This article was downloaded by: *[University Of South Australia]*
On: *25 February 2011*
Access details: *Access Details: [subscription number 918775679]*
Publisher *Routledge*
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Australian Feminist Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713402962

REFLECTIONS ON THE ARCHETYPAL HETEROSEXUAL MALE BODY

Murray Drummond

Online publication date: 24 February 2011

To cite this Article Drummond, Murray(2011) 'REFLECTIONS ON THE ARCHETYPAL HETEROSEXUAL MALE BODY', Australian Feminist Studies, 26: 67, 103 — 117
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/08164649.2011.546331
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2011.546331

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ARCHETYPAL HETEROSEXUAL MALE BODY

Murray Drummond

Abstract Despite the emerging array of papers on the male body, many are functionalist in their approach in terms of answering a question or questions around 'bodies' or 'body image' and often from a positivist epistemology. Much of this previous research has focused broadly on 'males' or specifically 'gay males'. Consequently, there is a distinct absence of focus on heterosexual men's bodies and the meaning of these bodies within broader culture. This paper aims to redress the paucity of analysis around the heterosexual male body using in-depth qualitative interviews to listen to the voices of younger and older heterosexual males.

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

Introducing the Heterosexual 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).

The notion of 'being' and 'doing' is a worthwhile theoretical framework around which to understand the heterosexual male body (Connell 1983; Drummond 1997). Indeed, what is the archetypal male body 'supposed' to look like, and what types 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, 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 socio-cultural 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

Australian Feminist Studies, Vol. 26, No. 67, March 2011
Routledge Taylor & Francis Group
ISSN 0816-4649 print/ISSN 1465-3303 online/11/010103-15
© 2011 Taylor & Francis DOI: 10.1080/08164649.2011.546331

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 have emerged for a particular group. Within the context of this paper, based around the heterosexual male body, I now find myself in a position of asking: 'what is a heterosexual man?' Indeed, this is a question that I pose to my first-year health education students (along with: 'what is a gay or bi man?'), while exploring the social construction of masculinity and its relationship to health. Invariably, in an attempt to define the meaning of masculinity, the students come to the conclusion that masculinity is anything that is not feminine and have the mandatory chuckle about penises and testicles. This discussion, however, ultimately involves an attempt to analyse what the archetypal male 'looks' like. Historically the archetypal heterosexual 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 2005a). This is connected to assumptions about women's interest in identifying such a body as being robust and therefore having the capacity to father 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—such as my first-year university students—find it easier to articulate their notions of heterosexual masculinity through discussion around body aesthetics. Accordingly, it is one that is muscular, but not too muscular. It is also a body that is devoid of fat and hair. It must be that one 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 and Drummond 2007), although 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, and 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- and 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 2005a). The interesting historical element to this is that, over time, as gay men came to see the cultural benefits of looking

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

'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, 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 2005a) 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 becomes increasingly multicultural and clearly diverse, particularly within metropolitan cities, an array of 'accepted' male body images is becoming 'tolerated', though 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.

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

Researching the Straight Male Body

While the common perception surrounding the archetypal male body is that of being muscular, we know little specifically about the heterosexual male body and its meaning to straight men, particularly from a naturalistic enquiry perspective. More recently, men's body image research has begun to investigate gay men's bodies, body image and body identity (Filiault and Drummond 2009). It is arguable, however, that we can tend to problematise marginalised groups first and research such groups sooner as a result of these perceived inherent problems. This section will identify a number of key elements associated with the research that I have undertaken around the heterosexual male body with over 200 males from a range of ages and demographics. While I have interviewed gay men as specific cohorts (such as young, Asian, and ageing men), the research data in this paper will be focused on straight men. Importantly, it must be recognised that the men I did interview as part of the heterosexual cohort within this paper were never specifically invited to express their sexuality.

A key issue that needs to be considered is: 'what is a heterosexual male body and who decides whether it is heterosexual?' Given that sexuality is a fluid state, merely identifying oneself as heterosexual at the time may not mean 'straight for life'. Indeed, there is a possibility that the research participants are yet to define, and enact, their sexuality or sexualities. As a qualitative researcher in the field of men's body image, it is important to be mindful of the research cohort and the fluid nature of sexualities in any data analyses. That being said, it was evident that the men were presenting a hetero-sexualised perspective given their discussion and labelling of gay and bisexual men as 'others'.

