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Masculinities at the Margins of 'Middle-Adulthood': What a consideration of young age and old age offers masculinities theorizing

Abstract

The intersections of masculinities and age have attracted relatively little theorizing. This article examines the theoretical implications of young/old age and masculinities by bringing together two bodies of literature (young age and masculinities and old age and masculinities) and two research studies (one with pre-teenage school students in Australia and one with grandfathers in the UK). We focus on two key themes: caring practices and relations, and the divide between physical activity and intellectual pursuits. Drawing on these themes, we show how age allows for gender transgressions and practices of gender equality and how young boys and old men can also uphold a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, despite age-related tensions. We conclude by arguing that a consideration of age has much to offer in terms of thinking about how gender is socially constructed, and illuminates the complex interplay of power relations between these social inequalities.

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity; Youth; Aging; Age; Intersectionality; Gender Equality

Introduction: Why this article?

> ‘I won’t be able to do this much longer, if anything you’ll be picking me up. When do you think you could pick me up?’ [Joe, age 10] replied ‘I don’t know… two years?’.
>
> (Bill, 72, and grandson Joe, 10. Field notes from grandfathering study in the UK - 05/09/09)[1]

This article brings together two qualitative research projects (one with pre-teenage school students and one with grandfathers) and two currently separate bodies of literature to examine the intersection of (young and old[2]) age and masculinities. While perhaps not immediately obvious, we feel our work has many similarities, both in content and in the way in which age works as a social category that intersects with gender practices. The above quote exemplifies the significance of age as a constant process that impacts how practices are undertaken and imagined. Bill, the 72-year-old grandfather, represents aging – as decline, and Joe, the 10-year-old grandson represents young age – as growth. The intention of this quote is not to construct an aged-based dichotomy between young (pre-teenage) boys and old men (around retirement age and older),[3] but to emphasize the complexities of masculinities and age.

There is a burgeoning interest in the intersections of gender and (old) age (see, for example, Arber and Ginn 1995, Calasanti and Slevin 2001), especially as they influence the lived experiences of women (Krekula 2007, Twigg, 2004, Utrata 2011). This literature examines the complex and shifting power relations evident when examining the intersection of gender and age. Age is viewed as ‘a primary organizing

principle of power' (Utrata 2011, 619), which intersects with other power relations, including in relation to gender. What this literature importantly draws attention to is how conceptions of age are socially constructed and contextual. Krekula argues that when gender and age (and other categories) intersect, these categories can be strengthened or weakened, supplementary or competitive (2007, 167). Rather than being straightforward (such as being old plus being a woman equals further marginalization), different intersections can produce new forms of marginalization or neutralize potential forms of marginalization (Krekula 2007, 167). While this literature has primarily focused on women and old age, it has much to offer for thinking about the intersection of gender and old/young age more broadly, particularly in terms of its focus on power relations and complex intersections. Writing explicitly focusing on the intersection of gender and young age is less common, but has drawn on similar themes, such as the importance of context and the impact of young age in allowing for the fluidity of gender (see, for example, Moore 2001, Thorne 1993). We draw on several of these points in this article, in order to explore and understand the specificities of the intersection of masculinities and age that have yet to be fully addressed in the existing literature, either within masculinity studies or feminist writing about old age.

While a consideration of young (pre-teenage) boys and old men (around retirement age and older) together is not necessarily straightforward, we believe there are sufficient similarities in their locations to offer a critique of masculinities theorizing and research which characteristically appears 'middle-adultist' and/or ageless. Connell and Messerschmidt have emphasized the importance of examining childhood/youth and aging as highlighting the changing of masculinities with age, as

well as demonstrating potential for more gender equal practices (2005, 852). Furthermore, an examination of the tenuous relations of age to patterns of masculinities offers the opportunity to critique the presumed universal applicability of hegemonic masculinity and related hierarchies. A focus on young and old age is useful for studying age-related transgressions and challenges to hegemonic masculinity, and how boys/men are variously positioned and position themselves in relation to discourses of masculinities. Paying attention to boys and old men together further allows for a consideration of similarities and variations in terms of the power relations in which they are embedded, including those related to age and gender (Calasanti 2004). We view this article as important to creating a conversation between the masculinities literatures on young age and old age. Despite the notable work of Hearn (1999, 2007, 2011, Hearn and Sandberg 2009, see also Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007, Chapter Four), a consideration of young and old age together is virtually absent.

