

## **Inclusive Masculinity in a Physical Education Setting**

There is a strong relationship between the cultural practices of competitive, organized youth sport and compulsory physical education. The hyper-masculine, violent, and homophobic culture traditionally found within boys segregated sporting spaces is mirrored when youth are compelled to participate in physical education. However, cultural homophobia is on rapid decline in Western countries. Recent research shows high school and university sport to be an increasingly inclusive environment for openly gay male youth. I explore this cultural shift among high school (sixth form) physical education students in England. Using three months of ethnography, and conducting 17 in-depth interviews with 16-18 year old ostensibly heterosexual boys, I show an absence of homophobia and homophobic discourse, the abatement of violence, the absence of a jock-ocratic school culture, and the emotional support of male friends. Thus, I show that while the structure of sport education has remained the same, the hyper-masculine culture surrounding it has changed.

## Introduction

Although there are various purposes and outcomes of sporting participation for men in Western cultures, a consistent finding is that organized, competitive, teamsports serve as a deeply ingrained social institution principally organized around the political project of defining acceptable forms of heterosexual masculinity (Anderson 2005a; Messner 1992; Nauright and Chandler 1996). Accordingly, in a culture that institutionalizes sport through physical education, this has meant that gender and sexuality privilege are also unequally distributed according to one's performance in physical education. Here, boys who perform well at sport best situate themselves within a masculine hierarchy. Those at the top of the hierarchy have been described as maintaining power and privilege over all boys and girls; but as long as they are seen as trying to approximate the hegemonic version of masculinity boys further down the hierarchy maintain privilege over all women and gay or bisexual men. This is something that Connell describes as the patriarchal dividend (1995). Accordingly, I have previously described sex-segregated sporting spaces as culturally privileging men over women and gay men (Anderson 2010), suggesting that this privilege extends into the workplace as well (Anderson 2009b).

There are, however, a number of cultural trends related to sexuality and gender that may influence contemporary relationships between homophobia, sport, and physical education. The most salient concerns the rapid reduction of cultural homophobia among male youth (Anderson 2009a; Kozloski 2011; McCormack 2011a, 2011b). This has increased the social legitimacy of alternative categories of sexuality and masculinity for high school and university students, and expanded their social and political landscapes (Anderson 2008a; McCormack and Anderson 2010; Savin-Williams 2005). Highlighting this, McCormack (2012) shows that when male youth peer culture values their gay or bisexual peers, all boys

are permitted to exist within various social cliques without the hierarchy or hegemony of the jock-ocratic school culture.

Within the scope of examining how decreasing cultural homophobia positively impacts upon youth culture, this research uses three months of ethnographic fieldwork teaching a physical education course to sixth form (high school) students in the United Kingdom. The data collected permits me to conclude that—at least within this school—overt homophobia is eliminated; there is a near-total elimination of homophobic discourse, an absence of physical altercations, and the erasure of a jock-ocratic school culture. I analyze the results using inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson 2009a), which highlights, that as the fear of being homosexualized through violating gendered behaviors (homophobia) decreases, heterosexual boys and men are provided more cultural freedom to express a variety of masculinities.

### **Sport and Orthodox Masculinity**

In the development of 20th Century gender and sexuality politics, the institution of competitive, organized sport has played a central role in promoting a conservative form of masculinity (Messner 1992). Throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, organized competitive team sports were thought capable of producing heterosexuality among American male youth (Anderson 2009a). Accordingly, in a culture that feared boys were becoming, weak, soft and homosexual, sports were integrated with public education (Savage 2007).

Traditionally, organized, competitive team sports have been near-universally described as locations where heterosexual men battle for masculine dominance (Brackenridge et al. 2007). In order to achieve the most socially valued form of masculinity, boys and men in sport learned to repress fear and deny pain (Messner 1992); violence in sport is common, and over-dedication and sacrifice are considered a normal operation of the game (Giulianotti

1999). Other socio-negative attributes of sporting participation concern the wholesale exclusion, and even (rare) violence directed toward gay male athletes (Anderson 2000). In fact, it was not until the early part of the new millennium that gay male athletes, in any real numbers, began to emerge from their school-based sport teams' closets (Anderson 2002, 2005).

Much of this exclusionary culture has been attributed to homo-negative and homophobic discourse, which marks out and defines acceptable masculinity in opposition to homosexuality (Cameron and Kulick 2003; Kiesling 2007). One way of examining the utility of homophobic discourse comes with examining its relationship to constructing of heteromascularity by examining how discourse works in the regulation of masculinities (Anderson 2002; Burn 2000; McCormack 2011b; Plummer 1999) and how homophobic discourse reflects and reproduces homophobia among its users (Mac an Ghail 1994; Thurlow 2001).

