice. I seem drawn to him. His first conversation with me is a question. "How long have you been running"? Upon responding with a guarded "not long", he seems impressed and tells me I am a "natural". I feel proud. I immediately feel my move from traditional masculinised sports of football and cricket to that of endurance sport is vindicated. However, he continues. "If you want to be any good you're really going to have to lose a few kilos". This is a defining moment in my life. While I try and come to terms with his original comment of being a "natural" tempered with that of having to "lose a few kilos" I immediately begin thinking of ways to lose body weight. Soon this aspect of my running will take over from training and I will no longer be a "natural".

The autoethnographical text above provides an insight into the way in which a man can be influenced by the sociocultural environment with respect to body image. As it is evident, the social environment in which we are located, and surrounded, plays a significant role in terms of who we are as individuals and the way we perceive ourselves. I often think back to that evening when I first began running with the group, and what I would have thought about myself and my body, had I not been acquainted with these other runners. From that night, and for many years to come, that encounter shaped the way I perceived my body and how I treated it as a result. The following extract is once again from the same autoethnographical tale and provides detail surrounding my plight with the body I inherited.

I look in the mirror with monotonous regularity and can see the emergent triathlete. I stand on the scales at the end of each day following my final training session, as the scales will determine how much I am allowed to eat, all in the name of 60 kilograms. I am intelligent enough to know that what I am doing to my body is injurious and yet I have little ability to cease. There is something bigger that must first be achieved, or so I was leading myself to believe. My body is constantly in pain. My joints continually ache. I have been treated for Iliotibial band syndrome, hip bursitis, shin splints, chondromalacia patella and anal haematomas. I have lost every toenail, and they regularly bleed. I am only 22 years of age and have been competing in triathlon for just two years. However, I have completed an ironman race and qualified for the Hawaii Ironman

World Championship. Everything I do to my body can now be justified and legitimised in some way. I now have a legitimate reason for becoming a vegetarian. I can now train at any time of the day or night due to the necessity of "building miles under the legs." I now have the opportunity to make a compelling case for my body being the central focus of my life. As a consequence, I cannot work full time. This would be compromising my commitment. In order to do justice to my personal pledge, I must provide my body with the best chance to perform at its optimum. Imagine if only I fully understood the notion of the mind–body dualism I supposedly learned in my sport sociology class. Maybe I missed that lecture when I was out cycling in the hills during my extended lunch. (p. 380)

Triathlon, and hence my body, had taken over my life. Upon rising in the morning, my body was the first thing I would think about. I would monitor it all day in terms of performance, weight, aesthetics, and feel. It was evident that while being a successful triathlete was important to me in terms of my masculinity and self-identity, the sport itself had become a conduit for change in terms of my physical and emotional body. This is not what my involvement in the sport had originally set out to do. The sport, the subculture, and the members of the subculture compound the problem and make it difficult to not be a part of its intensely critical, self-focused and yet self-adulatory world in which one's body is closely scrutinised on both a personal and subcultural level.

The Body and Masculinity

The sociology and theorisation of the masculine body are important elements within the study of men. Many central concerns of men and masculinities are associated with physical size, shape and capabilities of the body (Connell, 1983; Schooler & Ward, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to develop theoretical links between constructions of gender and those of the body and its processes (Hearn & Morgan, 1990). However, it is in the interests of gender studies to direct the study of gender and

masculinities away from the ideological and cultural and towards the bodily without falling into biological reductionism (Hearn & Morgan, 1990). Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Connell (1983) present arguments pertaining to the body in the social construction of masculinity central to the notions within this current study. Merleau-Ponty claimed that the experiences of our bodies are related to our senses, how we relate to the world and to others around us. Connell suggested that to learn to be a male is to learn to project a physical presence that displays latent power. Empowerment is the key element in this line of argument. This would suggest that sport is an ideal site for the empowerment of young male bodies because it teaches them to use their bodies in ways that achieve power through combined acts of force and skill. To be masculine is to embody force and competence (Connell, 1983).

The body affects the way we perceive others, our surroundings and ourselves. It constitutes the core of our being and has the capacity to determine, or at least influence, our social relations. The body also constitutes a major site of social struggle, and therefore it is a battle for control over the body that determines the way power is structured and types of social relations are, to a large extent, constituted. Loy (1991) suggested that class, gender, age and race are all significant in this context. Further, Loy (1991) highlighted the extent to which the body can be perceived from a sociocultural perspective. However, he argued that other groups perceive the body in various ways. For example, biomechanists, physiologists and sport psychologists all perceive the body, and its subsequent capabilities, differently from one another. Biomechanists, for example, view the body as a system of torques and levers whereas physiologists see the body as a system of essential cellular processes. Sport psychologists, however, perceive the body as 'sets of attributions and cognitions' (Loy, 1991, p. 119). Coming from a sports-oriented perspective, Filiault, Drummond, and Agnew (2012) used physical exercise, injury, pain, illegal drug abuse and homophobia as examples of the body constituting the core of sporting activity.

It is in the arena of sports that the body has often come under close scrutiny. It can be contended that there is only a relatively short history in the scholarly analysis of sport. While the conceptualisation and theorisation of the body in sport within the social sciences and humanities

is increasing, it has not been dealt with in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Bringing the body into focus from a sporting perspective allows theorists to conceptualise social phenomena that have been occurring, and in many instances perpetuating, for many years. Earlier theorists such as Turner (2008) argued that bringing the body back into social theory allows for a much more complete consideration and understanding of the social basis of patriarchy. This bodily subordination of women has been called *patrism,* a term coined by Turner to help explain the patriarchy to which women have been subjected.

Sport emphasises the creation and perpetuation of bodily patriarchy because it is a legitimate arena in which the male body can partake in masculine activities without fear of retribution. Correspondingly, the body is a primary 'site of power or the locus of domination' (Theberge, 1991, p. 126). Through this legitimisation of masculine sports, patriarchy is reinforced and thus perpetuated. Significantly, Connell (1987) noted that the bodily actions performed within the domain of competitive sports have far-reaching gender implications because 'prowess of this kind becomes a means of judging one's masculinity' (p. 85).

Connell (1983) addressed the significance of the body in the formation of masculinity through sport by claiming:

> Sport is, all considered, astonishingly important. It is the central experience of the school years for many boys and something which even the most determined swots have to work out their attitude to. What is learned by constant informal practice, and taught by formal coaching, is for each sport a specific combination of force and skill. Force, meaning the irresistible occupation of space; skill, meaning the ability to operate on space or the objects in it. (p. 33)

A critical point made by Connell in respect to these elements of force and skill is that when the two are combined, power is the ultimate product, and this is a key, delineating element in the social presence of women and men. He stated that, 'while women conventionally have an image of attractiveness, men conventionally have a presence dependent on the promise of power they embody' (p. 33).

 Power and empowerment of the body constitute a major part of the development of hegemonic masculinity (Day, 1990; Foucault, 1981; Hargreaves, 1986; McKay, 1991; Whannel, 2002). Accordingly, it is contended that power is exercised at varying levels.

> If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realise, it produces effects at this level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. (Foucault, 1981, p. 59)

The occupation of space to which Connell (1983) refers is a crucial element in the development of masculinity. He believed that 'to be an adult male is distinctly to occupy space, to have a physical presence in the world' (p. 33). Conversely, it could be argued that to be an adult female, one must attempt to conserve space.

> The notion that patriarchy prefers women take-up less space is supported by work in kinesics. Henley's (1977) study of body politics documented how in public, at home, and in the workplace men have greater personal space than women. Even women's bodily demeanour is restrained spacially: Men expand to occupy available space; women conserve space. Fat women are often resented by thin people for taking up too much space in public places. (Kissling, 1991, p. 147)

To be physically large and muscularly developed commands attention from both males and females and may be a determinant in the development of bodybuilding as a masculine domain. The intrinsic and extrinsic reasons why men feel the necessity to lift weights in order to gain size and muscular definition are quite intriguing.

> Body building is some kind of logical extreme, and it is interesting that this more than the others is popularly seen as slightly ludicrous. Though it is flesh developed, it is flesh unused, unskilful. Further, it is a rather too naked revelation of the narcissism in men's preoccupation with their bodies, which contradicts other elements in the hegemonic ideal of masculinity (suppression of affect, doing rather than being). (Connell, 1983, p. 34)

Doing Versus Being

What Connell is suggesting here in respect to *doing* rather than *being* can have major implications in the perception of one's body and masculinity. Take, for example, a successful competing ironman triathlete's personal body image and perception of masculinity as opposed to that of a dedicated bodybuilder. The male triathlete is likely to gain his perception of masculinity through the success of competition and knowing that his body has competed to its fullest capacity. Despite not possessing a large body that occupies space to the same extent as that of a bodybuilder, there is contentment with regard to masculinity. Present is an awareness that his body is capable of performing, or *doing*, physical feats of endurance that most men, including bodybuilders and women, are incapable. A body that is hard, lean and devoid of excess fat holds the endurance capacity to swim, cycle and run long distances for extended periods of time. Proud of his physiological capacity, this athlete displays accepted health-like qualities that are desired contemporary societal traits. To the ironman triathlete, masculinity is perceived as a dynamic concept whereby masculine behaviours are developed through the performance and successful completion of regarded physical activities. A bodybuilder is different. Construction of masculinity is through the occupation of space and *being* hyper-muscular, that is, the overdevelopment of a perceived masculine attribute. Together with this development is the manifestation of power, which is displayed through physical prowess. Stronger and physically larger than any woman or average male, his physical presence is obtrusive. Dominance is established over anyone who is smaller and weaker and unable to match his size or strength, including peers in the weight room. Through bodybuilding, this athlete has ultimately constructed a static form of masculinity. He has the *power of being*.

This *power of being* is not easily developed in bodybuilders and often comes at a price. Insecurity and powerlessness experienced by these men prior to their hypermasculine physiques is the price conferred upon them. In a discussion of a Californian bodybuilding subculture, Klein (1990) contended:

> The feelings of insecurity of many body builders are often masked by veneers of power. The institution of body building not only makes a fetish of the look of power but also festers identification with reliance upon figures of power. The claim here is that the institutionalised narcissism of body building, hypermasculinity, and homophobia is in part a reaction against feelings of powerlessness. (p. 241)

According to Klein (1990), it is the sense of powerlessness and the feeling of low self-worth that lead bodybuilders towards a craving for admiration. He claimed that, 'in body building terms, admiration is dependent on building a powerful-looking physique and finding people to acknowledge it' (p. 130). However, it is contentious whether the physical power developed in bodybuilding equates to the type of kinaesthetic skill that is widely recognised as an intrinsic quality of *doing* sports. Messner (1992) highlighted this point by citing an interview with an ex-competitive runner who claimed that runners know

> what speed their body's going at, they know how they are feeling, they have some sense of how much distance is left and what they can do, and very often will run against the clock, no matter what is going on in front of them; so they are not thrown off by people running foolishly fast or foolishly slow. (p. 63)

Following an interview with a world-class, Australian surf-lifesaving ironman, Connell (1990) argued that this top performer had a precise knowledge of his body and its capacities. It is this knowledge of one's body, the kinaesthetic sense and the skill level at which they perform that sets these competitive *doing* sportsmen apart from the bodybuilder. Connell stated that the ironman was quite eloquent about the particular kind of skill involved in top-level performance in his sport, and that it was far from being *pure brawn*. Such a statement is striking since the suggestion of a typically masculine sport like the surf-lifesaving ironman being far from *pure brawn* is a significant transformation or shift from the traditional masculine ideology and tenets of thought.

The Instrumental Male: The Body as a Machine

The body as a machine is an interesting concept in need of exploration in an investigation of masculinity and sport. Messner (1992) argued that it was not simply that an athlete's body became the focus of himself, but rather that the athlete was encouraged to see his body as an instrument. Perceiving one's body as an instrument or a tool is believed to have significant implications where the athlete's feelings and emotions, towards both himself and others, are concerned. Messner (1992) has called this type of athlete an 'instrumental male'.

> An 'instrumental male' is an alienated creature: he is usually goal-oriented (in his work and personal relations), and he frequently views other people as objects to be manipulated and defeated in his quest to achieve his goals. The ultimate extension of instrumental rationality is the alienation from one's own body -- the tendency to treat one's body as a tool, a machine to be utilised (and 'used up') in the pursuit of particular ends. Tender feelings (toward oneself and toward others) come to be seen as an impediment, something that needs to be repressed or 'worked on'. Physical or emotional pain is experienced as a nuisance to be ignored or done away with (often through the use of alcohol or other drugs). A common result of this focus on the body as an instrument is violence expressed toward others, and ultimately toward oneself. (p. 62)

The implications of the 'instrumental male' upon physical and emotional respect for women are concerning. As a consequence of instrumental rationality among male athletes, women are commonly perceived as those 'other people' who are objects to be manipulated and defeated in the quest for goal achievement. By perceiving their own bodies as 'tools', alienated from emotions, some men can inhibit others who wish to be more emotionally expressive. These inhibitions stem from the overriding physical power of certain men having the capacity to intimidate the physically subordinate.

> The magnificent machine of [the athlete's] physique has meaning only when subordinated to the will to win. To mentally and emotionally

subordinate one's body toward the goal of winning is to make of the body a tool, separate from the mind. As we shall see, that tool is to be used against other people. (Messner, 1992, p. 64)

Messner suggested that the male athlete uses his body in a manner that will enable him to compete and win at the expense of others. Connell (1995) elaborated, arguing that bodily performances in sport are used to 'realise and symbolise' social relations of gender which include 'competition and hierarchy among men' and the 'exclusion or domination of women'. He concluded that, 'men's greater sporting prowess has become a theme of backlash against feminism. It serves as symbolic proof of men's superiority and right to rule' (p. 54). However, with masculinity being dependent on bodily performances, gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained, such as through illness or physical injury.

As this book will present, the way in which a male comes to view his body including what it looks like, how he uses it and what it represents is established early on in his childhood years. As a boy, he is surrounded by representations of stereotypical images and portrayals of historically imbedded masculine archetypes. These are further maintained and perpetuated through socially constructed processes, often beyond the control of the child. While this may not be a problem for a majority of boys who seemingly navigate themselves through the sociocultural milieu, it can be problematic for many others who struggle to come to terms with living up to social and cultural ideals that promote a body that is muscular, athletic, devoid of fat, powerful, dominant and with a capacity to hurt others.

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2

Male Body Image Across the Lifespan

The History of the Male Body

The archetypal male body has historically been regarded as strong, muscular and athletic. It has been seen as a body containing latent power and potential capability. It is also a body that has traditionally been recognised as one that can 'do' things that are practical and meaningful to everyday existence. Men have traditionally been involved in manual labour such as building, construction and farming. They have also predominantly been involved in the services such as police force, fire brigade and armed military services. Indeed, it has been mainly men who have lost their lives in wars and combats as well as in dangerous occupations. It could be argued that men's bodies have been regarded as ones that were functional and, in some ways, expendable. As identified previously, the male body often revolved around what it could 'do' more so than that what it looked like. However, the consequence of that 'doing' body was the development of a physique that was regarded as strong, powerful and 'in control'.

The archetypal 'strong man' physique has been a central figure in historic masculine contexts. The notion of 'strong man' has also created

a sense of intrigue and entertainment for people over the years. Looking back to the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was Eugen Sandow who captured people's attention, and imagination, by his ability to develop his muscles and exhibit them in a way previously unseen. Given that women's existence had largely centred on physical aesthetics, developing a muscular male physique could have been looked upon as a form of feminised vanity. It could therefore be argued that this emerging practice of bodybuilding was carried out under the guise of developing strength, recognised as a highly masculine trait. In the 1920s, Charles Atlas took bodybuilding to the masses by hosting bodybuilding contests and popularising male bodybuilding and physique development. Atlas became a popular cultural icon of the time and even had his own comic strip based on muscles and strength, all in the name of retribution. This was based around a skinny male character that was often bullied due to a lack of musculature. Therefore, the character developed muscles, and strength, to seek revenge on the bullies through his newfound strength and physique. This played directly into the hearts, and ideologies, of many young males. Hence, muscle development became an important signifier of masculinity and became inextricably linked to strength and power.

During the mid-1900s, another popular masculinised character arose in Tarzan. The premise of these movies was based on a boy who was raised by apes in the jungle. The character displayed a raft of masculinised traits, including physicality, strength, intuitiveness and intelligence despite that lack of formal education. Additionally, he displayed a body that was muscular and athletic. It was certainly recognised as a body that was capable of 'doing' more so than the bodybuilder physiques presented by Sandow and Atlas. Once again, many young males aspired to be, and look, like Tarzan, while many women were enamoured by his masculine body and capabilities. It is possible to argue that it was Tarzan who played a key role in the development of further masculinised 'comic book' superheroes such as Superman, Batman, Spiderman and so on. All of these characters displayed archetypal masculinised traits of the time based on muscles, strength and power as well as 'good defeating evil'. This continuation of comic book superheroes flowed through the 1960s and 1970s ultimately leading to new,

bigger and more muscular versions with their lead characters emerging from the bodybuilding subculture in Conan the Barbarian (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and the Hulk (Lou Ferrigno). These 'new age' superheroes were incredibly popular with young males and influenced a generation of adolescent boys, and young males, to take bodybuilding and muscular development seriously as a means through which they could develop, maintain and enhance their masculine identity. Interestingly, this was also the time around which masculinity was no longer defined by displaying a hairy chest. These superheroes emerging from the bodybuilding subculture were smooth and hairless. It could therefore be argued that muscles usurped hair as a definer of masculinity.

Adolescence and early adulthood in males are a significant time in the construction of masculinity and hence masculine identity. The body plays a pivotal role in this construction given that it is easily and visibly comparable to other men that might be viewed as masculinised. Masculinity is an interesting concept that many males struggle to come to terms with. Over the past 20 years, I have undertaken research with hundreds of males across a range of ages, demographics and sexualities. One of the first questions I ask them is 'what do you think masculinity means?' Over the years, the responses have varied little in terms of the way in which the question has been answered. For the majority, males have struggled to define its meaning other than suggesting being strong or being the protector and breadwinner of the family. However, overwhelmingly they defaulted to what a masculine man 'looks like'. This was seemingly much easier to assist their interpretation rather than having to discuss masculinity at a conceptual level.

There are many reasons why males may find it easier to articulate their notions of masculinity through discussion around body aesthetics. Accordingly, for the majority of males I have interviewed, a masculine body is one that is muscular, but not too muscular. It is also a body devoid of fat and hair. It must be 'cut' and 'chiselled' and appear strong and powerful. It is a body that clearly assumes positional power with respect to aesthetics. In terms of masculine hegemony, it could be argued that muscularity plays a key role in the development of a masculine hierarchy. Those men afforded the privilege of attaining and maintaining a muscular and athletic-looking physique are often perceived as more masculine

(Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). In his groundbreaking text on the bodybuilding subculture, Klein (1993) identified that, owing to the backlash that confronted gay men around HIV/AIDS in the mid- to late 1980s, many gay men began bodybuilding to make themselves appear 'heterosexual' and therefore 'pass' as straight (Leary, 1999). At the time, the archetypal gay male physique was that of being thin. With the advent of the perceived HIV/AIDS 'epidemic', being a thin gay man heightened the possibility of being stigmatised as 'contagious' while further marginalising an already marginalised group (Drummond, 2005). The interesting historical element to this is that, over time, as gay men came to see the cultural benefits of looking 'heterosexually muscular', the increased numbers of gay men entering the bodybuilding subculture led to bodybuilding and hypermuscularity being perceived as the antithesis of heterosexuality and, consequently, homosexuality. Hence, the archetypal heterosexual male physique is now one that is muscular yet with a high degree of athleticism. It has distanced itself from the 'protest muscularity' (Drummond, 2005) adopted by the gay male community and is now seen as a physique that is athletic, aesthetic and functional.

Clearly, masculinity is a fluid concept (Connell, 1995) and will vary from place to place and from one generation to another. The body plays a significant part in how masculinity is conceived, constructed and enacted. In Australia, it is arguable that the past decade has seen a shift in the ideological construction of masculinity 'through' the male body. As the nation, and Western culture more broadly, becomes increasingly multicultural and clearly diverse, particularly within metropolitan cities, an array of 'accepted' male body images is becoming 'tolerated' (Hall, 2015). However, it is evident through interviews with young males that the hegemonic form of masculinity associated with heterosexuality and the body is still that of athletic muscularity.

Adolescent Males

Adolescence is a period of change and experimentation (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Crooks, 2006). It is also a period of impressionability and envy. Adolescent girls, for example, may be thought to envy those female

images within contemporary media and ultimately aspire to achieve a similar body aesthetic (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). They might also envy other females who have 'acquired' boyfriends with lustful bodies. Similarly, envy among heterosexual males has often been confined to the 'acquisition' of culturally aesthetic female partners and sports (Drummond, 1996). To be openly envious of another male's body, in terms of its appearance, was not thought to be a traditional masculine orientation. Historically, the male body has been seen as somewhat utilitarian with less emphasis placed on its appearance. Its function has largely overshadowed its aesthetics. The changing nature of contemporary Western culture has led to a shift in expectations placed on the male body. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution creating less manual labour in traditional masculinised occupations (Strand & Tverdal, 2005), together with the rise of white-collar occupations, the development of a muscular male body through occupation-based physicality has diminished. In order to attain what has arguably been perceived as the archetypal masculine physique typified by muscularity, men have had to actively seek out ways and means of attaining such a physique. This has meant having to consciously exercise to achieve this aesthetic. As Morrison and Halton (2009) have aptly identified, men's bodies have undergone a profound change from predominantly instrumental to predominantly ornamental.

Adolescent males and emerging young men in their late teens and early 20s are now bearing the brunt of the aesthetically driven Western cultural ideal (Farquhar & Wasylkiw, 2007; Grogan & Richards, 2002). These young males have increasingly become focal points for niche media and advertising campaigns for products that may, or may not, relate to the body, such as fashion, health, cosmetics and sports. Much of the imagery is now centred on the youthful, yet adult looking, athletically muscular male physique (Pope et al., 2000). The physiques are somewhat alluring from a number of perspectives in the sense that they are 'heterosexual enough' to be aspirational for young straight men to want to achieve a similar body physique, as well as be desired in a manner that exudes 'muscular sexuality' by girls and women. It is important to recognise that this 'muscular sexuality' is arguably sexually alluring to gay men as well. Such bodies hold immense positional power

in the minds of young males. Given that adolescence and early adulthood in males are significant periods in masculine identity formation, the body thus becomes a central focus around which such identity is forged. During a discussion with a group of adolescent boys in one of my numerous research projects on young men's bodies, the following conversation arose around the way in which these young males come to perceive themselves and their bodies as well as the broader culture around the male body. Further, when invited to discuss the meaning of masculinity, adolescent males in particular were the group that translated this line of enquiry into physical appearance and in particular muscularity:

> *Q*: What about the word masculinity. What does that mean to you?
> *A*: Very muscular. He would be someone who is tall with lots of muscles like Arnold Schwarzenegger.
> *Q*: Well what does femininity mean to you?
> *A*: Someone like a female politician.

For most of these young males, the muscular male body was most easily and conveniently represented through sports. For example, one young male claimed:

> Yeah, I like my body. I guess I want to be a bit bigger to be able to take the hits a little better. I guess I am still young when it comes to playing League football [Australian football]. But it's a man's game and you have to be able to take it.

Many of the boys in this cohort provided specific examples of muscular male bodies from the highly aggressive masculinised sport of Australian football, as in the previous quote. Interestingly, the majority of these players were also positioned in the two dominant parts of the field at centre half-forward and centre half-back. These two positions on the field are seen as the two most controlling positions and require players with large muscular physiques, immense strength and an ability to 'take control' as a leader. Therefore, the body has the capacity to display masculinity through a visual representation of muscularity as well as its

capacity to display strength. It is also the notion of control that reflects positional power, dominance and a form of hegemony. An adolescent directly referred to these key offensive and defensive positions on the ground when he stated:

> Guy's like centre half-forward and centre half-backs are my idols because they are big men who play in controlling positions on the ground. They are the focal point of the team.

The other salient element in these adolescent males using Australian footballers as descriptors and exemplars of archetypal masculine male bodies is the heterosexual implicitness within such a sporting cohort. By identifying that a footballer has a 'good body' is less likely to be construed in a homoerotic manner. The bodies of footballers are 'built' for a heteronormative, masculinised purpose. Heterosexual males are 'supposed' to gaze at these footballers' bodies in awe in terms of the way they perform. Conversely, it is heterosexual women, and possibly gay men, who have the cultural right to gaze at these bodies in a sexualised manner.

Adolescent males also identified professional World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) consistently as a site in which masculinised archetypal physiques are regularly on display. Rather than an implied heterosexuality, this 'sport' is overtly promoted as a heterosexual agency in which young, white, male, middle-class spectators, in particular, are indoctrinated into a heteronormative culture (Soulliere, 2006). This has broader ramifications than body image and masculine identity. As Soulliere (2006, p. 9) contends, 'the WWE messages stifle both minority and homosexual versions of manhood, which may inadvertently foster racist and/or homophobic attitudes'. Large muscular men act out visual representations of strength through power and domination over weaker and less able men, while a highly sexualised female often fawns upon the winner, thereby endorsing heteronormativity. It is arguable that young adolescent males perceive this to be 'normalised' masculine heterosexuality. An adolescent male provides a typical response from the cohort of young males regarding their perception of WWE men:

The best male body has to be 'The Rock'. He is almost 7ft tall. He's got a nice height, and his legs are just huge because he's been working out a lot on them. They just look big and muscly. I guess steroids help him a lot too. He's got a pretty big chest and the way his body looks, it just suits his head too. His whole body looks perfect, you know. Really well proportioned. It balances perfectly. I just love his traps.

Adult Men and Muscularity

The majority of adult men aged between 18 and 45 years that I have interviewed with respect to body image have also invested heavily in sports as a means through which they have constructed their masculine identity. Once again, heterosexuality has been an implied notion as expressed by these men through their rejection of homosexual ideals. While these notions cannot be taken for granted as assumed heterosexuality, they do provide a point of reference for these men with respect to sexuality. For example, when invited to discuss sexuality, the following comments were indicative of the majority of men:

I've got on alright with many gay men I've met. As long as they don't pressurise [sic] me in that particular way. I've met some guys who are just like any other guys really, just that they have different habits than you and I might have.

Another man stated:

It doesn't worry me. I've known and met quite a few [gay men] over the years and they seem okay. I mean, you get them in sport at different levels and come across them over the years. As I say, it's no skin off my nose if they do their own thing. I mean it's only a sexual thing.

Similarly, it was claimed:

As long as they're not trying to do a line on me they can have it. As long as they're not performing in the streets and jumping up and down in these kinds of gay Mardi Gras. They can just keep it [public displays of

affection] to themselves, that's fine. I don't go having sex on the streets with my girlfriend so they shouldn't go having sex on the streets with their boyfriends.

It was in the light of these comments that enabled the heterosexual framing of these men's lives.