An intended aim of this article is to draw together the limited existing literature available, which theorizes (young and/or old) age and masculinities specifically, alongside an exploration of our two research studies. Therefore, we begin the article by reconsidering theorizing about hegemonic masculinity in terms of the implications of age, and then go on to examine the existing writing about masculinities theories and young and/or old age. This mapping provides a contextual background to the second half of the article where we discuss commonalities (and differences) relating to age between our research studies. Thus, in the second half of the article, we analyze the first author's research with pre-teenage school students in Australia and the second author's research with grandfathers in the UK. We use these studies to

examine how young boys and old men position themselves and are positioned in relation to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, arguing that a consideration of age complicates this. We do this via two themes common to our research projects: engagement in caring relations/practices and the divide between physical activity and intellectual pursuits. The article concludes with reflection on how young boys and old men trouble and problematize privileged forms of masculinity (Hearn 1995, 98-99).

Gender, age, and a reconsideration of hegemonic masculinity

Connell's (2000, 2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, at the top of a hierarchy of masculinities, is frequently drawn on in masculinities research (Beasley 2008, 88). Connell's hierarchy of multiple masculinities theorizes subordinate and marginalised masculinities that are not classed as hegemonic, highlighting power relations between men, as well as between men and women. However, a preoccupation with hegemonic masculinity has been at the expense of greater attention to other patterns of masculinities, where the rest of the hierarchy has been under-utilized (Bartholomaeus 2012b, 2013, Connell 2008, 133). Age relations, and a focus on men/boys who occupy a tenuous position in relation to hegemonic masculinity, are largely invisible in discussions of masculinities because hegemonic masculinity valorizes youth[4] or focuses on a middle age group often perceived to be universal to all ages (or at least the most important). Feminist gerontologists have provided a more developed framework that acknowledges that age, like gender, is routinely accomplished and sometimes challenged in daily life (Laz 1998, Utrata 2011) and that 'the experiences of groups are situated in a web of interlocking power relations' (Calasanti 2004, 307).

Hegemonic masculinity has attracted a number of critiques (Beasley 2008, Coles 2009, Demetriou 2001), but few in relation to age (Hearn and Sandberg 2009). We propose a reframing of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, although we are still cautious of its usefulness in understanding young boys' and old men's gender practices. Drawing on Foucault's notion of discourse, we reframe hegemonic masculinity as a discourse (Bartholomaeus 2012b, 2013, Beasley 2008, Elias and Beasley 2009), to conceptualize how, while practices relating to a particular version of masculinity were endorsed by young boys and old men in our studies, they expressed plural and fluid gender practices. A discourse of hegemonic masculinity refers to 'that which is most influential in defining what is most "masculine" in any given setting, and that ensures men's (as a group) authority over women (as a group)' (Bartholomaeus 2013, 281). This framing allows for an examination of masculinities as fluid practices rather than 'types', meaning that individual boys/men can move between different discourses. This fluidity is illuminated by young/old age but not exclusive to it.

Where are young and old masculinities?

Feminist-informed research focusing on masculinities has tended to exclude a theoretical consideration of age as a social category (Hearn 2011, 90), despite arguments that gender relations interweave with age to structure social life in young age (Moore 2003, Thorne 1993) and old age (Arber and Ginn, 1995). Age is unique from other categories because of its apparent universality and its status as continually changing (Hearn 1999, 2011). Consequently, it offers the opportunity to highlight the fluid and socially constructed nature of gender and processes that challenge gendered norms, potentially revealing possibilities for social change.

There are some interesting parallels between young and old age in terms of masculinities. Both age groups, for example, challenge 'middle-adultist' notions of masculinities, in that they both occupy ambiguous social positions. Young boys and old men are privileged by sexism, but disadvantaged by ageism (for this point in relation to old age, see Hearn 2011, 95), although this can play out in different ways. Despite potential difficulties with applying concepts because of young/old age, hegemonic masculinity is often used uncritically with these age groups, particularly in studies with young (pre-teenage) boys. Connell herself adopts several different stances in understanding young boys' relation to hegemonic masculinity – ranging from boys having the same relationship to hegemonic masculinity as men through to exclusion from the concept because of their young age (for a full discussion, see Bartholomaeus 2012a).