A number of scholars have shown that the primary way to subordinate a young male is to call him a 'fag,' or accuse him of being gay—even if one does not believe he is (Davis 1990; Pascoe 2007). Accusing someone of homosexuality demonstrates one's own heteromascularity at the expense of another. For example, interviewing openly gay athletes between 1998 and 2001, I found (Anderson 2002) homophobic language present in all types of men's sports. Here, homophobic discourse served as resistance toward the intrusion of gay subculture, serving to maintain orthodox masculinity in sport (Wolf Wendel, Toma and Morpew 2001).

While there has been a modest degree of research into the homophobic nature of organized sport in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there has been very little addressing homophobia in institutionalized physical education courses (Clarke 2006; Gill et al. 2006). One exception comes from Morrow and Gill (2003), who surveyed 82 physical education teachers and 77

students about homophobia in physical education in the state of North Carolina. Results showed that homophobia was at least as strong in physical education as it was in the wider school population. This is because what occurs in physical education bleeds over into the school's culture. What occurs in sport affects physical education; and what occurs in physical education affects school culture and youth culture more generally.

### **Compulsory Physical Education**

The aggressive and exclusionary culture of competitive organized sport reaches into the lives of not just those who elect to play organized sport, but into nearly all of male youth culture. This is because organized competitive sport has been institutionalized in the form of compulsory 'play' in the form of physical education, which models its ideas about acceptable masculinity from competitive sport. Thus the culture of physical education and competitive sport are closely related (Gill et al. 2010).

There is one notable difference between physical education and sport however: physical education is normally comprised of some students who both like and dislike sport, while the mostly voluntary nature of sport (recognizing parental influence) makes it more resistant to alternative notions of masculinity. In other words, sport is comprised of those who maintain orthodox (or hegemonic) notions of masculinity and those desperate to be seen approximating this dominant masculinity; while compulsory physical education is comprised of those whom are either unfit or unwilling to play competitive team sports.

It is paradoxical then that the institution of forced physical education would somewhat mirror that of masculine sporting culture; after all, this is an institution comprised of those who have either been cast down (out) or whom have volitionally rejected sport culture. What keeps the culture of hypermasculinity and homophobia within physical education courses at schools then has something to do with *who* teaches physical education.

Physical education is not taught by adults who were marginalized by physical education as youth; those who had a difficult time in physical education. Conversely, physical educators, although required to have a bachelor's degree and postgraduate qualified teacher status in the U.K., nonetheless remain a group of failed athletes who have built much of their masculine identity around their sporting participation (Kirk 2010). Thus, when it concerns male physical education teachers, they are men who have played competitive sport and now seek a career related to the teaching of it: These are not men who have suffered under its hypermasculine ethos (Anderson 2005a). As such, male physical educators tend to transmit their masculine 'values' of physical cultural practices onto their students. This is not to indict all male physical education teachers, and this overlooks the value of having female physical education teachers instruct boys as well as the potential of physical educators to develop a master identity around educator instead of just physical educator; but it is to suggest that *generally* males who go on to teach physical education are those who excelled in sport and physical activity, and not those who have not. Thus they likely cannot relate to students who have failed at it, have been rejected by it, or simply want not part of it: students who are merely forced by state law to participate in it.

Another reason that a hyper-masculine sporting ethos affects all male youth in school cultures is because whereas one's performance on a math exam is only domain to the teacher and student, success or failure in physical education is observable to all. When a student fails to catch a football in physical education his failure is visible for all to see. While the public nature of sport may elevate the self-esteem of those who excel, the nature of failing publicly carries with it problematic effects. Whereas failure on a math exam only upsets the individual who fails, failure at sport (whether in organized sport or sport played through physical education) might also upset one's teammates, who were depending on his performance for their needs.

Because of their forced participation in physical education; the culture of athletic masculinity intentionally promoted (or at least modelled) to the students by their teachers; because of the high visibility of failure in front of one's peers; and because of the social and institutional promotion of athletes through school and local media; physical prowess has been an important mechanism in forming the attitudinal components and behavioral processes necessary in maintaining or improving a male youth's social positioning within school cultures (Plummer 1999). Accordingly, failure to live up to the esteemed cultural construction of masculinity traditionally results in males being subject to physical and discursive methods of subordination, not only on the field but among peers in school as well (Pascoe 2007).

However, in this article I show that this system of masculine stratification can be at least partially undermined by a decrease in cultural homophobia. This is because boys and men have not simply valued muscularity and physicality independently; instead, these attributes have been valued because they distance oneself from cultural suspicion of homosexuality.

### **Shifting Masculinity Practices**

Despite decades of research highlighting homophobia in sport and physical education there is compelling evidence that homophobia has decreased in recent years. For example, in (2005a) I used in-depth interviews with gay athletes to document how men are increasingly emerging from their athletic closets and contesting orthodox masculinity. Other evidence of a decline in homophobia among groups of boys/men traditionally thought to be highly homophobic exists as well. I have recently shown that decreased cultures of homophobia exist among fraternity members (Anderson, 2008b), male rugby players (Anderson & McGuire, 2010), school boys (McCormack & Anderson, 2010), heterosexual male cheerleaders (Anderson, 2005b, 2008a), and even the men of a Catholic College soccer team in the Midwest (Anderson, 2011a).