My research with males about bodies and body image has employed richly descriptive individual interviews, focus group interviews and inductive thematic analysis. This research methodology has provided the opportunity to undertake a meta-thematic approach (see Drummond 2005b). The other common element running through this research is a phenomenological epistemology; that is, a research epistemology which focuses upon what the participants take to be crucial meanings for them around their

bodies and body image. It is this attention to participants' constructions of essential meaning for them that underpins phenomenological research (Van Manen 1990). Indeed, Patton claims that the phenomenological approach maintains 'the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced' (2002, 106). While clearly I do not subscribe to any notion of an ongoing, universal or intrinsic 'essence' of meaning for sexuality or body image, I find the phenomenological concern with research participants' understandings very useful for body research.

Understanding how the perceived masculine body is located within the lives of heterosexual men is at the core of the research underpinning this paper. Some argue that this is the contemporary approach to postmodern body-based research. Jung agrees by claiming that 'by way of body politics, phenomenology and postmodernism are inextricably linked' (1996, 1). It is the postmodern interpretivist paradigm that underlines this phenomenological research with boys and men from a range of ages.

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

Interviewing and Analysing the Straight Male Body

I quickly learned that, while seemingly open to the notion of being interviewed about their bodies, men and boys not only required the line of enquiry to be framed around either sport or health but the site of the interview also required a degree of consideration. In many cases interviewing men about their bodies was an experience that might place the male participant in a vulnerable, somewhat metaphorically 'exposed' position (Drummond 2006a). Accessing an interview locality that assisted in reducing participant tension and anxiety became a key component of the interview process. In consultation with participants we discussed where they would feel most comfortable to partake in a discussion. Confined spaces such as in schools, as was the situation with young males, were also negotiated. These spaces were crucial to the generation of research data that were as rich and free from socially and culturally constricting forces as possible. As a result, many of the interviews with males, other than those with boys at schools, were undertaken in places and spaces such as homes, cafés, sporting venues and health clubs. The men perceived these places as the most appropriate to discuss somewhat personal aspects of themselves and their bodies.

As previously identified, unless the research was specifically investigating gay male body issues, the men's sexuality was not overtly addressed. The perceived sexuality of the men was evident, however, through interview data and the subsequent inductive analysis. This raised another important question that I needed to address. I asked myself: 'do I need to identify my sexuality when researching sexualities-based issues?' When interviewing gay men in the past, a number of this cohort asked about my sexuality or, indeed, presumed that I was gay. The straight men did not enquire as to my sexuality nor did they express to me an assumption of my sexuality. It is arguable that straight men are not socially constructed from an early age to think about their sexuality, and indeed others', owing to the implicit ideological construction of heterosexuality in contemporary Western culture, while, according to the men I have interviewed over the past 14 years, anything that is not perceived to be straight is gay. Therefore the research focus is likely to impact the research participants' perceptions of the interviewer's sexuality. Seemingly, in the eyes of the participants, a gay man will research gay men's issues and a straight man will

research heterosexual men's issues. From a personal perspective, identifying one's sexuality is meaningless to the overall research process, though being a reflective and reflexive researcher in terms of the research cohort is key. As a heterosexual male interviewing young gay men, tensions and a lack of reflexivity existed for me early in my research career. As a consequence I could not use the data on one particular occasion (see Drummond 2006a). Such issues have not existed when interviewing straight men.

The interviews were conducted originally using an audio-recorder and then transcribed verbatim. They were then open-coded (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and analysed by me using inductive thematic analysis. Patton argues that this form of analysis is ideally suited to such research as it enables 'categories or dimensions to emerge from open-ended observations as the inquirer comes to understand patterns that exist in the phenomenon being investigated' (2002, 56). Patton further establishes that such an approach allows for categories, patterns and themes to emerge as the researcher continually interacts and engages with their data. Once the data were analysed, differences and similarities were noted based on my own set of understandings, the literature and professional knowledge. As a meta-thematic analysis, differences and similarities then needed to be established between cohorts and 'themes of themes' needed to be constructed. What will be presented here is the meta-thematic analysis based on my interviews with cohorts of heterosexual males and analysed according to my understandings, the literature and professional knowledge of heterosexual men's bodies.