Much empirical research with pre-teenage (and teenage) school boys/students uses hegemonic masculinity (Renold 2005, 66), but there is little critique of the significance of age in being a barrier to hegemonic masculinity for pre-teenage boys (Bartholomaeus 2012a, Renold 2007, 276). Renold argued that hegemonic masculinity was inaccessible to the 10- and 11-year-old boys in her English study because the concept is both 'adult-centric' and 'elusive' (2005, 67). Eriksson also provides a strong critique, focusing on Connell's The Men and the Boys (2000), arguing that masculinities theorizing, designed to understand the multiple positions of men as gendered adults, is used with boys and young men without consideration of the implications of age or age-related power (2007, 62). Others have also critiqued the use of 'adult' versions of masculinities and theorizing about men with young (pre-

teenage) boys (Bartholomaeus 2012a, Davies 2003, 101, Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007, 104-105, Thorne 1993, 172). Despite the relatively small yet growing amount of research with pre-teenage boys (including, but not limited to, the references above), searches of the leading masculinities journals, Men and Masculinities and Journal of *Men's Studies,* reveal a lack of engagement with this particular age group (for exceptions see Epstein et al. 2001, Hasbrook and Harris 1999, Renold 2007, Swain 2006).[5]

Debate focused on old men is more nuanced than on young boys and the literature is beginning to burgeon (as exemplified by the growing number of articles in the leading masculinities journals Men and Masculinities and *Journal of Men's Studies*, such as Slevin and Linneman 2010). However, as in the studies with pre-teenage boys, studies about old men have similarly tended to utilize hegemonic masculinity without acknowledging that Connell did not theorize old age. Despite Connell's long-standing interest with the life history method, it is apparent that in her key book Masculinities (2005), none of her participants are older than 50, with the majority being in their 20s. Hearn highlights the difficult fit between old age and hegemonic masculinity, arguing that '[h]egemonic masculinity has limits as a framework for taking on board all the complexities of ageing (men)' (2011, 95). Men's positionality within gender relations have been found to differ as they age, positioning them as subordinated by and/or complicit to hegemonic masculinity. This is because old age translates automatically to decline, especially as hegemonic masculinity is premised on physicality (of the body), sexual prowess, and authority (Eman 2011). According to Slevin and Linneman (2010), old gay men occupy subordinate positions in Connell's hierarchies of masculinities, which relates to issues such as sexuality and exclusion from public

spaces (Tarrant 2013). However, the use of subordinated masculinity reflects an ageist conceptualization of old men in gender relations, who have entered a feminized life 'stage'. Linking old age and subordinated masculinity appears too simplistic, and ignores factors such as status related to old age – whether financial or relating to 'wisdom' and age hierarchies. Other writers position old men's practices as complicit with hegemonic masculinity. That is, old men (as a group) gain from the patriarchal dividend through their advantage over women (as a group) (for example, see Hearn 2011, Thompson Jr 2006). However, theorizing old men as subordinate or complicit ignores fluidity within men's gender practices and the diversity of practices and bodies in the 'old age' category. Such a framing also fails to capture, for example, the many anxieties that men negotiate as they get older, which in many ways are rooted in and constitutive of wider socio-cultural contexts and expectations in which aging and the 'greying' of the population is feared.

Despite several similarities in the theoretical positioning of young (pre-teenage) boys and old men, we acknowledge that there are differences between boys and men. Boys can look forward to status gained by economic earnings, athleticism (or they at least are likely to have stronger and more athletic bodies than they have in childhood), and sexuality, while old men may have enjoy these things, although at least some of these experiences may be in the past. In some non-Western cultures in particular, old people, especially men, may appear to be revered because of their old age (see, for example, Powell and Cook 2006), but they may only retain the 'utterances of control and rituals within the family', rather than any actual privilege (Cook and Powell 2007, 140). It is also important to recognize that there is much diversity within young age and within old age as well as differences relating to 'generational' change, and other

intersections such as ethnicity, race, culture, class, (dis)ability, sexuality, and geographical location.