As was found in relation to adolescent males, for adult men muscularity and being physically bigger were a key theme associated with heterosexual masculinity. The point of difference with adult men was that they were less aspirational with regard to attaining the muscular physique they seemingly desired. Indeed, the men talked about wanting to be bigger but rarely provided solutions or strategies towards attaining this larger body. Hence, 'the body we have is the body we have been dealt', as one of the men suggested. Another man stated that:

I still do weights. I suppose I do them once a week if I can. But it's just a fact of life. I mean people are born the way they are … So I mean, you are what you are and you can't do much about that, so you've got to be happy with what you've got.

In relation to developing size and visible musculature, the same man, similar to many of the other men, was resigned to not 'bulking up':

I did weights until the cows came home and it really didn't make much difference at all. It just made me stronger and made me develop a fairly defined sort of shape.

Noteworthy, however, was the clear articulation of the adult mens' understanding of the significance of muscularity in the lives of men. Hence, most identified that at some point in their lives, they would like to be bigger and more muscular for several reasons. One of these included sexual and physical attraction to women; the other was the recognition and peer approval it would likely produce from other men. The following comment by one man provides a strong indication of the type of body that is perceived as being the archetypal male physique:

> I like myself. I like me, but I wouldn't mind being bigger. A bit bigger
> in size. Bigger in size, bit bigger in size. A bit heavier and a bit bigger
> in size. You know, blond hair, blue eyes, tan. You know, your bronzed
> Aussie. That's a good look. I like that. I wouldn't mind being bigger. So,
> you know, I'm happy with myself but, if I could just be a bit bigger, I'd
> probably be a bit happier.

Similarly, the following claim provides further evidence that if they
were to have a second chance, the possibility of attaining a body that
they perceive to be bigger and arguably more masculine would be
considered:

> Well, you could basically put down your ideal man as probably your idol
> really. When you look at it I mean, there's always someone there you'd
> like to be and I guess if you had a second chance in the world you'd ask
> if you could have those longer legs and bigger chest or stronger arms. But
> that dream is always there.

For this man, the notion of being bigger is clear, which in turn could
impact positively on sporting performance through extra muscula-
ture, though it is the claim of being more 'muscle bound' once he has
retired from his sport that is significant and provides an indication of
the meaning of muscles to masculine identity in the wake of sporting
retirement for these men.

> I think I'd like to be bigger. I have a lot of trouble putting on weight
> and that image is probably broadcast by people constantly saying 'God
> you're looking skinny', especially in the middle of the triathlon season
> when I'm really lean or whatever it may be. I suppose in some ways I
> do take offence and I suppose it does affect me. But people have been
> saying it for so long now. I mean even this winter I'm trying to put on
> weight. I'm trying to do a lot more weights and things like that and get
> stronger. Whether that's going to be a physical presence I don't know, but
> I do want to have a bit more of a physical presence. I mean people say I'm
> not, well this is probably another issue, but they say I'm not aggressive
> enough and things like that. I need to be a lot more aggressive with my
> racing. Whether that's got to do with my physical stature or not, I don't

know, but I certainly want to build up a bit. Whether that means looking good or not, I don't know. Although I suppose if I gave up the sport I'd probably want to look a bit more muscle bound than I do now.

Ageing Men and Muscularity

As a man ages, the 'being' and 'doing' components of masculinity begin to deteriorate. Indeed, his body becomes less muscular as a result of inevitable physiological processes, while his strength is somewhat diminished as a result. The men that I have interviewed within ageing men's bodies research projects typically identify that these changes are difficult to negotiate, particularly early on when they first become apparent. For example, in a research project I conducted a number of years ago on retired men's bodies the dominant themes to emerge from the research were based on functionality. These men typically identified that these changes are difficult to negotiate particularly early on when they first begin to recognise and experience these changes. Some of the men referred to their body 'failing' them. It is possible to argue that these men appear to be attempting to live up to an expected archetypal ideal of what a man's body should be able to do. It is noteworthy that many considered they had enacted their masculinity through their occupation and felt they no longer had the capacity to do this given they were now retired. They also enacted their masculinity through the tasks they were 'supposed' to traditionally undertake, namely tasks their 'wives were not supposed to do'. Cleaning roof gutters, mowing lawns, washing cars and other manual labour were their masculinised domain. A problem arose when the men's bodies could no longer allow them to 'do' those activities they once could 'do' to enable them to perform and visually display their masculinity. Even tasks such as taking lids off jars for their wives, which clearly demonstrated their masculine heterosexuality in opposition to femininity, became problematic and impacted their masculine identity, to which one man claimed, 'I suppose it makes you feel worthless'. Regarding the physical deterioration of his body, another man stated:

> Well I had a serious lung problem a few years back and I thought I was gone on a number of occasions. That was only five years ago and I could only crawl to get around. It made me feel terrible, you know, 'man-wise'. Your body just can't do what it used to be able to do, and that affects you.

While muscles and muscularity play a significant role in the lives of ageing men, these men understood that their bodies no longer had the capacity to retain a muscular aesthetic. They also understand that some physical loss of strength will occur, which appears to play a more significant role in the masculine identity of these men. However, it is important to recognise that as men age, despite the initial anguish they experience over the physical loss of particular traditional masculinised bodily acts, they do come to terms with these physical changes over time. The same man who commented about his lung condition went on to claim:

> I've had to work pretty hard to get back to where I am so every day is a bonus and I am just very happy to be here, and it's a lot better than the alternative. After all, most of the people around my age are dead.

While it is possible to argue that older men perceive their bodies revolving around the functionality more so than the aesthetics, it would be remiss to claim that they do not care what it looks like entirely. From the research, it seems that have become 'comfortable' with the notion that they will no longer look like the once did. Holding on to their functionality is potentially more manageable through conscious physical activity. Having said that there is a time in men's lives where the body's aesthetics are central to their sense of masculinity.

It is clear that the perception of what is deemed to be the archetypal male remains relatively stable across the lifespan (i.e. boyhood, adulthood and ageing males). However, it could be suggested that there are particular aspirational shifts over the life course from boyhood to ageing men. Most males throughout the life course tend to identify muscular athleticism as being the archetypal masculine physique they would like to acquire and, indeed, the physique that men would most likely

desire to attain due to its perceived, inextricable, links with masculinity. As a consequence of these aspirational shifts, there is the potential for boys to think of the archetypal male body in terms of 'what I could be' given they are still developing in size and musculature. For adult men, their time is *now* and they may think of the ideal male body in terms of 'what I should be', whereas ageing men are likely to think in terms of 'what I was'. As identified earlier, the noteworthy aspect for older men is the fact that they often come to terms with 'what I was' in relation to aesthetics. The struggle around functionality is the real concern for these men. If only we could tell our younger self that appearance is not as important as function, we might enjoy our lives more throughout the life course and remain active and healthy into ageing.

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3

The Stories of Boys' Bodies, Sport, Health and Physical Activity

The Research

The basis of the research that underpins this book was to listen to the stories of boys in relation to sport, health, physical activity and the body. As a qualitative researcher, I had a desire to listen to the boys and allow them to freely and openly discuss the issues, and aspects, most relevant to them at the time. I had previously worked on a research project with a Ph.D. student that investigated body image in early childhood a few years earlier (see Birbeck & Drummond, 2005, 2007). This provided me with a wealth of knowledge and understanding in terms of how to best work with these early childhood boys with whom I was about to interview. Regardless of this perceived knowledge and experience, I will be the first to admit that I made a few mistakes and underestimated this loud, sometimes boisterous, energetic cohort of five-year-old boys. Having said that, it was an absolute pleasure to engage with them at this stage of their lives, and then continue to meet and talk with them each year for the next seven years. Watching the boys grow and develop from early childhood through to emerging young men has been something I have been fortunate enough to

be involved in. The interesting thing for me is that while the boys have changed enormously, they are still very much the same little boys with whom I met all those years ago. This chapter will highlight the way in which the research came about and how it was conducted. It will provide insight into the way in which the data were collected (i.e. method). However, it will be explained in a manner that is accessible and easily understood.

Listening to the voices of boys in early childhood in terms of how they perceive the world in which they live, as well as the way in which they view issues such as sport, health, physical activity, bodies and masculinities is central to understanding how older boys and young males come to view themselves, their bodies and their health. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing amount of literature surrounding male body image. While this has largely focused on the 'drive for muscularity' (see, e.g., McCreary & Sasse, 2000; Morrison, Morrison, & Hopkins, 2003), there has also been an emerging literature on eating disorders among males from a variety of perspectives including social, psychological, qualitative and quantitative perspectives (Drummond, 2011; O'Dea, 2007; Soban, 2006). It is clear from this literature that young males are not immune to body image concerns and many and varied social and cultural factors that come into play, just as they do for girls and women (Dohnt & Tiggeman, 2008; Paquette & Raine, 2004), that impact negatively upon a young male's body image and body identity.

One area that lacks understanding in all of this debate around male body image is that of *masculinity* and the role it plays toward being a barrier to, or facilitator of, positive or negative body image. I have argued elsewhere that masculinity needs to be better understood in all aspects of male health (Drummond & Drummond, 2010). Indeed, the first Australian National Male Health policy released in 2010 (DoHA, 2010) did not mention masculinity once throughout the entire document while seemingly placing emphasis on changing male practices and behaviours surrounding health. This document was meant to be the first step in redressing the significant concerns surrounding boys and men's health in Australia. Not challenging the way in which masculinity is constructed or attempting to understand and acknowledge its role in

male health is fraught with problems. That is why understanding the role of masculinity in the lives of young males, as young as early childhood, is particularly crucial in understanding how concepts, notions and ideologies around masculinities and health are formed.

Masculinity and Health Literacy

Importantly, the Australian National Male Health Policy (DoHA, 2010) has referred to the significance of health literacy for males. It has also identified the significance of taking this into consideration within a life course approach. Boys and young males, therefore, need to be identified within this discussion. This book provides important contextual information around health literacy and boys.

Masculinity plays an important role in the health of men and boys by influencing how they recognise, interpret and act upon health messages. Understanding the links between the social construction of masculinity and health literacy is the key to developing health promotion strategies, specifically for men and boys. Masculinity is a social construction played out in a variety of ways among different groups of males (Connell, 1995). In Western culture, masculinity is socially constructed in a manner that has the potential to impede health promotion and personal health education. For example, taking action towards attaining health is seen by some males as being a feminine ideal, while risk-taking and attitudes that flout convention about health can be seen as a masculinised trait. Although healthy dietary behaviours and engaging in physical activity for health may be regarded as feminised practices, they are likely to reduce chronic lifestyle diseases in both men and women (Blair et al., 1996).

According to Peerson and Saunders (2009), *health literacy* (accessing, understanding and using information to make health decisions) is the key to health promotion among individuals and communities. As a gender, males have been identified as being less receptive to health promotion messages (Drummond, 2002). Compounding the situation further according to von Wagner, Knight, Steptoe, and Wardle (2007) is being male, having low educational attainment and having a low

income provides the greatest risk of having limitations with health literacy. Specific demographics such as men of low socio-economic position, with lower levels of formal education and subsequent health literacy, have limited understanding of the meaning of physical activity in their lives (Williams, 2003). A similar situation exists regarding the importance of dietary behaviours among this group of males.

Irrespective of socioeconomic position, males with lower health literacy levels display difficulties in understanding the significance of health-oriented dietary practices (Strand & Tverdal, 2005). In addition, this cohort may not have been provided with the skills and abilities to interpret and act upon health promotion messages directed towards them. Health-promoting behaviours and nutrition education have typically been perceived as a feminised practice by some groups of men (Roos, 2001). All these factors linked to the social construction of masculinity place substantial barriers in the way of men with lower health literacy levels adopting more desirable physical activity and dietary behaviours. While this book focuses on boys' bodies within the context of sport, health and physical activity, there is clear evidence to suggest that intergenerational issues exist regarding health literacy of fathers and significant adult males in boys' lives. Significant adult males play an important role in social construction around a whole range of, often, stereotypical masculinised attitudes and behaviours.

Masculinity, Physical Activity and Health

While some adult men's health concerns relate to gender-specific conditions such as prostate and testicular cancers, it has been argued that the relationship between men's health and the social construction of masculinity is a primary issue underpinning men's poor health status in contemporary Western culture (Courtenay, 2000a; Department of Health and Ageing, 2010). What Mahalik, Good, and Englar-Carson (2003) identify as traditional masculine 'scripts' of knowledge and behaviour act as barriers to poor health; they argue for the need to incorporate a sociocultural context that includes training and practice when working with men. In specific communities, such as low socioeconomic status,

traditional scripts around masculinity can significantly influence men's health (Mahalik et al., 2003). The relationship between physical activity adherence, dietary behaviours and the ways in which older males influence the construction and perpetuation of traditional masculine ideologies around health requires further attention.

Developing a clear understanding of the issues around the way in which masculinity is shaped early in a boy's life and how this has the potential to form his physical activity behaviours will likely have an effect on a man's health later in life. It may also affect his health beliefs and attitudes towards health (Courtenay, 2000a, 2000b; Mahalik, Levi-Minzi, & Walker, 2007; Robertson, 2006). This book will attempt to articulate the interplay between socially constructed masculine scripts with that of physical activity and health among boys. Understanding masculine ideologies and health behaviours early in a boy's life is pivotal to the overall health in men, later in life. Given the significant issues associated with lifestyle disease, specifically linked to physical activity and diet among men, listening to the voices of boys around these issues will provide a basis upon which we can begin to establish a deeper understanding of masculinities and health.

The Research

The data within this book emanate from a longitudinal qualitative research project I conducted with boys in early childhood through to early adolescence. The project is based on interviewing a cohort of boys from their Reception school year (age 5) through to Year 7 (age 13). Of the 44 boys in the initial Reception year, the parents of 33 boys provided consent for their boy/s to be interviewed in a focus group setting on an ongoing, annual basis. The research, which attained institutional ethics approval, was based in a middle-class school in south-western metropolitan Adelaide. Despite ethics approval, there were several parents, namely fathers, who were wary of allowing their sons to be involved in the research. Several mothers sought me out at the school to provide justification on their husband's behalf given husband's fear associated with the perception, and reality, of an adult male interviewing

their five-year-old son. The social stigma that has arisen from numerous high-profile child molestation cases, locally and globally, has impacted a number of peoples' perceptions of men engaging with young children, even at the research level that has institutional ethics approval, school endorsement and with the researcher having police clearance and approval to work with 'minors'.

The fundamental tenet of the research is to understand the way in which masculinity is constructed and changes over time among boys from early childhood through to early adolescence and in relation to sport, health and physical activity.

The boys were interviewed in focus groups of around four children per group, which was good for the purpose of interviewing this group of young boys. During the early childhood years, like most five- to seven-year-old boys, they were boisterous, mischievous and chatty. Therefore, rather than an interview per se, this was set up as a discussion with young boys straddling the line between formal and informal interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 2000) around a range of issues. This allowed the boys to feel like we were having a conversation and that what they had to say was important to me. Patton (2002) states that good focus groups allow all of the voices to resonate, which is why an environment was created where all the voices of these boys could be heard.

The boys were interviewed in a range of settings within the school environment. However, research ethics protocol meant that each interview had to be within close proximity to the classroom. In order to eliminate the children's potential fear of retribution from teachers, in event of speaking openly and candidly about a multitude of topics, the interviews were not within 'earshot' of the teachers. This also reduced the teachers' 'positional power' and further enhanced the opportunity for the boys to speak freely (Drummond, Drummond, & Birbeck, 2009). Enabling the boys the opportunity to provide rich, descriptive, qualitative data is important to understand the issues that confront boys from a range of perspectives associated with their health and wellbeing. While not unique, listening to voices of children in qualitative health research has been limited. Drummond et al. (2009) have claimed that although there is a wealth of literature on children and health, what is absent from the literature are the voices of the children themselves.

Indeed, the majority of studies in this area tend to be *about* children and *on* children, but do not often *include* children's voices.

The interviews, which were each audio-recorded with a digital voice recorder, lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. An interview guide was used in each of the focus group sessions to assist the interviewer to adopt a specific line of enquiry. A phenomenological interviewing approach was also taken whereby the children's responses were further questioned and clarified to ensure that all aspects were fully explored. The interview guide was used to bring the interview back to a specific focus to ensure that all children posed the same core questions, thereby enhancing research reliability and was constructed through knowledge and awareness of contemporary literature in the area, as well as the researchers' extensive backgrounds in the field. However, in the first few years of interviews the boys were in early childhood. Therefore, this early childhood cohort required a slightly more structured approach with respect to an interview schedule. Indeed, this group of boys was invited to draw pictures, which in turn elicited rich descriptive responses directly related to that picture. In the first round of interviews, the boys were specifically asked to draw pictures associated with sport, health, physical activity and fitness. They were also asked to draw a picture of a man. I then had the capacity to ask them questions about the more prominent physical features of the man they had drawn such as musculature, size and shape.

During the second round of interviews (Year 1), the boys were asked to draw a picture of a healthy alien. The reason an alien was chosen came about inadvertently. Given that the boys had previously drawn pictures of 'health' or people in the act of 'doing health' the year before, some of the boys 'badgered' me to draw 'something else'. One of the boys asked if he could draw an alien, to which I replied, 'yes, you can, but only if it's a healthy alien'. This was not a preconceived methodological ploy. It came about as a result of keeping the boys interested and responsive. It also came about through the experience of being a reflexive researcher. Regarding research reflexivity, Malterud (2001) claims:

> A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions. (pp. 483–484)

Being reflexive and responsive is important as a researcher. It is arguably more so with a challenging cohort of boys in early childhood who often struggle to maintain concentration on the topic during a focus group interview. Therefore, taking the lead from Christensen and Prout (2002), I needed to explore ways in which to meaningfully engage this group of boys in the research. This approach clearly resonated with the boys at such a young age as they all chose to take up the option of drawing such a figure. Importantly, it provided the opportunity to discuss elements of health, with respect to this alien, in depth. We then discussed how the alien might reflect aspects of their own, or others' lives, similar to the pictures they had drawn the previous year where they used human participants 'doing health'.

The boys were interviewed in a variety of settings. However, as stipulated in the ethics guidelines underpinning this study, at all times they were visible to the teacher but not within hearing distance. It was important that the boys felt comfortable in expressing themselves without fear of reprisal. The lunch tables outside the classrooms were ideal settings to conduct the interviews. While I did my best to be able to work with the boys in early childhood, it was clear they were excited about having the privilege to abstain from the classroom and be interviewed in the presence of an audio-recorder by a professor from a university. They were excited to talk about their lives and on some occasions showed me their sporting capabilities. One of the teachers remarked, to me, 'I wondered what was going on when several boys ran at top speed past her [the teacher] classroom'! I informed her that this was not intended. However, the moment got the better of some of the five-year-old boys and rather than drawing a picture of themselves running, they would rather show me, despite my protestations.

The interviews beyond early childhood took a more traditional approach given the age of the boys and the ability for them to articulate their responses far better, as well as have longer attention span within the focus groups themselves. However, that is not to say that the focus groups were not without problems despite the boys growing older. On occasions, some boys would decide to make a joke out of everything and disrupt the entire process. Other boys sat still and did not say a word. Yet the following year, those same boys were the most vocal.

The group dynamics became more evident over the years, and the importance of matching personalities was crucial to the process. While it was incredibly difficult, having the most vocal boys in the same focus group alleviated the problem of them dominating other groups and leaving the quiet boys without a voice. Matching the quiet and more introverted boys enabled them to flourish in a focus group situation and also allowed them to feel comfortable without fear of being ridiculed or laughed at.

There is a plethora of literature reporting on studies of children's well-being by health professionals. However, as Drummond et al. (2009) have claimed, 'absent from this literature are the voices of the children themselves; the majority of studies in this area are *about* children and *on* children, but rarely *include* children' (p. 4). This book, in part, will present the voices of boys in early childhood as a point of contrast to the previous studies conducted. It will highlight the way in which young boys perceive aspects of health including sport and physical activity. Importantly, it will highlight the way in which they come to view their bodies and provide a starting point to understand the way males socially construct their attitudes and behaviours around health.

Data Analysis

While the pictures the boys in early childhood drew were a significant part of the research process, they were not analysed from a psychoanalytic perspective. They were designed as a means through which discussion could begin around a range of health issues as well as sport, the body and masculinities. Self-complete activities such as this, according to Mauthner (1997), provide ideal opportunities for a segue into research with young children. It also provided a greater opportunity for the boys to become involved in the research process and brings in past and present experiences (Brooks, 2009; Mauthner, 1997).

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, then open coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and analysed using inductive analysis. This type of analysis involves identifying categories, patterns and themes by means of interaction with the data (Patton, 2002). The author's

personal understanding, professional knowledge and the literature (Strauss, 1987) allowed for similarities and differences in the data to be documented.

Themes

There were major themes and sub-themes that emerged from interviews with the boys. Given the wide-ranging and varied nature of the topics discussed with the boys, only those relating to bodies, sport, health and physical activity will be identified throughout this book. Regardless, many of the most significant themes to emerge were body related. For example, those including muscles and muscularity, strength, power, dominance and speed were consistently a point of major discussion. The following chapters will articulate these major themes while drawing on the way in which masculinity is socially constructed within contemporary Western culture.

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4

Boys, Sport and Physical Activity

Masculinity and Sports

It is important to recognise that sport plays a role in socially construct-
ing boys' masculinity from an early age. However, the question that is
often proffered here is where does it begin? Indeed, sport has long been
regarded as a site for the development of masculine behaviours. Early
scholars such as Sabo (1985, 1986) and Messner (1992) played a key
role in beginning the discussion around this area. It can therefore be
argued that the role of sport in influencing young males' masculinised
behaviours has been historically and culturally embedded within west-
ern culture. In the 1960s, the belief that sport built character in men
was readily accepted throughout society (Messner & Sabo, 1994). Sport
had become one of the most important sites of masculinising practice
and socialised boys into many of the values, attitudes and skills consid-
ered so important in the adult world of men. Even before the 1960s,
history provided evidence of the importance and praise politicians and
military leaders placed upon sport, for instilling in boys and young men
values of courage and strength necessary to defend the nation (Messner,
1992; Sabo & Runfola, 1980; Whitson, 1990). It was also around this

time that sport was intended to emphasise and teach 'manly' values and behaviours (Messner, 1992). Further, it was claimed that organised, competitive sports were perceived as being sites in which boys were taught to be tough while creating men who fit dominant forms of masculinity (Messner, 1992). According to Messner (1992), these sports demonstrated that men's bodies could sustain physical punishment and engage in violence (Young, White, & McTeer, 1994) in ways that made them superior to women's bodies. This 'superiority' is underpinned by the notion of hegemonic masculinity.

According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity in western society is equated to male dominance and the oppression of femininities, as well as subordinated and marginalised masculinities. Further, Donaldson (1993) claimed that 'hegemonic masculinity' is a term that has been 'invented' with its main emphasis placed on the critique of masculinity. Some fundamental tenets of masculine hegemony are heterosexuality, homophobia and men's sexual objectification of women.

Sport has played a major part in the formation and perpetuation of masculine hegemonic ideology (Drummond, 1998). Organised team sports in particular have often been revered as a central site for the construction of masculinity (Messner & Sabo, 1994). It has been speculated that organised sport develops a sense of male solidarity, which encourages men to identify with one another thus providing a medium for the regular rehearsal of masculine identification (Whitson, 1990). The playing arena at training or in competition, the locker room or social settings beyond the sporting context, such as bars or nightclubs, are all locations in which this masculine identification and solidarity is reinforced (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). Boys' sport has been cited as a testing ground for uncomplicated admission into adult society and initiation into manhood (Drummond, 2002).

Boys and Sport

Sport is a major site for the social construction of masculinity in boys. The boys who are good at sport—and physical activity—are often afforded the privilege of being popular among peers, thereby enhancing

such elements as self-esteem, self-image and masculine identity. Boys who are not good at physical activity and sport are often ridiculed, which in turn affects the manner in which they perceive themselves as males. As a consequence, they are likely to search for other ways in which to express their masculinity. For some, this comes in the form of anti-authoritarian acts such as violence, aggression, graffiti and consuming alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. These young males regard such acts as being the epitome of masculinity. On the other hand, there are academically oriented boys who find solace in being surrounded by just a few close friends and who are very similar to themselves. That is, these boys are generally academically oriented as well as computer literate.

The problem faced by the boys who do not involve themselves in sport and physical activity is that they make future involvement in sport and physical activity increasingly difficult. This is a crucial period in developing motor skills as well as lifelong learning principles associated with long-term physical activity habits (Baum, 1998). It is also a crucial period in the development of self, body and masculine identity. Positive experiences in sport and physical activity have the capacity to enhance these domains. By progressively disassociating themselves from sport, the boys are making it harder to develop skills that will enable them to be more proficient at various sports available to them. Without these skills, they are less likely to involve themselves in the sport, for fear of further ridicule and humiliation. Therefore, the most logical and easy option available to them is to totally abstain from sport and physical activity. By abstaining, the boys are not placing their lack of skill on display and are therefore not being ridiculed and taunted by peers as a result. In this instance, their masculine identity is not being threatened. However, for those participating boys, their masculine identity is being positively reinforced at the expense of non-participants. Further, the participating boys are likely to develop skills that will enable them to acquire more complex skills in the future. The acquisition of such complex skills is likely to play a major role in enhancing one's masculine image and positive self-esteem, not only during boyhood. It is likely to play a role in ongoing masculine identification as they move into adolescence and manhood.

Two Important Stories

Often when I am giving a lecture to my undergraduate sport, health and physical activity students, or presenting at a conference on an aspect of my research on boys and sport; I find that it is important to discuss the social and cultural meaning of sport and masculinity to males in order to provide important context to the ensuing presentation. As a part of this process, I generally defer to several stories within my own life to help explain it, or at least to provide some sort of framework. I am firm in my belief that storytelling provides an important means through which we can better appreciate aspects of our lives, as stories are the foundation upon which we can understand the past, in order to influence the future.

Story one:
The first story emanates from a period in my life at high school, where sport was, and still remains, an integral part of my personal and masculine identity. While I was generally 'okay' at my academic endeavours in school, it was sports where I shone most and, in retrospect, was somewhat advantaged. I was captain of both the school football and cricket teams from my junior through senior years. Both of these sports were perceived as being highly masculinised, given the combative and dangerous nature of the sports as well as the cultural 'masculine' capital they provide and given their position as two of the most popular male sports in Australia. Folklore suggests that the captain of the Australian men's cricket team is the second most important position behind the nation's Prime Minister. Similarly, albeit on a far less scale, captaining a school cricket, and football, team provides a degree of kudos that transcends most other aspects of school life. I was therefore placed in quite a privileged position throughout my secondary schooling years and, as a result, navigated myself seamlessly to completion. This was not the case, however, for some of my other peers at high school, despite several of them also being exceptionally talented at a variety of sports. The problem for these particular peers was the fact that the sports at which they excelled were simply not cricket or football, or any other sports that may have gained a degree of social—'masculinised'—acceptance.

