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J Health Psychol 2009 14: 1047

DOI: 10.1177/1359105309342299

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'That's not masculine'

Masculine Capital and Health-related Behaviour

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COMPETING INTERESTS: None declared.

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Journal of Health Psychology
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Los Angeles, London, New Delhi,
Singapore and Washington DC
www.sagepublications.com
Vol 14(7) 1047–1058
DOI: 10.1177/1359105309342299

Abstract

In recent years increasing attention has been given to how different masculinities are expressed in young men's health behaviour. To examine whether men can use competence in key health-related masculine domains to compensate for other non-masculine behaviour, group discussions were conducted with men aged 18–21 living in London, England. The analysis revealed the ways in which competence in traditionally masculine health-related domains produces masculine 'capital', which can be used to compensate for non-masculine behaviour in other domains. However, the capacity to trade this capital is limited because different masculine and non-masculine behaviours have different values.

Keywords

- *gender*
- *health behaviour*
- *males*
- *men's health*
- *qualitative methods*
- *social capital*

IN RECENT years much attention has been given to masculinities and young men's health and social behaviour. Many men endorse and aspire to 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987, 2005), the locally dominant ideology of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is expressed in social and behavioural domains such as physical and emotional strength, predatory heterosexuality, being a breadwinner, risk taking and so on (Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Iacune, 2005; Kimmel & Messner, 1995). These domains include health-related behaviours (Courtenay, 2000). Gender is not simply reducible to biological sex: boys and men must learn how to perform like 'real men' within different social contexts (e.g. Butler, 1999; Connell, 2005; Paechter, 2003; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Although hegemonic masculinity is often associated with less healthy behaviour (Courtenay, 2000; Gough & Conner, 2006), some hegemonically masculine behaviours such as competitive sport have potential health benefits (e.g. de Visser & Smith, 2007; Whitehead, 1999). Thus, it is important to find ways to encourage young men to develop healthy masculine identities.

Some have suggested that the utility of the concept of hegemonic masculinity is weakened by a somewhat rigid conceptualization of hierarchy and power which may not adequately reflect the fluidity and multiplicity of masculine discourses and embodied masculinities (e.g. Demetriou, 2001; Hearn, 2004; Whitehead, 1999). However, an important influence has been the conceptualization of masculinity as plural rather than singular: hegemonic masculinity exists not only in opposition to femininity, but also in relation to other masculinities. Elements of hegemonic masculinity are set up in binary opposition to their alternatives: anything other than the orthodox form is deemed non-masculine or feminine. Thus, whether a man engages in particular behaviours—and his competence in these behaviours—has implications for his masculine identity. Men who resist or reject hegemonic masculinity must develop viable alternative masculine identities.

Masculinity as 'credit', 'capital' or 'insurance'

Given that a masculine identity is accomplished via various social behaviours, it is important to examine whether men must be competent in all masculine domains or whether men can be masculine in some domains but not others. These questions arise because

of changes in the availability of different masculine identities—for example, the 'new man', 'new lad' and 'metrosexual' (Benwell, 2003; Gill, 2003; Simpson, 2002). Men may be able to create a viable masculine identity by using competence in one masculine domain to compensate for a lack of competence in (or a refusal to engage with) other masculine domains. For example, sporting success can be used as 'credit' to counter potential threats to identity due to non-masculine behaviour in other domains (de Visser & Smith, 2006). Anderson (2002) found that openly gay male athletes were able to come out because their sporting success gave them 'masculinity insurance' to withstand negative social responses. Such evidence suggests that it may be possible for men to accommodate 'non-masculine' behaviours within an overall 'masculine' identity.

There are parallels between notions of 'masculinity insurance' (Anderson, 2002), 'masculine credit' (de Visser & Smith, 2006, 2007) and Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) 'symbolic capital'. Symbolic capital consists of an individual's knowledge, experience, prestige and/or social connections that enable them to succeed in social settings; it is an important source of authority and power. It may be accumulated in different ways, lost, invested and traded. This concept of capital is linked to Bourdieu's (1977) concept 'habitus', which can be defined as a durable system of cognitive and behavioural dispositions. One way of conceiving of habitus in relation to gender identity is the subjective embodiment of social discourses of masculinity. The habitus is manifest in social behaviour—via which individuals may accrue or lose symbolic social capital. However, the capital associated with particular behaviours varies according to which 'field' or social arena they are enacted in (Bourdieu, 1977; Williams, 1995). Thus, the standing of an individual in a particular social context is the result of an interaction between the specific rules of the context (field), the individual's dispositions (habitus) and the individual's behaviour (and social capital) (Bourdieu, 1984). Masculinity can be considered to be a form of symbolic capital.