Research with primary school boys and grandfathers

This article draws on two research projects. The first author's research examined primary school students'[6] understandings of and views about gender. Research was conducted in two South Australian co-educational primary schools in August-November 2009. One school was Greek Orthodox ('Socrates Primary') and the other was Catholic ('St Catherine's Primary'). Both schools had students from a mix of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, with the majority at Socrates Primary being from Greek and/or Cypriot backgrounds, and over half at St Catherine's Primary from Anglo/white backgrounds. Both schools were largely middle-class but, on average, students at Socrates Primary came from more advantaged backgrounds. The research involved a total of 95 students in two junior primary school classes (aged 6-7) and two upper primary classes (aged 11-13). Each class was involved in five sessions, lasting approximately 90 minutes each, which were made up of two or three activities aimed to encourage the students to explore issues about gender. These sessions involved activities such as writing about who they looked up to, completing a friendship activity naming their 'best' and 'other' friends, writing about their imagined futures, and being involved in discussions, drawing, and writing about popular culture. Interviews were conducted with the teachers from all four classes, and six mothers of the students in the classes (including two in a joint interview). An additional mother was involved via an emailed questionnaire. No fathers elected to participate. The parent and teacher interviews focused on how the parents/teachers thought gender was understood by their children/students in their class. Three

teachers were available for second interviews where they were asked for their feedback and explanations of the initial findings from the research. Students were also shown some of the initial findings and were asked for their interpretations in the final session (for full details of the study, see Bartholomaeus 2012b).

The second author's study examined men's constructions, performances, and geographies of grandfatherhood and grandfathering, focusing on their identities as old men and their relationships with their children and grandchildren. Thirty-one semi-structured interviews and two complementary observations were conducted with grandfathers, who were living in the North-West of England. Data was collected over a period of one year between July 2008 and July 2009. The sample filled a gap in the grandparenting literature where research is mostly conducted with women, and involves either only a limited sample of men or none at all. The average age of the men interviewed was 68 years old; ranging in age from 52 to 86 years old. The sample was predominantly white, middle-class, and able-bodied, although one grandfather was Black with Jamaican heritage and another was vision impaired. Despite limited cultural and ethnic diversity in the sample, the semi-structured approach allowed for the exploration of key themes relating to contemporary grandfathering of which care practices, aging, relationships with grandchildren, and personal biography were central (for greater detail of the study, see Tarrant 2011).

We now focus on data from these two studies, exploring how factors relating to age positioned young (pre-teenage) boys and old men in multiple ways in relation to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. We examine caring practices/relations and the divide between physical activity and intellectual pursuits, because they were themes

common to our two research projects, and demonstrate complexities with engagement with hegemonic masculinity.

Caring Practices and Relations

Caring practices and relations may be seen as providing a particular challenge to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity (where boys and men give and receive care) and show how the boundaries of age (young and old) can impact on these practices. However, in this section we also show the limits to caring both for the young boys and the grandfathers, and how caring practices were engaged with in particular ways, which sometimes worked to uphold gender divisions rather than being transgressive.

Young Age: Caring practices and cross-gender friendships

There was a complex interweaving of age, masculinities, and caring practices in the primary school research, and there were particular ways in which caring practices could occur. Practices which could be seen as challenging to and/or differing from a discourse of hegemonic masculinity involved caring about others and maintaining cross-gender friendships (these themes are discussed in greater detail in Bartholomaeus 2013).

Engagement in caring and considerate practices was evident amongst many of the boys and girls in the junior primary classes. This behavior was advocated by both junior primary school teachers in the research, and was supported by the general context of the junior primary school classroom with its focus on fairness, sharing, and turn-taking (see, for example, Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen 2010). While such practices were less evident in the upper primary classrooms, caring practices and attitudes were occasionally shown by some boys when writing about their imagined

futures, where an 11-year-old boy wrote '[i]n My future I will win a lottery and give some to poverty', and a 12-year-old boy wrote that he '[w]as well mannered' and '[d]idn't have a car - Rode a bike because hated Pollution'.

At times, some of the boys also demonstrated caring attitudes when writing about their love for their family and friends. For example, Amin wrote of his love for his family and home country:

> when I am 60 I will go to my country and I want to be in my plune [plane] in my country and I wish to be with my family even [sic] and my seocand [second] wish is to be die where my family is die [sic].
>
> (Amin, 12, Socrates Primary, imagined future story)

About a third of the younger boys and half of the older boys who completed an activity about who they looked up to wrote about looking up to their mothers and sometimes described them as 'loving'. While some boys wrote about love for their family, girls from both age groups were more likely to express this. In addition, describing mothers as 'loving' is less challenging to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity than boys expressing their love for others or describing themselves as loving. A few of the boys wrote about their friendships with other boys in a caring and emotive way.