One such peer during my adolescence was a boy in my Year 9 level (i.e. ~15 years) who was the national junior figure (ice) skating champion. This particular boy was dedicated to his sport, trained regularly and clearly excelled. The issue here was that figure skating in Australia was, and still is, not perceived as a masculine sport in which to participate. This was particularly problematic for young males participating in such sports back in 1980. Indeed, many young males at the time may not have even regarded figure skating as a sport. As I reflect upon this situation now, some of the other boys who were not involved in any sport were likely perceived higher on a hierarchy of masculinity than a figure skating male. On the other hand, had this boy been a speed (ice) skater, notoriously characterised for its potential to produce physical harm through high-speed crashes and collisions, the perception may have been different. Notably, in these races, there is also a clear winner and loser through discernible competition rather than a score based on artistic merit. These are all very important masculinised ideologies. Traditional masculinity in sports is built upon the premise of power, speed and aggression with the potential for injury and pain (Filiault, Drummond, & Agnew, 2012), not artistic and aesthetic ability.

The interesting aspect for me, even back then, was the way in which some of my football and cricket team members, who were clearly 'making up the numbers', gained higher social capital simply by being a member of the cricket or football team. They were certainly not highly skilled in the sport, yet given the nature of many school-sporting teams the lack of numbers can sometimes ensure immediate entry to particular teams. Indeed, Australian football teams require 22 players, as well as several reserves within the squad. Therefore, there were ample opportunities for boys to be involved despite a number of them lacking the necessary skills or ability. While this should not be seen in a negative light given the positive aspect for a range of boys engaging with sport in a team-oriented social environment, the comparative lack of respect provided to the national figure skater was noteworthy at the time and alarming upon reflection.

Story two:

The second story I often recount is one that played a significant role in my interest in researching key aspects of sport and masculinity. The following excerpt is taken from a paper I wrote some time ago now. However, it provides important context around my own understanding and meaning of masculinity in sports. It also highlights the relationship I had with my father that was positively forged through sports, as well as the beginning of my academic career in seeking knowledge and clarity about masculinity in sports, and masculinities more broadly.

Standing at the base of the tallest building in Melbourne, about to embark upon a race which entailed running up 74 flights of stairs, not only did I question my ability but also my sanity. Along with 149 other men I had to race up the Rialto Tower in a narrow stairwell to determine who would be the fastest upon reaching the top. The winner would be crowned 'State stair climbing champion' and receive $1000 and an airfare to New York to compete in the World stair climbing championships. The interesting part in all of this was that the women had a separate race on the same day with the same prizes awarded to the female winner. However, despite being provided 150 slots for competitors, less than 50 women turned up to race. On the other hand, almost 100 men were turned away from their event. Up until that point in my life I had competed in a variety of sports. However, more recently I had focussed on triathlons, ultimately participating at an elite level. Regardless of the sport played or the level at which I participated, sport had been an uncomplicated pleasure for me, particularly during childhood. Outstanding in most sports attempted, I was afforded the liberty of choosing the sports I wanted to pursue through adolescence and into adulthood. My parents provided immense support throughout my sporting youth and became involved themselves in the teams with which I played, but they never appeared overbearing. I was grateful to them as much as they were proud of me, but it was my father I most wanted to impress. In under age football matches he was the only person I acknowledged in the clubrooms before running out on to the ground, and his praise and critical comments were the only ones I cared for on completion of the game. At cricket matches we sat together prior to me going in to bat, and I would be back next to him on being dismissed regardless of the score made. Despite my intrinsic sporting motivation, my father was my greatest inspiration.

From a personal perspective sport played an important role in the construction of my masculine identity, and the relationship I developed with my parents and in particular my father. Later, as an adult, it helped me to affirm, and challenge, my masculine identity by competing against other men who were rivals but who would eventually become friends. However, it was not until the stair-climbing race that I began to question the masculine nature of many sports. Nor had I critically evaluated the patriarchal domain in which sport was seemingly grounded. It was from this point that sport began to take on a different meaning for me. Further, it was the catalyst, which fuelled my quest for knowledge surrounding the taken-for-granted notions concerning men, masculinity, sport and health.

It is evident from these two stories that there are several distinct issues at play. One relates to the way in which young males can be seemingly outcast as a result of their sporting selection. That is, in the event that a boy's chosen sport does not comply with the social and cultural conventions of what is perceived to be masculine, this can have implications for the way in which that boy is perceived among his peers. Interestingly, I am privy to this ideology on a personal level as I regularly listen to my son's concerns about the perceptions of his peers regarding his high-level achievements in sports that are not always regarded so favourably. My son is an outstanding physiologically talented athlete who has made numerous state teams competing at nationals in track and field, swimming and his primary sport of surf-lifesaving. Fortunately, he was gifted with fast twitch fibres and has excelled at sprinting in both athletics and swimming. It seems that sprinters hold a little more masculinised sway than endurance events during adolescence. Despite this, as well as training five to six sessions a week in the pool and several running sessions a week on the track, he realises he does not hold the same cultural capital as his football playing peers who may only train once or twice weekly. He understands, after much discussion, that these are the 'cards he has been dealt' in the pursuit of his sports.

The sport of surf-lifesaving is an interesting one because despite the national championships, colloquially known as 'Aussies', having the second most number of competitors behind the Olympic games, it is not highly revered as a 'sport'. Indeed, the sport has historically grown out

of the surf-lifesaving community movement, which was established in the early 1900s to minimise drowning on the beach and to save lives. As a consequence, many Australian families enrol their children into the junior programme from as early as six years of age. These children are called 'nippers', and they learn as much about the surf-lifesaving movement as they do about the sport, which was originally designed to keep the patrolling members fit. Surf-lifesaving as a community organisation plays an enormous role in the traditional Australian ideology. Despite the large numbers of competitors, the sport of surf-lifesaving is not revered other than in the northern states, and in particular on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast of Queensland, where the culture of surf-lifesaving is historically and culturally embedded due to the warm weather, enabling year round beach usage. Certainly, there are aspects of surf-lifesaving such as the ironman, which is a gruelling multi-sport event, often in heavy surf, that the majority of Australians know. However, these athletes are not household names in the same vein as the elite footballers, cricketers and rugby players. Some surf-lifesavers are professional athletes. However, most are community participants. Indeed, many of the elite level competitors are also high achieving athletes in their own right within specific sports that make up aspects of surf-lifesaving. For example, Olympic swimmers often swim in the surf races, while Olympic kayak specialists may race in the surf-ski events. Similarly, Olympic sprinters often run in the beach sprint events. However, once again, these are not footballers, cricketers or rugby players. Therefore, despite being a multiple state ironman champion and recent winner of surf sports athlete of the year in his state, my son is simply not perceived in the same way, in terms of masculinity, as his footballing peers. Certainly, there is a degree of respect for the training and physiological ability that he displays. The difference is that he is not a part of a team that are seen as 'warriors' who go out to battle each week and are prepared to 'put their bodies on the line' for one another, or so the myth may have it.

Despite this lack of social capital associated with being an outstanding runner, swimmer and surf-lifesaver, I have noticed a change over the past 12 months as my son increasingly moves into the sport of surfing for leisure and recreation and not competition. It is universally

recognised that surfing is a 'pretty cool' thing for young males, and increasingly young girls, to do, certainly here in Australia. Therefore, by default, surfers are also generally seen as being 'cool' in their own right. Significantly, while my son does not specifically train for surfing, and surfs once a week, he has received more social capital from his peers for being a good, non-competitive surfer, than he ever has for his competitive sporting pursuits. It is no surprise that he wants to surf often and seek out large waves, including the 'urban mythical' surf breaks, that will build and enhance his burgeoning reputation around this sport. Seemingly, this is a far more masculinised pursuit than surf-lifesaving among his peers. The issue from a parental standpoint is that surf-lifesaving offers him enormous benefits in terms of community engagement, fitness and competitive sport. Therefore, my wife and I, as parents, are keen to see him stay involved in the movement for life. However, we are also cognisant of the value that surfing provides to his identity. Our task is to therefore nurture both and navigate him through to adulthood without dropping out of one or the other.

In the second story, the meaning of sport to men is firmly at the forefront. The basis of the story is to emphasise that despite all race conditions being the same, together with media exposure and equivalent prize money, allocated for men and women, the notion of running up a gruelling 74 flights of stairs appeared to be far more appealing to men than women. I can remember vividly watching the small number of women begin the race approximately 30 minutes before the men's race and it was at this point that I began to question why so many men wanted to race compared to women. It is also arguable that this was the foundation point of my academic career, as I ultimately researched a Ph.D. around the social construction of masculinity in elite sports, which in turn grounded my understanding of gender in sports and, more specifically, masculinities. Developing this understanding has fuelled my entire research career. Certainly, there have been times when I have moved out of the area to research opportunistic issues. However, my understanding of the world is underpinned by social constructionism where gender plays a pivotal role in this ideological standpoint. Most recently, I have been working in the area of women in sports and was appointed to the Women in Sport Parliamentary Taskforce here in my home state of South

Australia. It is clear that my expertise in sport and masculinities enables me to develop understanding of the key issues facing women with respect to sport participation. After all, sport does not exist in a vacuum.

Summing It Up

Within contemporary western culture, there is an underpinning notion that a boy's social and cultural development is dependent largely upon the values attributed to sport (Connell, 1983, 1990, 1995; Hayward & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Swain, 2000; Whitson, 1990). Booth (2000) provides an historical perspective to this argument, claiming that New Zealand schools embraced rugby as a means by which 'the value of hard work, and determination, cooperation and teamwork, and character' (p. 54) could be taught. As Zavos (1988, p. 118) states, schoolboy rugby 'is one of those tribal experiences that has helped to create that unique and under-rated species, the New Zealand male'. Sport is often perceived as a rite of passage for boys (Connell, 1990; Messner, 1992). On the other hand, boys who do not participate in sport and physical activity are often marginalised due to the cultural perception that sport is a primary site for the social construction of masculinity (Davison, 2000; Whitson, 1990). Those boys who are good at sport are often afforded the privilege of being popular among peers thereby enhancing such elements as self-esteem, self-image and masculine identity due to the creation of dominant and subordinate groups (Swain, 2000; Weinke, 1998). Boys, who are less skilled in sport and school physical education, are often ridiculed thereby negatively impacting their self-perception as 'worthy' males (Swain, 2000).

Boys who do not live up to societal expectations of being accomplished at sport and physical activity may feel unskilled and awkward (Gard & Meyenn, 2000). Further, they may find abstaining from physical pursuits to be a meaningful alternative. Consequently, by not participating, they are eliminating further ridicule and humiliation in a public forum among peers. Hence, their masculine identity is not challenged. Nor do they have to confront the social consequences of not having to conform to the hegemonic masculine underpinnings of sport. It is within the masculinised arena of sports that one's masculinity is

constantly under scrutiny. Challenges from peers are continually set down, particularly in terms of appearance or size, performance, aggression, violence, as well as off-field behaviour (Curry, 1991). However, arguably, it is sporting performance in terms of competition that has the capacity to override all of these masculine determinants (Drummond, 1996). On the other hand, those boys who feel comfortable in participating have the opportunity to enhance skill development, thus providing them with a variety of alternatives in terms of sports and activities they may pursue in the future. Due to the underpinning social and cultural importance that is placed on sport and physical activity for boys, the acquisition of such complex skills is likely to play a major role in enhancing one's masculine image and positive self-esteem.

Finally, the importance of physical activity for everyone in terms of health and longevity cannot be overstated. Not having the skills and ability to feel comfortable about pursuing physical activity throughout life may have detrimental effects on long-term health (Drummond, 2001). As well as the immediate associated social, emotional and psychological concerns for these boys, this also has implications for men's health later in life (Drummond, 1996). That is, for these men, physical activity may be seen as a barrier and may not become a part of their lives. With more and more men becoming overweight and obese (Pritchard, Nowson, & Wark, 1997), physical activity must become an integral part of men's lives for overall health and well-being. It does not need to be about aesthetics and body image.

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5

Muscles, Strength and Power

The Beginning of Muscles, Men and Masculinity

As an Australian, growing up listening to colonial history and popular lore, we were taught that Australia was built through the efforts of male muscle. Folklore depicts Australia's formative years to be a period where rugged outback settlers battled nature and the odds, in a struggle for survival. Men were revered and held responsible for this pioneering and forging of new land. Similarly, the development of Australian industry is deemed as being the product of male initiative, although not displaying the same brawn qualities of its pioneering predecessors. Regardless, the notion of muscular masculinity, together with physical and emotional strength, is the philosophical bedrock of the way in which Australia was 'created'. There are numerous other countries throughout the world with similar historical masculinised ideologies 'where men were men' and their bodies were the vehicles through which nations were built. It is this backdrop that contemporary males have had to navigate and develop their own masculine identity in a sociocultural environment very different to the one in which the aforementioned

masculinity was grounded. Contemporary masculinity is heavily based upon aesthetics. It seems that the muscular, athletic looking male is afforded a number of privileges compared with less muscular, skinny or overweight peers (Drummond, 2011; Moss, 2011).

Muscular size has played a crucial role in determining masculine identity for many males. This notion is historically linked, particularly with respect to men's bodies being a product of (manual) labour. In her groundbreaking article, Connell (1983) discusses men's bodies in terms of 'being' and 'doing'. I also built on, and developed, this notion a number of years later (see Drummond, 1996). Historically, the archetypal male body has largely been perceived as one that has been created through manual labour (Drummond, 2003). As identified earlier, the notion of the muscular male working the land or involved in other traditional 'blue collar' professions, which demand a degree of physicality, had traditionally been perceived as the expected and accepted way of achieving a desirable masculine physique. Along with the resultant physique men are also 'doing' masculinity (Connell, 1983; Drummond, 1996). That is, they are 'doing' traditional masculinised occupations and therefore placing their masculinity on display. Contemporary male bodies are different. The advent of the feminist movement and the rise and rise of industrialisation, and new technologies, has eroded traditional sites of masculine labour, which has ultimately impacted upon 'doing' the masculine body. Therefore, unless they are a high-level competing athlete that demands extensive physical and athletic training, the way in which a male now attains his archetypal masculine physique is likely to occur predominantly through conscious forms of exercise, specifically designed to build and sculpt culturally defined exemplars of masculinity. In this way, men are taking it upon themselves to look a certain way in order to 'be' masculine (Connell, 1983; Drummond, 1996).

It is the changing nature of contemporary Western culture that is arguably having an important impact upon males with respect to their bodies. Over time the archetypal male has changed from being one in which size, particularly muscularity, was championed. More recently, it appears the archetypal male body of today is not only muscular, but also devoid of fat, together with elements of body symmetry and grooming (Drummond, 2005). Nowadays, the archetypal male body requires a

good deal more attention, and control, to be achieved than the classic masculine physique of the past. Indeed, it is interesting to look at the physiques of male icons over the years to ascertain the changes that have taken place in terms of archetypal male bodies publicly lauded. Take, for example, the changing physiques of the popular Hollywood *Tarzan* movie characters over the years. The original *Tarzan* of the 1930s was muscular but certainly not overly athletic in appearance. He was also 'smooth' and hairless. The *Tarzan* of the 1960s was different. He was athletic and had less visible body fat as well as being quite vascular (visible veins due to lower body fat). It is also noteworthy that he had chest hair, which at the time was a sign of masculine virility and was a popular cultural trend among men. The most recent *Tarzan* in 2016 was muscular, athletic and devoid of fat. He had visible abdominal muscles colloquially known as a 'six pack' which is a sign of masculine athleticism and is commonly revered among men, as well as being cited by women as a key indicator of masculine aesthetics. This *Tarzan* could easily adorn the cover of either a Men's Health magazine or Track and Field publication, such is the appeal of the contemporary archetypal male body. It is also noteworthy that the current archetypal male physique displays such homogeneity that it has the capacity to transcend numerous different cultures. Indeed, I often show my undergraduate students the cover of a number of Men's Health magazines published in a variety of countries from Australia, USA, UK, Germany, Denmark and so forth. It is apparent the students cannot identify any difference between the men on these covers such is the level of 'sameness' among their appearance and overall 'look'. Arguably, globalisation has played a major role in creating this homogeneity and specifically movies, television, travel and, of course, the ubiquitous Internet.

Straight Males, Gay Males and the Archetypal Physique

As identified earlier, the notion of 'being' and 'doing' is a worthwhile theoretical framework around which to understand the heterosexual male body (Connell, 1983; Drummond, 1996). Indeed, what is the

archetypal male body 'supposed' to look like, and what type of masculinised acts is it 'supposed' to engage in? This notion of the archetypal male, as Connell has suggested, pervades within current popular literature 'about men' and has an 'unrelenting psychological focus' (Connell, 1992, p. 735). The archetypal male physique while seemingly established within a psycho-social context has created a cultural means through which to categorise the ideal body. Paradoxically, it has the capacity to create considerable sociocultural concerns for a range of males. Further, there is a presumption of heterosexuality—as in many other life situations—such that when discussing the archetypal male body, this body is implicitly straight. For example, from a personal perspective, I have researched and published extensively in the area of men's bodies/body images and, unless I have specifically engaged with the gay male community, the implied assumption within the research has been that my male participants are straight. Do the participants or the researcher decide whether the research participants are gay or straight? This is an important question to ponder given the cultural dynamics that exist in the labelling of a man's sexuality. From a qualitative research perspective, the labelling of men as straight or gay has ramifications for the analyses of data that has emerged for a particular group.

Historically, the archetypal heterosexual—straight—male body has been one that has displayed muscularity. Further, the perception of strength and power has evolved through the cultural significance placed on the heterosexually masculinised Adonis 'V' shape. This is achieved through the development of broad shoulders and large chest, tapering down to a smaller waist, thereby creating the perception of size. Not only is the perceived physique identified as being powerful and athletic, it is also seen as being sexually virile (Drummond, 2005). This is connected to historical assumptions relating to women's interests in identifying robust, male bodies as having the potential to father healthy children. Both sexual virility and desirability linked to reproductive capacity, deemed to be displayed in the archetypal male body, are traditionally seen as integral to the heterosexual male role. In this sense, the archetypal male body is implicitly isomorphic with heterosexual masculinity.

For many reasons, individuals find it easier to articulate their notions of heterosexual masculinity through discussion around body aesthetics. Accordingly, many of my undergraduate students, both male and female, have claimed it is one that is muscular—but not too muscular. It is also a body devoid of fat and hair. It must be one that is 'cut' and 'chiselled' and it must appear strong and powerful. It is a body that clearly assumes positional power in terms of aesthetics, which some refer to in the gay community as a hegemonic aesthetic (Filiault & Drummond, 2007). However, it is a theoretical underpinning that is transferable to heterosexual men.

In terms of masculine hegemony among heterosexual men it could be argued that muscularity plays a key role in the development of a masculine hierarchy. Those men who are afforded the privilege of attaining and maintaining a muscular, and athletic looking, physique are often perceived as more masculine (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). In his groundbreaking text on the bodybuilding subculture, Klein (1993) identified that due to the backlash that confronted gay men around HIV/AIDS in the mid- and late 1980s many gay men began bodybuilding to make themselves appear 'heterosexual' and therefore 'pass' as straight (Leary, 1999). At that time, the archetypal gay male physique was that of being thin. With the advent of the perceived HIV/AIDS 'epidemic', being a thin gay man heightened the possibility of being stigmatised as 'contagious' while further marginalising an already marginalised group (Drummond, 2005). The interesting historical element to this is that over time, as gay men came to see the cultural benefits of looking 'heterosexually muscular', the increased numbers of gay men entering the bodybuilding subculture led to bodybuilding and hyper-muscularity being perceived as the antithesis of heterosexuality, and consequently gay. Hence, the archetypal heterosexual male physique is now one that is muscular yet with a high degree of athleticism. It has distanced itself from the 'protest muscularity' (Drummond, 2005) adopted by the gay male community and is now seen as a physique that is athletic, aesthetic and functional.

Clearly, masculinity is a fluid concept (Connell, 1995) and will vary from place to place and from one generation to another. The body plays a significant part in how masculinity is conceived, constructed and

enacted. In Australia, and Western society, it is arguable that the past decade has seen a shift in the ideological construction of masculinity 'through' the male body. As societies across the world become increasingly multicultural and clearly diverse, particularly within metropolitan cities, an array of 'accepted' male body images is becoming 'tolerated'. However, the straight and gay hegemonic form of masculinity associated with the body is still that of athletic muscularity.

Boys and the Meaning of Muscles

The ways in which boys perceive their own bodies as well as other males' arguably play a significant role in the development of a young male's masculine identity. For a considerable amount of time, concerns around body image and identity have been primarily linked to adolescent girls and young women (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2008). However, the significant emphasis placed upon bodily aesthetics in contemporary Western culture has meant that boys and young males are not immune to body image concerns (Drummond, 2011; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003). Much of the research on bodies has focused on young people, particularly around adolescence and early adulthood (see, e.g., Carlson-Jones, 2004; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). This book is different, as it will focus on the way in which young boys talk about their bodies from five to six years of age through to 13.

All too often we do not attend to the needs of pre-adolescent boys regarding issues pertaining to bodies and body image despite evidence to suggest that body image and eating disorders are increasing in prevalence among young males (Drummond, 2011). Given this has largely been the domain of girls and young women; there is a real need to focus on the voices of boys and young males to listen to their perspectives and understand any issues or concerns they may have in relation to body image and body aesthetics. This may include issues associated with muscularity, height, weight, cosmetic features as well as overweight and obesity concerns. The more we know and understand boys and their bodies the better we will be equipped to deal with problems that may arise (Drummond, 2012). However, it is important to recognise that this

book is not specifically about boys' body image concerns. Indeed, it is a book that reflects boys' attitudes and opinions associated with the male body. Ultimately, the rich descriptive qualitative data provides a unique looking glass through which we can understand boys and their bodies and how this may play a role in the construction of masculinities.

All boys develop differently and at various physiological and psychological rates (Pope et al., 2000). Boys who mature early, displaying mesomorphic physiques, have a distinct advantage over other boys, particularly in physical contact sports where size, musculature and strength are important for success. Psychologically, boys who develop earlier have an additional advantage, at that time, where self-esteem and positive body identity are concerned (Pope et al., 2000). In terms of physical ability, there is a greater likelihood of these boys being able to carry out strength tasks with comparative ease over boys the same age, thereby positively reinforcing self-esteem including masculine identity as a consequence of ongoing praise and recognition. As Pope et al. (2000) claim 'muscular bodies are strong, and they symbolize power, virility, and masculinity' (p. 180). Further, Pope et al. (2000) site an example where a boy identifies perceived personal deficiencies as a consequence of a lack of muscularity and strength. The boy stated that:

> I was always a little behind the other boys athletically. When I was in elementary school, they could catch a ball better than I could, throw more accurately than I could, and fight better than I could. I never felt very good about myself. When I started lifting weights in high school, it opened a whole new world for me. When I saw I was getting bigger, my self-confidence went up incredibly. (p. 180)

Boys who develop early often take on a manly appearance. Muscular and mesomorphic by definition their bodies can quickly resemble miniature adult males. Further, the appearance of visible facial and body hair sets them apart from late maturing boys. Therefore such boys can become the envy of peers. These boys, who are often held in high esteem, are led to feel good about themselves, thereby often developing a healthy body image and positive self-esteem (Pope et al., 2000). The same cannot be said for boys who are small and frail in size and have developed a

resultant poor body image and self-esteem. Nor can this be assumed for boys who are obese. Davison (2000) has eloquently dealt with this issue in his self-reflective paper on childhood physical education lessons. He claimed that changing clothes before and after lessons was a significant deterrent for him and many boys. Further, some of my early research in this area (Embrey & Drummond, 1996) identified that for many of the boys interviewed, showering, playing shirts on/shirts off competitions and scheduling swimming lessons with girls was problematic for them in terms of being forced to display their bodies. They claimed that for some of the boys, coping with being overweight and, conversely, underweight was difficult. Having to show their bodies to others, whom they perceived as having more aesthetic physiques, only heightened the personal inadequacies they harboured. These inadequacies were more related to not being the same as others. That is, having bodies that deviate significantly from the archetypal male body that is so often upheld in contemporary Western culture. As a consequence of these physical deviations, there were implications for masculine identity as well.

One of the most important aspects of muscularity among young males, and certainly among males in general, is the visible representation of latent strength, power and dominance. Given the social capital provided to those individuals with potential dominance, whether it be around being physically imposing in stature or presentation of sporting prowess having an imposing muscular physique provides opportunities for a belief by others of 'potential'. This may arise in the form of being perceived as a formidable opponent or as a protector. Regardless, it is this notion of strength and power that is key within the debate surrounding muscles, males and masculinity.

Strength and Power

The importance of strength and power to a male's masculine identity cannot be understated. While Western culture has placed a good deal of emphasis on the way in which a body looks in terms of athletic muscularity; the need to be strong and powerful is an important part of idealised masculinity. This is particularly so within the context of a

straight—heterosexualised—world in which the man is perceived to be the protector of not only the woman, but also his family. It is interesting when I talk about this ideology with my undergraduate students. Despite the significant gains in women's rights through feminist education, the young women in my classes will often suggest that, in the event of unusual sound in the house, it is their boyfriends who should make sure there are no intruders. They would also expect this of their male partners to protect the family if they were to marry in future. Therefore, through my many conversations with students over the years, it is this role of 'protector' that is prominent as a key indicator of a man's role. Interestingly, this is also a similar notion held by the young undergraduate males within the class, which is consistent with hundreds of research interviews I have conducted with a variety of males across a range of ages and demographics. In these interviews with males, irrespective of the issue that I am researching—be it body image, health, sport, physical activity, prostate cancer, eating disorders, etc.—one of the first questions I ask is: 'what does masculinity mean to you'? Generally speaking the majority refer back to size, strength of body, strength of character, muscles, and being a protector and provider for their family either now, or in the future when interviewing younger males. Given that it is, seemingly, very difficult to define masculinity, overwhelmingly the most common response is to identify masculinity in terms of 'what it is not'. Therefore most of the males suggest that masculinity is *not* being a girl, *not* being a woman, *not* showing emotions and *not* showing fear. Being weak, which is a common generalised misconception about women, was also prominent. Therefore being strong, which is the antithesis of being weak, was a signifier and key identifier of masculinity.

In order to be the protector, there is an underlying belief, certainly by straight males, of the need to be strong and powerful which aligns with the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It would seem that strength and power are the primary assets required in order to fulfil this perceived masculinised role. Further, for men, strength and power do not start and finish at being the protector of partners and families. Often men are called upon to assist their female partners in, seemingly mundane, household tasks such as taking sealed lids off jars or manual labour that requires heavy lifting or

moving objects such as furniture. Without the required physical capacity, these men may have to ask other males to assist, which in turn can impact the way in which they perceive themselves and their masculinity. Previously I conducted a research project where I interviewed a group of retired men involved in a walking group (Drummond, 2003). The basis of the research was to understand the way in which older men perceived their bodies within the context of masculinity and ageing. Interestingly, one of the key findings to emerge was that the men, aged between 55 and 83, found great difficulty in coming to terms with their failing bodies. That is, they could no longer 'do' the activities and tasks they could once perform that made them feel like a man. Strength was a major component of their masculine identity given that part of their 'job' within the relationship with their wives was, indeed, to 'take lids off jars' and 'get on the roof to clean the gutters'.