Although the possibility for trading masculine capital exists, it is clear that alternative masculinities are inferior to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). However, it is not known whether all components of masculinity are of equal value, or whether all non-masculine behaviour can be compensated for by masculine behaviour in other domains—for example, to what extent does athletic prowess 'compensate' for homosexuality? Or, using Bourdieu's

terms, to what extent can masculine capital accrued in one field be transferred to another? The analyses presented here were designed to examine how young men's perceptions of other men's masculinity are influenced by their competence in four key 'masculine' behavioural domains briefly outlined below. These four domains were chosen because they represent distinct health- and body-related aspects of hegemonic masculinity that may be used as sources of masculine capital.

Physical prowess

Physical prowess is an important part of orthodox masculinity (Connell, 2005; Messner, 1992; Robertson, 2003). 'Masculine' sports and certain traditional masculine occupations (e.g. construction, labour) require physical strength. Thus, a muscular physique has become a symbol of masculinity to which many men aspire (Beagan & Saunders, 2005; Fawcner & McMurray, 2002; Tiggemann, Martins, & Kirkbride, 2007). Whereas a muscular appearance had in the past been linked to masculine labour, Gill, Henwood and McLean (2005) suggested that in consumer culture, a muscular body is valued not so much because of what it can do but because of how it looks.

Lack of vanity

Although a muscular physique is valued, a common belief is that men should not be overly concerned with their appearance: narcissism and vanity in men are equated with femininity and homosexuality (Barber, 2008; Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2000, 2005). Indeed, qualitative research suggests that men may experience a tension between wanting a lean, muscular masculine physique and not being too concerned about their appearance (Beagan & Saunders, 2005; de Souza & Ciclitira, 2005; Grogan & Richards, 2002).

Sexuality

(Predatory) heterosexuality is another defining feature of orthodox masculinity (Connell, 1992; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998). Within the binary opposition of hegemonically masculine behaviour and alternative behaviours, homosexuality is deemed non-masculine, and indeed feminine:

'To many people, homosexuality is a *negation* of masculinity, and homosexual men must be effeminate. Given that assumption, antagonism toward homosexual men may be used to define masculinity' (Connell, 1992, p. 736, emphasis in original).

There are two important implications of the perceived non-masculinity of homosexuality. First, failure in 'masculine' domains unrelated to sexuality—for example, sport or alcohol use—can lead to labelling as a 'fag' or a 'poof' (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Pascoe, 2005). Second, men's success in traditionally 'feminine' domains—for example, female-dominated professions—can lead to labelling as homosexual (Donaldson, 1987; Lupton, 2000).

Alcohol use

Alcohol consumption has traditionally been symbolic of masculinity (Lemle & Mishkind, 1989; Plant, Plant, & Mason, 2002). Indeed, many young men think being able to drink excessively and to hold one's drink are important aspects of masculinity (de Visser & Smith, 2007). Furthermore, the very acts that surround men's drinking—the style and content of conversation—reinforce hegemonic masculinity and silence subordinated masculinities (Gough & Edwards, 1998).

The aim of this study was to expand on previous research by examining how different masculinities are constructed from masculine capital accrued via health-related behaviour, and by examining the viability of non-hegemonic masculinities.

Methods

The sample consisted of men aged 18–21 living in London, England. Stratified purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) produced a sample diverse in both class and ethnicity. Higher socioeconomic status/opportunity (SES) men were recruited via notices on two university campuses in central London. Lower SES un(der)employed men were recruited via advertisements placed in employment centres and a local newspaper in parts of inner east London with low SES and a substantial non-white population. The sample included similar numbers of students and un(der)employed men. Half were white, one quarter were black and one quarter were Asian. All were able bodied and ostensibly heterosexual. Five group discussions involving 27 men and lasting around 90 minutes were conducted. Of these five groups, two consisted of students, two consisted of un(der)employed men, and one contained un(der)employed men and students. Sessions were conducted by a white man in his early 30s.

Participants were asked to define and discuss concepts including 'masculinity'. This discussion was prompted by photographs of famous men (à la

Fawcner & McMurray, 2002; Gill et al., 2000, 2005). Participants gave written informed consent. Audio recordings of discussions were transcribed verbatim, with names replaced with pseudonyms. A thematic analysis grounded in participants' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify ideologies of masculinity and masculine behaviour. Transcripts were re-read and coded individually to identify key elements of men's definitions of masculinity and their discussions of specific health-related behaviours. When individual transcripts had been coded, comparisons were made between them to allow an analysis of shared and divergent understandings of the topics of interest.