The two undisputed dominant themes to emerge from all groups of males were that of muscularity and strength. Indeed, muscularity was perceived as being integral to the fundamental requirements of being a heterosexual man and provided a representation of an archetypal male (being). Similarly, strength, too, was integral to this notion. This was related to displaying one's masculinity through physical acts (doing). The data presented here will reflect these significant elements by identifying how different groups of males perceive these seemingly important aspects of heterosexual manhood. While muscularity and strength can be easily interpreted as being homogeneous constructs, the way in which different groups of males perceive muscles, muscularity and strength is different, particularly across the lifecycle. Indeed, young boys' views of muscles, muscularity and strength are somewhat different from those of adult men and certainly different from ageing men. Perception, social acceptance and functionality all become a part of the way in which groups of individuals construct the meaning of muscularity and strength and the heterosexual male. Consequently, the groups of males will be categorised as:

- Boys: what I could be
- Adolescent males: what I should be
- Adult men: what I am
- Ageing men: what I used to be.

Boys and Muscularity: 'What I Could Be'

Recently I have begun a longitudinal research project investigating changing masculinities among boys in early childhood through to upper primary school. Boys between five and six years of age were interviewed in focus groups and will be subsequently interviewed each year, for eight years, through to year 7 (i.e. 12–13 years). The framework around which the discussion of masculinities was set was underpinned

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

by sport, health and physical activity. The methodology used, given the ages of the boys, was to engage in discussion around pictures drawn by the boys. The direction I provided was simply 'draw me something relating to sport', 'draw me something relating to health' and 'draw me a man'. It was this final drawing, of a man, that generated much of the discussion. In the 'un-sexualised' eyes of these boys a man, in his purest sense, is muscular. The majority of the 33 boys involved in the research project drew pictures that emphasised muscular biceps, broad shoulders, and in some instances a small tapering waist depicting a 'V' shape typically identified in archetypal male ideals (Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia 2000). It is clear that boys at five to six years of age have a definitive perception of what a man 'should' look like.

Boys in early childhood also have a clear view of what that muscular male body can 'do'. Accordingly it can lift heavy weights given that it has immense strength and power. It is a body that is far stronger than a woman's and thus has the capacity to be much more adept at sports than a female's, particularly those that demand, speed, power and aggression, all stereotypical masculinised traits and indeed linked to muscularity. It is a body that is in direct opposition to that of a woman's. Seemingly, males have big muscles, women do not. Men can use those muscles in a more functional manner to be faster, stronger and more powerful. By definition, women are seemingly slower, weaker and less influential. It is quite a fundamental argument that these boys construct and yet it has the capacity to shape their notions of what a man should look like aesthetically, his performance in sports and his hegemonic status over women in particular as a consequence. The following discussion with a group of five- to six-year-old boys emphasises this notion well. Indeed, this is typical of the conversations that were held around boys and their capacity to 'beat' girls:

Q: So tell me why you think that girls are not as fast at running.
A1: Yeah, I could beat them.
A2: Because boys can actually beat them because the girls are slow.
Q: Why do you think girls are slower?
A1: Because the boys are super fast, they're faster than a stink fly [a cartoon character].
Q: Wow, that's fast. But what makes boys superfast?
A1: Exercising.
A2: Yeah, and they get big muscles.
Q: So what do you think muscles do?
A2: Make you grow. Yeah, they make you go super fast.

Noteworthy is that this connection is then extended to adulthood, where men are clearly perceived as being the dominant gender based on their ability to 'outperform' women in various sporting pursuits through their heightened levels of muscularity:

A1: Men are the fastest in the Olympics.
Q: Why is that?
A1: Because they get fast and are fit.
A2: Because they have strong muscles.
Q: Who do you think are the strongest then?
A1: Men.
Q: Why?