When we think about males and bodies, we seldom think about the emotional relationship that men have developed with respect to what their body can do. Similarly, we think less about what it might mean to them if, and eventually when, it is taken away from them. We have little understanding about how older men feel if they can no longer carry out the physical functions they once could do. We also do not have a deep understanding as to how these men feel when other males around them may continue to function in their usual manner. In terms of bodies, we predominantly tend to think about how the body looks. Certainly, for this ageing group of men, they really did not overly concern themselves with respect to their physical aesthetics. They were primarily concerned with how their body 'worked'. This is very different to young males where aesthetics has been shown to be an emerging issue within contemporary Western culture (Drummond, 2012; Pope et al., 2000).

The Need to Focus on Young Boys

In contemporary Western society, the gaze associated with men's bodies may arguably have never been stronger (Drummond, 2005). Increasingly, men's bodies are being portrayed in ways that

commercialise and objectify the male body, similar to ways in which the female body has been, and remains, commodified. Arguably, this has occurred largely as a consequence of social and mainstream media focus particularly with respect to advertising (Patterson & Elliott, 2002). Such media focus, according to researchers, has played a significant role in the construction of negative body image for many males (Pope et al., 2000), especially among young adolescent males and boys (Drummond, 2001, 2005; Garner & Kearney-Cooke, 1997; Pope et al., 2000).

Despite Connell's (1995) earlier claims that male bodies continue to remain under-theorised, recent research has provided data that highlights the difficulties contemporary males face with respect to their body image and body identity.

However, a concern with much of this data is that it either has focused on young men and/or adolescents, or when looking at pre-adolescent boys the data has been largely quantitatively based. Some would argue that very young boys' voices have not been heard on this topic. Two reasons may explain this neglect. First, qualitative research methods may not adequately deal with such a young age group (Birbeck & Drummond, 2005). Secondly, some might ask 'what do very young boys have to say that is worth telling at such a young age?' As I will endeavour to highlight within this book boys, at a variety of ages from early childhood through to early adulthood, have a great deal to offer in terms of insight into the way young males come to view their bodies over the course of their childhood.

It is difficult to ascertain when males begin to develop conceptions around themselves, their bodies and masculinities, and the meanings they place on body image. Body image researchers have placed a large amount of time and energy investigating the period of early adolescence, mainly in girls, but increasingly in boys, as it is commonly perceived as the most significant transitional period in an individual's life. That is, he or she is changing from a child into an adult where physical and emotional changes occur quite dramatically. How an adolescent deals with these changes has often been perceived as a measure of adult success. While the value of understanding an adolescent

male's construction of body image and body identity cannot be questioned, the need to investigate the early years is a priority (Birbeck & Drummond, 2005). The earlier we begin to understand the meanings and values that young boys place on their bodies and notions of masculinities the more comprehensive our understanding of boys' development will be.

While referring to young boys' bodies from a body image perspective is certainly a necessity given the paucity of data and understanding around this area, it is also important to reflect upon the way in which young boys' bodies influence aspects such as health, physical activity and the construction of masculinities. For too long we have dismissed the significance of boys' bodies as a means through which masculinities can be constructed, and aspects such as health and physical activity can be impacted. Take, for example, a young boy who is overweight. Such is the stigma attached to being overweight in contemporary Western society that he is likely to bear the brunt of stigmatisation and potential marginalisation as a consequence of body shaming and bullying from peers. Even in the event of not being targeted by peers the sheer pervasiveness of the anti-obesity discourse within Western culture means he is more than likely to be aware of negative attitudes towards a body that looks like his. Then you have the boys who are excessively tall or short. That is, their bodies do not 'fit into' the average or perceived 'normal' height range and stand out as being different to their peers. Being different is a key element. A number of years ago, I wrote a paper titled 'The meaning of difference: Young gay males' experiences at school' (Drummond, 2007). While the paper was not necessarily about bodies or body image, it was based around what it was like for boys who identified as being gay and the manner in which they were perceived as being 'different' from the majority of their male peers at school. Importantly, I am not in any way suggesting that being excessively tall or short, or visibly different, is remotely the same as being a gay male at school. However, what I am suggesting is that being different and deviating from the 'norm' can have significant implications for the way in which young males are embraced and perceived by their peers, which ultimately impacts the construction of individual masculine identity (Drummond, 2007).

Summary

The male body has never been placed under so much scrutiny than it is currently being placed under in contemporary Western society. The impact of traditional and new social media is 'triangulating' forces whereby males, and in particular young males, are never very far away from the gaze. Most young males have access to social media, while traditional media such as television and movies still pervade a large part of our social setting. That fact that a television or movie 'star', with an aesthetically appealing body can be seen on the screen and then further promoted on social media through advertising or sharing by peers, promotes and triangulates the significance of this image. With the multitude of forces all promoting and championing the image, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a young male might begin to compare and ultimately question his body shape, size and physique in a negative manner. We know this can occur, given that women and girls have been subject to this bodily scrutiny for centuries and have succumbed to a range of subsequent mental health conditions including anorexia and bulimia nervosa. Unfortunately, this is a relatively new phenomenon for males and has implications for body image disturbances including muscle and body dysmorphia as well as eating disorders (Drummond, 2002; Pope et al., 2000). Indeed, for young males the past 20 years have seen an increase in the social expectation placed on 'what a male body should look like'. This has largely occurred through changes in cultural ideologies in terms of broader and more diverse social commentary around a range of issues, including what a man should look like. Indeed, it is also a reflection of the feminist movement, providing women and girls with the opportunity to feel comfortable about voicing their opinions around what they perceive to be sexually attractive in men and the types of things they want to do with their life (Stalp, 2015).

With this cumulative gaze comes the need to better understand the major issues at play. Significantly, as increasing numbers of boys have access to new media, there is greater potential to have more exposure to aesthetically appealing bodies. Similarly, these boys are being exposed to such images much earlier given the use of electronic devices such as computers, tablets and smartphones from a very young age. Despite some

of the boys not owning such devices the ubiquity and their presence in the community, including those of peers, means they are never very far away from the images. As adults from a generation or two—or three—away from these children we do not have a complete understanding of the issues they face on a regular basis. We can at least, in part, begin to develop a sense of understanding by talking with these young boys in order to develop some strategic insight. By researching with young boys using qualitative research methods we can listen to their voices, and perspectives, to assist us as researchers and decision-makers about strategies to support young males with potential concerns of the body.

The way in which boys perceive their own bodies as well as other males arguably plays a significant role in the development of a young male's masculine identity. For a considerable amount of time, concerns around body image and identity have been primarily linked to adolescent girls and young women (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2008). However, the significant emphasis placed upon bodily aesthetics in contemporary Western culture has meant that boys and young males are not immune to body image concerns (Drummond, 2011; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003). Much of the research on bodies has focused on young people, particularly around adolescence and early adulthood (e.g. Carlson-Jones, 2004; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). Importantly, not a lot has focused on boys from early childhood. The following chapters will provide this unique insight, as the boys I have interviewed over an eight-year period provide their perspectives on growing up male with a particular reference to bodies, sport, health, physical activity and masculinities. The data goes beyond image and provides the opportunity to understand the meaning of boys' bodies within a broader context of sport, health and physical activity.

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6

Boys' Bodies in Early Childhood

The Meaning of Muscles, Men and Masculinity to Young Boys

My son is 16 years old. However, when he reached eight years of age, I noticed that he was quickly moving out of early childhood as he recognised and embraced the social and cultural forces that influence most children in contemporary Western culture to 'grow up quickly' and what McDonnell (2005) has called the 'turbo-childhood'. Despite parental guidance to shield him from the more negative influences, it is the ubiquitous nature of these forces that offer the potential to change behaviour and gender-constructed ideologies from a very early age, just as it has been for my daughter, now 19 years old. The visual association with bodies is providing a significant dynamic force with the potential for immense psychological and physical harm to children in contemporary Western culture.

Given the intense manner in which bodies are now on display in contemporary Western culture, children of all ages regularly have the opportunity to gaze upon semi-naked and often sexualised images of bodies. Regardless of whether bodies appear on advertising

billboards, television or in print media, the exposure is omnipresent and arguably influential (Grogan, 2007). Additionally, there has been a plethora of research papers to indicate that adolescents are at risk of developing body image concerns based on this constant exposure to beautified bodies (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003). According to Dohnt and Tiggemman (2008), this has now filtered down to pre-adolescent girls, particularly leading to a desire for thinness. However, over the past decade, there has been increasing awareness of young men's and adolescent males' emerging body image concerns (Drummond, 2011; O'Dea, 2007; Soban, 2006).

Noteworthy, and irrespective of gender, is that the majority of research on bodies has focused on young people, particularly around adolescence and early adulthood (see, for example, Carlson-Jones, 2004; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). This can be accounted for in the argument that adolescence is the significant period where immense physical change occurs. Therefore, researching this period will seemingly offer important scope for understanding and possible interventions. However, there has been a dearth of research on bodies and body image among children, particularly children in early childhood (Birbeck & Drummond, 2005). When gender is taken into consideration, there is a further lack of research where boys are concerned.

In terms of bodies, it is not simply 'body image' that needs to be taken into consideration. Bodies play a pivotal role in how a young person, or any person for that matter, perceives himself or herself. One's body may influence the type of sport they play, or the physical activities in which they engage. Alternatively, it may play a role in them not engaging in any sport or physical activity at all, such is the negative view of their body in terms of its aesthetics and how it functions. Once again, the notion of *being* and *doing* is central to this construct. Therefore, this chapter will not solely focus on body image among early childhood boys. It will explore the way in which they perceive their bodies and how this influences the types of sports and physical activities in which they engage. It will also examine how boys perceive male

bodies in general within the context of contemporary Western society. The boys discuss male bodies that are large, small, tall, short, active, sedentary as well as the bodies of significant men in their lives such as their fathers, brothers, uncles and grandfathers. The chapter will highlight the power of perception for these young males and the implications this has for them in terms of their own body image and the manner in which their bodies are used. It should also be recognised that within the context of this research and for the purpose of this book, early childhood is deemed between five and eight years of age. The following themes that will be explored have emerged from the many interviews with boys during this phase of their lives. It was a pleasure to listen to their voices as they spoke about life with such enthusiasm.

The Meaning of Muscles

Given that I have been conducting research around masculinities, sport and health for the past 15 years, I have had the opportunity of interviewing older men, young men, gay men, straight men, adolescent and pre-adolescent males, to name a few. The consistent theme emerging throughout these interviews has been that of muscles and muscularity being a signifier of masculinity (Drummond, 1996; Stibbe, 2004). One should bear in mind that, while boys in early childhood have begun to socially construct gender (Blaise, 2005), they have no conception of the meaning of masculinity. Therefore, during the interviews, the boys were invited to draw a picture of a man. They were not asked to draw a masculine or, indeed, muscular man. It is noteworthy that the resulting pictures were of either muscular men, or men in the act of developing muscles, such as weight training. The figures below provide an indication of the way the boys come to view men and their view of what a man should look like.
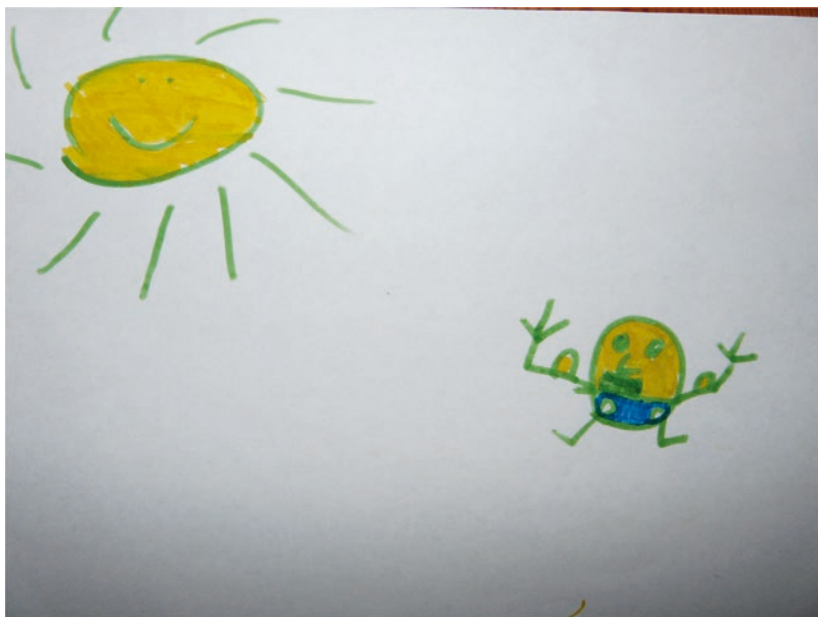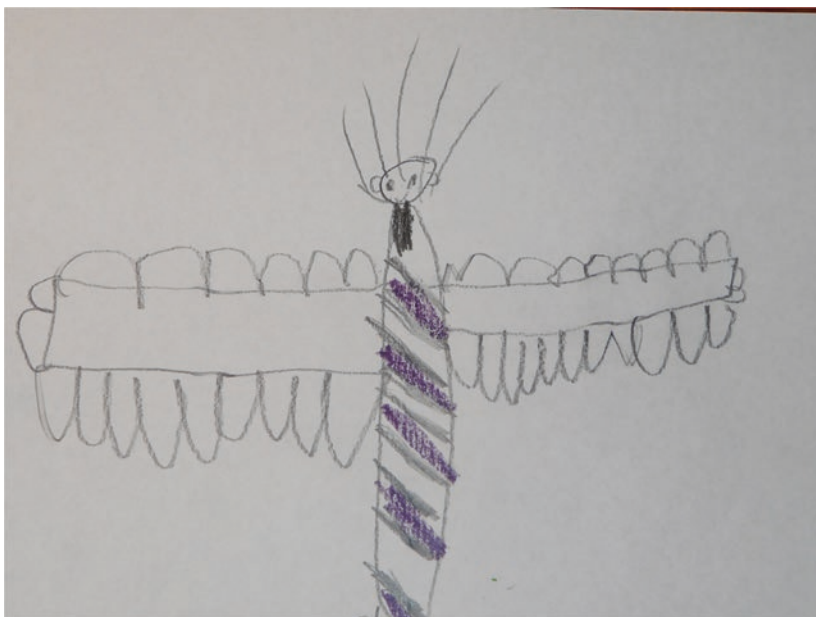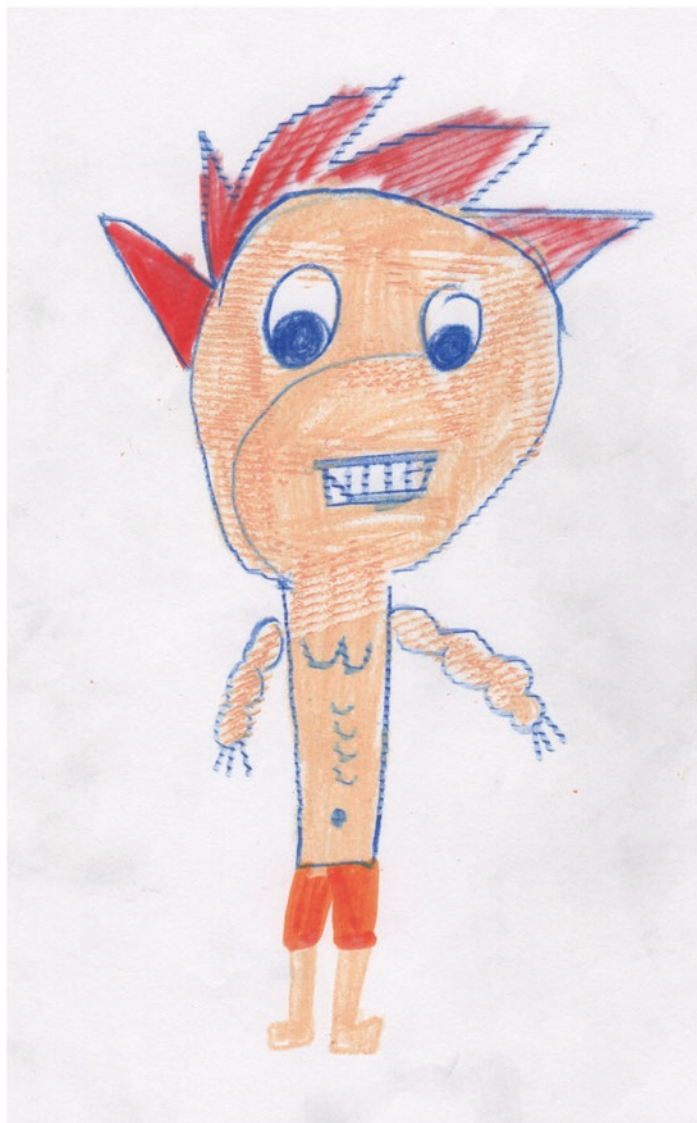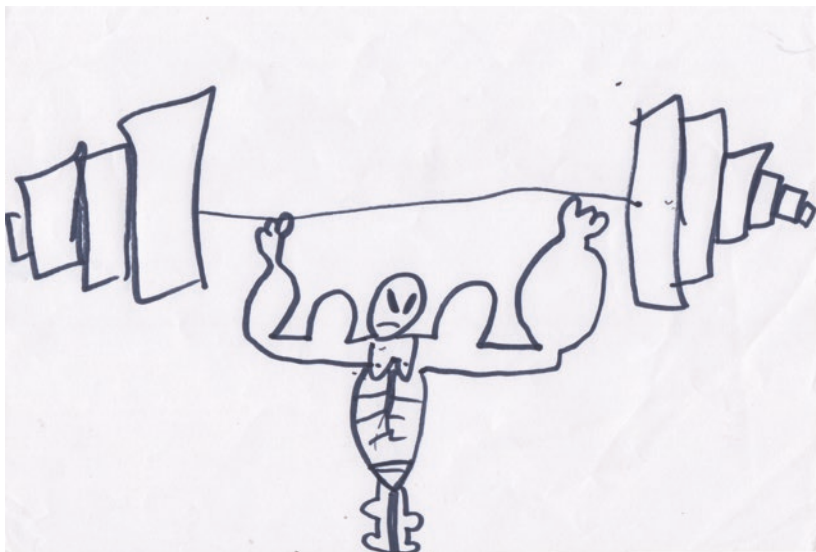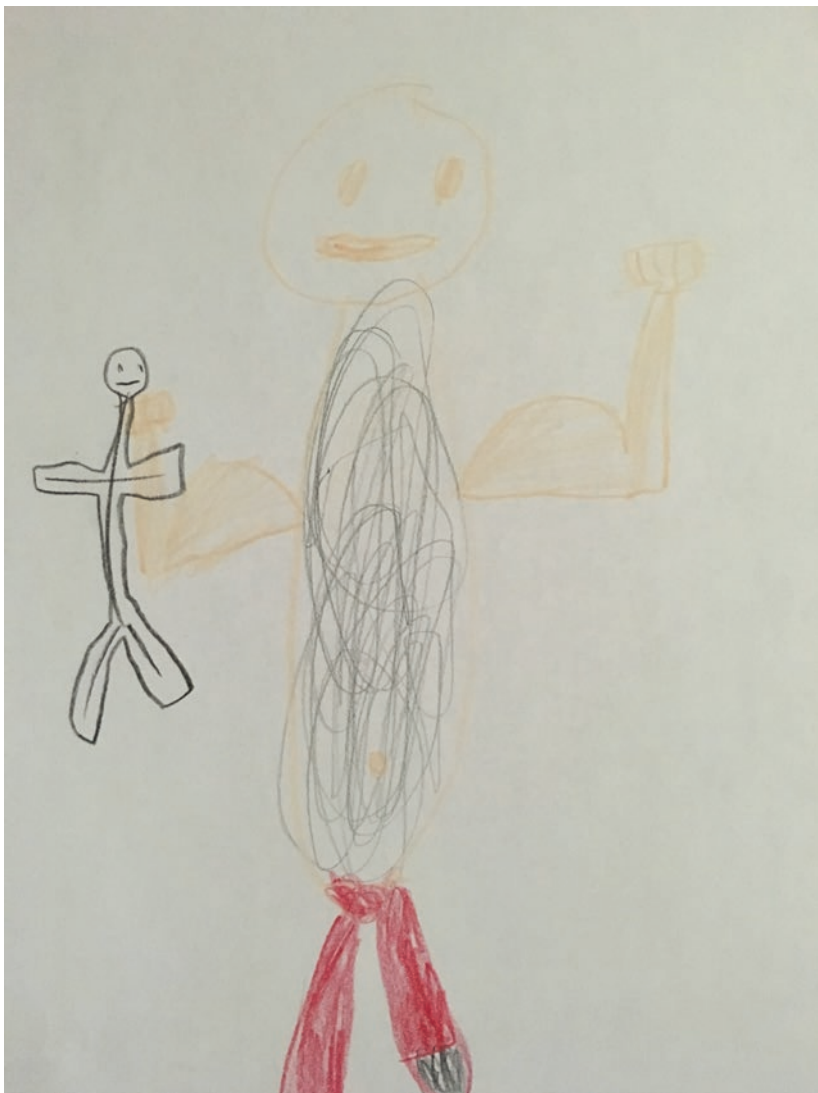
The comments by the boys also reflected a taken-for-granted notion of the relationship between that of men, muscularity and strength. Bearing in mind the drawings that have just been presented, the following comments are representative of the way in which the boys define a man:

A man is someone who has muscles all over him.

Look how big his muscles are [commenting on his own drawing].

Men are strong, strong and they've got their muscles hanging out.

While these comments are quite explicit in terms of specifically identifying what a man looks like; the following discussion was representative of other boys' views and the way in which they attempted to interpret their perspective of a man's body, his muscularity and physicality.

Ben: A man should be like a caveman.

(Interviewer) *I*: A caveman! What does a caveman look like?

Ben: He has umm….He has horns through his nose.

I: Does he?

Ben: Yeah, he has a thing coming across. A sash coming across, and a tiger skin.

Seb: Oh, and yeah, and he's big.

I: Really! How big is he?

Seb: About this big [arms spread wide and high], and he has, he's so big he has like big muscles.

I: Does he?

Seb: Yeah….Yeah he's a slammer.

This notion of being big, muscular and powerful in order to display a foreboding dominance over others was a constant point of discussion by the boys. The need to have muscles to be perceived as being a formidable foe was prevalent among all of the focus groups. The following discussion is testimony to such an ideology and is emblematic of the type of discussion raised by all of the boys.

I: Okay, so tell me about the picture of the man you have drawn.

Henry: Yeah, he has muscles. He's very big and he has a giant head, bigger than his legs.

I: Really, wow. Now, you talked about muscles; what does it mean if a person is muscly?

Henry: It means they've got big muscles.

Levi: That means they're really strong.

I: Does it?

Levi: And you better keep away from them.

I: Really, you better keep away from them?

Levi: Yeah.

I: Wow.

Levi: Because when they get angry they might hurt you. But if you are near someone really muscly and strong you can go close to them and they'll protect you.

Similarly, another group of boys articulated a response espousing the same notion in the following discussion:

> *I*: Now, because you have all drawn pictures of men with big muscles, let's talk about the muscles then.
> *Flynn*: Well, men have more muscles than ladies.
> *I*: Why do you think men have more muscles?
> *Flynn*: Because they eat healthy food. Not junk. Healthy food.
> *I*: But if ladies eat healthy food, will they get muscles too?
> *Flynn*: No [all boys].
> *I*: Why not?
> *Flynn*: Because they don't have any muscles because they're not boys.
> *I*: So, only boys can have muscles, is that right?
> *Toby*: Yes [all agree].
> *I*: What does it mean if you've got muscles?
> *Toby*: It means they get healthy food, and they buy heaps of healthy things because they want to get really strong.
> *Ethan*: So they can get in the Olympics.
> *Jake*: Yeah, because they want to win.
> *I*: Do you think you'll ever have muscles one day?
> *Flynn*: Yeah [all agree].
> *Toby*: I could beat Sebastian up.
> *Ethan*: Me too.
> *I*: That's not nice. When do you think you'll start getting your muscles?
> *Ethan*: When I'm older.

The visible, *being*, element of muscles is acutely understood by the majority of these early childhood boys as an important signifier of hegemonic masculinity, which has been referred to as the hegemonic aesthetic (Drummond, 2011; Filiault & Drummond, 2007). For these boys, appearing big and muscular seemingly evokes feelings associated with power and dominance. The following discussion with a group of boys accurately highlights this point as well as provides an articulate representation of the majority of perceptions among all of the boys.

Caleb: It's mean to show your muscles to other people because if they have smaller muscles, and someone has bigger muscles, and then they'll go, 'ha, ha you have small muscles'. It will be mean to them.

I: Do you think so? Have you ever seen anyone do that before?

Caleb: Yep.

Hayden: Yep.

I: Have you Hayden?

Hayden: I have.

I: What do they do?

Hayden: I saw them going like this [flexes his biceps].

I: As if he was flexing his muscles?

Hayden: Yeah but then he got smaller. It was big, then it got smaller, then they went 'ha, ha you've got small muscles, you've got small muscles'.

To the early childhood boys involved in this research, muscles define what a male should look like. It appears they are a visual representation of strength, which is a signifier of masculinity. Muscles are also a visual representation of not being a girl. This aspect is an important point that is situated at the heart of young males' gender-constructed notions of life, and the resultant attitudes and behaviours they display not only associated with themselves, but also towards others. However, it should be recognised that none of the boys identified their desire to be muscular or bigger than their current size. They merely reflected upon what a man should look like, and in the process, provided additional discourse around what that body could potentially *do*.

Strength and Doing Masculinity

As previously identified, strength that emerges from muscularity was an important element of the perception of being a man for these boys. Being strong, according to these boys, means that: 'you can *do* more things'. Additionally, it means that one can *do* things better, particularly in terms of defeating others in competitions that require physicality. It is important to recognise that boys not only identified defeating their male peers in competition, but also specifically girls. Once again,

gendered constructions of masculinity being represented through something that is not a girl are prevalent in the emergent themes within the data and are represented in the following discussion:

> *I*: Okay, what were you going to say?
> *Joe*: And a girl said 'do you want to have a match'? And I had a match and I won, because boys are stronger than girls, [did] you know that?
> *I*: Are they?
> *Joe*: Yeah.
> *I*: Who says boys are stronger than girls?
> *Joe*: Most of the boys.
> *I*: Why do you think that is?
> *Joe*: I'm not sure.
> *Noah*: Oh, I know why.
> *I*: Why?
> *Noah*: Because girls aren't brave enough to go into a wrestle.
> *I*: Aren't they brave enough? Are some of the girls here [at this school] brave enough to go into a wrestle?
> *Noah*: No, they don't have muscles.

Accordingly, the boys in this research regularly articulated that girls are simply 'not good enough'. They go on to reaffirm such a claim by stating phrases as in girls 'not being strong' or 'not being fast'. The significant amount of emphasis these boys place on physicality, at such a young age, provides important contextual information around the way in which boys begin to formulate their sense of identity and masculinity in opposition to girls and femininity. However, it was this notion of strength, power and dominance over others that was central to most of the discussions, particularly with respect to the sports in which men are 'supposed' to engage. It is within these archetypal masculinised sports that men seemingly have the opportunity to display their masculinity through their aggressive strength acts. It appears to these boys that hurting others is a signifier of strength and hence of being a man. For example, one group of boys claimed:

> *Corey*: Strength means toughness.
> *I*: What do you mean by toughness?

Corey: Rugby is tough. They actually hold the ball and they crash out the other teams, like a bomber. Like a big bomb. They go like this, 'POW'.

