The Performance of Young Working-Class Masculinities in the South Wales Valleys

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis examines the lives of a group of young working-class men in a post-industrial community in the South Wales Valleys. Using a longitudinal ethnographic approach, I focus on how young masculinities within a specific community are performed across a variety of educational and leisure spaces and indicate how social, economic and cultural processes impact on the formation of self. This thesis also describes how, within the limits of place and during different social interactions, individual young men can be seen as active agents in their own construction of identity. Ideas and issues drawn from Erving Goffman's work on the performance of self and the formation of social identity are central to the theoretical framing of the thesis. I suggest that Goffman's dramaturgical framework has important implications for analysing performances of masculinities. When applied to masculinities (and femininities) this framework highlights how gender comes into being through socially constructed performances which are understood (consciously and unconsciously) as socially acceptable in a given situation, setting or community, not as innate biological accomplishments but as dramaturgical tasks. Throughout the thesis, through paying attention to the diversity of social identities and relations within an ostensibly homogeneous working-class community, I challenge commonly held beliefs about working-class young men that appear in the media and in policy discourses. I argue that for a group of young men in a community of social and economic deprivation, expectations and transitions to adulthood are framed through geographically and historically shaped class and gender codes.

Contents

Part I

Part II

Part III

List of Maps, Tables and Figures

Maps

Tables

Figures

I come from down in the valley

Where mister when you're young

They bring you up to do

Like your daddy done

Bruce Springsteen, *The River*

Chapter 1
Introduction

Background

This thesis describes and outlines the lives of a group of young working-class men in a post-industrial community in the South Wales Valleys. Using a longitudinal ethnographic approach, I focus on how young masculinities are performed across a variety of educational and leisure spaces and indicate how social, economic and cultural processes impact on the formation of identity. In detailing these process in a specific locality, this study contributes to the literature on young masculinities by describing how place can impact on the formation of a masculine self and also how everyday experiences within specific places and spaces can shape the way education and schooling is viewed. Ideas and issues drawn from Erving Goffman's work on the performance of self and the formation of social identity are central to the theoretical basis of the thesis and the research adds to the symbolic interactionist tradition. When applied to masculinities (and femininities) this framework highlights how gender comes into being through socially constructed performances which are acceptable in a given situation, setting or community, not as innate biological accomplishments but as dramaturgical tasks (Goffman, 1977; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Schwalbe, 2005; Robinson, Hall and Hockey, 2011).

In this opening chapter I outline the key features of the study, research questions and describe the rationale behind it. I begin by looking at the changing transitions from school to work that have overtly affected young working-class men since the late 1970s and the impact this has had on contemporary forms of masculinity. I then turn to focus on the perceived 'crisis' in masculinity that has accompanied these changes and indicate that while research has begun to look at how young people have dealt with these changing times, there have been relatively few studies that have looked at the significant impact of place on the way young working-class men experience education. To conclude the chapter I consider the part my own biography has played in shaping this study, before describing the structure of the rest of the thesis.

Changing transitions from school to work

The end of compulsory schooling is a key period of transition, when young people make decisions about their futures and when social inequalities really begin to sediment. When the school-leaving age was raised to sixteen in 1972, many young people, especially working-class men (Willis, 1977), left school at this age. But with de-industrialisation and shifts in the mode of production to other countries, entry to the labour market at sixteen has now become the exception rather than the norm. The majority of young people in the UK now continue in education not only to gain qualifications which will supposedly make them more employable, but because there are few other options available to them.

Since the late 1970s the education systems of countries within the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) have undergone major reforms leading to education and training becoming key strategies within economic and social policy. McDowell (2003) emphasises these differences in the UK, reporting that in 1979 47% of adult men had no formal qualifications, compared to 61% of adult women. By the end of the millennium things had altered with only 15% of adult men and 21% of adult women being without qualifications. In keeping with the trends of OECD countries, educational polices by the Welsh Government such as *The Learning Country* (Welsh Assembly Government [WAG], 2001), *Learning Country, Learning Pathways 14-19* (WAG, 2002) and *The Learning Country 2: Delivering the Promise* (WAG, 2006a) have been implemented with the intention of transforming the 14-19 curriculum. The Welsh Government sees this as a key area that will shape the country's economic and social future providing a highly skilled workforce. Alongside more young people 'choosing' to continue in post-16 education in the UK, there are also more young people entering university than ever before; however, middle-class young people have been the chief beneficiaries of such changes (Reay, David and Ball, 2005). There are still more working-class young male school leavers in the UK without qualifications or with the lowest levels of educational attainment than almost any other group (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Gillborn, 2009).

For young working-class men, in particular, the shift to adulthood was once inextricably linked to labour. However, as de-industrialisation has continued,

working-class young men are no longer likely to be 'learning to labour' (Willis, 1977) but 'learning to serve' (McDowell, 2000) in different industries to what preceded them. The performances of a masculine self which accompany these newer industries, are highly contradictory to what preceded them (Kenway, Kraak and Hickey-Moody, 2006; Walkerdine, 2010; McDowell, 2012). The service sector has, to a certain extent, replaced many of the former industries that would have employed those who left school at the earliest opportunity, but as Belt, Richardson and Webster (2002) indicate through their research in call centres in the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands, these jobs require different skills and attributes from those they replaced. Service sector work is split into different versions and should perhaps be better characterised by two forms of employment (Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996; Brint, 2001). On the one hand there is the low paid, low skilled and repetitively unrewarding work found in fast food outlets, shops, restaurants, bars or as cleaners and the high paid, highly qualified, high tech jobs that are said to typify the 'knowledge economy'. The first version of service jobs lack mobility, security and satisfaction and the majority of these do not require high levels of qualifications and are often 'outsourced' to low wage economies in poorer countries in the global South, such as Bangladesh. The second version of service jobs is based on higher educational qualifications, smaller in number and financially secure. But in times of recession, even these could be seen as being at risk and there is no guarantee of a 'job for life' in any sector of the economy. A new set of theoretical debates has emerged in sociological theory and in policy discourse over the last two decades in response to industrial changes. This literature has sought to explore how the transformation of the labour market has impacted upon both employment and personal identity highlighting the growing uncertainty, insecurity, and risk many people face in post modernity (Bauman, 1998; Beck, 1999; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

These changes in status and forms of employment patterns have also been accompanied by a common assumption that appears to have developed in the media and public policy since the mid-1990s indicating that there is an apparent 'crisis' in contemporary forms of masculinity (MacInnes, 1998; Clare, 2000; Hoff-Sommers, 2001). Men, it has been claimed, are now the new disadvantaged and are increasingly seen as struggling educationally. A persistent media discourse suggests it is now girls who are achieving in schools and becoming the more advantaged group to the

supposed disadvantage of boys (Weiner, Arnot and David, 1997; Epstein et al, 1998; Martino and Meyenn, 2001; Segal, 2007; Francis, Skelton and Read, 2012). These arguments of 'crisis' are further manifested through uncertainties around social roles, sexuality, high rates of suicide, truancy levels and the use of violence by young men [1]. However, what some studies have shown is that the loss of well paid, secure, industrial and manufacturing jobs which has deeply affected the towns and cities that relied on these industries, overtly disadvantages some subgroups of men over others (see MacLeod, 1995; Anderson, 1999; Arnot, 2004; Kenway et al, 2006; Weis, 2006, 2008). A second body of literature would argue that the 'crisis' and moral panic that has developed in recent times has actually been an on-going project throughout the last two or three centuries (Connell, 1995; Cohen, 1998; Hayward and Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Morgan, 2006; Segal, 2007) and it would appear that not all men are suffering this 'crisis' equally. This is supported by the fact that in regard to educational achievement, there has historically been an issue with working-class white and black boys who have tended to achieve less well than their more privileged counterparts (McDowell, 2007; Nayak, 2009; Skeggs, 2009); that there seems to be an implicit blaming of girls, teachers and feminists for this 'crisis' (Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Lingard, Martino and Mills, 2009) and as Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, (2002: 2) put it, a 'neglect of the fact that half of all girls in Britain do not gain five grade A-C at GCSE'. Further work by Gillborn and Mirza (2000) and Gillborn (2009) show that the biggest differences in educational outcomes are more to do with class and ethnicity combined, rather than gender (see also Francis, 2000; Francis and Skelton, 2005; Skelton and Francis, 2009).

Since the millennium, qualitative studies have begun to focus on what young people themselves think about these issues and how they are experienced in different spatial contexts (see Ball, Maguire, and Macrae, 2000; Frosh et al, 2002; McDowell, 2003; Nayak, 2006; Kenway et al, 2006; Hall, Coffey and Lashua, 2009; McCormack, 2010). In relation to working-class boys in particular, there seem to be few studies which focus on the impact of place on the way young people experience education and the influence a locality's history has on the way young men view education, schooling and their performances of masculinity (see Kenway et al, 2006). There are

[1] See Beynon (2002) for an excellent summary of these issues.

also limited numbers of studies which look at the experiences of those working-class boys who do well in school and who manage to achieve despite their socially marginalised position and progress into higher forms of education. Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of studies with young working-class men who opt to stay on in education after the age of 16, and negotiate transitions across both academic and vocational subjects.

As Connell (1989: 292) noted 'research on schooling is usually confined to schooling and thus has difficulty seeing where the school is located in a larger process'. In keeping with other researchers who have looked at young masculinities in and out of school settings (Nayak, 2003a,b; 2006) this thesis argues that young men's lives are always located in specific localities, times and places and that research must address how multiple masculinities are displayed across different sites. Through an in-depth ethnography spanning two and a half years, I fill some of these gaps and describe the different educational and social lives of a cohort of young men (born between September 1991 and August 1992) in one locality. From their last few months of compulsory schooling in the spring of 2008, to the autumn of 2010, when some of these young men entered university, I explore how these young lives are played out in a transforming community. Here I contribute to these debates on masculinity, place and educational success by providing a perspective from a de-industrialised community in South Wales, and also exploring what the lived reality is for young men within both educational spheres (academic and vocational) and their wider social lives. By combining multiple spaces, practices and processes of interaction, I therefore offer a broad analysis of working-class masculinities and a deep insight into their lives. I also illustrate how place impacts on the continuous reproduction of gendered and classed inequalities through performative acts and highlight how the 'interaction order' (Goffman 1983) not only places individuals in categories, but also reproduces identities.

Research aim and questions

Drawing on the literature outlined above, the overarching aim of this thesis is to investigate the dynamics of white, working-class masculinities in one socially and economically disadvantaged community in South Wales. I analyse how performances of masculinities are formed, articulated and negotiated by the young men concerned. These dynamics were guided by the following research questions:

1. How are young working-class men living in the Valleys adapting to change in insecure times and making sense of their position as they make the transition to adulthood?

2. When young men are left with the historical legacy of industrial labour, do they perform and articulate traditional forms of masculinity in particular ways and by different means?

3. In educational contexts, how do academic and/or vocational subjects impact upon specific classed masculine subjectivities?

4. What are the broader social and spatial networks within the community (e.g. family, sports, nightlife, fast cars, music, sex) that mediate the identities of these young men and how do space and place impact who they can be and become?

To develop the study from the perspectives of the young men, methods such as participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews and ethnographic conversations with individuals, groups, teachers, caretakers, receptionists, secretaries, bus drivers, parents and even (on one occasion) a baroness (who visited the central school site) were conducted (see Chapters Five to Eight). My research was therefore undertaken across multiple arenas in order to provide a rich 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of their lives, which led to a more meaningful and intricate understanding of how they understood and represented their world. Areas included not only the central school site during different lessons, time in the Common Room, the Library, the lunch hall and the playground, but also other educational arenas such as college classrooms and vocational spaces like workshops, stables and garages. In addition I explored other regions of their lives including general 'hanging out' in the

cars they drove, the fast food places they ate in, the pubs and nightclubs they drank and danced in, university open days and places of work such as sports centres, bars and supermarkets. I was also invited to attend sports events, to go shopping or to the cinema and important social occasions such as birthday parties and on one bizarre occasion a lap dance club (see Chapter Six). Online social networking sites such as *Facebook* and *Microsoft Messenger* were further used to communicate with the young men when away from the field. The study foregrounded educational pathways, but going beyond them allowed, as Nayak (2003c:149) explains, for a 'multidimensional and ultimately more intimate portrait of their masculinities to emerge'.

Although the questions that shape this research are formed by local and global changes and the transitions in social and economic circumstances of working-class young men, the research is also inescapably tied to my own personal biography. Before moving on to outline the layout of the thesis, I summarise some of the underpinning issues in my own life that have had an effect during and after the research process and how my own biography led me to the research topic itself.

Auto/Biographical beginnings

As Miller (1995) suggests through her concept of the 'autobiography of the question', it is important to note the part that a researcher's biography plays in the development of research and writing (see also Van Maanen, 1988; Coffey, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Epstein and Johnson (1998:7) suggest that biography is inextricably linked to research and state that:

> Books are written from particular standpoints…it is important for readers
> to understand where we are coming from, in terms of who we are as much
> as in terms of what we think.

My interest in working-class masculinity has grown out of my own educational journey and the development of my own sociological imagination (Mills 1959). I have written about this in some detail elsewhere (Ward 2011). However, I believe that it is important to offer a brief outline for the reader of the life experiences that have impacted this study in particular. My sociological journey began almost by accident.

It was the autumn of 1999 and I was in the final year of my A levels in a comprehensive school in the South Wales Valleys similar to the one attended by the young men in this study. I was searching for an interesting university course to put onto my UCAS form as I knew I did not want to continue studying what I was doing at the time (English Literature, History and Geography) for another three years. Neither of my parents or my stepparents had been to university, leaving school with two or three O levels and working in the public sector and the retail industry at jobs which they disliked, so they suggested that above all else, I should do something which I would find interesting. So, following their advice, I started to look for something else. I was not doing particularly well in my subjects and I realised I was never going to get into Oxbridge or a 'proper' university, but knew I wanted to go and study something which was 'to do with people'.

I literally stumbled upon sociology one day in the tiny Sixth Form library (a single filing cabinet!) while flicking through the prospectus for the *University of the West of England* (UWE) in Bristol. It seemed perfect. There was a course which appeared to be about how and why people behaved in certain ways and how they were shaped by the time and place in which they lived. Autobiographically it seemed the right fit. Both my grandfathers had been coal miners and active trade unionists and their families had moved to South Wales because of the coal industry in the late 19th century and left school before 14 to join their fathers down the mines. Politics and current events were always talked about around the dinner table with my parents. Sociology seemed very much about the underdog and looked like it fitted in with many of the conversations from my working-class upbringing. The university was also away from South Wales, which was one of my main requirements, but not too far if things got lonely. Contact time was low (eight hours a week), entry requirements were moderate (one C and two Ds) and if I deferred a year (as I planned to do some volunteering in a children's home in America) the grades would be lowered to three Ds. The modules on offer also seemed interesting with courses ranging from the 'Individual and Society' to the more exotic 'Anthropology, Magic and Wicca'. When my A level results came through in August 2000 and I received three D grades I checked to see if UWE would still have me the following year. I was told that they would and looking back now, I paid little further attention to the course prior to entry.

I arrived at the *University of the West of England* in September 2001. I was unaware of it at the time, but it was here that my outlook on the world would begin to change and where I was to be able to make sense of the social and cultural experiences I had experienced whilst growing up. However, I was no overnight sociologist, failing my first essay; but I kept reading and writing, and after three years I graduated with a 2.1. After my degree, sociology slipped under the radar for a year or two and I returned home to South Wales and worked for a while as a produce manager for a supermarket saving to travel and then backpacking around Asia, Australia and New Zealand. After I returned to the UK I realised I could not commit the rest of my life to the retail industry and returned to study, this time at *Cardiff University*, for a PGCE in Further Education (F.E) specialising in sociology. At first I found the return to study a struggle but over the first few months got back into the swing of things and developed confidence in my teaching skills before going out to my college placement to teach sociology AS, A2 and Access courses. Although it was extremely tiring planning and delivering lessons from scratch, I found it much more rewarding than managing a department in a supermarket. However, I still had some doubts about just spending my time teaching other sociologists' theory, ideas and research. I wanted to do my own studies and draw on my own experience of working with young people in an area similar to the one that I grew up in.

While applying for full time teaching posts in F.E. colleges across the UK, I also had one eye on a 1+3 PhD studentship at Cardiff. Unfortunately, I did not receive funding. In August of 2007 I had a choice to make. I was offered a full time teaching position and a surprisingly high salary for a first post to teach sociology at an F.E. college in Cornwall. I pondered over the decision for a few days. I still wanted to do the PhD at Cardiff, but realised that if I went to Cornwall this would realistically be the end of my research dream. I wanted to teach but I also wanted to make my own mark on the subject; finally, I decided to opt for a research methods course (which I self-funded from money saved from the bursary received from the Welsh Assembly Government to do the PGCE) and hoped I would be awarded funding for the PhD the following year. My father in particular could not quite believe that I had turned down a well-paid job for yet more study. He had left school at 16 and worked for the same company for 40 years, so it just did not make sense to him.

For the next year, while studying full time for an MSc in Research Methods, I continued to teach sociology (and, bizarrely, home economics) part-time at an F.E. college. Working closely with my supervisors at Cardiff, I submitted a PhD proposal in the spring of 2008 and whilst taking a Home Economics cookery lesson. I received a phone call offering me a +3 PhD studentship at Cardiff.

In terms of my own identity I feel I inhabit a multitude of paradoxes. When I began the PhD journey at Cardiff, I struggled with the different academic environment to my previous university and felt I didn't quite fit in. I also feel I never quite fitted in back in my home town and reflecting on it now, I am not sure I ever totally did (see also Hobbs, 1993). As Wakeling (2010: 41) puts it, 'there is no going back to working-class origins because university education and upward mobility change the individual psychologically and set them apart in the eyes of those left behind'. This is something that seems quite a common trend among academics who have written about their working-class upbringings (Dews and Law, 1995; Halsey, 1996; Mahony and Zmroczek, 1997; Winlow, 2001; Childers, 2002; Hey, 2003; Wakeling, 2010) but one which is needed to highlight the influences upon one's own position when conducting research. Clearly, I have learned to code-shift (Anderson 1999) to a certain extent or I would not have continued to do a PhD and write this thesis. However, like Halsey (1996) I can never quite shake the feeling that research and academia is not 'really work'. I always wondered why I chose to stay on in education whilst many of my peers, some of whom achieved far higher GCSE grades than I did, left school at the earliest opportunity. Looking back on the time I grew up in the Valleys, I was never quite sure what friendship group I belonged to either and how this reflected on my own performance of masculinity. I was interested in sports and like a lot of young men in the area played rugby but, in addition, I liked to read and write and held ambitions to escape the area by travelling and going to university. These desires alienated me from some of my former classmates when I progressed to the Sixth Form. In part this thesis is a way to reflect back on what sort of young man I was and why I took the pathway I did. I have provided this autobiographical narrative in order to enable the reader to 'place' the remainder of the thesis into the context from which it stems and to also illustrate that even though my education had provided me with a little distance, I too was a young man from the same culture that I attempt to describe in the following pages.

Thesis Structure

Part I

The first part of the thesis provides a historical account of the industrial expansion of the South Wales coalfield. I focus on how the social and cultural milieu that developed alongside employment practices, created a specific form of masculinity. After considering the impact of the demise of the industry on young men, in Chapter Three I review the sociology literature on young men and masculinities. Here I analyse how the performances of young men's masculinities can be understood through the work of Goffman and the impact of place on educational decision making,

Chapter Two   **The South Wales Valleys: History, Modernity and Masculinities.**

In this chapter I describe the research locale in more depth and highlight the significance of place to the thesis. I outline the industrial development of the region and the consequences of the demise of the coal industry. I specifically focus on the construction of a particular type of stoic masculinity that was connected to this form of industry and the challenges that economic, social and culture changes have made to what it means to be a man in the area. I use this chapter to set the scene for the rest of the thesis and explore the complex ways people come to know and experience a particular place.

Chapter Three   **Theorising Young Masculinities: Interaction, Space and Place.**

This chapter provides an overview of the research conducted into young masculinities that have used ethnographic, observational and interview methods over the past four decades. I suggest that what seems to be missing from much of the literature, especially when considering working-class young men's attitudes to education, are connections to the places and spaces they inhabit and the everyday interactional practices that influence young men's experiences of school and their future life chances. In keeping with others (see Atkinson and Housley, 2003; Jackson and Scott, 2010) I argue further that rehabilitating an interactionist perspective and using

Goffman's work as a theoretical framework, also enables a wide analysis of the ways young men perform their masculinity to emerge.

Chapter Four   **'Doing' Ethnography: Understanding, Researching and Representing Young Working-Class Masculinities.**

In Chapter Four I address the role of ethnography as a tool for the generation of data and its role in analysing masculinities. Drawing on critical issues from the field, I demonstrate how ethnographic fieldwork can show the richness of everyday life. I suggest it is also a useful method to highlight the lived experiences of a particular place and to allow an intensive analysis to come through. Furthermore ethnography played a key part in the development of the interactionist tradition to which this thesis contributes.

Part II

In Part II the focus of the thesis turns to the analysis of the lives of the young men that were at the centre of the ethnography. These empirical chapters present the young men's lives through what Ball et al, (2000: 17) term 'analytic sets'. This device is adopted to present, analyse and introduce the complex lives that were studied and that I was a part of. Through these analytic sets, which draw on ethnographic field notes, individual interviews and biographical histories, the research questions are explored and addressed.

Chapter Five   *Valley Boiz*: **The Re-traditionalisation of White Working-Class Masculinities in a Post-Industrial Community.**

This chapter concentrates on those young men within my study who came from families that would not have traditionally continued into post-compulsory education. I focus here on a group of young men who performed a specific version of hegemonic masculinity influenced by the industrial past of the area. I show how the historical legacy of a former era was re-traditionalised in different ways both within and beyond the school. I suggest that these practices formed the 'front stage' display of these masculinities. However, behind the archetypal macho masculine front, a 'backstage'

performance was also evident which provided some contradictions to the front displays. Despite these differing performances, the legacy of industrialisation was hard to escape.

Chapter Six *The Geeks*: **Academically Achieving Working-Class Boys.**

Following on from the previous chapter here I concentrate on a different friendship group based around academic success. I show how *The Geeks,* another set of working-class young men from the same locale, displayed a softer, more studious front stage region of working-class masculinity, characterised by working hard in school and being interested in comic books, technology and reading. These performances brought with them risks and bullying sometimes occurred. I also outline how, as these young men grew older, other presentations of self occurred and like the *Valley Boiz* contradictions in their performance of masculinity were also apparent. Furthermore, I illustrate in this chapter the difficulties which these young men experienced in trying to escape the locale and progress to university.

Chapter Seven **Bakers, Ian and Frankie[2]: Vocational Education and Training and Speedy Leisure-Pleasures.**

Chapters Five and Six focus on two different working-class friendship groups and their performances of masculinity within Cwm Dyffryn High School and their lives beyond it. In this chapter I explore the performance of masculinity in three different vocational educational courses in three different F.E colleges by focusing on three young men. Two traditionally 'masculine' courses (motor mechanics and engineering) are compared with a more 'femininised' subject (equine studies) to explore whether these spaces of Vocational Education and Training (VET) can frame and validate traditional or hegemonic forms of masculinity, and whether they provide a space to enable subversive forms of masculinity to be performed. I also seek to investigate if, in these three courses, similar bodily performances are on display. To bring this chapter to a close I look outside the vocational spaces where these performances are displayed and examine the role of car culture, which was important in these young

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[2] All the young men's names are pseudonyms; some were chosen by the young men themselves.

men's lives. While some of the *Valley Boiz* were also highly involved in car culture, for Bakers, Ian and Frankie the car was more than just a leisure tool. It was an extension of their vocational studies and a space in which to get together outside their separate colleges.

Chapter Eight   Jimmy the Chameleon: Multiple Performances of Self.

One of the central arguments that I present in this thesis is that young men are not locked into a particular version of masculinity. A repertoire of masculinities would seem evident, performed in different ways with different audiences and within different settings. In this chapter I draw specifically on the case study of Jimmy to foreground the immense struggles he experienced while undergoing educational, social, cultural and spatial transition. I show in detail the problems that occur when a locality's specific historical legacy collides with contemporary masculine practices and the demands Jimmy was under to negotiate multiple performances of self, or as I put it, to 'chameleonise' his masculinity'

<div align="center">

Part III

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Chapter Nine   Conclusion: Growing up into Uncertain Futures?

In this final chapter I draw together the central arguments of the thesis. I first reiterate the argument that there are diverse ways to be a young man within a working-class community (see Man an Ghaill, 1994; McDowell, 2003; Nayak, 2006). I suggest that masculinities must always be understood in time and place and that while new times demand new ways of being, not all young men find transition easy. Third, I advocate that the ability to hold together the contradictions of multiple performances, rests upon some complex familial, social, cultural and historic dynamics. Finally, I suggest that being a young 'man', cannot be read off entirely from educational pursuits as it might have been from previous industrial employment practices.

Part I

Chapter 2

The South Wales Valleys: History, Modernity and Masculinities.

Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the town of Cwm Dyffryn[3] and the surrounding area to enable what follows in subsequent chapters to be considered in the economic, social and political context of this formerly industrial place. Most, if not all, of the young men featured in this study, (and their parents and grandparents) were born and brought up in this one locale, although as will become clear, their lives were far from restricted to this specific place. The young men were able to move between spaces, and as they did, so did I. However, this study moved with them to different educational institutions around the locale and to the different towns and cities in South Wales. However, Cwm Dyffryn was their main base and was therefore the main location for the study. Since industrial change and the performance of masculinity is central to the thesis, and as few people reading this will have visited places like Cwm Dyffryn or be aware of the history of the area beyond generalisations or stereotypical imagery, I offer this chapter as a way of letting the reader 'place' the narratives and descriptions of my participants into a given, yet still constructed, context.

This chapter begins with a brief historical account of the development of the South Wales Valleys before moving on to focus on Cwm Dyffryn in the post millennium era. I then look at the consequences of the collapse of the coal mining industry in the area and the impact that the economic, social and cultural changes have had on notions of masculinity.

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[3] Although I've maintained the original names of the major cities and towns in South Wales, a pseudonym has been chosen to replace the main research community throughout this thesis. I have done this in order to go some way to protect the identity of the young men that participated in the study and in keeping with BSA ethical guidelines to anonymity.

Map 2.1 *Map of the South Wales Valleys*
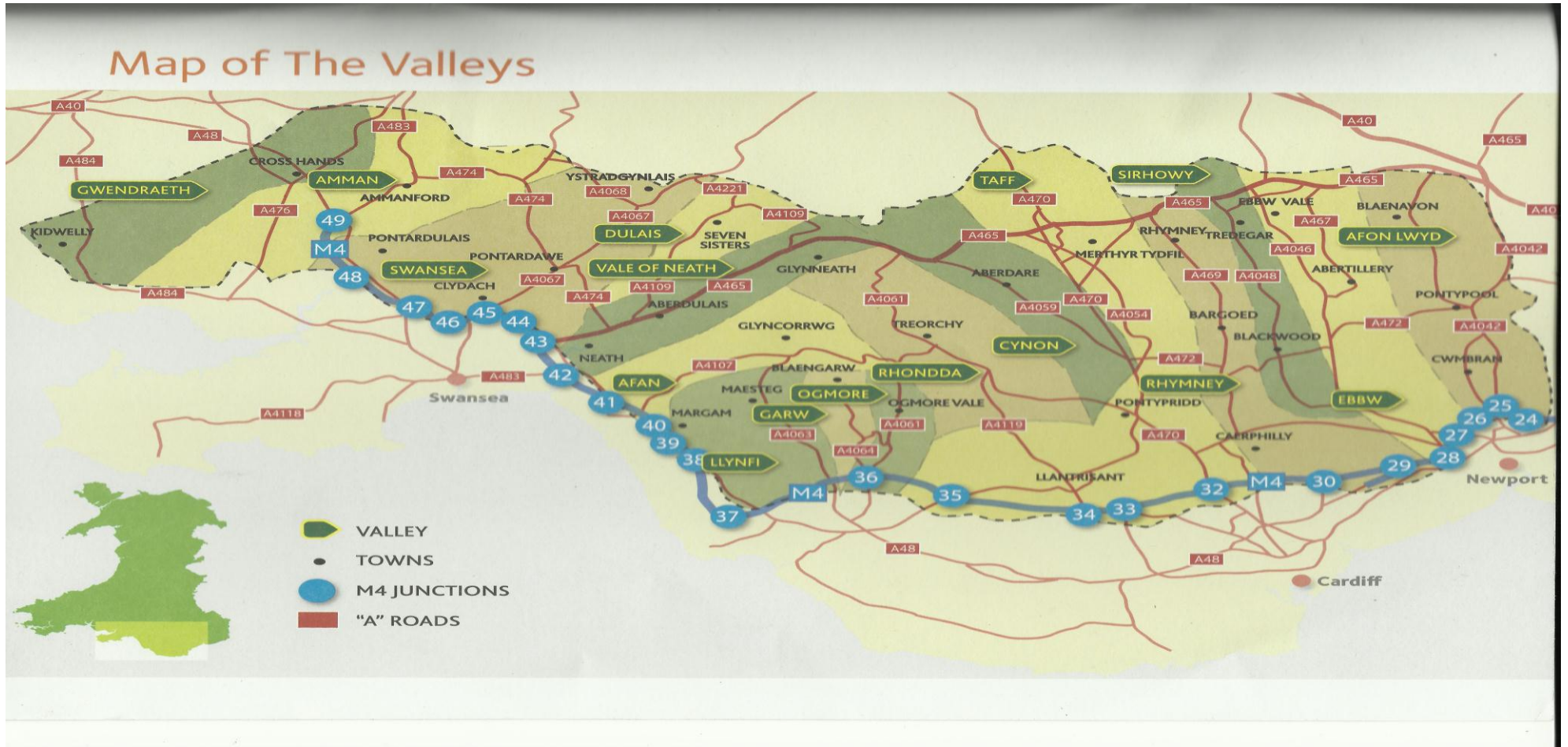
The Valleys Guide 2011

A brief history of the South Wales Valleys

Industrial Heritage

As the map above shows, the Valleys area of South Wales is a region measuring around 150 miles stretching from the coastal city of Swansea in the west to the town of Newport in the east. The communities of the South Wales Valleys are often presented as classic working-class communities forged out of heavy industry in the late 19th century (Smith, 1984; Adamson and Jones, 1996; Day, 2002). Similar to other regions across Britain that developed due to the expansion of the iron, steel and coal mining industries, the Valleys have traditionally demonstrated a specific composition of economic, political, social and cultural characteristics. These were produced through the development, growth and slow decline of what were once vital areas of the British economy.

Up until the beginning of the eighteenth century agriculture was the principal occupation of the county of Glamorgan and the population was constrained to a collection of small hill farms. The Welsh language was the majority language spoken (Grant, 1991) and did not alter until the influx of immigrants as the century progressed. The development of the iron works in Merthyr Tydfil, for example, saw it develop into one of the largest towns in Britain during the industrial revolution and its population rose from 7,700 in 1801 to 49,794 by 1861 (Rees and Stroud, 2004). As the world economy expanded the demand for steel grew with it, leading to a vast amount of coal being required. Having once just been an adjunct to the iron industry, the South Wales Valleys soon became a rich source for the 'black gold'. According to Day (2002: 30) an 'unspoilt rural landscape became densely inhabited and totally polluted'. This led to a massive population increase in South Wales, drawing first from the agricultural areas of the country and then from the border counties of England and other regions of Cornwall, the North and the Forest of Dean. Migrants from Ireland, Italy and parts of Eastern Europe also moved into the area to work (Jones, 1999; Williams, Evans and O'Leary, 2003). Day (2003: 31) likens the growth of the area to the 'frontier towns of the wild west' with many similarities to the gold rush of 1849 in California with primitive working conditions and cramped hurriedly

built communities. In the Rhondda Valley[4] the arrival of immigrants altered the population so dramatically that the number of inhabitants increased from 545 in 1801 to 113,735 in 1901 (John and Williams, 1980: 342). As Smith (1984: 23) put it, these radical, social and economic conditions changed the nation and 'an industrial people' emerged.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the coal industry of the region had become not only a major component of the British economy but also of global markets (Smith, 1984; William, 1985; Rees and Stroud, 2004). The peak of production came during the First World War when the coalfield employed up to a quarter of a million men (1/3rd of the Welsh labour force) and produced nearly 57 million tons of coal a year. This was 1/5th of the total British coal output of which 70% was exported to foreign markets (see Arnot, 1975; Egan, 1987; Cynon Valley History Society, 2001).

By 1914 coal from the region was being used by the world's major navies and merchant shipping companies and the area played a vital role in the war. However, even though employment levels were high, working conditions remained poor and pay was low. Strikes were common and tensions existed between mine owners and their workers with the government eventually taking control of the South Wales coal industry towards the end of the war (Cynon Valley History Society, 2001). This was a turning point for the South Wales coal industry. Despite an increase in workers, investment by mine owners in the industry was low and working conditions continued to deteriorate. The South Wales Miners Federation was formed to demand reduced working hours, increased wages and the nationalisation of the industry which was highly influential during the General Strike of 1926 (Arnot, 1975; Francis and Smith, 1998; Cynon Valley History Society, 2001). However, as the 1920s progressed and the collieries of Western Europe recovered from war, foreign markets declined, unemployment rose and production fell so that by 1929 coal production in the area had decreased to only 3% of world output (Egan, 1987; CIHS, 1997). The problems of 1920s were compounded by the collapse of the world economy in the 1930s and

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[4] Even though the singular term is often used, the Rhondda Valley is in fact split into two valleys Rhondda Fach (little) and Rhondda Fawr (large). See Cameron (2002) and Skelton (2000) for particular discussions about the Rhondda.

the depression that followed greatly affected the area. The risks of economic dependence on a single industry were highlighted with unemployment reaching a peak of 140,000 in 1931 (CWM, 2002).

There was a brief revival to the industry during the Second World War, with an increase in production, and the nationalisation of the industry in 1947 brought better wages and working conditions for miners. However, the slow decline continued and around 90 collieries closed during the 1940s and 1950s. These closures continued into the 1960s with another 75 collieries being shut down under wider UK industrial restructuring (CWM, 2002; Rees and Stroud, 2004). Despite these closures, Rees and Stroud (2004: 6) show that by the beginning of the 1970s there were still 'over 50 collieries employing some forty thousand men'.

By the late 1970s the closure of these industries began to affect great swathes of the nation. The general election of 1979 and the victory of the Conservative Party was to be a major turning point in the social and economic history of the valleys communities (Jones, 1999). Industrial subsidies were cut and substantial job losses were incurred. By the beginning of the 1980s there were still around 35 collieries remaining with a workforce of around 25,000, but after the 1984-1985 miners' strike the remaining collieries were shut down and by the early 1990s only one deep mine remained in South Wales[5] (Cynon Valley History Society, 2001; CWM, 2002). Jones (1999: 14) argues that between 1980 and 1985 60,000-120,000 people became unemployed in South Wales and as a result a generation 'were consigned to the dole and the social consequences in many parts of Wales were profoundly destructive as unemployment led inevitably to poverty and all its associated evils'.

In recent times this total has diminished further with only 7,000 jobs left in mining in Wales by 2005 (BBC Online, 2005). With the closure of *Tower Colliery* (the last deep mine in South Wales) in January 2008 (BBC Online 2008), only a handful of smaller drift mines or open cast mines, remain employing far fewer than the 7,000 in

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5 Tower Colliery had been in operation since the mid-19th century and was nationalised in 1947. In 1994 British Coal decided that the mine was no longer economical and opted to close it. In early 1995 the miners opted to use money from their redundancy pay to buy back the colliery against stiff Conservative government resistance and the mine reopened as a workers' cooperative. The coal seams continued to be worked until 2008, 14 years after it was deemed uneconomical.

2005. Given the speed of the closures the results were profoundly traumatic for those working in the industry at the time and for those who relied on it for other employment opportunities in the wider communities.

Cultural heritage

The development of the South Wales coalfield had an impact far beyond the industrialisation of a region (Smith, 1984; Baldwin, 1986). As the population increased, distinct forms of terraced housing were built at precarious angles on the mountainsides for colliers and their families. Social institutions grew with them and by the start of the First World War chapels, trade unions, working-men's clubs and pubs, musical halls and theatres had come to be an integral part of the many small communities. The vibrant social scene in the Valleys during the 1920s and 1930s drew the stars of screen and stage to perform at theatres and music halls in the area. Paul Robeson, the black American civil rights activist and soul singer, appeared in concerts and films to support the miners and others, such as the actress and comedienne Gracie Fields, regularly performed across the region (Baldwin and Rodgers, 1993; Cameron, 2002). The Queen and other members of the royal family also visited the area to attend social events such as the Welsh eisteddfods and to open a collection of pithead baths. These were introduced after campaigns by miners' wives to ensure that all collieries provided miners with a place to wash, thus alleviating the pains of using tin baths in front of open coal fires when they returned from work (Baldwin, 1986; Cameron, 2002). There was also a large sporting scene with some professional football sides playing in the English leagues, many amateur rugby union teams and a prolific number of professional boxing champions (Davies and Jenkins, 2008). Education and health care provision also improved during the early part of the 20th century and a vibrant social and cultural environment developed. These relationships were important in shaping a collective working-class identity and were integral to the development of the South Wales coalfield. Francis and Smith (1998) suggest that the nationalisation in 1947 of the coal industry was the climax of this collective solidarity.

Despite the growth of a collective identity, to describe the 'Valleys' as a homogeneous community today is rather misleading. First, the towns and villages that

developed during the 18th century began as small isolated communities spread out over the valley floors and across the mountainsides. Due to the influx of people and developing infrastructure, only then did they become geographically connected to each other. In general, links between communities within each valley were strong, and remain so today, with ties through local newspapers and social institutions such as school programmes, sporting events and other local organisations (see Baldwin, 1986; Baldwin and Rogers, 1994; Cameron, 2002). However, due to the geographical dimensions of the region, links between individual valleys have always been less strong and although distances amid towns in the wider area can seem small when viewed on the map above, the infrastructure of the region has changed little. There have been major improvements in the road and railway networks surrounding the area but the shortest route is still often up and over individual mountains on small, sometimes impassable, roads.

Second, there is great economic, health and educational diversity within the region. The recently defined *Heads of the Valleys* (WAG, 2006b) area for example (which is made up of constituencies from the *Rhondda Valley*, *Cynon Valley*, *Merthyr Tydfil* and *Blaenau Gwent*) consists of some of the poorest communities in Europe, which are in receipt of EU Objective 1 funding (WEFO, 2012). Those living in the lower boroughs nearer the M4 corridor are more likely to have better access to employment, healthcare and educational opportunities (Fevre and Thompson, 1999; Day, 2002; UCU, 2009).

Third, over the past century 'official' local authority recognition of towns and villages has altered (Smith, 1999) and as numerous districts, county councils and constituencies crisscross the region differing in population size and geographical scale, one 'catch all' definition seems problematic. Given these complexities, it is important to recognise that while the Valleys themselves may be seen as something of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983), they do provide 'the contours of identity' (Fevre, 1999: 111) through a shared historical consciousness and as a site of public representation (Dicks, 2004). Despite these difficulties, I use the term 'Valleys' as a convenient way of referring to the area as a whole and as a way of anchoring lived experience to a given geographical place. Having described the historical background of the locale, I now concentrate on the main town where this study was

conducted, before turning to the implications of these developments on masculinity, young people and education within the region.

Cwm Dyffryn in the post-millennium era

It can be a truly beautiful drive through the eight miles of bending winding roads of the valley to the town of Cwm Dyffryn. Depending on the season, the mountainsides on either side of the U-shaped valley can change through a range of vibrant colours, transforming through different shades of green, to reddish brown to greys as the year goes on. Although rare, severe winter snowfalls can turn the area into something resembling a Swiss alpine resort and access too many of the communities can become difficult. As one travels north to Cwm Dyffryn across the large valley floor, and its gentle sloping sides, other towns and villages that grew around the industrial developments of the region in the nineteenth century are strung-out along the route. At the centre of the valley floor a river and a railway line meander their way south to Cardiff -the capital city of Wales- and the coast around thirty or so miles away.

Settlements in the area can be traced back to the first century AD through Bronze Age burial grounds, circular cairns and the Roman fort remains on the mountainsides around some of the villages and towns (see Baldwin, 1984). On the outskirts are the town's secondary schools, a couple of supermarkets, a global fast food franchise, petrol stations, a hospital, industrial estates and a large leisure centre with a skate park and playing fields. Residential areas overlap and post-war council (social) housing estates are interspersed with modern housing developments which surround Cwm Dyffryn on all sides. The older residential streets, with their closely interlinked terraced houses, corner shops and primary schools lead into the town centre itself, which is stretched out over a few main pedestrian streets that have seen more prosperous times. Amongst the boarded up properties there is a collection of banks, building societies, discount department stores, hairdressing salons, some small clothes outlets and an abundance of charity shops, betting shops and pawnbrokers. Adjacent to one of the main streets there is also an older indoor market, with a collection of stalls selling a wide range of traditional goods. Cafes, fast food outlets, half a dozen pubs, a few working men's clubs, a bingo hall and the solitary nightclub make up the remainder of the civic centre. A car park, numerous offices and public buildings –

magistrate courts, country council services, library, job centre - and a couple of large churches complete the picture.

The population of Cwm Dyffryn stands at around 40,000 and the town is part of a larger local authority area of Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT), which brings together the districts of the Rhondda Valley, the Cynon Valley and the Taf Vale region[6]. RCT is ranked 4th out of 22 local authorities in Wales for high rates of child poverty and ranked 3rd of 22 local authorities for overall deprivation (National Assembly of Wales [NAW], 2000). In 2010 19.8% of people of working age were claiming benefits, compared to 15.4% for Wales and 12.2% for Great Britain (RCT, 2012). Unemployment in the region is also high at 4.7% and this is especially so with younger people, as 11.4% of those aged between 16-24 are recorded as claiming Job Seekers Allowance (ONS, 2012). There are low workplace-based earnings, with those in full-time employment averaging around £447 per week, which is substantially lower than that of both Wales (£460) and Great Britain (£503) more widely (ONS, 2012). Labour market conditions in RCT are therefore fragile, with lower numbers of people in employment than the national rates. The recent recession has thus affected these indicators disproportionately.

In 2009 there were 5,125 businesses based in RCT, 89% of these employed fewer than 20 people, highlighting the importance of smaller companies to the area's economy (RCT, 2012). The service sector is by far the biggest employer with the largest number of businesses. In 2009 the service sector provided 77% of jobs, the manufacturing sector was second largest with 18% and construction and other industries delivered 5%. Within the service sector public administration is the largest employer with 37% of jobs, although the numbers employed in all parts of this sector has decreased since 2005 (ONS, 2012). As only around 10% of workers within RCT are in professional or managerial roles, compared with 14.5% of workers throughout Wales and Great Britain (RCT, 2006), the region is still predominantly working-class.

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[6] RCT is the 13th largest principle area of Wales in terms of geographical size and measures around 424 square kilometres (RCT 2007). It has a total population of 234,100 (ONS 2008). Due to issues of anonymity and shifting regional boundaries, statistics are drawn from the wider local authority area as I found them to be more reliable and up to date.

The working-class nature of this former industrial community is further illustrated through qualification levels. In 2011 16.6% of all adults aged between 16 and 64 were recorded as having no recognised qualifications, compared to 11% in the UK more widely (ONS, 2012). There is also a high level of children on Free School Meals (FSM) in the area with 27% of nursery and primary school pupils and 22% of secondary school pupils in receipt of them. In comparisons to neighbours England, there 15.9 % of children in nursery and primary schools and 13.4% in secondary schools receive FSM. At the beginning of their school careers children in Wales are similar to others in the UK in terms of attainment levels, but as they get older a gap develops (Gorard et al, 2004). This continues with only 22.5% of people holding a NVQ level 4 (HND, Degree or Higher Degree) qualification when compared to 31.3% of the UK (ONS, 2012) or 42.5% of those in Cardiff (UCU, 2009). Gorard et al, (2004: 142) suggest that these low scores are interlinked and that what these relationships identify is 'an underlying pattern of cause, termed variously "deprivation", "exclusion" and "disengagement" ' with the latest of these being the 'poverty of aspiration' discourse (see Roberts and Atherton, 2011).

Studies have shown that traditionally working-class young people are less likely than those from the middle classes to stay in education and progress to higher education (Willis, 1977; Corrigan, 1979; Brown, 1987; Bourdieu, 1996; MacDonald, 1997; Ball et al, 2000; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001; Reay, 2004; Roberts and Atherton, 2011). Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (especially those from families who receive state benefits) are particularly less likely to achieve (NCIHE, 1997; DFEE, 2001; Reay, 2004). Since devolution at the turn of the millennium, educational policies by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) such as *The Learning Country* (WAG, 2001), *Learning Country, Learning Pathways 14-19* (WAG, 2002) and *The Learning Country 2: Delivering the Promise* (WAG, 2006b) have been implemented with the intention of transforming the 14-19 curriculum and aimed supposedly at widening participation and increasing educational attainment rates. WAG sees this as a key area that will shape the country's future and has claimed that through Wales becoming a 'Learning Country' (embracing the idea of lifelong learning and equal educational opportunity for all) the nation will become more socially prosperous, highly skilled and be transformed economically. By investing in education and in

following the trends of other OECD countries, WAG has sought to provide young people with the key technical and occupational knowledge (hard skills) and wider personal and interpersonal knowledge (soft skills) that a knowledge-driven economy demands. However, educational policies are 'irrelevant to the 40% of the population who have not already participated in post-16 learning opportunities' (Gorard et al, 2004: 145). Issues of multiple deprivation, a lack of role models and a history of disengagement based on family and personal histories act as barriers to learning and learner identity. For education polices to work, there is a need to break the cycle of poverty (Adamson and Jones, 1996; Adamson, 2008).

Historically a small number of young people did leave the area to attend university via the grammar school system (Rees and Delamont, 1999). However, it is important to remember that young men, in particular those who left school without qualifications, could still enter heavy industries (coal and steel) until the 1980s without them. Training in specific skills and trades occurred inside these industries (Cynon Valley History Society, 2001). Career progression also often depended on vocational qualifications gained through the workplace (Stroud and Rees, 2004). The collapse of industries in the Valleys has removed this vocational route to learning and the possibilities of career progression that came with it. It is often the case that young people must move out of the area not only to find employment, but to also use the educational skills they have gained. For those young people who do remain in the locale, the lack of job opportunities or the prospects of getting a job that are available are extremely low and highly competitive.

