

**Teenage boys' perceptions of the influence of teachers and school  
experiences on their understanding of masculinity.**

Submitted by

John Robert Lee

BA (UNSW) DipEd (UNSW) GradDipReligiousStudies (CCES) MEd(Religion) (CCES)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Religious Education

Faculty of Education

Australian Catholic University  
Research Services  
Locked Bag 4115  
Fitzroy Victoria 3065  
Australia

January, 2003

## **Statement of Authorship and Sources**

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committees.

John R. Lee

## **Abstract**

There is widespread interest shown in the education of boys in school as evidenced in research, education initiatives and discussion in the general community. Research undertaken by Connell (1989, 1995, 1996, 2000), Laberge and Albert (1999), Mac an Ghail (1994), Martino (1998), West (1999, 2002) and others suggests that there is a range of masculinities displayed by teenage boys. Some of the masculinities with which boys identify are in conflict with accepted ideas of educational achievement. This doctoral study investigates the contribution of teachers and school experiences to teenage boys' understanding of masculinity. There are two components to the study. The first part is a systematic review of the literature to highlight findings about boys' perceptions of relationships between masculinity and schooling. The second part is a qualitative empirical study of the views of a sample of Year 11 high school boys in two single sex Catholic schools. The interviews focus on their understandings of masculinity and their perceptions of influential aspects of school life. It includes an analysis of the boys' views of the impact of teachers, sport, discipline and classroom experiences.

Participants in the study indicated that masculinity is changing and the community is requiring men to be more expressive of emotions. The majority of teenage boys interviewed stated that teachers and school experiences influenced their understanding of masculinity. Pupil - teacher relationships, conversations, exhortations and non-verbal communications are all perceived as means by which teachers influence students. Some teachers were regarded as good role models, making a positive contribution to the boys' masculinity. Interviewees reported that the schools promoted two masculinities, 'sporting' and 'academic'. They spoke of contrasting interpretations of the appropriate expression of emotion. One finding of the study is that some of the teenage boys experienced a 'spirituality of connected masculinity' through singing, cheering and participation in school activities including sport, liturgies and retreats.

Implications are drawn from the study and recommendations are made for improving the education of boys including how schools can encourage a diversity of 'reflective' masculinities rather than reinforcing 'hegemonic' understandings of masculinity.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank:

- My family and in particular my wife Elizabeth. The completion of a doctoral research study would have been impossible without the generous support of Elizabeth and our children Julia, Maria and Michael. The sacrifices made by my parents Billie and Kevin Lee in support of my schooling has been foundational and I thank my mother for assistance with this study.
- Principal Supervisor Professor Graham Rossiter and Co-supervisor Associate Professor Paul Chesterton. They operated as a highly effective team providing wise input, unceasing support and timely advice at every stage of the study.
- Dr Ross Keane who served as Co-supervisor in the initial year of the study. His insightful contribution at the outset has had lasting benefits.
- Academic staff and student colleagues in the EdD program at Australian Catholic University. The colloquium program provided valuable opportunities for learning, collaboration and support.
- Library staff at Australian Catholic University, Mount St Mary Campus.
- The College Foundation of my school and The Independent Education Union of NSW for providing some assistance with expenses.
- Students who participated in interviews. My thanks to them for their openness and involvement.
- Principals and teachers who enabled student interviews to take place.

Statement of Authorship and Sources	
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Table of Contents	
List of Tables	
Main text of the thesis	
Appendices	
Bibliography	

## Table of Contents

### Chapter 1

#### Introduction

1.1	Background .....	1
1.2	Purpose of the study .....	2
1.3	Methodology .....	2
1.4	Definition of terms .....	3
1.5	Organisation of the thesis .....	4

### Chapter 2

#### Literature on Masculinity, Schooling and Teenage Boys

2.1	Introduction .....	5
2.2	Masculinity or Masculinities, and Teenage Boys .....	6
	2.2.1 Defining masculinity .....	6
	2.2.2 Implications of definitions of masculinity for research with teenage boys .....	13
2.3	Influences on Teenage Boys' Understanding of Masculinity .....	15
2.4	Teenage Boys, Masculinity and Schooling .....	19
	2.4.1 Overview of research on Teenage Boys and Schooling .....	19
	2.4.2 Studies of Teenage Boys, Masculinity and Schooling .....	20
	2.4.3 School as agent in the making of masculinities .....	21
	2.4.4 Addressing the education of boys .....	23
	2.4.5 Reporting boys' views on masculinity .....	25
	2.4.6 Need for institutional changes .....	27
	2.4.7 Need for more research .....	27

2.5	Teachers, School Experiences and Masculinity .....	29
2.5.1	Teachers .....	30
2.5.2	Sport .....	35
2.5.3	Subjects .....	41
2.5.4	Discipline .....	43
2.5.5	Spirituality and Religion .....	44
2.6	Summary .....	45