I: Do they hurt each other?

Corey: Yeah because you can hit into each other. And they might bleed.

Fletcher: No, the toughest thing in the world is wrestling.

I: Really, why's that?

Fletcher: Because you punch and jump on people.

Engaging in tough sports is clearly seen by these boys as an extension of this notion of 'doing' masculinity. It appears that the boys have a variety of perspectives of what constitutes a tough sport. However, it is clear that all definitions include aspects of aggression and pain. The following discourse is an articulate representation of the boys' discussions on tough sports together while highlighting some of the broader issues around the way in which boys should 'act' and the manner in which they are socially constructed to do so from an early age.

I: You mentioned tough sports. What is a tough sport?

Corey: Football.

I: Why would that be a tough sport?

Corey: Because you have to kick hard balls.

Fletcher: And you've got to watch out, so you don't knock any people out.

I: Would rugby be a tough sport?

Fletcher: That's a really tough sport.

I: Why is that really tough?

Corey: Because sometimes you get knocked over and stuff, so it's really tough.

Nick: I know and sometimes they bleed.

Corey: And sometimes that doesn't hurt.

I: Sometimes it doesn't hurt; what about if it does hurt?

I: Are you allowed to cry if it hurts?

Corey: No.

I: Why not?

Corey: Because then you'll feel like a baby.

I: You'll feel like a baby?

Fletcher: And that could mean that you're a little kid or something.

I: Really? But what about if you guys get hurt, do you cry?

Corey: Nuh [all boys].

Corey: Sometimes I don't, like when I fall down and then my head hurts sometimes I don't even cry.

I: Why don't you cry?

Corey: Maybe 'cause I'm growing up.

Corey: Because maybe it doesn't hurt.

I: Tell me about this, you're saying that you shouldn't cry?

Corey: 'Cause they treat you like a baby.

I: They treat you like a baby if you cry?

Corey: Yeah.

I: Okay. Has anyone taught you not to cry?

Corey: Yeah.

I: Who?

Corey: Daddy told me not to cry.

Fletcher: I just learned it myself.

I: So you're daddy told you not to cry; what does he say?

Corey: He sent me up to my bedroom, that's what he's done.

I: If you start crying he'll send you up to your bedroom, really?

Corey: If I do something, when I cried daddy said he'd put me in my bedroom.

I: Why does he do that?

Corey: Because he's cross, he doesn't like me crying.

While engaging in tough sports is about developing masculinity for these boys based on physically demanding physical sporting pursuits, it is the notion of not crying that is also compelling in terms of its potential to uphold a masculine identity. Strongly endorsed by their fathers, it appears that the boys in this research have developed an understanding that to not cry is to be masculine. Arguably, this is the initial stage of the development of emotional resilience for young males, which can have negative implications for their health as men later in life.

Fastest, First, Best

While this is a theme that could have arguably been located as a sub-theme within 'doing masculinity', it was the persistent nature of these comments by the boys that has led to this being a theme in its own

right. The boys consistently and in some instances, relentlessly, talked about the significance of being the fastest runner in the class and within their year group. They also talked about being first in running races and, therefore, being the best. It appeared the boys had developed their own social hierarchy based on the speed at which they can run. It was common for boys to discuss the hierarchy within their own immediate class and then compare and contrast with other boys throughout the year group. In some cases, the boys emphasised and highlighted names from these other classes, yet they had never met these boys, nor did they know who they were or what they looked like. Significantly, the reputation of these boys preceded them. The following discussion was typical of the type of conversation among all of the focus groups.

> *Hunter*: Running fast. You have to run fast.
> *I*: Is running fast important?
> *Hunter*: Yes.
> *I*: Why?
> *Hunter*: Because you get to see who is the best.
> *I*: Who is the fastest runner in your class?
> *Hunter*: It's actually me. Mmm, yes, me, then Daniel and then Tyler [all boys agree].

Another group of boys stated something similar.

> *Leo*: I'm the fastest in the class.
> *I*: Why is that good?
> *Leo*: Because you can win races.
> *I*: And winning races is important to you?
> *Isaac*: Yes, because then you get the gold medal.
> *I*: Why are gold medals so important?
> *Isaac*: Because it shows you are the best.

Being the fastest in the class allows these boys to develop a sense of social order in terms of masculine hierarchy. However, it is interesting that this hierarchy is based on physicality, and at such a young age. One might contend that given this physicality is visible, it is therefore easier to judge than other aspects of children's lives. It is also arguable that the

pervading media images of sports stars and athletes tend to be predominantly male. This patriarchal sporting and athletic dominance of male sport coverage within the media provides an ideal foundation upon which young males create both positive and negative values associated with sports and physical activities (Whannel, 2002). The notion of winning and competitiveness is heavily embedded within the broader narrative that surrounds these images. Additionally, images of men grimacing in pain and dripping with blood are often lauded as 'normal' archetypal ideals within many masculinised sports such as rugby and Australian football. Clearly, these have implications for young males who perceive this as something to which they should aspire or view as a 'normalised' component of such sports, and for males to endure.

Early Childhood Boys and Their Teeth

This next theme, while seemingly a little tangential to a discussion on bodies, sport and physical activity, has significant implications for understanding around boys, men and their health. The theme discusses findings associated with early childhood boys, their teeth and dental hygiene. Importantly, it should be noted that the school at which the boys attended had no formal curricula around dental hygiene; therefore, the boys had little guided influence around oral health at school. The theme also takes into consideration issues of gender and masculinities as being an important aspect of health among young males.

Research suggests that the way in which masculinity is socially constructed plays an important role in the development of health-oriented behaviours later in a man's life (Courtenay, 2000a; Drummond, 2002; Drummond & Drummond, 2010). Attending to one's health needs is often perceived as a feminised practice by some groups of males, particularly those in adolescence where masculinity is heavily influenced by potentially self-destructive or harmful attitudes, and behaviours around personal health and well-being (Mahalik, Levi-Minzi, & Walker, 2007). In other instances, while not necessarily overtly engaging in harmful behaviours, a general apathy towards personal health can sometimes be regarded as the antithesis of femininity and therefore also regarded as

masculinised practice. That is, anything that is not feminine is perceived to be masculine (Drummond, 2011).

It is important to recognise the significance of developing positive attitudes and behaviours around health in boys to ward off potentially detrimental long-term implications around health. While the symptoms of ill health associated with lifestyle disease do not generally present themselves in childhood and adolescence, they are often grounded in the attitudes and behaviours developed early in life and present during adulthood and early ageing. For example, research indicates that an overweight or obese adolescent will likely become an overweight or obese adult (Willerhausen, Blettner, Kasaj, & Hohenfellner, 2007). Therefore, given the high association with lifestyle disease and men's poor health status later in life, the need to address these issues early in a boy's life is paramount (Drummond & Drummond, 2010).

Evidence suggests that poor dental health among males is linked with overweight and obesity (Willerhausen et al., 2007). Additionally, Willerhausen et al. (2007) identify that being overweight or obese has a greater potential to lead to dental caries. Attending to the dental and health hygiene practices of young males could positively affect dental health, and it can be speculated that other health-oriented behaviours, particularly those around nutrition and lifestyle disease, could be positively influenced (Willerhausen et al., 2007). Kawamura, Takase, Sasahara, and Okada (2008), in their study on health attitudes among young people, identified that girls had significantly higher scores than boys in their desire to improve oral health care (e.g. with teeth brushing) as well as their concern over the number of cavities. The study indicated that girls' overall oral health behaviour was better than that of boys and that the tendency to postpone visits to the dentist increased markedly with age. Similarly, Hallett and O'Rourke's (2002) study found that boys within the city of Brisbane, Australia, exhibited significantly higher caries severity compared with girls of similar age. However, the reason behind this was not clear and articulated the need for further research.

As previously identified, the interviews were designed to investigate masculinities within the context of health, sport and physical activity among boys. Given the context in which health is socially constructed

within contemporary Western culture, issues such as nutrition, dietary behaviours and food were all discussed within the broader framework of health. Oral health was an aspect of health raised alongside such dietary behaviours as sugar intake and poor nutrition habits, where a number of the boys appeared proud of their penchant for sweet foods and their disregard for oral health. Given the boys' awareness of sugar laden foods labelled as being 'fun foods', 'sometimes foods', or 'party foods', it is possible to suggest that this disregard for oral health and a snubbing of health messages at this early age provides a looking glass through which older boys' and men's health conventions may be viewed. The following extract is from one of the interviews with the boys:

> *Tyler*: I have five sweet teeth, one, two, three, four and five.
> (Interviewer) *I*: Five sweet teeth, what do you mean [by] sweet teeth?
> *Tyler*: Like lolly tooth.
>   I like sweet stuff, like junk stuff.
> *I*: Yeah, why is there something on your teeth?
> *Tyler*: No I just like junk stuff.
> *I*: Oh do you? Have any of you gotten fillings or anything like that?
> *Tyler*: I've got fillings, I have two.
> *I*: Really, why is that?
> *Tyler*: Because I don't know, I don't brush my teeth well.
> *I*: You've got to brush your teeth.
> *Owen*: I don't brush my teeth ever.
> *I*: Really?
> *Owen*: I like keeping junk stuff in my teeth.

A similar type of discussion emerged from another group of boys when they claimed:

> *Ben*: I don't clean my teeth and I don't care about the stuff in them.
> *I*: Don't you clean them before you come to school?
> *Ben*: No, I don't care about the stuff in them.
> *I*: Don't you?
> *Seb*: Sometimes, but I don't clean them properly, that's why I have fillings.
> *I*: Well who cleans them? Do your mum and dad help you clean your teeth?
> *Daniel*: I never clean my teeth.

I: Do you forget to clean your teeth?
Daniel: Kind of, I don't brush them at all.
I: Do you brush them before you got to bed?
Ben: No.
I: Why not?
Daniel: No one tells me to.

This final comment by B3 in relation to cleaning his teeth and stating that 'no one tells me to' is a fundamental issue that requires immediate attention and is situated at the heart of parental health literacy. While this is a group of middle-class boys with parents who are likely to be somewhat health literate given the socio-demographic in which they live, it is apparent that these boys require a degree of coercion or at the very least, a reminder to brush their teeth on a regular basis. The boys do not appear to have developed the necessary skills to undertake regular teeth brushing of their own accord. Nor, in most cases, do they seem to care. Therefore, the role of parents in maintaining a degree of influence over the boys' dental health is crucial in the development of behaviours such as cleaning teeth and oral health. Further, given that there was no formal school class time devoted to the issue of dental hygiene, this may also raise the question as to introducing some form of dental hygiene education within the school curriculum to support parent instruction at home.

The following discussion from another set of boys vindicates such a claim.

Corey: Tell me, do you clean your teeth much?
Corey: Yes.
Fletcher: No.
Nick: No.
Fletcher: I fake it.
I: You fake it?
Fletcher: I go down there and I get my toothbrush, I put it in my mouth without any toothpaste on, I just pretend.
I: Really. Why is that?
Fletcher: Because I want to.
Nick: Sometimes I forget to do it.

Having the capacity to clean one's own teeth is perceived as somewhat of a milestone of independence and can be seen as reducing adult control over a child's life (Mayall, 1993). Additionally, it is arguable that dental hygiene at home is one of the first independent acts of health management to occur within a child's life. Therefore, faking one's own teething-cleaning regime by these boys may be seen as a form of autonomous defiance and may also be the foundations of hegemonic masculine behaviours associated with adolescent and adult male health. There is a wealth of literature surrounding socially constructed masculinised attitudes and behaviours towards health, which have negative implications for males (Courtenay, 2000a, 2000b; Drummond, 2002). Given that dental hygiene is one of the initial independent health-oriented acts; the need to understand why some boys choose to fake cleaning their teeth as opposed to those boys who adopt a regular dental hygiene regime is of significance. The links between the social construction of masculinity and health behaviours can play a part in this understanding, particularly as the boys move through the developmental periods of childhood and adolescence.

While some of the negative issues and barriers around dental hygiene that emerged from the boys' interview data have been highlighted, there were also some encouraging aspects that need to be recognised. By providing facilitators as well as barriers, health promoters will gain a deeper understanding of the potential programs that can be implemented for successful health outcomes around dental hygiene among boys in early childhood.

I: What about your teeth?
Dylan: I have metal teeth.
I: Do you?
Kane: Yes, because you don't brush your teeth a lot.
Dylan: Yes I do, I brush them three times a day.
Kane: Good for you then [all laughing].
Dylan: You're crazy.
I: Do you have to get special caps on your teeth, do you?
Dylan: Yes.
I: Why is that?

Dylan: I don't know.

I: Do you guys clean your teeth much?

Chris: I clean my teeth three times a day; I clean them in the morning, after school twice.

Kane: And the afternoon.

I: Does anyone make you clean your teeth or do you remember to just do it by yourself?

Chris: I remember.

I: Do you?

Chris: I do it by myself. But my dentist told me to do it three times a day.

I: That's good. What about you, do you clean your teeth?

Dylan: Not really.

Chris: No, I have to do flossing, use toothpaste, mouthwash and tooth mousse.

I: Oh really.

Chris: Every, three times a day.

I: To make your teeth stronger?

Chris: Yes. Every single day.

I: Why don't you clean your teeth?

Dylan: Because it's crazy.

In this previous line of enquiry, it is clear that some boys do have the potential to heed the messages about dental hygiene and act upon them. However, there is a possibility that too much responsibility is handed over to the boys in early childhood to maintain their teeth brushing and dental hygiene regime. The final comment by one of the boys is arguably testament to such a claim. It is recommended that parents should assist in cleaning their children's teeth until the age of six (Oulis, Raadal, & Martens, 2000). For these boys, only one of 33 gained assistance from their parents in terms of brushing once or twice a week. It was claimed by this boy that:

My dad comes in about a twice a week to make sure that I am cleaning my teeth OK. I've got one of those electric toothbrushes and he makes sure that I am getting the tops and bottoms and the backs and the fronts. It buzzes off after two minutes. It always needs recharging. But that's OK. We have a charger.

There are a number of assumptions one can make in regard to the reasons underpinning the desire of independence around the boys' teeth cleaning practices. One could assume that the boys themselves are seeking independence around an act, which is conceivably attainable at their age. Alternatively, it could be a parental desire to hand over a personal responsibility to their child, which they perceive can be carried out sufficiently despite the boys' young age. Regardless of the underlying reasons, given the age group involved in this study being between five and eight, it is arguable that more supervision is required where boys and teeth cleaning in general are concerned. Additional reinforcement of dental health practices both at home and school could provide positive long-term health benefits beyond the realm of oral health.

Implications for Health

While the research that underpinned this book was not designed to specifically target dental hygiene, it emerged as an important point of discussion within the context of broader health issues and masculinities. As stated, the boys expressed a degree of autonomy around their teeth cleaning and dental hygiene regimes. While this can be viewed in a positive light in terms of the boys taking control of their dental health, it needs to be reflected upon in the context of their early childhood lives and also the wider milieu of masculinities and how these are socially constructed.

Young males' health gradually deteriorates in the absence of parental involvement, generally around the beginning the adolescence (Drummond & Drummond, 2012). Risk-taking behaviour and a general disregard for personal health, and sometimes safety, are arguably a by-product of hegemonic masculine behaviours displayed among young males. It is the disregard for personal health, which has been socially constructed as a masculinised act that is constantly culturally endorsed and perpetuated within contemporary Western culture. Conversely, attention to health is often perceived as somewhat feminised and therefore often rejected by young males. Cleaning one's teeth and fundamental dental hygiene can be rejected further given the perceived aesthetic nature of teeth as a cosmetic rather than functional part of the body.

Attending to the health education needs of boys in early childhood is imperative in developing attitudes and behaviours that can be adopted for adolescence and beyond. However, boys need to recognise that attending to health needs is not feminising and will be important for later life. The problem is that most boys—and many young people in general—'live for now' and do not adequately comprehend the implications of long-term health-oriented behaviours. Therefore, where dental hygiene and teeth cleaning are concerned, boys need to recognise the practical implications of not brushing and flossing. Given that teeth are often regarded cosmetically, in so far as being seen and discussed in terms of their aesthetics, there is potential to take an alternative perspective and discuss this aspect of the body in very practical terms. Health promoters need to be cognisant of gender when discussing the potential benefits of dental hygiene and teeth cleaning and ask, 'what will work best for this group of boys with whom we are working'? Gender, together with age, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status and health literacy also need to be taken into consideration.

Promoting dental health among boys early in their lives has the capacity to create positive health implications beyond dental hygiene. Given that cleaning teeth is one of the first acts of health-oriented independence, utilising the process of dental health as a mechanism to teach boys about health promoting behaviours in general is possible. By promoting vigilance around cleaning teeth regularly, and appropriately, including other aspects such as flossing and regular dental checks, the significance of self-monitoring health promotion is emphasised. This is something which is lacking among many males from adolescence. The dental hygiene regime then becomes a template for understanding how self-monitoring health promotion can work. This can be taught at home, in schools and recognised culturally as a method of developing young males' positive health practices. As Willerhausen, Haas, Krummenauer, and Hohenfellner (2004, p. 404) articulated, 'the significant success in the reduction of caries prevalence with preventive programs in schools could represent an exemplary concept for corresponding health efforts in the area of nutritional guidance and an increase in physical activities'. It is these areas of men's health that require attention most during adulthood. In finding another means

through which they can be facilitated and positively promoted early in a boy's life, such as through dental hygiene or other traditional health and well-being practices, we offer greater potential for change.

We understand the significance of early dental hygiene practices in both boys and girls. However, the independence of cleaning teeth early in a boy's life offers immense scope for future health promotion initiatives later in life. Listening to the voices of boys in early childhood about such practices has the capacity to provide important understanding in how we go about improving not only the dental health of boys, but also other aspects of young males' health.

Summary

The basis of this chapter was to highlight the way in which boys in early childhood perceive the male body both in terms of what it can do and its aesthetics, or how it looks. It is clear from the boys' narratives that even between the ages of five and eight years, they have a clearly constructed notion of what a male body should look like and how it should perform. Indeed, this notion is very traditionally oriented and based on historic and traditional notions of masculinities. That is, men should be muscular, athletic, good at sports and so on. Additionally, the sports that men should be good at are those seen as 'blood sports', which once again hark back to traditional masculinised ideologies held within Western cultures.

Earlier in the book, an example was provided in relation to a boy at my high school who was a figure skating champion. He received far less 'masculine capital' than boys who were not athletically gifted and yet were team members in the school football and cricket teams. The comments made by these boys in early childhood around the importance of playing blood sports are further vindication of such an ideology. Similarly, being seen as the fastest runner in the class was also perceived highly and created a social pecking order that placed those fastest at the top. It seems what the body can 'do' is pivotal among early childhood peers given that what the body looks like, in terms of muscularity, is somewhat irrelevant during this early phase of life. Having said this, the

boys clearly have an understanding of the significance associated with developing and maintaining a muscular physique, particularly where sports are concerned. They know that being a muscular male is regarded highly given that the majority of high-profile sportsmen, they admire and idolise display bodies that are muscular, and perform well. The bodies the boys cherish are aesthetically appealing, and they are highly functional in sports that are socially and culturally revered. At this early stage of their lives, such bodies are highly aspirational and hold enormous potential in terms of social (masculine) capital.

The other aspect of this chapter that is significant is the association with early childhood boys and their initial foray into personal health. Using dental hygiene as an exemplar for this first act of personal health provides evidence that, even at a young age boys display elements of, some might say, neglect when it comes to health promotion. Others might argue that it is boys taking an anti-authoritarian stance in an attempt to display risk-taking behaviours. Regardless of the perspective one might take, it does provide an opportunity to understand some of the attitudes and behaviours that early childhood boys display with respect to health. Indeed, allowing the boys to clean their teeth is seen to be one of their first forms of personal health and hygiene that is handed over to them by their parents that does not require immediate supervision once they have learned the brushing 'skill'. Some might suggest that is a potential 'looking glass' through which we can see the adolescent and adult male where personal health is concerned given the statistics surrounding men, and their attention to individual health and ultimate longevity.

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7

Boys' Bodies in the Middle Years

Understanding the Middle Years

The middle years of a boy's life in primary school are interesting. Typically, such boys are aged between nine and 11. However, many are still caught in the early childhood years either physically, emotionally or both. On the other hand, there are some boys who are seemingly ready to move into these conceptual years, well beyond their physical age, and navigate a more direct path to adolescence. Irrespective of whether these boys mature early or they are potential late bloomers, as some may say, there are significant similarities within this age group with respect to the boys' ideological perspectives around a whole of range of issues. All of the boys at this age are trying to come to terms with developing a sense of independence as well as creating their own unique identity within the restraints of needing to fit in alongside their peers. Indeed, they are acquiring their social cues from one another as well as those that are being presented by the broader culture in which they live. This chapter will therefore reflect more on the changing nature of the boys, and some key issues that shape the way in which they view themselves and the world.

While sport, bodies, health and physical activity are central to the boys' lives, it appears there are many other factors that are now coming into play that have a seemingly greater impact on their lives. The language they use, the clothes they wear outside of school, the hairstyles they maintain—to use hair product or not—the choices of sports and leisure activities in which they participate as well as the emergence of compulsory heterosexuality are key within this age group and developmental period. Take, for example, one boy who was not involved in football or cricket or other traditional masculinised sports. Instead, he was involved in gymnastics, swimming, karate and hip-hop dancing. Interestingly, none of these sports are perceived as overly masculine in the eyes of boys aged between nine and 11 years. Nor were they perceived as such during the early childhood years given that these sports do not really have the capacity to offer the shedding of blood for its participants. They are therefore not seen as 'blood sports', as the boys referred to earlier in the book. The difference between these perspectives in middle years' boys as opposed to those in early childhood is that younger boys were not as forthright in expressing their social views. Indeed, their perspectives were strong. However, they had not associated 'non-blood sports' with gender, sexuality or femininity in such a conceptualised manner. They were certainly vocal in aspects such as sport, health and physical activity. The middle years' boys, however, had begun developing the capacity to conceptualise the meaning of heterosexuality and of being gay together with the relationship associated with sports, physical activities, bodies and physical traits such as voice and bodily mannerisms.

Masculinities, Sexualities and the School Environment

The school environment is a contested arena in which many ambiguities and tensions exist (Mac an Ghaill, 1996). Mac an Ghaill (1996) further claimed that the school environment is a heteronormative one in which gender and sexual divisions of labour are both reflected, and actively produced and reproduced. Heterosexuality, including the traditional ideologies of femininities and masculinities, is made available to students at various hierarchical levels, but it is generally left unquestioned

and rarely deconstructed. Indeed, Epstein (1997) claims that despite the efforts of teachers who do important cultural work on the construction of identity, including sexuality, their efforts are thwarted given the compulsory heterosexual context in which schools are positioned. In 1989, Jones and Mahony discussed the culture of Western-based schools that exists within the boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality. Almost three decades later, compulsory heterosexuality still exists and is produced and reproduced through the moderate mainstream schooling structure. Difference is rarely embraced within such a structure, while sexual difference is even admonished in the heteronormative environment that schools sustain.

According to Pascoe (2005), the relationship between masculinity and sexuality, particularly in schools, is based on a fundamental concept of the 'faggot'. The notion of faggot, claims Pascoe, is closely aligned symbolically with being penetrated and therefore relinquishing power. Since power is inextricably linked to masculine ideology, loss of power as a consequence of being labelled a faggot affects the way an adolescent male constructs his gender identity. He yields to the demand to seem heterosexual to reduce the possibility of homophobic insults. Kimmel and Mahler (2003) identify homophobia as central to the characterisation of masculinity in schools and particularly directed at gay boys.

As Pascoe (2005) notes, with its homophobic jokes and banter, 'fag talk' provides a discourse and a form of masculine disciplines for young males. Given that any male can move in and out of such banter in any given social setting or space, the notion of fag is a fluid construct. Irrespective of one's perceived sexuality, fag talk is premised on a failure to have achieved a particular level of masculinity. This may be related to competency associated with masculinised features, including strength and heterosexual prowess, as well as revealing weaknesses. Kehily and Nayak (1997) concur when they suggest there is indeed a struggle to fashion dominant heterosexual masculinities through the use of jokes and humour among boys in schools. Additionally, they claim, women and subordinate males are the butt of many of these jokes, which in turn blurs the boundaries of harassment and humour. The authors add that homophobic humour is a means by which heterosexual masculinity can be overtly displayed.

Learning from Family

For the boys in this research fag talk, as well as entry-level swearing, was a sign of adhering to a brand of masculinity for this age group of boys present within the school. This was no fault of the teachers who were clearly attempting to thwart 'bad' language and consistently champion the ideology associated with equity and inclusivity at every opportunity. It was clear that many of the boys were attaining their social cues from the broader society, whether through mainstream media, the Internet, video games or from peers beyond the school environment. There was also the 'big brother' factor where boys with older brothers (or male cousins or close friends, etc.) had already developed an established set of masculinised social skills and ideologies from which the younger brother could potentially glean behaviours, language and characteristics.

Significantly, compulsory heterosexuality in primary schools is somewhat of a silent, taken-for-granted assumption. While teachers at this level regularly discuss diversity, equity and issues relating to humanity, the topic of sexualities and homophobia are rarely addressed in primary schools. Therefore, during these formative years, children end up learning about sexualities from family, friends, peers and the broader society in which they live. Given that this process is socially constructed with little or no 'filter' this education process can be alarming, enlightening and potentially life affirming in terms of the way in which they come to view the world where sexualities are concerned. Parents and family play a significant role in the development of socially constructed ideologies and 'world views' for the young child.

I: So who is your favourite sportsperson?
Tyler: Usain Bolt.
I: Yeah? Why do you like Usain Bolt?
Tyler: Well, he's the fastest runner in the world.
I: Yeah that's right.
Tyler: And the second fastest runner is Tyson Gay, but I hate him because he's gay, because it has it in his name.
I: Oh, what's wrong with that?
Tyler: He's gay!

I: And what's wrong with being gay?

Tyler: Because, you know, you're gay!

I: I'm curious, what is wrong with being gay?

Flynn: That's happy.

Tyler: I meant the other gay.

Flynn: Oh!

Tyler: Yuck. I mean, the disgusting gay.

Flynn: Oh!

I: Why is it disgusting?

Tyler: Well, you know—men.

I: Yeah go on, men what?

Tyler: Two men having [giggling].

I: Okay, so tell me, why is that disgusting? I'm just interested.

Tyler: I don't know, it just seems—well, gay means like—two men having….

Tyler: Well gay means like two men married, and it's exactly the same as women, but don't get me started on that, so, for men, yeah it just sounds like he's actually, you know.

I: But I'm actually interested in what you're saying; why is it disgusting for two men to be gay?

Tyler: Just saying 'gay' isn't right for me.

I: Isn't it?

Tyler: Nup…..I mean, it's two men having—you know!

I: Where did you learn about this?

Tyler: Er, my mum and dad talking.

I: Oh yeah that's good, that's good. Do you talk about this sort of stuff a lot?

Tyler: And TV.

I: Where did you learn that sort of stuff on TV?

Tyler: Well, I was looking at this show, right? I didn't see the classification, so I was watching the show and there were two boys saying it, and then I just like switched to the Simpsons, so I didn't hear the rest of it, and yeah—gross.