McCormack (2010) shows that among English high school students (aged 16-18) at three different schools (lower, middle and upper-middle class), young men express physical tactility, and that homophobia (including homophobic discourse) is stigmatized. Bush, Anderson & Carr (2012) even show that 97% of heterosexual male athletes graduating from a British university known for sporting success would support having an openly gay male teammate and/or coach. Even in the American South, Southall et al. (2009) found that less than a quarter of division one university athletes had some reservation about sharing sporting spaces with gay men.

Further evidencing a decrease in homophobia, in over a dozen ethnographic investigations of undergraduate sport teams, spread across both the United States and the United Kingdom, I show that attitudes toward homosexuality are mostly positive among heterosexual teammates, even though heterosexist thinking persists (Anderson 2009a). These ethnographic findings are supported through quantitative data sets, including *General Social Survey* in the United States, and the *British Survey of Social Attitudes* in the United Kingdom (Anderson, 2009a).

In my most recent research on openly gay high school and university athletes (2011c), I find that more team sport athletes (as compared to individual sport athletes) are coming out of the closet. Furthermore, unlike in my previous studies, openly gay players reported that their teammates celebrated their sexuality, instead of silencing it. This speaks to declining homophobia among many local youth cultures in educationally based settings (McCormack, 2011; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2005), particularly in the U.K. (McCormack 2012; Ripley et al., 2011).

Thus, while the 1980s were characterized by extreme homophobia; and the 1990s began to see a crack in this hegemonic stigmatization, evidence from the 2000s—recognizing that decreasing homophobia is an uneven social practice—shows that young men are losing



their homophobia. This is an important cultural trend in Western countries; and it is one I analyze through Inclusive Masculinity Theory.

### **Inclusive Masculinity Theory**

In my research on white, middle class, former high school football players (2005b), I first used the term *inclusive masculinity* to theoretically describe the social process concerning the emergence of an archetype of masculinity that undermines the principles of orthodox (read hegemonic) masculine values—yet one that is also esteemed among male peers. Here, I described how a reduction of cultural homophobia challenged the dominance that hegemonic masculinity maintained over heterosexual university athletes.

The originator of the dominant theory of masculinities, R.W. Connell (1987) argues that multiple masculinities exist within any organization, institution or culture; and she certainly argues that any one hegemonic archetype of masculinity will be challenged and perhaps replaced by another. However, she also describes hegemonic masculinity as a *hegemonic* process by which only *one* form of institutionalized masculinity is “culturally exalted” above all others (Connell 1995, p. 77). Then, according to Connell, men are compelled to associate with this one dominant form (i.e. men looking up the hierarchy).

In periods of high homophobia Connell is correct: only one dominating, hegemonic version of masculinity will exist, and it will have homophobia at its core. In other words, in a period of high homophobia men will seek to align themselves as far away from homosexuality as they can. Certain behaviors (i.e. playing certain sports) become coded as ‘gay’ and fearing being perceived as gay (something I call homohysteria) men will largely avoid these stigmatized behaviors, arenas, activities or expressions (Anderson 2011b).

However, inclusive masculinity theory suggests that something different emerges in a culture of diminishing homophobia. Here, men are permitted increased social freedom in the

expression of attitudes and behaviors that were once highly stigmatized/coded as homosexual. In other words, inclusive masculinity theory maintains that in a culture of extreme homophobia (as was the zeitgeist when Connell developed the theory on men in Australia and the USA), one dominating masculinity archetype will exist. In a moment of decreasing cultural homophobia however, such as England today (Anderson 2009a), multiple archetypes will exist.

In other words, inclusive masculinity theory maintains that as cultural homophobia further diminishes *multiple* forms of masculinity can exist in a horizontal (not stratified) alignment. Here, one or more forms of inclusive masculinity are shown to dominate numerically, but that they are not hegemonically dominating. This is something found in a number of university settings (Anderson 2005b, 2008b, 2009a) and three British senior high schools (McCormack 2011a, 2011b, 2012). The key principle here is that as homophobia ceases to regulate men, multiple types of masculinities can exist without cultural pressure to approximate any one, hegemonic, form.

Inclusive masculinity is recognized through multiple attitudinal and behavioral mechanisms. It is predominantly characterized by inclusive attitudes toward gay men, but it is also exemplified by the maintenance of homosocial physical activity, and strong emotional relationships, between men—something I attribute to decreasing homophobia. Exemplifying this, Anderson, Adams and Rivers (2010) have recently documented that nine out of ten heterosexual male undergraduates from their multi-institutional survey in the United Kingdom kiss their male friends on the lips as a form of non-sexual, homosocial bonding. This is a behavior that I have recently documented occurring at 20% among university soccer players from three different teams in the United States (2009a). Furthermore, Filiault and colleagues (under review) have found same-sex kissing exists at 25% among heterosexual male undergraduates in Australia. In all three countries, men who do this suggest that a kiss

signifies their platonic love of their heterosexual mates.