Results

The analysis is structured around men's responses to the different images of men, and the different aspects of orthodox masculinity towards which these images were oriented.

Physical prowess/vanity: Men's Health model/Muhammad Ali

One of the images shown to men was the cover of an issue of *Men's Health* magazine: the black and white photograph of a male model with a muscular physique customary for this magazine (Alexander, 2003). Men's responses to this image indicated that although it was possible to be both masculine and feminine at the same time, any femininity was equated with homosexuality:

- Patrick: That's both. He looks both—feminine and masculine.
 Kevin: I reckon he looks masculine.
 Patrick: But he looks—He could be gay anyway. Like, the way, the way he's smiling and everything. [laughter] And he's shaved and everything. He's both.
 Efe: But you look at how white his teeth are. Look at his teeth. That's kind of gay.
- Marcus: That to me looks like quite a homosexual image.
 Sean: Yeah.
 Marcus: But um ...
 Joe: To me if you do, if you do something like that just for, not for yourself but for other people, then that takes away from the masculinity.
- Adi: I wouldn't classify him as masculine, either.

- Rahul: Well ... it is. In its own way.
 Adi: Not really. Like, he's just posing with muscles it's just—
 Rahul: —Yeah, but it is a masculine thing isn't it? He's got bigger muscles than us, so he supposedly is more masculine.
 Adi: I don't know. You see, that's the thing. I mean, the guy's taken his shirt off, he's sitting on the chair and trying to look attractive and model on the cover of a magazine. I wouldn't classify that as hugely—I'm not saying he's not masculine, but I wouldn't classify it as hugely masculine, either.

Men in all groups agreed that the model presented a masculine form, but that because he presented this in a non-masculine way for a non-masculine purpose, his masculinity was compromised. It was apparent that the model's excessive concern with his appearance and his pose were considered to be non-masculine.

In all groups, the image of the model was followed by an image of Muhammad Ali at the height of his boxing career. This provided a contrast between a muscular body employed in a 'masculine' activity (boxing) and a muscular body employed in a 'feminine' activity (modelling). In some groups the segue from the *Men's Health* cover model to Muhammad Ali was pre-empted by participants, rather than a response to the interviewer's introduction of Ali to the discussion, as indicated in the following quote:

- Tim: [re: *Men's Health* model] That's not masculine.
Int: *That's not masculine?*
 Tim: No.
 Jack: That's— [unclear]
 Matt: Yeah. It's kind of not—It's not masculine because ... he might be built like that, but, you know, he'd probably be no good at rugby or whatever—
 Tim: —The reason he's doing it is just to show off.
 Paul: Is he on a deck chair? Or is he in a stool in a boxing ring or something?
 Tim: Yeah. [unclear]
 Matt: He's wearing these '50s swimming shorts as well.
 Tim: Absolutely. If that was a boxer like that, then you would be like 'OK. Yeah. That's a masculine image.' But the fact that he's not just ...
Int: *So if you had, um [finds picture] this one. Muhammad Ali with George Foreman on the mat.*

- Tim: Yeah, that's more like it.
 Charlie: But it's, like, he's like that for a reason.
 Jack: Yeah. You know something else about Muhammad Ali. You know, that he was one of the hardest bastards in the world. He had to overcome a whole culture of racism.
 Paul: It's a more manly way to be.
 Jack: And that guy who has buffed himself up and waxed all his hair off so that he can get on the cover of *Men's Health*. There's a difference in, sort of, how much you respect them.

The model's masculinity was questioned because despite having a muscular physique, he was perceived not to be able to engage in masculine activities like rugby or boxing. In contrast, Ali was seen to be more manly because 'he's like that for a reason': his muscular physique was cultivated for use in boxing rather than for modelling. This comparison of a muscular physique for display and a muscular physique for use was apparent in other groups:

- Rahul: I would prefer, kind of like, a boxer or an athlete of some sort or like a—
 [facilitator displays picture of Ali]
 —Yeah! Well there you go.
 Adi: Hey man!
 Patrick: Yeah, that [Ali] is masculine.
 Efe: Yeah.
 Patrick: Because he looks like he's ready, right. He's thinking—
 Kevin: It's aggressive. He's ready for—
 Patrick: —Yeah, it's aggressive. It's aggressive, innit. It's more masculine. This other guy is, like, sitting there smiling.