I: It's gross is it?

Tyler: Too gross.

I: Okay.

Tyler: Oh, two men having…. I just—he was going to have a baby.

I: Yeah well, that's right, they're not actually going to have a baby, but they can adopt and that sort of thing.

Tyler: Mmmm.
I: And what about two girls together?
Tyler: Well, that's exactly the same thing as men.
I: Yeah?
Tyler: Yeah, but I don't want to get started on that. It's….
I: Why not?
Tyler: Well girls, like…. I mean, two girls, it's not normal. Imagine like my mum and you know, other friends just go [hand gestures and giggling] with each other.
I: Okay.
Tyler: Can we please move on?
I: We can move on.
Tyler: I do want to move on.

It is clear from this discussion that Tyler was struggling to come to terms with the notion of homosexuality, whether it be gay men or lesbian women. He had gleaned snippets of information from his social environment including the television as well as listening to his parents briefly discuss their views on same-sex relationships and parenting without entering the conversation. As a consequence, he had developed his opinion based on listening to their comments, interpreting the emotions of the people involved—several of which were his parents—and then potentially testing out his views with others among his peer group. The reaction of Flynn, who really had no conception of homosexuality, provides some evidence to suggest that boys who do not have an opinion of homosexuality do not oppose the views being espoused. Rather they agree or, in Flynn's case, merely abstain from the conversation. Ultimately this is complicit behaviour and does not provide the opportunity for diverse and equitable viewpoints. Then again, some might suggest that 9- to 11-year-old boys are not well versed in this aspect of socialisation, and therefore cannot 'really' engage in-depth in conversation about such matters. I would argue otherwise, as the boys that I interviewed had a good understanding of a range of social, cultural and health issues and were willing to engage in discussion around the topics they raised. The strong voice on compulsory heterosexuality and lack of voice around homosexuality was stark, apart from those boys who vehemently opposed or, indeed, laughed about it.

As identified in the previous dialogue, Tyler's parents played an influential role in developing his fundamental ideologies around sexualities. This type of influence is common in many aspects of a child's life with parents playing a central role in the way in which a child's fundamental ideologies are socially constructed. Not only does this include sexualities, but also health, particularly in terms of smoking, drinking alcohol and consuming drugs as well as areas such as physical activity, nutrition and obesity. These underlying elements of social constructionism are not limited to this list. Indeed, it goes far beyond that which is provided and covers a range of issues including domestic violence, gambling and unemployment (Kourgiantakis, Stark, Lobo, & Tepperman, 2016; Polak, 2004), to name a few. For the purposes of this research, I was particularly interested around the way in which sport and physical activity were socially constructed with respect to parental influence. Similarly, nutrition was a key aspect of focus as well. However, diet and nutrition are almost always talked about synonymously within any discussion around health, and particularly so for young people and the boys in this research. It was clear that many parents within this cohort of boys played a positive, and influential role, in being active, engaging in sports, and specifically influencing the types of sports and activities in which they participate. Therefore not only were many of the parents good role models; they were also proactive in determining the types of activities and sports in which they selected their children to engage. The following section provides a more detailed discussion with respect to the boys, their parents and sport.

Parents and Sport

There is clear evidence to suggest that parents play a key role in the development of sporting participation among children (Elliott & Drummond, 2013, 2017). There is also evidence to suggest that children's parents heavily influence the types of sports in which they engage (Velardo, Elliott, Filiault, & Drummond, 2010). Take, for instance, my own personal example. My daughter, like many girls, was fascinated with horses as well as the idea of becoming an Olympic equestrian

competitor. As good parents are *supposed* to do, my wife and I decided we would seek out a reputable riding school and have her taught professionally and 'correctly'. It should be noted at this point that other than a few trail rides when we were younger, my wife and I were not 'horse' people. We did not have a history of horse riding in our families, nor did we own a property with horses or indeed, ever own a horse. Our lives as children and adults were consumed with traditional organised sports in the form of athletics, cricket, football, netball and triathlon, to name just a few. Therefore, this whole notion of becoming an equestrian competitor was quite foreign to us as parents and in some aspects a little daunting, not to mention costly! When this feeling of unfamiliarity was coupled with the actuality that our daughter was a fast runner and equipped with similar, fast twitch fibres to those that enabled my wife to become a national level sprinter, there was a strong, and logical, tendency to encourage her down an athletics pathway. Ultimately, the athletics environment was one we knew and felt comfortable in, as well as the fact we could see a potential 'successful' pathway for our daughter in the event she chose athletics. Conversely, we had no idea about the equestrian subculture and, in hindsight, were most likely a little intimidated by it. We justified the decision, on attempting to encourage our daughter into athletics based on equestrian riding, as being impractical in terms of time commitment and fitting into our lives. Our daughter decided to pursue sprint running including track athletics, surf-lifesaving, beach sprinting and professional running. She is happy with her sporting pathway and has had a good deal of success to vindicate the choice for her and for us! However, there is always a niggling doubt as to *what might have been* had she gone on to fulfil her equestrian *dream*.

Generally speaking, it was evident throughout discussions with the boys that their parents were essentially good role models for their children. Many of the parents attempted to engage with the boys in the event of not having peers around to play with them. For example, the boys spoke of going for bike rides with their parents, or playing 'kick-to-kick' football with them. Just being with their parents and engaging with them in some form of sporting or physical activity capacity was seen in an enthusiastic light. The following comment is indicative of many of the conversations I had with the boys. It highlights the

importance of them engaging in sport and physical activity with their parents. While it emphasises aspects associated with engagement, it also highlights the learning that comes with supervised engagement such as understanding road rules and to be cautious of cars when riding bikes. These are significant life skills being taught and learnt through supervised parental physical activity.

I: So, do you do any physical activity with your parents?

Xavier: I sometimes play footy with my mum outside, just on the back lawn.

I: Do you?

Xavier: Yeah.

Corey: Yeah. I do it with my dad. I practise footy and go down to the nets on Saturday for cricket training.

I: That's cool. What about you, William?

William: Bike riding with my dad.

I: Do you? When do you do that?

William: On the weekend.

I: Do you do anything with your mum?

William: Yeah, I do bike riding on Saturday and Sunday and take my dog for a walk with her.

Xavier: I do stuff when I go to my dad's place in Sydney, which I am today. So I'm going to have a bike ride today. Every time I get there off the plane, I take a bike ride. So I'm going to be taking a bike ride today.

I: That's great Xavier. Do you guys—now that you're getting older—do more physical activities and activities in general without your parents now?

William: Yes.

Xavier: Yes, yes.

Corey: Yeah, because … umm… Well…

I: Okay, for example, if you've got a pool in the backyard, do they come and watch you and supervise?

Corey: No. Okay, I have this thing on a post in my backyard. It's a cricket ball and I hit it back and forth. And I also have this thing, which is called Crazy Catch. You chuck it at this net thing and it bounces off.

I: Okay. So you do that without your parents?

Corey: Yeah, normally on Friday nights because it is not a school night and I can stay up longer.

I: Okay, and what about riding around the streets on your bike and that sort of thing?

Xavier: I do that.

Corey: Yeah, I normally do that on Saturday and Sunday.

I: By yourself?

Corey: Yeah.

I: Okay, so they let you have a bit of space. What do you think you have learned from them?

William: To be sensible and stuff. You know, obey the road rules and watch for cars.

I: So what was important about doing physical activity with your parents early on?

Xavier: Oh, it just helped me learn about how to do things and stuff. If my mum and dad didn't help me learn to ride a bike I would never have known.

Noteworthy within all of the discussions with the boys was the constant reference to engaging with sport and physical activity with their fathers. While the mothers of the boys tried to help 'play footy in the backyard' in the absence of their fathers due to work commitments, or in some cases separation and divorce, much of the mothers' role in sport and physical activity was assigned to walking with the boys, or the occasional weekend bike ride. Sports such as football, cricket, basketball and rugby have a traditional masculinised orientation and therefore they were generally left to the fathers to assist in teaching. Due to the socially constructed nature of sport in Western society, the father's role is pivotal in developing the skills of boys who often gravitate to traditional masculinised sports and activities. The following discussions identify the way in which the boys place emphasis on the importance of their fathers within this process.

I: Do you do much physical activity with your parents?

Mason: Um yeah, I bike ride with my dad all the time. Sometimes I run with him like, run with dad and the dog Jasper.

I: Do you?

Mason: We run about four kilometres I think.

I: Do you really?

Mason: Yeah.

I: Did you do the City to Bay race?

Mason: Yeah.

I: That's good. Did you run with your dad?

Mason: Yeah.

I: That's cool, how did you feel after that, were you tired?

Mason: No, I could have ran the 12 kms, or whatever it is. But I just did the 6 kms. It was good having dad with me. He kept me going. That's why I think I could have done the 12 kms.

Mason: I also love riding motorbikes with my dad.

I: Why is that?

Mason: It's just fun being with him.

In another discussion, the boys identified a similar theme, particularly with respect to the way in which their fathers provide 'mateship' as well as guidance that is required at this stage of their lives. They are learning to become men and their fathers provide this *through* sport. The following discussion provides evidence of education but also controlled physicality.

I: Do you guys do much physical activity at home with your parents?

Noah: Yeah. I play footy.

Daniel: Yeah.

Noah: I try to tackle my dad.

Daniel: When my dad's got the ball, I jump on his back and try to go over and then get the ball.

Noah: I try—when I'm playing cricket I try to hit the ball—hit the ball in his nuts [all laugh].

Will: We had a father–son footy match at school this year. It was great. Some of the dads once played for the Crows [professional football club]. It was awesome. We learned heaps.

Noah: And we had one at my footy club and it was fathers versus sons match. And we could—I could actually tackle some of the fathers.

I: Really?

Noah: Yeah. That was cool.

I: Wow!

Parents and Health

Parents play a pivotal role in the engagement of their children in sport and physical activity through encouragement and role modelling. They also play a significant role in many other aspects of their children's lives including health and education. Generally, when discussing the notion of health, as stated earlier, the boys in early childhood quickly deferred back to food and nutrition as well as being physically fit. However, as they matured and developed a deeper understanding of the meaning of health they started to discuss broader aspects that included aspects of society and culture. They also started to discuss the genesis of individuals' unhealthy behaviours rather than merely victim blame. This was an unexpected theme at this stage of the boys' development. However, it was pleasing to note from a health promotion perspective.

I: Hey, so tell me, what do you think just overall, being healthy means?
Jackson: Well, being healthy.
Dylan: Be healthy, yeah.
I: What can you do if you're healthy?
Jackson: Do a lot of things that fat people couldn't do. Because fat people—they don't like running.
I: Don't they?
Jackson: They normally—well, they're normally like… if there are people good at running they would normally go, and then the fat person would be right here and not keeping up or not running at all.
I: Really?
Jackson: Yeah. So they would, they like go like this [appearing tired and puffing]. When they go like this, they go [appearing tired and limp].
Chris: Owen said I'm fat.
I: So do fat people puff a lot?
Jackson: Yeah, they puff a lot. Like on *The biggest loser*.
Dylan: Yeah.
Chris: Yeah.
Sebastian: Yeah.
I: What do you think of the people on *The biggest loser*?
Sebastian: They're bad.
I: They're bad?

Sebastian: They feel bad for themselves.

Chris: Yeah, they feel bad.

I: Do you feel a bit sad for them or do you kind of laugh at them?

Chris: Yeah.

Jackson: No, I laugh at them.

Sebastian: Maybe their parents might be fat, so they might get fat.

Chris: No, their parents are fat. Like, it's quite weird. If your parents are fat…

I: Yeah, tell me.

Chris: If your dad is fat, normally you're fat.

Sebastian: It's harder for kids to be *normal*, you know thin, if your parents are fat.

Dylan: Yeah.

I: So you've often seen that, have you?

Sebastian: Yep.

Chris: Have you seen some fat kid and you know their parents might be fat and even though if they eat healthy they might still just get fat?

Sebastian: Yeah!

Chris: If you eat fat a lot, and all that, and then they try to eat healthy and getting away [sic] the fat might not work.

Sebastian: It all has to do with the parents mainly. If they eat healthy and show the kid how to eat healthy then they won't be fat.

Chris: Yeah.

Dylan: Yeah.

The boys are doing their best to try and explain the ideology surrounding parenting and health literacy. Conceptually they have developed an understanding that parents play a crucial role in the health of the child. Simply put, if the parents are fit and healthy, engage in physical activity and eat in a healthy manner, there is a strong likelihood that their children will also be very similar and adopt the same approach to life in terms of health, nutrition and physical activity. Here, they explain this further through discussion on the topic.

Henry: I often find that if the father is fat then the kids will be fat too.

I: Really?…And not the mother?

Henry: Well, it can be the mother too. But that is more to do with the food because the mum does most of the cooking whereas the dad does most of the sport and stuff.

I: So it's mainly the dad do you think?

Henry: Well, dad and brother. No, it's the whole family when you think about it.

I: So is anyone responsible for that?

Henry: Yeah. The parents.

Ryan: Yeah.

Henry: Yeah, so like if—so say the person's fat.

Ryan: If the parents are fat, the child normally gets fat.

Henry: If they're fat, the child will get fatter and then their child will get fat, and then their child will get fat and then their child will get fat.

Toby: Wait! Their child might not get fat.

I: Why not?

Toby: It depends if they're smart enough to be fat—or less—it depends if they're smart enough to either be fat or don't be fat.

Ryan: You can be fat when you're really like, eating healthy.

Henry: And sometimes…

I: Okay, so tell me what it means if you're smart?

Toby: You make the right decision to either be fat or not fat.

I: That's an interesting comment.

Similarly, in another focus group the boys raised a comparable ideology when they discussed this issue:

Isaac: Sometimes if you grow up in a house—like your parents aren't healthy at all, like you take on from them and you don't get healthy. But if your parents are healthy, you will probably be healthy too.

I: That's a very good point. Where did you learn that?

Isaac: I don't know. You just see it sometimes.

Hunter: Yeah, you just see it.

Connor: So, I have seen people—parents who are bigger than them, but they're perfectly fine.

Isaac: Yeah, that's true. Sometimes you do. But a lot of the time, if the parents are big, then so are the kids.

In the following discussion, the boys moved beyond the association of aspects other than health and weight. Upon challenging each other with respect to the role of parents around healthy eating, fatness, fitness and physical activity, they began to talk more broadly around the way in

which parents play a key role in some significant aspects of health, with one of those being cigarette smoking.

> *Eli*: When I walk down Jetty Road and someone's smoking on a bench or something…
>
> *Jordan*: Yeah, I go like this [covers nose and mouth with hands].
>
> *Eli*: I hold my breath.
>
> *Nick*: I hold my breath and I walk around them. I don't go near them.
>
> *I*: So does your mum or dad smoke?
>
> *Eli*: No [all agree].
>
> *Nick*: No, I'm glad.
>
> *Eli*: My mum feels sick after the smell of the smoke.
>
> *Jordan*: I don't feel sick but I just hate the smell, and I know it's unhealthy for you and all that.
>
> *Nick*: My sister gets sick. And my sister actually said—we were sitting down and there were these smokers. They were smoking. And she said, "Let's go. I'm not going to sit next to smokers," because she gets sick.
>
> *I*: Okay, so where do you learn all this from? How do you know this?
>
> *Eli*: I learned it from my parents.
>
> *Jordan*: Yeah, same.
>
> *Nick*: Same, same.
>
> *Eli*: Yeah, they're really good like that. They tell me everything about smoking, and alcohol and drugs. They say that one day I might have to choose and they figure if I have all the information, then I might make a good choice.
>
> *I*: Wow. That's very grown up. Do you like that?
>
> *Eli*: Yeah. I do.
>
> *I*: What do you think you will do?
>
> *Eli*: I dunno. I know I won't smoke and take drugs. I don't know about alcohol.

The parents of the boys are inadvertently taking a health-promoting model of health whereby they are providing their boys with sound information and advice based on health promotion principles. This is where health literacy becomes a key component within this context. It also highlights the significance of the socially constructed nature of health attitudes and behaviours of children and the importance of health-literate parents and guardians in the lives of children.

By providing health-promoting information early on in the lives of children, the entire process of discussing health and health behaviours in a responsible and rational manner is 'normalised'. This should be the cornerstone of health-literate children. Discussing these things early means that by the time adolescence comes along, which is a time of significant developmental and behavioural change, including experimentation, the capacity to openly discuss issues associated with aspects such as cigarette smoking, drugs and alcohol is commonplace for the child. It is not one that is foreign whereby the adolescent child feels the need to hide information or ask for advice.

A large part of this chapter has focused upon the significance of parents as being key influential figures in the boys' attitudes and behaviours associated with sport, health and physical activity. It is these middle years when the boys began to realise and then have the capacity to articulate their perceptions. Significantly, it was also at this time that they began to reflect upon aspects of their bodies that were changing, as well as specific parts of their body that they perceived were aesthetically appealing not only to themselves, but to others as well. Much of this had to do with, once again, musculature. However, notably was the focus, and sense of social capital, on an aspect of the body colloquially known as the sixpack.

Male Aesthetics and the Sixpack

Over the past decade, the term 'sixpack' has become common vernacular among young people in Western culture. Through globalisation influenced by local and global media, as well as the Internet and social networking sites, it is arguable that there is a homogenising effect occurring around the use of words and language. The body is a site of particular gaze for many young people. Photographs and images are easily viewed in the online environment, and comments can be readily made for a huge 'audience' to see and discuss. The term sixpack, coined from bodybuilding origins, has infiltrated everyday language among young people and fuelled its acceleration of use through popular media, and global Internet and social networking sites. It is clear from the boys in

this research that the terminology has now infiltrated their own language, despite not really comprehending what it means, nor its implications. However, it is arguable that the use of such terms is problematic in that it begins the process of focusing the bodily gaze at a much earlier age than adolescence. And this has the potential to establish preconceived notions of the body prior to significant developmental periods in a child's life. As a consequence, there are likely to be greater individual expectations upon what the body should like during adolescence and early adulthood.

In the following discussion with boys in the middle years it was clear that some of them began their first foray into discussing 'abs' (abdominal muscles) and a sixpack. It was also clear they were experimenting with their use while attempting to understand these terms through their own explanation. In the following quote, one of the boys provided commentary on the way in which a number of boys in this research think about males and the sixpack. He stated:

> All my family basically, except my mum and my sister, have a sixpack [i.e. the males]. Because my dad's a jockey and me and my brother just swim the whole time and play sport. But you have to use your sixpack for good [laughs]. You can't just show it off all the time. But it's not your fault if you show it off when you're swimming. Like in the Olympics. It's not like they wear rashies [sun rash vests] or that sort of thing.

Noteworthy, the visible sixpack has become synonymous with strength for most of the boys in this research. When asked what they perceived to be a strong person, many of the comments included having a sixpack. For example, one boy claimed:

> A strong person is someone with abs you know, a strong muscly dude with a sixpack.

The next comment provides an opportunity to gain insight into the way in which the boys perceive the male body, and the implication of this body on broader aspects of life. According to the boys, who were now between nine and 10 years of age, having 'abs' and a 'sixpack' provides

a number of opportunities that may not otherwise be afforded to those without an aesthetically appealing sixpack. It is also the first time across all interviews that the boys began talking about 'ladies' (girls) in any way other than being stronger than them and beating them in sport. This comment was representative of the way in which other boys in the research are beginning to perceive the male body and the role of the sixpack.

> Boys want to be big and strong so they can get the 'ladies'. They also have to have a sixpack. Everyone wants a sixpack to show off to the girls. I've seen these guys on the beach and they just rip their shirts off and go 'look at this ladies' and they're [the girls] like 'uh, huh' [all the boys laugh].

This notion of the sixpack and the social capital that it provides is an interesting one, particularly for boys at this age. The middle years are quite challenging given the diverse range of stages at which the boys are developing. Some are still transitioning from early childhood while others are forging on, with their sights clearly focused on adolescence. The visible sixpack, for some of the more advanced boys, was a symbol of adulthood, manhood and in some cases sexual virility. Therefore they argued that a sixpack had the potential to attract girls—and women. It is clear that the boys developed this ideology from their socially constructed world. The movies and TV shows they watch, as well as sites on the Internet, they frequently create and uphold these perspectives. Indeed, they normalise the underpinning belief that men should aspire to develop and maintain a sixpack. It should also be noted that brothers played a significant role in the development of this ideology around the importance of having a sixpack. The banter surrounding male muscularity and the need to display a sixpack in order to, as they say, 'get the chicks' is common vernacular. Hence, the younger brothers in this study often pick up on the language and discourse and attempt to mimic their older brothers in the belief they are replicating attitudes and behaviours surrounding what is socially expected of them as young males. Using this language earlier than other boys without older brothers provides a comparative sense of heightened masculinity with a potential for enhanced social capital.

In the following conversation, it is evident there is an element of reverence when discussing their older brothers and the bodies they possess, particularly with respect to the sixpack. This was a common thread running through many of the conversations where the boys had older brothers.

> *Jai*: I got a sixpack.
> *I*: You've got a sixpack have you?
> *Lucas*: My brother has a sixpack. Him and his mates try and hold a can of Coke in the line down the middle of their stomach….you know that line down the middle?
> *I*: Yeah, it's actually called *Linea Alba*, but you don't have to know that! You see it lots in bodybuilders.
> *Jacob*: When I get older, I will get a sixpack.
> *Lucas*: Same.
> *I*: Why?
> *Jacob*: Because it's cool, and my brother has one.
> *Lucas*: Same.

Significantly, it is not just about developing a body similar to their brothers that is driving the boys' desire to be like them. The boys talked fondly of the relationship with their brothers that involved what has typically been referred to as 'masculinised' rough play. This aspect of their relationship was noted as being fun. However, it also provides a means through which the younger boys learn traditional masculine ideologies. It was not uncommon, for example, to hear comments such as:

> I play boxing with my brothers and my brothers just keep on beating me up and I'm laughing.

> Yeah, I got his gloves and my brother was just ditching balls at me. It hurt but it was cool.

> Because I just try and beat up my brothers. It's what we do.

When invited to discuss what they enjoyed about sport and physical activity within their family, a group of boys articulated the types of things that were stated by a number of boys throughout the research

in this particular period of development. The following is part of this discussion.

I: So what do you like about doing sport and physical activity with your family?

Jonah: You can get active and get fit and … and I was going to say something else but I forgot.

Cory: I get to beat up my brothers.

I: Oh, okay!

Cory: Yeah and tackle.

Jonah: Get some abs -- yeah I'm winning [i.e. doing well in life].

I: You get some abs?

Jonah: Yeah, keep on winning.

I: I struggle to get abs.

I: You like abs, don't you? I remember you spoke about abs last year.

I: And the year before that and the year before that.

I: What is it about abs you like?

I: Just shows off your strength.

I: Does it?

I: Yeah, shows off your strength.

Jonah: But it can also make you….

I: Body muscle.

I: Body muscle. Who talks about that?

I: My older brother. Yeah.

Cory: I give Eli crap.

I: Does he talk about that with his mates?

Cory: Yeah.

Jonah: Aren't I the one bigger than your brother?

I: All my family basically, except my mum and my sister, have a sixpack. Because my dad's jogging, me and my brother just swim the whole time and play sport.

I: So is it good to have a sixpack?

I: Yeah, because it just shows off your strength.

I: Does it?

I: It depends how you do it because if you like, because you can turn into a big, big show off and no one will like you. Like, get out this [sixpack] or you can just be like, yeah I've got a sixpack so what?

Cory: Yeah, use your sixpack for good. Not evil [laughs].

Jonah: It doesn't mean if you have—it doesn't mean if you don't have a sixpack that you can't be strong.

I: But it's not your fault if you show it off when you swim. Because most people don't really wear rashies [sun rash vests], do they?

Jonah: No, it's not when you're showing off.

I: No.

Jonah: No, it's not when you're swimming.

I: Like in the Olympics.

I: Oh yeah, I get it.

Jonah: All they see, yeah.

I: No, it's not like that. But it's like when you're just standing there going…

Summary

The boys in the middle years have come to understand that there are certain factors in society with the potential to influence aspects of health, physical activity and the body. It can be argued that social constructionism is at the heart of this ideology as they begin to formulate opinions and perspectives based on what they are seeing, hearing and learning from others around them. They understand that families play a significant role in the health and fitness of children within that family. Interestingly, they suggested that fathers played the most significant role in determining whether a child would become fat as they were the ones who seemingly had the most influence on physical activity in the family, whereas the mother looked after their nutrition and cooking. It appears that in this period of development the boys placed more emphasis on the association of physical activity with healthy weight than on nutrition.

It is also in this period that they begin to really take notice of their bodies in terms of aesthetics. Previously, in early childhood, they talked about men being big and muscular as well as being strong to win and defeat people at sports. However, in the middle years they have to come to realise there are components of the body that are appealing aesthetically, which have the capacity to provide some sort of social capital. One

of those is the development of a set of sixpack abdominals. Once again, it is arguable that social constructionism has played a significant role in the development of this ideology as the boys see pictures of men ubiquitously across numerous media platforms including print, television, movie screens and clearly, social media. As identified, older peers and boys, particularly those with older brothers, also influence them. This is clear evidence of social constructionism at work where body image is concerned. The need for this to be challenged is now upon us at schools, in the home and within contemporary society.

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8

The Pre-pubescent Years

Changing Bodies

The pre-pubescent years, as I have referred to them, are very interesting given that some boys are already entering puberty while others are 'lingering' behind. Generally speaking, most boys reach puberty after the age of 13 years (Richmond & Rogol, 2007). Therefore this chapter can comfortably discuss 11–13 as the pre-pubescent years among boys. Certainly, in the case of the boys involved in the research for this book, it was visible that the majority had not entered puberty. Having said that, these boys were cognisant that puberty was impending and that changes were going to occur to their bodies, just as they had discussed in classes at school, as well as heard and seen among older siblings and peers. Therefore the boys were not concerned about being smaller or shorter than others as they had developed a belief that eventually things would 'even up' in the long run. Nor were they too concerned about their levels of musculature given the same ideology pervaded their thinking. A number of the boys alluded to expecting to be a particular height based on their fathers' and therefore did not seem too concerned. As Kane stated:

Well my dad is around six foot and he's pretty big and strong so I reckon that I will be around the same height and size as him. He does eat and drink a bit though and he has a big belly. So I don't want to get like that. But yeah, if I get to his size I will be pretty happy, which I think I will.

Toby said something similar:

My two brothers are older than me and they are getting to the same size as my dad. So I think I will be about the same size as them. Mum even says that I am taller than my brothers at the same age so I might be taller than them, which would be good. Dad's a pretty good height.

Interestingly, while the boys were generally satisfied that their height and musculature would 'sort itself out' given that it was genetically determined, and in their eyes closely associated with the height and size of their fathers', they appeared to be more concerned with issues associated with aesthetics. In the following part of the chapter, I explore the boys' perceptions of hairstyles, clothing, shoes and personal hygiene including body odour, deodorant, pimples and acne. Generally speaking, these areas have historically been regarded as feminised domains and yet, not only were these boys quite conscious of the importance and significance of them within their lives; they were also somewhat forthcoming in their opinions and happy to engage in constructive conversation with each other.