Collectively, these studies highlight that as cultural homophobia diminishes, it frees heterosexual men to act in more feminine ways without threat to their heterosexual identity. It suggests that while homophobia used to be the chief policing mechanism of a hegemonic form of masculinity, there no longer remains a strident cultural force to approximate the mandates of one type of homophobic masculinity.

### **Methods**

The last time I taught physical education was in 1995. Two years earlier I had come out of the closet as America's first media recognized openly gay high school coach (Anderson 2000). I was also a high school health and physical education teacher. After coming out, my heterosexual athletes and I suffered institutional and overt homophobic discrimination by members of other teams, students from within our own school, and particularly from members of the high school's American football team. The athletes on my team were assumed gay (through a guilt-by-association processes) largely because of the high degree of stigma on homosexuality at the time (Loftus 2001). Two American football players even assaulted one of my athletes, repeatedly punching his face, breaking four facial bones and attempting to gauge his eyes out while calling him a fucking faggot (Anderson 2000). The police did not report this as a hate crime, or even an assault; instead, it was dismissed as 'mutual combat.' It was this event that launched my career into studying the relationship between sport, homophobia and masculinities; of which this research is part of.

### *Procedures*

A novel methodological approach was employed in this ethnography. I contacted my local senior high school (ages 16-18) with the possibility of doing ethnographic research on

their students. Part of my request included using my graduate student, Mark McCormack, in the field as well (see McCormack and Anderson 2010; McCormack 2012). When the Headmaster learned that I was a scholar of Sport, she asked whether I had experience teaching physical education, stating that one of the school's physical education teachers was out sick for a three month period. The school needed a replacement. I accepted the job under condition that we could collect data via ethnography, immersing myself into youth culture outside of the classroom.

It was agreed that I would be permitted the freedom to simultaneously be a teacher, and immerse myself into the student's world, while my graduate student would be able to roam the school freely. Students were aware of my status as a researcher, and Mark's status as a PhD student. But our willingness to engage with them personally, coupled with the fact that I would never assess them formally, permitted them to more readily accept us.

Much of our socializing with the students occurred in the common room. Open all day, the common room is for both male and female students to use during their free time. The majority of students spent at least some of their day in this setting, and boys of all social groupings (and various masculine archetypes) used it. This gave us access to students away from other adult supervision/judgement. This setting therefore provided the opportunity to observe boys of various sub-groupings away from institutional regulation.

We promoted our acceptance in this space by engaging in minor rule breaking behaviors with the students. Accordingly, we played sports with them in the common room, accompanied them off campus to buy snacks from a local shop, cussed openly, and talked about sex frequently. This approach was influenced by Ferguson's (2000) ethnographic work. Here, Ferguson aligned herself with students, distancing herself from teaching and administrative staff. This approach enabled her to develop a level of trust with students, providing a richness of data usually unobtainable in school settings.

While I appreciate the complexity and intricacy of engaging with teenagers, recognizing that there were still palpable differences, I believe I was readily accepted into their social groupings, particularly among the physical education students I taught. This is supported through noting that students invited me to social activities away from school (running, playing sports, musical events, and even to the local pub for drinks or to play snooker). Also, in order to examine for how our sexuality might impact upon the students, we elected to remain closeted for the first three weeks of the research, only coming out after we had formed relationships and assessed attitudes toward homosexuality ( which were unanimously positive).

While three months of participant observation provided insight into the male students' behavioral patterns, interviews provided data about informants' attitudes (Brewer 2002). These interviews were conducted near the end of the study so that rapport was heightened between researchers and informants. Here, Mark and I conducted sixteen semi-structured, strategically selected, in-depth interviews with heterosexual students, and one gay student. We accomplished this by schematically mapping the friendship groups of the approximate one hundred boys, and strategically selected participants from the various groups for interview. Interviews were conducted in a vacant classroom, away from student view. We elected not to conduct group interviews, in order to avoid a bias effect of others simply agreeing to peer statements.

Because of my position as a coach, my formal training in sport, and my athletic abilities, I conducted interviews with athletes (soccer, hockey, lacrosse, rugby, athletics, and tennis), leaving Mark to do the non-athletes. But data from the athletes is not limited to interviews, we also took notes based on our interactions with the students. These came in the form of sending texts to ourselves, or making notes while in the restroom. These field notes were written more thoroughly upon completion of each day's data collection.

The interview schedule covered participants' attitudes toward gay men, their understandings of masculinity, their perceptions of popularity among peers, and other subjects related to the use of sport in masculinity-making. Interviews averaged sixty minutes. Permission was obtained by the Head Teacher, a guardian, and each student interviewed. All names have been changed.