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

A1: Because they get fit exercising.
A3: Because they eat healthy food. Not junk healthy food.
Q: But can women eat healthy food get muscles too?
A3: No.
Q: Why not?
A3: Because they don't have any muscles because they're not boys.
Q: So can only men can have muscles, is that right?
A1: Yes, and get strong.
Q: What does a man look like, do you want to draw me a picture of a man?
A1: Yeah. A strong man.
Q: What does he have?
A1: Muscles.
Q: [Looking at the picture] Wow. He's got big muscles on his arms. What do his legs look like, are they strong too?
A2: Yep. Mine has 100.
Q: And what does it mean if you've got muscles?
A2: It means they get healthy food, and they buy heaps of healthy things because they want to get really strong.
A1: So they can get in the Olympics.
A3: Yeah, because they [the men] want to win.

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

There was an underpinning ideology among the boys in early childhood that a man must have a level of muscularity that is visible. Otherwise he will be seen to be less of a man and subsequently ridiculed. In the following comment by a five-year-old boy, he makes the connection between males being bullied and teased in the absence of an 'acceptable' level of muscularity:

> It's mean to show people 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.

It has often been assumed that children in early childhood cannot provide reliable data that is meaningful in terms of the data's ability to be analysed (Birbeck and Drummond 2005). As this research has shown, listening to the voices of boys in early childhood can provide us with some insights into how they perceive the male body and the expectations placed on a muscular male body. Given the 'asexualised' lens through which these boys perceive the world we can begin to interpret these expectations as those of the heterosexual male body.

Adolescent Males: 'What I Should Be'

Adolescence is a period of change and of experimentation (Wolfe, Jaffe, and 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 and 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 1997). 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 and 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 and Wasylkiw 2007; Grogan and 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, Phillips, and Olivardia 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. The following data are reflective of the manner in which these young males come to perceive themselves and their bodies as well as the broader culture around the straight male body.

When invited to discuss the meaning of masculinity, the 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:

> 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 Rules football]. But it's a man's game and you have to be able to take it.

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

Many of the boys in this cohort provided specific examples of muscular male bodies from the highly aggressive masculinised sport of Australian Rules 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 male talked about two big men in the Australian Football League who play in the key offensive and defensive positions on the ground. He stated:

> Guy's like Wayne Carey and Darren Mead 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 Rules 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, 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 muscley. 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: 'What I Am'

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

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

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 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 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 gay Mardi Gras' they can just keep it to themselves that's fine. I don't have to go having sex on the streets with my girlfriend so they don't go having sex on the streets with their boyfriends, that's fine.

It was in 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 was a key theme associated with heterosexual masculinity. The point of difference with the 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 men's understanding of the significance of muscularity in the lives of heterosexual men. Hence, most of the men identified that at some point in their lives they would like to be bigger and more muscular

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

for several reasons. One of these included sexual and physical attraction to women, the other was the recognition and peer approval that 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 musculature, 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 heterosexual 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: 'What I Used to Be'

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 ageing heterosexual 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

begin to recognise and experience these changes. Some of the men referred to their body 'failing' them. One might suggest that ageing men, irrespective of sexuality, would seemingly be homogenous in their views towards ageing as the masculinised body begins to 'fail'. Yet this has certainly not been evident among the ageing gay men that I have interviewed in the past (Drummond 2006b). The significant difference that exists is that the ageing heterosexual men appear to be attempting to live up to an expected archetypal ideal of what a heterosexual man's body should be able to do. It is noteworthy that many of these men considered that they had enacted their masculinity through their occupation and felt that they no longer had the capacity to do this given that they were now retired. They also enacted their masculinity through the tasks they were 'supposed' to traditionally undertake as a heterosexual man, namely tasks that their 'wives were not supposed to do'. Cleaning gutters on the roof, 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 that 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 demonstrated clearly 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 heterosexual men, these men understand that their bodies will no longer have the capacity to retain their 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. It is important to recognise, however, 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 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.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have identified the meaning of muscles, muscularity and strength to heterosexual males across the lifespan from boys in early childhood, to adolescent males, adult men and ageing men. While the meaning of muscularity is different for each group, I have identified that there is a significant degree of importance in each regarding this perceived element of heterosexual masculinity. The boys in early childhood provide evidence that they are shaped in a socio-cultural context with respect to how they come to view the male body and its subsequent muscularity. Accordingly in

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

their eyes, the male body is muscular and strong as a result. It is a body that is physically stronger and more powerful than that of girls and women. It is also larger and can 'do' physical acts, such as sport, better. While these are simplistic perspectives they do provide an understanding of the fundamental tenets of thought that underpin young boys' concepts of what it is to be a man.