In all groups there was a clear distinction between the positive evaluations of Muhammad Ali—who was involved in a traditionally masculine sport, and the negative evaluations of the model—who had developed a masculine physique solely for an activity deemed less masculine, homosexual or feminine.

Physical prowess/sexuality:

Ian Roberts

In all groups, men were shown images of a professional rugby league player. The extracts below illustrate the common belief that the man in the image was masculine:

- Rahul: I think it shows athletic endeavour to a certain extent. So, you know, I personally

- regard that as, if you want to class that as masculine, because—
 Adi: —he is athletic—
 Rahul: —the way you say masculine defines us as being different from women, right. So ... if he is able to play that sport at a high level that is something that other men and women can't do, then he I suppose by definition is regarded as being more masculine than other people.
 Int: *Would you say that that's masculine?*
 All: Yeah!
 Int: *And what is it about that that's masculine?*
 Patrick: The facial expression says 'I'm a hard man'.
 Efe: And the—
 Patrick: —and his build.
 Kevin: Yeah, he's built.
 Efe: Yeah, he's stocky. And there's aggression in his face.

In the first extract it was suggested that the rugby player's masculinity: (a) existed in opposition to femininity—he was doing something that women cannot; and (b) existed in relation to other masculinities—he was doing something that most other men cannot. As per the discussion of Muhammad Ali, participants emphasized that not only was the body's form important (i.e. being 'built', 'stocky'), but so too was its function (i.e. 'athletic', 'aggressive'). When men had rated the masculinity of this man, it was revealed that he was Ian Roberts, an Australia international rugby league player. At the height of his career he became the first Australian professional footballer to openly declare himself gay. The following quotes indicate how this revelation affected participants' beliefs about his masculinity:

- Paul: A lot of Rugby League fans would have ... would have had issues with that, you know, because there is a lot attached to it ... masculinity, and the whole culture surrounding it. Especially Rugby League more than Union, I think. But I suppose in Union as well.
 Matt: But in the, I think probably it's harder for a guy who's playing rugby perhaps to come out.
 Paul: Oh, yeah.
 Matt: It would be far harder to come out, because of the entire kind of—
 Tim: —It would be a really bad sport for gay guys in rugby.

The reason why men thought that it would be difficult to be a gay rugby player was that rugby was seen to be an archetypal masculine activity. In this group, Matt constructed rugby as being at the same time 'the most masculine thing you can do' and 'the least gay thing in the world', highlighting many men's belief that homosexuality is irreconcilable with masculinity. However, it is important to note that not all men agreed. For example, Kevin made a distinction between masculine and feminine gay men:

- Int:* Can the fact that he's gay change your ideas about his masculinity?
 Kevin: Well, not really. Sometimes you hear in gay relationships there's a masculine, someone takes the masculine role and someone takes the feminine role. So he might be the masculine one.
 Efe: He definitely is the masculine one! [laughter]

In several groups, participants suggested that some homosexual men develop muscular physiques in order to compensate for their 'non-masculine' sexuality. However, for other men, homosexuality was an insurmountable barrier to masculinity:

- Marcus: Some gay men are ... they kind of go to the extreme of making themselves extra ... very masculine.
 Sean: Yeah, like, there are those proper big ones.
 Chris: And, like, bodybuilders and stuff.
 Marcus: So it's, like, it's hard to, whether you define that as masculine or—
 Sean: Those big geezers with the tight tops on—I don't care how big they are, that's not masculine.

The comments on the *Men's Health* model, Muhammad Ali and Ian Roberts indicate that a muscular physique is deemed more masculine if it is used for masculine activities, but that even when men have a muscular physique and use it for masculine activities (e.g. sport), this masculinity is compromised by non-masculine behaviour (e.g. homosexuality).

Vanity/sexuality: Will Young

The importance of sexuality for perceived masculinity was further examined via responses to an image of Will Young, the openly gay winner of the UK Pop Idol competition modelling expensive designer clothing and holding a half-empty bottle of expensive champagne. The initial response in most groups was reference to Young's sexuality:

- Int:* You said 'poof' straight away. I mean, would you say that he's masculine?
 Chris: No.
 Sean: No.
 Joe: He's like the opposite. He's just like ... he's just reactionary to the society we have now where it's good not to be masculine.
 Sean: He's too feminine.