Hair

As the boys moved into the pre-adolescent years, I was quite surprised by the level of discussion and open conversation around the topic of hairstyles. Given they were at a school that required them to keep their hair somewhat in check, the notion of styling their hair was a strong topic of conversation over several years of interviews. The discussion often centred on whether the 'manicured' or messed up 'surf' look was 'cooler'. For those who preferred the manicured look, several had a standing monthly appointment at the hairdresser for a 'shampoo, cut and blow-dry'. Lachie stated:

Yeah, I used to dread my hair getting cut and I would wait four or five months but now I like my hair short you know. I just love everything neat and tidy and the girls love it too [laughs]. They come over and touch it and say "I love you hair. It's so cool". So I asked mum if I could keep getting it cut, so I pretty much go every month around the same time. It just makes it easy and I think it looks better. Oh, and *lovvvve* getting my hair washed and head rubbed. That's really cool.

While some of the boys found this a little humorous it was nothing that received a great deal of admonishment from the boys in the focus groups. Indeed, several boys agreed that it would be good to have a monthly appointment as their hair could become a little unruly after a few weeks. At least in this way, they would know that a haircut was imminent and they could deal with the unruliness.

That's awesome. I would love to be able to get my hair cut every month like Lachie, but it costs so much. So my mum just says "get it done once at the start of each term", so I get it cut about four times a year, unless there's a wedding or something that I have to go to with the family.

There is certainly a subcultural context around which the boys have decided upon the hairstyles they wish to adopt and maintain. In this group of boys, similar to other groups of young people, there are those who are perceived as being the leaders particularly in terms of their ideologies, beliefs, mannerisms and aesthetics including clothes and hairstyles. That is to say, some of the boys who are seen as leaders with a particular 'look' and particular hairstyle have a greater influence on other boys with respect to hairstyles and overall aesthetics. It is clear that the boys are entering an age where peers are playing a key role in the way in which they develop particularly in terms of physical aesthetics. It is arguable that hairstyles are a relatively simple and visible way in which the boys can make an immediate impact upon their aesthetics but also express individuality for those who are more confident, while providing membership of a subculture for those who are less confident and feel the need to 'fit in'. The following is a conversation, which highlights this point.

I: So you mentioned getting your hair cut often, why is that?

Jai: I don't know really. I just get it done every three or four weeks from this hairdressing shop for guys called the Barber Boys. It's really cool.

I: Yeah I know the one. It looks good.

I: But why do you go so often?

Jai: I think because I like my hair short, you know. And a lot of the other kids in my year also get their hair cut from there.

Tyler: Yeah, I also get my hair cut from there, and it's kind of just what you do.

I: Why do you think that is?

Tyler: I guess we all just do the same sort of thing because we're friends.

Flynn: I don't. I just wait about four months until it gets in my eyes. But I don't care what anyone thinks about my hair [everyone laughs].

I: Yeah, I remember when it was in your face. It was really long.

Flynn: Yeah [everyone laughs].

Some of the other boys were 'not into' having their hair cut on a regular basis. However, unlike Flynn who just 'couldn't be bothered getting it cut', these boys made a conscious effort to maintain a hairstyle that looked a little unruly and unkempt. Once again, there were certainly perceptible leaders of this socially constructed group who were also beginning to surf and engage in the broader surfing subculture. There were also clear 'followers':

I: So do you guys surf?

Dylan: Yeah, a bit.

Toby: Yeah, absolutely, Dad got me into [surfing] a while ago. So much fun!

I: What do you like about it?

Toby: It's just fun. And I also love the look.

I: What do you mean?

Toby: You know, the look: the clothes, the hair.

I: So what is it about the hair?

Toby: I don't really… I just like that you can keep it a bit messy and not have to get it cut.

Dylan: Yeah, me too. Even though I don't surf much. It just looks cool.

Clothes

Clothes played a significant role in the identity of the boys, similar to the way in which hairstyles were pivotal for some and how they perceived themselves, and felt connected to their peer group and subculture. Maintaining a certain look was important, irrespective of whether it was the clothes themselves or the way in which they were worn. Given that the boys attended an independent school with a relatively strict dress code, the need to wear a consistent uniform was policy. In the summer, the boys would wear specific school shorts together with short-sleeve shirt, grey socks and black school shoes. In the winter, the option of wearing long pants was offered. However, it was compulsory to wear a long-sleeve shirt. It was interesting to note that in the early years, many of the boys wore long pants in winter. However, as the boys moved into their final two or three years of schooling very few took up this option. It was seen as 'cool' to wear shorts all year round irrespective of the weather. In some instances, the weather was quite chilly and the boys would be wearing their shorts to school on days when it began at 5 °C and would not become much warmer than 10 °C. The boys claimed they liked to run around so much they would overheat in long pants and that long pants were also quite restricting. For example:

> *I*: So, why do you guys always wear shorts, even in the winter?
> *Fletcher*: It's just easy you know.
> *Ethan*: Yeah, you don't even really think about it. You just wear shorts.
> *Fletcher*: Yeah, I don't even own a pair of long pants anymore. I think I wore long pants back in Grade 2 or 3.
> *I*: So what is it about long pants that you guys just don't like?
> *Ethan*: I don't know really. There are only a few guys in our year that wear long pants and they don't play any sport.
> *Fletcher*: Yeah, it's definitely about the sport, and being able to run around and stuff. Plus you get really hot in long pants.
> *I*: But what about when it's really cold.
> *Fletcher*: Yeah, well you warm up pretty quick. And all of the rooms have heaters so it's all good.

Kane: Yeah, and my mum thinks it's great because long pants cost a lot and they get dirty really easy.

I: True.

Analysing the discussion above, and other similar conversations with the boys about the virtues of wearing shorts all year round despite the cold weather, it was apparent that much of the rationale revolved around sport, or the potential to engage in sport. This despite the reality that not all of the boys who wore shorts actually engaged in sport or physical activity while at school during recess or lunch breaks. Therefore, it is possible to argue that some of these boys wore shorts in order to look like the boys who played sport and seemingly, held greater social capital within the school. The boys who did not play sport and wore long pants appeared to have diminished social capital. By wearing shorts, there was less potential of being labelled as 'non-sporting' due to the sporting aesthetic they conveyed. It should also be recognised that, as identified earlier, sports play a significant role in the development and construction of a hegemonic form of masculinity (Drummond, 1996). Therefore, despite some of these boys not necessarily being highly skilled at sports and physical activities, wearing the clothes that suggest *they may be* provides them with an opportunity to be recognised in the same light as those boys who are skilled. To be good at sports, particularly masculinised sports in the eyes of society, males are afforded a number of privileges.

Beyond school, the boys were also beginning to branch out and think more consciously about the types of clothes they wore and the *look* they wanted to portray in terms of their individual identity and the *look* they wanted to convey to others. This was particularly telling where birthday parties were concerned and this had a good deal to do with the fact that parties were no longer single sex. The majority of parties they attended generally had an even split between boys and girls. This somehow placed a degree of pressure on young males in terms of the types of clothes they wore. According to the boys, this was not necessarily an easy task, as they had to dress for the approval of their male peers, but also the girls as well, adding another layer of complexity to an issue that never really concerned them previously. The following conversation is representative of this ideology.

I: So, what types of clothes do you like to wear when you are not at school?

Isaac: I dunno, I just put anything on. Usually shorts and T-shirt. And I always wear a hoodie when it's cold.

I: What about you Jake?

Jake: Yeah, just jeans if it's cold and a hoodie. Shorts and T-shirt when it's hot.

I: What about when you guys go out, like to the movies?

Isaac: Still the same but just a bit better quality. Although, if I'm going to a party I will wear something nice like good jeans and shirt.

I: Okay, why is that?

Isaac: Well because you have to look good for the party, because there's all of your school friends there and girls and stuff as well.

I: Okay, does having girls there make a difference?

Isaac: Yeah, heaps.

Jake: Yeah, because they know about fashion and they talk to each other about what you look like.

I: Do you know that?

Jake: Nah, it's just what I think.

I: So, is looking good for girls important then?

Jake: Yeah, well it is. But you also have to kind of wear the clothes that your mates wear too.

Isaac: Yeah, that's important.

I: Why?

Isaac: It just is, you know.

Some of the boys were developing a dress sense that suited their personalities as well as what, they argued, suited their body types. This was the age when they were beginning to think more consciously about the way in which others perceived their bodies. The following conversation reflects this notion:

I: So what sort of clothes do you like to wear?

Ben: Well, I've only just started getting into shoes and clothing, but with clothing I like to look nice and tidy and wear good clothes. I don't want to look daggy. I want to look simple but stylish. Street wear look. I like to be well fitted and slim looking.

I: That's an interesting comment. Can you explain some more.

Ben: Well, I'm not a tall guy and some clothes make you look short and tubby, which I don't want. I mean I'm not fat or anything so I want to make sure my clothes don't make me look like that. With the body I have, slim [looking] clothes kind of make me taller if you get what I mean. I also like the darker colours just because it's easy.

I: Yeah, I do.

Ben: Sometimes my mum will say "I hate that", but I like it.

I: So, how does that make you feel?

Ben: Yeah, I hate it when she says that.

Hayden: Yeah, I hate that too. My mum always says that. You know she will say "that doesn't match, put this on". Yeah I don't like that.

Seb: Well, I'm not really into caring about looking good and my mum says "you can't go out looking like that. You can't wear trackies there" [all laugh]. The thing is they're really comfortable and I like wearing them.

Interestingly, when it came to clothes, the most discussed piece of attire, without question, was that of shoes. The boys were incredibly enamoured by shoes. As one boy stated, 'I actually think some of us are a little obsessed'. However, the shoes they were so excited by were not merely average shoes. These shoes were incredibly expensive and primarily basketball related. There were several boys within the cohort that played basketball in combination with Australian football and cricket. All of these sports are socially revered as being masculinised sports in Australia, and therefore the boys were recognised among their peers as having a higher social capital than most. The significance these *leaders* placed on particular basketball shoes peaked the interest of others and created a degree of fervour around them. For example, some of the shoes were the type worn and endorsed by well-known *star* NBA players including Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, Stephen Curry and LeBron James. For example, one of the boys was happy to explain his penchant for shoes:

Noah: I just love shoes. I reckon I've got about 10 or 11 pairs. Some don't even fit me anymore but I just can't get rid of them.

I: Really? What sort are they?

Noah: Oh, they're really good ones. Some are Nike Air Jordan's™. I've got this one pair and they cost me $280. I just had to have them.

I: Wow! That's a lot of money.

Noah: I know. But I really wanted them.

I: How do you afford them? Do you work?

Noah: No. I just save up all my birthday and Christmas money. I just ask that people give me money so I can buy shoes.

I: Wow, you love them that much?

Noah. Yeah, I can't help myself.

I: Why do you like them so much?

Noah: I dunno. It makes you feel good when you get them and when you wear them and everyone says stuff about them. You see all these really cool guys wearing them on social media and stuff and they just look really cool. So you just want them.

I: That's interesting. Do you wear them much?

Noah. Nah, not a lot because they're too good. I wear them to parties sometimes and the movies and stuff. But then I grow out of them.

I: And you just keep them?

Noah: Yeah, because they're too good.

I: I bet you are looking forward to your feet stopping growing?

Noah: Yeah [laughs].

While many of the boys identified that they *loved* shoes and were pre-pared to pay a lot of money for them, simply for the branding, there were some boys who were quite astute and openly opposed to this ideology. One boy within a focus group of four where three of the boys were talking about the virtues of expensive basketball shoes claimed:

Flynn: I don't get why you have to pay so much money for shoes? I mean I've got three pairs of shoes, well four if you count my school shoes. I have my Crocs™, my sneakers and my, I guess you would call them my fancy shoes [laughs].

Ethan: Yeah, but it's soooo cool when you go online and search up *Kicks*™, and you look at them and you go, "Oh I want them, I need them".

Josh: Yeah, me too. You just want them.

Flynn: I hate it. I don't get it. I mean, you look at these shoes and they've got brands on them and it says "look at me I'm different, pay $1000 for me or whatever".

Toby: Well I've got these Jordan's for $160 and they normally retail for $US320. So they were a steal.

Josh: And I got some Jordan's too and they were just like $150. They were a lot more when they first came out in the US.

Flynn: But the thing is they probably make them for 10 bucks and then they sell them for hundreds. I mean I just go "why"? "Why"?

I: So, the question then is why do you want the branding? How do you feel when you wear these shoes?

Toby: Well, it gives you this really good feeling to know that not many other people have them, definitely within the school, but even within the state or the country. That makes you feel really good. It's the thought of not many people having them.

Flynn: See, I find that weird.

Ethan: Well, I was wanting a pair of indoor soccer shoes and I wanted to find a pair that no one would ever wear here in South Australia. So I spent heaps of time searching online for two weeks and doing the research on the performance tests on them to make sure they were good. And no-one has them that I know, which is good.

I: That's amazing! So do you want people to say "wow, I've never seen those types of shoes before"?

Flynn: Toby did that [all laugh]. On casual dress day Toby was going "Hey Ethan I love those X5200 s" or whatever they were [all laugh].

Toby: Oh, yeah they were the Jordan's [all laugh]. They were pretty awesome.

Personal Health and Hygiene

The boys all understood that their bodies were changing in terms of height, weight, musculature and strength. These were all the visible or tangible aspects of development that were recognisable, measurable and easily defined. There were certainly other aspects of growth and maturation of which the boys were aware, with some already starting to experience change and others preparing themselves. Issues such as body odour, pimples, acne and general body maintenance that required potential ongoing attention were becoming prevalent, now that their bodies were changing through the production of additional hormones.

It appears most of the boys were aware of the issues associated with body odour and most had begun to develop a regime of wearing deodorant daily or on a periodic basis. The socially constructed nature of this regime was apparent as most of the boys wore a product by the name of Lynx™, which was advertised specifically for young teenage males. The boys were clearly intrigued and persuaded to use this product through the use of strategic marketing, as well as the influential nature of their peers and older siblings using the deodorant. Almost all of the boys had used, or regularly used, deodorant as identified in the following discussion:

I: So what about deodorant?

Owen: Yeah I wear it sometimes. You know after footy, if I don't have a shower.

I: Why wouldn't you have a shower?

Owen: Oh, because sometimes we have to go somewhere really quickly.

Levi: Yeah, no one really has a shower at the ground. We usually have one at home.

I: Okay. So what sort of deodorant do you use?

Levi: Well, I wear Lynx.

Ryan: That stinks!

Levi: No it doesn't. My brother wears it.

Ryan: So! It still stinks.

I: What about you Chris?

Chris: Yeah, I sometimes use it. Some of the guys have cans in their bag and we spray it on after lunch if we get hot and sweaty.

I: Okay, that's good.

Levi: I use my brother's because it's on the bathroom basin all the time.

I: Do you like wearing it?

Levi: Yeah, I think it smells pretty good. It's better than smelling bad. My brother's 15 and he sometimes smells really bad. My mum always tells him, because he forgets sometimes to put it on.

The comment above about Levi's mum reminding his brother to use deodorant is a common thread that appears regularly throughout the discussions. It appears mothers play a significant role in health and hygiene (including teeth) of these boys, just as the literature suggests

(Saied-Moallemi, Virtanen, Ghofranipour, & Murtomaa, 2008). The following discussion is representative of this claim:

> *I*: So, when did you decide to use deodorant?
>
> *Aaron*: Haha, it wasn't me, it was my mum.
>
> *I*: What did she say?
>
> *Aaron*: She said that my clothes were starting to smell and that I needed to wear deodorant.
>
> *Caleb*: Haha, yeah my mum said something like that too and then she said no one would want to be near me.
>
> *Julian*: My mum said no girls would want to get near me [all laugh].
>
> *I*: That's funny. So did she buy you some?
>
> *Julian*: Yeah, she bought me some Lynx.
>
> *Caleb*: My mum got me some Rexona Sport™ because she knew that I would like it because Ricky Ponting [Australian cricket captain] wears it. It smells pretty good. I just forget to wear it sometimes.
>
> *I*: Do you think you mums are the ones who mainly talk to you about your hygiene stuff?
>
> *Aaron*: Yeah, mainly mum. Although dad talks about a lot of that stuff too. He also said it's not good to smell bad. But it's usually mum who starts it first.
>
> *Caleb*: Yeah it's like mum starts and then dad agrees. He even got some more Rexona the other day. It was a roll on so I could leave it in my school bag, just in case I needed it.
>
> *I*: Oh, that's pretty cool.
>
> *Caleb*: Yeah, it is.

In the discussions with the boys over the years, other than body odour, there were other aspects of health and hygiene raised. While health was not at the forefront of the boys' minds there was certainly an understanding that it played a significant role in aspects of the ways in which their bodies appeared (aesthetics) and functioned. For example, through the years the boys had an unwavering perception that health was largely associated with nutrition. This construct emerged in the early years and remained through to these current pre-adolescent and adolescent years. In particular, the boys talked about food playing a significant role in the cleanliness of their skin, for example, and the ability of food to reduce

pimples and acne. For the majority, it was food more than anything else that influenced whether or not the boys had clear skin now and in future.

I: So what are some of the main health aspects that you guys need to think about, now you are becoming teenagers?

Connor: Definitely pimples and stuff.

Nick: Yeah, definitely.

Connor: I mean I think it's mainly the food you eat. Well, that's what I've heard.

I: Really? Who did you hear that from?

Connor: I guess I've just heard it from people on TV, and other kids and stuff.

Tom: My mum always says that.

I: What does she say?

Tom: Oh, just things like "if you eat too much chocolate and stuff you'll get fat and you'll wreck your skin because you'll get pimples".

Nick: Yeah, my mum says that too.

I: Does she?

Nick: Yeah.

I: So, do you listen to her?

Nick: Yeah, well I try. But it's really hard because I just eat anything I see. I mean if we have a birthday party in class and someone brings along cupcakes or chocolate and stuff, I just eat it, because it tastes good. I mean, I know it's not that good for my skin but it tastes good [all laugh and agree].

I: Is there anywhere else you learn from this?

Connor: Yeah, well we learn in class some times, and you hear about this sort of stuff on the TV, like on this morning show they're always saying how to be healthy and make your skin look good.

Tom: I mean, we know bad food makes you fat. But it can also be bad for your skin too.

Some of the 'more advanced' boys were cognisant of these issues and were beginning to take some steps towards minimising any potential long-term skin problems. This was particularly so for the boys who have older siblings, and have seen first-hand how pimples and acne can affect

one's body and face in particular. This provides some indication that the boys are aware of aspects of their health and hygiene and are beginning to take notice of those aspects in their surroundings. It is therefore possible to argue that they are developing elements of health literacy, to which the boys allude:

> *I*: So, what are the main sorts of health and hygiene issues you think you will face as you are getting older?
> *Hunter*: Definitely acnes and pimples.
> *Jeremy*: Yeah, definitely.
> *I*: Why do you think that is?
> *Jeremy*: Well, my brother, he's 15, he has pretty bad acne. It mainly happens after he shaves. My mum buys him pimple stuff to put on his face every day and it sometimes works. I know I'm gonna have to be pretty careful with my face too. I've heard it runs in the family.
> *I*: How do you know that?
> *Jeremy*: I heard my mum and dad say they had acne as kids and they said it can be passed down to their children.
> *I*: That's good that they tell you that. Do you feel better or worse that they have told you?
> *Jeremy*: Oh, better I guess, because now I can prepare myself and I watch my brother and see what he does to make it better. I mean I'm hoping I don't get it, but I probably will.
> *Leo*: Yeah, some friends of ours, their daughter had to go on medication to get rid of her pimples. Antibiotics or something.
> *I*: How does that make you feel?
> *Leo*: Well, you can only look after your skin and hope that it doesn't get too bad. I think I eat well and wash my face every day. So, I hope it's okay.
> *I*: Who taught you to wash your face?
> *Leo*: Oh, mum.
> *I*: What about you guys?
> *Jeremy*: Yeah, mum. But I watch my brother sometimes too when I'm cleaning my teeth.

This pre-pubescent period is certainly an interesting and diverse time for the boys. Indeed, it is an interesting and diverse time for the parents as well, as they try and assist in navigating the boys along a healthy and

hygienic pathway. There appears to be a range of ways in which the boys move towards an end point. However, there is a common thread, that is, their parents, and in particular their mothers, play a pivotal role in the development of health and hygiene literacy.

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Boys and Young Males' Bodies in the Age of Social Media

Social Media Is Everywhere

Social media is ubiquitous in the lives of young people in contemporary Western society. The group of boys involved in this research project are in essence the first group of children to grow up with social media at the heart of their everyday existence. As soon as these boys were literate enough to key on a computer, tablet or smartphone, they were able to engage with others using social media platforms including fundamental messaging applications (apps). For example, some of the boys previously used a fundamental, early form messaging service—a free, instant messaging mobile app that could be used on their mobile phones or tablets. However, as the boys were in their final year of primary school, a number of them were using Instagram and Snapchat. These are popular social media apps given they are free, and most of the boys' peers were using them. Having said this, the boys in this research were not overly interested in communicating through social media. They seemed to be quite ambivalent about it, and many could not really see the point at this stage of their development. The following conversation was typical of most of the discussion:

I: So, do you guys use social media?
Joe: Yeah, a bit.
Daniel: Sometimes.
Eli: Yep, but not much.
I: Okay, what do you use?
Eli: Oh, just like Instagram and Snapchat.
Daniel: Yeah, me too.
I: What about you Joe?
Joe: Nah. I didn't really use Instagram.
Daniel: You don't? You don't? Yeah right!
Joe: Yeah, well I used to.
I: So what sort of things do you use it for?
Eli: Oh, I just look at sports stars' posts. I love NBA. Nothing much else.
Joe: Yeah, I don't really use it to look at what friends post. I just like it for
   the sports.
Daniel: It's a bit overrated.
I: Why do you think that?
Daniel: Oh, I dunno. Not everyone's into it, so it's a bit boring.

There were also other ways in which the boys could contact each other including direct text messaging on their phones. Some of the boys also messaged each other through the iMessage if they had Apple products such as iPhone or iPad. Interestingly, a number of them engaged with each other through their online gaming devices such as PlayStation and Xbox. The boys who had these gaming consoles were beginning to explore talking with each other on headsets while playing the game online with their peers. They were also able to use a messaging app associated with the device. Therefore, some of the boys who did not have the headsets could be involved in 'online chat' through the messaging app as well. All of this technology, while new, was almost regarded as a taken-for-granted expectation in their lives. Once again, this was particularly so for the boys who had older brothers or engaged with older peers.

While it was clear that, at this point in their lives, the boys had limited use of social media as a tool to connect with one another, there was certainly evidence of them beginning to take a significant interest in social media as a means through which they could quickly access items of interest. For example, many of the boys had a strong interest

in American sports including NBA, Major League Baseball and NFL. The ease with which they were able to access this information was a relatively new phenomenon for them as they were now increasingly being given freedom from their parents to explore the Internet unencumbered. The majority of the boys claimed that while their parents had little control over their social media use in terms of the amount of time they used it, in reality there were few restrictions on what they could actually view. According to some of the boys, there were certainly parents who asked them what they were viewing on a regular basis. However, there were very few parents who would investigate the search history on the device.

I: So, what do you guys like to search on the Internet?

Chris: I search up sports stuff mainly.

Ben: Yeah, me too. NBA mainly.

Zach: Yep, NBA and English football.

I: So, is it mainly sports?

Zach: Yeah, I guess so.

Chris: Yeah, most of the time. Although I search up other stuff too.

I: Like what?

Chris: Oh, I dunno, things like Minecraft™ (online game) videos on YouTube.

Ben: Yeah, that's fun watching those guys play online. They're really funny.

I: Do your parents ever ask what you are watching?

Chris: Yeah, sometimes, but not much.

Zach: Mine don't.

Ben: I guess they kind of ask me what I am watching occasionally and I'm usually watching sports videos.

I: Okay, well, have you ever come across anything online that you thought you might need to tell them about? Like has there been anything that confused you or you didn't understand?

Ben: No, not really.

Chris: No, I mainly watch sports stuff too. Sometimes there are some crazy ads that pop up but I just don't look at them.

I: Okay. What sort of ads?

Chris: Oh, things like getting bigger muscles and stuff.

Ben: Yeah, and those ones for women getting tighter abs and bigger boobs [all laugh].

I: Okay, so how does that make you feel?
Chris: I just don't really look at them.
Zach: Yeah, me too. I've seen them. I just don't worry about them.

The discussion above, which is indicative of many of the conversations I had with the boys, suggests that their parents were not heavily monitoring their Internet use in terms of what they were viewing online. The boys did allude to their parents monitoring their screen time use more so than their search history. It seems the 'screen time' narrative that dominated the media and social conscience influenced the parents' ideology in this instance. The *amount* of time on screen was also arguably easier to 'police' than monitoring *what* the boys were viewing.

It was evident that the images and videos the boys were viewing influenced the way in which they perceived the world. This also included the types of clothes they wore, the hairstyles they thought were 'cool' and certainly the shoes they sought to purchase or at least aspired to wear. Influential people such as Kanye West, and as previously mentioned LeBron James, Steph Currie and Michael Jordan, were seen as key individuals to whom the boys could aspire in terms of the clothes they wore and the brands they endorsed, particularly the shoes. For example, the following conversation, typical of conversations with the boys, identified the power of the Internet and social media in influencing decisions around clothing and popular culture more broadly.

I: So, tell me about some of the clothes that you like to wear?
Corey: I just like to look smart, you know.
I: What do you mean by that?
Corey: I guess, just look neat and tidy and wear good brands.
I: Okay. What brands are you talking about?
Corey: Oh, you know, like my Jordan's and the brands that Kanye wears.
I: So, do you like Kanye?
Corey: Yeah, he's pretty cool. I follow him on Instagram.
I: So, do you follow others as well?
Corey: Yeah. But they're mainly sportsmen and NBL.
I: What about you Daniel?

Daniel: Yeah, I follow a few guys on Instagram, like Kanye and that.

I: So, what is it that makes you interested in seeing these guys on Instagram?

Daniel: I guess it's just because they're famous and everyone talks about them, and they're always on the news and stuff.

Jace: I think it's because everyone else follows them and we feel like we have to do the same to be like the other kids.

I: Wow, that's interesting.

Jace: Yeah, I don't follow Kanye. I know lots of my friends who do. I don't worry too much about that. My brother does though.

I: Does he?

Jace: He follows lots on Instagram and he has heaps of followers.

I: Is he older than you?

Jace: Yeah, he's 16.

This previous discussion is indicative of the socially constructed world in which these boys exist. The boys are heavily influenced by their surroundings, their peers and various forms of media including print, television, cinema and social media. These are important to recognise. While we tend to immediately identify social media as the primary culprit in shaping young peoples' perspectives and ideologies in contemporary Western society, we do need to acknowledge that traditional media also plays a major role in a somewhat triangulating effect. The way in which contemporary media now operates is based on saturating a range of media platforms. For example, various major network television companies will run a story on their news or entertainment programs and then also present them on their social media platforms. In the event that a multinational media company owns the television station, they will have likely diversified their business and also own traditional print media outlets including newspapers and magazines. Therefore, the majority of platforms are covered, and there is a good chance that an individual will view the story at least once throughout the day. In the event that this is seen several times or more, it has the potential to send a message that the story is somehow significant and will therefore influence perspectives.