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

3.1	Introduction .....	46
3.2	Research Design .....	46
3.2.1	Literature Review and Qualitative Investigation .....	46
3.2.2	Research Design of the Qualitative Investigation .....	46
3.2.3	Justification of Research Design .....	48
3.3	Data Collection .....	51
3.3.1	Pilot and main phases of the study .....	51
3.3.2	Schools and students in the study .....	53
3.3.3	Standardised Open-ended Interviews .....	55
3.3.4	Interview Schedule .....	55
3.3.5	Conduct of Interviews .....	56
3.3.6	Individual Interviews and Group Interviews .....	57
3.3.7	Recording Interview Data .....	58
3.3.8	Ethical Considerations .....	58
3.4	Data Analysis .....	59
3.5	Validity .....	60
3.6	Reliability .....	62
3.7	Summary .....	62

## **Chapter 4**

### **Teenage Boys' Perceptions of Masculinity**

4.1	Introduction .....	63
4.2	Perceptions of being a man today .....	63

4.2.1	Today's Men: Independent, Responsible and Traditional .....	64
4.2.2	Men are Changing .....	65
4.3	Perceptions of Masculinity .....	68
4.4	Perceptions of types of masculinity .....	70
4.5	Perceptions of Influences on Understanding of Masculinity .....	73
4.6	Discussion of teenage boys' perceptions of masculinity .....	80
4.6.1	Being a man today .....	80
4.6.2	Understanding masculinity .....	83
4.6.3	Expressing emotions .....	84
4.6.4	Multiple masculinities .....	87
4.6.5	Influencing masculinity .....	88
4.7	Summary .....	89

## **Chapter 5**

### **Teenage Boys' Perceptions of the Influence of Teachers on their Understanding of Masculinity**

5.1	Introduction .....	90
5.2	Perceptions of the influence of teachers on students' understanding of masculinity .....	90
5.2.1	Teenage boys' recollections of teachers and masculine identity ...	90
5.2.2	Teenage boys' perceptions of the influence of teachers' on their understanding of masculinity .....	93
5.3	Perceptions of teacher messages about masculinity .....	96
5.3.1	Teenage boys' awareness of their teachers' views on masculinity	96
5.3.2	Teenage boys' perceptions of how their teachers' views are communicated .....	99
5.3.3	Teenage boys' perceptions of their teachers' views on the best forms of masculinity .....	101
5.4	Role models in school .....	104
5.5	Discussion .....	109
5.5.1	Teachers enhance teenage boys' understanding of masculinity ...	109
5.5.2	Teacher action and masculinity .....	112
5.5.3	Teacher talk and masculinity .....	113

5.5.4	Esteemed teachers and masculinity .....	115
5.6	Summary .....	116

## **Chapter 6**

### **Teenage Boys' Perceptions of the Influence of School Experiences on their Understanding of Masculinity**

6.1	Introduction .....	118
6.2	Perceptions of the influence of school experiences .....	118
6.3	Perceptions of the understanding of masculinity promoted by the school.	123
6.4	Perceptions of the influence of school culture or spirit on their understanding of masculinity .....	127
6.5	Perceptions of the influence of features of school life .....	131
6.5.1	Sport .....	131
6.5.2	Discipline and Pastoral Care .....	135
6.5.3	School Subjects .....	137
6.5.4	Religious Events like Masses and Retreats .....	139
6.6	Participants' satisfaction with the ways masculinity is portrayed in their school .....	142
6.7	Participants' views on the choice of this school for their sons .....	143
6.8	Discussion of teenage boys' perceptions of the influence of school experiences on their understanding of masculinity .....	144
6.8.1	Culture of masculinity within two Catholic boys' schools .....	144
6.8.2	Dividing sporting and academic masculinities .....	146
6.8.3	Spirituality of connected masculinity .....	149
6.9	Summary .....	151

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion: Findings and Recommendations**

7.1	Introduction .....	153
7.2	Findings .....	153
7.2.1	Objective 1: Analyse the literature on masculinity related to schooling and teenage boys .....	153

7.2.2	Objective 2: Investigate teenage boys’ understanding of masculinity .....	155
7.2.3	Objective 3: investigate teenage boys’ perceptions of the influence of teachers and school experiences on their understanding of masculinity .....	157
7.2.4	Objective 4: interpret the research findings and identify implications for the education of teenage boys .....	159
7.3	Strengths of the study and contributions to research .....	165
7.4	Recommendations for further research .....	166

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1	ACU Ethics Clearance for a Research Project – Approval Form	169
Appendix 2	Information Letter to Participants	170
Appendix 3	Informed Consent Form	171
Appendix 4	Interview Schedule	172

<b>Bibliography</b>		175
---------------------	--	-----

## **List of Tables**

Table 2.1	Criteria for the selection of research literature reviewed .....	5
Table 2.2	Structure of the review of literature .....	6
Table 2.3	Researcher’s Summary of ideas presented in Edley and Wetherell (1995, 1996) .....	8
Table 2.4	Styles of Masculinity proposed by Connell (1995: 77-81) .....	9
Table 2.5	Researcher’s Summary of difficulties with the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity reported by Phoenix and Frosh (2001: 27-28) .....	10
Table 2.6	Researcher’s summary of Lingard and Douglas (1999: 4-7) Two political dimensions of the masculinity literature: pro-feminist and mythopoetic essentialist masculinity .....	11
Table 2.7	Summary of Hearn’s (1996: 214) proposed way of moving beyond the concept of masculinity .....	12
Table 2.8	Key themes in current thinking on masculinity as summarised by Salisbury and Jackson (1996: 7) .....	13
Table 2.9	Selected Research on Boys and Education arranged according to theme	20
Table 2.10	Themes used for reviewing the literature on Teenage Boys, Masculinity and Schooling .....	20
Table 2.11	Why schools should decide to work with boys as a matter of importance. Arguments proposed by Salisbury and Jackson (1993: 3) .	24
Table 2.12	Themes used for reviewing the literature on Teachers, School Experiences and Masculinity .....	30