Young age also appeared to allow for cross-gender friendships which can be seen as a challenge to misogyny and homosociality, often viewed as important for constructing hegemonic masculinity (Bird 1996, Flood 2008). Students were asked to draw a friendship map, naming their 'best' and 'other' friends. Cross-gender friendships

made up nearly a third of all friendships noted, with a similar number of cross-gender friendships named by boys and girls. The ways in which these cross-gender friendships played out varied for the different classes and age groups. In this activity the upper primary students were more likely to identify cross-gender friendships than the junior primary students. However, from the perspective of the teachers, the junior primary teachers emphasized cross-gender interaction more than the upper primary teachers.

The age of the students was a reason given for cross-gender friendships and interaction by both junior primary teachers. This was evident from Mrs Searle's (Socrates Primary) observations that boys and girls played together and were 'cohesive' in Year 1 (aged 6 and 7), but began to separate in Years 2 and 3, with 'girls sitting down talking and the boys off playing sport and those sorts of things'. The complexities of this interaction was emphasized by Mrs Hartley (St Catherine's Primary) who suggested that boys and girls in her class tended to separate by gender when they had a choice, but they did not mind when she put them into mixed-gender groupings.

There were also examples of positive interactions between girls and boys in the upper primary classes, and much clearer patterns of cross-gender friendships emerged. These patterns involved boys labelled by their teachers as 'effeminate' or 'feminine' being friends with girls; friendships between boys and girls who had a 'low status' and/or were marginalized in one of the upper primary classes; and heterosexualized friendships between boys and girls who enjoyed a 'high status' in class – that is they were secure in their position in the classroom.

Young age influences the existence and acceptability of cross-gender friendships as well as the ability to demonstrate caring and loving attitudes. While these practices could sometimes be a challenge to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, there were particular avenues for this to occur. Caring for families was often an accepted and expressed practice for boys, as was also evident in the grandfathers study.

Old Age: Grandfathering and caring for grandchildren

Feminist researchers have long argued that it is women who predominantly take on care responsibilities for children (Brannen and Nilsen 2006, McKie, Gregory and Bowlby 2002) and grandchildren (Scraton and Holland 2006), and that this is spatially reproduced in an ongoing division of labor that constructs men as breadwinners or pursuers of outdoor leisure pursuits, and women as carers and associated with the domestic. This is supported to some extent, by the grandfathers who took part in this study (Tarrant 2013). However, difference and diversity in grandfathering points to variability in the practices of care grandfathers are involved in, as well as how they construct these practices in relation to masculinities. Furthermore, grandparenting is a relational practice (see Utrata 2011), with circumstances and contexts influencing care practices.

Several of the men interviewed were involved in more intimate, 'feminine' caring tasks such as nappy (diaper) changing. Across the sample responses ranged from no involvement in nappy changing, supporting a resilient gendered division of familial labor, to an open discussion of sharing caring tasks with wives. The narratives of Ray and Wally demonstrate these different approaches effectively:

> I didn't have to [nappy change] the little ones, thank God (laughs). Colin [son] does it all and Jenny [daughter] does it all. When they're here, Pam [wife] does it. They're girls, I think girls need girls, I'm sorry I'm a bit old-fashioned, do you know what I mean? Men, men are men, in that sense and as I say, they love their grandma to do it, they look to grandma to do it, they don't look to granddad to do it and I think 'yeah that's good, that's good'
>
> (Ray, 69)

> The stereotypical view is of course, the guy goes down the pub, with a box of cigars, sinks 50 pints and celebrates the birth. I don't subscribe to that at all, and it's not a man's job to bother with children and change nappies and so on. Because of the nature of the life we have, I change nappies, do the washing, do the ironing, cooking, cleaning whatever, as and when necessary, as and when I'm able to do.
>
> (Wally, 56)