- Int:* Do you think he's masculine?
 Efe: No, 'cause I know he's gay so ...
 Patrick: Mm.
 Efe: If I didn't, If I didn't know him, like, if I didn't know he was gay ... but I don't know with that whole hand in the pocket thing. He looks ... he just looks weak, like. He doesn't look—Like, you know men are meant to be out, right, he just seems to be inwards.
 Patrick: Slumped.

Like men in other groups, these men indicated that Young is not masculine *because* he is gay. In the second quote, Efe began to suggest that Young's homosexuality may not hinder his masculinity, but then suggested that because Young does not present himself as physically strong, his masculinity is reduced. Again, how men use their bodies was seen to be important. Patrick's reference to Young's 'slumped' posture paralleled his negative response to the pose of the *Men's Health* model. Men in all groups made statements similar to the following:

- Lucas: I think being obsessed with your image is a very unmasculine thing. It's ... I don't know, it's seen as feminine.

However, some men noted that if they did not already know that Young was gay they would say that he is portraying a particular form of 'classy' or sophisticated heterosexual masculinity—the playboy:

- Matt: In that picture he's quite, he's presenting that kind of image though, isn't he? He's wearing a shirt that he'd wear to this, kind of, after-show party.
 Charlie: You know, it's a little bit more classy. It's a little, it's not necessarily ... I mean, we know he's gay, but it's not necessarily less masculine.

- Arjuna: If you didn't know who he was—

- Adi: —He looks like a bit of a ladies man, actually—
- Arjuna: —yeah, you would think he was a bit of a ladies man. The fact of the matter is when you see him on TV you can tell he is camp. You may not know he is gay, but you can tell he is camp, which in my mind that lowers his masculinity.

In this interpretation of the image, Young presents a metrosexual masculinity linked to success and style. It is interesting to note Arjuna's distinction between gay (homosexual) and camp (effeminate): camp behaviour is observable as non-masculine. Thus Young could be considered to be masculine to some extent (e.g. metrosexual), but his homosexuality was a barrier to being perceived as masculine.

Physical prowess/vanity: David Beckham

In addition to his sexuality, Young's source of fame may have influenced men's perceptions of his masculinity—pop music is less traditionally masculine than hip-hop or rock. Therefore, they were asked to imagine the same image, but with the face of the England footballer David Beckham in the place of Young's. Beckham is a metrosexual archetype: he is successful at football, but he and the media are very conscious of his appearance. This vanity led many men to question his masculinity—and again femininity was conflated with homosexuality:

- Sean: He's like a gay, man. He just poses for the cameras. [laughs]
- Int: *OK. Well what about the fact that he is a good player and England captain? Wouldn't that normally be seen as a masculine thing?*
- Sean: No, I lost all respect for him, man, in the Euro, 2000s. I just lost all respect for him. I don't think he's masculine at all, though.
- Marcus: I think being obsessed with your image is a very unmasculine thing. It's ... I don't know, it's seen as feminine.

In line with responses to the *Men's Health* model, excessive concern with one's image was considered feminine, and thus was conflated with homosexuality. However, Beckham—like basketballer Dennis Rodman in the 1990s—is able to engage in traditionally feminine behaviours and concerns (i.e. his appearance) because he has already demonstrated his masculinity through his sporting prowess:

- Arjuna: His voice is very, a soft gentle voice and, um, the way he dresses, the emphasis he puts on his looks ... a lot of people do think he's very feminine, but the fact that he, all the ladies love him, and the fact that he's world-renowned as a good footballer distract you from the fact ... from that.
- Rahul: Mm.
- Arjuna: I think a lot of people would, if he wasn't as good a footballer as he was—
- Rahul: —He can virtually get away with whatever he wants, though, can't he?
- Arjuna: If he wasn't as good a footballer as he was then a lot of people would slate him. I don't think he—
- Int: *So what if he was an average player in the second division?*
- Arjuna: No way!
- Rahul: You couldn't get away with it really, could you?
- Int: *But the fact that he's England captain—*
- Rahul: —that allows him to do those, sort of, weird things.
- Kevin: His image and his facial expressions is always, like, masculine. He has like a screw face. And then, like, he'll be wearing pink nail varnish and stuff like that, or wearing skirts, and all the hairstyles and stuff like that. One day he might be feminine and the next day he will be masculine ... like, cuts in his eyebrows, or whatever.
- [... later...]
- Int: *Do you think he'd be able to get away with it if he wasn't England captain and a good footballer?*
- Efe: Nah!
- Patrick: No.