Cwm Dyffryn and the South Wales Valleys more broadly are examples of localities strongly rooted in the modern industrial era, which are experiencing difficulties in transforming economically, socially and culturally to cope with a post-industrial society. The economic, social and cultural conditions described above have also had a significant impact on how masculinity has been shaped and re-shaped within this environment. In the final section of this chapter, I turn to look at the development of working-class masculinities in the region and then move on to look at the impact of change in the post millennium era and the development of the 'crisis' discourse.

Industrial masculinities in the South Wales Valleys

As discussed above, from the early 19th century Cwm Dyffryn and the surrounding area relied almost entirely on coalmining as a form of employment (see Arnot, 1975; Parry, 2003). Although, as I have shown, periods of hardship, recession and unemployment occurred—especially between the two world wars—working-class men could usually find work somewhere within the South Wales coalfield or move to work in other coal mining areas within the UK. From 1843, when the Mine Regulation Act (which excluded women and children under the age of ten from working underground) was introduced, mining was an exclusively male occupation (Humphries, 1981; Cynon Valley History Society, 2001). Hours were long, with twelve-hour days common until the Coal Miners Regulation Act (also known as the Eight Hours Act[7]) in 1908 and then the Coal Mines Act (Seven Hours Act[8]) in 1919 reduced the hours that could be worked underground. As miners tended to work piecemeal, being paid for the amount of coal they produced, these Acts resulted in a reduction of wages and increased the pressure on miners to produce the same amount of coal in a shorter space of time. Much of the work was considered highly skilled with some trades receiving higher wages than others.

> To say that the job of a miner is unpleasant and dangerous is a statement against which few would seek to argue, except perhaps to say it is not as bad as it was in years gone by. The dangers affecting the miner at his workplace deep in the earth included the emission of gas from the coal, leading to explosions or suffocation, explosions of coal dust, inundations, accidental fires, injuries caused by machinery and haulage, the inhalation of dust and falls of roof… sometimes the pressure of gas would be so high as to burst out from the strata when it would be termed a blower.
> (Cynon Valley History Society, 2001: 147)

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[7] See http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1909/nov/09/mines-eight-hours-act <accessed 21st July 2012>.

[8] See http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/9-10/48/enacted < accessed 21st July 2012>.

These conditions demanded (and helped produce) a specific form of industrial embodied masculinity based on considerable strength, stamina and skill. Men earned respect for working arduously and 'doing a hard job well and being known for it' (Willis, 1977: 52).

Winlow (2001: 36) suggests that 'young boys were keen to enter the world of work as soon as possible to establish their masculinity'. This rite of passage from the family home to the world of tough, physical labour would serve to separate the real 'men from the boys' (Winlow, 2001: 36). This process of distancing one's self from the weakness of childhood to the sense of belonging to a collective group of working adult men, enabled young men to gain a confidence in their masculinity which was then proved through physical and dangerous work. It also enabled a positive male image through a certain sense of worth and accomplishment about their labour. Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012) further argue that physical forms of employment such as coal mining or steel production demanded this kind of masculinity in South Wales, which was then invested in, celebrated and reified as a way of coping with a dangerous and hard job, but also to enable the communities these men lived in to survive. The importance of work then to the development of masculinity within the region cannot be over emphasised and I would argue that such work demanded a tough, stoic 'masculinity'.

The ability to provide for a family and remain in employment was also seen as integral to working-class men's responsibility and respectability (see Willis, 1977; 1979; Humphries, 1981; Rutherford, 1988). Periods of unemployment created depression and anxiety and the failure to work meant the removal of one's identity (Lush, 1941; Morgan, 1992). In this context, would have found it difficult to neglect the social, cultural and economic pressure to provide for their families and take on the role of breadwinner. Kimmel (1996: 265) writing of the US, notes that this pressure to be a successful breadwinner was 'a source of strain and conflict not pride and motivation'.

The coalfield was also an environment in which intense male friendships were formed and one's sense of self developed. As Kimmel (1996: 7) notes 'in large parts, it is other men who are important to men...men define their masculinity not as much in

relation to women, but in relation to each other'. Nonetheless to develop their masculinity they also demanded certain qualities and labour from women (e.g. having babies, staying home to cook and clean) which created gendered spatiality's and societies. Whereas middle-class men can exert institutional power, Kimmel (1996) argues that their working-class counterparts utilise different forms of power through acts of aggression, fighting and playing contact sports. This is further accompanied by drinking large amounts of alcohol, machismo practices and displays of sexual competence acting as signifiers of a collective bravado (Willis, 1977; Corrigan, 1979; Collinson, 1988; Canaan, 1996; McDowell, 1997). Collinson (1992) and Collinson and Hearn (1996) further suggest that subcultural workplace processes also aid the reproduction of a specific form of working-class masculinity. Interaction at work resulted in masculinity being performed not just through the physical act of labour, but through a whole range of signs and signifiers, through in-jokes; coarse, often sexist language; the 'piss take' of one another; having a laugh; homophobic banter/ jokes and the exclusion of the feminine.

Likewise the workplace and the camaraderie underground (in the mines) took on an enormously important part in the construction of masculinity in the Valleys. But work itself was also influential in the construction of masculinities and shaping social relationships beyond the workplace. As Day (2002) suggests, because coal mining was among a selective band of extreme occupations that were so omnipresent in their impact, entire forms of life appeared to be dominated by them. Day goes on to argue that localism was therefore a key part of the mining community identity, where all those living there would shop, work, reside and marry in close proximity (see Sewell, 1975; Town, 1978). Weeks (2007) writes in detail about the omnipresent stifling environment of the Valleys and the impact on those who lived there. Reflecting on the area of the Valleys where Weeks grew up he states that 'as the mainstay of its economy declined, [the Rhondda] built for itself a conservative, defensive culture; conservative in terms of its gender, family and sexual values' (Weeks, 2007: 33). For those who did not conform to and/or deviated from normal expectations of manhood, by rejecting physical labour, sports and hard drinking, 'a mocking sissyhood remained the only fate' (Weeks, 2007: 30)

As the traditional 'masculine' infrastructure in the area has declined, heavy industry has, in part, been replaced by an expanding service sector economy. Women now make up over half the labour force (ONS 2012) in a region that was once associated with a physically hard, tough, and dangerous heavy industry[9]. In a post-industrial world workers are required to be mobile, flexible, with high levels of technical skill and large amounts of cultural and economic capital to thrive in a global market (Beck, 1992). Clinging to traditions of work, social class and locality are seen as a hindrance (McDowell, 2002, 2003). With the closure of the coalmines, ex-miners found they could not adapt as easily to new forms of labour. This 'feminisation' of the labour market, as Massey (1995: 203) conceptualises it, made Welsh ex-miners feel that they could not 'be expected to turn their attention to making marshmallows or underwear'. The uniqueness and the status of the masculine nature of work that the geographical dimensions of the locality created have not been equalled by the growth of newer service sector industries, part-time work or fixed-term contracts. Given these transforms, one of the key questions to ask is how are working-class young men adapting to these changes in insecure times?

Young masculinities 'at risk' in the South Wales Valleys in the post-millennium era

Over the last thirty years, changes in the structure of advanced industrial economies and the distribution of capital across spaces and between social groups, has, perhaps, been best described by McDowell (2003: 26) as a series of transformations captured in a number of all-encompassing terms including 'globalisation', 'feminisation', and 'casualisation'. The consequences for the economy of the South Wales and the British economy more widely have been evident in three major ways. First, there has been a shift in structural forces with a move from industrial production to a service based industry (Winlow, 2001; Nayak, 2003). Second, through the need to compete in a global market place, private companies and, more recently, public services have merged to become international corporations (Connell, 2005). Third, these developments have resulted in an uneven spread of regional and global economic growth patterns (McDowell, 2003; Willis, 2004; Kenway, et al 2006). ,

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[9] See Kenway et al. 2006 on similar areas in Australia.

In the UK these effects have been felt most acutely in the North-East of England, Western Scotland and South Wales, where communities have been altered by the loss of industrial and manufacturing jobs that shaped the development of these regions. A recent report by Walsh, Taulbut and Hanlon, (2010) highlights the effects of de-industrialisation on a range of areas in Western Europe (including Scotland and South Wales) showing how these economies have altered since 1970. In employment terms, the majority of areas lost around 40% or more of industrial, manufacturing or construction type work.

In this context of global restructuring, new ways of living-out working-class lives are formed inescapably around masculinity (Weis, 2004). Men establish new forms of working-class lives alongside the emergence of new gender patterns (Delamont, 2000; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). Nonetheless, as Adkins (1999, 2002) and Kenway and Kraack (2004) have noted, many of these processes actually retraditionalise gender patterns instead of transforming them. In a study of marginalised masculinities in Australian communities that had once been built around mining, fishing or farming, Kenway et al (2006) suggest that many young men find it difficult to 'unlearn' attitudes associated with manual employment and local forms of hegemonic working-class masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). While those working-class young men who successfully invest in mental labour may escape traditional patterns of masculinity, this does not mean that future life chances will automatically follow (Ball et al, 2000; Breen and Jonsson, 2005; Platt, 2007).

In these deindustrialised, times groups of working-class young people have striven to reinvent themselves through educational achievement, be it through traditional academic courses, vocational courses or new forms of work connected to the development of new technology and the media (Arnot, 2004; Ingram, 2010). Yet the former traditions of work and identity are still deeply connected to the communities of the South Wales Valleys. To be a 'proper' boy from the Valleys an archetype of masculinity (associated with an older world of industrial work) must be outwardly performed through 'masculine' affirming practices of playing sports, engaging in physical and aggressive behaviours and adhering to specific embodiment practices. The expulsion of the feminine and/or homosexuality is also an essential part of this performance. As Green and White (2007) highlight, it is important to recognise that

these young men's attitudes towards education, training and work opportunities are also formed through their wider social networks and attachment to place. What is evident is that there are competing dichotomies occurring in the Valleys with the emphasis from educational policy on developing educational skills, versus the historical legacy of the locale where the body is valued over the mind. The situation has also been exacerbated through a media and political discourse in Britain that has seen young men, especially young white working-class men, as problematic and deemed them 'in crisis' or 'at risk' (Epstein et al, 1998; Morgan, 2006; Segal, 2007; Ivinson, 2012).

McDowell (2007) has suggested that there are three sets of 'ambivalent constructions' that appear around young people in youth policy. First, young people, particularly young men, are portrayed as yobs or as NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Second, young people are represented as either irresponsible individuals or as subjects of parental control. Third, through the increased significance of place, the locale is often seen as a site of containment and of exclusion for young people. All these depictions tend to focus on the inadequacies, the failures, and the lack of control and 'respect' that young working-class people are presumed to have (Fergusson, 2004; Gilbert, 2006; Skeggs, 2009).

Much of the concern about these young men concerns maintaining order, control and creating an 'other' whose social disadvantage, in keeping with the wider neo-liberal rhetoric, is placed squarely at their own feet (MacDonald et al, 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). This 'othering' is perhaps best illustrated through the concept of the Chav or Chaver (Nayak, 2006; Jones, 2011). The media and politicians have jumped on this phenomenon, with this youth subculture being deeply associated with an urban underclass stigmatised through race and class and separated from other youth (Reay, 2009). These stigmatisations link back to other deviant working-class subcultural groups (Hall, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Robins, 1984) but unlike the mods and rockers, football hooligans, skinheads, punks and Hell's Angels, the derogatory label 'chav' holds little prestige with its members. The term is deeply associated with an underclass which is seen as a cultural problem and popular satirists in the form of characters, such as Vicky Pollard from the

television programme *Little Britain*, have sought to mock and vilify them (Nayak, 2009).

Industrial change has brought with it specific problems for young people and alterations to employment patterns and traditional gender regimes have meant that boys and men have had to forge newer, more flexible identities. As Hall et al (2009: 551) argue, for the last 30 years politicians have reacted to these changes in 'economic forces and community transformations with a policy focus on young people'. Transitions to adulthood are now seen as framed in relation to the individual crossing various thresholds such as educational spheres, training placements, work, family and acts of consumption (Ball et al, 2000). Employment is no longer the key factor in transitioning to adulthood, but is now linked more to a range of other factors in both the public and private spheres (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, many young people in marginalised communities such as the South Wales Valleys are continually excluded from wider society (McDonald et al, 2005) and positioned in relation to their lower social class situation, which is linked to locality and place. The second series of the American HBO drama *The Wire*, set in and around the docks of Baltimore just after the turn of the millennium, is a vivid example that highlights these struggles by illustrating the changes impacting on forms of white working-class masculinity connected to the demise of heavy manual labour. Such media/popular cultural portrays provide a poignant portrait of a way of life shrinking and of a form of masculinity that is becoming increasingly marginalised and exploited in the global metropole (Winlow, 2001; Nayak, 2006)[10].

Since the turn of the last millennium there has also been a growth in this global 'crisis' or 'at risk' discourse related to boys' supposed educational 'underachievement' when compared to the relative success of girls (Weiner et al, 1997; Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Lingard et al, 2009). A moral and political panic has developed about this failure in schools, which has been linked to the alleged 'feminisation' of schooling, the lack of male role models and even questions over the content of the curriculum itself (Epstein et al, 1998; Skelton, 2001; Mayan et al, 2008;

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[10] The film *The Full Monty*, also acts as a portrayal of similar demise in relation to the Sheffield Steel Industry.

Francis and Skelton, 2009). A boys and men as 'victims' (Clare, 2000; Hoff-Sommers, 2000) discourse has developed with two resulting consequences. First, this biologically essentialist concept continues to suggest a overly simplistic view of gender which only portrays masculinity and femininity as 'natural' differences between men and women (Connell, 1995). These 'supposed' opposites are formed through biological differences, psychology, social functions and aspirations. The second consequence of this global 'at risk' discourse is that it has been reported that only men can truly understand masculinity, because women, it is alleged, cannot appreciate sports, violence or competition or cannot have control over their emotions in a way that men can (MacInnes, 1998; Hoff-Sommers, 2000).

These arguments must be viewed with a degree of scepticism as men still tend to operate all the key positions of authority and control throughout society through church, finance, education, media, government and forms of world power (Connell, 2009). As some studies with young men have shown (McDowell, 2003) the crisis of school to work may not really be linked to a 'crisis' of masculinity at all, but more to one of social class inequality. Furthermore, as Frosh et al's (2002) and Nayak's (2006) research on young masculinities illustrates, few young men themselves are concerned about this crisis. Morgan (2006) asks what does the term 'crisis' actually infer? Does the term refer to individual men or is it linked to all men? Does it apply to certain forms of masculinity or only dominant forms of masculinity? Furthermore the crisis itself is not exactly new, as Beynon (2002) has suggested, this current 'crisis' is just the latest in a long line of crises going back over the past few centuries, listing the Boy Scout movement as just one example of an institution that was organised to 'rescue men' and equip Britain with the right type of men, fit to build an empire around (see Cohen, 1998). Connell (1995) in addition offers a list of other challenges to masculinity from the Renaissance to the growth of commercial capitalism and the development of war in Europe. It must also be noted that the current 'crisis' is experienced in different ways. *The Times* (27/11/2010) in a recent publication dedicated a 35-page pull out section to this 'crisis' in one of its magazines. Six men in their late twenties to early forties (five white, one of Chinese heritage who was educated at a prestigious public school), all residing in or around the city of London, were interviewed about their masculinity. Their occupations are listed as an aspiring writer; a commercial lawyer; a freelance writer and radio producer; a film maker; a

former stockbroker now turned mature student; and a project manager for a city law firm. These well-educated, financially affluent men living in and around London, when compared with the young lives that make up this thesis, do not seem to be in 'crisis' at all.

If such a 'crisis' does exist, it has roots in a number of political, social and economic areas that do not affect all men equally. Connell's (1995) 'crisis of the gender order' could be a better term as the practices of patriarchy are certainly by no means under threat. What is clear is that the problems faced by working-class white boys in the South Wales Valleys in the post-millennium era are not the same as those from other backgrounds. The development of a 'crisis' discourse overtakes other issues of poverty, racism and structural inequalities that impact on wider society. Alongside these issues there is also the change in identity formation and the development of a complex and confusing idea surrounding the very nature of what it means to be a man or what masculinity actually means (Connell, 1995; Beynon, 2002).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the research site and the surrounding geographical area to show how this has impacted on the formation of masculinity in the region. I illustrated how the South Wales Valleys were once a global industrial centre with a thriving social and cultural environment, but since the closure of these industries over the past 25 years, the area is now one of the most deprived in Europe. Despite global industrial change the deeply ingrained 'natural' belief that to be truly masculine, one must be tough, heroic, enjoy forms of sport with bodily contact, be able to drink heavy amounts of alcohol, to desire women and (hetero) sex and to be seen as rational and emotionally distant, still persists. Young men in the former industrialised regions of the South Wales have not been freed from the structural positions they find themselves in and are not in a position to reproduce the working cultures of their fathers and grandfathers. If masculinity is shaped, at least in part, by its relationships to an industrial labour market, what happens when these industries are taken away? How are young working-class men living in the Valleys adapting to change in insecure times and making sense of their position as they make the transition to adulthood? When young men are left with the historical legacy of industrial labour, do

they perform and articulate traditional forms of masculinity in particular ways and by different means? In educational contexts, how do academic or vocational subjects impact upon specific classed masculine subjectivities? What are the broader social and spatial networks within the community (e.g. family, sports, nightlife, fast cars, music, sex) that mediate the identities of these young men and how does space and place impact upon who they can be and become? It is these research questions that will be addressed in the rest of this thesis. The next chapter looks at this issue in depth and concentrates on what constitutes and defines masculinity in relation to young men and how masculinity has been theorised in different ways and in different spatial contexts.

Chapter 3

Theorising Young Masculinities: Interaction, Space and Place

Introduction

In this chapter I engage with various theoretical perspectives, as well as with selected empirical research, in order to explore constructions of young masculine identities through ethnographic, observational and interview methods. There has been a growing field of research within the sociology of education, cultural studies and in studies of men and masculinities over the past half century that has centred on young men. A particular focus of this early work was on educational achievement, anti-school attitudes and on young men's sub-cultural identities (Jackson and Marsden, 1962; Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Cohen, 1972; Hall, 1976; Willis, 1977; Corrigan, 1979; Brown, 1987). However, even though this earlier work was conducted with boys and young men, it did not explicitly analyse the practices and processes through which masculinity was constructed and performed. Furthermore this work has been accused of pathologising certain groups of working-class young men with the male authors glorifying aggressive, dominant forms of masculinity (Skeggs, 1992; Delamont, 2000; Nayak, 2003a; Ingram, 2009). Consequently recent work has sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of young men's lives and to challenge and interpret the concept of masculinity. Masculinities, it has been argued, can only be considered through their intersections with other forms of identity, such as class, 'race', ethnicity, sexuality and their relationship to femininities (see Mac an Ghaill, 1994; MacLeod, 1995; Sewell, 1997; Redman and Mac an Ghaill, 1997; Reay, 2002; McDowell, 2003; Anderson, 2009). As young men move through the life course their identities are continually being reinvented and challenged and other studies have shown how young men are capable of analysing situations and circumstances and are able to re-construct gender and sexuality as active subjects (Martino, 1999; Frosh et al, 2002; Pascoe, 2007). This work has sought to advance a feminist agenda by opening up the concept of masculinity to challenge and explore issues of male dominance and power. It has illustrated how young men are neither merely separate actors nor passive recipients of social structure, but that they are also thinking, self-reflexive individuals.

In this chapter I consider the research conducted with young men over the past four decades highlighting and engaging with these earlier studies and with more contemporary debates on masculinities. I draw attention to what I have identified as a lack of research that deals with the significance of places and spaces to constructions of young working-class masculinities and how everyday interactions and practices beyond the school gates shape the way young men see school and experience education. What also appears to be neglected within the literature are studies outside major cities in the UK that explore the masculinity making processes that impact on young working-class men as they progress through school and into post-16 education. There is also a lack of studies that focus on how young men move in and out of friendships groups and adopt different ways of being and experience things differently beyond the school gates. I consider here how a specific locality is important in understanding not only why young men embrace (or not) education, but also how particular forms of masculinity emerge and the implications of large scale economic and cultural changes for masculine identities (Winlow, 2001; Kenway et al, 2006; Nayak, 2006).

The chapter comprises five sections. In part one I begin by looking at sociological definitions of masculinity and what constitutes manhood. In part two I provide a critique of both Connell's and Anderson's work on the theorizing of masculinity. These theories provide two interesting ways of looking at masculinity, the former laying much of the ground work for the development of masculinities studies, with the later providing an alternative way forward in the field. I then move on to argue that rehabilitating (Jackson and Scott, 2010) an interactionist perspective when studying young masculinities provides a more nuanced analysis of the everyday practices and processes which young men utilise to actually 'do' masculinity in different ways. Since one key site for masculinity making is the institutional space of the school, in the third section I turn to key studies by Willis (1977) Mac an Ghaill (1994) Sewell (1997), Redman and Mac an Ghaill (1997) and Frosh et al (2002). Each of these authors has written extensively about how young masculinities intersect with other areas of identity formation such as class, 'race' and sexuality. By focusing on these core studies, I will critique and highlight under-researched areas in the literature, namely the specific and changing contexts that shape and mediate the interactions between young men and how performances of masculinities can change as boys and

young men grow older. The fourth section turns to the importance of space, place and ethnography in understanding young men's masculinities and their educational experiences. I argue that masculinity does not simply intersect with other areas of identity formation; it is also relational to specific spatial contexts and specific locales with historical legacies. In the final section of this chapter I focus on re-thinking masculinities, space, place and identities and suggest that place is centre stage in the performance of young men's masculinities.

The sociology of masculinity

Sociologists have approached masculinity as a multiplicity of different gendered practices enacted by men, whose bodies are assumed to be biologically male.[11] Early in the 20th century psychologists and psychoanalysts became increasingly concerned with distinguishing between men and women (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996). As a result a 'normal' adult came to be defined in terms of their adjustment to their own 'sex role' (Pleck, 1987). Sociologists such as the structural functionalist Talcott Parsons (1954) increasingly saw these 'sex roles' as fundamental to the ordering of families, the economy and wider society. These 'sex roles' created a strong distinction between men and women and Parsons suggested that any deviation from the roles of women as primary caregivers and men as breadwinners would create 'role strain' and ultimately weaken society. However, there were also other scholars writing at the same time, who although they did not address the issues of masculinity or gender directly, did indicate that there were differences within, as well as between, the sexes. As Goffman (1963: 128) states:

> In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports … Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself - during moments at least - as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior.

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[11] Also see Halberstam 1998 for a debate on female masculinities.

It is clear that some, like Goffman, were beginning to highlight that a more nuanced approach to gender was required. Although first wave feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1989) had begun to challenge 'sex roles' towards the end of the eighteenth century, it was not until the growth of the women's movement in the 1970s that feminist theorists really began to explore and challenge 'sex role' theory. Working within materialist frameworks some feminists began analysing how power was embedded in these 'sex roles' and how relations between men and women were social, rather than natural and therefore an identity formation ultimately created through patriarchal inequality (Hartman, 1976; Delphy, 1977; Kessler and McKenna, 1978). Pascoe (2007: 6) suggests that Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) and Nancy Chodorow (1978), working within a psychoanalytic framework, argued that contemporary masculinity:

> …is the result of a family system in which women mother. Identification with a mother as primary caregiver provides much more problematic for a boy than for a girl child, producing a self we understand as masculine characterised by defensive ego boundaries and repudiation of femininity.

Feminist psychoanalytic theorists associated masculinity with a search for independence and separation from a feminine 'other'.

The feminist movement directly influenced the growing literature on the sociology of masculinity (Tolson, 1977) and as Morgan (1992: 6) put it 'feminism provided the context, the overall set of assumptions within which the current studies of men and masculinities' were conducted. As a field of study, research on masculinities did not really develop until feminists began to challenge taken for granted political and social traditions, thus offering radical implications for men (Brittan, 1989). Nonetheless, it was not until the publication of the paper by Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985), *'Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity'*, that a new model for understanding masculinities began to emerge that illustrated how masculinity was linked to power relations amongst men, as well as over women. This paper highlighted the links between masculinity and heterosexuality, emphasising that not all men were equal players in the patriarchal oppression of women. This enabled masculinity to be defined not as one single character trait (returning to a theme Goffman initially

highlighted twenty years previously), but as a form of domination and as collective male practice.

The ideas presented in the influential paper by Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) were further developed a few years later by Connell (1987) into a systematic sociological theory of gender and sexualities. Reviewing theories of gender from feminist, psychoanalysis, sex role theory and socio-biology perspectives, and drawing on both present-day and historical evidence from multiple sources, Connell (1987) outlined the multiple structures that influence gender relationships. These included theories of patriarchy and the related debates over the role of men in transforming patriarchy, the new left and women of colour. The concept of a hegemonic form of masculinity was also further developed here. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's (1971) analysis of class relations, which refer to the cultural and material dynamics through which different groups can assert and maintain a leading position in social life, Connell applied this to gender and highlighted that certain forms of masculinity can occupy the hegemonic or dominant position in a given pattern of gender relations.

Since the publication of Carrigan, Connell and Lee's (1985) and Connell's (1987) significant contributions, a growing body of sociological work has developed that has sought to understand patterns of masculinity and has changed understandings of gender throughout the social sciences and the humanities. Messner and Sabo's (1990) edited collection, *Sport, Men and the Gender Order* and David Morgan's (1992) persuasive book, *Discovering Men,* underlined the continual importance of feminist scholarship for studies on men and masculinities. Both texts further indicated that it was vital to begin to understand that there were a number of masculinities in existence and not one universal characteristic that defined manhood. Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) began this mapping with a collection of ethnographic explorations into the lives of men across the globe. This was closely followed by Connell's (1995) seminal text *Masculinities,* which provided a conceptual framework for theorising the plurality of masculinities. Edited collections of papers by Mac an Ghaill (1996) and by Whitehead and Barrett (2001) further explored the multi-faceted nature of masculinity and this developing sociology of masculinity became a 'critical study of men, their behaviours, practices, values and perspectives' (Whitehead and Barrett 2001:14).

The *Handbook of Men and Masculinities* edited by three of the most prolific writers in the field, Kimmel, Connell and Hearn (2005) was one of the more recent collections which surveyed much of this sociological work (see also Flood et al, 2007; Flood, 2008; Janssen, 2008). What this collection of work on masculinities highlights is that in different cultures and over different time periods, there are multiple definitions of what constitutes manhood and there are diverse ways for men to operate within the wider gender order and across class, racial and sexual contexts. Masculinity can therefore be seen as:

> The child of culture … men are not born with masculinity as part of their genetic make-up; rather it is something into which they are acculturated and which is composed of social codes of behaviour which they learn to reproduce in culturally appropriate ways
>
> (Beynon, 2002: 2)

These sociological definitions which outline that masculinity is not something biological, but something which is composed of many facets reproduced within different contexts, has influenced my own analysis of young working-class masculinities. I now turn to look in more depth at how two different authors working within the field have gone about theorising men and masculinities before moving on to address what can be learned from them and applied to this study and what can be discarded.

Theorisation of masculinities

Elaborating on earlier work (Connell, 1983; Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Connell 1987) Connell (1995) argued that in the social hierarchy, individual men embodied different forms of masculinity within the wider gender order, termed *hegemonic*, *complicit*, *subordinated* and *marginalized*. The most visible bearers of *hegemonic masculinity* are not always the most powerful and Connell stressed that hegemonic masculinity was not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same, but that it was the 'culturally exalted form of masculinity' (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985; 592). Connell (1995: 41) also emphasised that even though a very small number of men actually embody hegemonic masculinity, all men still benefit from the

'patriarchal dividend'. *Subordinated masculinity* is based on sexuality and refers to homosexual men's subordination by hegemonic heterosexual men. This occurs through a range of practices from political and cultural exclusion, to systematic abuse through religious doctrine, legal violence, street violence and economic discrimination.

Complicit masculinity refers to men who benefit from patriarchal oppression, but do not enact hegemonic masculinity. 'A great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home the family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists.' (Connell, 1995: 80). While men that fall into this category do not receive the same benefits and privileges as those who are seen as purely hegemonic, they do still support it, are controlled by it, and the practices which constitute it are used to judge the conduct of other men. Connells final form of masculinity is termed *marginalized masculinity* which describes those men who benefit from a powerful gender position, but not in terms of class or race. What Connell further highlighted was that these forms of masculinity were not everywhere the same and were open to change.

Connell's model of multiple masculinities led to the concept of hegemonic masculinity being highly important in developing the field of masculinities research. As a concept is has been utilised in countless studies, reports and books and across a wide range of social institutions.[12] However, this body of research has not escaped opposition. Critics have argued that the application of the concept tends to promote and reproduce static categories or fixed typologies that are difficult to use analytically without reproducing simplistic accounts of masculinity (Clatterbaugh, 1997; Beynon, 2002; Anderson, 2009). There has also been some criticism of who, if anyone, actually embodies hegemonic masculinity (see Donaldson, 1993; Martin, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Demetriou, 2001). For example, how can working-class men (who may hold the hegemonic position within a working-class community), maintain this hegemonic position whilst dominated by the overarching social structural inequalities of the class system? In response to these criticisms Connell and

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[12] See Swain (2006) and Pascoe (2007) for an overview of its application in a range of studies.

Messerschmidt (2005) provided a reworking of the concept. They argued that in any given setting a form of masculinity exists which is associated with authority and power. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity can be found in different forms at the local, national and global level through different 'configurations of practice' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 847) rather than a set of prescribed traits to ensure that it is not conceived in an essentialist way. These forms of masculinity do not have to be based on types of violence or superiority of numbers, but the existence of a dominant version of masculinity continues to privilege the position of men over women. Nonetheless, because hegemonic masculinity has often been used to describe negative male behaviour which subordinates other men and women, the term has become something which is associated with the worst excesses of masculinity and, in particular, with young men synonymous with macho, 'hard' or laddish identities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Epstein, 1997; Renold, 2001; Jackson, 2003). What is also apparent is that these negative attributes are more likely to be applied to certain groups of working-class men than any other group (see Ingram, 2012).

The emergence of a 'softer' masculinity?

Other work on young masculinities, specifically within the fields of youth studies and sexualities, has argued that different educational institutions act as spaces for questioning the meaning of contemporary understandings of masculinity. Anderson (2009) and McCormack (2012) have suggested that contemporary masculinities are much more fluid, flexible, and open especially around aspects of sexuality, than previously noted. Eric Anderson (2009) terms this 'inclusive masculinity'. Drawing on ethnographic studies with a small number of white, middle-class university students in the United States, Anderson suggests that decreased levels of overt homophobia and more open, fluid forms of homosocial relations have challenged hegemonic patterns of masculinity and that this 'archaic archetype of masculinity' (Anderson, 2009: 4) is now on the decline.[13] Anderson (2009) argues that this decline

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[13] Of course, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have pointed out in their reappraisal of the definition of hegemonic masculinity, it is always confined to context and to power relations in a specific moment and time. So, in some contexts, like a university classroom, it could be that 'softer masculinities' might occupy the hegemonic position. Hegemonic masculinity is also about relations with women - not just about men with men - and can operate on an individual, micro-social and socio-structural level.

in hegemonic patterns of masculinity combines with wider social changes in sexual practices such as sex before marriage, higher divorce rates, same sex marriages/civil partnerships, and the social and political expansion of gay and lesbian politics has resulted in a softening of masculinity in contemporary society. He argues that the Internet has also expanded the idea of homosexual sex and has provided a form of sexual awakening, where pornography sites can be swapped and viewed through developments in new technology, impacting further on this change.

Additional UK based ethnographic research by McCormack (2010, 2012), which applied Anderson's inclusive masculinity theory, has looked at the lives of a group of young, white, mainly middle-class students, at Sixth Form colleges in the South West of England. McCormack (2010) found that his male participants were much more comfortable with being physically affectionate with one another than has been noted in previous studies with young men. In addition, he deduced that these participants were more likely to have pro-gay attitudes, have friendships with students who were openly gay and engaged in activities such as face stroking and resting heads in each other's laps. McCormack concludes that from his research findings that homophobia has reduced in schools. From this conclusion he then argues that it is now socially unacceptable to be seen as homophobic which presents a change in socially accepted performances of masculinity among (all) young men,

While Anderson and McCormack show that for some young men there appears to be a decline in homophobia, nonetheless it must be remembered that the privileged position that the majority of these young men hold as white, educated middle-class men, is perhaps exactly what enables them to engage in behaviours that were once seen as sexually deviant or unacceptable, without the accompanying risks. It is also possible that the dominant version of masculinity, in McCormack's (2012) school study could have been a 'softer' queer masculinity, where all boys (regardless of sexuality) were engaged in the process of domination over women at the school. Furthermore, the behaviours and practices of masculinity described by these authors are very different from other research findings on masculinity and homophobia (Herek, 2004; Stonewall, 2007; ILGA, 2012; Ward, 2012) and both fail to address issues of social class or the impact of locality on life chances. Finally, neither take into account that other 'softer' forms of masculinity have existed alongside 'harder'

forms of masculinity throughout history (see Kimmel, 1987; Cohen, 1998; Segal, 2007).

Although the concepts and issues raised by Connell and Anderson are undoubtedly useful for considering the complexity of gender relations, I suggest they both fail to adequately address the everyday processes through which masculinities operate and are deployed, contested and refined. Furthermore as Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997: 119-120) put it 'hegemonic masculinity is the standard-bearer of what it means to be a 'real' man or boy and many males draw inspiration from its cultural library of resources'; generally the concept has been utilised and applied exclusively as a category of 'real' masculinity which is not only elusive for most men, but which other forms of masculinity are compared to without necessarily considering the context. Anderson and Connell also fail to acknowledge the different positions men can occupy in different situations.[14] What is also problematic when looking at masculinity is the categorisation of masculinity under consideration (e.g. working-class masculinity, black, Latino, etc) as this implies that all individual men in each category are similar and perform masculinity in the same ways. Such a strategy has a tendency to obscure in-group variations.

Despite the difficulties with the concept of hegemonic masculinity that I have outlined above, in this thesis I take up Connell's ideas and apply them at the local level in a working-class deindustrialised context. However, I also explore whether 'softer' forms of working-class masculinity, which I characterise as being less aggressive, macho and boisterous can still exist alongside 'dominant' versions of working-class masculinity at the local level, rather than being totally dismissed by the young men, as Anderson and McCormack claim. Is it possible for working-class young men in a deindustrialised community to display open, 'softer' tendencies expressed through working hard in school, talking about emotions, anxieties, thoughts and feelings and speaking positively about relationships with girls, as well as engaging in performing those characteristics associated with more traditional forms of masculinity in different situations?

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[14] Connell's more recent work (see for example, 2007) has begun to address some of these other criticisms.

Working within social constructionist traditions, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) suggest that the common theme between men is not the individual body, but the type of act which signifies a masculine self. If men are to remain in a dominant gender position, these authors suggest that men must signify possession of a masculine self. This comes through the ways an individual male is viewed by others during different interactions, behaviours and appearances. Recognizing that masculinising practices and processes extend beyond individual male bodies will enable the various ways young masculinities are performed, deployed and refined through interaction to be analysed in greater depth. It also helps to identify the way young men 'do' masculinities both within and across social class boundaries. In the next section I turn to an interactionist perspective and in particular the work of Erving Goffman. I suggest that this facilitates a greater insight into how young working-class men recognise structural understandings of masculinity, and how they display agency in interpreting, conforming to or subverting masculine norms.

Goffman's legacy

The symbolic interactionist perspective sees gender as representing a range of dramaturgical performances that individuals display through a number of face-to-face interactions within different settings and situations (Goffman, 1959, 1977; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Brickell, 2005; Grazian, 2007; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). As West and Zimmerman (1987: 137) propose 'doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential or biological'. This perspective argues that femininities and masculinities, are not instinctive or innate biological accomplishments, but are undertakings of human behaviour which appear 'natural' because individuals gain knowledge of (and adhere) to strict social codes and signifying practices learned through the interaction order (Goffman, 1983). These expressions are then performed through a number of acts, or displays which convey to others how we regard them and indicate how individuals interact with others during a range of social situations.

In Goffman's most renowned work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, ([1956] 1959)*,* he lays out a dramaturgical framework to represent the conduct of an

individual's interactions using the stage metaphors of front (made up of setting, appearance and manner) and back regions to illustrate how the self is a social product of performances that individuals or 'teams' of individuals (Grazian, 2007; Hughey 2011) display in different situations. Goffman argues that the front-stage or front region is the part of the individual or team performance that functions 'to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (1959: 32). Front is the 'expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance' (Goffman, 1959: 32). Goffman suggests that there are three different parts to this front performance. First, there is the *setting* which provides the location for human interaction to take place and which is then played out inside, before or upon it. A *setting* is geographically fixed. So, for example, performances within a vocational educational institution (see Chapter Seven) cannot begin until performers bring themselves into that particular place. Secondly, alongside the *setting*, there are other parts of front that are termed 'personal front' which convey the additional items that are identified with the performer, which Goffman refers to as *appearance* and *manner* which are the scenic parts of the performance. *Appearance* is the stimulus which tells us about the performer's social status and their temporary or ritual status at a given time or situation within the life-cycle. *Manner* is the stimulus which tells us what interaction role the performer will potentially play in a given situation.

A large number of acts can occur behind a social front performance and different routines can be presented behind the same front. This means that there is not always a perfect fit between the character of a performance and the socialised guise. As I show in Chapters Five to Eight, young men can display different front performances of masculinity in a variety of settings. These performances are then overtly validated and a sense of front self develops. Goffman also uses the term 'team' to refer to sets of individuals who 'co-operate in staging a single routine' (1959: 85). These co-operations then help to express meaning within different social relations (two 'teams' of young men are considered in Chapters Five and Six). The overall team impression can be seen as a performance alongside the individual acts, through forms of impression management. The back-stage or back region, which occurs behind the front and the team performances, is further defined by Goffman as 'a place, related to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly

contradicted as a matter of course' (1959: 114). Away from the front, things can be adjusted and changed. In Chapters Five and Six I show how two of my respondent groups *The Valley Boiz* and *The Geeks,* do this in different ways. Some aspects of an activity in a given situation can be accentuated to portray the identity the young men want to project. However, other actions, which might spoil or ruin the performance and the overall impression, are suppressed.

For Goffman these performances of self (and therefore gender), occur not only within social interactions between individuals, but also within the wider culture of a given social setting. Goffman (1974: 10-11) argues that frames organise social experience and help create 'definitions of the situation [that] are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events… and our subjective involvement in them'. It is also these frames which govern how we talk (Goffman, 1981) and the arrangement between the sexes (Goffman, 1977), allowing us to see how we 'do gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) through social interaction and how this social interaction is framed through specific contexts and within wider social, economic and cultural histories. Frames contain various levels of reality, and organise actor's experiences and events. These experiences are governed by rules and norms and we learn to present behaviour in accordance within the frame of interaction (Poloma, 1979). In Chapter Seven I show how these frames become particularly apparent when studying VET courses.

Rehabilitating interactionism

Jackson and Scott (2010) suggest that there is a need to rehabilitate the insights of the interactionist tradition that I outlined in the previous section, in order to highlight and re-establish its continued relevance to sociology and feminist analysis of sexuality and gender identity. It was this tradition, they argue, that first developed a sociological theory of sexuality and began to understand gender relations in the 1970s (Gagnon and Simon 1973) challenging biological determinism. While interactionism is still popular to some degree with scholars working in the field of gender and masculinities in North America (Thorne, 1993; West, 1997; Pawluch Shaffir, and Miall, 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009) only a few have continued to utilise this form of sociological enquiry in the UK when addressing issues of gender (see Plummer,

2003). Indeed, interactionism has suffered what Jackson and Scott (2010: 812) call 'theoretical amnesia' among feminists and sociologists of gender within recent years (see also Maines, 2001; Atkinson and Housley, 2003). This perspective has been eclipsed by the rise of Foucauldian, post-structuralist and queer theory (Foucault, 1978, 1980; Butler, 1990; Davies, 1994; Jagose, 1996). While much of this latter work has been influential in theorizing the ways in which gender, performativity and the subversion of gender norms are connected, Jackson and Scott argue that much has been lost by forgetting the insights of interactionism. What is missing from much post-structuralist work is attention to the practices, embedded in everyday social life and the local social relationships and meanings that shape gender identities, rather than the analysis of discursive practices.

I agree with Jackson and Scott's reappraisal of interactionism and, taking into account some of the difficulties within the theorisation of masculinities I have outlined above with Connell and Anderson's work, I believe that there is a need to return to an approach inspired by the interactionist tradition to address contemporary aspects of young working-class masculinities. I now turn to some situations which frame and govern the experiences of young men and which are key areas of interaction. The school is one site where these different areas have been researched. Using key qualitative studies I begin by considering how the formal school curriculum impacts in different ways on the formation of boys and young men's masculine identities. I then move on to look at more informal practices and the peer group as key areas in the production of masculinity. I do this to further explore what an interactionist approach can contribute to the field and how it can help understand emplaced masculinities.

Masculinity, schooling and the framing of experience

Kehily (2007: 155) suggests that 'education can be seen as a key site in which young people come together and learn in the process of becoming an adult'. To understand the multi-faceted processes and practices that are involved in masculine (and feminine) identity formation in these arenas, scholars have distinguished between the official and 'hidden' curriculum and cultures of schooling (see Bernstein, 1971; Kessler, Ashenden, Connell, Dowsett, 1985; Pollard, 1985; Ball et al, 2000; Connell, 2008). In general the formal curriculum refers to those frames and practices that are

sanctioned by the school, such as the curriculum or syllabus, educational policy and the organisation of institutions. The informal curriculum often refers to the cultural frames through which pupils interact with each other and with teachers outside the official relationships (Swain, 2006). Drawing on key studies I now turn to some of these formal and informal practices through which presentations of a masculine self have been shaped.

Formal curriculum: Gendered and classed subject choices

Although schools are situated within social, economic, political and historical contexts, the cultures of individual institutions have an significant impact on the formation of young lives. Schools can be said to have their own gender regimes (Kessler et al, 1985) and these can be highly evident in some ways but more nuanced in others. Connell (2008) and Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) recognised four key areas of 'masculinizing practices', which then create different options and ways to perform versions of masculinity. These comprise: (1) management and policy/organisational practices (including discipline), (2) the relationship between teacher and pupils and, importantly, (3) the curriculum and (4) sports/games.

There are three very large curriculum areas: academic subjects; vocational or practical subjects; and arts based subjects such as drama or fine art. The competitive academic curriculum is centred on natural sciences, maths, English, languages and the humanities. As Connell (2008: 139) puts it, these courses are:

> … marked by abstraction and by a hierarchical organization of knowledge by sharp boundaries between different areas of knowledge ('subjects') and by abstract methods of assessment, traditionally the unseen written examination and now commonly standardized tests.

Apart from the academic curriculum, there are other subjects in schools and colleges that are accompanied by a strong gender division of labour and through which the body is defined as masculine (active) or feminine (passive). Some of these particular school subjects, which Connell (2008) refers to as 'masculine vortices', are vocational courses such as woodwork, engineering and technical drawing. These are historically

connected with gender-segregated occupations and often taught by men with a background in these occupations (Ivinson and Murphy, 2007; Nayak and Kehily, 2008). However, as Redman and Mac an Ghaill (1997) illustrate, these practices are somewhat contradictory as certain forms of masculinity based on 'hard subjects' (maths, physics and chemistry) and those formed through sports, especially cricket, and rugby union, are more socially valued than others (see Parker, 1996a). Furthermore by studying vocational courses such as Modern Apprenticeships or national diplomas students not only become gendered, but also become classed subjects (Reay et al, 2005; Reay, 2006) as the traditional A level is seen as a direct entry into university and a route into more professional or middle class occupations, whereas vocational courses often lead straight into forms of skilled or semi-skilled employment.

The modern structure of the curriculum has also been formed through the historic public schools systems, where classics were once exclusively taught. Newer subjects then developed after the Second World War with the extension of the tripartite system. As the curriculum developed from the position of the ruling elite, some authors have suggested that the working-classes are, in many ways, unprepared for middle-class programmes of study based on book centred pedagogies, as they are alien to working-class culture and for the most part their future trajectories (Willis, 1977; Skeggs, 2004). As Willis (1977: 128) put it, for working-class young men to succeed through education, they have to gain knowledge which is in itself class biased and must overcome the

> inbuilt disadvantage of possessing the working-class culture and the wrong educational decoder to start with. A few can make it, the class can never follow. It is through a good number trying however that the class structured is legitimated

The hierarchical organisation of school subjects is also influential in the construction of a hegemonic adult male, as the progression from academic subjects studied at elite public school and universities often leads into elite positions in government and the corporate world. Therefore the system created a certain form of classed leadership-oriented masculinity instilling dispositions to administer an empire and a powerful

nation state (Leinster-Mackay, 1987; Poynting and Donaldson, 2005; Proctor, 2011).[15]

Such arguments illustrate that the role of the school in the formation of masculinity can be understood through both the physical setting and also the structures and traditions that act as 'masculinising practices' within the schools. These 'masculinising practices' indicate that educational institutions themselves carry and portray certain forms of masculinity and acceptable ways of being male (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Therefore the school can, as Connell (1989) indicates, act as an authority structure, through disciplinary practices, pedagogy and violence (Beynon, 1989) to sanction and portray specific ways of being male. These authority structures then support other forms of state power and control such as the machinery of the police, the judicial system and prisons. These authority structures, which control pupils, can be resisted, but ultimately any resistance or disruption of the school rules will end in defeat for pupils (Willis, 1977).

Drawing on Goffman's (1959, 1974) dramaturgical framework, I address the impact of the formal curriculum and this authority structure on the formation of masculinities, by asking whether different curriculum spaces and post-16 educational pathways (academic and vocational) can actually frame and validate traditional or hegemonic forms of working-class masculinity, but also provide a space to enable subversive forms of masculinity to also be performed.

The informal curriculum and the intersection of gender, class and sexuality

Apart from the formal curriculum, schools also shape patterns of masculinity through social settings, where pupils mix together. Through peer group interaction (often based on subject selection) a hierarchy of masculinities develops which brings great problems for those who do not meet the 'normal' expectations of these groups and are seen as effeminate or gay. The friendship group then becomes a key area of

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[15] The current Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove (who was privately educated and attended an elite university) exemplifies much of this elitism in his plans for changes to secondary education.

masculinity making (Willis, 1977; Pollard, 1985; Brown, 1987; Connell, 1989; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Sewell, 1997; Connell, 2000; Renold, 2001, 2004; Parker, 2006; Pascoe, 2007). Status in these groups is not something which is taken for granted, it has to be worked on and involves an active process of negotiation though multiple performances which are played out alongside wider social structures, illustrating how multiple forms of masculinity are policed and regulated.

Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour; How working-class kids get working-class jobs*, is one of the earliest texts presenting boys as holding agency or as active subjects within the confines of the larger social structures which impact their lives. Written over thirty years ago, primarily as a class-based analysis of the processes of schooling, it is an endearing ethnography which focuses primarily on two groups of young men (there are others included in the book) dealing with school in different ways. One group of young men who conformed to school rules, are termed the 'ear'oles', whilst those who rebelled against it were deemed anti-school, and are labelled 'the lads'. Arnot (2004: 24), in a close re-reading of Willis' text, suggests that it still has an important part to play in contemporary research on working-class masculinities, education and social justice as it clearly illustrates how masculinity is 'a systematic socially negotiated process'. Willis has been taken to task by feminists who suggest that he offers an overly romantic view of 'the lads', whose rebellious nature is a core aspect of the book.[16] These boys make teaching hard, and also learning hard for others sitting around them in the classroom (Dalley-Trim, 2007). Also, because Willis argues that 'the lads' were a class-based culture, not a sexist or racist culture, Skeggs (1992: 191) has suggested that he legitimised power and domination of men over women and 'failed to recognise the issues of sexuality in the formation of gender identities by not addressing girls' experiences of school'. So, while Willis suggests that femininity is 'othered', it is produced by 'the lads' in class terms, rather than as a mode of masculinity.

As gender intersects with other social structures in the formation of masculinities, the peer group is an ideal place through which to research the interaction between young men and in organizing social experience. Mac an Ghaill's (1994) study of young men

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[16] See Skelton and Francis 2009: 105-106 for a summary of these issues.

and the regulation of sexuality and Sewell's (1997) work on black masculinities, show how these processes intersect through secondary schooling. Mac an Ghaill (1994) found four groups of young men in one school site, 'the macho lads', 'the real Englishmen', 'the academic achievers' and the 'new enterprisers'. The 'academic achievers' were those boys from skilled working-class backgrounds who were ridiculed and bullied for their participation in conventional 'feminine' subjects such as English and Drama. However, the academic achievers still tried to assert their masculinities in more conventional ways, by protecting themselves through the act of parodying their oppressor's macho language.

Sewell (1997) in *Black Masculinities and Schooling* describes how young black men in London respond to a racist culture, seeing themselves as superior to white and Asian peers in terms of sexual attractiveness, fashion tastes and physical toughness. A 'phallocentric framework' seemed evident through three groups of young men, the 'conformists', 'rebels', and 'innovators'. The 'conformists' got on in school and invested in education as a way to help them combat a racist society. The 'rebels' resisted racism but also reinforced white stereotypes of black men, by listening to rap music, adopting a pronounced gait and bodily gestures when walking around the school and being highly misogynistic. The final group the 'innovators' desired academic success but were attracted by the 'rebels' style. The 'rebels' were similar to Mac an Ghaill's (1994) 'macho lads' and Willis (1977) 'lads', asserting themselves over others by drawing on their sexual experiences, while the 'conformists' like Mac an Ghaill's (1994) 'academic achievers' saw themselves as superior in intellectual terms.

In Haywood and Mac an Ghaill's (1997) ethnography of the culture of a group of young men undertaking Modern Apprenticeships, heterosexual identities were particularly important in the construction of the peer group. Heywood and Mac an Ghaill argue that the Modern Apprenticeship was, in many ways, a sexual apprenticeship made visual in different ways through different groups. First, they found that for the 'fashionable heterosexuals', heterosexual desirability was performed through their consumption patterns of dress, socialising in nightclubs and through driving cars. Second, they illustrate that another group the 'explicit heterosexuals' who were misogynistic, violent, racist and highly sexist, formed their

identities against other groups of students who they saw as the sexual outsiders. This abuse was aimed in particular at one student, James, who because of his long hair and interest in a certain form of heavy metal, was seen as both gay and effeminate. The Modern Apprenticeship also seemed to act as a training ground or showplace for sexual experience. In one conversation four boys, Hugh, Richard, Gareth and Jeremy, are discussing anal sex with their girlfriends or as Richard rather crudely puts it 'taking it up the chocolate box' (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1997: 587). It is clear that these young men are not only involved in a collection of attempts as a 'team' (Goffman, 1959) to maintain a heterosexual identity but are also involved in the domination of women and the feminisation of other men who do not comply with their dominant version of masculinity.

What these studies illustrate is the vulnerability of masculinity within peer group settings and how identities have to be always be proven against an 'other'. The peer group has been seen not just as place where manhood is defined and where huge pressure exists to conform to heterosexual 'laddish' behaviour (Francis 2000), but also as a place to avoid talking about feeling and intimacy for others (Holland, Ramazanoglu, and Sharpe, 1993). In an interview-based study involving 11-14 year old young men in schools in London, Frosh et al (2002) found that masculinities were often constructed in the most misogynistic ways within amongst the peers, but that beyond its camaraderie, the peer group was quite an unsupportive and often a lonely place to be for young men (see also Mac an Ghaill, 1994). A key finding was that many young men had sophisticated understandings about the contradictions associated with the performance of masculine identities. In particular they found that young men were aware that being seen as anti-school and a rebel attracted more kudos than being seen as hardworking, but some were clear that they wanted to gain good qualifications without being labelled as academic achievers. Contradictions seemed evident between 'laddish' attitudes, which the young men felt were needed to attract friendships and impress girls, and attitudes associated with working hard in school.

Other research has further illustrated the complex and multiple contradictions that occur between the presentation of self in the peer group and at the individual level. Wood (1984:79) argues that young men may look for a relationship with a girl as a way to combat the pressure of the male peer group that would 'allow them to relax

certain constraints of macho'. Walker and Kushner (1997) and Redman (2001) also argue that having a girlfriend and falling in love not only makes young men seem less 'laddish' and more mature, but also enables boys to escape hurtful banter and become more articulate. Furthermore, Walker and Kushner, (1997) found that many of the young men in their study had great anxieties between their 'public', 'private' and 'authentic' self. Those whose 'public' selves were more traditionally macho, in 'private' were worried about the impact of their 'public' behaviours. Frosh et al (2002: 61) suggest that while it is important to recognise the 'public/private dichotomy in the ways boys construct and experience their identities, it is equally important not to reify the public and private by associating the private self with authenticity and stability and the public self in contrast with artificiality'. As I have detailed above, a large number of acts can occur behind a social front performance and different routines can be presented behind the same front. This means that there is not always a perfect fit between the character of a performance and the socialised guise.

Once gender is viewed as a performance of multiple acts, it is possible to look at the interactions through which this is done. But it is important to remember that even though gender (and therefore masculinity) is a feature of a social situation, these interactions occur within specific localities and identities become situated in specific places. These practices extend beyond male bodies and masculinities are produced, reformed and negotiated in a complex relationship not just between gender, class, sexuality, and race but relational to specific spaces and places. There seems to be minimal recognition in any of these studies of the way these young men relate to the spaces and places they inhabit and how this impacts on their performances of self. Masculinity must therefore be seen as relational. Relationality is defined by Hopkins and Noble (2009: 815) as identities that are 'constructed processually around senses of similarity and difference'. To think of masculinity as relational, Berg and Longhurst (2003: 351) argue that it 'must be connected to the system of gender relations with which is arises'. In the fourth section of this chapter I now want to look at the impact of space and place in the performance of young masculinities beyond the school and to understand more about the surrounding society which schools are situated within.

Locating institutions with wider communities: bringing in place, space and ethnography

As I have demonstrated in the previous section, a number of scholars have highlighted how schools are located within wider processes of class, sexuality and race in the formation of identities. However, what is still missing in much of this work is how home life, individual neighbourhoods, regions and nations shape the performance of young men's masculine identity and the way they view education and schooling. Place and space is therefore important in gaining a deeper understanding of not only the performance of young masculinities in schools and why some embrace education and others do not, but, more importantly, about the particular influences on these performances.

Massey (1984) gives a clear definition of the social and the spatial on which I draw to provide a more place-specific analysis of young masculinities. Massey (1984:5) suggests that:

> [The] term space includes a whole range of aspects of the social world. It includes distance, and differences in measurement connotations and appreciation of distance. It includes movement… geographical differentiation, the notion of place and specificity and of differences between places.

Massey (1994, 1995) has argued that because places can be conceptualised as social spaces bringing together different forms of social interaction, place should also be seen as a process which is experienced in different ways by different people. This then also leads to differences within as well as between genders. Despite Massey's insights, Urry (2000) has argued that sociology as a discipline has traditionally failed to look at the geographical intersections of regions and place alongside class, gender and ethnicity, and instead focused on occupation, income, education and social mobility. It was the work of Jackson (1991, 1994) in the early 1990s that marked the start of a geographical interest in the social and cultural construction of masculinity and questioned aspacial accounts of men's lives. Interdisciplinary studies began linking the notion of place and space to employment (Massey, 1995; McDowell,

1997) and further work across a range of studies explored the complex relationship between masculinities in different spaces. For example, Bell (2000) explored the different gay culture outside urban areas in the UK and Brandth and Hauggen (2000) analysed changing masculinities in forested areas of Norway. However, it was not until a few years later that a sustained analysis (using Connell's concept of multiple masculinities) began to be applied within the field of social geography (Berg and Longshurst 2003). A collection of papers by Van Hoven and Horschelmann (2005) called *Spaces of Masculinity* was a key text in this developing body of work on the impact of spaces and places in the formation of male identities. This literature explored the changes to gender identities and relationships to specific places and spaces and the place/space variations in the construction and reconstruction of masculine identities. This work, as Massey (1994: 178) put it, states why 'what it means to be masculine in the Fens is not the same as what it means in Lancashire'.

Kenway et al. (2006) support this body of work further with an in-depth study of masculinities in deindustrialised areas of Australia which used to have large mining, fishing, and logging industries. They investigate how the different spatial regions of these locales impacted on formation of a masculine self and argue that place and space exists in a mutually beneficial relationship. Drawing on the work of Latour (1987), Nespor (2000: 40) suggests that 'topologies of masculinity' exist and that different kinds of spaces can produce different interspatial modes of masculinity. He terms these 'bounded clusters' which are associated with hegemonic forms of masculinity, 'leaky spaces' with ambiguous masculinities and 'distributed networks' which transport ideas of masculinity across the globe through the different forms of media. Masculinity then becomes a network, rather than a form of embodiment.

In keeping with this literature I suggest that young working-class masculinities are not just shaped by place, but masculine identities shape and influence the specific character of places themselves. In a direct link between the interactionist tradition and spatial theorising Lefebvre, ([1974] 2001: 162) suggests that it is 'by means of the body that space is perceived, lived and produced'. The identity of place comes not simply from its historical developments, but also from the day-to-day reality and specificity of its 'interaction with the outside' (Massey, 1994: 169). Place therefore is both a heuristic device for positioning oneself and others and also, as Scourfield et al

(2006: 15) argue, a 'social construct arising out of our interactions'. Therefore, there are multiple ways of experiencing the same place.

Scourfield and Drakeford (1999), in a rare paper to focusing on masculinities in Wales, argue that to understand Wales there is a need to understand its inhabitants, both those with and without power. They argue that by analysing Welsh men it is possible to critically explore the 'social process of the construction, production and reproduction of masculinities' (Scourfield and Drakeford 1999: 4) within the nation. However, given the diversity of the country, in terms of those who speak the Welsh language, social class dynamics, and the north/south/urban/rural divide, I suggest that Welsh men must be analysed within separate historical and geographical contexts and within the social construction of gender within a specific locality. This then enables 'the messiness of layered subjectivities and multi-dimensional relations in particular localities' (Hopkins and Noble, 2009: 815) to come through.

Hopkins and Noble (2009) have pointed out that it is only in the situated, empirically grounded analysis of actual men in actual places, that we can understand power relationships and masculinities better. It is here that masculinities can really be understood as performances played out through specific practices and processes (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). It is place then that shapes the character of institutions like schools, colleges and the identities that are performed within them. Masculinities can therefore been seen as socially and culturally constructed, but also through social interactions that change between spaces and over time. I suggest that there needs to be a greater understanding of place and context when conducting studies with young men. It is not enough to recognise that gender intersects with other forms of identity such as class and ethnicity but also that there exists a range of dimensions of masculinity within these wider identities. What then are the broader social and spatial networks within a community (e.g. family, sports, nightlife, fast cars, music, sex) that influence the identities of these young men and how does space and place impact upon who they can be and become?

Using ethnography to explore meaning of place

Within spatial accounts of young men's lives, ethnography is a useful method to highlight the lived experience of place. By bringing together geographical theories of space and place with ethnographic traditions a more nuanced picture can be gained. The methodology allows for a more intensive analysis and for fine-grained detail to emerge by providing 'the optimal way to illustrate and explicate the oft-stated connection between the life world of a social group and the geographical world they construct' (Herbert, 2000: 555). Nayak's (2003a) study of young men in the North East of England utilised ethnography and brought together historical, structural and cultural approaches. Nayak clearly shows how three groups of young men, 'The Real Geordies', 'The Chavers' and The White Wannabes' were responding to social, economic and cultural transformations. While his study is insightful and provides a rich description into young lives experiencing similar conditions to the young men in this thesis, Nayak did not engage with the multiple performances of masculinity displayed by these groups of young men and how they might appear in different ways to different audiences.

In this thesis I provide a rich analysis of how young men are responding to de-industrialisation and performing their masculinities in different ways within the immediate locale. The overall emphasis is on the locally entrenched experiences of young men and the way social interactions between them occurs. Ethnography can ultimately provide an account of diverse masculinities within a specific place and also enable messy (more fluid) identities to emerge. Ethnography is vital for studying young men as it allows both for practices of movement between people and the implication for a specific place to come through. This study seeks to do this by providing an account of young men and place through a multi-site analysis and by connecting the patterns of everyday life with wider social structure.

Conclusion: rethinking young masculinities, class, place and identity

As highlighted in the previous chapters the South Wales Valleys constitute a geographically, economically and culturally distinct region, historically associated with an intensive extractive and manufacturing history through two hundred years of coal mining and iron and steel production (Smith, 1984; Day, 2002; Hall et al, 2009). However, the economy has changed and Britain's landscape has altered. There is no longer an industrial nation or an industrial people in Wales (Smith 1999); de-industrialisation has left places like the South Wales Valleys with severe economic and material problems. Its heavy industrial past is now only visible through heritage museums (Dicks 2004). Economic transformations which are still being felt in the advanced industrial West, have undoubtedly altered gender relations. Some authors have observed this as a positive move that has assisted in the decline of patriarchy (MacInnis and Perez, 2009), whilst others would argue that rather than declining, patriarchy has taken on new forms and increased on a global scale (Connell 2009).

It is clear that research around masculine identity in recent years has gone beyond the essentialist ideas of masculine identity. A critical relational approach to analysing the multiple versions of masculinity has begun to be developed, a move which Berg and Longhurst (2003) have suggested is long overdue. In building upon this literature, this thesis weaves together insights into place and space with an interactionist perspective. In keeping with others who have sought to rehabilitate interactionism (Jackson and Scott, 2010), I return to an interactionist analysis of gender and therefore masculinities, as I believe that this can provide a better understanding of what young working-class men do, both individually and as a group in a specific locale. This will enable the practices and processes at the local level to come through more succinctly.

Using Goffman's dramaturgical framework, I explore within a specific research context, how place and space mediates front and back performances of young working-class men's masculinity. How do young men deploy and negotiate multiple performances of self within a deindustrialised space? Are front performances of masculinity always displayed through dominant, aggressive, macho behaviours similar to those noted by Connell and others? Are there alternative front performances that come closer to Anderson's more 'inclusive' masculinity? Does the back-stage

offer respite from maintaining the front-stage? Can the back-stage be an area where the impregnable dominant expectations of a masculine self-such as the ability to be seen as strong, aggressive, sexually promiscuous, competitive and emotionally distant- be resisted and challenged (see Walker and Kushner, 1997; Reay, 2002; Fisher, 2009 for notable examples)? Or, can the back-stage also be a place for shared private communication between individuals where the front of the performance is fostered and refined?

The presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) and therefore a masculine self, comes through the ways an individual male is viewed by others during different interactions, behaviours and appearances. It is not psychological or biological, but conveyed by signs, face-to-face and virtual interaction. Masculinities can be multiple, contested, changeable and variable within wider gendered spaces. This then make the processes and spaces of identity productions important in the construction of young working-class masculinities and the ways of understanding them in relation to life chances. These are some of the issues I take up in the forthcoming chapters by looking within and beyond educational contexts. In the next chapter I move on to look at the different methods used to conduct the study and the issues and problems I encountered.

Chapter 4

'Doing' Ethnography: Understanding, Researching and Representing Young Working-Class Masculinities

Introduction

This chapter explores some of the significant methodological issues that emerged from conducting ethnographic research with a group of young working-class men that forms the basis for the next four chapters. Using participant observation as a core method of investigation was imperative for my research as the advantages it offers enabled me to create a thick description of the young men's everyday lives. This chapter begins by discussing the importance of using an ethnographic approach for learning about a culture and moves on to highlight its importance in studies on masculinities. I then turn to outline the different settings and phases of the research and its participants. Following this, I focus on issues of reflexivity and identify how the experiences I encountered as a researcher—of similar geographical/biographical origin from a very similar locale—impacted on research relationships and the generation of data and analysis. I end the chapter by providing details of the coding and analysis of the data and discuss the ethical implications of using an ethnographic approach.

It is also important here to offer a brief explanation (and clarify for the reader) regarding one key decision before moving on. Throughout this chapter (and the rest of the thesis) I refer to my participants as both young men and boys interchangeably for two reasons. First, it reflects the ambiguities and the complexities within the masculinities literature during the teenage years (see Frosh et al, 2002 for a wider discussion); second, and more importantly, because in many South Wales communities men present themselves (and are presented by others) in an eternally youthful way, being commonly referred to as 'boys' when they are very much men (Holland and Scourfield, 1998); for example the phrase 'going out with the boys', is often used well into old age when referring to socialising with male friends.

Ethnography: getting to know a culture

In Chapter three I argued that an interactionist analysis of masculinities with a place-specific focus was important when examining aspects of young men's lives and their performances of masculinity. In keeping with the traditions of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Blumer, 1969; Becker, 1970; Strauss, 1993; Prus, 2005; Rock, 2007), to capture the enacted activities these young men participated in, an ethnographic approach was adopted (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Pawluch et al, 2005; Loftland et al, 2006). The fieldwork phase of the ethnography allows the researcher to experience the routines, ritual and conditions through which people live their lives. However, as Geertz (1973:10) suggested:

> Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherences, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour.

Ethnography, like life, is therefore a messy business. It is not a straightforward process and can be both 'highly particular and hauntingly personal' (Van Maanen, 1988: ix) to the researcher. Nonetheless it can provide a way to illustrate and illuminate everyday practices within a specific area through which, among other things, boys and young men perform their masculinities. The emphasis of this thesis is upon locally embedded practices and the way social interactions are situated in time and place, in order to provide a rich 'thick description' of the lives studied (Geertz, 1973: 2).

Ethnography played a vital role in early British and American studies that sought to explore young male subcultural identity in schools (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Cusick, 1973; Willis, 1977; Everhart, 1977; Bullivant, 1978; Larkin, 1979; Woods, 1979; Ball, 1981). More recently ethnography has also been utilised in a range of critical masculinity studies exploring the lives of young men both within and increasingly beyond educational institutions (see, for example, Connell, 1989; Mac an

Ghaill, 1994; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Martino, 1999; Swain, 2000; Messner, 2001; Winlow, 2001; Nayak, 2003a; Kenway et al, 2006; Pascoe, 2007; Anderson, 2009). Indeed Connell (2000) has suggested that it is one of two core research methods (the other being life history interviews) specifically used to explore the social construction of masculinities and examine how subjective experience is affected by class, ethnicity, sexuality, cultural locations and within specific times and places. The 'ethnographic moment', as Connell (2000: 9) puts it, from the 1980s to the turn of the millennium, helped bring attention to how multiple versions of masculinity exist. This 'moment' also provided a way of exploring different aspects of the same life in much more complex and nuanced ways, than might be possible through other forms of social science research.

Although there are various criticisms of specific elements of ethnographic research such as ethical concerns, issues of objectivity, 'representative' samples and the dangers of 'going native' (see Miller, 1952; Silverman, 1993; Delamont and Atkinson, 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Hammersley, 2006), the method can break down a number of research conventions. For example Nayak (2003a: 30), conducted an ethnography with a group of young men who inhabited a similar community to those in my study. He suggests that ethnography can 'implode established dichotomies between structure/agency, public/private, theory/practice, talk/action, fact/fiction and even researcher/researched'. Also, unlike interview-based studies, where participants only offer glimpses into their often complex lives retold to an interviewer, I participated in many of the same activities as my respondents. Aside from experiencing the conditions of others, Goffman (1989: 125) suggests that ethnography is also a way of 'subjecting yourself, your body and your own personality and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle'. My interpretations and understandings were therefore formed through personal knowledge and deep relationships with the young men and this account is as much about my journey, as theirs.

As Delamont (2002: 8) has stressed, the importance of reflexivity as a process of social scientific self-consciousness is imperative because 'as long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, making their process explicit, then issues of reliability and

validity are served'. So, in keeping with other ethnographers from different fields, who have increasingly engaged with reflexive accounts of fieldwork and their analysis (Everhart, 1977; Whyte, 1981; Coffey, 1999; Goodall, 2000; Loftland et al, 2006; Fortune and Mair, 2010), I seek to acknowledge my own perceptions and the way my own biography has impacted this research. The multi-layered dimensions of ethnography means it remains an invaluable research tool through which to highlight sociological concepts and provide empirical examples of how young lives are lived at the margins of society. I now turn to describe the various research settings before moving on to address some of the problems and issues of conducting ethnographic work with young men. By drawing on key moments in the field, I then reflect on the fieldwork process and discuss how I went about analysing the data and the process of writing up and representation.

The setting and participants

In Chapter two I outlined that this ethnography was conducted within one community, Cwm Dyffryn, in the former South Wales coalfield. In this section I highlight the key areas within this community and introduce the young lives that were central to this study. As I have acknowledged, this study was conducted in a similar district to that in which I grew up. However, I wanted to create a little distance between myself and my participants, so I made the decision to select a community that I was familiar with, but was not my own. Initially a list of schools was compiled in the area that would be suitable for a pilot study to be conducted in the spring school term of 2008. I also hoped that there would be opportunities to explore other areas of young men's lives by going beyond the school gates, if I could return for further research and if funding was granted over a longer period of time (it was).

After an initial search of secondary schools (ages 11-18) in the area, I found 12 schools suitable for further consideration and letters of introduction to head teachers were sent. I excluded all faith-based schools and Welsh medium schools because of access issues and my own (embarrassing) inability to speak the Welsh language. Two community schools were selected for final consultation. One of these was Cwm Dyffryn High School and it was chosen for two key reasons; first, it fitted in demographically with my research aims as it was situated in a largely white, working-

class area in a former coal mining town and had a high proportion of pupils on Free School Meals (FSM) and entitled to the post-16 Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), indicating high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Second, and most importantly, it was selected because of the overwhelming support and encouragement from Mr Simpson the head teacher. Without Mr Simpson's interest and continued support over the two and a half years of the research period, this study would not have progressed as it did.

The School

As I indicated in chapter two, the school was located a few miles outside Cwm Dyffryn at the top end of the valley, built overlooking the towns and villages below and surrounded by terraced houses, a small shop, a few pubs and a large graveyard. Opposite the school was a large F.E college that backed onto the open mountainside. The site had been used since the 19th century for a variety of educational purposes, including providing technical education and later as an all boys grammar school. In its current form, the school had been in operation since the late 1970s providing a single sex and, more recently, a mixed, comprehensive education. A gateway just off the busy main road was the entrance to the site with a large car park separating the entrance from the main building where the reception, senior staff offices and assembly hall were located. It was here that teachers left their cars and where buses and parents stopped to drop off children who attended the school. Behind the main building, grassy banks and a large playground were flanked by other school buildings, built at different times over the past few decades. On one side stood a large three storey structure, rather worn and run down, with different classrooms, technology workshops, and the small Sixth Form common room and library. On the other side of the playground stood another block of classrooms that included the language and science labs and the school dinner hall. On the site there was also a multi-purpose sports hall, funded through the National Lottery and used by the wider community during evenings and weekends.

Once access was gained, I drew on inspection data from the Welsh inspectorate *Estyn* in October 2005, to provide some information of the demographics of the school. There were around 700 (male) pupils on roll with 22% of these being in receipt of

FSM. At the time of the inspection there were 134 pupils in Year 9, who by the time this study began, would have progressed to their final months of compulsory schooling in Year 11. All year groups were further divided up into five mixed ability form groups with further special educational provision for other pupils. The GCSE subjects were then streamed into ability sets. After completing their GCSEs pupils had the option of returning to the school's Sixth Form (Years 12 and 13), which was part of a wider consortium of 5 schools and a local F.E college in the area, that provided joint post-16 provision.

In theory the consortium allowed individual pupils access to a wider range of subjects as not all schools offered every subject. These ranged from traditional academic A level courses, vocational school based BTEC qualifications and, through links with a local college, a variety of other vocational subjects such as health and beauty, motor mechanics and brickwork. The consortium offered free transport between school sites and a single timetable was operated across the different Sixth Forms and the college, to allow continuity. It also provided students with the ability to meet and mix with others from outside their own 'home' school. However, in reality there were sometimes difficulties in the smooth running of the consortium. Students were regularly late for the beginning of lessons as buses between sites (schools were spread over a large area) were delayed and in order to accommodate individual subjects and teachers, subjects were split between teachers at different schools. This often caused confusion between students (as on occasion they were taught the same part of the curriculum twice) and problems for individual teachers, as they were unsure of which parts of the curriculum had been covered by other teachers. Also, in most cases, students tended to stick with friendship groups from their 'home' school and were discouraged by teachers from lingering in Sixth Form common rooms in other schools, so interactions between pupils from different schools were minimal.

Table 4.1 *Research Phases*

Dates and Location	Type of Data Collected	Participants
Phase 1 March- May 2008 Cwm Dyffryn High School Final term of compulsory school	Participant observation and fieldnotes of -Classroom lessons - P.E lessons - School assemblies - Playgrounds - Dinner Halls Individual pupil one day 'trails' Focus group interviews	Young men from Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13. After the first week, research focus shifted to just Year 11 (134 male pupils). Pupils from different subject sets, form groups and friendship groups. Craig Leon *The Geeks* *The Valley Boiz* *The Emos*
May 2008- September 2009 Cwm Dyffryn High School	Ethnographic conversations during intermittent visits One-on-one interviews	Year 12 (56 male pupils) who had returned to school after their GCSEs. Head Teacher Head of Sixth Form
Phase 2 September 2009- June 2010 Cwm Dyffryn High School	Participant observation and fieldnotes of - Classroom lessons - Form room at registration - Sixth Form common room - School fieldtrips -University open days -Parents evening -Prize Nights One-on-one interviews	Year 13 (35 male pupils remaining) Main Friendship groups *The Geeks* *The Valley Boiz* Year 13 pupils
South Side, East Side and West Side College October 2009- December 2009	Participant observation and fieldnotes -Classroom lessons (theory) -Workshops lessons (practical) One-on-one interviews	Bakers Frankie Ian Other college students

October 2009- August 2010	Participant observation and fieldnotes	Young men from both school and college
Outside educational institutions	-Pubs and nightclubs	Friends and girlfriends
	-Car and car parks	
	-Cinemas	Other family members
	-Shops	
	-Places of work	
	-Facebook	

Participants

As the table above outlines, in the spring term of 2008 I conducted the first phase of fieldwork, which consisted of participant observation of classroom and sports based lessons, school assemblies and break and lunchtimes. Originally Years 11, 12 and 13 were considered, but I took the decision to refine the study to include just Year 11 after the first week of observations in order to increase the richness of data collected in the short space of time available. At the end of the period, before the year group broke up for a period of study before GCSEs examinations, I conducted three focus group interviews with different groups of young men based on friendship ties that had become apparent over the period. I also felt these different groups of young men were performing their masculinities in quite distinctive ways.

As I discussed in the previous chapters, a historical and cultural discourse of embodied industrial masculinity continues to shape expectations of manhood in the region, even though the industrial base that shaped these expectation no longer exists. During this study I found that masculine identities were performed in variety of ways within and outside the school. These seemed to continue this industrial legacy but also to contradict it. Through processes of participant observation, I identified three distinct friendship groups, which I term *The Geeks*, The *Valley Boiz* and *The Emos*[17]. These groups seemed to exemplify continuities and changes in expectations and performances of masculinity particularly well. There were also other young men who cut across these friendship groups or who did not seem to belong to any group at all.

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[17] This majority of the members of this friendship group left Cwm Dyffryn High School after their GCSEs and attended separate Further Education colleges. This had the effect of splitting up the group and contact was lost with many of the respondents. I have written about *The Emos* in a separate paper and so the friendship group does not feature heavily in this thesis (see Ward 2012).

Over the course of the study these groups also fluctuated, as did the group membership.

The Geeks who invested most of their time in 'mental labour', (Willis 1977) were the quietest and most articulate group that emerged through my time at the school. They detested the attitude of those in their year group who they thought wasted their time and had clear plans for the future. This meant achieving academically and moving out of the town and valley. Their position however was a subordinate one in relation to their year group, and their performances of masculinity were most often challenged and denigrated, most notably by the *Valley Boiz.* The *Valley Boiz* were actively involved in all manner of contact sports (Football, Rugby Union, Judo, and Boxing) and were seen as the hegemonic group (Connell, 1995) and continued, even in the Sixth Form, to police a heterosexual and misogynistic environment, positioning many as 'gay' for working hard academically in school. They also described *The Geeks* as 'boring' for not participating in drinking alcohol, which was a big part of their social scene. The *Valley Boiz* attitudes towards success and long term goals, or plans for the future, were varied, articulating mixed immediate futures within the trades (labouring, carpentry, plastering, mechanics) or *'working for my old man'*, *'drinking and getting drunk'*, *'watching sports'* and *'chasing women'*. Through their performances of masculinity, they appeared to re-traditionalize a white, heterosexual, working-class masculinity based on a heavy industrial heritage. The third distinct group were *The Emos*. Their leisure pleasures were associated with a youth subculture characterised as the 'alternative scene' (Tsitos, 1999; Hodkinson, 2002; Moore, 2005). The 'alternative scene' revolves around a combination of guitar based bands stemming out of broad genres of non-mainstream music which transcends the globe (Moore 2005). The scene is accompanied by a particularly distinctive dress code and those participating in it are likely to have longer hair, facial and body piercings, tattoos and take part in activities such as skating, BMX riding, playing American football, and watching live music gigs.

Questions asked during these interviews ranged from: *What do you think would be your best/worst memories up until now that you'll take away from school? Any plans for the future when you leave Year 11?* and *Have you any educational or vocational (work) goals?* Discussions also centred around more personal issues such as what

other influences the boys had in their lives within and outside school. Due to the small-scale nature of the project it was impossible to involve everyone in the year group so selection was made on a voluntary basis and through invitation. Consent forms were signed by the young men and their parents to take part in the interviews. All group interviews were then subsequently digitally recorded and transcribed. The analysis of this data was then written up in my Master's thesis (Ward, 2008).

This first phase of the research was then the basis for the more in-depth, multi-sited intensive year-long ethnography that followed between September 2009 and August 2010. This was conducted in the same school's Sixth Form and across other educational institutions that some of the young men opted for after their GCSEs. This enabled me to explore how some of the same boys performed their masculinities across different post-16 educational pathways and over a longer period of time. When I returned to the school, and as the research period progressed into F.E colleges, this again included observing and actively participating in different lessons (on one occasion I helped change a tyre on a car and on another groom a horse); 'hanging around' in the Sixth Form common room and various canteens during break and dinner times; playing Scrabble; and attending school events such as prize nights, parents' evenings, school trips and sporting occasions.

In order to extend the gaze of research and gain a more meaningful and intricate understanding of how the young men understood and experienced their world, a major aim of the study was to go beyond their educational institutions. Once the young men invited me into these other areas of their lives, research was undertaken across multiple arenas. I was then able to spend time in a variety of different settings in order to gain a deeper understanding of their performances of masculinity. These included sitting in cars in car parks and driving around the town; attending sports events and nights out in pubs and night clubs in the town centre and in the larger cities of South Wales; going to live music gigs; the cinema; shopping; birthday parties; frequenting takeaways and cafes; playing computer games; going to university open days and visiting places of work (such as sports centres, bars and supermarkets). I also used the social networking site Facebook as a means of keeping in touch and being involved in organised events. I only become 'friends' with the young men in these spaces, once they had invited me to do so.

Appendix 1 contains the educational and biographical details of those young men who began Year 13 in September 2009 when I returned to the field for the second, in-depth phase of study. From the original year group of 134, 56 boys had returned to the Sixth Form at the start of Year 12, around 46% according to the head teacher [*Fieldnotes 17th June 2009*]. By the start of Year 13 (September 2009) as Appendix 1 shows, 35 remained enrolled on a variety of A-Level and BTEC courses. Many of those who had participated in the Year 11 focus groups, but had not returned to the Sixth Form, were now enrolled on other courses at local F.E colleges. These included most of *The Emos* friendship group (see Ward 2012). Others such as Shenkin (who I had interviewed with the *Valley Boiz*) and Craig (who I had trailed around the school for a day) had joined the armed forces. Their narratives are not included in this thesis as contact was lost when they moved away from Cwm Dyffryn.

As I spent more time hanging out with those from the Sixth Form on nights out, I also became reacquainted with three other young men, Frankie (who I had interviewed in Year 11 with *The Geeks*) Bakers and Ian from the original year group. They had all returned after their GCSEs to the schools Sixth Form, but had subsequently left once they had finished Year 12 and were enrolled at different F.E colleges on different vocational courses, around South Wales. After another round of letters, emails and telephone calls supported again by the ever-helpful Mr Simpson, I was granted permission by the individual colleges (Frankie, Bakers and Ian having readily agreed) to conduct participant observation and shadow the three boys on their different courses (see chapter seven).

I tried hard to avoid 'going native' (Junker, 1960; Pearson, 1993) by over identifying with any one group or particular participant. For example, Cusick (1973) in his study of American high school youth subcultures, spent more time with the sportsmen or 'jocks' than other groups of young people. Willis (1977) also famously sided more with the 'lads' than the 'ear oles' in his study, so with this is mind, I tried hard to balance up the time I spent interacting with different groups. However, just as Coffey (1999) found with her participant 'Rachel' in her ethnography of an accountancy firm, and as Everhart (1977) found in his study of a Junior high school with 'Don', I did develop closer friendships with some (Jimmy, Ruben, Sean, Alan) more than others (Carr, Scooter, Ed). In many cases this was simply because they were around the

school and the town more and also because we were 'friends' on the social networking site Facebook.[18]

Individual interviews

Even though many hours were spent in the school and elsewhere carrying out participant observation and multiple ethnographic conversations (some online), to build a biographical picture alongside these observations, more formal interviews were also conducted with key actors across different subjects towards the end of Year 13. Interviews provided an important way of understanding individuals' stories and were particularly useful for bringing Jimmy's narrative (see Chapter Eight) into focus. Other interviews were conducted with Sam, Alan, Sean, Ruben, Scott, Bunk, Clive, Brad, Cresco, Stig, Tomo and Frankie. Each interview took place on a voluntary basis, which meant that not everyone was interviewed in a more formal structured way. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed fully by myself. I also took the step of providing all interviewees with a transcript of the interview after we had met. This enabled participants to comment and discuss any issues they may have had with the narratives produced. In addition, I saw these interviews as a way to back up and explore further the findings emerging from my fieldwork as a participant observer. The interviews gave the young men an opportunity to talk to me away from the bigger group and explain their lives, problems and experiences without being distracted by others. Some interviews were conducted in empty classrooms or offices at the school or college, whilst others were carried out in canteens, cafes and pubs.

These interviews involved asking the young men to tell me about their lives both within the school and outside of it. Some of the topics we discussed involved why they had taken certain subjects after their GCSEs, what their opinions, attitudes and hopes were for the future and what they thought they might miss about school. Discussions also centred on girlfriends, hobbies, where they went on nights out and their feelings toward 'mates', families and Cwm Dyffryn. I used unstructured interviews, as I believe these enabled the young men to give their own accounts of what was important to them without me overly guiding conversation. Second, as I had

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[18] For the impact of Facebook on friendships see Robards and Bennett, 2011.

adopted a very casual and open approach in the field, I did not want to alter the trust and rapport that I had built up by taking up a more formal approach when interviewing, which I thought might not generate such rich and useful data.

I also got to know other young people who were friendly with those I have introduced here and had conversations with them. I met other male and female friends on the college courses and on nights out in the town—girlfriends, brothers and sisters, and some parents. The number of young people I spoke to over the period could have been in excess of a hundred, but I have had to narrow down the narratives to those who I spent more time with, so as to bring some order to the data. I turn now to some of the other issues I encountered in the field by exploring how the experiences of researching young men impacted on me as a researcher and how I went about managing field relationships.

Managing field relationships

Practicalities of note taking and writing up

Taking fieldnotes is an integral part of ethnographic research, but so too is deciding when to write and when not to write (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Emerson et al, 1995; Atkinson et al, 2007). Before starting the first phase of research I had been aware of classic stories within the literature of ethnographic researchers retreating to toilets to write up brief notes, or even using toilet paper itself on which to record details (see Ditton, 1977). This tactic has been adopted by fieldworkers because they have either felt uncomfortable writing in front of participants, or the process of note taking has been impractical (see also Cahill et al, 1985). Initially, this seemed rather a silly idea and I could not quite see myself doing this. As most of the lessons I observed were classroom based and writing was an integral part of these lessons for the pupils, it seemed perfectly acceptable to write in a notebook. For sports lessons that I participated in, where it was impractical for me to take notes whilst running around (I was more concerned with not looking like an idiot), I wrote notes up after the events. However, as the research progressed and I started to observe different settings, I encountered other difficulties about how to record conversations. I had bought a

digital voice recorder (DVR) but felt nervous about using it, fearing that it would look more intrusive than a notebook and sometimes it just seemed impractical.

I persevered and experimented with the DVR using it in class and asking those I was talking with if they minded me recording something as we were chatting. But again this seemed intrusive and even though the recorder was small, and similar to the size of a mobile phone, it seemed to stifle conversation and I found the boys kept looking at the recorder. As the classrooms were often noisy places, surrounding chatter would also be picked up so I soon discarded the DVR and it was not used again apart from recording the more formal focus group interviews.

When I returned to the field for the second phase in September 2009, I again took copious notes during the lessons I observed. Here I recorded details about the specific subjects that were being taught, the layouts of the different classrooms and the interactions between the boys and between them and their teachers. As I became more familiar with the young men, these notes became more refined and the focus narrowed to how individuals experienced lessons and interactions within friendships. In some practical lessons at the various colleges I felt I got in the way slightly, especially when I was with Bakers in the workshop. I got around this by trying to help where I could on different tasks.

> I stood by and held the nuts that Bakers was taking off the passenger side front wheel—at least I was doing something useful. With Charlie working on the BMW, Bakers was left to work on the buggy alone and at one point I helped, albeit slightly, by turning the tyre to try and line up some lines on the drive plate. I struggled, but it was good to do something instead of standing around. *[Fieldnotes November 16th 2009]*

As the weeks went by I spent less time in lessons and more time in the Common Room, often just 'hanging out'. I took the decision early on not to write notes in these less formal settings, but to write up events afterwards as best I could. As the research became more in-depth and I spent more time in the field, I began to realise that maybe the classic ethnographic stories of writing notes in toilets were not so silly after all. I

often retreated to my car if the boys were in lessons or not around, to write up brief notes if I thought something was particularly important. When I started to go outside the school gates, note taking became erratic. There was a running joke between the boys and me when we met up in pubs, about me bringing my notebook along. Fearful of losing the book, I left it in my car or at home. As figure 4.1 below shows, it was here that I often used napkins to scrawl notes on, often getting the young men to write things down themselves.
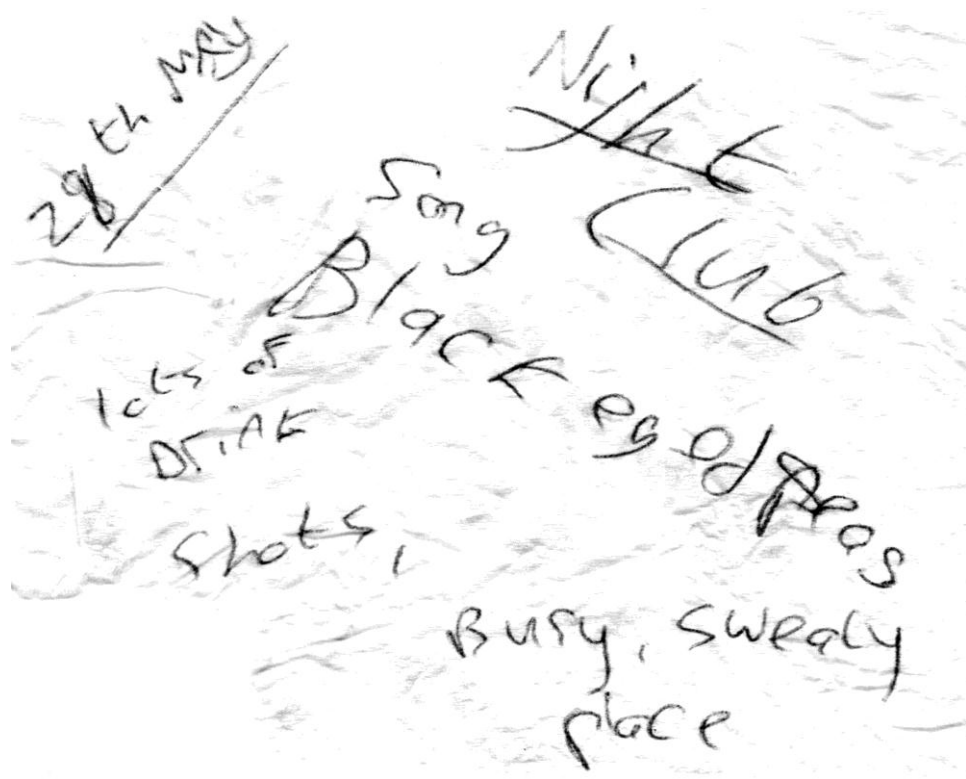
Figure 4.1. A napkin I use to record notes on.

After a day in the field I tried to write up my notes each evening, but I found the fieldwork a lot more tiring that I thought it would be:

> Again shattered today, didn't realise how draining the fieldwork was going to be. I knew I'd have to write up my notes after every day, but I didn't think it would take this long and that I would be writing things up in so much detail.
>
> [Fieldnotes October 08th 2009].

On some occasions in the colleges, where I was on my feet a lot in workshops or in the stables trying to dodge horses, I found the process of note taking and talking to different people exhausting:

> As I got back into my car after signing out at reception I felt exhausted and it took me a few minutes to gain the energy to start the car. I'm not sure I'll ever get used to how tiring this type of research can be.
> *[Fieldnotes November 20th 2009]*

During my time at the various colleges, as I was less familiar with the procedures and ways of operating, I shared written up notes about the setting and the technical aspects of their vocational courses, with Frankie, Bakers and Ian via emails to make sure I had observed things correctly. Ian was especially good at this and the notes I took from my time spent working alongside him, are almost a collaboration where he refined some of my writing and added detail about the more technical side of his Modern Apprenticeship.

I developed a routine that I stuck to religiously unless I had been out late at night and had had a few drinks. After returning home from school or college I would sit and write up my notes on my laptop that I had taken in my field notebook that day. This often took me hours, but regardless of how tired I was, I felt each day needed to be written up and this routine was more or less adhered to throughout the whole research period. At first my written notes were often less than a 1,000 words, but the notes from the second phase of the fieldwork were more detailed often running over many pages. Overall I ended up using five small notebooks and wrote over 150,000 words. I return to the issue of how I coded and analysed this data later in the chapter, but I now consider how, apart from note taking, I took other practicalities into account.

Dress

Thorne (2004) writes about how much easier it is to establish connections to participants when characteristics like age, ethnicity, gender and culture are not so different. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 83) suggest that a process of 'impression management' is therefore essential for researchers to establish identities and roles in

order to create good field relations. I consciously paid attention to how I dressed in order to 'impression manage' my fieldwork relationships with people ten years younger than myself. During the first phase, as a result of being an unfunded student, I had to juggle teaching at an F.E college, studying for a full time masters at Cardiff University and a part-time job in a supermarket whilst conducting fieldwork. As I taught classes at an F.E college, I had to dress professionally (wearing dark trousers, shoes and plain coloured shirts) and as I did not have time to change between teaching and fieldwork at the school, I had to turn up wearing similar clothes to many of the teachers. Although I cannot be sure, this may have impacted on the data collection in a small way in terms of trust between the boys and me, as I did not stand out from teachers at the school.

When I returned full time to fieldwork in September 2009 I made the decision to dress differently. As the school still applied a uniform policy in the Sixth Form it was obvious I could not dress like the boys, however, I also did not want to dress like a teacher or be mistaken for one. So I chose a different uniform to help adopt the 'least adult' role (Epstein, 1998). I opted to wear casual shirts with floral patterns, checks or stripes on them. I never wore a tie with these, something that was pointed out by the deputy head on one occasion. My shirts were accompanied by jeans and dark trainers, or, when it was raining or cold, boots. I made a point of almost always wearing a hooded jacket, as they were banned and against school uniform rules. Pupils were disciplined for wearing 'hoodies' to school, (even in the Sixth Form) so this was a double strategy to avoid being seen as a teacher (no other teachers seemed to opt for the floral shirt ensemble anyway!) and also to be seen as a little bit of a rebel, as I knew no teachers would ever ask me not to wear one. I always carried a hard backed notebook in my back pocket, with a pen, a digital recorder and when at the school a visitor's badge that I had to wear pinned to my shirt. Whilst visiting Frankie, Bakers and Ian at their separate colleges I was also required to wear certain clothes in the workshops or stables, so I had to purchase overalls and safety boots to be allowed access. When not at school or college I wore much the same—maybe a t-shirt to the pub instead of a shirt sometimes.

Age

Even though I was only ten years senior to those in the study, at times I felt a lot older. As mentioned above in the early days of fieldwork when the boys were still in Year 11, I sometimes played football with them during lunchtimes and during P.E lessons. I do not really like football and I am not at all good at it, but I joined in as I was asked repeatedly to play by some members of the year group. I was even left 'in charge' by the teacher for a brief period during one P.E lesson. On some occasions I think I was taken pity on and given easy passes to help me to score or put into a team as an extra player so others could cover me. By the time I returned, many of those with whom I had previously played football had not remained in school, but some of the same boys who did and were now in Year 13, had (luckily for me!) grown out of the habit of lunchtime football and thought themselves too grown up to play it in the playground.