Bodies on Social Media

It is one thing taking notice of famous and interesting people online with the possibility of trying to attain a certain 'look', particularly with respect to the types of clothes, and shoes, these people wear as well as the activities in which they engage—the 'things that they do'. However, it is another thing trying to attain the bodies regularly displayed online that are often regarded as exemplars of the ideal body to which people should aspire. As I have identified earlier in this book, girls and women have been victims of this 'problem' for many years predating the Internet and social media. Simply by virtue of being on the 'big screen', men and women alike had often placed movie stars in high regard. However, it was the women, more so, that were held to higher accountability around issues associated with physical aesthetics, weight and body size. Men, it seemed, could 'get away' with being larger, and not as aesthetically appealing, due to their role as breadwinners in society (Drummond, 1996). Therefore, men's role in society tended to be more about functionality than 'looks'. As identified earlier, with the advent of the feminist movement and the reduction of manual labour due to industrialisation, traditional male-oriented jobs began to erode. For example, machines could do much of the work that men originally had to do manually. Given that machines generally work more efficiently than a group of men, and only one man was required to operate the machine, employment for men as labourers began to diminish. Additionally, the women's movement, which advocated for equality in society and the workplace, offered women the potential to become machine operators as well, leaving some men in a state of flux and turmoil. There was an additional cost with the reduction in manual labour for men related to their bodies as well. Where men once had the capacity to attain a muscular and relatively toned physique through the physically oriented work they did, industrialisation meant that these men did not have to physically work as hard and hence muscle tone and athleticism reduced, while weight production increased through more sedentary behaviours. Interestingly, this all happened while the archetypal male physique, seen as muscular and athletic, did not change.

Therefore, in order for men to acquire the archetypal male physique in the new industrial age, they now had to actively seek out ways in which to attain this body rather than it happening 'organically' through their work. For example, they now had to seek out weight training, running, cycling, swimming and so on.

As previously mentioned, women have dealt with the 'aesthetic gaze' for quite some time. However, arguably the rise of social media has played a significant role in the visibility of the male body in contemporary Western society, the likes of which has not been experienced in previous generations. The accessibility of viewing the male body has become increasingly easier through the ubiquity of the male body, certainly in advertising and also through social media posts by young males who appear comfortable and proud of the body they sense they have worked hard to achieve. It is this nature of displaying the body, which has become a point of conjecture in contemporary Western society, as it could be argued that, other than bodybuilders, previous generations of men did not feel the need to display their bodies in order to seek external approval and gratification. This is arguably a consequence of these men feeling vindicated for the time and effort expended to achieve their results. It is also emblematic of the socially constructed environment in which these young males have developed given the peer approval required to endorse, or repudiate, success. Social media through its process of likes and dislikes as well as the potential to comment on posts has influenced the way in which individuals communicate with one another. This is certainly the case for people with whom they are friends. However, it can offer people they do not know, and may have never met, a similar opportunity through 'cross postings'. The 'social media net' is cast wide, and many people have the capacity to comment or 'rate' posts irrespective of their relationship with the individual 'poster'. This is particularly so for Facebook, the social media platform, where sharing of posts is common as well as 'tagging' individuals to view the post and potentially join the conversation. It is not unusual for certain posts to be viewed, liked, disliked and commented on by thousands of people irrespective of the numbers of 'friends' they may have on the social media account.

With respect to the boys in this research, social media had not yet become a major influential factor in their lives. However, it did exist, and they were cognisant of its presence in society and the way in which it had the potential to create change among large numbers of people. While they did say that social media did not influence them a great deal, the boys identified posts and images highlighting they are indeed provided with some sort of stimulus with respect to shaping their ideologies on men's bodies and body image. The following discussion is representative of this claim:

I: So, tell me now what you think the ideal men's body looks like.

Jeremy: Oh, I guess it's slim, but muscular and kind of athletic looking. You know, like a sportsman.

I: Okay. What about you guys?

Flynn: Yeah, same. I mean, being muscly is pretty important, but not being fat is more important.

Henry: Yeah, not being fat.

I: Why do you think that is?

Flynn: Well, being fat is not good for you. I mean it's not good for your health to be fat.

Henry: Plus, you can't see your abs if you're fat [all laugh].

I: Where do you learn that sort of thing?

Henry: I mean, you just see it on the Internet. You see these guys' posts telling you how to burn fat, so you can see your abs better.

Jeremy: Yeah, it's true. I follow like a commando fitness guy on Instagram and he is always posting stuff on how much to lift, and how to make your abs look good and stuff.

I: Okay. So, do you take much notice of those sorts of things?

Jeremy: Well, I guess so, because he's pretty famous and he knows what he's doing.

Henry: Yeah, I see stuff like this all the time and it makes you think about things, maybe not now, but in the future.

Flynn: And my brother and his mates do some of the workouts that people post on Instagram too. They're full on.

I: Do they post anything about their workouts?

Flynn: No, I don't think so. But some other guys they know do. They post it from the gym!

The boys appear to have a relatively good understanding of the way in which social media can influence views on particular body types. They spoke about social media highlighting 'the best bodies' and people posting pictures of themselves 'just because they look good'. They also spoke about some individuals potentially 'photoshopping themselves' all in the name of attaining more likes on their social media page. These were certainly insightful remarks for boys their age, which in turn prompted me to ask questions pertaining to where they had come to learn these sorts of notions.

> *I*: So, tell me about the bodies that you see on the Internet and social media.
> *Daniel*: You see heaps of girls and stuff with just bikinis on.
> *Eli*: Yeah, but you see guys as well with shirts off, and tattoos and stuff.
> *Joe*: Yeah, some are pretty big.
> *I*: So, what do you think about that?
> *Eli*: Oh, I dunno. It's just there, you know.
> *Daniel*: Yeah, I think that's just what some people like to do.
> *Eli*: I don't think some it is all real too.
> *I*: What do you mean by that?
> *Eli*: I guess some of the pictures are taken in a certain light, to make them look good.
> *Joe*: Yeah, probably photoshopped.
> *I*: How do you know about this sort of stuff, like lighting and Photoshop?
> *Daniel*: We talk about it in some of our health lessons.
> *Eli*: Yeah, I like talking about those things.
> *I*: That's pretty cool. Does it make you think about why people do it?
> *Daniel*: Yeah, a bit.
> *Joe*: Nah, I don't think about it much.
> *Eli*: Yeah, I do. I mean my sister does photography, so I have heard her talk about it as well. We sometimes talk about it at home as well.
> *I*: That's great!

As the conversation above indicates, school plays a role in allowing these boys to begin considering and critically analysing the bodies on display on social media. For some, it is then deliberated further at home, which in turn plays a pivotal role in bringing the family into the discussion as

well. Once this avenue for communication is open, surrounding social media, the opportunities to discuss a range of issues pertaining to social media are created. These opportunities provide enormous potential for ongoing, open dialogue beyond the realm of social media as the boys move deeper into their teenage adolescent years. These might include issues pertaining to health, drugs, alcohol, sexuality and sexual practices, to name just a few pivotal areas.

In another conversation, some of the boys identified that it was good to be able to talk about social media openly within the classroom because, for most of them, they had really only learnt how to use social media from their peers, older siblings or relatives. While school did not 'teach' them how to use social media, it did provide a forum to discuss the positive and negative aspects. It was interesting to note that, according to the boys, very few parents invested a lot of time working with them to assist in setting them up on their social media account or continually monitor or challenge what they were viewing. At the ages of 12 and 13, this was arguably the first time the boys had real autonomy over their lives beyond their family. That is, they were now potentially dealing with other peers beyond their school environment as well as older adolescents and, in some cases, adults in the online environment. They were certainly viewing and listening to adult-oriented content that required discussion and analysis. As indicated earlier, these included watching online YouTube™ identities that have become celebrities by posting videos of them playing online games. The content is often beyond 12 or 13 years old, with excessive violence and swearing. However, given the popularity of these videos among their peers, the boys seek out the videos and regularly discuss and share their content.

I: So what do you mainly watch online?
Flynn: Mainly YouTube.
Henry: Yeah, me too.
Jeremy: Yeah, they're cool. I watch this Minecraft guy.
Flynn: Oh, yeah he's really funny.
Henry: Yeah, I watch that too.
I: Is this the only one you watch?

Flynn: Mainly him, I guess. But I've seen others doing Call of Duty [COD]. They're full on.

I: So do your parents know you watch this sort of stuff?

Jeremy: Yeah, mine does.

Flynn: Yeah, mostly.

I: What does that mean?

Flynn: Well, they don't really know what goes on in them. You know, like there's lots of swearing and stuff. But it's funny!

I: So, do you think they would mind if they found out?

Henry: Mine [parents] would.

Jeremy: Yeah, me too.

Flynn: Oh, my dad's seen them before. He thinks they're funny. So he doesn't mind. My mum probably would though.

It is evident that the boys are certainly moving into a new phase of their lives that many adults still do not entirely understand nor comprehend. The 'online world' is a very different world to the one in which their predominantly generation X parents grew up. It could be argued that there is a fundamental lack of knowledge on the parents' behalf that could potentially lead to a perceived sense of apathy around the boys' online use. In reality, it is not apathy. Rather it has more to do with parents possibly feeling out of their depth and therefore having to trust the boys in what they do. Therefore, it could be suggested that there needs to be a relationship built around trust and negotiation between these boys and their parents where online use is concerned. School can play an integral role in preparing the boys to develop an honest and open relationship with their parents by identifying and teaching them about generational issues that most parents have had to face in an historical context. By allowing parents into their lives, it should be recognised as a positive aspect rather than restrictive. However, parents also need to be aware that in the event of the boys, allowing them into their 'online lives' they must not be gatekeepers. Instead, they must be the supportive structure that can assist in guiding them along the way.

There is a good chance that the future of these boys with respect to their online and social media use will likely take a similar path to most other young males in contemporary Western culture. At some point,

they will certainly view sexual or sexualised images and video content, such is the nature of the perceived sexualisation of Western culture (Gill, 2012). Additionally, there has been evidence of young males using social media as a platform for sharing sexually explicit images either of themselves or others, both with and without consent in some cases. These boys, like all boys, need to be aware of the consequences of sharing such explicit images not only for themselves, but also others who may be involved directly or indirectly. We are certainly living in a period of rapid technological change that is posing enormous challenges for everyone. Understanding the context in which these technologies operate will be key to moving forward. This is particularly relevant for parents in contemporary Western society.

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10

Boys' Bodies

What Does It All Mean and Where to from Here?

It was a pleasure to interview this group of 33 boys from Reception to Year 7. Over this eight-year period, I had the opportunity to witness an enormous level of change among the boys, both at an individual level as well as collectively. During that time, they moved through significant developmental periods of change from early childhood through to early adolescence. Upon deeper reflection, these changes were significant, considering the first set of interviews was conducted when the boys were just five years of age. At this time, they had only recently graduated from half-day attendance at kindergarten and were still predominantly at home under their parents' full supervision. It was clear, at this point, that the boys had limited conceptual development around a whole range of issues and were largely socially constructed by their early childhood experiences, particularly at home and through media such as television and movies. However, as the boys developed, so too did their conceptual development. It is these initial concepts and the changes thereafter that are pivotal to this research.

Early Childhood

The initial 33 boys in this research were asked a range of questions around issues pertaining to sport, health and physical activity. The research was framed around understanding these issues within the context of masculinities. Given the ages of the boys when the research began, a research methodology based on drawing pictures and discussing them was used in order to facilitate discussion. It was clear that the majority of boys in this age group, particularly those in the first two years of school (i.e. five to six years), found some difficulty in sitting still and answering questions and discussing issues they may not have ever had to think about previously. It then became an important objective within the whole research process to develop a method that would enable worthwhile discussion. Hence, the use of the boys' own drawings as a means through which we could talk about individual pictures as well as comment on aspects raised with other boys' drawings was adopted. This method also provided an element of fun and kept the boys occupied during the focus group process.

Given masculinities were a focal point around which the research was framed, it was always going to be difficult to seek the boys' understanding of this conceptual issue. Therefore, the methodology of drawing pictures and discussing them enabled this to occur in an 'inadvertent' manner. For example, in order to understand the way in which boys perceived men, which in turn could be related back to masculinities, the boys were invited to draw a picture of a man. It was clear that the boys almost unanimously drew a picture of either a muscular man, a man holding weights, or a man involved in sports, such as a well-known athlete or a man simply engaging in sporting activity. Therefore, through the process of discussing their pictures and asking them about the muscles they had drawn and the men engaged in sports-related activities, it was clear they had a socially constructed view of what a man should look like as well as the types of activities in which he is 'supposed to be' engaged in. According to the boys, they had a 'world view' of men as being muscular, strong, powerful and athletic. It was interesting that this notion was generally in opposition to girls and women as a familiar reference point.

The notion of being in opposition to girls is an important issue identified in the interviews. It provides evidence of the socially constructed nature of the society in which boys are raised as well as the feelings they possess in terms of having to differentiate from girls. For some of these young males, being a boy was indeed 'not being a girl'. Therefore, the primary way in which they could express this was through the notion of *being* and *doing*. That is, males are seen as being muscular (*being*) and they are strong, powerful and athletic and can play sport (*doing*). To not display these qualities, or at least have the potential to display these qualities, could be seen as feminine or at the very least feminised.

While the boys discussed masculinities in opposition to girls, it should be noted that they also compared themselves to other boys, particularly with respect to the types of physical activities they could do. These included, but were not limited to, running fast, being stronger in arm-wrestling competitions and tackling in general. Noteworthy, all of these activities are perceived as being masculinised activities, and they each involve an element of competition. It appears that competition is a key component for these boys, as defeating others is a mark of success and has the potential to place a boy higher up the masculine hierarchy at school. It should also be recognised that this hierarchy is contingent upon the masculinised nature of the activity. For example, the cultural capital associated with defeating another boy in running, or a strength activity or playing outstanding in a game of Australian football, far outweighed them winning a game of badminton.

The types of sports in which adult men engage did play a significant role in terms of the ways in which the boys came to understand the process of being a man and indeed the beginning of interpreting various forms of masculinities. For example, a number of the boys were demonstrably excited when they talked about sports where collisions, brutality and quasi-violence were prevalent. Some of the boys referred to these as 'blood sports', and these included Australian football, boxing, rugby and WWE wrestling. They identified the men who engaged in the sports as 'tough' and 'strong'. They were also men to whom the boys looked up to, as being archetypal figures of what a man could be. The boys were also cognisant of the fact that not all men were capable of engaging in such activities, or looking, like these men. They referred

to people who they knew, such as fathers and uncles, who did not resemble this 'representative man' and yet displayed their own elements of 'being a man'. Regardless, there was a perception by the majority of boys that their fathers were strong, irrespective of whether they had visible muscular definition. Strength, it seems, was understood simply to be a consequence of being a man and not necessarily, as a matter of course, a woman.

A significant finding that emerged within the first few years of interviews with the boys related to their teeth. As researchers, we often have educated hunches surrounding the type of issues that might be raised by participant cohorts when researching broad areas such as sport, health and physical activity. This is often due to our understanding of the literature and previous research in the field as well as the experiences we have gained throughout our own previous research projects. In my case, it was 20 years of interviews with males across a range of ages and demographics. I must admit to not expecting a theme based on cleaning teeth. I was also not expecting the underlying reasons as to why these boys were raising such an issue. It seems cleaning teeth offered the boys the opportunity to develop a sense of independence they had not experienced previously in relation to their health. The boys identified that this was the first health-related 'task' they were given that was not supervised by their parents. Most had electric toothbrushes, and therefore, they knew that when the toothbrush 'buzzed', their two minutes of cleaning had been completed. While this was certainly interesting, the more noteworthy occurrence, I would argue, was the issue a number of the boys raised in relation to defying their parents' wishes to clean their own teeth. Hence, the boys claimed to go into the bathroom and pretend to prepare to clean teeth and then turn on the toothbrush without actually cleaning their teeth. They would simply hold the toothbrush while standing, or sitting, in the bathroom.

The significance of the boys not cleaning their teeth cannot be underestimated in the context of broader male health. While some may suggest these are merely young boys engaging in some hijinks with their parents, there may an alternative theory. I have argued that this display of behaviour that rails against authority could be the antecedent to reckless behaviour surrounding male health into adolescence and manhood.

As identified earlier, the attitudes that many men display towards their health could be improved. Similarly, taking risks during adolescence and early adulthood are commonplace for many young males. Some of these risks may place boys, and their bodies, in vulnerable and injurious situations. This is largely due to the way in which masculinity has been socially constructed over time in Western cultures. While not cleaning one's teeth during early childhood might be seen as trivia, it could potentially lead to more significant and systemic behaviours associated with health in the future. The need to address these issues with boys on a continual and systematic basis from early childhood is paramount. Presenting 'one-off' sporadic workshops addressing issues associated with reckless attitudes and behaviours throughout their boyhood and adolescent years is simply not enough. There is a strong need to embed positive health messages to boys early on in their lives and maintain the development through ongoing and consistent messaging both at school and at home.

Middle Years

The middle years were an interesting period for these boys. Some were still emerging from early childhood and 'finding their way', while others were firmly entrenched and beginning to move rapidly towards adolescence. There was certainly a mixture of views around a whole range of issues, some of which were entirely new and had never been discussed previously. Similarly, the type of language they used was beginning to change, and it was not uncommon for the boys to use swear words on occasion throughout the interviews. These were not significant in terms of what is deemed inappropriate with contemporary Western society. However, they were still regarded as inappropriate within the school confines. These included words such as 'bloody', 'shit', 'crap' and so on. There were particular words that simply would not be spoken. However, it could be argued that the boys were just beginning to explore their own boundaries as to what was socially acceptable where swearing was concerned.

While the boys' language was beginning to change during this period, there were also the foundations of a shift in ideologies around a range of social and cultural issues. At this time, the boys were beginning to understand the social and cultural environment in which they lived and were taking notice of social events on a local, national and global scale. They were also becoming aware of sexualities or at least starting to develop and express opinions on sexualities during these middle years. Given the boys' inability to express themselves in an articulate manner at this stage of their development, some of the claims and opinions were not conveyed in a manner that was well informed and, it could be argued, lacked social awareness. Delving further into these claims, it was apparent that significant influential people such as parents, older siblings and significant peers in their lives had played a pivotal role in socially constructing the boys to develop, either expressly or inadvertently, such ideologies. One important example was their understanding of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (GLBTQI) issues. While this was raised by several boys, it was clear they had a limited perspective on major issues associated with GLBTQI sexualities. As expected at this age, and despite raising the topic themselves, the boys would giggle and laugh at the discussion around GLBTQI sexualities. Most of the boys did not have a strong opinion given their lack of understanding and awareness. However, there were some who had definite opinions about the 'appropriateness' of GLBTQI relationships. As the boys alluded, parents influenced these ideologies heavily.

The notion of the sixpack was one of the major issues to emerge around boys' bodies during this period of development. It was during this stage that the boys had begun to understand the social capital afforded to a body that 'looked' a certain way. In the early childhood years, they reflected on bodies that were muscular, powerful and strong in order to undertake masculinised activities that included, for example, sports and lifting heavy objects. However, the boys were now talking about the aesthetics of the male body in a different way. A number of them had older brothers and were now privy to the way in which these adolescent males were attending to their 'look' in a more manicured way. They heard their brothers talk about muscles, physiques and staying lean. They also heard them talk about the sixpack. Given the

alluring nature of the term 'sixpack', it appeared all of the boys were well aware of its connotation. However, they were also beginning to understand its meaning in social capital terms. Indeed, these boys could see the privileges afforded to men with physiques that were muscular and displayed a visible sixpack. They were regularly applauded and presented as archetypal males that other males should attempt to aspire.

Given the various media platforms that exist through television, cinema, print and now electronic social media, the ubiquity and ease with which the opportunity for these bodies to be displayed and commented upon have made them easily accessible and influential in the boys' lives. It also appears that older siblings, and peers, play a significant role in socially constructing these boys' perspectives on the male body and, in particular, the notion of sixpack. Further, health promoters conveniently default to blaming social media for 'causing' and perpetuating body image ideologies. While it is clear that various media, including social media, create a triangulating effect around body image, at this relatively early stage of their development the boys have other influencers for which they must contend. Importantly, the power of older siblings and significant others, such as extended family members and peers, needs to seriously be taken into consideration as a major influential factor in constructing body ideals in young males.

Adolescent Years

The adolescent years were the period around which significant change occurred among the boys. For some, their bodies were beginning to change quite dramatically, particularly in terms of height and body hair development. There were also a small number of boys who were also developing pimples and other forms of skin blemishes. However, these were not significant at this stage of their maturation. Conversely, there were also a number who were well behind the majority of boys in terms of physical maturation. Some of these boys were quite short and displayed no visible signs of puberty such as muscularity, coarse body hair or facial hair. Irrespective of where these boys were situated within the adolescence context, none talked about teasing or bullying with respect

to this physical development. There was real sense of understanding around physical development among them, which is likely a testament to the school, and the way in which it attended to the education around physical change among children and adolescents. There seemed to be a unanimous understanding that change was inevitable and that it would occur at some point in their schooling years. Whether that was early, or late or somewhere in between, it did not seem to matter to these boys.

It was during this phase that the boys began to experiment with aspects of their physical aesthetics. In particular, they started to explore their own identity through their type of hairstyle. While the school in which they were enrolled did not allow for excessively long hair, the boys could, if they wished, let it grow down to their collar as the 'regulations' stipulated. However, there tended to be a culture within the school for the boys to regularly receive haircuts and wear a more manicured style. A number of the boys attended a specific male-oriented barber, which was seen as 'cool'. Other boys attended hairdressers that were easily accessible to them and their parents. It should be noted there was also a number of boys who simply did not care too much what their hairstyle looked like. Indeed, the dishevelled 'look' became a part of their persona as they passed through their primary school years. The noteworthy aspect of hairstyles, just like the process of teeth cleaning back in early childhood, was that it presented an easy method of developing a form of independence around an aspect of themselves and something around which they could take control. The type of hairstyle they chose could also provide a source of identity for the boys and therefore begin the process of masculine identity.

There were also additional changes among the boys that did not relate to physical development during this adolescent phase. Noteworthy is they did, however, relate to aesthetics in terms of the way they 'looked' and appeared to other people. For example, it was during this phase that the boys began to discuss the significance of clothes as a means through which they could express a form of personal identity. They commonly talked about clothes that would enhance a certain aspect of their physique or offer the potential to disguise and mask particular aspects. For example, some of the boys talked about wearing particular coloured clothing in order to make them look 'slim' while

others talked about the cut of the clothes, which enhanced their body physique. It could be argued that these are quite mature claims for boys around 12 to 13 years of age. However, it provides an indication of the way in which these young males were beginning to perceive themselves within the context of the broader sociocultural environment. It is also evidence of the boys exploring options to develop a personal identity, beyond the physical, that is meaningful to the way in which they perceive themselves.

While also along the same lines as clothing, it was during this period that some of the boys seemed to develop an infatuation of sorts with high profile, and high priced, shoes. Indeed, these were not simply regular shoes. They were generally well-known, and branded, basketball shoes worn by key American basketball players. Otherwise, they were worn and endorsed by celebrities, thereby providing further validation of their social and cultural capital. It is interesting to note that this 'fascination and fixation' on these high profile shoes had been largely fuelled by the ease with which they could view them online, being worn by sports stars and celebrities. Through their initial foray into social media and then online search engines, this offered the opportunity to be fascinated by those wearing them and then fixated by continual product searches including reviews and price matching at online sites and so on. This created a veritable 'perfect storm' for the boys to maintain and enhance their interest in shoes.

As mentioned, the Internet and social media were beginning to play a pivotal role in the lives of the boys. While they were neither obsessive about the Internet, nor social media as the main form of socialisation during this phase, there was certainly evidence that they were beginning to become a significant presence in their lives. For example, rather than go to the library to search for information in books, the boys referred to immediately defaulting to the Internet and specifically Wikipedia, as a form of reference. Additionally, as with the example of the high profile basketball shoes, in the event of a product they noticed being used or worn by a celebrity or athlete they would quickly search the Internet for information. The ease with which they could conduct this information seeking was certainly life changing for these boys. However, given their seamless entry into the digital world, it was not a major singular

event. Most had grown up with devices such as the iPad and digital tablets and therefore had the opportunity to search the Internet at their leisure. Importantly, it was noted that the boys more frequently engaged in social media and began to feel a little more mature with respect to social media upon receiving their first mobile phone. While some of the boys had previously engaged in limited social media apps, they were now beginning to move towards the more popular, mature apps such as Instagram™, Snapchat™ and Facebook™. Ultimately, this opened them up to a vast 'social environment' beyond their somewhat confined networks. They were now fast approaching the 'adult world' through these new social networks.

What Has Been Learned and Where to from Here?

There have been enormous levels of social, emotional, psychological and physical change among this group of boys from the initial interviews when they were five years of age through to 12–13. The main developmental periods for this book have been around early childhood, middle and adolescent years. As identified throughout, each of these periods has presented its own unique set of circumstances with respect to sport, health and physical activity in relation to masculinity. The boys seem to have navigated themselves through the various pivotal periods of change well, which has been in part due to their strong social networks at school as well as their family connections. Despite several of the families experiencing marital divorce throughout the eight-year interview period, there remained strong connections to family and there did not appear to be a situation associated with 'absent parents' in these instances. A number of the boys in this situation spent equal time with their father and mother, thereby providing opportunities for male role models in their lives. This is significant given the dearth of male teachers in primary schools in Australia, which in turn means a lack of male role models provided during the early schooling years within the schooling system.

From a social constructionist perspective, the boys have developed from early childhood through to adolescence in a somewhat linear manner. Indeed, throughout the interviews they have identified many key social and cultural issues that are likely to impact personal and social development along the way. The primary 'immediate' influencers have been factors such as parents, significantly extended family members, older brothers and peers. However, there has also been substantial, broader social and cultural influence from areas such as the Internet, social media and the media in general, which ultimately provides a triangulating effect for endorsing various forms of gender constructed attitudes and behaviours, including physical aesthetics and body image. Therefore, these media outlets have the potential to create, promote and maintain socially constructed ideologies that can become social and cultural norms. As a consequence, these boys have come to present, what some regard as 'typical' gendered viewpoints throughout the interview process. However, noteworthy was the way in which a number of these notions were challenged by each other within the focus groups discussions. It provides some evidence that despite broader coercive forces, the boys have the capacity to challenge and reject social norms they may see as undesirable within the context of their lives.

After conducting all of the interviews with boys over eight years, I have had the opportunity to watch them grow and develop from early childhood into independent adolescents. The future is certainly bright for these boys, it would seem. Clearly, there are going to be challenges along the way to adulthood and beyond. However, they appear to have developed a sense of resilience that will hold them in good stead throughout their secondary school years and adult life. The key to this, from my perspective, is social and cultural literacy. The boys have developed critical skills to be able to participate and engage in Western society. While some of the boys' voices are louder than others, they all appear to have the skills and abilities to choose the appropriate path. I would argue that the boys' strong social networks, including parents, family and peers, have been integral to this whole process. I look forward to seeing these boys become men.

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