Compared to Young, Beckham's masculinity was less affected by his vanity and 'soft gentle' voice because Beckham had proven himself as masculine via football and as a heterosexual father (although some do question Beckham's sexuality). The data indicate that men can engage in masculine and non-masculine behaviour, but still have a net masculine identity.

Physical prowess/alcohol consumption: Jonny Wilkinson

Another image facilitated further examination of perceptions of the masculinity of men who engage in some traditionally masculine behaviours but eschew others. Participants were shown a magazine

advertisement for a non-alcoholic sports drink which featured English Rugby Union star Jonny Wilkinson. Like Roberts, Wilkinson had proven himself in the masculine domain of international rugby. However, unlike Roberts, his non-masculine behaviour was not homosexuality, but abstinence from alcohol. The advertisement's ironic caption 'Like most rugby players, Jonny Wilkinson is a big drinker' emphasized Wilkinson's non-conformity to the stereotype of the beer drinking rugby player:

Int: *Would being a big drinker be a marker of masculinity?*

Patrick: Yeah.

Kevin: Yeah. Definitely.

Int: *So, I mean, what do you imagine it's like for him being a non-drinker in a team of 15 who after the match would be drinking? What do you think it would be like for him?*

Patrick: I reckon people might, or his team mates might look on him as a bit of a wimp or something. 'Cause when you, when you say, when you tell people you don't drink, they are usually surprised or shocked ... if you are a man. They are like 'What, don't you drink? Where have you been?', and stuff like that.

Int: *So even though he's been in the same team and played the same game they still might look at him as what he's doing isn't masculine?*

Kevin: But still he has an excuse, because he's looking after his body. He's, like, a world-class Rugby player.

Patrick indicated that Wilkinson may be considered 'a bit of wimp' for not drinking, and drew on his experiences of people's responses to his own abstinence. Kevin's comment that Wilkinson 'has an excuse' implies that men *need* an excuse for not drinking. In the extract below participants note that because Wilkinson has proven himself in the masculine domain of rugby, he has accumulated masculine capital to excuse his non-masculine abstinence:

Arjuna: I think because he is the best, he is England's best player—

Rahul: —He is regarded as being the most masculine.

Arjuna: Yeah. I would say that over-rides the fact that he doesn't drink. So I see the point of your question now from before ... that how, what criteria ... and if you do one but don't do another one, does that over-ride it?

Rahul: The, the ... the thing is, I think, that certain males will always be striving to look masculine, kind of thing. So somebody like him who has, kind of, got that adulation from his sport, from his sport achievement, from his achievements on the field, he doesn't have to kind of compensate for that by his drinking attitude, or by his getting women and stuff like that ... Whereas generally, most people obviously aren't as good as him, kind of thing, so they ... in certain ways they

Arjuna: —make up—

Rahul: —they have to make up for it, kind of thing. So as you were saying, like, is it lots of little things adding up, or if you're exceptional at one thing, like, if you can bed any woman, then you don't need to be a big drinker, you don't need to be a good sports player. But ... you know, the normal people, kind of thing, the majority are going to have to bring in a little bit from here and there to try and ... you know, bolster their image.

Although participants agreed that not drinking may be un-masculine, Wilkinson's overall masculinity was not in question: he had already proven it by winning the Rugby World Cup. It is important to note that Wilkinson's abstinence had less adverse consequences for his perceived masculinity than did Ian Roberts' homosexuality or David Beckham's metrosexuality. Perhaps this is because (as Kevin noted), alcohol consumption could interfere with Wilkinson's capacity to play rugby, whereas not being homosexual or vain would not affect sporting ability *per se*. Alternatively, or additionally, homosexuality may have more serious implications for masculinity than abstinence. Rahul's last comment was interesting: because most men are not exceptionally good in masculine domains, they must accumulate masculine capital wherever and however they can.

Discussion

The data presented here give valuable insights into heterosexual young men's beliefs about masculinity and health. It is possible to identify two major over-arching themes. The first over-arching theme consisted of three sub-themes which illustrated the construction of hegemonic masculinity in opposition

to femininity and alternative masculinities (Connell, 1992, 2005). The second over-arching theme was that displays of competence in hegemonically masculine health-related domains can produce masculine capital which can be used to compensate for non-masculine behaviour in other domains.