As O'Flynn (2007: 47-48) comments in her own thesis, I assumed I was also a lot younger in the boys' eyes than I was. She describes giving two of her teenage participants a lift in her car to the supermarket to buy paints for an art project. After looking at her cassettes and playing with the radio in the car, both teenage girls joked about O'Flynn's taste in music and asked her who the rock band U2 were. O'Flynn expressed shock at this as she assumed everyone had heard of U2 and realised her cultural world was different to that of her participants. In Year 13 as the fieldwork progressed and the boys became legally allowed to drink in pubs, I was often invited to nights out in Cwm Dyffryn and I also fell into this trap. One evening when we were sitting in the local pub, chatting and drinking (I will return to the issue of alcohol in a moment) with Jimmy, Hughesy, Tomo and Bunk it was my turn to put money into the jukebox, or in the words of the young men to 'feed the pig'. I looked through the choices on offer and selected songs I hoped wouldn't make me look too out of touch and from artists that I knew the boys I was with liked. These included songs from bands such as T*he Killers*, *Bullet for my Valentine*, *Funeral for a Friend* and *Muse*. Having had a few beers and feeling quite happy with the way the evening had gone I could not resist adding a song choice of my own, *Born to Run* by *Bruce Springsteen*. When the song eventually played ten or so minutes later, my choice was met with a chorus of boos, jeers and comments from around the table such as 'what the fuck!'

and 'who put this on?' which were jokingly directed at me. As the boys laughed and I tried to explain that I had been trying to educate them in classic rock songs, I was told in no uncertain terms that this was 'old' or 'dad's' music and to get a round of drinks in as a forfeit for my 'uncool' behaviour. Just as Hey (1997: 48) found when conducting research with girls a few years younger than these young men, a 'series of complex trade-offs' occurred. Whilst Jimmy, Hughesy, Tomo and Bunk mocked my music knowledge and demanded a round of drinks for my musical mistake, I was also learning about their world.

Figure 4.2. A club flyer (anonymised) showing one of the events I attended.

Morgan (1992) suggests that the field of men and masculinities is fraught with difficulties and that men who study men must recognise patriarchal inequalities and challenge (and potentially change) men's practices within it. However, whilst conducting research, male researchers should also recognise how one's own gender influences or restricts the development of relationships within the field (see Warren and Hackney, 2000; Ortiz, 2003). As I began my fieldwork I did not expect my gender to be a particular issue. I assumed that as I was an older man from a similar community, I would be able to easily talk with other men (albeit a few years younger than myself) and would have little problem in building rapport and trust. Nonetheless, the rapport building and the trust I gained over time, took longer with some than others. I learned that I had to adopt different strategies with different individuals and to negotiate my performance of masculinity in different ways (Goffman, 1976; West and Zimmerman, 1987). I found that with some young men such as *The Geeks* (see Chapter six), I had to rely on my status as a university student to gain trust, whilst with those young men who seemed more interested in sports and cars (see Chapter five and seven), I had to be able to code-shift and discuss and talk about practices which I often knew little about. Whilst I stopped short of joining in with misogynistic or sexist jokes and stories, at first I did not openly challenge their views and opinions for fear of being seen as judgemental and ruining rapport. Over time, as I got to know them and they got to know me, I did begin to ask why they said some of the things they did and behaved in certain ways. The negotiation of my own masculinity continued throughout the fieldwork and I discovered the success of the project would depend on me finding appropriate displays of masculinity to enable me to successfully impression manage my field relationships. This practice then enabled me to gain access to both front and back regions of their world (Goffman, 1959).

A balancing act

Ethnographic research is often a balancing act where researchers try to become immersed in their fieldwork to better understand a culture, without becoming too immersed or 'going native' and losing one's focus (Delamont and Atkinson, 1995; Delamont, 2002). As I indicated above, I went out to pubs and clubs with the young

men on numerous occasions to experience aspects of their lives other than school in order to discover some of the broader contemporary networks that impacted on their performance of masculinity. Very much like Hobbs (1988), I not only worried about spending research money on alcohol, but after drinking sessions with participants the following morning, I regularly woke up with a hangover and it was often a case, as Hobbs (1988: 6) put it, of deciding 'whether to bring it up or write it up'! Occasionally I also felt torn between being a researcher and participating in what was happening, or feeling responsible as an adult who should take control when things were getting out of hand. On some nights out I participated in rounds of 'shots', the practice of drinking or 'downing' neat alcoholic sprits, quickly:

> At this point Ieuan came back to the table with shots of vodka for us. I really hate drinking neat spirits but felt that I had to participate or otherwise I wouldn't fit in. I almost retched as I swallowed the vodka, but even with the bitter taste, I somehow managed to keep it down.
> [*Fieldnotes evening of 29th October 2009*]

> Shots of various spirits were also drunk in each new place. These were often bought from saleswomen walking around the venue with trays of cheap shots in test tubes or vodka in jelly format.
> [*Fieldnotes evening of 29th May 2010*]

At other times I was more cautious. During Scott's 18th birthday night out I was invited to go out with him and his friends, *The Geeks* of the year group (see Chapter six for more details of this event). A lot of alcohol was drunk and some of the boys overindulged and fell ill. Although I did not do it on this occasion, on other nights out I deliberately stepped in to try and minimize the damaging effects of drinking too much alcohol had on the young men. On another 18th birthday night out, this time in Cardiff, I thought there was a particular need to assert some authority over the situation and as a researcher, I had an ethical responsibility for my research participants' safety and well-being:

> As we came into Cardiff we got off at Cathays train station and walked through the city finishing off the cans and bottles we had had on the train and headed to the Old Library pub. There was a live band on in the pub

playing cover songs, so it was hard to talk with the loud music. Ieuan ordered a round of *Jägerbombs* and we knocked them back to celebrate Sean's birthday. A *Jägerbomb* is a cocktail that is mixed by dropping a shot glass of *Jägermeister* (a strong dark liqueur) into another glass containing the energy drink *Red Bull*. The drink tastes revolting but has to be knocked back as quickly as possible and the glass then slammed down onto the counter. Leon was looking a bit worse for wear after 2 bottles of wine, the drink on the train and now the *Jagerbomb*. Even though I was technically just along as a researcher and friend, I still felt somewhat responsible and attempted to play the adult card and wanted him to drink some water, which once I'd ordered it for him from the bar, he did. [Fieldnotes evening of 12th August 2010].

These themes come through in the following chapters and, as will become evident, alcohol (regardless of where the young men were positioned in the year group), going out to pubs and clubs to socialise both locally and further a field, were important parts of their lives.

Researcher as vampire?

Ethnographic research has been described as a 'messy business' that can be both unpredictable, chaotic and emotional (Pearson, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It was not until I became fully involved in the field, that I became aware of how complicated things could get. At times during fieldwork I felt very much like a vampire, trying to suck information instead of blood from my participants or victims. One example is shown quite clearly in my early field notes after I returned for the second phase, when I get told about Tomo becoming a father-to-be:

We were sitting at the front of the room and I asked about a love bite on Tomo's neck. Tomo (who's quite a tall boy, with short dark hair and wears designer zip up jackets, studs in his left year and white trainers which are not part of the school uniform) said that he had fallen down the stairs. To this Ruben replied 'what in a bungalow' and Bunk laughed and

repeated the line…. As we talked about Tomo's girlfriend under his breath Bunk seemed to say something about being pregnant. Ruben smiled and I asked Bunk to repeat himself as I'd missed it, but he mumbled something again which was still too quiet for me to catch and I got the feeling he didn't want to tell me. Tomo then told me that his sixteen-year-old girlfriend was pregnant which shocked me a little. I couldn't believe it; inside, rather selfishly, I thought wow what rich data and immediately told him about a study of young fathers being done by Karen Henwood at Cardiff University. Afterwards I thought this was maybe a bit rushed and realized how odd this must have sounded! *[Fieldnotes Oct 6th 2010]*

As Delamont (2002: 67) highlights in her book on fieldwork in educational settings 'one unintended consequence of adopting qualitative methods is that the researcher may become contaminated permanently' by the fieldwork phase. As this was still early days in the field, I think it was the PhD and the academic environment that I had just left, that had contaminated me. The desire to help other academics in their studies (Professor Karen Henwood's young fathers' project at Cardiff University) and share my own 'data', for me far outweighed what this young man was telling me and what he was going through and my initial reaction was how I could use this information. Sadly for Tomo and his partner they suffered a miscarriage the following month, after I had arranged for him to speak about the pregnancy with the young fathers' project. But by being a researcher and removed from the situation in times of crisis this was also beneficial. After Tomo's girlfriend had lost their baby, we had chatted about it for a few hours one night on the Internet using the social networking site Facebook. When I saw him the next day he told me that it had been nice to talk about it all with someone he felt he could trust and who was removed from the situation. He said he had not really wanted to talk about it with anyone, especially not his parents, but he was really glad he had told me about how he had felt and that is was a lot easier using the Internet, as he felt less pressured to explain himself without worrying about it.

At the end of each individual interview I took the step of asking each interviewee what they had thought about the whole research process, which proved quite illuminating:

Sean   …..I've found it enjoyable, interesting to be honest like it's nice to have like it seems that someone is taking an interest kind of thing. I know it sounds a bit weird but um, you get the feeling that most people around here especially adults in this school, they don't really care kinda thing.

Sam   …..it's interesting, like a counselling session..

Alan   Yeah it's been good, I sort of uh got a few insights into myself about talking to you.

MW   Oh yeah…like what?

Alan   Well you know sometimes we'll be talking and um I'll come out with something and I didn't realise I thought that

Ruben   Um well I think it was weird for Year 11….and then we came back and it was like oh yeah it's Mike, it's good to talk to you about stuff you're the only male person I know I talk to about this stuff.

Sean, Sam Ruben and Alan found the experience interesting, but they also found it helpful to talk with someone about issues they were facing. Others in the year group were less reflexive, but still seemed to find it enjoyable.

Jimmy   Don't really notice you're there… we see you as a mate

Frankie   It don't bother me, you're like one of the boys to me, it don't matter,

Brad   …we just know you as Mike now, one of the boys kinda thing, once you're in the group kinda thing you just talk, you don't think you're

	that guy who comes in, you're just one of the boys kinda thing, join in with the talks
MW	Ah that's nice mate,
Brad	Ah it's alright mun, I'm not lying, you come out with us, speak to the boys now and again and you got to be who you are

MW	And since I've been doing the interviews and hanging around with you has it been ok?
Clive	Yeah, you've been accepted as one of the team
Cresco	More the merrier in it!

For Jimmy, Frankie, Brad, Clive and Cresco I was just 'one of the boys'. Alan also commented on this and shows how by going beyond the school, the rapport developed further.

Alan	Yeah, I think cos you come out, outside of school as well, maybe if it was just inside school, sticking to your questions all the time, but you're a mate more than anything now I suppose

Tomo's reflections were particularly insightful;

Tomo	… you're quite sly, like sit here for like five minutes and then I realise what I just told you, shit I wouldn't sit down and tell anyone that!
MW	Oh right (Laughs)
Tomo	Got a bit of a gift for getting information out of people, you'd be a good spy (Both laugh)
MW	Ok (Laughs)
Tomo	And when I listen to other people talking to you, they are slagging other people off like to you and that's brilliant that is how you can just sit down with someone and make friends with people really easy can't you?
MW	Right, yeah I suppose
Tomo	Yeah like you're an outsider aren't you, like you're outside this group if you told someone in this group it would move around the group, but you're not

going to go to someone else and tell um all about it, it's nice to have someone like that about for us as well as yourself.

This brief snippet from a much longer conversation shows how surprised I was at being viewed in this way in his eyes. I was conscious of having to try and talk to as many different people as I could, but I hadn't realised how others interpreted this. Of course Tomo had already confided in me around the issue of the miscarriage, but still this illustrates how significant trust and confidentiality was to him and also how comfortable these young men had become with me.

So far in this chapter, I have outlined and reflected on the methodological issues I encountered whilst in the field and how I dealt with these different situations. However, whilst rich data can be gained from ethnographic research, it also arouses debates about ethics and how one goes about interpreting the data gained (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). To draw this chapter to a close, I now discuss some of these ethical and interpretive challenges and look at how I analysed the mass of data I collected and the ethical considerations that I encountered.

Interpretation, data analysis and ethical considerations

Data Analysis

Van Maanen (1988) suggests that the writing of ethnography is as important as the fieldwork phase, but that the boundaries during and after fieldwork are often blurred. In order to counteract this, the interpretation and analysis was ongoing throughout the fieldwork phase. However, by its very nature, the data gathered from qualitative forms of research are as problematic as they are beneficial 'because of the attractiveness of its richness, but the difficulty of finding analytical paths through that richness' is often confusing (Bryman, 2001: 388). As outlined before I had analysed and written up the initial phase of research for a previous study (Ward 2008) and presented some of these findings at various conferences (Ward, 2010; Clayton and Ward, 2011) so I was already familiar with the participants and the analytic process when I came to writing up the final document. However, the practice of analysing the data from the fieldnotes and interviews was not straightforward.

Quite early on I constructed a simple spread sheet with a register of all those who remained in school and the subjects they were studying updating this with key information gained as I went along. I kept a field journal and used it to write a plethora of analytic memos and added diagrams and sketches of classroom layouts to these notes. When writing these fieldnotes, I also began to look for recurring themes and tried to make sense of the data being generated. I also got into the habit of writing reflections on my day in the field, to support my typed field notes. As the second phase of fieldwork became more demanding and took over other parts of my life, this was not only part of good ethnographic practice, but I found it helpful as I could re-evaluate what had happened that day or evening and make connections between the data and my ethnographic self (see Coffey, 1999).

Despite the initial approach, as the fieldwork continued I was cautious about beginning to analyse the second phase of data and still had some concerns about portraying my participants' lives adequately. In order to give myself some breathing space between having conducted the research and turning it into a written manuscript, I did not begin the real in-depth analysis of my fieldnotes (which were the bulk of the data gathered) until a few months after the end of the fieldwork. The analysis was therefore split into two stages and I first turned to typing up the interview transcripts (all were recorded using the DVR) from the individual interviews and began the process of coding the data here. Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 26-27) refer to this as 'assigning tags or labels to the data... as part of an analytical process'. These labels then, as Seidal and Kelle (1995: 27) suggest, enabled me to connect the data that was gathered with my original 'theoretical concepts'. This indexing and coding was carried out using the CAQDAS package NVivo, which helped me to organize the data into further key themes. These interviews provided me with an opportunity to increase the biographical information about each participant and highlighted issues that I had previously observed in the field, identified in the background literature and what had formed my original research questions. These included talking about the performance of hegemonic or softer masculinities, the different uses of space within the school and the wider community, the impact of place on future decision making and it allowed me to explore the ability of young men to impression manage their own masculinities and perform different presentations of self to different audiences (Goffman, 1959).

Once I had transcribed the interviews the second stage of analysis began, which involved consulting my fieldnotes. I started to use the NVivo computer package for the 'coding and retrieval of the data segments' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 166) from the huge bulk of fieldnotes which amounted to many thousands of pages. In particular this helped me identity the different displays of a given performance which occurred in multiple settings and any contradictory performances that might have occurred. However, I found it hard to analyse the data in a meaningful way, and felt that I was becoming lost in a data entry exercise and the analysis process was become mechanistic and uncritical (Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson, 1996). After weeks of frustration I collected my entire set of fieldnotes (since I had began the research in 2008) into one document and printed them out on paper as a complete hard copy data set. I then added other information that I had collected such as subject material from the lessons I had been in, prospectus and maps from the colleges, local newspapers cuttings, napkins, beer mats and fliers I had picked up in pubs and clubs. This enabled me to view the whole structure of the data as one and I felt it could be now interrogated away from my desk and my computer. I re-read through my hand written notes and the whole data set over a few days, adding and making notes and highlighting key passages and themes with different coloured pens. Here I also referred back to the individual interviews and cross-referenced some of the data. I was interested in looking for behaviours which were recurring and which could then indicate the emergence of a particular trend. These 'small chunks' (Delamont, 2002: 176) were then further coded according to events, the participants involved, the physical settings events took place in and the times and durations of these events. I also coded my own reactions, thoughts and feelings to these events alongside what I had observed. I then went back to the full data set on the simpler Microsoft Word processing package to bring all the data together. This to my relief, as Stanley and Temple (1995: 167) illustrate, was perfect for my needs. They suggest that 'qualitative researchers should consider using a good word processing package as… the facilities provided in a good word processing package will be sufficient to the analysis required'. As I was already familiar with the package, I felt I could add any further comments and attach notes to the central themes within the data with ease and therefore enhance the original codes and concepts from the hard copies.

I also drew the data together based on friendship ties that became apparent as the fieldwork progressed. As illustrated in the previous chapter, a common strategy for presenting young men's subject positions within ethnographic and masculinities research has been through the use of friendship groups. A few key examples of these were drawn on previously, but others researching masculinity over the last twenty-five years have also followed in this trend. In Kessler et al's (1985) study there was the 'bloods' and the 'cyrils'; Walker (1988) had the 'footballers' the 'competitors', 'the Greeks', the 'three friends' and the 'handballers'. Connell (1989) had 'the cool guys', 'swots' and 'wimps'; Parker (1996b) the 'hard boys', 'conformists' and 'victims', Edley and Wetherell (1996) the 'hard lads' and the 'opposition group'; Warren (1997) the 'princes of the park' and the 'working-class kings'; Martino (1999) the 'cool guys' 'party animals', 'squids' and 'poofters'; Dalley-Trim (2007) the 'bad lads' and the 'roguish lads and larrikins'. Although not primarily a study on masculinities, Hollingworth and Williams (2009) also clearly highlight how different youth groups are defined by students themselves and in relation to each other as 'hippies' 'poshies', 'goths', 'emos', 'skaters', 'jitters', 'rockers', 'gangsters', 'townies', and 'chavers'.

Some writers such as Francis (2000) and Swain (2006) have suggested that whilst friendship groups may correctly demonstrate that multiple versions of masculinity may exist in a singular setting, they often appear too static, simplistic and limit the portrayal of the multi-faceted nature of 'real life' and have a tendency to produce typologies. The use of strict friendship groups also fail to show the ability of young men to move between groups or to change groups altogether as they grow older.

Whilst I recognise these difficulties, the chapters in this thesis presenting the young lives studied take the friendship group as a starting point for a number of reasons. First, I argue that while young men perform multiple performances of self and can move in and out of friendship groups, many of these performances still occur as Goffman (1959) put it within 'teams' of individuals, so it is important to recognize the power of the friendship group. Second, the friendship group enables the front and back performances of masculinity within these 'teams' to be examined. Third, I suggest that this tactic also enables comparisons with other studies and acts as a cross referencing point throughout the field of masculinities research. Nonetheless, as I

spent more time with the young men both inside and outside the school, I also came to recognise the difficulties with this approach. In acknowledgment of this, in Chapter Eight, I highlight some of the problems and complexities that some young men, who did not fit easily into straightforward categories, encountered when trying to move beyond and between groups. Each chapter is written in what Ball et al (2000: 17) term 'analytic sets'. This device is adopted to present, analyse and introduce the complex lives that were studied and I was a part of. These sets allow comparison and difference in masculinities, educational routes and subject identities to come through.

Ethical considerations

Some aspects of ethnographic research can cause tension, conflict and create questions about ethical consideration particularly in response to participant observation (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Denzin, 1997; Mauther et al, 2002; Hammersley, 2006). Lauder (2003: 186) suggests that because ethnography is 'fraught with methodological and ethical challenges' around informed consent, privacy, explanation and ethical guidelines set by academic bodies, the validity of ethnography is brought into question. Norris (1993) has argued that it is necessary to carefully resolve these issues by looking at three different approaches that seem to divide opinion about ethnical codes of conduct.

First, there are the 'legalistic' or professional codes which guide researchers and enable studies to be conducted with similar procedures for allowing informed consent, privacy, anonymity and non-intrusive forms of research. The British Sociological Association and university guidelines, are two examples of professional codes of practice. Second, there is the 'antinomian' perspective, which suggests that the gathering of knowledge comes before any concern for ethics and goes beyond professional procedures. Humphreys (1970) *Tearoom Trade* is a classic ethnography dealing with some of these issues and processes. Third, Norris (1993) suggests there is the 'situational' approach, bringing together both other perspectives to emphasise that as every research situation is different, this should be taken into account when completing ethical guidelines. As qualitative data, in particular ethnographic data, is fundamentally different to other forms of data collection, it is therefore impossible to impose the same ethical measure across all forms of research. The situational

approach to ethical procedures is suited to ethnographic research as it can compensate for the complexity and messiness that comes when conducting these types of studies.

Ethical guidelines often outline that research participants should be informed about any research they are involved with, in a clear and understandable way in order to give consent before the study begins. With this in mind, when conducting this study (also following Cardiff University guidelines) all participants involved in the research were openly informed of my presence and I made every effort to clarify why I was there and what I sought to investigate. I provided teachers and parents with information sheets and gave out postcards with information on it to the young men and their friends. I often found these were scanned quickly and stuffed into bags, pockets or left discarded on tables, but became invaluable when attending the colleges with Frankie, Bakers and Ian as I met so many new people and the information was enough to quickly satisfy the curiosity of others.

Whilst it had been my intention to inform all the young men and other people I came into contact with about my study, as the ethnography progressed and I met more and more young people outside the main cohort, this became impossible. On nights out in nightclubs and pubs, it was not only totally impractical to inform everyone in these establishments that an ethnographic study was going on, it was also difficult to articulate and explain why I was conducing it, so unless asked outright who I was, it often went unmentioned. In relation to harm and exploitation, I was also often concerned that because some of the practices and activities that the young men participated it (both legal and illegal) were potentially dangerous, I tried hard not to place either the young men or myself in vulnerable positions. To go some way to protecting them, all participants involved have been anonymised as far as possible along with changing the name of the town to Cwm Dyffryn. Most participants selected their own pseudonyms; however others were reluctant to do so as they wanted their real names to appear in the thesis and any publications. It was often hard to explain that even though I was writing about their lives and the issues they faced, I still had to try and protect their identities.

When I began the research I was also an F.E lecturer so I had undergone an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. I was therefore aware of the privacy and

confidentiality issues that came when working with young people. All young men who were formally interviewed (individually and in the early focus group interviews) had to return signed consent forms before participating.[19] Each participant was also aware that the interviews were being recorded and I mentioned to all those participating that the recordings would only be heard by me and that all transcripts would be kept in a locked filing cabinet. I was therefore consciously deliberating whether or not the information I gained would compromise anyone in the study or cause harm or embarrassment. However, I also feel that this research raises many issues about these socially marginalized young men and was therefore important to share with others via this thesis.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the research study and focused on some of the methodological complexities of conducting research with young men. I have provided examples of the practical and ethical issues that I encountered during the fieldwork and afterwards whilst analysing the data. I have argued that to really understand what it is like to be a young man in a disadvantaged community, research needs to be conducted across multiple sites both within and beyond different educational pathways. My role as an ethnographer and as an instrument of data collection has also been discussed and I suggest that it has been crucial in the gathering of data. I now turn to the empirical findings. The narratives and stories from the field that are used are not exhaustive, but they do allow multiple positions to be addressed. The emphasis of the thesis is on the themes emerging in the different chapters, namely the educational pathways chosen and the classed and gendered codes that accompany them, the boys' relationships with each other, the different spaces of leisure adopted by these young men and the important of place in their decision making.

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[19] The boys who participated in the Year 11 focus group interviews also had to return signed parental consent forms before taking part.

Chapter 5

Valley Boiz: The Re-traditionalisation of White Working-Class

Masculinities in a Post-Industrial Community

Introduction

In this chapter, I concentrate on a group of boys who performed a specific variety of white working-class masculinity based on the industrial heritage of the region (Carrigan Connell and Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Devoid of the opportunities to enter industrial labour which would have originally produced a form of stoic masculinity, I show how the legacy of the industrial past and the working-class cultural milieu of the locale, were retraditionalised through other acts across different educational and leisure spaces. These acts included studying BTEC or vocational school-based qualifications, alongside sporting interests notably rugby union and football, which served to marginalise other forms of 'doing boy' in the area. These sporting interests were accompanied by other practices such as drinking large amounts of alcohol, going out with young women ('on the pull') and engaging in 'risky' leisure pursuits such as fighting, driving cars very fast and experimenting with recreational drugs. I suggest that while these practices enabled the *Valley Boiz* to perform an archetypal masculinity through retraditionalising practices (Adkins, 1999; Kenway and Kraak, 2004; Kenway et al, 2006), they operated as a front and illustrate just one region of these boys' performances of masculinity.

Drawing on Goffman (1959), I argue that, for the *Valley Boiz,* behind the front of the archetypal macho masculinity, a back performance was evident. Frosh et al (2002) suggest that individually, away from the wider friendship group, a 'softer' or less 'hyper' (Beynon 2002) performance of masculinity (characterised by less negative attributes such as sensitivity, caring and rejecting machismo) can emerge. While this was evident with the *Valley Boiz*, a 'softer' performance also emerged within the friendship group. Nonetheless, a legacy of working-class industrial masculinity prevailed alongside these 'softer' displays. This chapter explores how these young men's performances of self continued to display the inheritance of industrialisation

and were demonstrated that as individuals they were unable to imagine futures away from the locale or undertaking higher education, unless linked to 'masculine' affirming courses.

The formation of a 'hard', stoic masculinity

As I highlighted in the opening chapter of this thesis, the South Wales Valleys were once major contributors to the British coal industry (Williams 1985). As the industrial regions developed, the South Wales coalfield came to contain over two thirds of the population. Yet despite these periods of extreme growth, the severe depression of the interwar years exposed the region's reliance on heavy industry and a slow decline began. After the Second World War, despite the nationalisation of the industry in 1947, coal mining in the region continued to decline and large numbers of collieries were closed. From the 1980s (due to Thatcherite restructuring policies), the region underwent rapid de-industrialisation (Williams, 1985; Smith, 1999; Day, 2002) and struggled to reinvent itself in the 'new modernity' (Beck 1999). This acute collapse coupled with the decline of the manufacturing industry, led to significant decrease in economic activity (see Brewer, 1999; Fevre, 1999). The area is now characterised by what Adamson (2008: 21) terms a 'triangle of poverty' with low levels of educational attainment (see also Gorard et al, 2004) and high levels of health and housing inequalities across the region.

This transformation has led to changes in the relationship between work and masculinity. A strong division of labour once accompanied these communities and the ability to maintain a distance from anything 'feminine', was essential for a strong masculinity that would enable the communities to survive (Walkerdine, 2010). Men earned respect for working arduously and these roles were often seen as heroic, with punishing physical labour that involved different degrees of manual skill and bodily toughness, creating a strong, stoic masculinity. Male camaraderie which was established through physicality and close working conditions underground or in steel works, also developed through joking around, story telling, sexist language and banter at the work site. This was further supported through institutions such as miners' institutes, chapels, pubs, working men's clubs and sports. Rugby union (and to a lesser extent boxing and football) in particular still holds powerful positions in the

culture of the locale, influencing those who play it, those who watch it, those who reject it and those who are deemed unfit for it (Holland and Scourfield, 1998; Howe, 2001; Harris, 2007).

Yet the attitudes to work and identity are still intrinsically connected to the community the *Valley Boiz* live in and their family biographies. To be a 'proper' boy or man from the Valleys an archetype of masculinity associated with an older world of industrial work must be outwardly performed through 'masculine' affirming practices of playing sports, engaging in physical and aggressive behaviours and certain ideas of male embodiment. The expulsion of the feminine or homosexuality is also an essential aspect in this performance and enables the *Valley Boiz* to perform their masculinities through retraditionalising practices which re-transmit the traditional values of the locale through pain, heroism and physical toughness (Adkins, 1999; Nayak, 2003a; Kenway et al, 2006).

In the first two sections of this chapter I look at the front region of these performances in more detail. I begin by introducing the friendship group or, in Goffman's (1959) terms, 'the team', before moving on to examine the school site and the subjects that my respondents studied. I then turn to their lives beyond the school gates looking at some of the social and leisure activities participated in by the *Valley Boiz*. In the final section of the chapter I then switch to the back region or backstage of these performances, which provide some interesting contradictions to the front displays and allows for a deeper insight into their lives to emerge.

Introducing the Valley Boiz: Family biographies and industrial heritage

The *Valley Boiz* were a large group of about a dozen white, working-class, young men who were all born and brought up in Cwm Dyffryn. Their behaviours and attitudes to education were similar to those documented in other ethnographic studies of working-class young men of a similar age since the end of the 1970s (for example see Willis'(1977) 'Lads', Mac an Ghaill's (1994) 'Macho Lads', MacLeod's (1995) 'Hallway Hangers' and Nayak's (2003b) 'Real Geordies'). However, there were a number of differences between these young men and the *Valley Boiz*. First, the *Valley Boiz* persevered with profoundly contradictory process of 'staying on' in education

post-16 (which clashed with the traditions of the community and their general anti-school behaviour) due to the limited employment options available to them in the locale. Second, returning to school not only enabled the group to delay uncertain futures for a further year or two, but it was also a safe and familiar space for them. Third, it was a way to collect a small amount of money in the form of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA).[20] Depending on the household income (less than £23,000 per annum) up to £30 per week could be gained as an incentive to stay in education post-16. Finally, for a minority it was also seen as a viable route to getting into a local university.

The table below introduces these young men and highlights their post-16 educational and future trajectories, family backgrounds and leisure interests. I then turn to look in more detail at their family biographies and links to the industrial heritage of the region. This, I suggest, influenced their post-16 choices and sustained the front performance of a masculine self. I then focus on how the continuation of these front performances developed and was supported through 'risky' behaviours beyond the school gates.

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[20] Although the coalition government announced the end to EMA in 2010 with no new claims eligible after January 2011, EMA continues in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (See http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk <accessed 4th March 2013>).

Name	Subjects studied Post 16, Sept 2008	Parents Occupations	Parents with Higher Education degrees	Siblings	In receipt of EMA	Team Sports	Results Aug 2010	Destination Sept 2010
Dai	BTEC National Diploma in Sport, BTEC Applied Science	F- ? M-?	None	1 Older Sister	Yes	Rugby	Pass, Pass	Unemployed
Birdy	A Level English A Level Business studies A Level Geography	F and M Small business owner (Post office)	None	Only child	No	Rugby (also Judo)	B,C,C	University Swansea- BA, Geography
Jonesy	A Level Physics A Level IT A Level Business Studies	F- 'Works in big office somewhere in Cardiff'?' M – Absent lives in France	None	?	Yes	None	Failed to finish courses, left school in the spring of 2010	Unemployed
Shaggy	BTEC National Diploma in Sport BTEC National Diploma Public services	F- Scaffolder M- Housewife	None	1 younger Sister	Yes	Football	Pass, Pass	University, Glamorgan HND, Public and Emergency Services
Clive	BTEC National Diploma in Sport, BTEC National Diploma Applied Science	F- Electrical Fitter M- Officer Administrator	None	1 older Brother	Yes	Football	Distinction Pass	University, Glamorgan, BA, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Community Health
Hughesy	A Level English A Level Applied ICT BTEC National Diploma in Applied Science	F -Bus driver M -Supermarket Assistant	None	1 younger Brother	Yes	Rugby	C, C, Pass,	University, Glamorgan BA, Criminology
Davies	A Level Electronics A Level Applied ICT BTEC National Diploma in Sport	F- Builder M- Housewife	None	2 older brothers	Yes	Football	Failed to finish courses, left school at Christmas 2009	Employed with father, General labourer
Brad	A Level English BTEC National Diploma in Sports BTEC National Diploma in Applied Science	F- Wall and Floor Tiler M- Course assessor at local college	None (Father, dropped out in 1st year of I.T degree)	1 younger sister	No	Football	C, Pass, Pass	Employed with father, Wall and floor Tiling
Cresco	BTEC National Diploma in Sports BTEC National Diploma Public Services	F- Retired Bus and Lorry driver M- Cleaner	None	3 older brothers	Yes	Football	Pass, (failed to finish public services qualification)	Employed at a local recycling plant
Tomo	A Level Physics A Level Electronics A-Level Applied I.C.T	F – Small business owner (Electrical Factory) M- House Wife	None	Only child	No	None	B,D,D	Apprenticeship, Tara Steel Europe
Bunk	A Level Physics, A Level Electronics A Level Maths	F- Plumber M-Admin Assistant local council	None	1 older sister	Yes	None	B,C,E	Unemployed

Table 5.1. *Valley Boiz: Educational and future trajectories, family backgrounds and sporting interests, September 2008-September 2010.*

Although the *Valley Boiz* were a large friendship group there was around nine key members, with other young men who were loosely affiliated and joined them for nights out in the town, drinking or driving around in their cars as they grew older. Table 5.1 illustrates the core members of the group, which comprised of Dai, Birdy, Jonesy Shaggy, Clive, Hughesy, Davies, Brad, Cresco, Tomo and Bunk.[21] The group dynamics were quite fluid and others such as Jimmy, Frankie, Bakers and Ian (whose lives will be described in the Chapters Seven and Eight) also joined the group on occasions. As the young men progressed through the Sixth Form, their friendships changed and some broke up due to arguments, fights, developing deeper relationships with girlfriends or moving to different educational institutions or the armed forces. Shenkin, for example, who was originally interviewed with the others in Year 11, joined the British army after his GCSEs and subsequently left the group (and is not included in the table) and was rarely seen after this.

The legacy of the region's industrial past was evident in their family backgrounds with the young men speaking of grandfathers and great uncles who had worked in the coal industry or occupations that had been linked to it, such as working in coal cleaning plants or driving lorries delivering coal around the area. Their fathers, who had grown up when the industry had been on the decline, had continued the tradition of working-class occupations by entering various other male dominated jobs. These included working in the building trade, or being employed as scaffolders or wall and floor tilers, plumbers, or as electrical fitters. Some, like Hughesy and Cresco, had fathers who were employed in traditional male working-class occupations such as bus or lorry driving. A small portion of the group had families who owned their own businesses such as Birdy's family who ran a local post office and Tomo's father who, along with six other men, owned an electrical factory employing 23 people. Others like Dai and Jonesy were somewhat unsure as to what their parents did or were reluctant to admit to it. All Jonesy could tell me, for example, was that his father *'worked in a big office somewhere in Cardiff'*, which, as far as he was concerned, was enough and not terribly important in defining his father to him.

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[21] Nicknames or slightly modified surnames e.g. Hughes to Hughesy, or first names such as David to Dai were used by members of the group when referring to each other.

The circumstances of the young men's female family members was slightly more varied, with mothers being described as 'housewives', cleaners, secretaries or clerical workers and retail assistants. Some, like Dai, had older sisters in higher education. Brad was a little unsure of his mother's exact job title, but said that she worked as an '*assessor*' in the local college. Brad was perhaps indicating here that she was involved in some form of teaching or training role. However, none of the parents concerned had any experience of higher education (apart from Brad's father who had attended university briefly in his late 20s before dropping out) and the majority of the young men were in receipt of the EMA. While a contradictory class position was evident for a few of the young men due to their parent's slight upward mobility, as a group these boys come from traditional white working-class families. In this sense, their relatively stable family backgrounds (only Jonesy had parents who had divorced) and employment histories, indicate that these boys were quite distinctive from those of their counterparts who had completely disengaged from schooling at the age of 16 and who were not involved in education, employment or training (NEETs).

Post-16 choices

I first encountered the young men when they were in the final weeks of compulsory schooling in the spring of 2008 and contemplating their impending futures. When asked during a focus group interview what they planned on doing after their GCSEs, some of these aspirations became clear whilst other less so.

Bunk	Apprenticeship
MW	OK, you want to tell me a bit about that?
Bunk	I've applied for one with *Ford* and *Quick Fit*...
MW	So that's work as well as college or…
Bunk	Yeah …
Tomo	That be good that is, be paid to do an apprenticeship!
Bunk	I think *Quick Fit* was like £280 a week…
MW	OK sounds good…
Hughesy	… stay on and see about something

Brad	I'm going to go to the Sixth Form till Christmas, so I can go skiing again and err then I'll go and work with my old man then…
MW	Shaggy what about you then...
Shaggy	Whatever happens….
MW	OK whatever happens...
Birdy	I want to go to uni cos of the girls…

[Group Interview April 25th 2008]

In this excerpt we can see that Bunk had already looked into a Modern Apprenticeship and reports that he had applied for two different schemes with national motor vehicle companies. Tomo seems impressed with this and illustrates that he has already some background knowledge about the Modern Apprenticeship because he realises it is accompanied by a paid wage. The validation for Bunk's choice comes through the ability to earn whilst studying in an 'acceptable' (male dominated) industry and therefore reproducing an idealised form of masculinity, which for the others in the group is the front of the performance to be maintained. Those who are not sure what they want to do, but have decided to stay on in education like Hughesy, Brad and Birdy, validate their choices in different ways reconfiguring their macho front performance. Hughesy expresses nonchalance without committing to anything, whilst Brad justifies his decision to return to the Sixth Form purely because he can go skiing again[22] and will then go to work with his father in an 'acceptable' manual occupation as a floor tiler. Birdy was the only one of the group to look beyond the immediate future by suggesting he wanted to go to university. However, he justifies this quickly by saying *'because of the girls'*. His educational aspirations are covered up by emphasizing (hetero) sexual motives, rather than any academic or occupational ones and he continues to collude with the front of the overall team performance.

Coming from families with recognizable manual skills (e.g. trades) which were intrinsically linked to working with the body, subjects leading to occupations which could be gained through apprenticeships or training schemes were most desirable.

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[22] Despite being situated in highly deprived community, Cwm Dyffryn High School ran an extensive programme of school trips with skiing and foreign language excursions to Europe every year.

However, it was not just their family backgrounds and the industrial heritage of place that had an impact of their views of education and what constituted acceptable subjects and performances of self; it was also through the interactions of the friendship group or 'team' within these spaces. It is to these other spaces within the school site that I now turn in more detail.

'Staying on': The performance of an acceptable front

As indicated in Chapter three, schools, as institutions offer a number of different ways of being male which often draw on the localised resources available and contribute to acceptable performances of masculinity (Aggleton and Whitty, 1985; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Edley and Wetherell, 1996; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1997; Horton, 2007). Heward (1996:39) suggests that in many ways schools act like a 'masculinity factory', regulating and producing idealised forms of masculinity based on physical prowess, toughness, competition and aggression through the 'official' curriculum. The 'official' curriculum indicates that there are spaces, or what Goffman (1974) terms 'frames of interaction' within school life, where processes of masculinity (and femininity) formation are more intense than others. Some of these frames can be highlighted through vocational courses such as woodwork, engineering, technical drawing and sports (see McDowell, 2003; Parker, 2006; Brown and Macdonald, 2008) where distinct ways of being a man are valued and promoted over others (see also Connell, 1989; Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

Despite some uncertainty, after their GCSEs, all of the *Valley Boiz* returned to the school's Sixth Form and enrolled on a mixture of two year science, maths or technological based traditional A levels (Birdy Jonesy, Bunk, Tomo); vocational or applied BTEC National Diploma courses, where assessment was based solely on projects and coursework (Dai, Clive, Cresco, Shaggy); or a mixture of both (Davies, Hughesy, Brad). Interestingly, Hughesy, Birdy and Brad were also persuaded by the Head of Sixth Form to take a joint A level in English literature and language alongside their other qualifications, after gaining high grades at GSCE in this subject area. The contradiction of this for their retraditionalised macho front is something I return to later in the chapter.

As with the *Real Geordies* in Nayak's study (2003c: 147) 'the embodied grammar of manual labour' continued through their post-16 educational choices via the prioritisation of vocational or 'acceptable' subjects. The BTEC National Diploma qualifications in science (a general course covering physics, chemistry and biology), sports studies and the A level in applied IT, were particularly favoured because they did not contain written examinations. When talking about their post-16 educational choices Clive and Cresco told me that they had opted for the BTEC National Diploma in Sport because they *'had always wanted to do something with sports'* (Cresco) or because that they were '*interested in sports'* (Clive). They were sceptical about other academic courses and in many ways seemed to have chosen these options not only to fit in with their interests, but to maintain an acceptable front performance of masculinity which was based on the re-traditionalisation of acceptable skills from the industrial era through the development of a sporting body (Messner and Sabo, 1990; Gorely et al, 2003). However, during an individual interview it became clear that these choices had, to a certain extent, been influenced by teachers at the school. Clive had been two months late returning after his GCSEs (he had had an unsuccessful time at a local college) and was told that the AS and subsequent A Level in PE and the separate sciences, would have been too difficult for him. This was despite achieving A*-C grades for his GCSEs in English, Science and Maths. Similarly, Cresco who admitted to being *'in the special needs class'* prior to the Sixth Form was told he could only take '*specific stuff'* and was enrolled on a public services course alongside his sports course without his consent. It would seem then that some teachers were influential in the choices made by these young men and also contributed to the formation of a socially acceptable form of masculinity in the school and the wider community. It could also be that these forms of education were the only way the *Valley Boiz* could continue in school and thus stay in education past the age of sixteen.

Uniform

The status of the *Valley Boiz* as sporting students enabled them to occupy a valued position in the school, or what Salisbury and Jackson (1996: 205) have termed 'top dog' masculinity with the front of these performances being activated and legitimised further through formal school structures. For example, a different uniform was sanctioned for those who were taking the BTEC National Diploma in sports qualification. The normal school uniform of black trousers, black jumper, white shirt, red tie and shoes was replaced by a tracksuit with the school crest and a polo shirt and training shoes. The uniform was only supposed to be worn during days when the subject was studied, but this rule was not fully enforced and it was disregarded totally during the Sixth Form. These artefacts then operate as forms of what Goffman (1959: 32) refers to as 'expressive equipment' of personal front. These enabled the *Valley Boiz* to perform their own recognizable identity and constituted a way of affirming and honouring a hegemonic version of masculinity, based on physical sporting prowess.

In a study of middle class young men attending a Sixth Form, Edley and Wetherell (1997) found that the school validated the sportier or 'hard lads' as they termed them, in explicit ways through different coloured blazers for members of their school's sports teams which, like the *Valley Boiz,* increased their kudos and group identity. This hegemonic position was also supported through positions of influence within the school which, like the sports uniform, added to the front of the performance. Dai, Hughesy and Brad had been selected by the Head of Sixth Form to work as paid dinner hall monitors. This meant keeping order in the dinner hall and providing the Free School Meal (FSM) tickets to younger pupils. With 23% of those at the school being entitled to a FSM, this amounted to a considerable number. These positions not only supported their already recognizable status within the school, but they also had the added benefit of having been personally chosen by a member of the school's senior staff team which therefore validated their position further. Any sporting success (however small) was celebrated by the school and various photographs were evident throughout its halls celebrating these achievements. In contrast, even though Sam from *The Geeks* friendship group (see Chapter Six) had been selected as Head Boy in Year 13, he was not regarded as having the same status (for a similar

discussion see Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). This position of authority held no influence with other pupils and Sam was more of a symbolic figure, to be rolled out to give speeches at prize nights or to attend civil ceremonies in the locale. Through these practices, an official status (school sanctioned and created) and an unofficial status (influenced by the peer group and wider culture) were created amongst the young men.

Power relations

Alongside the 'official' curriculum, 'unofficial' indices exist through which dominant performances of masculinity in schools can be produced. These include peer group interactions, relationships to girls and acts of homophobia (Epstein, 1997; Nayak and Kehily, 1997; Martino, 2000; Dalley-Trim, 2007). What becomes apparent then is that a range of body performative techniques can form the front of an acceptable performance of masculinity in any given space. Inside the confines of the school the *Valley Boiz* were able to achieve such dominance through their loudness and disruptive practices in class and their behaviour out on the playing fields and other spaces around the school buildings. For example, when studying for their GCSEs they tended to dominate the classroom discussions and shouted out answers to questions that the teacher asked, without raising their hands as the school rules indicated they should. In one particular Maths lesson some of this disturbance is recorded in my field notes below:

> The boys at the back of the room on my side were constantly talking and laughing. Davies put his headphones in and turned to look in case I could see. Another boy looked to be texting on his mobile phone held under the table, just out of view of the teacher who was trying to guide the class through an equation on the white board.
> *[Fieldnotes 8th April 2008]*

This texting on mobile phones and listening to MP3 players whilst in class, led to a repeated battle with the teacher who had to continually ask for these devices to be put away and turned off. The boys were also boisterous, messed or joked around, misbehaved, and generally ignored the lesson. I suggest that these practices also

enabled the continuation of the archetypal front performance of masculinity based on the working-class culture and traditions of a former era. In-group banter and joking around were key components once used for dealing with arduous working conditions underground and a tool employed when dealing with the Overman at the colliery[23].

When walking in corridors on the way to lessons or waiting outside classrooms for lessons to begin, this front performance was further achieved by the pushing and shoving of younger pupils who tried to walk past the *Valley Boiz*. The playground was another scene of dominance where games of rugby and football were played which took over the whole yard. This pressed younger members of the school and those in their year group who did not participate, to the margins of the social spaces available. On one occasion when I played football with the *Valley Boiz,* it was clear that their dominance caused conflict as younger boys were shouted at and abused if they dared to walk into the game. Such abuse was also followed by physical intimidation.

Hughesy	If you get in the fucking way again I'll have you!
Younger Boy	I was only walking across mun…
Hughesy	I don't give a shit, fuck off
Dai	Yeah piss off butt!

[Fieldnotes 11th April 2008]

Following this remark Hughesy then kicked the ball towards the younger boy and hit him on the back, which caused great hilarity to those watching and the young boy to run to the edge of the yard to relative safety. The comment 'butt' which is used here by Dai in place of the term 'mate', to tell the younger pupil to more away from the game, was in common usage between the boys. Again like the nicknames they used to refer to each other by, it links back to an era of industrial work, where the term 'butty' was synonymous with coal miners working together underground (Penlington, 2010).

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[23] According to *The Coalmining Resource History Centre*, the Overman was the third in rank of the officers of the mine. He had the constant charge of everything underground, including the work, people and the ventilation and was similar is status to that of a foreman in a factory. (See www.cmhrc.co.uk/site/literature/glossary/index.html <accessed 3rd May 2012>).

As Kamoche and Maguire (2011: 727) explain further:

> The history and mythology of mining is a history of disasters and change, characterized by a variety of (often) conflictual employment and sub-contracting methods. An example was the butty system in which the work was contracted to butty men who in turn sub-contracted to men to whom they supplied pick and shovel.