### *Coding and Analysis*

To minimize the visibility of the research process, our note taking on observations was left to immediate recall (Spradley 1970). Although this can lead to particular parts of data being mis-remembered, misgivings about this strategy are minimized by mutual confirmation and coding. It is our perception that having two researchers in the field not only facilitated a broader and deeper collection of data, but also strengthened the thematic coding and analysis of events (cf. May and Pattillo-McCoy 2000). For example, we met for data collaboration and interpretation sessions several times daily. Here, we discussed our joint and independent observations in private, frequently interrogating each other's interpretations. We argue that this approach provided a more thorough and valid investigation of the multiple meanings and interpretations of the social events at Standard High—compared to having just one researcher in the field.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then coded independently by each researcher using a constant-comparative method of emerging themes (Goetz and LeCompte 1981). These codes were then compared to improve the validity of our analysis. Although we researched both boys and girls, in this article I restrict our discussion to the gendered behaviours and attitudes of boys. I also limit the analysis of race (to white) and class (to middle). This is because the analytic lenses of sexuality and gender provided the most fruitful

coding of data, and this restriction also served to control the already extensive scope of this research project.

### *Situating Standard High*

Standard High sits seven miles from a major British city in the south of England. It draws students from its 15,000 residents of Standard town. Although there are 1,300 students, the sixth form (high school) has approximately 200 (aged 16-18), of which about half are boys. We strategically selected this school because it fit the demographic similarity to the population of England. That is to say that the students at Standard reflect the race and class profile of the country as a whole: Ninety percent of the students are White British and the remaining ten percent are near evenly split between Polish, Black British and Asian British. The scholastic achievement rankings of the school also show that the students rest at the median of England's formalized testing results. Finally, this mixed [co-educational] community comprehensive school represents the most common type of school in the United Kingdom. While this does not mean our findings can be generalized to all schools in the UK, Standard high represents a type of school that is at least most generalizable to other schools in the South of England.

### **Uncoupling Homophobia from Sport and Physical Education**

It's difficult to describe the overwhelming sense of openness, softness and kindness that boys expressed toward each other at Standard High. McCormack (2012) shows, extensively, public emotional support among boys. For example, he shows tenderness between boys in the face of loss (of girlfriends), encouragement for students afraid of failing their driver's test, and long hugs between friends in public spaces. But another way of describing this style of masculinity is through what they were not found to do. For example, although this is not in-

and-of-itself proof of a homophobia-free culture, it is nonetheless noteworthy that no male student expressed homophobia during our interviews. Instead, homophobia was regarded as a sign of immaturity.

There is limited evidence that the expression of homophobia was more acceptable in younger years, but that one was expected to grow out of it by the time they reached sixth form. Exemplifying this, Matt (not an athlete) said that if someone was homophobic, he would be policed by his peers and that, “He wouldn’t keep at it for long.” Matt added, “It’s just childish.” Justin (who plays sport for a cricket team and competes in motor cross) said, “When I was in middle school, some kids would say ‘that’s gay’ around the playground, but they wouldn’t get away with it anymore. We’d tell them it’s not on.” Sam (a footballer) agreed, “You might find that [homophobia] before [sixth form], but not here. It’s just not acceptable anymore.”

Supporting these statements, participant observation highlighted that the word ‘gay’ is *not* used to describe dissatisfaction by these young men in any social setting observed as part of this ethnography—by both researchers—unlike older studies of youth who frequently use the word to show dissatisfaction without homophobic intent (cf. Pascoe 2007; Plummer 1999). Terms such as ‘queer’ and ‘poof’ were not used, while ‘fag’ was only used to refer to a cigarette. ‘Gay’ was only used in sensible discussions about gay identity and sexuality. This finding was borne out in interviews as well.

### *Free Association with Homosexuality*

There appears to be no fear of homosexualization among heterosexual boys for associating with gay males at Standard High. Highlighting this, one of the boys went running with me, alone. But because school rules prohibited us from leaving school grounds, we ran our laps around the school in full view of his peers to see. He was not harassed about having



run with the openly gay teacher/researcher. Other students sought me out for advice, speaking confidentially to me in the classroom (with door closed) although other students walking by could see us through the windows.

This is just part of the evidence that leads me to suggest that the youths enrolled in physical education at Standard High were supportive of men's homosexuality. Not only were there public statements of support, including appropriate banter, but whenever either my openly gay male graduate student (who was just 23 at the time) or I (aged 40 at the time) raised the issue of homophobia in interviews, *all* informants positioned themselves against it. When I told them of my coming out story, and my athlete being beaten—they were in disbelief. One student said, "That's like racism used to be." Later that week a group of male students in my Physical Education class (who were aged 18 at the time) invited me to the pub for drinks after school. Here they talked about how shocked they were by my story, unable to understand why people took such issue with homosexuality back then.