Adolescent males offer a different lens through which to understand perceptions of the heterosexual male. It is arguable that this group, above all identified within this paper, are the most impressionable in terms of body aesthetics. Adolescent males are coming to terms with the changing nature of their own body as well as attempting to interpret meanings of straight and gay masculinities and how these fit into their own lives. It appears that contemporary heterosexual masculinity is defined through a muscular and strong male body. While this is a somewhat simplistic understanding of the heterosexual male body, it may be the consequence of the tumultuous adolescent period. Opportunities to make this stage more cerebral for adolescent males need to be presented prior to and during these adolescent years.

Heterosexual adult males within the context of this paper offer alternative insights into the construction of masculinised male bodies. Accordingly, this group of men appear somewhat more at ease with the shape of their bodies and levels of musculature, despite articulating their desire to become bigger at some point in their lives. The heterosexual adult phase of life, particularly from the mid-20s to mid-40s, is often consumed with work, marriage and families. Seemingly, the size and shape of one's body is not the highest priority for this group of men. Body aesthetics are less likely to be a priority, particularly for men in their 30s and beyond, as they are more likely to have found a female partner and have 'proved' their heterosexuality to male peers through sexual conquests. Hence, developing a body to attract women is less of a priority. Similarly, peer approval of heterosexuality through the visual aesthetic of a large muscular body has diminished. Irrespective of such a claim, it is still arguable that heterosexual men during this period of life are likely to feel vulnerable at times with respect to body image and body identity. The cultural archetype of the idealised heterosexual male body that is youthful, muscular and athletic is all-pervading and has the capacity to impact negatively at the individual level. Indeed, adult heterosexual men as a cohort have not been a research priority where men's bodies are concerned. They are seemingly not marginalised, nor stigmatised and for that reason left to 'their own devices'.

Ageing heterosexual men offer an entirely different perspective to the other groups of males within this paper. It is clear that this group of men are not concerned with the aesthetics of the male body in terms of muscle definition. Rather, it is how that body functions, which is the main concern for this group of men. Strength, which in essence is bound to musculature, is integral to their understanding of heterosexual masculinity. Being able to 'do' masculinised acts that require strength are visible definers of a heterosexual masculinised body. An ageing, 'failing' male body can mean a faltering heterosexual masculine identity. Clearly, understanding the ramifications of such body 'failure' is a significant issue in contemporary Western society where an ageing society is in existence.

The heterosexual male body requires attention at all levels of the lifecycle. Understanding how heterosexual males construct their masculinity through their body is important within the context of a heavily aesthetically driven Western cultural ideal.

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

Listening to the voices of straight, as well as gay and bisexual, men therefore becomes a key issue in how masculinity and sexuality are constructed largely through the male body.

REFERENCES

BIRBECK, DAVID, and MURRAY DRUMMOND. 2005. Interviewing, and listening to the voices of, very young children on body image and perceptions of self. *Early Child Development and Care* 176 (6): 579–96.

CONNELL, R.W. 1983. Men's bodies. *Australian Society* 2 (9): 33–9.

———. 1992. A very straight gay: Masculinity, homosexual experience, and the dynamics of gender. *American Sociological Review* 57 (6): 735–51.

———. 1995. *Masculinities*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

DRUMMOND, MURRAY. 1997. The social construction of masculinity as it relates to sport: An investigation into the lives of elite male athletes competing in individually-oriented masculinised sports. Unpublished PhD diss., Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth.

———. 2005a. Men's bodies: Listening to the voices of young gay men. *Men and Masculinities* 7 (3): 270–90.