The first theme—the oppositional positioning of masculinity/femininity and hegemonic/non-hegemonic masculinity—resonated with past research (Connell, 1992, 2005; Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Kimmel & Messner, 1995). First, participants stated that (excessive) concern with one's appearance is non-masculine, such that the perceived vanity of the *Men's Health* model, Will Young and David Beckham detracted from their masculinity. Similarly, the second sub-theme related to the equation of heterosexuality with masculinity and the equation of homosexuality with femininity. Thus, Ian Roberts and Will Young were considered less masculine because of their homosexuality, and non-masculine behaviours were frequently labelled 'gay' (see also Donaldson, 1987; Lupton, 2000; Pascoe, 2005). The third sub-theme related to the belief that physicality and aggression are masculine, but that a muscular physique is not necessarily masculine. Thus Ian Roberts, Jonny Wilkinson and Muhammad Ali were exemplars of athletic masculinity, whereas a muscular male model was not considered masculine. Gill et al. (2005, p. 40, emphases in original) argued that in terms of symbolic capital, the muscular body has become 'a source of symbolic capital less because of what the body is able to *do* than because of how it *looks*'. However, the young men in this study value more what the male body can *do* rather than how it *looks*. A muscular body just for display or modelling was considered less masculine than a similar physique used for aggressive, competitive ends. Using Bourdieu's (1986) terminology, the capital acquired from *doing* masculine things was more valuable than capital acquired from *looking* masculine.

The second over-arching theme was that displays of competence in hegemonically masculine fields provides masculine 'capital' (Bourdieu, 1986), 'credit' (de Visser & Smith, 2006, 2007) or 'insurance' (Anderson, 2002) which can be accrued and, if necessary, traded to allow or compensate for non-masculine behaviour in other domains. These findings expand on previous research by shifting the focus from men's subjective experiences of masculine identity (Anderson, 2002; de Visser & Smith, 2006, 2007) to an examination of how masculine

credit may be accrued and traded by men in general. The discussion of trading masculine capital illustrated how sporting prowess allows Jonny Wilkinson to abstain from alcohol, allows David Beckham to be a vain metrosexual and ameliorates the consequences of Ian Roberts' homosexuality. However, while men may acquire and trade masculine capital, the capacity to trade it is limited because different masculine and non-masculine behaviours are valued differentially by other men. For participants in this study, Wilkinson's abstinence was less problematic for his overall masculinity than Beckham's vanity, which in turn was less problematic than Roberts' homosexuality. This is perhaps not surprising given the centrality of heterosexuality to common conceptualizations of masculinity (Connell, 1992). Thus, some men believed that despite his muscularity and athletic aggression, Roberts' homosexuality was too great a barrier to his masculinity. So although it is possible for men to acquire and trade masculine capital, their capacity to trade this capital is limited because of the different values attributed to different masculine and non-masculine behaviours.

Within different social 'fields' (e.g. among men of different ages), different 'masculine' behaviours may convey more or less 'masculine' capital (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Thompson, 2006). For example, Robertson (2003) found that the importance of sport is rejected or resisted by many gay men (even though they may be engaged in sport) as part of identifying with 'gay culture'. Overall, there was more similarity in responses *among* men than *between* groups of men in terms of socioeconomic status (SES) or ethnicity. However, black men and un(der)employed men were less tolerant of certain non-hegemonic behaviours, especially homosexuality and attention to appearance. For example, it was the lower SES white un(der)employed men who shouted 'poof' in response to the image of Will Young, whereas the student groups had more nuanced views of Young and his urbane metrosexual style. The black men and un(der)employed white were, however, more positive in response to images of muscular, physical men, particularly when they were depicted in active or aggressive stances. In contrast, 'metrosexual' men were more acceptable to higher SES men than lower SES men. Similarly, the value of predatory heterosexuality varies depending on whether men endorse patriarchy or gender equity (Barker, 2000). Thus, even within this sample of young heterosexual men in London, there was some

variation in hegemonic masculinity. Further research would be required to confirm these findings, and to examine geographic and generational variations in hegemonic masculinities.

Given the findings presented here, it is important to ask what the capacity to trade masculine capital means for: (a) individuals; and (b) hegemonic masculinity. Although masculine capital may be traded, it is also the case that compared to hegemonic masculinity, alternative masculinities are inferior (Connell, 2005). Thus, the rejection of hegemonic masculinity comes at a cost. Men who reject part or all of orthodox masculinity must construct and defend alternative gender identities (e.g. de Visser & Smith, 2007). Although individual men may incur costs to their masculinity, it has been noted that at the societal level, non-hegemonic masculinities may undermine hegemonic masculinity by rejecting certain elements of hegemonic masculinity while maintaining others. For example, homosexual male athletes threaten the links between sport and hegemonic masculinity because it is customary for people to think of heterosexuality and athleticism as 'nearly synonymous' (Anderson, 2002, p. 875; see also Messner, 1992). This threat to hegemonic masculinity may help to explain the negative reactions to homosexual athletes (e.g. Justin Fashanu in English Football and John Amaechi in US Basketball). However, it also demonstrates that masculinity is socially constructed and relational, and therefore changeable (Connell, 1992, 2005).