A 'Butty' was, thus, a term synonymous with the industrial work that had shaped their community and strong masculine traditions which were still continued by the *Valley Boiz.*

Casual behaviour and sexual story telling

While the *Valley Boiz* turned up for school regularly, as attendance had to be proven to receive their EMA, they did not always attend every lesson, and often opted instead to sit around the common room chatting about girls, plans for the weekend or making use of computers in the library to surf the Internet. When they did go to lessons their classroom behaviour was not disruptive as it had been when they were in Year 11, but it was still far from that of those middle-class pupils recorded in other studies (Heward, 1988; Edley and Wetherell, 1997, 1999; Kehily and Pattman, 2006; McCormack and Anderson, 2010). During lessons their interactions with teachers were casual and banter was often exchanged about football or rugby results from the previous weekend. Mr. Harper, who took some of the *Valley Boiz* for part of the BTEC Applied Science course, in particular, was awarded the honour by Clive of being '*like one of the boys*'. When I asked Clive to elaborate further he told me *'he talks to us normally so you respect him a bit more like, but some teachers abuse their authority and shout at you!'*. Mr. Harper was liked because he did not shout at them or pressure them into handing in work and because he talked to them 'normally'. Here Clive is makes a distinction between a teacher who treats him and the other *Valley Boiz* like young men, almost on an equal level, with similar cultural and social interests and other teachers who still see them as children in need of discipline.

In the excerpt from my fieldnotes below, this banter is further illustrated:

> The interactions with the teacher were different to that of *The Geeks*. They uttered informal comments on parts of the lesson such as Hughesy saying in a surprised, sarcastic tone to the teacher, *'Organised today Sir,'* in regards to the handouts he had printed out in advance. Compared to the other, A-level Chemistry or Biology classes the attitudes were different. Teaching styles differed as well and the teacher talked with these boys instead of at them. Dai also hadn't brought a pen with him and therefore had to borrow one off the teacher. This is something I didn't think would happen with the A-level class. *[Fieldnotes October 16th 2009]*

When compared to the separate A-level Science classes (Physics, Biology, and Chemistry) that were taken by *The Geeks,* the BTEC lessons were not only more informal due to the interactions between the boys and the teacher, but amongst the *Valley Boiz* themselves. Even in the empty classrooms (there were only around half a dozen at most taking the BTEC subjects) the *Valley Boiz* sought to sit at the back of the room as far away from the teacher as they could. In a throwback to their compulsory school days, they still exhibited an indifference to being close to the front of the classroom, which might have meant being seen by the others as over-investing in the lesson and therefore gaining a derogatory label as a swot or a geek. Sitting at the back of the class out of earshot of the teacher meant that a certain amount of banter, 'piss taking' and sexual storytelling could occur during lessons (Parker 2006). A clear example of this can be seen in another BTEC applied science lesson, when Hughesy recounts a tale from the weekend's activities during a group science experiment:

> The boys began 'taking the piss' out of Hughesy about an incident with a caravan. I asked to hear more about this and Hughesy told me eagerly. He'd been out on a Saturday night in the town and 'pulled' an older woman in a nightclub. After getting a kebab (which he'd dropped all over his black shirt) he'd gone home with her. But instead of her inviting him into her house, she took him into a touring caravan that was parked outside it. When he awoke in the morning (with scratches all over his back

he was happy to tell us) he had no idea where he was. Alongside the *'rough bird'* he had *'pulled'* there were a few Doberman dogs in the caravan which he said looked *'fucking scary!'* He called everyone on his phone to try and get a lift home and only Clive had answered and gone to fetch him in his car, at 8:30am on the Sunday morning. Clive had commented that Hughesy had sounded *'well quiet'* and shy on the phone and as Hughesy wasn't sure exactly where he was, it took him a while to find him. Hughesy admitted not calling her again and lying to her about his age. He told her he was in university so that she would think he was older and would sleep with him. *[Fieldnotes October 06th 2009]*

Three things seem to be going on in the telling of this tale, which continues the front performance of the team. First, the *Valley Boiz* are engaging with a practical science task and whilst carrying it out are reproducing normative expectations of heterosexual prowess. By interacting around a practical task, a sanitised older world of industrial work is being retraditionalised in the classroom space. Second, through storytelling one of the team members occupies an honoured position and reaffirms dominant myths about what constitutes a 'real man'. As Goffman (1959: 44) puts it, this impression of front is 'idealized in several different ways'. Hughesy is enjoying being the centre of attention and his desires are shared by the others as he portrays himself as something of a hero. He went through dangers (the Doberman dogs), incurred injuries (the scratches on his back) and needed to be rescued from the ordeal by his friend (who drives to find him) after the event. His story is also validated by this rescue as some of the tale (only the unnamed girl can fully authenticate the story) is commented on by Clive. Finally, the sexual objectification of the girl is complete when Hughesy states that he did not call her again and admits lying about his age in order to sleep with her. This incident strengthens the group identity and acts as a collective normalizing practice, by reinforcing myths about the roles of traditional masculinities in the locality and through emphasising a heterosexual prowess.

In this section I have looked at how the front performances of the *Valley Boiz* masculinities displayed within the school setting. I have shown that some subjects and practices (which are supported and sanctioned by the school) framed the interactions that occured within school life and created idealised forms of masculinity which are

supported through expectations within the wider culture of the locale. However, as the school sits alongside wider spaces of identity formation which, as Ball et al (2000: 59) point out, 'are equal to, if not more important than their educational selves' for many young people, I now turn away from the school setting and look at a number of 'risky' behaviours through which the re-traditionalisation of white working-class masculinities for the *Valley Boiz* was displayed. I begin by focusing on the process of drinking before moving on to concentrate on the role of cars, fighting and soft drugs in their lives. Finally, I turn the process of going out 'on the pull' to highlight how these rituals then continue to reinforce the front performances of a dominant heterosexuality and expectations of a certain form of hegemonic masculinity within the area. Once these have been considered, I turn to the back region, where some of the contradictions to these front performances occurred.

Beyond the school gates: The continuation of front through 'risky' behaviours

A drinking heritage

The drinking culture of the South Wales Valleys is intrinsically linked to the industrial heritage of the region with the majority of the pubs and workingmen's halls in the area being built during the industrial revolution. Workingmen's halls (along with general hospitals) in particular had been built through contributions from coal miners and the large buildings, many of which are now dilapidated, still dominate the main streets of the towns and villages. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1996: 22) suggest that 'ideologies of traditional masculinity, the institution of waged labour and the process of working-class culture in contemporary society' are intrinsically linked to spaces of leisure. These spaces act both as a form of resistance for young men and also as a way of reproducing identity (Williams 2003; Willis 1977).

The hallmarks of the regions heritage live on in numerous pub names. Some offer direct references to the industries such as the *Colliers Arms Tavern*, *The Blast Furnace Inn* and *The Pick and Shovel,* whilst others such as the *Marquis Inn*, *The Bute*, *The Cyfaertha*, *The Mackworth Arms*, *The Osborne Hotel* and *The Nixon's* were named after the canal, mine or iron work owners. Others such as *The Rock Inn* stem from the numerous breweries that spread across the region in the 19th century and

names like *Temple Bar* and *The Hibernian Club*, reveal the legacy of Irish immigration into South Wales. Occupying another important position in this drinking culture is the local rugby team's clubhouse (Howe, 2001, 2003). The clubhouse acts primarily as a base for the rugby union team, but it also provides a gathering place to celebrate birthdays, engagements, weddings, christenings or to mourn after funerals. Alongside these functions it also acts as a focal point for people to gather to watch the nation play international rugby matches on wide screen televisons, usually at the beginning of every year (February and March) when the Six Nations rugby international matches are played.

Despite the demise of the industrial base, the night time economy of Cwm Dyffryn has changed little over the past half century until relatively recently. Most of the pubs belong to national brewing companies, but retain a local character, employing local owners and staff (Diedrich, 2000). Even though large chain pubs and clubs have generally stayed away, in the last few years a *Wetherspoon* pub[24] has opened in the centre of the town bringing with it a change in local drinking customs. This cheaper alcohol and food has had an effect on other pubs in the town and caused a few to close. This historic backdrop provides insight into the national and regional leisure practices and drinking can therefore be seen as something of a 'cultural praxis' (Wilson, 2005: 12), helping to shape and define the region's identity and indicative of wider working-class culture (Canaan, 1996; Winlow, 2001; Blackshaw, 2003).

The *Valley Boiz* had already started going out drinking whilst in Year 10 and by Year 11 this had become a regular weekend event in the park or in a local pub which has known to 'turn a blind eye' to drinking underage:

MW	OK… what about drinking then, do you drink every week?
Davies	Yeah, Friday, Saturday, regular
Tomo	Have a few cans init
MW	So, where would you go then?

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24 JD Wetherspoon is one of the biggest high street pub chains in Britain with over 800 pubs. It also owns the Lloyds No. 1 pub chain and Wetherspoon Hotels. (See http://www.jdwetherspoon.co.uk/home/discover-jdw/about-us <accessed 4th August 2011>).

Tomo	We go to *The Harp*[25], or just down the park
MW	And where do you get the money to do it?
Davies	Milk Man, part time job like
Birdy	Get it off my parents
Hughesy	Yeah, my old man gives me some money like
Shenkin	I do some gardening
(Group laughter)	
Brad	… (talks over him)…No you don't!
Shenkin	Yeah I do right, I do some for the people in my street, get paid for it as well like...

[Group Interview April 25th 2008]

By the final year of compulsory schooling, going out to drink in the town's park was an important part of the *Valley Boiz* social lives and can be seen as another key signifier of a masculine front for these young men. The *Valley Boiz* like their fathers and grandfathers would have done before them, were celebrating the end of a 'working' week, even though their 'working' week consisted of classroom bases activities instead of a workplace. Drinking in the park and the occasional foray into a pub, acted as a rite of passage and training ground before progressing to the adult environment of the pub or the nightclub full time (Blackshaw 2003). Underage drinking was funded by a range of part-time jobs and ingenious money making schemes. However, it was also supported and sanctioned through money from parents. Whilst the wider world may have moved on since Willis' (1977) 'lads', for the *Valley Boiz* going out at night was still a way to connect to an older world of industrial work and the working-class culture of the locale. In Chapter Eight, I look in detail at the pressure that one young man felt he was under to continue this drinking heritage, whilst also trying to study and make a successful transition into higher education.

During the Sixth Form some of the *Valley Boiz* secured other part-time work to help fund their out of school activities. Tomo worked in a factory cleaning, before moving to a local bar after being made redundant, while Hughesy, Clive and Birdy worked in fast food outlets (McDonald's and KFC) situated on the outskirts of the town. By the

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[25] The name of the pub has been changed.

final year of Sixth Form (Sept 2009) Davies and Brad (now joined by Jonesy) were still helping the local milk man on his early morning deliveries. However, because the milk round involved getting up at 4am on some occasions Jonesy would turn up for school and fall asleep in the library or common room instead of going to his morning lessons. For others like Shaggy and Cresco, money for going out was gained solely through their weekly EMA.

Out on the town

The *Valley Boiz* portrayed a collective drinking uniform and went out at night dressed in fashionable clothes (paid through for by part-time work) from high street shops. They wore tank tops, vests, checked or striped shirts, multi-coloured T-shirts with logos and jeans accompanied by leather jackets or hoodies. A local pub—*The Harp*—on the outskirts of the town was their favoured meeting point. On certain nights of the week they often went there for a *'quiet pint'* and to play pool and to use the jukebox. The pub acted as a social base for the *Valley Boiz* and they were able to joke and laugh with the landlord and other older men in the pub (see also Blackshaw 2003). It was also a place where they could belong to something, which they did not quite feel in school and were always in resistance to.

At the weekend, after a few initials drinks in *The Harp,* the young men would move into the town centre itself and to *Wetherspoons* before ending up in single nightclub. Once the *Valley Boiz* moved off from one pub to the next, text messages would be used to convey to others where they were and direct friends to meet up with the group. Drinks were sometimes bought in rounds of two or three to save going repeatedly to the bar. Having little money this was also easier than running the risk of buying a large round of drinks and not getting a drink bought back for you in return. Pints of lager or cider were favoured by the *Valley Boiz,* but on occasion *Guinness*, bottled beers (such as *Budweiser* or alcopops such as *WKD Blue)* were also consumed. To accompany these drinks, shots of neat spirits or vodka jellies (jelly made with vodka instead of water) were often 'knocked back' or 'downed'. During wilder nights out *Jargerbomb's* (a shot of *Jagermeister* sprit dropped into a glass of energy drink *Red Bull*) or tequila slammers were also drunk. By going out in a big group and drinking large amounts of alcohol, the front performance of the team which

was fostered inside the school through appropriate curricular subjects, aggressive and macho behaviours and relationships to teachers and their peers, was continued.

On some occasions when out at night some of the *Valley Boiz* would encounter problems when drinking too much and would in turn result in them being barred from certain pubs for the evening.

> Bunk came over and told us that Hughesy had been thrown out of the venue by the bouncer because he had been caught *'chucking'* (throwing) a plastic pint glass which he had urinated in against the roof of the toilets. This was now dripping from the ceiling and as I had to return to the toilet again that night, I had the pleasure of confirming this.
>
> *[Fieldnotes November 29th 2009]*

These drunken antics had a dual function. Not only did they illustrate the continual performance of a working-class, localised form of masculinity around the collective process of drinking (see Ratliff and Burkhart, 1986; Canaan, 1996; Gough and Edwards, 1998; Blackshaw, 2003) but also during the post-night-out discussions in school the next day, these events could then be dissected. This also allowed for the collective process to be pooled and shared with others who might not have been present.

Out on the pull

As I have shown, drinking was a form of masculine exhibitionism based on the culture of the region and played out in local pubs. For the *Valley Boiz,* drinking in a group was more often than not a male only affair with few, if any, female friends present. Girlfriends were rarely invited to come along. This process acted as a continuation of older local traditions, where men would have often gone to the pub, leaving wives at home (see Lowe 2003). As more of the group reached the legal drinking age of 18, the problems of being denied a drink or entrance to a pub or club diminished. This meant that they began to leave the town for nights out, often arranging mini buses with others from their year group to clubs in the capital city. Only on nights out away from the town was it acceptable for girlfriends to be asked

along and ultimately the decision as to whether a girlfriend was invited, seemed to lie with the young men themselves. There was a general rule between the *Valley Boiz* that it was *'bros before hoes',* indicating the objectification of their girlfriends[26]. Nonetheless this mantra was not without some flexibility and as Cresco explained to me when talking about his girlfriend, he tried to '*spend one weekend up her house, next out, just to keep her happy init'*. It was unacceptable to spend too much time with a girlfriend over being with male friends. Also by having girls along, the chances of 'pulling'[27] were reduced.

For the *Valley Boiz* drinking and looking for (hetero) sexual conquests seemed to go hand in hand with a night out (see Gough and Edwards, 1998). The performance acted as a further strategic display of archetypal macho masculinity. Grazian (2007: 221) argues that the ritual of going out on 'the pull' is a practice which:

> Reinforce[s] dominant sexual myths and expectations of masculine behaviour, boost[s] confidence in one's performance of masculinity and heterosexual power and assist[s] in the performance of masculinity in the presence of women.

On nights out whilst drinking (without their girlfriends) this elaborate performance of masculinity was practiced on the dance floors of night clubs. The *Valley Boiz* would often 'move' onto or 'attack' the dance floor as a group and whilst dancing would manoeuvre themselves into positions alongside groups, or pairs of girls. An almost mating-like ritual would then follow, where individual boys would try to get noticed by dancing closer and closer to a girl, with subtle and not so subtle movements. Some of these techniques included dancing near a particular girl whilst looking across to the her and simultaneously trying not to look as if one was interested, by dancing with male friends. Other not so subtle movements included trying to physically grab girls and spinning them around while dancing, standing behind a girl and gyrating with her

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[26] 'Bros before hoes' is an expression used between men to indicate that male friends should always come before females. (See www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bros%20before%20hoes <Accessed 25th July 2012>).

[27] 'Pulling' refers to the practice of attracting a person for a range of sexual purposes ranging from French kissing to sexual intercourse.

to the music or hi-five-ing a friend on the dance floor above the head of a girl. The boys often goaded each other into dancing with as many different girls as possible and there seemed to be an enormous amount of pressure to comply with a heterosexual masculinity (Connell, 1995). On occasion these tactics and strategies seemed to be reciprocated or even instigated by the girls themselves and resulted in couples passionately kissing or *'meeting'* (as it was described in the local vernacular) on the dance floor. On other occasions, this process did not go smoothly. In an individual interview, Clive and Cresco retold the story of an incident where Clive's advances had been spurned:

Clive	Ah, I was dancing with her, but she wasn't having any of it
Cresco	(Laughs)
Clive	And then she slapped me. There was another time when she didn't slap me, just rejected me
MW	Ah right
Clive	All the boys dancing around her, I thought I'd take it a step further, you know I'm seeing someone, well she doesn't know, but I just grabbed her and she turned around and went like that to me, like (waves finger in air, mouths the word 'No')
MW	No, right
Clive	I thought you slag, I just want to dance with you
Cresco	Dance init, don't want to kiss you!
Clive	She was too minging (unattractive) to kiss anyway, I just wanted a dance and she wasn't having any of it like, and she was dancing dirty weren't she!
Cresco	She what?
Clive	Dirty dancing wasn't she, in *Polka's* (nightclub*)*!
Cresco	Ah filth
Clive	Getting on tables and that and you're like asking all of us to get inside of you, be honest, and she was having none of it like, couldn't fucking believe it, bitch, shock of my life!

Here the implications of the performance of a compulsory heterosexuality in this interview are laid bare. For Clive his masculinity in this situation is not validated by the successful act of picking up or pulling a girl, as in the first excerpt, but just in the endeavour of trying to engage in this practice amidst a male peer group. Both young men then re-tell the tale, this time during a recorded interview differently. The reason they give to me and to others as to why Clive was unsuccessful was not because the girl in question spurned his advances, but because she was too '*dirty*' to dance with him. If she had been *'dirty'* dancing with him, then this might have been a far more acceptable action and something Clive might not have been so quick to dismiss and to subsequently label her as too *'minging'* or unattractive to kiss. What is also clear here is that a compulsory heterosexual performance is engaged in by the young women as well as the young men.

As the nightclubs that these young men attended tended to be very busy, crowded places accompanied by loud music, they did not allow for easy conversation. The ability to talk improved the chances of meeting girls and 'pulling'. One way of doing this was through 'chat-up' lines, which were often practiced in quieter venues before moving on to a nightclub:

I'm sitting with Clive, Cresco, Brad, Tomo and Birdy on high chairs around a tall table in the middle of a large *Wetherspoons* pub drinking bottles or pints of lager. The pub is very busy and I lean in closer to hear the conversation on the other side of the table, which is mainly about which girls in the room are *'fit'* or *'hot'*. Tomo suggests that Birdy should try out his chat up line on a table of girls of a similar age who are sitting near them. After some encouragement from the others, he finished his pint and along with Clive, goes over to talk to them. When the two boys approach the table Birdy asks the group of unsuspecting girls a pre-planned question, *'How much does a polar bear weigh'?* One of the girls offers a hesitant response, *'Ah what....um I don't know'?* Confidently, Birdy replies by saying *'enough to break the ice'.* This is met with a chorus of groans and laughs from the girls, but it is enough for Birdy and Clive to start a conversation and they are allowed to join the girls at their table. *[Fieldnotes 25th May 2010]*

Here the experience of the chat up line is not just an individual achievement, but also a collective team experience. For these young men the end result is important, but so too is looking good to the other *Valley Boiz* and to have 'a laugh' through the process. Even though the remainder of the group look on in passive support of Birdy and Clive's endeavour, they exhibit a form of what Connell (1995) has argued constitutes a 'complicit masculinity'. Those not involved add value to the archetypal front performance by validating the 'patriarchal dividend' and sanctioning the action.

These boys inhabited a very male world, in which masculinity is conducted in relation to other boys and men in the classrooms at school and in the pubs outside of it. Girls here are dehumanised and seen as sexual objects or as conquests. There is however a back region to this performance, where the contradictions to these front displays can come through. In the final part of this chapter I explore these in detail, but before turning to the back region, I look at how other influences upon their masculine identities arrived from a variety of directions.

Drug taking

Alongside drinking some of *The Valley Boiz* also admitted to taking recreational drugs on occasion and being offered drugs by people in pubs and clubs around the town. Whilst it would seem that the *Valley Biz* were happy to participate in—and talk about—drinking alcohol a great deal, the issue of drug taking was an altogether different matter. As I have indicated, the cultural milieu of the region sanctioned many social and leisure activities which stemmed from an older era of industrial labour. However, drug taking, which is, after all, an illegal activity, was not held in as much esteem as alcohol consumption. It must be acknowledged that these young men may have hidden their wider drug use from me, or refrained from talking about such practices in front of me. Nonetheless, considering the amount of time I spent with them, I believe that if they had participated in illicit drug use, I would have been aware of it. It did occur, as the snippets from the following conversations I had below show, but it was conducted amongst close friends or acquaintances which they knew from their housing estates and small villages in which they lived, not as a collective team practice:

Cresco	To be honest with you I've done it twice
MW	Smoked weed now?
Cresco	But the first time, I was curious, I took a drag, but the second time I was like chilled, I was in my brother's house, I was on my *Playstation*, and he went shall we try it? And I was like ' Ah whatever…'
Brad	I have smoked a bit of weed before, and obviously if you go out in the town, people ask you, if you got anything, I've been asked if I got pills, if I got coke, or stuff like that.
Clive	Boy come up to me at the bar in *Polkas* [nightclub] and went to me, 'I can get you any drugs you want', I was like [thinking] fuck off, but I didn't say anything, he was massive, so I just went 'Na*'* and he walked off.

Going on a night out not only held the risks of drinking too excess, getting into fights and being thrown out of clubs, but also the risk of being asked if they wanted to buy drugs, or in the case of Brad, if they had any themselves to sell. Smoking cannabis (weed) was something that some had participated in, but this caused problems that Tomo found difficult to deal with when some of his mates began over indulging. He shed some more light on the drug 'scene' in Cwm Dyffryn during an individual interview. This was something which I was unaware of even after a considerable period of time conducing fieldwork and years of living in a similar community. It appeared that Tomo had a lot of older friends aside from the *Valley Boiz*, whom he had met whilst getting into DJing. He had his own mixing desk and played at different venues and entered DJing competitions in clubs, but he had found this an expensive hobby and had to stop doing it. It was here that he acquired his knowledge of this underground economy:

Tomo	There is a massive underlying drugs problem, loads of different crowds as well, people go out and drink and take loads of coke, then people who won't drink at all, but smoke weed, like Trevor and Jonsey that's all they do. Every time I see Trevor, he's stoned off his face, he's just no fun to talk to and the day after he's like a slouch (MW yeah). I just

> don't waste my time trying to talk to him, Trevor used to be my best friend, now I don't talk to him, me and him, cars bikes, but now….

Here we can see the impact smoking cannabis had on Tomo's friendship with Trevor. It is unclear whether or not Tomo participated in smoking with Trevor, but I am inclined to think he did at one time or another, as his knowledge of the 'scene' was remarkable. Tomo is clearly angry at his former best friend and the distance the drug use has created between them. Drinking was a way of reaffirming an archetypical form of masculinity, but smoking cannabis and taking harder drugs was less likely to be participated in as a team activity and looked down on by others. In many ways, as I have shown throughout this chapter, the *Valley Boiz* front performances of masculinity were conducted through older traditions and practices some of which were potentially damaging. However, some of these boys do see alternative or different futures to other young men in the area. Tomo recognises the waste that surrounds him and some of his friends and is keen to push past this. Away from the pubs and clubs of the town, other spaces of masculine production were also part of their lives. I turn briefly now to the role of cars in their lives and the impact this had on confirming ideas about a certain form of masculinity.

Car culture and the continuation of front

Research on young men and the roles cars play in their lives has often centred around the risk of accidents and injuries (see Hartig, 2000; Walker, Butland and Connell, 2000; Granié, and Papafava, 2011), car theft (O'Connor and Kelly, 2006; Mullins and Cherbonneau, 2011), or on the role car culture plays for young people as a networking tool and as a form of social space (Carrabine and Longhurst, 2002; Mellostram, 2004; Kenway and Hickey-Moody, 2009). Accompanying youthful car cultures is the risk of tragic death. Whilst carrying out this study I personally witnessed hazardous driving, high speed car chases and listened to stories about accidents and injuries to friends and vehicles. Six months after the cessation of fieldwork the consequences of these practices became tragically clear as one of the young men featured in this chapter suffered a serious injury whilst driving at high speed and died a few weeks after his 19th birthday. My focus here (I return to discuss the role of car culture in more depth in Chapter Seven) is to illustrate briefly how important cars were to the continuation

of the archetypal front performance of masculinity that I have detailed so far in this chapter.

Apart from Tomo and Davies, none of the group owned their own cars. The majority were insured as named drivers on their mothers' or occasionally their fathers' vehicles. As more of the *Valley Boiz* passed their driving tests, they began to drive to school. This often created arguments with their teachers, as there was a ban in place on students parking in the school grounds. This meant that anyone who drove to school had to park in the college car park across the road, something that was not always adhered to. I use the incident outlined below to show how important the roles of cars were in emphasising masculine prowess.

One lunchtime during Year 13, a fight erupted between Birdy and Davies in the yard outside the main building of the school. Davies had taken a wheel trim off one of Birdy's car wheels as a joke. At lunchtime, when some of the *Valley Boiz* went out to their cars, Birdy found that one of his wheel trims was missing. A bystander in the crowd that has gathered around Birdy's car pointed out that Davies had done this and when Davies then drove past, he waved and beeped his horn. Birdy then chased after the car on foot and grabbed hold of one of the door handles, which promptly came off in his hand. Davies then stopped his car and a fist-fight ensued until it was broken up by some teachers who had come running out of a nearby school building. During a conversation a few days later whilst sitting in class registration, Tomo was telling others about the incident. Davies had told him that even though Birdy had had him pinned down on the floor and had one hand around his genitals and the other around his throat chocking him, he had not attempted to punch him. The group then began to comment on how weak this was of Birdy for a boy so tall and with a black belt in Judo. Hughesy stated that Birdy could have *'battered him'* (beat him up) but because he did not throw a punch, referred to him *as 'a bit of a knob'*. Here possessing the ability to fight but not doing so was met with confusion and Birdy was criticised for his behaviour and for not punching Davies.

The emphasis on masculine prowess was illustrated further through driving fast, doing circuits around the town and bringing cars into the school space to help endorse and validate the front of the macho performance. It was also a way to bring the outside

into the school, where driving gave them an equal footing with older men in the community. The front of the performance is not just about being macho, it is also about the continuation of older traditions through retraditionalising practices and expectations of what is means to be a 'real man' from the Valleys.

So far I have argued that for the *Valley Boiz* an archetypal form of masculinity with links to the heritage of the region was performed. This front was illustrated through a tough, aggressive, physical masculinity performed through certain school subjects and leisure practices outside the school. Despite being a close friendship group, to say that all the *Valley Boiz* were homogenous in outlook and desires would be slightly misleading. Away from the front display of the overtly masculine performances of the team, both in school and beyond it, contradictions occurred. In the last section of this chapter I look more closely at some of these conflicting and multiple presentations of self, by analysing the back region or (backstage) of these performances.

The back region: behind the mask of heritage

For the *Valley Boiz,* as I have shown throughout this chapter, their performances of masculinity were inherently place specific, influenced, (as least in part)in part by the former industrial traditions of the region, their family biographies and the cultural milieu of the area. The background of skilled and semi-skilled traditional masculine occupations had a significant impact on how the boys viewed school, education and what they did in their leisure time. The result of this was the re-traditionalisation of older forms of masculinity displayed in certain settings and through behaviours and manners within the post-industrial community. However, during social interaction it is the 'back region or backstage' (Goffman, 1959: 114) of a performance where contradictions make an appearance. Thus, the performances of masculinity that I have described so far in this chapter illustrate only one region of the *Valley Boiz* masculinities. In *Frame Analysis* Goffman (1974: 573-574) discusses the role of social performances and proposes that it is the specific culture that influences 'how we think we should show ourselves within a given context and how we should perform in a specific manner'. When undertaking a performance, we conceal the discrepancies of the performance. Using three specific examples, I now turn to look at some contradictions to the front performance illustrated though the collective team

practices outlined above. Through a series of complex interactions at the peer group and individual level, an alternative side to members of the *Valley Boiz* emerges. I use these examples to argue that the industrial traditions of the region, which were being retraditionalised in different ways by the group, were also being challenged and were open to subversion.

Brad, Birdy and Hughesy; Studying English

As I highlighted above the school subjects chosen by some of the *Valley Boiz* were an important arena for the performance of a particular form of dominant working-class masculinity. These performances were endorsed in many ways by the school through a separate uniform, positions of power (as dinner hall monitors) and the glorification of sporting success which adorned the halls and corridors of the building (see also Martino and Palcotta-Chiarolli, 2003 who also highlight these issues).[28] These endorsements were accompanied by macho swaggers and posturing, sexual comments, physical toughness and an 'anti-school' attitude which continued even when the *Valley Boiz* had progressed to the Sixth Form. However, three of these young men, Brad, Birdy and Hughesy, were also enrolled on the more traditionally 'feminine' A level English Literature and English Language course which, as Redman and Mac an Ghaill (1996) point out, is a supposedly 'soft subject' lacking in masculine rigour (see also Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Epstein et al, 1998; Renold, 2001). The Joint Council for Qualifications (2010) *GCE A level results report* would seem to support this argument further. In 2010 (the year these young men sat their final exams) only 6.8% of male candidates who were enrolled on A2 level courses sat English (literature and language) exams, compared with 13.6% of female candidates.[29] Brad, Birdy and Hughesy were therefore combining both academic and vocational subjects and challenging the meaning of what it meant to be a 'real' boy (or young man) in this context.

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[28] The school itself, as an institution, also has its own form of masculinity (See Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

[29] There were also differences in the percentages of males and females taking certain other subjects. At AS and A2 level, boys were approximately three times more likely than girls to take Physics and twice as likely to take Maths and ICT. Apart from English Language and Literature, Girls were also approximately twice as likely as boys to take Psychology, Sociology and Art & Design.

The excerpt from my fieldnotes below is taken from part of an English Literature and English Language A level lesson. The front of the macho performance is highly visible; however, some of the contradictions of this performance are also evident:

Mr Berry opens the lesson with the music video for the song *Dakota* by the band Stereophonics, playing on the electronic whiteboard at the front of the classroom. He's using the YouTube website and the music is blaring out of the speakers. Some of the boys smile and comment on this as they enter the room in ones and twos for their first lesson of the day. When Hughesy walks in he's eating something which looks like a bacon roll and through his full mouth mumbles '*I've had no breakfast see Sir'* as some form of explanation as he find his seat. The class is split into two tables with some of *The Geeks* (Sam, Alan, Gavin, Sean, and Nibbles) sitting on one, whilst the other is occupied by Brad, Birdy and Hughesy along with another guy Ed, who tends to be a bit of a loner and keeps himself to himself. The music is switched off and the class quietens a little. The lesson opens with the learning objectives for the session being given by the teacher, which centre on the book being studied, which is *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. Mr Berry questions each of the students in the class individually about their progress to date on coursework. Sam offers a really articulate answer when Mr Berry enquires about the piece of writing he's doing and what bit he's concentrating on at the moment. Whilst this is going on Hughesy stands up, walks the length of the classroom and noisily slams the packaging from his now finished bacon roll, into the bin. As he returns to his seat Alan and Gavin continue to update the teacher on their progress and describe in detail where they are with their writing. When it comes around to Hughesy's turn to talk he doesn't articulate himself quite so well and seems a bit lost, indicating that he wasn't sure what he was doing. Birdy and Brad both answer nonchalantly and appear to be behind the others in their progress.

The lesson moves on and Mr Berry sets a very precise eleven minute task to read the opening part of a scene and compare it to a passage from the play *King Lear* that they had previously read and discuss it as a group.

The Geeks begin to read the scene straight away, but the others seem to take a while to begin and are never really all quiet. Hughesy asks if he can borrow a pen and for another copy of the book as he hasn't brought his version with him. After a few minutes (in regards to a passage in the text the group are comparing) he asks an insightful question to Mr Berry about sympathising with characters like King Lear, who do not share the same value system as those who maybe reading it. Birdie, who is sitting alongside Hughesy, nudges Brad and sniggers as he asks this, whilst Brad laughs loudly and accuses Birdy of being rich, so to just shut up. When Mr Berry responds, Hughesy just sits quietly and doesn't contribute anything further to the discussion and the group begin to talk about the previous weekend. Later Mr Berry gets different members of the class to read a passage from the book out loud. Whilst Sam reads and articulates his words well, Brad seems less confident and takes his time. However, when Mr Berry asks the class as a whole what type of sentence the author is using, Brad very quickly gives the correct answer and competes with Hughesy to explain how this can be used to analyse the text.

[Fieldnotes October 7th 2009]

This example of classroom interaction illustrates how different masculinities are being performed in one micro setting. Hughesy, Birdy and Brad can answer the questions that are delivered, but not in as much depth as some of the others in the class. Yet it is clear that they are aware of the answers. In this lesson the ability to analyse and to think critically about the text, alongside the capacity to write about what is studied, would seem to indicate the performance of masculinity most valued. Still, this performance contrasts with the archetypal front performance and sometimes Hughesy, Birdy and Brad chastise each other for asking questions, talking over each other and competing to answer questions without letting others in the class answer. However, there are occasions where something else is visible, and a more insightful, back performance is evident, but the hegemonic or macho lad image has to be maintained alongside the more feminine or passive one required in the English classroom. A process of 'code-switching' seems to be going on here. Elijah Anderson (1999:36) argues that 'code-switching' is when a person behaves according to different sets of rules, depending on the situation they find themselves in. The ability

to adapt one's behaviour as a response to change in different situations and value systems for these boys is interesting and drawing further from fieldnotes taken from another English lesson, these contradictions again seemed to occur.

> Mr Berry started the lesson with some talk about the weekend football results and the new Cardiff City stadium which led into a discussion about discourse and hedging. He asked the class to remind him what this meant and Hughesy was quite eager to answer. He said *'it's something to do with a topic... I know it sounds stupid but…ah… I don't know...'* which caused Brad and Birdy to laugh out loud and even after further prompting from the teacher, Hughesy just mumbled something and sank lower into his chair. Later, when Mr Berry posed the question to the class about what literature actually was, Hughesy shouted out *'it's the expression of the mind'* nudged Birdy and laughing as he did so.
> *[Fieldnotes November 9th 2009]*

Here Hughesy highlights the complexity of the position he occupies as one of the *Valley Boiz.* He clearly has an awareness of and interest in the topic in question, but cannot be seen by the other *Valley Boiz* or *The Geeks* to be over investing in the subject. By showing too much interest he draws laughter from Brad and Birdy and is quick to put himself down before anyone else can. I noticed that he, Birdy and, to a lesser extent, Brad all did this in different ways throughout the lesson. Given these contradictory performances, I wanted to know what the written work of the *Valley Boiz* was like, to see what their expected grades were so I stayed behind after the lesson had finished and asked Mr Berry. He informed me that Hughesy, Birdy and Brad had all achieved B grades in the AS modules at the end of the Year 12, and he was positive they would achieve a good result at the end of their final year. For the *Valley Boiz* studying English and achieving good grades resulted in a constant process of impression management. Laughing, messing around and put-downs took place in the classroom so that the contradictions of studying a passive subject, could be minimised.[30]

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[30] See Jackson (2003) and Jackson and Dempster (2009) which have centred on academic 'denial' and issues around 'effortless' achievement.

Sean, one of *The Geeks,* commented on these contradictions during an individual interview when I asked him about some of the *Valley Boiz* in his class:

MW   So is it weird then that Hughesy and Birdy are doing English….

Sean   Yeah! But they're really good at it as well (MW yeah?) but like they put on this big thing like. They go *'ahh go drinking like'* [impersonators harsh regional accent] and then when it comes to lessons and they are reading their creative writing out, it's really good like.

MW   Do you find that bizarre then?

Sean   Ah yeah it is, they are clearly putting on a front like don't do it, just be normal! Umm... I'm trying to think of an example…but a couple of weeks ago I think Birdy, who hasn't been in for a while, so Hughesy been on his own and he's been really nice and tidy [ok/friendly], talking to us and stuff, having a laugh bit of banter, Birdy then back in today now and then he's not knowing us, it's gone like! You can tell, keeping up appearances kind of thing like…. but like it's weird cos like when you talk to them on their own like, say um I was talking to Birdy the other day, like you talk to um and you have a laugh with um, but they laugh at the things you're saying and you feel alright, ah this is tidy like and then as soon as they go then it's like ahhh… they treat you as if nothing happened like it's weird! *[Individual Interview March 10th 2010]*

For Sean the masculine front of the *Valley Boiz* is clearly that, a front. He suggests that away from the group these young men are much more sociable and willing to talk to him and join in with the conversations *The Geeks* have something that doesn't happen when the *Valley Boiz* are together. Their written work, a solitary, individual practice, is also remarked on by Sean to be of a good standard and he seems impressed by it. I suggest that away from the glare of the team performance individually Hughesy and Birdy are able to code-shift and, to an extent, suppress the archetypal front performance of masculinity. Studying English enables them to express another performance of masculinity which is more diverse, but full of tensions and is a struggle to achieve. This code-shifting practice was further evident with Brad.

Brad: 'I don't want people to be intimidated'

As the final year in the Sixth Form progressed, Brad began to distance himself from the other *Valley Boiz* to spend more time with his girlfriend. This was a common trend among my respondents, (something I will discuss more with Jimmy in Chapter Eight), but it was interesting to see how much effect the change had on Brad. I asked Brad if he thought this had altered things with his friends and he gave a thoughtful reflexive response.

Brad   Ah yeah, big time, happened to me, I was a cock big time I was before, I was aye…

MW   Ah that's a bit harsh

Brad   No, I was like, before like to Lucy, my life was the boys, boys, boys, then I realised who they were and what I had and, ah, I threw it back in her face, I was a cock, but I don't give a shit anymore, I don't care what people think of me, whereas before, I used to think about what the boys thought… but now I don't care, I am who I am! [*Individual interview 4th May 2010*]

Brad felt that the transition he had made from privileging his male friends, to focusing on his own relationship with his girlfriend, had had a positive impact on him. It had enabled him to realise that macho or dominant front performance was problematic and that even though it had provided some form of collective identity for him, he had worried about it. When I asked Brad more about this and perhaps how being part of the *Valley Boiz* group might have been seen by others in his year as a bit intimidating, he offered another insightful response:

Brad   But I don't want people to be intimidated, I don't like that. I don't want that for other people, because maybe in some ways I was intimidated in some ways by other people

MW   Do you think you were intimated by them because they were quiet or...?

Brad   Na I wouldn't have been, just find it hard to make conversation, I wouldn't be able to have a conversation say with Nixon, I wouldn't

	know what to bring up, I'll say hello and if I have a sweet I'll offer him
	one as well, but I wouldn't know how to have a conversation with him
MW	Right
Brad	And I wouldn't be able to have a conversation with Sam, I find it hard,

	because if I do overhear a conversation it's about computer games and
	I'm like ahh mental stress (Laughs). It's all I ever hear, he probably
	doesn't talk about it all the time, but that's all I ever hear, always going
	on or about school work…so you know…just let him be init!
	[*Individual interview 4*[th]* May 2010*]

Far from being confident in his front-stage performance, Brad occupies a contradictory masculine position. These two stories highlight the pressures and costs to Brad of performing a traditional version of masculinity. He and the other young men in this chapter may seem to be performing a retraditionalised version of an older form of masculinity, but the feelings displayed here highlight the on-going struggle to negotiate multiple versions of self. By not wanting to appear intimidating and admitting to being intimidated himself, the inconsistency of being one of the *Valley Boiz* is clear. Away from the coercive pressures of the team, Brad finds some release, but cannot connect with the different interests some of *The Geeks* have and ironically becomes marginalised himself. The hegemonic masculinity that was institutionalised by the school, changed as the *Valley Boiz* transitioned through the Sixth Form. As the following section concludes for others like Jonesy, the pressure to maintain the front of the performance hid deeper problems.

Jonesy: *The playboy mansion*

On occasions during Year 13 various fieldtrips or events were organised by the school for different groups of students. The fieldnotes below were made during an information day held at the University of Glamorgan about the *Engineering Education Scheme Wales*[31]. The scheme was aimed at Sixth Form students interested

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[31] See http://www.stemcymru.org.uk/en/about/default.php <accessed 20th August 2012> for further details of the Engineering Education Scheme Wales (EESW).

in engineering careers and partnered schools and their students with engineering companies to work together on different projects.

> The room next to the main conference centre at the university had been set up for lunch and we filed in. Tomo and Jonesy who I was with, eagerly heaped sandwiches, pasties and crisps onto their plates and we sat down in a semicircle at one side of the room. During the break out session between talks, Jonesy and Tomo began discussing the lack of women in the room and how difficult it would be to go and talk to any that were there. Tomo laughed and said that they should try out Birdy's chat up line. The conversation moved onto Hugh Hefner and the playboy mansion. Jonesy and Tomo exclaimed that he was *'cool'* and a *'legend'* and they would love to be that age and still have *'fit'* girls living with them so that they could *'bang um'* any time they wanted. Jonesy mentioned that when he had been in LA he had visited the *Playboy mansion*. He wasn't allowed into the house, but told me that he had grabbed a plant from inside the gate and pulled it out. He'd then stuffed it into his pocket and brought it home with him. He said it was to act as a memory of the holiday, but sadly it just turned into a brown lump by the time he'd got home. He said that he still had the memories in his head that wouldn't fade.
> *[Fieldnotes 18th November 2009]*

I had gone along to the event with members of the A level Physics class and during the lunch break the above discussion had taken place with Jonesy and Tomo. The way Jonesy told the story surprised me as up until this moment he had rarely stopped acting like the classic 'class clown' (see Adler et al, 1992; Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Jackson, 2003; Dalley-Trim, 2007). In school and on nights out he used jokes, did impressions of teachers and other boys and generally messed around to increase his status with friends, but also it seemed, in order to belong. On one occasion during Year 12 some of this disruptive behaviour had earned him almost legendary status. Whilst sitting in the common room he had taken this performance to a new level, by urinating into a kettle that was provided for the students and then boiling it, causing revulsion and admiration from those watching. Here however, I sensed something deeper was going on. This conversation between Tomo and Jonesy was more than just

Jonesy trying to validate his status through telling a story. I suggest his narrative can be read in two ways. First another example of fantasy and sexual storytelling (similar to Hughesy's caravan tale) and second a heroic narrative of Hugh Heffner's sexual prowess in the form of an imagined other. Here Heffner is seen as 'cool' and a 'legend' something that the boys say that they want to aspire to, but under the surface this story is far more nuanced and contains some of the softer elements of masculinity that I have already outlined. Through the telling of this story to one of his closest friends, the usual portrayal of front, had slipped and something else was visible. Jonesy not only illustrates a naivety in the belief that the plant would remain alive, but also there is a sadness and softness to the tale around the memory of a potential holiday of a lifetime that he said would not fade.

A few days later I had the opportunity to talk with Jonesy alone as we sat in the common room and felt it was a chance to ask more about the holiday. The conversation moved onto learning a language and Jonesy mentioned that he wanted to learn Spanish so that he could pull more girls. I said that I did not speak any languages apart from English, but sometimes having a different accent was useful. Jonesy said that he agreed with me on the accent front and told me that when he had lived in Swindon, he had experienced this. I was confused as I had not realised he had ever left Cwm Dyffryn and asked him about this. Jonesy then went on to tell me that he had moved there with his mother for about two years when he was around ten, as his mother had taken him away after she had split up with his father. He continued to inform me that he had only moved back to Cwm Dyffryn (to live with his father and grandparents) when his mother had moved to France with her new partner. The holiday to America (which he stressed was paid for by his mother's new partner) had been the last time he had spent any time with her. She had given him her car when she left for France, which he appreciated, but he mentioned that he would rather see her more. He went on to say that this '*probably affected him psychologically'* and that he worried about girls leaving him. His girlfriend had just cheated on him, but even though he had since kissed someone else, this had not made him feel any better about it.

What is clear here was that for Jonesy, like the other *Valley Boiz,* away from the wider peer group the performance of masculinity can be softened and the front can be

allowed to be adjusted. With close friends, one can be more open or, as Goffman (1959: 115) succinctly puts it, 'step out of character'. The front and back displays of a performance can be kept close, but when a front performance is given, the 'backstage or region' is more often than not often hidden away. When Jonesy is 'on stage', he is a joker and always 'having a laugh', but behind it something else is visible and a glimpse of a more troubled and difficult world seems to emerge.

Conclusion

At the end of the Sixth Form many of the futures of these young men were uncertain. Birdy, Hughesy, Clive and Shaggy finished their courses and made successful applications to local universities. Through family connections Davies (who had dropped out of school before the end of the Sixth Form), Brad and Cresco had all found employment, the former with their fathers, the latter with his brother in a local recycling plant and Tomo had been successful in gaining a Modern Apprenticeship with an international steel company. Dai, Jonesy (who had also dropped out before completing Year 13) and Bunk were unemployed and looking for work. What this chapter has shown is that de-industrialisation has yet to erode the locality's traditional culture and the associated masculinities still live on even when economies change. These practices become damaging as many young working-class men have not the resources to create alternative options. In many ways the *Valley Boiz* seemed to resist the subordination of the new global order by a process not only of enduring, but also by retraditionalising the industrial heritage of place by reaffirming acceptable gender norms through educational subjects and leisure pursuits (Kenway et al 2006). However, as I have shown, on occasion different presentations of self would seem evident and newer ways of being a young man from the Valleys operate simultaneously within some contexts and peer groups relations. This then facilitates a discussion of the contradictoriness of identity to be observed and articulated by the boys themselves. This back region seems to develop as they transition through the Sixth Form. The hegemonic masculinity that is performed during some interactions seems to belong to a particular age and the Sixth Form is a highly contradictory space which influences the cracks and gaps that begin to emerge.

By staying on in education, despite not being typical Sixth Form students, the *Valley Boiz* were able to begin to break away from the front of the macho performance and a more complicated picture started to emerge. Returning to school was a safe and secure choice for these young men, but it also creates and allows for some space to diverge from the 'normal' expectations of what has come to define what being a man from the Valleys is. It allows for some hope to come through and for a return to ideas of self-improvement which were once fostered through trade union and miners' institutions, but have perhaps been forgotten since the loss of industry. Nonetheless, traditional forms of masculinity based on physical strength, heterosexuality, and the rejection of the feminine, continue to hold a powerful position and results in the marginalisation of other ways of 'doing boy' in the region. In the next chapter I turn to look at how another group of young men in the area adapted to these industrial changes and negotiated the pathways to adulthood differently.