Both Ray and Wally constructed nappy changing in relation to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity by either rejecting stereotypical views or adhering to them ('men are men'). The reasons for this are complex and individualized, relating to the men's specific family circumstances, their relationships with the other men and women in their lives, and generationally specific notions of masculinities. Interestingly, in Ray's example the reasons for not nappy changing are that he deems it less appropriate for someone of his gender and age. He upholds the 'gender order' by adhering to what he refers to as an 'old-fashioned' notion of being a man. Ray's

rejection of the carer role and his subsequent adherence to traditional gendered and generational norms reinforce his marginal status as a carer in the family. Wally however does not subscribe to this view at all; nappy changing is something he has always done and caring practices are an acceptable part of grandfathering. Unlike Ray, Wally's narrative explicitly acknowledges his transgression from the dominant discourse of masculinity. There is little evidence that he is subordinately positioned. Rather, age and caring practices he deems generationally appropriate, as well as the opportunity to nappy change afforded by his personal circumstances, promote gender equality, fitting with a more progressive form of masculinity that may be outside the hegemonic/subordinate hierarchy.

The grandfatherhood and primary school studies both show how age outside of 'middle-adulthood' allowed for some transgressions and more caring behavior. However, they also showed that sometimes the rejection of these practices upheld the 'gender order', such as when men defined their care in relation to 'old-fashioned' notions of masculinity (for one of the few in-depth considerations of masculinities and care, although without much discussion of age, see Hanlon 2012). Differences in how this played out were sometimes specific to age-related contexts in the family, such as some grandfathers being expected to engage in caring practices which was not evident amongst the young boys. The context of daily interactions between boys and girls at school allowed for more discussions of friendships between boys and girls, which was not illuminated in the grandfathers research, potentially because of the focus on family practices. While there was a tendency to be complicit with the 'gender order', the caring practices of both grandfathers and young boys reflect how

masculinities in their localized contexts can disrupt a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

The Physical Body versus the Intellectual Mind

Participants in both studies also engaged with ideas of physical activities, particularly sport, as different from intellectual pursuits, suggesting there are ways of asserting superiority intellectually rather than physically. While engagement in intellectual pursuits may be viewed as challenging a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, they may actually fit with Redman and Mac an Ghaill's (1997) concept of 'muscular intellectualness', where superiority is asserted through the mind rather than through the body. Redman and Mac an Ghaill developed this concept from a high school teacher who was able to 'push people around intellectually' (1997, 169). The ability for 'muscular intellectualness' to function in practice is reliant on context, and is strongly heterosexual and middle-class. The way in which age intersects with these issues are discussed throughout the section.

Young Age: 'Intelligence' versus sport?

Participants in the primary school research on occasion emphasized intellectual pursuits rather than physical sporting pursuits. On the whole, sport was a key element of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity constructed by the students, despite the fact that these young boys did not have hard, sporting bodies, and often drew on adults/professional athletes to discuss masculinities (Bartholomaeus 2011, 2012b). However, there were times when presenting oneself as 'intelligent' was accepted and even valued (the themes outlined here are further discussed in Bartholomaeus 2013). These findings are similar to those of Renold who suggests the high-achieving boys in

her research may be viewed as engaging in 'older' forms of hegemonic masculinity such as 'muscular intellectualness', rather than alternative masculinities (2004, 261).

Sport was not always central to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity at St Catherine's Primary, and drawing on 'intelligence' appeared to be a different way masculinities could be established for both age groups. This was well-illustrated by Zach who enjoyed reading and writing, and wrote about becoming an author in his 'imagined future' story:

> - At 20 years old, I became a Fantasy Author. I sold 50 million copies in the first week worldwide.
> - As I grew more popular, and movies were made, I was afraid to leave the house for fear of screaming fangirls and reporters.
> - By age 40, and being a multi-billionaire, I retired having written over 200 titles.
>
> *(Zach, 12, St Catherine's Primary, im*agined future story)

Zach can be seen as combining what might be called practices relating to an alternative masculinity with what are often viewed as validating aspects of (adult) hegemonic masculinity (money, career success, fame, and girls/women as sexual objects), thus showing complicity with the current 'gender order'. Zach was described by the mother of another boy in this class as 'very unusual' yet a 'really good friend' to her son, whom her son called 'eccentric'. The construction of Zach as 'eccentric' may have given him a legitimate avenue to construct a masculinity which involved an interest in reading and writing. Zach's investment in 'intelligence' (and a 'masculine' form of story writing) worked to establish privilege and may be viewed as 'muscular

intellectualness'. This alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity was at least partly supported in this classroom/school.