———. 2005b. Men's bodies and the meaning of masculinity. Refereed conference proceedings of the Ian Potter Museum of Art Masculinities Symposium, 1–2 October 2004, University of Melbourne [cited 20 August 2009]. Available from http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/events_transcripts.aspx?type=Symposium&typetitle=Masculinities:%20Gender,%20Art%20and%20Popular%20Culture

———. 2006a. Confessional tales: Interviewing gay men: A heterosexual experience. *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review* 2 (3): 141–4.

———. 2006b. Ageing gay men's bodies. *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review* 2 (2): 60–6.

FARQUHAR, JAMIE, and LOUISE WASYLKIW. 2007. Media images of men: Trends and consequences of body conceptualization. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* 8 (3): 145–60.

FILIAULT, SHAUN, and MURRAY DRUMMOND. 2007. The hegemonic aesthetic. *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review* 3 (3): 174–84.

———. 2009. Methods and methodologies: Investigating gay men's body image in Westernized cultures. *Critical Public Health* 19 (3): 307–23.

GARD, MICHAEL, and ROBERT MEYENN. 2000. Boys, bodies, pleasure and pain: Interrogating contact sports in schools. *Sport, Education and Society* 5 (1): 19–34.

GROGAN, SARAH, and HELEN RICHARDS. 2002. Body image: Focus groups with men and boys. *Men and Masculinities* 4 (3): 219–32.

HARGREAVES, DUANE, and MARIKA TIGGEMANN. 2004. Idealized media images and adolescent body image: 'Comparing' boys and girls. *Body Image* 1 (4): 351–61.

JUNG, HWA YOL. 1996. Phenomenology and body politics. *Body and Society* 2 (2): 1–22.

KLEIN, ALAN. 1993. *Little big men: Bodybuilding subculture and gender construction*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

LEARY, KIMBERLYN. 1999. Passing, posing, and 'keeping it real'. *Constellations* 6 (1): 85–96.

MESSNER, MICHAEL. 1992. *Power at play*. Boston: Beacon Press.

MORRISON, TODD, and MARIE HALTON. 2009. Buff, tough, and rough: Representations of muscularity in action motion pictures. *Journal of Men's Studies* 17 (1): 57–74.

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011

PATTON, MICHAEL. 2002. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

POPE, HARRISON, KATHARINE PHILLIPS, and ROBERTO OLIVARDIA. 2000. *The Adonis complex. The secret crisis of male body obsession*. New York: Free Press.

PRONGER, BRIAN. 1990. *The arena of masculinity: Sports, homosexuality, and the meaning of sex*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

SOULLIERE, DANIELLE. 2006. Wrestling with masculinity: Messages about manhood in WWE. *Sex Roles* 55: 1–11.

STRAND, BJØRN, and AAGE TVERDAL. 2005. Can cardiovascular risk factors and lifestyle explain the educational inequalities in mortality from ischaemic heart disease and from other heart diseases? 26 year follow up of 50 000 Norwegian men and women. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 58: 705–9.

STRAUSS, ANSELM, and JULIET CORBIN. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research*. 2nd ed. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

VAN MANEN, MAX. 1990. *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

WHITSON, DAVID. 1990. Sport in the social construction of masculinity. In *Sport, men and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives*, edited by Michael Messner and Don Sabo. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

WOLFE, DAVID, PETER JAFFE, and CLAIRE CROOKS. 2006. *Adolescent risk behaviors: Why teens experiment and strategies to keep them safe*. Newhaven: Yale University Press.

Murray Drummond is an Associate Professor of Sport, Health and Physical Education at Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia. He has a special interest in men's health and in particular men's bodies. He has been the Chief Investigator of numerous qualitative men's health research projects relating to issues such as male body image, prostate cancer, gay men's health, ageing men's nutrition and sport and masculinity. He sits on the editorial boards of *Men and Masculinities*, *International Journal of Men's Health*, *THYMOS: Journal of Boyhood Studies*, *Journal of Student Wellbeing*, *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* and the *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*.

Downloaded By: [University Of South Australia] At: 22:10 25 February 2011