Although this study has made important contributions to our understanding of masculinity, it does have some limitations. One limitation was that no men identified themselves as homosexual or bisexual. The inclusion of non-heterosexual participants may have expanded our understanding of the importance of heterosexuality to perceptions of masculinity. Similarly, the inclusion of physically disabled men may have enhanced our understanding of the importance of physicality to masculinity (Sparkes & Smith, 2002).

Another potential limitation is the context of data collection itself. Group discussions can act as a site for the reproduction and reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity (Gill et al., 2005; Gough & Edwards, 1998). At times, these processes appeared to be at work in the group discussions used in this study—and it could be argued that, at times, the interviewer encouraged certain lines of discussion, for example, when he produced the picture of Muhammad Ali. Thus, although group discussions

can allow the expression of a range of opinions, it is possible that opinions running counter to hegemonic masculinity may have been silenced. However, this is not necessarily a disadvantage of group discussions. Such processes are likely whenever groups of men interact. This suggests that part of the power of hegemonic masculinity is the way groups of men feel the need to gravitate towards it, while men in other settings (e.g. individual interviews or mixed-sex groups) may have greater freedom to endorse non-hegemonic masculinities (Gough & Edwards, 1998). However, to understand fully these processes, there may be a need for data from group discussion to be complemented by data from other sources such as individual interviews. Individual interviews are also necessary to examine properly how masculinity is embodied: there needs to be more 'theorising *from* male bodies rather than theorising *about* male bodies' (Robertson, 2006, p. 452, emphases in original). Although the use of group discussions of images of men proved very fruitful in this study, there is also a need for research into men's experiences of their own bodies and their own masculinity.

Some may question whether the use of images of famous men would allow anything but a discussion of stereotypical masculinity. However, it is important to note that some images were chosen because the men would *not* be known to participants. This was clearest in relation to the discussion of the image of Ian Roberts. It is also important to note that participants did not just talk about the men in the images: as intended, these images were used to prompt a discussion of men in general. For example, Rahul made an explicit comparison between David Beckham and 'normal people' to emphasize that most men have to accrue masculine credit across multiple behavioural domains. It is worth noting that the majority of images used in this study featured white men. It may therefore be necessary for future research to include images of men with other ethnic backgrounds.

Men who adhere to orthodox masculinity are more likely to engage in risky or unhealthy behaviours (e.g. Courtenay, 2000; de Visser & Smith, 2007; Gough & Conner, 2006). However, sport is a healthy 'masculine' behaviour, and the young men who took part in this study indicated that sporting prowess can counter or excuse 'non-masculine' behaviour in other domains. This finding suggests that encouraging healthy 'masculine' behaviours such as sport will provide health benefits, and may

also reduce the potential harms entailed when men use health-compromising behaviours such as binge drinking or risk taking to develop and demonstrate their masculinity.

This study adds to previous research (Connell, 2005; Kimmel & Messner, 1995) by illustrating how different masculinities exist in relation to other masculinities and in relation to femininity. The data presented here suggest that although masculinity and femininity per se are not irreconcilable, within particular behavioural domains masculinity and femininity are seen as oppositional. This reflects the conceptualization of masculinity in which behaviour that is not hegemonically masculine is immediately non-masculine or feminine (Connell, 1992). Indeed, it has been noted that men may find themselves having to navigate a course 'between the Scylla of the macho man and the Charybdis of the wimp' (Edley & Wetherell, 1997, p. 211). Connell (2005) notes that most—if not all—men embody a range of both hegemonic and subordinated masculinities. Men can have overall masculine identities which combine masculine and feminine behaviour. The focus of the analyses reported here was the extent to which young men believe that non-masculine or feminine behaviour can be incorporated in an overall masculine identity. The employment of Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1986) concepts of 'capital' and 'field' to develop notions of 'credit' (de Visser & Smith, 2006, 2007) and 'insurance' (Anderson, 2002) proved fruitful. Although men may acquire and trade masculine capital via health-related behaviour, the capacity to trade this capital is limited because different masculine and non-masculine behaviours have different values.

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