The inclusion that these students showed me and my graduate student was supported by their inclusion of the only openly gay student at Standard High's sixth form during that period (there are now three male students who are openly gay). This student (not a physical education student) said that he did not feel subordinated by his peers. While he was bullied "a little" with homophobic discourse in earlier years, it did not happen in the sixth form. "I like it here. The other guys are cool with it. I've got my friends, and nobody is bothered," he said. While we did not investigate homophobia among students at the lower level of the school (researching only 16-18 year olds boys among the sixth form); it's quite possible that one reason our results are so positive is that sixth form students have elected to remain in education, whereas other students drop out at 16—the age upon which compulsory education terminates in the UK.

My openly gay neighbor, Alex, also attends Standard High. I met him when he was just 15 a year before he would attend Standard's Sixth Form. Alex is now 18 and I have talked about his schooling experiences throughout his sixth form years. Alex tells me that he had no problems being openly gay either in Standard's lower grades, or within the sixth form. He had not suffered a homophobic comment or felt excluded because of his (rather flamboyant) openness about his sexuality.

Alex's self-report is supported by seven Standard High boys that I met just this month, in our local park. In the course of our two hour discussion, we talked about Alex and how he was accepted at Standard. I told the boys that I might like to interview them further and passed my iphone around for them to add me into Facebook. All seven of them were already friends with Alex on line (thus, showing no fear of the guilt-by-association process I earlier discussed).

### *Shifting Relational Possibilities*

Significance evidence of inclusive masculinities proliferating at Standard High comes from the emotional support they express for one another. I best summarize this by sharing a bit of research that I'm conducting on 16 year-old boys from this same town (although at a different school). I provide Jake, who is 16 and ostensibly heterosexual, as an example.

Jake publicly expresses his love for his best mate in multiple ways. Jake and Tom profess their love for each other in similar fashion to how most other boys in this town do; they write endearing messages to each other on their Facebook walls; they send messages of support via text, and they even express their love verbally (Anderson 2011b). In Jake's case, he expresses his love for his best mate as much as he does love for his girlfriend (of over a year). Illustrating this homosocial love, Jake showed me a text that his best mate sent to him. It read: "Love you, this week has made me realise how weak I can be without you. And I

don't like not being with you :/x." This type of socio-emotional support is common among students.

The inclusive nature of the physical education students that I taught was not only made evident in the manner in which they treated me, their openly gay instructor, but also in how they related sport to their peers. Instead of sport being used to create a strong sense of in-group and out-group, they seem to be playing sport for sports sake (as opposed to playing it to build their heteromale capital). Even if one's successful sporting accomplishments earned him popularity within the sporting community, it did little to improve his social standing within peer culture more broadly. Exemplifying this, three of the most popular students at Standard high played very different sports: motocross, football, and high jump. Conversely, there were many students who played football at a high level, but because their personalities were not large, or because they did not maintain friendships in multiple groups of people, they retained less social capital. Instead, as McCormack (2011b) highlights, popularity was achieved around the personality attributes of being charismatic, genuine, and in maintaining the ability to be socially fluid with boys from different groups.

McCormack (2011a) describes the tenets that make one popular in a culture of inclusive masculinity—data derived from this research location. He shows that for boys of this age popularity is determined not through athleticism, but instead, it is based in a notion of 1) maintaining a truthful and honest self, instead of trying to be someone one is not; 2) showing emotional support for friends, including helping those in need, and 3): maintaining friendships with boys in a variety of groups, not just the group the most identify with. Thus, jocks at Standard High might only be popular if they socialize with those outside the athletic arena as well.

Finally, another way of highlighting the shifting relationship between male peers in response to declining homophobia is to again examine what they do not do—they do not

fight. An examination of the school's disciplinary record indicates that there were no physical altercations (fighting) between any students at this school during the entire duration of the school year. Their attitudinal disposition toward fighting was largely that it might have a place, sometimes, but that fighting was mostly an ineffectual way of solving disputes. Most of the boys studied had not been in a fight their entire lives. For those who had fought, they did so when they were quite young.

Thus, concerning the social fluidity required for popularity; the lack of violence between boys; the open inclusivity of homosexuality and the importance of physical touch and emotionality in homosocial friendships, results of this research show that physical education, at least in this setting, is far different than the way it is normally implicated with homophobia and other expressions of orthodox notions of masculinity. The culture of both sport and physical education both appear to be changing in this school, and that affects the rest of the school's culture as well.

### **Discussion**

The value of this research is that it adds to the growing body of literature which shows that while the competitive sporting games youth play in sport and physical education have not changed, the cultural ethos surrounding them has (see the special edition of the *Journal of Homosexuality* Feb, 2011). Findings from this ethnography, where I embedded myself into masculine peer culture by teaching physical education to 16-18 year olds, show that these young athletes did not subjugate gay men, use homophobic discourse, or perform hyper-macho or aggressive forms of masculinity. Instead, the behaviors of these athletes were not significantly different than of their non-athletic counterparts, with the exception that they were perhaps more boisterous in their public play within the student common room.