What might be called 'muscular intellectualness' was also demonstrated by one boy in the upper primary class at Socrates Primary, although in this classroom/school it was not necessarily an alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Christos (age 11) used 'intelligence' to subvert a discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on physicality. This was clearly demonstrated in an activity where students were asked to draw their own 'Furious Five' (a team of Kung Fu experts) after watching a clip from the movie Kung Fu Panda (2008). Most boys and girls drew animals or people, commonly fighting and/or sometimes using weapons, whereas Christos based his characters on language and grammar skills: Luie 'Can spell really fast', Frodo 'is an expert in synonyms', Frankie 'loves to work out Anagrams', Buck 'can say a scentence [sic] that lasts for a thousand years', Jamie 'loves to read', and Crystle 'speaks in sounds'.

However, within his classroom/school, Christos's practices cannot easily be linked with 'muscular intellectualness' because they gained little status in a context where a discourse of hegemonic masculinity was strongly linked to sport. In this class, displaying 'intelligence' and being studious were often only acceptable when they were teamed with other things such as an interest in sport (see also Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, 136, Renold 2005, 89). Christos's investment in 'intelligence' could be viewed as a challenge to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on sport and physicality. Some primary school research has found that 'intelligence' and/or being studious can be a part of hegemonic or 'dominant' masculinity in middle-class settings, but is more likely to be denigrated in working-class or lower income school

settings (Connolly 2004, Hasbrook and Harris 1999, Warren 1997). Both schools in the research were largely middle-class, yet there was a stronger case for 'muscular intellectualness' as a possible alternate discourse of hegemonic masculinity in St Catherine's Primary, which had a lower socio-economic demographic than Socrates Primary.

Old Age: Failing bodies, wise minds

Several of the men were conscious of the ways in which interactions with grandchildren emphasized their declining bodily abilities. Much like Bill's comments in the introduction, remarks like, 'trying to keep her out of mischief. It's bad for the back' (James, age 62) and 'when I see them they'll run across the room, leap up in the air, arms round my neck and sort of swing on me … now I feel as though my neck's about to be broken' (Peter, age 65), were common. Davidson, Daly and Arber (2003) argue, however, that in grandfatherhood, masculinities are represented through qualities of being wise or a 'sage', a form of rational, rather than embodied masculinities, which appears to align with the concept of 'muscular intellectualness' (Redman and Mac an Ghaill 1997). When describing their intergenerational practices with their grandchildren, the men discussed tasks such as reading, telling stories, and helping with homework. 72-year-old Mervyn argued 'I've always had the feeling that grandparents, one of the useful things is to do reading with their kids, with their grandchildren'. The men often combined discussion of activities with grandchildren with reflection on sporting practices. Many felt that intellectual capacity was a different way of being an old man, but recognized this as a failure to achieve culturally exalted bodily practices:

> [Tommy, grandson] and I will sit down and we like to do crosswords where possible and code words and maybe discuss reading books…I can't do physical things, I can't play football. He doesn't want to play football anyway. Neither do I but I might take him for a swim…I'll say 'do you want to go to the pool?', he'll say 'yeah', yeah there's usually something that you can do
>
> (Jim, 72)

Jim combines practices relating to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity (physical activity via swimming) with more intellectual pursuits. Interestingly, while Jim does not emphasize an embodied, sporty masculinity, he explained his role as differently gendered to that of his wife and granddaughter, revealing the generational exchange of gendered practices that continue to reinforce gender inequality. The old men in this study understand the importance of physical bodies in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The relationship between bodies, 'intelligence', and privileged masculinities is complex. Waldrop et al. (1999) argue that grandfathers demonstrate care by passing on wisdom and life experience, which actually reflects an alternative discourse of masculinity (Mann 2007) rather than fitting with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

What we have shown here is that age – whether young or old – may hinder efforts to construct masculinities in relation to physical pursuits. For the old men, 'muscular intellectualness' may be a way of asserting their masculine authority despite their (often) physically ailing bodies. In addition, their gender, age, and class enable them access to the role of wise 'sage'. This concept of a wise 'sage' links to old age so is not accessible for the young boys. Instead, the context of particular

schools/classrooms strongly influenced how engagement in 'intelligence' was viewed – with it being an alternate form of hegemonic masculinity ('muscular intellectualness') in one classroom and a challenge to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity based on physicality in another. Importantly, 'muscular intellectualness' as an alternate form of hegemonic masculinity appears to be no better for girls/women than one based on physicality for either age group. In other words, the 'gender order' is still upheld and 'external hegemony' remains unchallenged.