Chapter 6

The Geeks: Academically Achieving Working-Class Boys

Introduction

Education has played a key role in shaping popular conceptions of Welsh society as being relatively open and meritocratic. It has been argued that a higher value has been placed on educational achievement as a way out of poverty and as a means for improving one's own occupational prospects than in other sections of the British population (see Williams, 1960; Lewis, 1980; Rees and Delamont, 1999; Williams, 2003). Whether based in fact or not, popular perceptions of the sons (less so daughters) of farmers, coal miners and steelworkers using educational success as a way into university, professional occupations and as a means of escape have persisted (Rees and Delamont, 1999; Weeks, 2007). Yet in Cwm Dyffryn and the South Wales Valleys more generally, education as a form of social mobility or as an escape attempt occurred at the individual level, rather than for the collective community and those who managed it were often the exception to the rule. In Chapter two, I showed how the majority of working-class young men progressed from school into occupations with few or no qualifications. Working alongside fathers, brothers and uncles, often in hazardous, dangerous, or life threatening occupations, a tough, stoic form of masculinity emerged. However, the profound social, economic and cultural changes over the last 30 years and subsequent restrictions to entry-level manual occupations, have altered working-class young men's trajectories to adulthood and challenged conceptions of what it means to be a man in the area.

As I highlighted with the *Valley Boiz* in the previous chapter, more young men from some working-class families are opting to 'stay on' in school and remain in forms of post-16 education than might have traditionally done, and they struggle with managing contradictory masculinities. In this chapter I outline the lives of *The Geeks*, another set of working-class boys in the same year group who lived in the same disadvantaged community. I explore here how, in opposition to the *Valley Boiz*, these young men's front region displays of masculinity were a lot 'softer' and characterised

as stereotypically 'geek'. These geekier performances of self were characterised through acts of working hard academically to achieve good grades in a range of subjects, but most notably maths, science and technology. Outside school these acts were accompanied by leisure interests such as reading books and comics, drawing, writing poetry, playing with gadgets and computer games and appearing less interested in cars, sport, drinking, girls or fashion. In comparison to the *Valley Boiz* and other young men at the school, they also seemed to express less misogynistic and homophobic views than their peers. The performance of a softer, geekier form of masculinity, in an environment where more traditional notions of masculinity were the default reference point, proved problematic and they occupied the lowest status position in the school's social hierarchy even as they transitioned through the Sixth Form. These performances were seen by others in their year group as 'feminine' and attracted homophobic name calling and bullying from their peers. However, just like the *Valley Boiz* in the previous chapter, other presentations of self could occur. As *The Geeks* transitioned through the Sixth Form into older masculinities, a back region offering some contradictions to the front region of the performance was also apparent. *The Geeks* in some situations and in settings away from the school and on occasions Cwm Dyffryn, engaged in many of the traditional, macho practices that they distanced themselves from. So, whereas the *Valley Boiz* expressed their 'softer' side in the backstage, *The Geeks* here expressed their macho side.

I begin this chapter by looking at the literature on working-class boys' educational achievement. I focus especially on the role of locality and address how this impacts on the development of a softer performance of masculinity. I then define the peer group and look at what being a 'geek' meant in this context. The chapter then analyses in detail the front displays of this softer, more studious form of working-class masculinity. Following these practices, some contradictions to this display are noted, which offer a glimpse into the back region of the performance. However, in other settings it also became apparent that there were costs and consequences that accompanied these traditional class based performances.

Working-class educational achievement, locality and the performance of geekier masculinities.

Sociological research in the UK that has centred on working-class young people has tended to focus on their problematic relationship with education. In particular this work has addressed three main themes. First, studies have concentrated on the role of education as a route to social mobility and as a way out of working-class origins, traditionally occurring through the grammar school system (Marsden and Jackson, 1962; Lacey, 1970; Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980; Brown and Scase, 1994; Halsey et al, 1997). Second, a prominent focus has been on anti-school or rebellious behaviour, poor performances and educational underachievement (Hargreaves, 1967; Willis, 1977; Corrigan, 1979; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Epstein et al, 1998; McDowell, 2003). Third, this work has begun to look at the costs associated with educational achievement for working-class identity, once one has progressed to university or reached adulthood (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine et al, 2001; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009; Wakeling, 2010).

However, some of this research on working-class men has been accused of pathologising the working-classes and there have been suggestions that some male authors have been guilty of glorifying oppressive forms of masculinity, such as the 'hooligan' (Skeggs 1992; Delamont 2000; Ingram 2009). Delamont (2000), in particular, has argued that this trend has a long history in ethnographic work and has occurred on both sides of the Atlantic. She notes that this tendency began with studies by the Chicago School during the early part of the 20th century (Abbot and Breckenridge's 1916; Thrasher 1927) and continued in the United States up to the Millennium in other landmark studies with young men in high schools including Hollingshead (1947), Stinchcombe (1964), Cruisck (1973), Werthman (1977), Burawoy (1991), Wexler (1992) and McLeod (1997). In the UK the anti-school lad has been forever immortalised in classic studies by Hargreaves (1967), Parker (1974), Willis (1977) and Corrigan (1979).

As a response to some of these criticisms, there have been studies which have offered a more nuanced critique of the problems and practices associated with being a working-class young man and opened up the concept of masculinity to challenge,

exploring male dominance and power inequalities (Connell, 1989; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Martino, 1999; Reay, 2001; Renold, 2004; Francis, Skelton and Read et al, 2010). Nonetheless what still appears to be missing from many of these studies and what the authors fail to engage with, is how the specifics of a locality impact upon what is means to be a man in certain communities and the effect this has on successful working-class boys' identities and intra-class differences.

Ingram's (2009) study of young men in Northern Ireland highlights how contrasting groups of 15-16 year old working-class boys in Belfast expressed different worldviews and the meanings they attached to place and space. The boys in the study, while living in the same locality, were divided by their levels of academic achievement gained during their 11-plus examination at the end of primary school. One group attended a grammar school with a high academic record and good reputation, whilst the other group went to a standard secondary high school with a poor reputation and declining student numbers. Even though the local neighbourhood was an important part of the young men's lives, there was a clear contrast between their conversations, aspirations and plans for the future. Those who were deemed academic achievers and attended the grammar school talked about going to university and getting out of the city, with less importance placed on belonging to the community. Those boys at the standard secondary high school seemed to experience a greater pressure to fit in and to belong to a community, which became the framework for how they expressed worldviews and was central to their conversations. Ingram (2011) highlights how the young men's masculinities were constructed and reconstructed in response to formal education, with some resisting it, and others embracing it. Those who attended the grammar school performed a version of masculinity based on studious academic work investing in mental labour and adopting middle-class languages, behaviours and tastes. For those boys who attended the secondary school, an investment in academic work was less recognised and they displayed a more traditional or hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, young men live their lives not only within educational institutions, but also within specific localities which can shape the way education and schooling is viewed. The experiences and interactions they have in their everyday lives, within their own places and spaces, help form the way young men experience schooling. For some young men, schooling may appear as an

extension to one's home life, but for others is may be an alienating experience (Reay, 2002; Weis, 2005; Kenway et al, 2006; Keddie, 2007). Locality and the importance of place are therefore significant when analysing performances of masculinity and attitudes towards education and more importantly, about how particular performances are shaped.

Those young men who transgress a locality's social norms by being academically successful and having different cultural interests are often bullied and receive labels by their peers such as 'nerd', 'dweeb', 'dork', 'freak', 'brainiac', 'boffin' 'swot' and 'geek' (see Connell, 1989; Martino, 1999; Pascoe, 2007; Zekany, 2011; Mendick and Francis, 2012)[32]. While the word geek is a relatively simple term, it is full of ambiguity and has multiple meanings changing from place to place. Nonetheless what these labels all tend to have in common is that those who received them are deemed to be stigmatised (Goffman, 1963) in some way or other as overtly- intelligent, shy, unattractive social outcasts with unfashionable hair and dress styles and who often shun other people who do not share their stigmatised status. Zekany (2011: 2-3) suggests that while it is more often used as a derogatory expression, being a geek can also be used as a 'term of endearment' and reclaimed by people who identify with such labels (Dunbar-Hester, 2008). However, when writing about high school culture, as Blake (2000:130) suggests, more often than not 'geek is a term of abuse which brands the labelled object as someone excluded from the victimizers' group'. The word geek is therefore more likely to be a pejorative marker and to be labelled as such is to be defined as a social misfit varying in degrees of harshness depending on the social context within which it is used (Kendall, 2000; Duerden et al, 2007; Pascoe, 2007). Kendall (1999: 263) further argues that to be a geek is to be symbolic of 'bad hygiene and a lack of social skill, creating a category of human partitioned off from the rest of humanity'. These labels can then shape the context for the performance of young men's identities.

Those working-class men who occupy this position in areas such as the South Wales Valleys are seen as socially deficient. It is not an essence of 'real' masculinity, forged

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[32] There are also a range of other labels applied to different sub-cultural groups in schools, some of which I have detailed in chapter 4 and written about elsewhere (see Ward 2008, 2012).

through industrial labour or associated with specific cultural or sporting practices. It therefore illustrates a softer, feminised and socially marginalised form of masculinity (Phillips, 2005; Jackson and Dempster, 2009). However, Redman and Mac an Ghaill (1997) suggest that, even in a context where doing well in school is not recognised as masculine, as one grows older and continues in education, a form of 'muscular intellectualness' can develop with being an academic achiever. An academic achieving working-class boy might be seen as a geek and might opt out of local social conventions and norms. However, these transgressions are intensely intellectual and motivated by a desire to distance oneself from a certain place and ultimately escape it all together.

While these performances of a geekier masculinity are to a certain extent self-fashioned, Goffman (1959, 1974) argues agency is mediated through the social context and interaction order where the individual is situated. Selves cannot be totally created outside the social milieu one is situated within, which can constrain one's actions and shape interactions with others. Despite their geekier performances, these young men were far from the one dimensional stereotypes depicted by popular culture. The desire to distance one's self from the locale and from an archetype of masculinity was clearly evident, but what was also evident was a tendency and pressure to perform more traditional displays of masculinity as the boys grew older. In this chapter I connect identity and expectations of masculinity within a locality in an attempt to understand the experiences of a group of working-class young men who were doing well and the challenges they faced between the front and back regions of this geekier presentation of self.

Introducing *The Geeks*: Educational achievement, subject-choice and family biographies

Sam: Get a sporting accolade and you're already like the greatest person ever

Alan: If you don't do sport in school you're like...

Sam   …a geek...

Sean: Yeah a geek basically

[Focus Group Interview 25ᵗʰ April 2008]

MW   So do you play a lot of video games then?

Sean   Yeah, I'm a geek I am, I love games!

MW   So are you really a geek like when you say you are?

Sean   Yeah I love all the geeky things, like um games, films um…

MW   …you're well into your films are you?

Sean   Ah yeah! Graphic novels, comics, things like that

[Individual Interview February 2010]

I think that a geek is someone that does not leave their home and constantly works and learns and does not socialise or have a sense of humour or have grown up.
[Craig, Age 16. Fieldnotes extract, 18th April 2008]

The Geeks friendship group consisted primarily of Leon, Gavin, Ruben, Scott, Nibbles, Alan, Sean, Ieuan, Sam, Sin and Nixon**.** Apart from Sin, who was of Chinese heritage, all were white and been born in the town. A 'geek' is described in these opening snippets from interviews and fieldnotes by the young men themselves as someone who does not participate in sports and is more interested in video games, films and comics. It is also helpfully defined by Craig, who was outside their friendship group and left school after his GCSEs at the age of sixteen to join the Royal Navy. During a Year 11 GCSE science lesson I asked Craig to write in my notebook what he thought defined a geek and he commented that it was someone who 'works and learns' therefore spending a lot of time by investing in mental labour. Masculinity for him was displayed through performances of going out, socializing and by 'having a laugh'.

Even though Cwm Dyffryn High School operated a mixed ability policy for the majority of the taught subjects during the compulsory years of schooling, the core GCSE qualifications of English, Mathematics and Science were still streamed from set one to six. It was in one of these top set classes (an English literature class) that I first encountered some of *The Geeks* on the opening morning of fieldwork observations in March 2008 when they were revising for an impending GCSE exam. Some of the young men were spread around one side of the classroom sitting quietly, two to a desk, concentrating on the poems and the past English Literature exam paper

they had been given by the teacher. Another group of young men (whom we met in Chapter five) although smaller in number, seemed to control the classroom space. They did this by shouting out answers to the teacher's questions, laughing and messing around with each other and generally dominating the learning environment and ignoring the commands of the teacher to *'put your hand up'* before answering. In the playground at break and lunchtimes this marginalisation continued. *The Geeks,* as they were referred to by others in their year group (as they grew older they reclaimed this label as Sean indicates above), stood or sat around the edges of the playground with their packed lunches. Here they talked about schoolwork and computer games and were excluded from the wider social space where games of football, which spread across the yard, dominated.

Name	Subjects studied Post 16, Sept 2008	Parents Occupations	Parents with H.E experience	Siblings	In receipt of EMA	Team Sports	Results Aug 2010	Destination Sept 2010
Sam	A-Level English A-Level History A- Level Media	F Caretaker M Supermarket Manager (Divorce)	None	Younger Sister	No	No	A*A.A	University of Nottingham BA English and Creative Writing
Ruben	A-Level Physics A-Level Electronics A- Level Maths	F Supply teacher (Secondary) M Midwife	Both	Younger Brother	No	No		Cardiff University BSC Engineering
Scott	A-Level Physics A-Level Electronics A- Level Maths A- Level Art	F Retired mechanic M House wife	None	Older Sister	Yes	No	A, A, B	University of Lincoln BA Architecture
Alan	A-Level English A-Level History A- Level Media	F Absent ,never known M Administrator local govt Step F unemployed/bus driver	None	2 Older Brothers 1 Older Sister	Yes	No	B,B,C	University of Glamorgan BA History
Sean	A-Level English A-Level History A- Level I.T	F Mechanic M Administrator in a school Separated, never married	None	Older Sister	Yes	No	A, D, E	Cardiff Metropolitan University BA English and Creative Writing
Nibbles	A-Level English A-Level History A- Level Media	F Absent M Dead Step F Steel worker But long term back injury so cannot work	None	Younger Brother	Yes	No	?	University of Glamorgan BA, English
Nixon	A-Level Chemistry A-Level Biology A- Level Maths	F Driving Instructor M Teacher (Primary)	M	?	No	No	B,B,C	University of Glamorgan BA Politics
Ieaun	A- Level Chemistry A- Level Maths A-Level Biology	F Mineral Surveyor M Housewife	F	3 Older brothers	No	No	C,C,D	University of Portsmouth BSc, Biochemical studies
Sin	A- Level History A- Level Chemistry A- Level Biology	F, M small business owners (takeaway)	None	Older Brother	No	No	?	Returned to Sixth Form to re-take A-levels
Leon	A-Level Chemistry A-Level Biology A- Level Maths	F Teacher M Secretary in college	F	Younger Brother	No	Yes Football	A,B,C	University of Portsmouth BSc, Chemistry
Gavin	A-Level I.T A- Level English	F Manager in a hospital M Housewife	None	?	No	No	D,D	Returned to Sixth Form to re-take A-levels

Table 6.1. *The Geeks*: Educational and future trajectories, family backgrounds and sporting interests September 2008-September 2010.

Being defined as a geek was also evident in more subtle ways than just being positioned as academically successful. In Year 11 some of *The Geeks* were smaller in stature and less physically developed than many others in the year group, making them easy targets for bullying. They turned up for lessons on time with their own pens and pencil cases, did their homework and carried their books and other equipment in bags. Along with this compliance to rules, they correctly adhered to the school dress code of white shirts, with red ties, black V neck jumpers, black trousers, and black shoes. This uniform was accompanied by short neat haircuts and for some horned rimmed glasses that completed the stereotypical geek persona. These front appearances helped to define their geeky masculinity, making them stand out from others in their year group. Some, like Craig who provided the definition of a geek above, sought to disrupt uniform policy and replace compulsory items with one's own. It was common practice to replace the standard black V-neck jumper, with a round neck one, because this then meant the tie could be removed and it would go unseen by teachers. Other attempts to disrupt school rules by their peers included replacing shoes with trainers and wearing hoodies and baseball caps. A lot of young men in their year group also adorned their bodies with flashy rings, chains and single earrings or studs. On top of these alterations, a large group of pupils who were registered on the BTEC or GCSE in Physical Education (including some of the *Valley Boiz*) were also allowed to wear a tracksuit instead of the regular uniform. This process then validated a specific form of masculinity based on sports and acted as a symbolic marker of status which *The Geeks* did not have access to.

In the autumn of 2008 *The Geeks* all returned to the schools Sixth Form after achieving good GCSE grades.

MW   You did quite well didn't you?
Ruben Yeah,
MW   A stars? 7?
Ruben Umm 6 I think, or 7….

Sean   I had a big 3 A's, then all B's really and 2 C's something like that.

Sam	7 A stars and 6 A's…
MW	Whew, the best person in the school then?
Sam	In the valley!
Scott	A star in art, then A in electronics, B in everything else bar R.E and Welsh which I had C's in,

In Year 11 Frankie (see Chapter seven) and another boy, Rhys, were also involved with this friendship group but they became more distant over the next two years as they took different subjects after their GCSEs or, in Frankie's case, left the school. Whilst some friendships waned, other boys, like Leon—who was tall, good looking with shoulder length hair, played sports and the guitar and seemed extremely popular not only within the wider year group, but with his teachers and girls in the town— moved more into the friendship group. During a school trip to Germany he had become friends with Ieuan and Ruben and when he returned to the Sixth Form to study A levels, these friendships became more cemented. This occurred in part because the majority of Leon's sportier friends (Ward, 2008) had either left school or, like Clive, Hughesy and Brad (Chapter five), were enrolled on vocational subjects. He also moved into this group because of his orientation to the academic curriculum and his ultimate desire to go to university to study pharmacy. Leon's shift shows that it was possible to become a geek by association and move into the group as one grew older. But this association and willingness to break away from the locale meant he became more estranged from former friends.

The subjects chosen by *The Geeks* to study at AS level and then A2 level were predominantly in the arts (English, history, fine art), natural sciences (biology, chemistry or physics), maths and I.T. *The Geeks* had been in the top sets for all their core subjects for GCSE and even though they were a close group of friends, they were fiercely competitive over their marks. They also all harboured aspirations to go to university. This is not to say that others who reached the final year of the school's Sixth Form did not aspire to go to university or gain well paid and meaningful employment (this was discussed in the previous chapter and I return to this in the following chapters), but for *The Geeks* this seemed to be of paramount importance to their projected futures.

Their parents' occupational backgrounds give some indication to their positive outlook on academic qualifications and they shared similar, although not identical, family biographies. A few of the boys had fathers and mothers who had some experience of higher education (Ruben, Nixon, Ieuan and Leon) and were employed in professional occupations as surveyors, teachers, secretaries or midwives. Other parents owned their own businesses in the form of garages, takeaway food shops or as driving instructors. However, there were also some parents who worked in more traditional working-class occupations such as lorry drivers, caretakers, in supermarkets or were unemployed. Three of the boys (Scott, Ieuan and Gavin) said that their mothers stayed at home and described them as housewives. Sadly Nibbles' mother had died when he was 14 and his step dad (his biological father has left the family years before) was on long-term incapacity benefit after being injured in an accident whilst driving a lorry.

While some of these young men's parents could be seen as employed in middle-class occupations, my justification for using the term 'working-class' to refer to these young men as a group, is that I feel it is important to recognise the inequalities that they experienced coming from a deprived locale. I suggest that having a parent who is a teacher in a deindustrialised area (with high levels of unemployment, low levels of health and educational attainment and employment opportunities) is very different to having a parent who is a teacher in a more affluent area (see Weis, 1990). I believe it is also important that the geo-demographics of place are considered when defining class and how successful boys from poorer communities, experience education (Burrows and Gane, 2006). I turn now to look further at the front performance of these geekier masculinities particularly through their classroom practices and interactions with their peers and teachers.

The performance of a geeky front: classroom practices and social interaction

In Cwm Dyffryn High School the focus on sports was high and as the previous chapter showed, this was a clear way of projecting a heterosexual self and successful masculine image (see Gard and Meyenn, 2000; Messner, 2001; Kimmel, 2006). This focus on sporting success infuriated *The Geeks*.

Sam: Get a sporting accolade and you're already like the greatest person ever!

Sean: Do you know where the old gym is by there? (Question asked to MW)

MW: Umm

Sean: Well on the wall outside it there are photos on the wall of sports men from the school, but you won't find any photos of people who done well and that…it's just all sports

Ruben: Yeah that's a point yeah...

Nibbles: …yeah…

Ruben: Like with all the past students they got or this one played football for, or AMATUER football, for Wales turns out he's now just a bin man now but he did play amateur football for Wales once…so have his picture up. Then you've got other people then, who've gone, like Mark Bowen, who recent left he's gone to Oxford to study in Oxford [University] and they haven't got, you know, no recognition of him around the school

However, performing a geekier masculinity brought with it certain disadvantages. Bullying and intimidation was often a problem in Year 11 for *The Geeks*. Some of this bullying had been physical further down the school, but it was still present through verbal altercations, subtle gestures and smirking smiles. Sam, in particular, found solace in being intellectually superior to others and as a way of combating this bullying.

Nixon: They do [*Valley Boiz*] try and bully us, or try

MW: Obviously they're not stealing your dinner money…

            (Group Laughter)

MW:	So what type of bullying would it take?
Sean:	Verbal abuse like
MW:	Alright
Ruben:	I wouldn't say I get bullied by them really, but they do always do their little in jokes, like '*Nixon, Nixon high five*' and then they expect Nixon to turn around and they all find it funny that Nixon doesn't turn around
Sam:	It's like little smiley little faces…
Ieuan:	(talks over the top of Ruben)… it's so retarded that it's funny but it's easy to beat them just by speaking
Sam:	We're more intelligent than them, as you probably all know, so you can just speak, you know just talk really fancy to them and they get annoyed and they just walk off, and you insult them without them realising it, which makes us feel big….

Sam and his friends here are illustrating a form of what Redman and Mac an Ghaill (1997:169) suggest is 'muscular intellectualness'. This was a way for them to combat the verbal altercations that had been targeted at them and to seem superior by using their intellectual capital. This performance helped validate a form of masculinity that differed to what was traditionally defined being a 'proper' man in their community. It also contradicted much of what the school culture tended to validate through its focus on sports. By Year 13 with the high dropout rate from the school (at the start of Year 13 only 35 student remained out of 138 who finished Year 11) and within the more mature environment of the Sixth Form, this intimidation had all but stopped. There was still the occasional 'piss-take' to be negotiated, with some dealing better with this than others (which I return to below), but the environment was now one of mutual co-operation between the multiple fractions of the Sixth Form.

Whilst in school they no longer adhered to the strict uniform policy; their clothes were not so neat, shirts were left hanging out of trousers and trainers often replaced shoes. Apart from their uniforms they were also more carefree about their appearance. Many of the group had long or shoulder length hair that some had dyed, and others showed the first attempts at beards or didn't shave regularly. Outside school a dress code or casual uniform, similar to that of many other young people was worn in the town. This consisted of checked or stripy designer shirts or T-shirts with funny slogans and

fashions labels written across them, jeans and trainers bought from high street shops or local supermarkets. Being a small town, the choice of outlets in Cwm Dyffryn was quite restrictive and many tended to order clothes off the Internet. The relaxation of the formal dress code in school as they went through the Sixth Form, accompanied by the longer hair and scruffy appearance, acted as a preparation ground for the next stage of the educational careers when they hoped to move onto university and become undergraduate students.

The development of 'muscular intellectualness' was also evident between lessons as it was common for *The Geeks* to play scrabble, a practice which I joined in with, but found somewhat difficult. Scores were kept and a record of who had won each game was collected. A dictionary was used to check words and cheating was frowned upon. During one game in the school's library, Ieuan had tried to use the Internet on his mobile phone to look for a word, and, when discovered, this was met with disdain by the others. Sam, who was selected by the head of Sixth Form to be the school's head boy, also found other subtle ways to promote his intellectual status over those in his year group who had previously taunted him. In the following excerpt from my field notes, Sam makes it very hard for Brad, one of the *Valley Boiz* who was studying English Literature at A level alongside his other qualifications, to get help with the homework that had been set. I was sitting in the library between lessons with some of *The Geeks* when Brad rushed in.

> Brad poked his head in (to the library) and looked really worried and agitated. He asked the boys what homework he had to do for Mr. Simon for Friday and as Sam put down a scrabble tile nonchalantly answered *'reading'*. Brad seeming confused at the advice being given and asked for a second time what this was. Sam again seemingly frustrated at the intrusion, sighed loudly and without turning to look at Brad said *'that chapter from the book we are reading'*. With only one brief further comment from Alan about the homework, Brad still seeming confused, groaned and rushed out of the library.
> *[Fieldnotes October 08th 2009]*

Sam here had a way of getting back at Brad whose performance of masculinity differed to that of the Geeks. He was wearing the sports tracksuit and trainers that were the required uniform for his BTEC course so he immediately stood out from the group who were dressed in school uniform. Sam's reluctance to help and his adoption of a superior position was a way of punishing Brad for his lacklustre approach to the homework. It was also as a way for him to exercise power in this situation where he so often (even being head boy) didn't have it. He had the answers regarding the homework and Brad wanted them. Nonetheless Sean still found that Sam didn't help his cause by continuing to snipe back in moments of genuine 'piss take'.

Sean   Sometimes he (Sam) doesn't really think about other people like

MW   I remember in Year 11 sometimes boys used to take the piss out of you but most of them have left now so he used a bit of humour to deflect it

Sean   Yeah but sometimes when he does that, it doesn't really help the situation! Like say they're like, you know, casually taking the piss…

MW   …yeah…

Sean   …and he'll get really bitchy and snipe at them or something and they'll just get worse and you're thinking by doing that you're making yourself look weirder! Just take it like!

In Sean's eyes Sam needed to 'take it' (the piss taking or the banter) in order to stop being seen as weird in front of the *Valley Boiz*. In an individual interview with Sam, I enquired more about the banter that went on between his close friends and he said *'we (do) take the mick out of each other, take the piss out of each other, if you fall over or spell something wrong, we laugh at each other'*. For *The Geeks* banter was just another extension of their academic abilities where having a laugh came through picking out errors in others' schoolwork or commenting on their personal faults.

Whereas Sam struggled with other forms of banter, Sean was good at this; being really quick witted and in the context of the small Sixth Form, he could answer back with a joke and almost always get a laugh from others around him, even those who were trying to 'take the piss' out of his friends. Alongside his geekier interests (computer games and reading comics), he supported Liverpool football club and along with his best friend Alan (who was a Blackburn supporter) would regularly talk to the

Valley Boiz in the Sixth Form common room about whose team had beaten who and whose team was better. Sean was quite tall and skinny but had an overgrown mop of bleached blonde hair, bearing a resemblance to a lion's mane. However, because of his ability to take part in a football discourse and to make others laugh (he could also laugh at himself), I never witnessed any 'piss taking' at his untidy mop of hair. Scott, who was a lot shorter and slighter in statue than Sean and who did not have the quickness of wit, often came to grief for his long hair and beard which grew longer and longer as Year 13 progressed. He was often referred to by others outside *The Geeks* group as 'Jesus' because of his supposed similarities to the religious figure. Only when his closest friends Sam, Ruben and Ieuan stressed how scruffy he looked and threatened to physically force him to shave and cut off his straggly beard and hair, did he decide to get it cut. This then prompted much hilarity and questioning when he walked into the Sixth Form common room the next day. It would seem that Sean's ability to perform a traditional version of working-class masculinity by investing in football banter, alongside his geekier masculinity allowed him to code-shift and get away with things that Sam or Scott weren't able to do.

However, away from the school this ability to code-shift was not so successful. When Sean had finished his A levels and he was waiting for the results, he worked throughout the summer as a receptionist in a local garage partly gained through his father's connections as a mechanic. He took calls from customers and dealt with enquires about cars and parts. However, in the workplace it soon became apparent that he was unable to shift masculine codes in order to display the traditional working-class football discourse he had successfully performed in the Sixth Form to protect him from the 'piss take'. Not only was his appearance at odds with the older mechanics he worked with, but he was unable to build up a rapport as he was working in the office away from the workshop. Whilst the mechanics were repairing cars as a team in the workshop, he was sitting alone doing forms of administrative work.

On a trip to the cinema with Alan and me to see the summer's big blockbuster film *Inception*, he told us how, on many occasions, he felt left out of the daily routines in the garage. These in particular were the journeys to the local shop for sausage rolls, pies or pasties that he felt he was deliberately excluded from. When he did give one of the mechanics money to buy him something, they often returned empty handed and he

was told that they had run out of whatever it was that he had asked them to get. On one occasion Sean had gone back to the same shop to find the shelves were actually full of the product he had wanted. Sean also said he felt frustrated as they expected him to make tea for them, but he never had a cup of tea made in return. Only the previous week he had ventured into the workshop as he was bored being stuck in the office alone and had mentioned he was going out with his girlfriend to the cinema on the upcoming weekend. On hearing this one of the mechanics had turned to him and exclaimed in mock surprise *'girlfriend'?* and created a big laugh from the other men in the workshop in the process. It is clear here that not only was Sean seen as effeminate due to working in the office of the garage (being ignored and often expected to make the tea) but from the not so subtle hints and assumptions made towards Sean, it seems that the other workers thought he was gay. The homosexualisation of his non-hegemonic gender performance was alien to the mechanics' workplace and the social-economic and cultural heritage of the region that was their default reference point. Sean and *The Geeks,* by choosing to invest in 'mental labour', saw this as a progression to professional futures. However, by investing in more middle class success discourses, they were further solidifying their marginalised masculinities and distancing themselves from their working-class peers. For Sean the experience of the workplace was like stepping back in time to a different era, when the physical body was valued over mental ability. The transition from school into a space of employment was difficult and even though it was a temporary position before going to university, it was an uncomfortable and troubled time and he left before the end of the summer. With limited opportunities for work in the locale, for boys like Sean these opportunities create valuable experience of the job market. However, the pressures to act in certain ways create extra problems and as in Sean's case, might be too much for some boys to deal with.

Teachers

The Geeks had a lot of respect for certain teachers, but seemed to have little or nothing at all for others. In Year 11 they mocked Mr Sharpe for looking like a character from the cartoon *The Simpsons* and talked with scorn about the lack of ability of some teachers to control other pupils in their classes who they thought weren't working as hard as they were.

Sam	They don't bother in class and then they get special help from the teachers to get their work done!
MW	On time?
Sam	Yeah just let them fail and laugh at them at the end… (group laughter)…I'd make a crap teacher!
Sean	It's like X changed the deadlines with the coursework, a week later they're still using class time to get it done, we had to take the deadlines but they didn't
MW	What was the deadline?
Sean	Umm can't remember now, but it was like next week next week, it kept changing
MW	So they try to give more time?
Leon	This one time right, all the chavs in the media class, speak and all that and X doesn't really do anything about it… and I spoke up cos X was teaching something… like ridiculous… X was doing spider diagrams and I said this isn't going to get me anywhere in life…

[*Group Interview 25th April 2008.*]

Sean and Sam adhere to the rules and deadlines set by the teacher, but they suggest that others in their classes do not appear to be as concerned. This brings with it a feeling of intellectual superiority because they have completed the work set by the teacher, but frustration because other class members who maybe struggling or less interested, receive extra time and help. Leon here not only criticises the teacher for the classroom pedagogy but also the way others pupils in the class, who he refers to as 'chavs', are dealt with—placing himself above the behaviour of both the teacher and his 'rougher' classmates. Being in the top sets for their compulsory subjects *The Geeks* were taught by the most experienced members of staff and had preferential treatment in terms of equipment and books. The hidden curriculum was important as it impacted on the expectations of them by their teachers. This continued into the Sixth Form with the preference of teacher help being given to those thinking of applying to university. Inter-class differences were appearing here, and *The Geeks* positioned themselves against others in their year group by using disparaging remarks and the use of the term 'chav'. This distancing from their peers occurred in other ways too.

Boyishness

Through their position in the school year group *The Geeks* were able to validate a form of masculinity through achieving academically. However, as I showed in the last chapter, others in their year group tended to reproduce and perform a version of masculinity based around traditional forms of white working-class credibility. These included non-academic work, sports, a rejection of authority from schoolteachers, sexism, homophobia, misogynistic language and going out on 'the pull'.

Sam: Some boys you know are very boyish!

MW: So between the boys (friends) do you talk like that about your …

Sam: …No, no I keep my private life private, I've only had one girlfriend and everything I know and everything I have done has been with her, that's it, she is the only person.

MW: Well in some ways I think that it's really nice cos some of the boys the way they talk about it you know *'I was with her last night and coorgh!!!'*

Sam: Yea I know, it's callous something to do a bit of fun... I know it's as if they treat them, not to sound clichéd, as an object. You know like I've got the latest mobile phone, I've got the latest girlfriend, that sort of thing.

In the school and in the valley more generally there seemed to be official and unofficial ways of being male with *The Geeks* occupying a difficult position as academic achievers and their displays of a geekier masculinity. Here Sam criticises others in the year group for being what he terms 'boyish' and treating girls as objects. In another individual interview with Ruben we discussed a night out in the town where he had felt under pressure from others in the year group to 'pull' a girl he was friendly with. Ruben told me

Like when we were in the Harp (local pub) with that Jenny… everybody, but you, said 'ah go on, get in there Ruben', But I explained to you what was going on and you listened. I tried to explain to the others but they weren't having it, but you understood my side of it…. you've got people expecting you to do stuff, making opinions on stuff, but they don't know

what situation you're in ...boys think that you only want to talk to girls for only one reason!

Whilst Ruben felt the pressure on him to comply with heterosexual norms, Nibbles, the only openly gay young man in the whole year group, felt less pressure. As Nibbles began to explore his homosexuality and go out to gay bars outside the town and attend gay pride events, he became more of an outsider and drifted out of the group. Whilst chatting about this in the common room one day he told me that he had come out at the start of Year 11, which had been a particularly tough time in his life as his mother had died around the same time. I asked him if he had experienced any bullying and he told me he often had to put up with some name calling and abusive language. I enquired if this still happened, to which he said '*I'm more used to it (now), and so much stuff has happened to me, I'm kind of not bothered*'. I did notice that whilst some of this name-calling tended to occur whilst he walked around the school from younger pupils, it did not occur from his own year group. I discussed this with Tomo and Brad, two of the *Valley Boiz* and asked what they thought about this bullying. Tomo commented that '*if he's gay, he's gay, no point in going on about it or bullying someone. As long as he stays away from me and don't try and touch me, it's all good*'. Brad laughed and added that there was '*no point in hating someone who was gay, it was childish*' but he also added rather forcefully that if a guy came on to him, he would '*batter him*' (beat him up)'. Thus, the experiences of some young men from deprived communities who do come out would seem to indicate that the declining significance of homophobia (McCormack, 2012) is more of a myth than a reality.

Whilst Ruben, Sam and Nibbles are trying to be anti-sexist, anti-objectivist and exploring their sexualities in different ways, they have to do so in an environment where more traditional notions of masculinity are the default reference points. Despite these positive outlooks, at other times, their masculinities seemed to be performed in often contradictory ways.

Behind the geeky front: contradictions and social pressures in the back stage

The friendship group was based primarily on their educational connections, which placed them in the top sets during compulsory schooling. However, outside school

The Geeks found it harder to 'hang around' or in the local vernacular 'bother' with each other in Year 11. The school's catchment area was spread between the outlying villages to the north and south of valley around the main town. Sam and Ruben, for example, lived six miles apart even though they attended the same school. Sam lived in a small farming village four miles to the north of Cwm Dyffryn whilst Ruben lived south of the town in a community of densely packed terraced housing which had been built around a long defunct colliery. Being sixteen, both were unable to drive and without any income they relied for the most part on their parents for lifts or money for buses. Ruben did cycle, but the six-mile journey, mostly uphill, that he would have had to have made to see Sam after school was impractical. As Ruben informed me, they could only meet up if it had been organised in advance. The Internet was one way for these friendship groups to continue and some chatted to each other outside school on the Internet using the MSN chat room service. In the spring of 2008 the social networking site Bebo[33] was popular and some of the group also used this. However, this left others out, as Sean did not have the Internet at home.

The geography of the area played a role in the nature of their friendships, but so too did their investment in mental labour. Those in their year group who played sports, played in rock bands (see Ward, 2012), or attended a local youth club had a collective focal point for their out-of-school activities which *The Geeks* did not have. Another focal points for socialising in their year group, was based around underage drinking.

MW	Nixon I heard you mention briefly in the background drink, outside school do we like buy bags of cans and go down the park?
(Group on mass)	Nooooooo
Ruben	I've never been drunk to be honest with you!
Alan	Na nor me
Rhys	I have drunk like but only once, for a special occasions
Sam	Yeah I'd agree with him on that one like in a party or something but not on the fucking street cos that's just sad!
Nibbles	Yeah like buying 10p cans of like shit or whatever

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[33] See http://www.bebo.com/c/about <accessed June 21st June 2012>.

Alan	Its like watered down Lager yeah and they go (Using harsh regional accent) 'I'm fuckking sssssshhhhhteaming boyyyys can and half like'…
Ruben	It's like they go 'I had four bottles of vodka and I still weren't drunk'…

[*Group Interview 25ᵗʰ April 2008.*]

Ruben and the others in this discussion do not see the appeal in drinking and distanced themselves from the practices of underage drinking in parks around the town. They situate these practices of a showy performance of masculinity based around drinking in parks from cans with an 'other'. As Alan mimicked the harsher drawn out vowels of the Valleys accent, he was further able to place himself above such behaviour, illustrating that he is particularly aware that his own speech patterns and behaviours, along with that of his friends, differ from those of his peers. This also highlights again the intra-class difference and the conflict between *The Geeks* and those around them.

However, as the young men grew older, during Year 12 when their parents went on holiday leaving them home alone, house parties were often held. This provided opportunities to experiment with drinking that others in their year had done in local parks at a younger age. These opportunities for the group to get drunk together and 'step out of character' (as Jonesy did in a different way in the previous chapter) away from the eyes of their more macho peers, teachers and parents, led to humorous, almost legendary, stories developing which were retold and reported to me (see also Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Nayak, 2003d). These tales included occasions where Ruben had drunk too much rum and had to be put to be bed, when arguments had developed over a game of poker that was only being played for matchsticks or such as the time when Sean's dog Clyde, had managed to drink some spilt alcohol.

On one New Years Eve there was also an occasion when a group of girls had been invited along to a party and two of *The Geeks* (Leon and Sam) had passionately kissed each other. They stressed that they had only done this because they wanted to watch the girls 'meet'. As I indicated in the last chapter, in Cwm Dyffryn the term 'meet' is used to indicate 'snogging' or French kissing. When I spoke to one of the girls (who

subsequently became Leon's girlfriend later in the year) about this, I was told that the kissing had actually gone on for *'quite a long time'* but that no one was really bothered by it at the party. These stories provide an opportunity for them to bond along with other things apart from school, to enable a collective identity based around shared experiences and to experiment with transgressing sexual boundaries (Nayak and Kehily, 2001).

Drinking games

Many pubs in Cwm Dyffryn especially the town's rugby club turned a blind eye to underage drinking. As their time in the Sixth Form progressed, different members of *The Geeks* began to go out together for nights out in the town knowing they could get served alcohol without being asked to prove they were 18. However outside the town in the larger cities of South Wales like Cardiff and Swansea, pubs and nightclubs strictly enforced legal age limits and demanded to see identification in the form of driving licenses or proof of age cards prior to entry. This meant that as more of those in the year group reached the legal drinking age of 18, the opportunities to go out to pubs and clubs outside their small town in the larger cities of Swansea and Cardiff developed. But as the young men lived far outside these cities, a minibus needed to be organised for these nights out. Due to the considerable cost involved in hiring a minibus (these trips often amounted to around £150) there was a need to fill every seat to ensure that the cost to the individual was kept low was crucial. This often resulted in 18th birthday nights out being organised across school friendship groups so as to ensure that the cost of getting a minibus would be minimal. Girlfriends, work colleagues and other friends (even researchers!) were often invited along to make up the numbers.

Ruben, in particular, felt the urge to socialise and going out at night was important for him. During the Sixth Form he worked part-time in the same supermarket as Ieuan and Leon (Sam also worked in a supermarket) so he had quite a bit of disposable income. As many of the others did not work and relied on EMA, they were often reluctant to go out drinking. In some cases this was because they were underage or fearful of not getting served because they hadn't reached 18, and not just because they did not have the money. He often as, he put it, had to 'chameleonise'.

Ruben	Like it depends on who you're going out with in the nights and stuff like that, you're talking about different things with different people… don't know…I'm a bit of a chameleon
MW	Yeah?
Ruben	I had a bit of a crisis a while back, I just thought, do I need to do it? Do I need to be a chameleon, should I just not…should I just…I like socialising, but like I was talking to Tomo about cars and I know shit all about cars…
MW	(Laughs)
Ruben	I absolutely know sod all about cars, literally, but then I can hold a conversation for ages about cars and then if it means I'm having a conversation about cars and it means he thinks about going and he invites me then, then…
MW	Yeah! So you kind of play these games sometime then?
Ruben	Yeah
MW	It's interesting you feel you have to do that sometimes
Ruben	Quite a lot of times, we can be talking about something and I'll agree with them, but in the back of my head I'm going really, you don't agree with this at all Ruben, you're just doing it to fit in!

Ruben was able to impression manage his masculinity on different occasions in order to be accepted on nights out by others outside his close friendship group. In this individual interview he admits to talking about cars with Tomo (see Chapter five) when not really having any interest or idea about the topic he's talking about. For him the desire to be invited out and to share in the world outside his schoolwork was crucial. The pressure to go out and socialise was so intense that Ruben felt he had to do and say certain things (even if he did not believe them) in order to achieve some sort of recognition from Tomo and the chance of experiencing a night out and fulfil some of the social expectations of what he thinks a young man should be doing at 18.

As more of *The Geeks* reached 18, Ruben became chief organiser and sorted more nights out and made a special effort around each member's birthday to ensure they could all go out together. The *Wetherspoon* pub, which as I showed with the *Valley Boiz,* was central to the nightlife of young people in Cwm Dyffryn, was stricter on

serving alcohol than the other pubs, so those who hadn't reached 18 would sit in one of the darker corners of the pub whilst those who were 'legal' would buy drinks for them. For Scott's birthday Ruben had arranged for a game of 'pub snooker' to be played. Everyone invited had to come along dressed as if to play snooker in ties and waistcoats. A chart, which Ruben was carrying, had been drawn up with the names of all the 'players' (Ruben, Scott, Alan, Sean, Sam, Ieuan, Sin, and my name) on one side with the points scored or 'balls potted' on the other. However, alcohol was to be substituted for 'balls potted'. Pints of lager or cider were the 'red balls' and worth 1 point each, shots of various coloured spirits were the 'coloured balls' and the more sprits drunk, the more points could be earned. In theory one had to drink a pint or pot a 'red ball' and follow it up with a shot of spirits or a 'coloured ball' progressing through the colours in sequence just like in the traditional game of snooker. However, as my fieldnotes illustrate this soon got a bit messy.

> When we got to the rugby club the 'game of snooker' was really beginning to get out of control. I had deliberately shied away from drinking spirits so as to last the night, but Ruben who was in the lead and still keeping score, kept downing shots one after the other. Scott the smallest guy in the year group was beginning to slur his words and I couldn't quite understand what he was saying… as the night wore on Ruben got in a bigger and bigger mess and at one point spilt a pint of lager all over the table, himself and the seats.
>
> *[Fieldnotes April 23rd 2010]*

Even though a few years previously they had mocked their peers for indulging in underage drinking, drinking and acting out of character when drunk, playing pub snooker provided a way for these young men to perform the more traditional working-class masculinities they missed out on by being academic achievers. But remnants of their front display of a geekier masculinity are also evident here and not totally discarded in this transition to a more relaxed back region. Here the young men are drinking with an aim not just to get drunk, but to score points and record the achievement in a chart as they went along, in keeping with their geekier masculinities. By embracing social practices and drinking games of many undergraduate students in higher education institutions, they could also be seen as preparing themselves for

university life, highlighting how these masculine pursuits in a sense cut across social class groups (see Thurnell-Read, 2012).

The Strip Club

Away from the town and within their own close friendship group *The Geeks* were able to further participate in some of the objectifying practices that they criticised some of their peers for doing. As the following detailed field notes show, on one occasion when *The Geeks* went out to celebrate Sean's 18th birthday in the capital city Cardiff, they ended up going into a lap dancing club and paying for private dances.

Whilst drinking in *Wetherspoons* before leaving Cwm Dyffryn, Ruben had suggested that when they got to Cardiff that night they should go to a strip club to really celebrate Sean's birthday. The other boys seemed interested and *'up for it'*. When we got to Cardiff later in the evening, I never seriously considered that they would go into one, but as we walked down one of the main streets and neared a club it appeared that we were going in! I momentarily tried to change the decision by saying that is was going to cost a lot of money and it would be better to go somewhere else, but no one seemed to listen and my pleas were ignored. As we paid our entrance fee (£6.00) and descended into the club the boys were rather excited. We were ushered over to a table in the middle of a large room full of comfortable low chairs and tables with floor to ceiling mirrors around the club and a small bar at the back. A small number of older men were spread out across the room with their eyes fixed on the dancer on the stage in front. She was naked apart from a G-string and *The Geeks* soon started nervously laughing and chatting to each other and pointing at the dancer on the stage. I noticed that there were half a dozen or so young women walking around the floor of the club just wearing underwear and small robes. Until we were served drinks by one of the clothed waitresses, they did not approach the table. Once the drinks and been brought over, a few of the dancers came over to chat to us. The girls sat on the edges of the seats or stood in front of the seats towering about the seated boys. Some whispered into individual boys' ears or playfully encouraged the others to suggest a dance for one of the group. I was struck by

how quickly the boys were persuaded to go off for a 'private dance' with the dancers. Each one-on one dance (costing £10 for three minutes) took place in a private booth. After midnight the prices were increased and the same dance cost £20. I also kept being asked for dances by different girls who came over to the table and the boys kept egging me on to 'have one', but I felt awkward enough as it was and kept declining the offers.