Table 2.13	Researcher's summary of Connell (1996: 229-230) on the role of teachers in changing masculinity .....	30
Table 2.14	Researcher's summary of Slade and Trent (2000: 218) Characteristics of Good Teachers .....	31
Table 2.15	Researcher's summary of Angus (1993: 83-87) on the contribution of teachers to the gender regime of a Christian Brothers' College .....	33
Table 2.16	Researcher's summary of Askew and Ross (1988) as reported by Bailey (1996) on four key dimensions to the experience of women teachers in a boys' school .....	34
Table 2.17	Researcher's summary of Dutton's (1995: 395-396) proposed reasons for contemporary interest in images of highly muscular male bodies ....	36
Table 2.18	Researcher's summary of Fitzclarence and Hickey (2000: 80). Recommendations on how to change attitudes with junior aged footballers .....	38
Table 2.19	Summary of Pollack (1998) Why sport is transformational for boys ....	39
Table 2.20	Summary of Salisbury and Jackson (1996: 209-215) Alternative school sporting experiences for boys .....	40
Table 2.21	Self-worth Protection Strategies proposed by Jackson (2002: 42-47) ...	41
Table 2.22	Researcher's summary of Connell (1996: 217) Discipline, vortex of masculinity .....	43
Table 3.1	Summary of Research Design: Qualitative Investigation .....	48
Table 3.2	Summary of Data Collection Information .....	53
Table 3.3	Schedule of Interview Questions .....	56
Table 3.4	Ethical procedures in place during the conduct of the study	59
Table 3.5	Maykut & Morehouse (1994: 135) Constant Comparative Method of Data Analysis .....	60
Table 3.6	Steps taken to safeguard Reliability .....	62
Table 4.1	Responses to Question 12. What does it mean to be a man today? .....	63
Table 4.2	Responses to Question 13. What does masculinity mean to you? .....	68
Table 4.3	Responses to Question 14. Are there different types of masculinity? ...	71
Table 4.4	Responses to Question 15. What has influenced your understanding of masculinity? .....	74
Table 4.5	Summary of perceived influences as nominated by participants in answer to Question 15 that relate to family .....	75
Table 4.6	Perceptions of men and change emerging from participants' responses .	80
Table 4.7	Comparison of perspectives on masculinity between the responses of the participants and Edley and Wetherell (1995; 1996) .....	84
Table 5.1	Responses to Question 2. Have your teachers influenced your understanding of masculinity? .....	93
Table 5.2	Responses to Question 3. Do the teachers' messages about masculinity come across to you? .....	96
Table 5.3	Responses to Question 4. Do the teachers' views on masculinity come across to you via subtle or explicit ways? .....	99
Table 5.4	Responses to Question 5. Have your teachers said or done anything which gives the impression that one form of masculinity is best? .....	102
Table 5.5	Responses to Question 16. Is there any adult in the school who is a good role model for you? .....	104
Table 5.6	Participants' descriptions of Mr Carter, role model .....	105
Table 6.1	Responses to Question 6. Has this school influenced your understanding of masculinity? .....	118
Table 6.2	Responses to Question 7. Does this school promote one particular	

	understanding of masculinity? .....	123
Table 6.3	Responses to Question 8. Does the culture or spirit of this school influence your understanding of masculinity? .....	127
Table 6.4	Responses to Question 9a: influence of sport .....	131
Table 6.5	Responses to Question 9b: influence of discipline and pastoral care .....	135
Table 6.6	Responses to Question 9c: influence of school subjects .....	137
Table 6.7	Responses to Question 9d: influence of religious events like Masses and Retreats .....	139
Table 6.8	Responses to Question 10: Are you satisfied with the ways that masculinity is portrayed in your school? .....	142
Table 6.9	Responses to Question 11: If you had a son, would you send him to this school? .....	144
Table 6.10	Perceptions of the culture of masculinity in the two Catholic boys' schools emerging from participants' responses .....	145
Table 6.11	Perceptions of achievement associated with sporting and academic masculinities emerging from participants' responses .....	147
Table 6.12	Dimensions and Features of a Spirituality of Connected Masculinity ...	151
Table 7.1	Aspects of schooling for consideration when reviewing masculinity ....	160
Table 7.2	Examples of possible strategies schools can undertake to enhance inclusive masculinities .....	161
Table 7.3	Some curriculum implications of masculinities research .....	163
Table 7.4	Proposed areas for extending research on teenage boys' perceptions of masculinity and schooling .....	168