Conclusions: Masculinities and the intersections of age

In this article we have demonstrated how a consideration of masculinities at the margins (both of the middle-adult center and academic interest) can highlight both challenges to and the tenuousness of dominant gender discourses. In particular, we have explored how a focus on age illuminates the messiness and fluidity of boys' and men's gender practices. While there are some limitations in comparing two research studies, the comparison has been useful for starting a necessary discussion between the two literatures; one about young boys and another about older men that theorises ageing masculinities and the broader literature that emphasizes the relationality of gender.

Despite analyzing research material from boys in Australia and men in the UK, a similar discourse of hegemonic masculinity was often aspired to by the young (pre-teenage) boys and old men, explicitly or implicitly structuring their practices in certain contexts. This is despite their complex positions to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity as a result of age-based hierarchies. However, young boys and old men illuminate the process of negotiating masculinities in fluid, highly contextual ways.

Both theoretically and empirically then, age complicates and engenders further critique of hegemonic masculinity. A close examination of young and old age reveals the complex ways in which men and boys may be complicit with and transgress a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. The strength of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity is demonstrated via the ways in which boys and men are complicit with and uphold particular practices even if they do not have access to them.

From a feminist-perspective we see it as particularly important to look at potential transgressions (in this case through caring practices and the complexities of intellectual and physical pursuits) and the ways in which age can allow for these. While our research has focused on young and old age, some of these transgressions may also be evident in 'middle-adulthood' but are possibly less clear. The process of upholding hegemonic masculinity, while challenging it, also questions whether all that is going on in the practices of young boys, old men, and other men at the margins can be encapsulated and theorized using this concept. As such, future research and theorizing about masculinities will benefit from a focus on relations between masculinities/gender and age, as well as other intersecting power relations related to ethnicity, race, class, (dis)ability, sexuality, and so on. Importantly, age should not be theorized only when referring to young or old age, but is also necessary for studies on 'middle-adulthood'.

Our findings also have implications for the broader literature that examines the intersectionality of gender and age. Age is part of the social process of gender and has implications for gender relations more broadly, generating specific meanings about masculinities and femininities (for discussions in relation to aging, see Shirani 2013).

Our comparative study offers suggestions for a greater focus on the specific age groups that become subsumed under the umbrella terms ‘young’ and ‘old’ and shows how examining the margins of age reveals tensions and disjunctures in dominant gender discourses. We believe that further considerations of young and old age together can add much to the understandings of gender in terms of fluidity, resistance, and marginalization influenced by age.

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Notes

[1] The names of all participants and schools mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.

[2] We follow the lead of Calasanti and Slevin who argue for the use of 'old' age rather than 'older' age, as a way of reclaiming the term 'old' and because 'older' positions this age group in relation to a center of middle/normal age (2001, 9-10).

[3]While we recognize age is fluid and socially constructed, for the purposes of this paper we use 'young boys' to refer to pre-teenage boys. This is because we are making a distinction from 'youth' or teenagers who are likely to have a different relationship to masculinities, and who have received much more attention than pre-teenage boys (Connolly 2006, 141). The focus on pre-teenage boys is also relevant to the context of the first author's research (most students were 6, 7, 11, or 12, although two boys and four girls had turned 13). We use 'old men' to refer to those outside of

‘middle-adulthood’ (often around retirement age and older). That is, ‘old men’ loosely refers to men who are in their 50s or 60s and above.

[4] When we use the word ‘youth’ here we are referring to young men – loosely defined as older teenagers and men in their 20s and 30s – as opposed to young (pre-teenage) boys. What is meant by youth is often unspecified in writing about old age and masculinities.

[5] There is an academic journal dedicated to boys (Thymos: Journal of Boyhood Studies), but this is organized around boys as a theme, and most articles do not problematize or offer a critical view on gender and masculinities (for exceptions, see Drummond 2007, Riggs 2008). (Thymos was discontinued in 2014 and will be re-launched as Boyhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal in 2015. The first edition of this journal had not been published at the time of writing, and therefore the focus of articles cannot yet be determined.)

[6] In South Australia, ‘primary school’ refers to students aged 5 (Reception) through to aged 12 or 13 (Year 7). We have used this definition of primary school in this article because of the location of the research, although note that this is not a universal schooling classification.