[Fieldnotes 12th August 2010]

The pressure to conform to heterosexual practices, to hold the male gaze and to objectify women is fully on display here. *The Geeks,* who as I have shown normally distanced themselves from many of the attitudes that their peers expressed towards women, when away from their home town felt much freer to indulge in many of the same front performances they chastised others for doing. Without the risk of being judged by anyone they knew, this night out was a chance for them to live the heterosexual fantasy and act like the 'real' men that their marginalised geeky position did not often allow. It was also an escape from the pressures that being an academic achiever in an area like Cwm Dyffryn brought on them. To end this chapter, I turn to the desperation and feelings of escape that *The Geeks* felt in being outsiders, and the barriers to these desires that came with occupying a disadvantaged social class position.

Escape practices: university desires and imagined futures

When I first encountered *The Geeks* they discussed wanting to escape the valley, which they aimed to do through achieving good grades at their GCSEs and then taking A Levels. Many also expressed a desire to continue to university and to enter middle class occupations such as medical consultants, journalists and geologists. Sam had already thought of a course in Year 11 and planned on spending a year in America studying:

Sam: Journalism is what I'd like to get into at the moment
MW: Alright.
Sam: And I'd like to go to America as well for my university course
         that's as far as I've thought

MW: So you've thought a little bit down the line where you want to go?

Sam: Yeah I have done a bit of research into it and they do offer it in some of the English universities and the exchanges into American universities, so I'll aim for that first...if I get rejected I'll just go lower down the ladder

MW: So you've thought about going to uni then?

Sam: Yeah… IAM GOING TO UNI!

Sam's commitment clearly illustrates a rejection of the locality and a willingness to move on. His subjectivity was constructed around his future aspirations and by stating 'if I get rejected I'll just go lower down the ladder' his determination to find a way to his goals by attending different universities is clear.

His university aspirations grew and he applied to study English Literature at Oxford in Year 13. However, he was unsuccessful, failing the entrance exam, and in an individual interview he reflected on this:

MW   And did you feel like you could have fitted in there?

Sam   (Laughs) No, not really, like um I went to like ah an Oxford interview preparation thing, in Bristol

MW   Right ok

Sam   Again totally pointless obviously

MW   No, no I think it's all experience

Sam   I went there and I felt, I'd never felt so Welsh!

MW   Really?

Sam   Like a lot of people there were Welsh, but they were privately schooled, so they spoke, you know with that really intelligent sounding non dialect accent, that just sounds English

MW   Ok

Sam   And everybody just spoke like that I thought I sound so Welsh, there was this part where he said '*do you want to speak in front of the group*', and I said no I don't

MW   Because you were conscious about your accent?

Sam	Yeah, I could hear myself, and I don't sound Welsh in comparison to a lot of people around here, everyone was really different is the best way to put it. I mean here its all camaraderie and you have you group of friends and you don't grass…as the old phrase goes!
MW	Yeah yeah
Sam	But there it was dog eat dog, you just look after yourself, and there everybody was (puts on posh accent) *'I'm very smart, listen to me'*
MW	And that's how you feel a lot of people were?
Sam	That's how they were yeah, they'd ask questions and then answer them, and jumping up and down or whatever, but when your schools like this and the teacher asks questions, you look at the floor, that's how it goes…

From Sam's retelling of his rejection by Oxford and the experience of the preparation day in Bristol, what comes through is that despite being one of the highest academic achievers in his school, he feels he is unable to compete with other young people he met at this event. He is aware of the accents of others at the preparation day (who he thinks may have been privately schooled) and feels conscious and possibly embarrassed about his Welsh accent which is shaped by an industrial working-class history. So, despite performing a softer, geekier form of masculinity in his home community which brought with it intimidation and marked him out as different from peers, he is unable to feel comfortable in this new environment, illustrating the hidden injuries of his classed position (Sennett and Cobb, 1972)**.** It also impacts on the degree to which he can impression manage his masculinity in this particular setting. He cannot fully shift from his classed position and he struggles with his normal intellectual performance with this different audience.

University for others was further seen as an escape and a way to get out of Cwm Dyffryn. One afternoon towards the end of Year 13 when I walked around the town centre with Sean and Alan, they seemed to vent their frustration at living in the town. I asked them what they saw as the worst things about it and Sean told me that he hated *'the people, the empty shops and the nothingness of it all'!* Alan said he couldn't wait to get out and go to university, and was desperate to leave. On the walk back to my car I asked the boys why they thought others did not want to leave the town. To this

Sean said, *'well without sounding like a prick like, I think it's down to intelligence in a way. There's nothing here, my dad said Cwm Dyffryn used to be known as the Vegas of the Valleys with loads of clubs and stuff. It's just shit now'.*

Alan and Sean also talked about the ages of people around them in the town and commented how old everyone seemed. The economic restructuring of the town and the valley as a whole, has led to more young people moving out to other areas to find work whilst those who stay are older and continue to get older still. This has meant that the population has slowly decreased, which has had an impact on the school system. Primary schools are merging and the secondary schools in the area are also due to merge if local council plans go through by 2014. Without any industry to support jobs, the area continues to suffer high levels of social and economic deprivation. As time goes on and more and more young people leave the area to find work or attend university which seems to be the hailed as the great saviour by the schools, the 'nothingness' of it, especially in the eyes of young people like Sean and Alan will continue. If they return looking for jobs to use the skills they have gained through their academic qualifications, they will not find them in the area that they left to acquire them in the first place.

Conclusion

With the exception of Sin and Gavin (who did not do as well as expected and returned to the Sixth Form to re-sit their final year) all *The Geeks* progressed to university in September 2010. Sam, Ieuan, Scott and Leon left Wales to study and made the largest moves out of the community. Whilst the rest stayed in South Wales, Ruben, and Sean did move to the capital Cardiff to study, so they did make some break from Cwm Dyffryn. While this chapter has highlighted working-class educational achievements, I have shown how these achievements come with risks and those who invested in intellectual labour were bullied for their success and deviation from the norm. Through a front-stage performance of a softer version of working-class masculinity, what I have termed geekier masculinity, in different ways inside and outside the school, they were positioned by others in terms of their educational success. They harboured escape desires and wanted to get away from the town and the Valleys, however there were contradictions within these performances. The birthday trip to the

strip club and the disadvantages occurred during the university application process and the interviews some attended, show older versions of traditional working-class culture (speech, cultural practices and social activities) rear their head from time to time. These young men are trying to be successful and embrace a neo-liberal agenda within a globalised workplace; however, they are restricted by the heritage of their locale. This impacts on their ability to perform multiple masculine subjectivities in different settings to various degrees to overcome these difficulties.

Apart from these geekier performances, these young men were far from a one dimensional geek stereotype and had different presentations of self. The desire to distance one's self from the locale and from an archetype of masculinity is clear, but this is never totally achievable. The working-class geeks offer a hybridised form of masculinity, trying to escape but also falling back and feeling the pressure to perform traditional masculinities. The implication of this on their ability to achieve their goals is important and illustrates how much harder working-class boys must work than those from more privileged backgrounds in order to be successful.

Chapter 7

Bakers, Ian and Frankie: Vocational Education and Training and Speedy Leisure-Pleasures.

Introduction

In the previous two chapters I concentrated on how two groups of young men, *The Geeks* and the *Valley Boiz,* performed different versions of masculinity in Cwm Dyffryn High School. I looked at how their masculine identities were further constructed through different social interactions and leisure activities beyond the school gates. I argued that these working-class young men are adapting to insecure times in different ways and emphasised how historic legacies of space and place impact upon their educational decision-making and leisure interests. In this chapter, I explore the way young masculinities are performed in other educational spaces. Continuing with three young men—Bakers, Ian and Frankie—I focus on the performance of masculinity in three different vocational educational courses at three different further educational colleges outside Cwm Dyffryn. Two 'masculine' courses—motor vehicle studies and a Modern Apprenticeship in engineering—are compared with a more 'feminine' subject, equine studies.

I have chosen to use Bakers, Ian and Frankie as case studies to investigate three interconnected themes. Drawing on Goffman (1959, 1974), first I explore whether these spaces of Vocational Education and Training (VET) can frame and validate traditional or hegemonic forms of masculinity, but also provide a space to enable subversive forms of masculinity to be displayed. Second, I seek to investigate if, in these three courses, similar performances (front-stage, back-stage) are evident in these young men's masculinities. This should help understand not only how masculinities are performed in vocational spaces through interaction in different situations, but also how masculine practices are displayed, perpetuated and changed through the situatedness of experience. Finally, I look outside the vocational spaces where these performances are given and returning to a theme I briefly considered in Chapter five, the role of car culture in these young men's lives. Are these speedy 'leisure pleasures'

(Kenway and Hickey-Moody, 2009) spaces of masculine production which act as discourses and symbols of masculine status, or are they forms and spaces of escapism for marginalised young men?

The gendered and classed nature of vocational education and training

The Further Education (F.E.) sector in Wales and the UK more widely is a complex area, offering a large variety of academic, vocational and training programmes some of which (like the Modern Apprentice scheme) are situated within industrial environments (see TLRP 2008; Jephcote, Salisbury and Rees, 2009; Salisbury and Jephcote, 2010). Brown and Macdonald (2008: 19) suggest that Vocational Education and Training (VET) (which makes up the vast majority of courses in F.E.) refers to 'learning that addresses the concepts and understandings relevant to a wide range of work environments and develops in young people the skills, knowledge, competencies and attributes needed for employment'. Although supporters of VET suggest it is a way of attracting some young people to continue in education who might otherwise not have done so, others have suggested it contributes to a dual system of academic versus vocational qualifications (Reay et al, 2005; Connell, 2008).

The experiences of young people in these sectors are far less well documented than those in other phases of education (Delamont and Atkinson, 1995). During the 1980s and into the 1990s, however, a few ethnographic studies began to show how VET played an important part in the construction of social class, ethnicity and gender identities and how these helped formulate potential careers (see for example Valli, 1985; Weis, 1985; Skeggs, 1986; Bates, 1990, 1991; Riseborough, 1992; Bates and Riseborough, 1993; Hayward and Mac an Ghaill, 1997). More recent studies have suggested that not only do many VET courses fail to give students who undertake these forms of qualifications the broadening of opportunities envisaged, but that class, gender and ethnic inequalities continue to persist and are a determining factor in an individual's future life chances (Arnot, 2004; Weis, 2004; Reay et al, 2005).

Even though there have been changes in girls' and young women's occupational aspirations over the past three decades (Arnot, David, and Weiner 1999; Francis et al ,2003; Francis and Skelton, 2005; Baker, 2010), boys and young men still tend to

avoid jobs and courses seen as stereotypically feminine. Girls are more likely to work in caring professions, while boys opt for technical, scientific and business jobs (Fuller Beck, and Unwin, 2005; Madden, 2005; Osgood, 2005; Osgood, Francis, and Archer, 2006). However, as I show in this chapter, there are some small indicators that young people post-16 are beginning to enrol on non-gender traditional subjects (see also Miller and Budd, 1999; Archer, Halsall, and Hollingworth, 2007) but that stereotypical choices and future career directions still persist.

Subject frames

VET in the UK (and elsewhere, see, for example, Weis, 1990; Brown and Macdonald, 2008) has followed a typical format. As Parker (2006: 695) explains, the apprenticeship in particular was originally linked to male dominated craft occupations such as building and printing, but 'by the early 20th century it had become an altogether more pervasive form of training across a variety of workplace settings including both broader manufacturing locales (i.e. engineering, shipbuilding) and the domestic trades' (see also Cockburn, 1985; Gospel, 1995; Fuller and Unwin, 2003). During the 1970s and the 1980s economic restructuring and the increase in neo-liberal policies saw a decline in apprenticeships being replaced by Youth Training schemes[34] and in 1994 the Modern Apprenticeship was launched. This was an initiative designed to increase the skills of young people through the expansion of work-based learning and to increase the participation of underrepresented groups (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 1995). However, the Modern Apprenticeship has attracted criticism because these schemes are said not to compete adequately with programmes overseas and lack currency with young people (Ryan and Unwin, 2001). Further, as noted above, they continue to reproduce class and gender divisions of labour (Fuller et al, 2005). They are also qualifications that the middle classes are less likely to adopt, and choosing them impacts on the range and possibility of choice of courses and options of progressing to higher educational institutions (Reay et al, 2005).

As I have shown throughout this thesis, for Goffman (1959) performances take on a dramaturgical framework, with a front-stage and a back-stage. These performances can also be 'disrupted' and contradicted as matter of course. These performances of

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[34] For discussion of their shortcomings see Mizen 1995.

self (and therefore gender) take place not only within social interactions between individuals but also within the wider culture of a given social setting. It is these frames that construct the meaning and interpretations of a given situation. I suggest that Goffman's 'frame analysis' can be especially applied to VET subjects, where gender and classed identity formation is particulate acute. Here the forms and content of the courses, alongside the interactions between students and teachers, frame and therefore sanction and validate performances of masculinity and femininity more intensely than in other post-16 educational courses, some of which I have considered in the previous chapters. These versions of gender identity are performed through front-stage and back-stage regions in line with dominant stereotypical expectations within the specific subjects. Nonetheless there are some possibilities for subverting gender norms by parody, displacement and resignification (Butler, 1990). Could it therefore be possible for gender norms to be subverted through adopting non-gender stereotypical vocational subjects? As Brickell (2005: 36) puts it, this could be a way 'to reorganize or supplement these frames and schedules in ways that may encourage new forms of subjectivity'. However, what does it mean to young men who try to perform alternative masculinities in places like Cwm Dyffryn?

I now introduce the young men, their family backgrounds and outline their course choices in more detail. I then move on to look at how Bakers' and Ian's narratives highlight how similar performances of a traditional working-class hegemonic masculinity are displayed and refined within these mechanical and engineering courses. I then turn to look at the case study of Frankie, to illustrate how he attempted to subvert the gender norms of the locale, through participating in a more 'feminine' equine studies course.

Introducing Bakers, Ian and Frankie

I briefly introduced Bakers, Ian and Frankie when I was outlining the family biographies of the *Valley Boiz* in Chapter five. Whilst they were part of this wider friendship group, I am drawing on their stories separately here in order to illustrate some different post-16 possibilities and ways of performing young masculinities in the region. The three boys came from similar, but not identical backgrounds. They shared equivalent educational experiences, perspectives on their futures and had

family biographies that indicated a history of industrial labour and working-class occupations in auto-trades and in farming in or around Cwm Dyffryn.

Bakers told me he wanted to be a mechanic, which was an interest he shared with his father (and grandfather before him), who was a divisional director of a car body repair chain whilst his mother, with whom he had lived alone (he was an only child) after his parents divorced a few years previously, was a housewife. Ian lived with his younger sister and parents, on a small farm situated on the outskirts of the former coal-mining town and wanted to move into an engineering career. Frankie was the middle child, with an older and younger sister, and lived with his father, the director of an electronics company, and his mother, who worked as a secretary at a local school. Frankie aimed to work in the equine industry and owned his own horse called Gypsy.

Like the 'ordinary young men' in Ball et al's (2000: 93) study of young people and their post-16 choices in London, they could be regarded as 'compliant and conformist young men who want to do well' by staying in education and gaining good educational qualifications. However, they also had hectic social lives, numerous (hetero) sexual relationships and all three passed their driving tests very quickly after they turned 17, so cars were a major part of their life styles. Ian and Bakers had bought their own vehicles and Frankie drove his mother's car, which she rarely, if ever, actually used, so to all intents and purposes the car was his. All three had also rejected higher education as a route to fulfilling their career aspirations and saw their vocational courses as logical steps in moving into their chosen occupations. These young men then tended to place equal emphasis on their educational and social lives and, even though they had plans for the future, they were open to change as the study progressed.

While I am presenting these three young men as working-class, I acknowledge that their families occupy an ambivalent class position. Some of their parents show signs of social mobility through becoming directors of companies; however none of the young men's parents had any experience of higher education, with Frankie's older sister being the first in his family to go to university. They also seem to indicate a more privileged subject position than many of the other young men in this thesis; Ian's family, for example, owned their own land. In contrast, Bakers and Frankie

(who were also best friends) lived in small terraced houses a few streets away from others like Ieuan, Scott, Nixon, Bunk and Hughesy and all three participated in the same social activities as other young people in the area. Also, while Bakers and Frankie had been born and brought up in Cwm Dyffryn and lived close to each other in the town centre, Ian was originally from the South of England and had moved into the area only as a teenager with his parents to help run the family farm. Their positions then could be seen to indicate that their working-class identities were not homogeneous or static and demonstrate the complexities, struggles and possibilities on their performances of masculinity when the dynamics of a place or locale are integrated into the analysis (Burrows and Gain, 2006; Kenway et al, 2006; Ingram 2011).

Despite Frankie having initially had plans to leave the area to train as a jockey after he completed compulsory schooling (which I explain in detail below), all three boys returned to Cwm Dyffryn High School after their GCSEs in the September of 2008. Bakers enrolled on a BTEC first diploma course in motor vehicle studies and an AS in ICT; the other two studied for AS levels, Ian doing Physics, Maths and Electronics and Frankie opted for Physics, Electronics and Chemistry. However, during Year 12 all three started to look at options outside the Sixth Form and left after their first year to attend different courses and training programmes at different colleges of further education. Nevertheless, they remained friends with many of their former class mates and continued to 'hang out', or in the local vernacular 'bother', with the *Valley Boiz* on nights out in Cwm Dyffryn.

Bakers and Ian: Re-affirming traditional masculinities in VET

As I highlighted above, educational choices post-16 tend to follow stereotypical pathways and for working-class young men in particular the transition from school to work was once viewed as a cornerstone of adult masculinity (Willis, 1979; Collinson, 1988; Collinson and Hearn, 1996). As this thesis shows, in Cwm Dyffryn this process has been severely disrupted over the last thirty years due to de-industrialisation (see Tolsen, 1977; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell, 1995; McDowell, 2001; Winlow, 2004; Nayak, 2006). However, the courses that Ian and Bakers were enrolled on continued, in many ways, to promote the rituals and traditions of a masculine working-class culture of industrial workplaces. As Nayak (2003a) found with the 'Real Geordies'

and as Maruza (1997) illustrated with the 'Skill School Boys', Bakers and Ian prioritised post-16 educational choices that would reaffirm a traditional localised working-class version of masculinity through future (skilled) manual occupations. However, unlike the *Valley Boiz,* who also sought to do this (see Chapter five), Bakers and Ian seemed to have much clearer career aspirations and plans to move into industries through which they hoped to achieve these goals.

After completing Year 12 at Cwm Dyffryn High School, Bakers left and went to work as a local panel beaters garage for a few months. However, he admitted that he was bullied at the garage and after an incident when a colleague had thrown a spanner at him, he left and enrolled on an *Institute of Motor Industry (IMI) National Certificate in Vehicle Maintenance & Repair* course at Eastside College, around 10 miles from Cwm Dyffryn. The course consisted of both practical and theoretical classes on aspects of the motor industry and was conducted over a twenty-hour week. The students on the course were all white young men aged between 16 and 21 and drawn from towns around the college.

Whilst happy with studying at school, Ian wanted to progress to a paid Modern Apprenticeship rather than go to university. During Year 12 he applied for different training schemes and was accepted on a Modern Apprenticeship programme with *NPower*, a national electrical supply company. The scheme involved working at a power plant and studying (over 35 hours a week) a *BTEC National Diploma in Operations and Maintenance Engineering* at Southside College which was approximately 30 miles from Cwm Dyffryn. *NPower* paid its apprentices a monthly salary of around £800 (tax free[35]) and also provided free hotel accommodation near the college and power plant during term time. Each apprentice was also given meal vouchers to supplement their wages. One of Ian's lecturers explained how difficult this scheme was to get on to.

> They have a huge number of applicants each year, it's like ah… a 300-1
> chance of being accepted. This college is the only centre south of

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[35] Scholarships, exhibitions and bursaries held by a person receiving full time instruction as university, technical college or similar educational establishments are exempt from income tax by Section 776 ITTOIA 2005 (see http://home.inrev.gov.uk/eimanual/eim06237.htm accessed 6th September 2011>).

Rotherham that *NPower* use to train its apprentices. Only twenty are accepted into the scheme and the apprentices [all male] who come here, come from all over the UK. [*Ben, lecturer at South Side College]*

The scheme was competitive, required good grades at GCSE and experience was preferable. Final choices were made on the basis of interviews and presentations by applicants before they were accepted on to the scheme. The *NPower* apprentices were drawn from across the UK, aged between 16 and 19 and the scheme was generally a white, male only affair like Bakers' course. Of all the young men in this study, Ian seemed to be in the most advantageous position at this stage of their life course, receiving a wage to study full time, as well as being provided with meals and accommodation.

In the previous two chapters, I illustrated how schools as institutions offer a range of ways of being male which often draw on the localised resources available, regulating and producing idealised forms of masculinity through the 'official' and 'unofficial' curriculum of the school (Connell, 1989; Martino, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Frosh et al 2002). As Parker (2006: 695) argues, forms of VET like the courses studied by Bakers and Ian, also produce idealising forms of masculinity and act as a 'cauldron of masculine construction'. As I discussed above, in *Frame Analysis* Goffman (1974: 11) argues that performances of self and the definition of the situation in which they appear, occur through frames, which are defined as 'principles of organization which govern events - at least social ones - and our subjective involvement in them'. I suggest that it is through these frames that Bakers and Ian learnt to become future workers and where traditional forms of masculine behaviour were adopted and sanctioned. It was here that practices that define what it is to be a specific type of man were sustained and such versions of gender identity are performed in line with dominant stereotypical expectations within a locale's heritage. I turn now to the front and back region of these performances of masculinity, where traditional working-class masculinities were reaffirmed through the subject's practical and theory frames.

Front-stage: Practical performances in the garage and workshop

Each course had substantial opportunities for practical work and for the performance of masculinity based around images of 'maleness' fostered through rituals and

traditions of manual workplace cultures. Here Ian and Bakers learned not only the work based skills, but also the norms and values expected of individuals in their future workplaces. In the table below, drawing on Goffman's (1959: 32) 'expressive equipment', I summarise the key features of front that defined the situation during practical sessions.

Setting	Personal Front: Appearance	Personal Front: Manner
College mock garage or college workshop. 'Jobs' include working on cars or pieces of machinery and using relevant pieces of equipment (e.g. spanners, oil pans, jacks, car lifts, screwdrivers) to complete tasks.	Dust jackets or overalls. Safety boots. Goggles. Dirt, grease and oil on hands, injured fingers. Baseball caps, 'bling' (e.g. gold rings and chains, stud earrings).	Masculinity performed through displays of physical toughness, of working with machines and team work to solve problems.

Table 7.1. – *Expressive Equipment of front in Bakers and Ian's vocational courses*

Even though each course differed in content, there were huge similarities between the courses that framed the situation in similar ways. In the following extracts from my field notes, these practical settings are described. In the first I was in Bakers' mock garage; the second describes Ian's workshop.

> Jon [the lecturer] came to greet me at the college reception and shook my hand firmly and enthusiastically. He was white and must have been in his mid to late 50s and was wearing a shirt and tie underneath a blue foreman's overcoat. We chatted briefly about what I was doing and, dodging the cold wet rain and wind, we headed over to the mechanical engineering department. The buildings were quite new and two huge garages with big sliding doors stood at the entrance. As we walked through the doors, Jon showed me which one his class was in. As I entered the garage a few of the boys turned towards me and I noticed Bakers at one side next to the roll up garage doors pulling on a coat similar to the one Jon was wearing. He waved and I walked over to say hello. The large room had work benches at the front with a few computers

scattered around (one of these I was later to find out was used to get descriptions of engines and other information about vehicles) on top of them. At the front of the room there were also a lot of engine parts and tools and 7 cars were spread out across the garage, which the 12 boys present (all white) would work on in pairs and small teams. They were given different problems or 'jobs', as they were termed, to fix at the beginning of the lesson and if they finished these more from Jon. Two of the cars (a Volvo and a BMW) were high up on a 'two poster' and a 'four poster' lift. The others, a Ford Fiesta, a Peugeot 306, a Fiat Bravo, a Rover Metro and a small buggy (which I was later to learn had an Austin Mini engine in it) were crammed into the garage. As we chatted Bakers showed me his log book which recorded the different problems or 'jobs' he had worked on which went towards gaining his qualification.

[Fieldnotes 16th November 2009].

As the table above shows, the setting where the performance took place here was the mock garage. The cars that had been donated to the college, were worked on in small teams and the students were given tasks which are referred to as 'jobs' to complete, which were then tested and recorded as part of the formal qualification. As an apprentice Ian was also expected to work within a small team and was set 'jobs' under timed conditions.

Ian and I, along with the other apprentices, entered the workshop and headed to the locker room so that they could change into their overalls and work boots. I noticed that *NPower* must have provided their overalls as they had the company's logo and their own names embroidered on to them. As we entered the large workshop, the smells of oil, and grease hit me. It was an open plan room, with a low ceiling, few windows and with dozens of metal workbenches, pieces of ancient machinery and equipment laid out in rows. Ian introduced me to the teacher, Ben, who was taking this session. Ben told me that this lesson was to run until about 7pm and was a practical session where the apprentices would have to strip down a V Twin Compressor, change the paper gasket then re-assemble it. *[Fieldnotes 24th November 2009]*

The apprentices' personal display of front was indicated through their appearance. The boys worked in overalls and dust jackets, and through the course's defining tasks as 'jobs', there was a direct link to the motor and engineering industries. These processes also acted as symbols through which a specific version of masculinity was performed by connecting these tasks to the workplace.

> Jon gave the boys a 'job' which entailed taking off the outer casing of the engine on the buggy and getting into the engine itself to work on the timing disc. To do this other parts of the engine had to be removed first so that this could be achieved. I stood on and watched and helped where I could by holding a big industrial torch so they could look into the engine. After some initial difficulties with the problem about the timing on the engine, Jon came back over and took the boys across to part of an engine that was on a stand at the front of the garage. Here he explained the crank shaft rotations and talked about other processes the boys should know. After the process was explained, Bakers and his partner went back to the buggy to try and get on with whatever it was that they needed to do. They wrote nothing down (indeed nobody wrote anything down, apart from me) for the whole four hours I was in the garage.
>
> [*Fieldnotes 16th November 2009*]

As the fieldnotes above show, by using the body to solve problems physically, working in an environment of oil, grease and machinery, Bakers was accessing a space through which to perform and reformulate a specific version of masculinity (see Ivinson, 2012). No written notes were taken, the expulsion of 'mental' labour (and its associations with femininity) which Willis (1977) once stated was rejected by the 'lads', was a key feature of this process. However, on Ian's apprenticeship things were a little different and a contradiction to the traditional manual working practices appeared. In my fieldnotes below these subtle differences are made clear during a practical task in the college workshop.

> The group was separated into teams of two; they collected the compressors they had practiced on last week and moved to separate benches. By 3:35 Ian and his partner Miles has begun to strip down the compressor laying out the bits they were taking off the compressor in

order on top of the bench. Ian then whispered to me that he hadn't fully put it back together like the others had done last week, so it was easier to take apart! I noticed that they had to keep a written track of what they were doing as they went along, which differed to the boys on the motor vehicle studies class who didn't write anything down in the garage. I asked Ian about this and he told me *'we have to do this in every lesson, they like us to show our workings out and that… it's what we gotta do in the plant as well, show our steps like'* [*Fieldnotes 24th November 2009*].

In this extract Ian was encouraged to write notes as he went along, so this was something which was seen as a requirement of the 'job' he was given. This course seemed to be preparing and enhancing both practical and theoretical (written) skills of the students in the practical space. Whilst these skills were essential, it is also important to look at where they were honed more specifically, by going beyond the practical aspects of these courses.

Back-stage: Theoretical lessons

As I illustrated above, in the workshop and the garage, Ian and Bakers were using the space to reformulate and frame a specific version of working-class masculinity. Through an investment in physically working with machinery, using tools, climbing into and around cars or taking apart components and interacting with teachers and student in these environments, the front of the performance was conducted. The back-stage, according to Goffman (1959: 114), is where the 'capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated: it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed'. In the classroom where the theory aspects of their course where taught, stereotypical gender values were reproduced, which then had a bearing on the front of the performance. One way of doing this was through the interactions between the male teacher (many of whom had taught in 'industry' before progressing into teaching) and the young men. The other was through the use of gendered examples and sexist comments during theory lessons.

As Jon took the registration he told the group that any late comers would now not be able to join the class. At 9:20 two boys tried to enter the class late, and Jon told them both that this was past the deadline as they had already started. He said '*you got to learn to be on time boys, I won't accept latecomers and an employer certainly won't*'.

[Fieldnotes 17*th* November 2009].

The previous day Jon has taken the theory class on the mechanics course in the mock garage and handed out 'jobs' that needed to be carried out on different cars. He had generally let the young men complete the tasks with some direct, but not too much, interference. However, in the theory classes he assumed a stricter role, one that could be compared more to that of the role of foreman in a garage, especially in regards to time keeping. All lecturers on both courses were called by their first names or by the term 'butt', a localised version of the more mainstream colloquialism 'mate'. This, as I discussed in the Chapter 5, has historical links with the coal mining industry. The lecturers also tended to still wear the overcoats that they wore in the practical sessions to teach the theory classes. Looking out of place in the classroom rather than the workshop, these overcoats, streaked with oil and dirt accompanied by top pockets bulging with pens, pencils and the odd screwdriver, still provided a link back to the vocational space.

The firing orders for an engine were drawn on a flip chart which was at one side of the front of the room. When Jon asked a question about '*top dead centre*' this was initially met with silence from the class. He said aloud when the silence continued that it was '*important in prac [practical] as well as theory that you understand this*'. Whilst Jon talked I noted some of the words that he used and questioned the class about, *piston, pressure, momentum, compression, volume, cylinder, four stroke engine, degrees, bottom dead centre*, and how the '*function of the turbo charge is to increase volume of air into the cylinder*'.

[Fieldnotes 17*th* November 2009]

The skills that had been taught and utilised in the practical lesson and which reaffirmed a working-class form of masculinity differed considerably to those that were needed in the classroom environment. The set up itself was different, with the lesson being teacher-led from the front and the whole class being addressed as one instead of in little groups whilst working on different problems. The boys were also sitting still behind desks in a relatively clean classroom writing down notes, and answering questions that Jon was writing down or asking them from the board instead of from physical examples in front of them. In the workshop the ability to do something active and use the body in a physical way, to get dirty whilst carrying out a job, to feel a sense of achievement when finishing a difficult task and the necessity to move around and physically touch and feel the parts of the problem that needed fixing (and therefore constituted masculinity in that setting) were not needed here. Bakers and the other young men in his class were now expected to act far more like *The Geeks* and express a more academic, passive, less traditional form of working-class masculinity. The ability to switch between a working-class culture of the shop floor and the classroom environment that added to and honed these practical skills was met with some resistance and the young men seemed to struggle with this aspect of their course. However, the re-affirmation of a working-class shop floor culture was emphasised in other ways, despite the expectance of a more academic style of learning, through the use of gendered and sexist examples in their teaching.

There was a tendency for lecturers in the theory lessons to use gender stereotypical examples when explaining problems on white boards or when talking about issues to groups of students.

> I copied down the following from the board; 'the rack and pinion is geared to give the driver 'feel'. This allows *him* to make the major adjustments required to steer the vehicle and know where it is'.

[Fieldnotes 17th November 2009]

Here one of Bakers' other lecturers, Jack, clearly emphasises the embedded gender imbalance of the subject by referring to 'him' in reference to the driver. On Ian's course too, lecturers would often use gendered examples when explaining problems and the masculine, heterosexual environment of the engineering world was reinforced.

During a discussion about insurance and cars the teacher emphasised that the sales 'men' would target him with different cars than with boys. This was because he said *'you boys want different cars for cruising and pulling the chicks'* which made the class laugh.

[*Fieldnotes 24th November 2009*]

A certain amount of humour was also used in this all male environment and a level of rapport was evident between the lecturer and the students. Furthermore during theory lessons on the mechanics courses, one lecturer, Jack, whilst using gendered examples in his teaching, also kept up a constant flow of jokes, 'leg pulling' and examples of sexist language with the young men in the class.

I sat at the back of the room in between Bakers and another boy. As the class settled down, Jack asked how I was finding the college. He told me and the rest of the class that *'the beauty of Valleys life is that you can get divorced from a women and she's still your sister'*. This continued throughout the lesson with Jack cracking further jokes and stories to keep the class entertained. When he told the class '*my friend who had a glass eye was in a car crash, I told him he should have drilled a hole in it so that he could see through it',* there was a general groan from the young men present and Bakers rolled his eyes at me. As Jack waited for the class to copy from the board, he talked about how he hated women drivers. He suggested that the *'girly button'* on some cars (the city button which acts to make the steering lighter) were designed for women in particular because they couldn't reverse. This was then followed up with another joke to the class about how breweries have started putting female hormones into beer these days as it now means he can't drive and talks rubbish *[Fieldnotes 17th November 2009].*

Whilst the Modern Apprentices had a more structured teaching experience away from the workshop, the masculine environment was still fostered through banter between the students and the lecturer. In my notes below, humour is shown to be a big part of the experience and helped foster and maintain the frame.

The afternoon's lesson was about legislation and the internal and external factors affecting the world of work. One of the boys made a joke about the teacher using big words on the page being projected onto the white board and asked had he just cut and pasted the words off the Internet. To this the teacher replied in a rather sarcastic manner which he kept up for the rest of the lesson, '*cut and paste, how passé*' and went on to tell the class that he had downloaded it and then made it all into a PDF.

[Fieldnotes 24th November 2009].

These practices were a direct link back to a working-class occupational culture where male chauvinism, racist and sexist humour were a part of the industry and accompanied by practical jokes, coarse language and the 'piss take' (see Beynon , 1973; Tolson, 1977; Willis, 1979; Cockburn, 1983; Weis, 1990; Marusza, 1995; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1997). During one lesson I asked a lecturer why he thought there were so few girls on his Modern Apprentice course, and he replied quite seriously that it was because *'girls' bone density doesn't agree with engineering'.* The back-stage performances of hegemonic working-class masculinity away from the practical sessions might have been refined and relaxed from the young men's perspective, but a culture of machismo was still being constructed by their lecturers. Their gendered examples and sexist language served to structure and frame Ian and Bakers definition of the situation, which they would take into the practical sessions and eventually the workplace. I return to their outside world later in the chapter, but I now explore how traditional versions of masculinity can be subverted, by looking at the case of Frankie who was enrolled on a traditionally 'feminine' course.

Frankie: A tortured masculinity?

Whilst there is some literature on the historic significance of horses and masculinities (for example Weil, 2006; Latimer and Birke, 2009), the dominance of men in the role of breeding and showing horses at farming events (Hurn, 2008), the enduring mythology of the Wild West cowboy (Connell, 1995; Birke, 2007) and various pieces of research documenting the professional 'masculine' world of horse racing, these have not tended to focus on the actually performative aspects of masculinity in these areas (Cassidy, 2002; Larsen, 2006; Butler and Charles, 2011). There also appears to be a distinctive gap in research on young men (and women) in what Birke and Brandt

(2009) define as the more feminised 'horsey world' of dressage and the experiences of those who are enrolled on FE courses related to the equine industry (see Salisbury and Jephcote, 2010 for some insights into a general animal care FE course). Whilst men may dominate the money making positions in the horse racing profession, it is women who tend to dominate at the amateur level, in pony clubs, during dressage and horse jumping, developing deep relationships and thus creating feminised spaces (Cassidy, 2002; Larsen, 2006). Using the case study of Frankie I investigate what is it like to be a boy in a predominantly female area of VET. How does one perform masculinity in an area where aspects of normative femininity are rewarded during competitions and events within this section of the equine industry? Is this 'feminised' performance also continued away from the show ring? Here I show how Frankie's performance of masculinity is both contradictory and fluid.

When I first met Frankie while he was still in school during Year 11, he was friendly with some of *The Geeks* and especially close to Sean and Ruben. During a group interview, he outlined his initial plans for the future.

MW	So you're all coming back [to school] apart from Frankie. Where are you going Frankie?
Frankie	*Newmarket*, *The British Racing School*
MW	Ok and what's that?
Frankie	It's where all the jockeys go to learn to become jockeys
MW	That's something really different to what everyone else in this room is doing, how did you get into that?
Frankie	I've always had a thing for horses I wanted to be a jockey when I was really young and then when I got older I just thought nothing's going to come of it, then we went up to see the [racing] school and I had an interview and they accepted me. [*Group Interview 25th April 2008*]

At sixteen, Frankie was already a confident rider owning his own horse and working part-time in a local riding stable. Following this interest in horses he had enrolled on a prestigious jockey apprenticeship course at *The British Racing School* at

Newmarket[36]. Being small in stature, thin and with a passion for horses, he was ideally suited to the course. After he had gained his GCSE results, he had left for Newmarket with his sights set on becoming a professional jockey. However, things didn't go to plan. Enrolled on an initial nine-week introductory course, Frankie found the work and the long hours tiring and admitted to missing home; he only lasted a week before returning to Cwm Dyffryn. In an individual interview, which was conducted coincidentally almost exactly two years after he had outlined his original plans in the group interview, Frankie was quite reflexive about his decision and regretted coming home.

Frankie   I should have stuck it out, I say that all the time, I should have stayed there

MW   Yeah but at the time you weren't happy so you got to think about that

Frankie   Yeah but I think it was more about the fact that I missed…mates…home

MW   But it's a big thing to do mate when you're 16

Frankie   But if I went back now I'd think *stuff this*, I'm not going back to Cwm Dyffryn ever again and I probably wouldn't, but it just proves what two years can do, I'd be happy now, to go to Newmarket do the 4 or 5 weeks or whatever it was come back for the weekend, then go carry on with it, cos that weekend I'd see everyone and then it'd be see you in another month like [*Individual Interview 27th April 2010*]

The draw of home was strong and he returned to the town and began working again at local stables, and went back to school to start Year 12 in September 2008. He enrolled on 3 AS courses [Physics, Electronics and Chemistry] but he found returning to school a difficult experience as he had to keep explaining to other students and many of his teachers, why he wasn't at the racing school in Newmarket. He also struggled with his subjects and didn't do well in his AS exams at the end of Year 12, so by the summer of 2009 he had decided go to Westside College to do a *BTEC Level 3*

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[36] The British Racing School is based at Newmarket in Suffolk in the South-East of England. It is the principal centre for training in the horse racing industry, providing a large range of courses and training opportunities ranging from jockey apprenticeships, to equine management programmes. (See http://www.brs.org.uk/Home/ <accessed 7th September 2011>).

Diploma in Horse Management and left the Sixth Form at Cwm Dyffryn High school. In the September of 2009 he began the new course involving working with horses.

Front-stage: Practical performances in the arena

According to Birke and Brandt (2009: 190) 'the performance of gender, of femininities and masculinities, takes different forms in different "horsey" worlds'. Historically, in western culture, images of men on horses have predominated the representation of equines. From images of charioteers in ancient Rome, to mounted knights during the Middle Ages, through to cowboys and Indians in the Wild West and depictions of heroic cavalry charges during war, these representations are laden with meaning about masculinity (Jurmain, 1989; Birke and Brandt, 2009). However, women have just as long a history with horses, but have been depicted far less often than men in historic representation, apart from the exceptions of glorious heroines from battle as is the case with Boudicca. In the UK, traditional equestrian worlds are historically linked to rural communities, hunting, polo and aristocracy.

Again using Goffman's (1974) frame analysis to refer to the organisation of experience through which people learn and express themselves in VET, I turn to a course linked to a feminine side of the equestrian industry and explore the possibility of performing masculinities in multiple ways at different times. The following fieldnotes detail the experience of a typical riding lesson, aimed at enhancing students' riding abilities, horse control skills and show jumping expertise. In addition these notes also illustrate the gendered nature of the multiple bodily acts which are required during such a performance.

> I walked through the stables, which were rows of metal cage like blocks filled with hay, but were for the moment empty of horses. As I rounded the end of the last small stable I came across the big gate to the arena. The arena was a large sheltered hangar about the size of a football pitch, with a flat surface and a spectator stand running along the length of one side with the gateway to the stables on the other. At either end of the hangar were two large gates leading to the outer yards. The teacher was standing in the gateway shouting orders out to nine students who were sitting on horses in

front of her. With their riding gear on (helmets, body guards, boots) I couldn't make out Frankie until he waved at me with his riding crop. The lesson centred on show jumping, so I trudged across the surface of the arena -which was made up of a weird mixture of sand and little bits of rubber- to the other side to sit in the spectator stand to watch. I walked through the spectator gate and climbed over a few rows of seats so I could sit at the back.

The horses were trotted around the arena as a warm up which lasted for about 5 minutes. At the end of it the riders slowed down their horses and they were ridden gently around the edge of the arena. The teacher continued to shout out orders and advice from the middle of the football pitch sized surface as each rider passed. As the horses milled around the teacher began to set up some jumps in the centre of the arena. She told the class that those brave enough should begin the jumps. Frankie was jumping last and from my novice perspective he seemed to execute it well and the teacher praised him and told him *'nice line'* as he pulled away. On Frankie's second jump he again drew praise from the teacher who said he had a *'good canter'* and a *'good jump'* and on his third jump he was told it was '*really nice'.* A few of the other riders were having problems but Frankie seemed to be at ease with it. A second set of somewhat higher jumps was set up. This time the teacher seemed more critical with phrases being repeated to many riders such as *'rubbish line' 'rubbish turn' 'insecure length'*. Apart from the interaction with the teacher, the whole class seemed very individual. Each rider was involved in a relationship with their horse and there was not much talk between students/riders. Three jumps had been set up for the riders and Frankie was again jumping last. On the first jump he was criticised and told that his *'canter was wrong'.* On the second jump the horse refused to jump, which was the first refusal by a horse to jump all session. He turned the horse and tried again but the horse pulled up short again and just didn't seem to want to go. It whinnied and made a strange noise and Frankie pulled it over to one side and tried again and it still refused to jump. The teacher came over and moved one of the poles making up the fence and Frankie came back for a

fourth try and jumped it with ease. The final fence was jumped first time and the teacher told/shouted at Frankie to keep the horse walking around, it wasn't *'allowed to nap'* after its poor performance on the jumps. The teacher asked the students to bring the horses back into a line across the middle of the arena and after some general talk about what went right and what went wrong during the last hour the session ended and the horses were led back to the stables through the doors on the opposite side of the arena*. [Fieldnotes 19th November 2009].*

There are several similarities here to the practical spaces of Bakers' and Ian's course. Frankie had to adopt a certain uniform for riding, was responsible for a task and had to listen to instructions. The riding instructor, like Jon in the mock garage, used subject specific language and offered advice and support to students using this discourse. Whereas Jon had asked about *'top dead centre'* on an engine, this teacher talked about *'insecure length'* and playing around with the feel of the horse to *'activate it or steady it'*. The teacher also mentioned a few times about being *'brave'* with the horses. If a horse is not ridden properly the rider could be thrown and possibly killed. However, here a contradiction becomes evident. The notion of bravery would more often be linked to industry or manual work, where 'real' men are employed and stoic forms of masculinity are forged through physical work. The macho environments Ian and Bakers studied in would not appear to be this dangerous and risk of serious injury and death was highly unlikely.

Back-stage: The stables

Away from the front of the performance Goffman (1959: 115) says that while a performance can be openly constructed, the performer can also relax, 'he can drop his front, forego speaking his lines and step out of character' (1959: 115). Frankie begins to 'drop' some aspects of this equine performance as soon as he leaves the arena.

> I crossed the strange floor of the arena once again and exited through the side door and into the stables through the back rather than the main gate. The controlled atmosphere in the arena from the last hour was totally different to what was happening here now. The students were now really busy putting the horses away and taking saddles off and beginning the

process of cleaned up. I walked down the centre of the stables looking for Frankie, dodging girls walking past me carrying saddles, buckets of water and containers holding sponges and brushes. I found Frankie pulling a blanket on the horse he had been riding and smiled and said '*alright*'. Frankie and the other students in the noisy busy stables were just as responsible for the horses now as they had been in the arena. The duties they had to perform, I realised, was just as much part of the lesson as had been the riding.

After taking off the horse's saddle, putting on a blanket and taking off his own riding helmet Frankie walked to the other end of the stables and put the 'tack' and the saddles into the storage room. In the storage room Frankie started chatting and laughing with two girls; one of them happily told me quite loudly that the other girl was '*Frankie's girlfriend*' which both Frankie and the other girl looked quite sheepish about. We left the tack room and collected some water and a container holding different brushes and combs and headed back to the horse. Here Frankie sponged down the horse, which didn't seem too keen on being touched and kept moving around. The teacher came into the stable and mentioned to me that it was probably best that I stand outside as the horse had a bad habit of kicking out at people. After Frankie had sponged down the horse, (I was quite surprised by how much it had sweated) he put a blanket on it and closed the stable door. Frankie said he was heading down to the changing rooms (an old portacabin) to get out of his riding gear so I walked with him. On the walk to the changing rooms Frankie discussed how he hated having to wear jodhpurs whilst riding, as other boys in the college took '*the piss*' out of him. He had an agreement with the course leader to be allowed to wear tracksuit bottoms whilst not on the horse and around the college. Once Frankie had changed we walked back up to the stables and back to clean out the horse and get it '*ready for the night*'. Frankie started to sweep out the '*shit and piss*' from the hay that was spread quite deeply across the individual stable. Frankie told me that these horses were really spoilt and that normally leisure horses weren't this well looked after.

Whilst I was standing outside the stable looking and feeling again like a spare part and dodging the others walking around with brushes and wheelbarrows full of hay two students started yelling at each other. This just seemed to me like a bit of banter and 'piss taking' between friends but when one girl Kayde shouted out *'fuck off'*, the teacher, who was standing near me, screeched for both of them to stop what there were doing. She issued a severe reprimand to both of them about their language and behaviour. She said to Kayde that the language was '*not very ladylike*', expressing the gendered stereotype of dressage riders and that there should be '*no swearing*' in the stables. I wonder if Jon had tried to enforce this rule in the garage or his classroom, how well this would have gone down? Something else that disturbed me a little was the fact that the teacher was also drawing me into the conversation. The stables were now silent and everyone had stopped what they were doing and were watching, to this audience the teacher expressed the need to have '*discipline in front of a visitor*' i.e. me *[Fieldnotes November 19th 2010]*.