The finding of research into the general population of this school (McCormack and Anderson 2010) my research on the physical education ‘sporty’ youth, and McCormack’s research into two other high schools in this part of the country (McCormack 2012), combined with my recent group discussion with the seven youth most recently, and all of the research on gay and straight male athletes aforementioned, suggests that rather than homophobia being an integral part of masculinity the way Kimmel (1994) once described, gay-positive views are a hegemonic perspective among white British youth in (at least) these studies (without exception).

The reason for the overall decline in cultural homophobia are largely out of scope of this paper and has many causes (Anderson 2009a) but they include the multiple advantages of the internet, increased rates of people coming out, and the decreasing religiosity of the UK. Collectively, these and other variables, indicate that homophobia is no longer acceptable as it once was.

These findings have implications, not just for sport, but for physical education as well. This is because physical education courses have traditionally modelled themselves after the culture of competitive team sports. Just as athletic capital stratifies boys on a football team, boys are also ranked among peers in physical education. It is for this reason that so many gay youth have been objectified and ostracized in physical education. Worse, one’s failure in physical education has traditionally spilled-over into their social standing among their school’s peer culture more broadly. It is this facet that helped reproduce a particularly narrow form of hegemonic masculinity among most all boys in school cultures.

However, this research offers hope. It suggests that as cultural homophobia diminishes in the larger youth culture—which is occurring at rapidly—it also diminishes in sport. As homophobia diminished in sport, it necessarily diminishes in physical education which models itself off of sport. Thus, although competitive sporting games may still be

marred by violence, hyper-competitiveness and the exclusion of those with lesser athletic abilities, they may not produce exclusive and orthodox notions of masculinity in the same manner that they used to.

It is possible that even if some aspects of orthodox masculinity are practiced on the pitch (something for which I did not investigate with this ethnography) they do not spill over into their social life away from the pitch (something I did investigate for). Support for this thesis comes from the work of Adams, Anderson and McCormack (2010), who have shown that even when university soccer players used homophobic or masculinist language on the football pitch, they viewed it only as a tool of the sport. The athletes did not use homophobic language outside of the sport setting.

The fact that these findings show that young men are more inclined to be emotionally supportive than to create rigid hierarchies of masculinity also indicates that more types of masculinity are acceptable to youth in peer culture today (McCormack 2011a, 2011b, 2012). While the findings of my one ethnography into youth physical education in the United Kingdom cannot be generalized to all physical education settings in western culture, or even to the United Kingdom more broadly, it is important to remember that these findings fit with at least a dozen other studies of sports teams throughout the United States and United Kingdom that I have conducted in the previous five years (Anderson 2009a). Thus, this study adds to this body of literature suggesting that we can no longer assume homophobia and hegemonic masculinity as a default expectation of young, heterosexual boys and their masculinities. A more inclusive and less stratified culture is at least in play.

## References

- Anderson, E. 2000. *Trailblazing: The true story of America's first openly gay high school coach*. Hollywood, CA: Alyson Press.
- Anderson, E. 2002. Openly gay athletes: Contesting hegemonic masculinity in a homophobic environment. *Gender and Society*, 16(6), 860-877.
- Anderson, E. 2005a. *In the Game: Gay athletes and the cult of masculinity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Anderson, E. 2005b. Orthodox and inclusive masculinity: Competing masculinities among heterosexual men in a feminized terrain. *Sociological perspectives*, 48, 337-355.
- Anderson, E. 2008a. "Being masculine is not about who you sleep with..." Heterosexual athletes contesting masculinity and the one-time rule of homosexuality. *Sex Roles*, 58(2), 104-115.
- Anderson, E. 2008b. Inclusive Masculinity in a Fraternal Setting. *Men and Masculinities*, 10(5): 604-620.
- Anderson, E. 2009a. *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Anderson, E. 2009b. The maintenance of masculinity among the stakeholders of sport. *Sport Management Review*, 12(1): 3-14.
- Anderson, E. 2010. *Sport, Theory and Social Problems: A Critical Interlocution*. New York: Routledge.
- Anderson, E. 2011a. Inclusive Masculinities of University Soccer Players in the American Midwest. *Gender and Education*, 23(6): 729-744.
- Anderson, E. 2011b. The Rise and Fall of Western Homophobia. *Journal of Feminist Studies*, 1(1): 80-94.
- Anderson, E. 2011c. Updating the Outcome: Gay Athletes, Straight Teams, and Coming Out at the End of the Decade. *Gender & Society*, 25(2): 250-268.
- Anderson, E., Adams, A., & Rivers, I. (2010). "You wouldn't believe what straight men are doing with each other": Kissing, cuddling and loving. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, online first.
- Anderson, E. & McGuire, R. (2010). Inclusive masculinity theory and the politics of men's rugby. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 19(3), 249-262.
- Burn, S. M. 2000. Heterosexuals' use of "fag" and "queer" to deride one another: A contributor to heterosexism and stigma. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 40, 1-11.

- Bush, A., Anderson, E. & Carr, S. 2012. The declining existence of men's homophobia in organized university sport. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 6(1): 107-120.
- Brackenridge, C., Allred, P., Jarvis, A., Maddocks, K., & Rivers, I. 2008. *A literature review of sexual orientation in sport*. London: UK Sport.
- Cameron, D. & Kulick, D. 2003. *Language and sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, G. 2006. Sexuality and physical education. In D. Kirk, D. Macdonald, & M. O'Sullivan (Eds.), *The handbook of physical education*. (pp. 722–739). London: Sag
- Connell, R. W. 1987. *Gender and Power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R.W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giulianotti, R. 1999. *Football: Sociology of the global game*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gill, D. L., Morrow, R. G., Collins, K. E., Lucey, A. B., & Schultz, A. M. 2006. Attitudes and sexual prejudice in sport and physical activity. *Journal of Sport Management*, 20, 554–564
- Goetz, J.P. & LeCompte, M.P. (1981). Ethnographic Research and the Problem of Data Reduction. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 12: 51-70.
- Kiesling, S.F. 2007. Men, masculinities, and language. *Language and Linguistics Compass*. 1(6), 653-673.
- Kimmel, M.S. (1994). Masculinity as Homophobia. In H. Brod & M. Kaufman (Eds.), *Theorising Masculinities*. London: Sage.
- Kirk, D. 2010. “The Masculinity Vortex’ of School Physical Education: Beyond the Myth of Hyper-masculinity.” In Kehler, Michael and Atkinson, Michael’s *Boy’s Bodies: Speaking the Unspoken* (51-70): New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Kozloski, M. 2011. Homosexual moral acceptance and social tolerance: Are the effects of education changing? *Journal of Homosexuality*, online first.
- Loftus, J. 2001. America’s liberalization in attitudes towards homosexuality, 1973-1998. *American Sociological Review*, 66, 762-782.
- Mac an Ghail, M. 1994. *The Making of Men*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- May, R.A.B., & Pattillo-McCoy, M. (2000). Do You See What I See? Examining a Collaborative Ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry* 6(1): 65-87.



McCormack, M. 2010. The declining significance of homophobia for male students in three sixth forms in the south of England. *British Educational Research Journal*, iFirst, 1-17.

McCormack, M. 2011a. *Gay friendly high schools: Masculinities, sexualities and friendship*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McCormack, M. 2011b. Hierarchy without hegemony: Locating boys in an inclusive masculinity school setting. *Sociological Perspectives*, 54(1), pagination to be determined.

McCormack, M. 2012. *Gay friendly high schools: Masculinities, sexualities and friendship*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Messner, M., 1992. *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Boston: Beacon Press

McCormack, M. & Anderson, E. 2010. 'It's just not acceptable any more.' The erosion of homophobia and the softening of masculinity at an English sixth form. *Sociology*, 44(5), 843-859.

Morrow, Ronald & Gil, Diane 2003. Perceptions of homophobia and heterosexism in physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 74(2): 205-214.

Gill, Diane; Morrow, Ronald; Collins, Karen; Lucey, Allison & Schultz, Allison. 2010. Perceived climate in Physical Activity Settings. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57: 895-913

Nauright, J. and Chandler, T.J. 1996. *Making men, rugby and masculine identity*. Somerset, England: Frank Cass & Co.

Pascoe, C.J. 2007. *Dude, you're a fag*. London: University of California Press.

Plummer, D. 1999. *One of the boys: Masculinity, homophobia and modern manhood*. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Ripley, M., Anderson, E., McCormack, M. & Rockett, B. (forthcoming). Heteronormativity in the University Classroom: Novelty Attachment and content substitution among gay friendly students. *Sociology of Education*

Savin-Williams, R.C. 2005. *The new gay teenager*. London: Harvard University Press.

Savage, J. 2007. *Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture*. Penguin: New York.

Spradley, J.P. 1970. *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*. Boston, MA: Little & Brown.

Southall, R., Nagel, M., Anderson, E., Polite, F. & Southall, C. (2009). An investigation of the relationship between college athletes' gender and sexual-orientation attitudes. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, (2) 62-77.

Thurlow, C. 2001. Naming the "outsider within": Homophobic pejoratives and the verbal abuse of LGB high-school pupils. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24, 25-38.

Wolf Wendel, L., Douglas, T. &, Morpew, C. 2001. How much difference is too much difference? Perceptions of gay men and lesbians in intercollegiate athletics. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42 (5): 465-479.