In the stables behind the scenes and away from the 'audience', which is normally the general public and competition judges, dressage riders engage with horses in a different way. Here Frankie and the other students on the course were also engaged in this practice. They get dirty, have to lift heavy hay bales, use trucks, tractors, handle spades, brushes, get wet, cold, get physically hurt through interactions with horses and get calloused hands. But once the riders leave the yard to compete, the front of the performance occurs and markers of femininity become more important. Frankie has to expand his masculinity here to incorporate aspects of femininity. Dressage itself dates back to men practising the classic horsemanship of the cavalry soldier, but in recent times this has been taken up by women (and a small minority of men) as a feminine pursuit and girls who practice it are characterised as girly girls, dressage queens and gender become marked by dress and one's overall attire (Birke and Brandt, 2009; Latimer and Burke, 2009). Generally in dressage competitions there is little difference in dress, but subtle performances of gender through the false bun hairstyle poking out of helmets, wearing of make up, colours of shirts under jackets, and pink ribbons on helmets. Thus performance in the dressage ring is not just about ability to jump and

carry out routines and movements but also frames performances of femininity and masculinity. Thus, when observed by judges on the horse, and when the rider receives marks during a competition, the top winners tend to embody the highest forms of femininity, and thereby, as Birke and Brandt (2009: 192), discuss go some way to 'rewarding a stereotypical valued feminine corporeality as being the most elegant, the most stylistic, even when others in the competition may be in fact better riders' (2009: 192). The front performance requires markers of femininity which can slip in the backstage in the yard or stables, but the gender divisions must be worked at and performed in the public domain (Latimer and Birke, 2009).

Away from the arena and stables, Frankie continued to contradict his on-horse feminine performance. The course was made up of around 20 students aged between 16 and 18 and apart from one other boy who was openly gay, Frankie was the only male on the course. As Bakers had put it when we had been discussing Frankie's course, *'he's got the pussy, we've got the nuts'*. Therefore he received a considerable amount of attention from many of the girls whom made up the rest of the class. He used his heterosexual identity to his advantage and slept with a few different girls, before starting a relationship with a girl in another year group. In the extract from my fieldnotes taken from a night out in a pub in Cwm Dyffryn, Frankie emphasised his heterosexual prowess and the reformulation of a hegemonic masculinity beyond the college, where his performance of masculinity expands to fill the space.

> As I sat down with my drink, Frankie seemed like he was itching to tell me what he'd been up to. He told me he'd slept with Vera from his horse course just before Christmas and then he'd started seeing this other girl off his course. Bakers pointed out that he had *'face raped'* her, which was met with laugher and disgust by the others who were around the table. Frankie was coaxed into telling me by the other boys about the incident. Whilst in bed with Frankie down in his grandparent's holiday cabin, she had told him she didn't like giving blowjobs, so in response to this he had knelt on top of her and held her arms down with his knees and forced his cock into her mouth. He followed it up with another story of how he had then belittled her in class which added to the nastiness of his behaviour towards her. He'd been sitting with Sherreefa in a theory lesson and Vera

had asked him why he'd deleted her from his Facebook friends list. He said it was because he didn't like her anymore, in response he said she told him that she didn't like him anyway. Frankie then said aloud to the whole class that she '*hadn't said that when she was sucking his dick'*. *[Fieldnotes 26th January 2010].*

Of course in this context and taken at face value Frankie comes across as arrogant, overconfident, brash, and with behaviour that was bordering on, if not outright criminal. He also appears to be interested only in his own image and sexual pleasure. However, it is also clear is that Frankie feels he has to compensate for the feminised form of masculinity on the horse, by showing his hyper-masculinity off around the others boys. This incident illustrates the continued pressure to perform multiple forms of masculinity that the young men in this thesis seem to experience. I bring these issues together and explore them in depth in Chapter 9.

Outside their vocational courses, one particular leisure activity that further illustrated the display of a hyper-masculinity, was that of car culture and in particular the 'boy racer' subculture. The role of car culture for Bakers, Ian and Frankie (some of the *Valley Boiz* were also heavily invested in it) was an important symbol of their masculine identities and highlights how their leisure-pleasures (Kenway and Hickey-Moody, 2009) were further embedded and embodied across the locale.

Outside college, performing masculinity through car culture

As I noted in Chapter five when I outlined some of the driving practices of the *Valley Boiz,* investigations into young men and their relationships with their cars (especially outside major towns and cities) have tended to point out the tragically high levels of injury and mortality rates, increasing levels of drink driving and instances of auto-theft that accompany youthful car cultures (Hartig, 2000; Walker, 2000; Carrabine and Longhurst, 2002; O'Connor and Kelly, 2006; Hickey-Moody, 2009). As Kenway et al (2006) point out in their study of young masculinities in Australia, car culture has an important place in the lives of young men outside the major cities not just because it provides a way of getting around often large distances when there is a lack of public transport, but also because it is integral to interaction between males within and across

generations. In the UK those who participate in this leisure-pleasure practice (Kenway and Hickey-Moody, 2009) are often referred to as 'boy racers' and there is a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1972) surrounding their behaviours [37].

The 'boy racer' is generally a young man, driving a modified car with an enhanced engine and with bodywork that has been adapted to include bigger spoilers, flashy alloy wheels and lower suspension. These adjustments to the vehicle are further accompanied by large noisy exhausts, bucket seats, blacked out windows and sound systems that blast out loud music. The 'cruising scene' that accompanies the culture occurs in retail parks, industrial estates and outside fast food chains (Bengry-Howell, 2005; Bengry-Howell and Griffin, 2010) and provides an area for young people to get together in their cars and to socialise with other like minded individuals, comparing modifications and testing out their driving abilities. However, these spaces are also a place where illegal activities such as speeding, racing and tricks such as doughnuts[38] are performed, bringing attention from the police and seen by older adults as a social problem (Hartig, 2000; Lumsden, 2009). Although it is a largely male-dominated arena, a growing number of young women are also increasingly likely to participate and become involved in the culture (see O'Connor and Kelly, 2006; Lumsden, 2009).

I suggest in this last section that car culture can be seen as another area or frame where the performance of masculinity for some of the young men in this thesis is displayed. Whilst as Hartig (2000: 37) explains 'there is nothing innately masculine or feminine about driving a motor vehicle', the activity in which one participates and the people who are involved in this activity, such as cruising or driving modified cars, help to construct a localised version of an acceptable form of hyper-masculinity, which is then performed in specific places and contexts. However, in an interesting

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[37] See for example http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2141818/A-case-special-branch-Boy-racers-car-tree-neighbours-fed-bad-driving.html or http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8619849/Boy-racer-reverses-down-dual-carriageway-to-escape-police.html# <accessed 19th August 2012>.

[38] A "doughnut" is created when the driver of a car rotates the rear of the vehicle around the front wheels continuously, thereby creating circular skid marks and tyre smoke. See http://www.modernracer.com/tips/rwddoughnuts.html <accessed 19th August 2012>.

contradiction it also enabled young men like Bakers, Frankie, Ian and others to escape and resist some of this hyper masculinity and retreat into their own safe space.

Cwm Dyffryn's youthful car culture tended to centre on the local *McDonald's* and in large supermarket car parks. Bakers and Frankie sometimes joined in with these meetings, but on the whole tended to stay away from the wider 'boy racer' community just driving around with each other or occasionally with some of the other *Valley Boiz* or Jimmy, whose story is outlined in the next chapter. Ian distanced himself totally from the scene and rarely used his car for cruising or driving around the area without a purpose. All used their cars for getting to their respective colleges, which were a considerable distance away from Cwm Dyffryn. But for Bakers and Frankie their cars were not just vehicles to move them from one point to another, more importantly they also enabled them to 'be seen' around the town.

> I arrived around 9.30pm and met Clive outside the rugby club who was chatting to Frankie and Bakers who were sat in a black Ford Ka in the small car park at the front of the club. I said hello as Clive was telling them how *'crap'* the party inside was and warned me that it would be a waste of time me going in. Bakers and Frankie had been in the town's theatre watching Bakers' girlfriend perform in a local play and weren't going to bother with the party. They told me that they were just *'cruising'* or *'driving round town'*. Bakers then asked Clive if he wanted a spin and he said why not, they asked me and I hesitated before getting in the back of the car. I wanted to get into the party, but I also didn't want to alienate these boys and I think Bakers wanted to show off his car to me. As I got into the back alongside Clive Frankie asked me if I'd rather be in the front as I was bigger, but I said no it'd be ok. We sped through the town centre and Bakers fulfilled every stereotype of a 'boy racer'. His driving was erratic and he tore around the street corners with 'banging or pumping' dance tunes coming out of loud speakers with the windows down and he and Frankie shouted out abuse to people as we passed. Over the loud music I asked Clive who sat in the back with me if he liked this sort of stuff and he said it was shit and preferred more indie stuff.
> [Fieldnotes 15*th* October 2009].

The fieldnotes above are taken from one evening when I was invited along to a party at a local rugby club that a lot of young people from the town were attending. Both Bakers and Frankie appear to be uninterested in it, preferring their own company and uniting through a more risky leisure practice than drinking and dancing. As the *Valley Boiz* did in Chapter five, they used the vehicle here as a front symbol of a hyper masculinity, driving laps around the town at high speed, showing off through their driving and playing loud music and shouting abuse out of their windows at passers by. Through sound and speed Bakers, Frankie and Clive, who was there along for the ride, were able to imprint their identities in the local space. The car is an integral part of this display and acts as a symbolic signifier of who they are to others in the area. Their ability to roam around the town shows a degree of control over what they do when outside college and enhances their masculinity status.

> As usual Bakers talked quite a lot about cars. I do struggle with these conversations as I don't really know that much about them and if I'm honest not that interested! He showed me a video clip on his phone that he had taken of his speedometer. The short clip showed his speedometer reaching over 110 miles per hour when he was driving on a motorway down to Swansea. *[Fieldnotes 2nd March 2010].*

Bakers had an enormous amount of knowledge about cars. He spoke quickly and used a lot of technical language to describe what he had done, or what he wanted to do with the car. When he showed me the video clip of him speeding, I asked him if he was scared when he drove at such high speeds and wondered if he thought about how dangerous is was. Bakers said that he knew he was a good driver and that he would never speed in an area where it wasn't safe to do so. On the motorway he felt in control and although he was aware of the dangers of driving fast, suggested that the real danger came from others who might be around him who were driving with less concentration. His connection to cars and machinery both through his course and outside of it, was an interest he shared with his father and they often spent time together fixing or tinkering with their vehicles. This not only had a direct influence on his chosen career plans and what it meant to be a certain type of man, but was a way to spend time with his father who he no longer lived with, after his parents' divorce.

Car culture is full of competitiveness and for some marginalised young men in Cwm Dyffryn, it was a way of displaying skill and agility though speed and allowed for a degree of power to be exerted over others and the town. However, it was also a way of bonding and cars could be used as a form of escapism and freedom. In my fieldnotes below the inside space of the car allowed Bakers and Frankie to relax some of the hyper performance displayed whilst driving or when they were with other young men. Inside their cars (both tended to ride together in one car) their friendship become quite close, engaging in intimate conversations about thoughts, feelings and problems they were going through.

On the journey up to Cwm Dyffryn Bakers expressed how happy he was that he was now single. He told Frankie and me that he had dumped his ex because she had said that he wasn't good enough for her. He talked about the phone conversation he had with her when he had *'ended it'* with her. Frankie and Bakers then went on to tell me about how Bakers had real *'anger management'* issues. Bakers said he had gone to the doctors a few times and had been given *'pills'* to try and subdue these problems. However, the pills had made him depressed and he had *'chucked them out of his car window'* one day so that he didn't know *'where the fuck they were now'* and didn't take them anymore. I asked him if he could remember when it had all started, but he seemed to think he had always had it. People he didn't get on with or *'wound him up'*, made him angry or created what he called a *'rage'* or a *'feeling'* inside him that made him react and freak out. This had meant that he had starting carrying a knife for his *'own protection'* as he put it, which worried me a little, but he quickly said that he didn't carry one any more. Feeling a little disturbed by some of these issues Bakers had mentioned I tried to ask if he had been offered counselling for any of it and he said he hadn't. He said he didn't talk about it much not even to his parents, but they did know about his problems as once when he was shopping with his mother in a nearby town, he had head butted someone who been trying to sell something to his mother in the street! *[Fieldnotes 12ᵗʰ February 2010]*.

The safe space inside the car is an area for Bakers to share some real intimate parts of his life (see also Lumsden, 2009). He talks about his depression problems and the anxiety he faces when around other people without feeling as if he will be openly judged or ridiculed. However, there is not a clear demarcation line between when he is being open about issues that affect him and moderating the story by emphasising more macho acts, such as head butting someone, even with his close friend. Multiple presentations of self are going on within the confines of the car and it is possibly the only space where these thoughts and feelings can come out at all and he can begin to articulate himself in a different way.

Conclusion

While many of the other young men in this thesis received their A level results in August 2010 and prepared to go off to university, Bakers, Ian and Frankie were due to return to college to complete their courses. In Ian's case his apprenticeship would last for another 3 years. For Bakers and Ian (like the *Valley Boiz*) I have suggested that their courses were a way of continuing the legacy of the region's industrial past through 'masculine' affirming courses and future occupations. For Frankie his involvement in a 'feminised' educational area brought with it risks, and away from the feminised front performance that some aspects of the course demanded, he sought other ways to reaffirm a dominant version of masculinity. Alongside their educational courses one of their main leisure-pleasures that I have discussed in this chapter, was that of car culture. Here a showy, hyper performance of masculinity was displayed through the risky driving practices of the 'boy racer' and being seen around town in their cars. This enabled them to imprint something of their identities on the locale. Interestingly, what I have also shown is that the inside of these cars also acted as a space to escape from the very macho displays that their driving and some aspects of masculinity their courses fostered. It was a space to relax from the tension of having to perform a specific version of a masculine self and be with a close friend in a safe space.

Chapter 8

Jimmy the Chameleon: Multiple Performances of Self.

Introduction

In the previous three chapters I outlined the diversity of young working-class masculinities within and beyond educational institutions in a post-industrial community. Drawing on Goffman (1959, 1974), I have argued that in a variety of settings, spaces and in different social interactions, multiple regions of masculinity are displayed by these young men through front and back-stage performances. What this thesis has also shown is how the history of the locality has played a significant role in how certain forms of masculinity emerge. This chapter explores the issue of multiple aspects of self further, with a detailed case study of one working-class young man called Jimmy and his transitions through post-compulsory education, which as Chapter five highlighted, is a relatively new transition to adulthood for the majority of young people in the locale. Here I consider the pressure he is under to perform masculinity in different ways, in different settings and with different audiences. Throughout I focus on the conflicts he faces in trying to achieve both academically, with aspirations of progressing to university, and also working hard trying to become a successful athlete. I explore if the challenges of working hard academically and at his chosen sport are simultaneously met with other pressures to achieve a socially valued form of masculinity through engaging in risky leisure pleasures (Kenway and Hickey-Moody, 2009). Here I investigate the difficulties of trying to achieve on many different fronts and how continuing in education can create alienation as one transitions towards adulthood.

By focusing on one case study, I explore in detail how one working-class young man is being demanded to perform multiple masculinities at this particular moment in his life when he is negotiating multiple transitions. This story also acts to draw together many of the themes from the previous chapters in this thesis that show that the performances of young working-class masculinities are not straightforward practices and the important role of history and place in decision making.

Code-shifting and multiple performances of self

There have been multiple studies involving boys and young men over the past few decades that have focused on the practices and processes that construct dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity and the pressure to perform masculinity in certain ways (see Connell, 1989; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1997; Frosh et al, 2002; Parker, 2006; Pascoe, 2007). As detailed in the previous three chapters of this thesis, this pressure for young men in Cwm Dyffryn to perform an acceptable version of masculinity was often displayed through acts of hardness, banter, sporting or driving prowess, sexual storytelling, drinking, heterosexual desires and by studying certain educational subjects (see also Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Martino, 1999; Renold, 2001; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Parker, 2006). Even *The Geeks*, who occupied a non-hegemonic position in the social hierarchy of the school and deviated from normative displays of masculinity, felt this burden to conform as the trip to the strip club for Sean's birthday showed. However, other studies conducted both inside and outside the school with young men have illustrated that young men's identities are quite fluid and complex and that there are possibilities to construct alternative masculinities that are not necessarily subordinated or oppressed (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Renold , 2004; Swain, 2006; Anderson, 2009; McCormack and Anderson, 2010). However, as Heward (1996: 41) has argued, a difficult question that arises when looking at masculinity is 'the extent to which individuals are constructed by their structural contexts and how far they can build alternative identities despite their stigma'. Jimmy is dealing with such tensions and his story acts to draw attention to some of these discrepancies and also the extent to which history and place impacts on the performance of masculinity.

Goffman (1959: 35) suggests that 'when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society' and that these values can change from group to group.

> The self then as a performative character, is not an organic thing that has a
> specific location whose fundamental fate it to be born to mature and to

die, it is a dramatic effect, arising diffusely from a scene that is presented'
(Goffman 1959: 253).

This can, perhaps, be summarised best as there being many aspects to one's self. Nonetheless some of these aspects of self are more prominent in some situations than in others and actors must work hard not to reveal certain aspects in front of the wrong audience. As this thesis has shown, young men tended to belong to different groups and switched between front and back regions of performance at different times both geographically, intuitionally and during interactions with others around them.

Influenced by Goffman, Elijah Anderson (1999) in his ethnographic study of an inner city neighbourhood in the U.S, where most of the residents were poor African Americans, found that members of the community characterised themselves and each other as coming from either 'decent' or 'street' families. Those from 'decent' families tended to be more financially stable, socialise their children to accept values of hard work, respect for authority, with a deep religious faith and a belief in education as a way for self-improvement. Those from the 'street' families were more likely to lead lives less secure than their 'decent' street counterparts, with drug and alcohol problems and where violence was a part of everyday life. However, he also found that some young people behaved in different ways according to the situation they were in (Goffman, 1959). Anderson (1999: 98) therefore suggests that 'the child may learn to code-shift, presenting himself one way at home and another with his peers'. 'Decent' young people saw the ability to code-switch as crucial to their survival in this violent inner-city neighbourhood.

> They share many of the middle-class values of the wider white society, but know that the open display of such values carries little weight on the street: it doesn't provide the emblems that say, 'I can take care of myself'. Those strongly associated with the street, who have less exposure to the wider society, may have difficulty code-switching: imbued with the code of the street, they either don't know the rules for decent behaviour or may see little value in displaying such knowledge. (Anderson 1999: 36).

The inner-city success story therefore requires the ability to code-switch, to play by the code of the 'street' with the 'street' elements and by the code of 'decency' when in other situations. Those most associated with the 'street' see little value in gaining middle class knowledge. How far the young people went to become 'street' depended on their socialisation at home, their own opportunities and their own decision making processes and life chances (see also Juette and Berger, 2008).

Reay (2002) illustrates many of the same processes in her study of Shaun, from an inner city council estate in London. The case study explores how Shaun had simultaneously to balance up his academic school side whilst trying to also maintain an aggressive localised version of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), which, as in Elijah Anderson's study, is needed for survival in the socially deprived community he inhabits. However, Connell (2001: 8) has suggested that there are 'fixing mechanisms that limit the fluidity of identities' with class, as Reay (2002) indicates, being one such mechanism that can limit the effectiveness of such code-shifting. A second 'fixing mechanism' that has been emphasised throughout this thesis is the importance of place, as individual choices are made in the context of geographically and historically specific and differentiated sets of opportunities (see also McDowell, 2003). Nonetheless, as Goffman reminds us, the 'self, then, is not an entity half-concealed behind events, but a changeable formula for managing oneself during them' (Goffman 1974: 573), so despite these barriers and disadvantaged social class position, as I show in this chapter, Jimmy is still involved in a constant practice of code-shifting which results in a form of chameleonisation occurring.

Chameleonisation of masculinity

Chameleons are a distinctive and specialised species of lizard that are famed for their ability to change skin colour[39]. Although not all species of chameleon can actually change their skin tone, and there is a base colour for all, some can camouflage

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[39] See http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Chameleon and
http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngexplorer/0210/articles/mainarticle.html <accessed 1st June 2012>.

themselves to fit in with almost any habitat (Le Berre, 2009). While this colour change can be used as a form of protection from predators and can alter depending on mood, light and temperature it is also used as a form of communication to potential mates or as a defence mechanism to warm off rivals. As this thesis has shown, young men move between groups and adopt different performances of self, but for most there does seem to be some sort of base identity, or to use the chameleon metaphor, a base colour that most young men perform as a front region to others e.g. geeky masculinity. Although chameleons tend to be shy, solitary creatures and Jimmy was a very sociable young man and well liked, I think his performance of masculinity in many ways further reflects the chameleonisation process and the metaphor is useful for trying to understand and make sense of his multiple performances across multiple fronts. But as I will go on to show, this act of chameleonisation is hindered by the expectation of masculinity fostered by the locale and the working-class industrial heritage of the region. Ultimately the barriers Jimmy faces impact on the success of his multiple performances and his future is uncertain.

Being Jimmy

His teachers first introduced me to Jimmy during the initial phase of research at Cwm Dyffryn School (Spring 2008). He was in the top set for most of his subjects and a promising athlete competing at both cross-country and track events (800 and 1500 metres). The local paper had written about him and tipped him to appear for the Welsh Commonwealth team in the near future. Unfortunately due to a small timescale (six weeks) I was unable to spend as much time with Jimmy as I would have liked and therefore did not have the opportunity to discuss much about his life or observe him in many classroom interactions. Due to Jimmy's absence from school, he was not included in the friendship group interviews I conducted on the last day of fieldwork. So it was not until I returned to the school in September 2009 that I really began to get to know Jimmy and experience the multiple tensions he faced at school and in his social life.

He was one of the oldest in his year group and lived with his parents and younger brother in a small terraced house a short distance from the school on the edges of Cwm Dyffryn. Jimmy's father was a train driver and his mother was a ticket sales

assistant at a nearby railway station. Both were from the town and had left school at a young age, neither having been to university. He was short at around 5ft 7, slim, with blonde streaks in his stylish quiffed up hair, which, coupled with his good looks, meant he bore a resemblance to the America teen actor Zac Effron[40]. This resemblance was a source of banter between him and his best friends (Bakers, Frankie and Ian) but it was something that he said did not bother him too much, as it tended to bring him attention from girls in the town. Jimmy was polite, softly spoken, well-mannered and seemed popular with teachers and the majority of his peers. His main interest outside school was his running, which connected him to his father. With whom he went training with on occasions and who had also been a successful long distance runner in his youth. As the study progressed Jimmy, supported by his father, began to run for different clubs and took part in competitions both at regional and national level.

His other interests included music and, along with learning to play the guitar, he told me that he liked a wide range of music spanning across different decades and this was a key part to his identity. Outside school he usually dressed in T-shirts with the names of different rock bands on them and often went to watch local bands in the pubs around the town. During the summer holidays between Year 12 and 13 along with some friends he'd also been to the *Sonisphere* heavy metal music festival[41]. He still wore the entrance wristband months after the event, which he said was to remind him how good it had been. When I asked him about his favourite bands he told me:

> Well I like *Metallica*, *Jimmy Hendrix*, *Black Sabbath*, *Led Zeppelin*, ah *The Beatles* they got to be in there, *ACDC*…ah there's too much choice man, *Avenged Sevenfold* also don't mind a bit of *Bullet … Joe Bonamassa*.

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[40] Zach Effron is an American actor who started in the Disney franchise High School Musical. (See http://www.zefron.com/ <accessed 10th October 2011>).

[41] *Sonisphere* is a large heavy metal festival which tours Europe during the summer months. (See http://uk.sonispherefestivals.com/ accessed <accessed 23rd October 2011>).

During the early stages of the study Jimmy was constantly changing girlfriends and had a reputation amongst his friends as being a bit promiscuous or as they termed it a 'playa'.[42] This was something Jimmy always denied and would stress that he was only really looking for 'the one' and that it was girls who tended to mess him about, not the other way around. Towards the end of his time in the Sixth Form, things became more serious with one girl, Rhiannon, and as he began to spend more time with her, he distanced himself from his male friends and saw less of them. This was something that had also occurred with Brad in Chapter five (see Frosh et al, 2002).

I now address these different areas of his life in more detail, drawing out the tensions that came with the multiple performances of self that Jimmy presented across multiple fronts. I begin with his academic struggles and his desire to go to university, before moving on to look at some of the risky leisure pleasures through which he performed a more traditional, macho masculinity and concentrate on how this impacted on his athletic performance. I finish Jimmy's story by addressing some issues around the relationship he had with his best friends and with different girls to draw attention further to the anxieties and pressures within his life. I do this in order to highlight how hard it is for working-class boys like Jimmy from post-industrial communities, who have to juggle lots of different responsibilities in order to try and achieve their goals and make a successful transition into adulthood.

The academic achiever

Jimmy had done well in his GCSEs and achieved 10 A*-C grades and returned to the Sixth Form in September 2008 to study Biology, Chemistry and Physical Education (P.E) for AS and subsequently A level. He was a peripheral figure in the *Valley Boiz* friendship group (as he had played football and rugby with many of them when he was younger) but continued to socialise with them both inside and outside school. His best friends were Ian, Bakers and Frankie but when all three left at the end of Year 12

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[42] A 'playa' can be described as a person almost exclusively a man, who is competitive and gregarious by nature, a bit like a Casanova (See http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Playa <Accessed 02th November 2011>).

(see Chapter Seven) he began to find school a difficult place to be—especially as many of the *Valley Boiz* were not taking the same subjects as him.

Jimmy	It's not as good as the old days when you're in Year 9 or 10 like
MW	Right… why do you feel like that then?
Jimmy	Because like Frankie and Bakers and that aren't here cos they were the ones I used to bother with the most…but now it's just seems one big group
MW	Right
Jimmy	And like when Hughesy, Birdy all that come in…when they come in its fine like…but the problem is they don't hardly come in

Jimmy was expecting to do well by the school and he wanted to go to university to study sports science, with the eventual aim of becoming a professional athlete or a P.E teacher. However, without his close friends in school and with many of the *Valley Boiz* in the BTEC classes as opposed to his own A level ones, Year 13 became a struggle. As these field notes illustrate he found himself increasingly alienated and alone during his A level classes.

> The chemistry lesson only had a small number of students present. The class was made up of Sam, Ieuan, Leon, Nixon, Sin, and Jimmy, whilst Abby and Carys joined the class from another school in the area as part of the combined schools Sixth Form programme. Jimmy was sitting on a bench on his own whilst the others were clustered around the front bench. I sat next to Jimmy on the middle bench and we chatted whilst the homework was passed around. He suggested that life had got a bit better for him since my last visit, but still didn't feel like he was free enough, but wanted to leave school as he felt like he was in limbo.

> *[Fieldnotes 2nd October 2009].*

We can see from these fieldnotes that Jimmy was sitting alone, a practice he often did when in his A level science lessons. As Jimmy got older and his former certainties had been dislodged, he had fallen out of place. His friends had moved on, but there

was tension between him and those who remained around him. As his final year in the Sixth Form progressed, he later told me that he felt rather irritated by some of the others in his class. When I asked him more about this he told me he found the attitude of *The Geeks* towards him annoying.

MW You were saying about science, didn't you say that you don't feel comfortable in there sometimes?

Jimmy It's just that there's an attitude from um, like Ieuan and that, they are looking down on me type of thing, like when I get a question wrong or something a snide comment comes out and they kind of go (sighs loudly) and they put their heads down [on the desks] come on we're 18 now …also its trial and error you're not going to get anywhere if you don't try…

MW Do you feel that if you shout something out and you're wrong, you think some people may have a dig at you?

Jimmy Um I know they'll dig at me… but it still won't stop me half the time I know some of the stuff the teachers on about so it don't bother me

MW So is that the same in P.E then?

Jimmy Ah no it's tidy there like, good boys I got in my class, cos I think they are into sport as well, you know you get that like sort of sport personality if you get what I mean, extrovert where as the non athletic types are a bit ummm… a bit ahh… all for themselves I find. You got to do what they want to do type of thing, like they other day when I was in the library I was just minding my own business and I heard Alan said that Sam called me inferior because I'm doing lesser subjects than him sort of thing!

As I showed in Chapter five when I focused on the lives of the *Valley Boiz*, to be a 'proper' boy or man from the valleys, an archetype of masculinity associated with an older world of industrial labour and 'masculine' ideas of male embodiment is still the default reference point. Jimmy's efforts to balance up his academic performance with other sides of his life are met with conflict. He feels that *The Geeks* belittle him in class when he tries to answer questions asked by the teacher and he is also mocked through his choice to study P.E by Sam, which as a subject that uses the body, is a

direct link to a manual world of labour. Of course this is the very area where he excels and the sporting sphere, where he feels comfortable, is a space which most of *The Geeks* avoid and distance themselves from. It is also clear how insightful Jimmy is in recognising the different forms of masculinity that are on display when he discusses the differences between the 'sports personality' e.g. the 'top dog' macho, working-class, local hegemonic form of masculinity, with those who he refers to as 'all for themselves' e.g. the individualistic, academic achieving, middle class aspiring geek. He then goes on to inform me how he felt *The Geeks* further criticised his subject.

MW	Do you think there's a type of snobbery then?
Jimmy	Yeah... definitely
MW	So the subjects you do in school, other people either look up or look down on you maybe?
Jimmy	Yeah apart from P.E like, it's a good subject... and there's more to P.E than those boys [*The Geeks*] think as well! Cos I still get comments off um saying that P.E isn't a subject mun, you know…
MW	(laughs) Who said that then?
Jimmy	Ha well them again really, Ieuan, Sam and them in Biology
MW	Even though you do a lot of biology as part of P.E don't you?
Jimmy	Yeah and history of sport...there's a lot, I can't wait to get out of here!

Without his best friends in his class he was open to ridicule and felt out of place, but Jimmy continued to work hard with the hope of being the first one in his family go to university. However, when discussing his future and university options, it became clear that Jimmy was adamant that he wanted to attend somewhere local, despite initial ideas about applying to universities further away from Cwm Dyffryn.

MW	So um when you decide to leave [Sixth Form] you're going to go to uni?
Jimmy	Yeah
MW	And you're going to go to UWIC [University of Wales Institute Cardiff]?
Jimmy	Hopefully yeah

MW	And what other choices have you…
Jimmy	Um… Glamorgan is my um (click fingers) insurance is it?? And I turned down Swansea
MW	Ok… and where else did you apply?
Jimmy	Um well just those three
MW	Ahh right… cos you had six choices didn't you?
Jimmy	Five I could choose yeah
MW	Five right…
Jimmy	Um cos I wanted to go to America like but…
MW	Right
Jimmy	But I didn't bother in the end
MW	Maybe you could…
Jimmy	….didn't bother applying or nothing like….
MW	Because you mentioned Bath to me a while back didn't you?
Jimmy	Yeah I was thinking of Bath Uni, … but it don't entertain me. UWIC's just as good as… it's on your doorstep init…Welsh people…and this is my home like, do you know what I mean?
MW	Yeah, do you feel then that they would be a bit different up in Bath then?
Jimmy	(Laughs) Um well you know what it's like when you go to a different country, also different sense of humour… like with UWIC or Glamorgan, I just do my work, come home chill out around here...

Jimmy seems to be trying to reconcile his aspirations to go to university and also to stay at home in a place where he feels comfortable (see Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003 for a discussion about working-class girls who also feel this pressure). As illustrated above, Jimmy struggled with the environment of the A level science classroom and his classmates' attitudes towards him. From his experiences it is clear that he does not fit in with *The Geeks*, who are themselves marginalised in the community for being academic achievers, but what it further shows is how his potential is hindered by his experience of studying without a close friendship group for support. Jimmy felt lonely and often belittled, battling against his classmates, whilst trying to do well in the subject in order to progress into higher education. This is something which can be compared to his descriptions of Bath University, when he

mentions that he thought people there might have a *'different sense of humour'* and resigns himself to staying local by opting for UWIC (which is based in the Welsh capital) as his first choice. He compares his experiences of being with *The Geeks* in the science classes, to how he perceives students could be in Bath. Financially of course this decision might make sense and he can live at home, but his choices also illustrate the limits of his understanding of the university system and the opportunities that could present themselves to him by applying to a more 'traditional' university like Bath, which has an excellent reputation for sports science[43].

The Party Boy

Whilst trying to achieve academically Jimmy was also caught in the position of trying to display a localised version of acceptable masculinity. As Year 13 wore on he went out at weekends and during the week drinking and partying with the *Valley Boiz*. He also bought a car from *Ebay* and took to driving around the town at high speed with Frankie and Bakers. However, when he went out with the *Valley Boiz* on nights out in the week, this affected his academic performance in class. As the extracts from my field notes below show, trying to burn the candle at both ends, or to perform a more macho masculinity, alongside a more studious position in the classroom, was not always possible.

> As I walked into registration I saw some of the *Valley Boiz* in the corner. When I joined Jimmy, Brad, Bunk, Tomo and Birdy they were chatting about a party they had been to in the rugby club the previous night. Jimmy was looking quite hung-over with a white face and dark bags under his eyes and was explaining to the others who had also gone out the night before, how bad he was feeling.

> Biology was the first lesson of the day and the class contained Jimmy, Ieuan, Leon, Nixon and two girls Abby and Carys from another school. The lesson was based on the human life cycle and sexual reproduction. From the beginning and throughout the lesson Jimmy struggled. This

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43 According to the *Guardian*, Bath was ranked 7th out of 67 universities in England and Wales that offer sports science as a degree (see http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/table/2011/may/17/university-guide-sports-science <accessed 4th November 2011 >).

seemed due to his hangover and not having done the notes he'd needed to do in order to catch up, as he'd missed the previous lesson. After around 50 minutes into the lesson the teacher suggested that Jimmy was half an hour behind everyone else which causes the others in the class to laugh. It seems that Jimmy's 'party boy' image and his popularity with everyone, certainly doesn't seem to be helping today. His hangover is definitely affecting his work and he seems to have to ask the teacher and the others for more help. Whilst they are waiting for Jimmy to finish off the diagram from the board, Leon shows the teacher his revision notes and the teacher marks the electronic register.

At 10.00am the teacher stops the lesson for a 10-minute break and the majority of the class head to the shop just outside the school gate. Jimmy follows a few minutes later after finishing the diagram. When he arrives at the shop, he buys a can of coke and before drinking complains that he feels really ill and states how hungover he is. On the way back Jimmy and Leon start discussing some chords from a song they had both been trying to play on their guitars, but when they return to the classroom Leon returns to his place on the front bench and the conversation is cut short. Back in the classroom the teacher goes through other parts of the reproductive process and the lesson continues as before, with diagrams on the board and the students making notes and answering questions. Towards the end of the lesson with Jimmy still showing signs of struggling due to his hangover, Carys mentions that this would be worthy of a Facebook status update which makes the others laugh and she criticises him for always drinking *[Fieldnotes 5th February 2009].*

This party boy image not only had an effect on his schoolwork, but also alienated him from *The Geeks* in his A level classes. As I showed in Chapter six, this is not to say that *The Geeks* didn't go out, but they tended to go out as a group on weekends or during the holidays when it would not impact on their school work. This acted to police and regulate their behaviour, something which Jimmy could not do if he was to maintain his standing with his wider peer group, so he began to fall behind in his academic work. Drinking was a way to maintain an acceptable symbol of manliness

and a connection to the heritage of the locale, that he was in danger of becoming disconnected from with by his investment in academic labour—and the hangover he was suffering was a symptom of this pull. His drinking also began to have an impact on his running and performance as an athlete.

The athlete

As is evident in my fieldnotes below, Jimmy took his running seriously. After spending so much time with him and discussing and reading about his continual progress in the local paper, I was interested to see him race for myself. When a trial for the Welsh schools team was held at a nearby athletics track towards the end of Year 13 accompanied by Ruben (see Chapter 6) I had gone along to support him.

> After eating lunch I said to Ruben we should head off and go and see Jimmy race. I parked just behind the running track and as we walked in, I asked the people at the table by the gate what time Jimmy was due to run. I was told shortly as the events were running ahead of schedule, so we sat at the back of the spectator stand amongst the younger pupils from schools across the valley, to wait.

> As we sat in the back row of the stand looking over the track to where the 10 or so runners were lining up for the 3,000 meters, I caught sight of Jimmy in a black and yellow vest with the number 22 pinned to the front, standing in the middle of the runners. From the beginning of the race he was out in front with another runner. For over 8 and a half laps he was neck and neck with the other runner and left the rest of the field far behind. Coming into the last lap he was still leading and held the other runner off virtually to the end of the race, but the other runner was too strong and made a surge for the line taking the race. I felt a little disappointed at the end for Jimmy who had told me in the morning that this was his last chance to get into the Welsh schools team. Ruben and I left the stand and walked to meet Jimmy at the end of the track. Jimmy's dad was there and he seemed slightly frustrated at Jimmy's 2nd place. After briefly chatting to Jimmy we left him to it as the atmosphere

between Jimmy and his father seemed rather tense. This was something Ruben commented on this as we walked away.

[Fieldnotes 5th May 2010].

During an individual interview we talked about the pressures he felt to go out and socialise and to run. However, as can be seen in the race above, to do both was not always successful.

Jimmy	Doing pretty well in my running like you know running for Wales and stuff but umm… in the past four months I'd say there has been a lot of socialising going on outside of it like…drinking and all that…but I got to get myself back on track been a week now, I know it sounds like I'm an alcoholic speaking but…but you got to start somewhere
MW	So you know when you're running and that, how many days do you run?
Jimmy	Six days a week I reckon
MW	And what or how much are you running?
Jimmy	About 10 miles or well about 8 miles a day on an average day, don't want to do too much too soon
MW	So you want to increase distance or speed or?
Jimmy	Um both really got to push yourself past your limits
MW	Umm when you're running like cross-country distances, what's your distance?
Jimmy	Four mile normal… but when I reach twenty it'll be um six miles
MW	OK… and how fast are you doing it?
Jimmy	Um for cross country it don't really matter about time like… just position, but umm when track season comes now, time will matter
MW	And you do six minutes on the track is it?
Jimmy	800 and 1500 metres
Jimmy	Yeah
MW	So when you do the running though, do you think it's a good way of coping with everything else that's going on?

| Jimmy | Umm because I've been doing it for so long I don't really think about it like that, but thinking on it or reflecting on it does help just switch off, get into a rhythm and don't think about anything else |

While the running was a form of escape for Jimmy and he said that when he was doing it he could stop thinking about other things, drinking was again having an impact on his performance, this time his athletic ability. He talks with knowledge about his sport and seems to know what is expected of him as an athlete, however drinking with his friends impacts on how good a sportsman he can be. This is also made clear when I asked him what his father thinks about his drinking:

Jimmy	Umm he hasn't said much but he said it won't help your running let's put it that way!
MW	Do you find though that it does mess it up a bit?
Jimmy	Ahhh yeah definitely you just feel tired all the time can't be bothered to do anything
MW	Must be difficult like when the boys are drinking?
Jimmy	Yeah yes it is, but um touch wood I won't do it for a long time now
MW	I think if you balance it though, it should be alright?
Jimmy	Humm, yeah just like you know not every weekend like, it's going to be hard let's put it that way! Well I want to get in good shape for the summer now…so if I start now, it'll get easier
MW	It must be hard when all the boys are going out...
Jimmy	Yeah I'll have to start going out and not drinking like which is going to be hard like

Jimmy's constant chameleonising takes a huge amount of effort to maintain, and the contradictions in his multiple performances of masculinity are clear. On the one hand, Jimmy is trying to complete his studies and be a successful athlete whilst, on the other, he is conforming to the localised working-class practices of masculinity in order to be accepted and maintain his relationship with close friends and the wider peer group. The overall consequence of this seems to be that he doesn't really fit in comfortably with either position. I turn now to look at a fourth area of his life where

he tries to juggle these positions further—that of his friendships with his close male friends and relationships with girls.

Friendships and girlfriends

Although Jimmy had a large group of acquaintances spanning across his school, sporting and social life, he had a relatively small circle of close friends. As noted above, these were Frankie, Bakers and Ian, whose lives I have already outlined in some detail in the previous chapter. After they had left the Sixth Form, Jimmy still spent a considerable amount of time with them through other activities such as meeting up with them at night to drive around in their cars together, or by going to the pub. During Year 13, alongside his schoolwork and his athletic training, Jimmy was also employed at a local sports hall as a receptionist during weekday evenings. He revised during these evenings and found it a place away from distractions. However, on some nights his mates would call in, often uninvited, to see him and disrupt his peace.

> Jimmy was surprised to see us and as we entered the corridor of the sports hall exclaimed '*what are you doing here?'* Frankie and Bakers said they'd come to surprise him and keep him company for the last 30 minutes of his shift before going onto a party held in a nearby club that was being held as a fundraiser for another schools' end of year prom. Jimmy and I sat on a table outside the reception area of the sports hall, whilst Bakers and Frankie starting kicking a football back and forth in the corridor. Soon after this we went and sat down in the reception room and the boys discussed which girls were going and began to talk about whom they wanted to 'pull' at the party. As I sat on a chair at one end of the small room, Jimmy leaned against the desk which had the computer, his abandoned books and revision notes spread across it. He was wearing a white T-shirt with a picture of Jimi Hendrix on the front with grey baggy jeans and trainers and said he was going 'casual' to the party and not bothering to change. Bakers and Frankie, who by this time had started messing around with a hammer and a screwdriver they had found on a nearby shelf, were dressed rather differently. Frankie had put in a silver earring in his left ear, spiked up his hair and was wearing a grey trendy

cardigan with tight skinny jeans. Bakers was wearing a black *Fred Perry* polo shirt with the collar turned up, alongside the same sort of tight skinny jeans that Frankie was wearing and both had obviously tired to make the effort. After taking the ball out of the computer mouse and throwing it around the room much to Jimmy's annoyance, Bakers proceeded to stick the screwdriver into the wooden floor and hammer it in with the hammer! The handle of the screwdriver then split which caused him to stop and laugh. Jimmy at this point tried to say with as much authority as he could muster that *'enough was enough boys, this is my job here like'* and wrestled the screwdriver off Bakers.

At around 9pm Jimmy closed up the sports hall and I jumped into his car, which was parked outside, with him. Jimmy had recently purchased his first car off *EBay* for £1,500 and was proud of it, which like Frankie's car, was the typical 'boy racer'. As we prepared to move off a plastic bottle hit the side of Jimmy's car. Jimmy got out and shouted at the other boys who had driven a little way across the car park. I don't think it was deliberately meant to damage the car or even if it had been thrown by the others (who denied it) but it annoyed Jimmy and when he got back into the car he said he was *'pissed off with how childish they were being tonight'* and as we drove to the party he wished that he wasn't going, but because this girl he liked would be there, he felt he had to go [*Fieldnotes November 4th 2009*].

During the evening Jimmy was again caught between his school studies (revising whilst working) and his loyalty to his closer mates who had left school and, as the last chapter made clear, were all enrolled on vocational college courses. The messing around with the screwdrivers and the mouse ball, which Jimmy calls *'childish'*, impacted on the time he had to catch up on his school work given his other commitments such as his running and social life. It is these other commitments however that distance him from the majority of his fellow A level classmates and make his school life quite miserable. He also indicates, at the end of the fieldnotes here, that he was only going to the party all three were heading to, because there was a girl he liked there. The pressure to maintain a heterosexual masculine identity was a

constant anxiety for Jimmy and he had to again switch between multiple performances of masculinity.

During Year 12 and into Year 13, Jimmy had had an on-off relationship with a girl a few years younger than him, but when she broke off the relationship he found it a difficult time and turned to going out on the 'pull' with an attempt to move forward. In order to maintain the presentation of a heteronornative self and gain peer group status this strategy of 'hyper' masculinity was adopted, but it seemed to be a selective process that would change depending on the situation and who he was with. However, as noted above, this had created his reputation as being a bit of a 'playa', or a 'man slag' which brought admiration from close friends and with the *Valley Boiz,* but disapproval from *The Geeks*.

One night whilst I joined them in the sports hall the topic of how they had lost their virginities came up. Whilst Frankie and Bakers were quite open and very brash about it, Jimmy remained quiet and would not be drawn into the conversations, playing with his phone whilst the others talked.

> As we chatted Frankie told me that they knew one girl who had apparently slept with over 30 boys at the age of 17. I asked if this would be ok for a bloke and Frankie said *'yeah course'* and laughed, but Bakers was more reserved and didn't seem to think it was that good a thing. This then led into a conversation about sex in and out of relationships and first times. Jimmy remained quiet and didn't offer much to the conversation, but Bakers was happy to tell us that he'd first had sex aged 15 with an older girl on holiday in Spain. He stressed it had been an awful experience from what he could remember as he had been really *'hammered'*, but that as *'any holes a goal'* he was glad he had done it as when he starting seeing a girl later that following week back in Cwm Dyffryn, he knew what to do. He mentioned that he thought he had waited fifteen years to have sex he admitted it had been *'shit'*. I asked did he think sex was better in a relationship and he said yes he thought it was, but usually hated the cuddles and stuff that came after sex with a girlfriend. There was only one girl that Bakers had been with whom he had liked doing this with and said

that the whole night (they'd watched a film, had a takeaway and kissed for ages before going to bed) had been cool. Normally he said that the first thing he wanted to do after sex with a girl was to *'wash his dick'* even if he had been wearing a condom. Frankie added that he always had to wash his hands straight away after and hated having to lie there for ages until he could get up and wash them.

Frankie said that he had lost his virginity in a field behind the riding stables where he worked part time. He said that the girl he'd slept with had told him that she had had sex with three other guys before they *'did it'* but when they had started she mentioned she hadn't actually been with anyone else either. Similar to Bakers he told me that it had been an awful experience and that neither of them *'knew what they were doing'*. He stressed that he hadn't even *'met her'* before or during sex. '*Met'* as I have come to understand it means French kissing and I couldn't believe this could be true and asked why not. Frankie said it was because she was *'hangin'* and a *'minger'* stressing the lack of emotional attachment that he felt towards the act. He said he had tried to have sex with her from behind but as it was both their first times *'it didn't seem to work'* so they had given up on this position. I was struck with how honest they were both being about it all to me and each other and how they both seemed to moderate the stories between bravado and naivety.
[*Fieldnotes 29th October 2009*].

Wood (1984) argued that a desire for a relationship could stem from the unhappiness of the male peer group. Holland et al (1998) and Walker and Kusher (1997) further highlight how young men still see relationships with girls as a way of distancing themselves from the peer group and see a girlfriend as an escape from banter and machismo and also as a way of developing a more self-confident persona, so a private and a public sense develops. These multiple selves are therefore contradictory because, as Walker and Kusher (1997) found, those boys who had public identities that seemed linked to the macho attitudes privately expressed anxieties about their public selves. However, Jimmy's anxieties and those of his close friends did seem to be expressed with each other. The front and back performances are therefore closely

connected and intertwined. As Frosh et al (2002) argue we should not assume the private is the authentic self; multiple aspects of self exist and it is possible that the private can come out in group interactions when it is allowed. On another occasion the topic of threesomes came up and this seemed safer ground and Jimmy joined in again.

> Jimmy and Frankie both talked about wanting to try one with a random girl. Both Jimmy and Frankie said it would be cool to have a threesome with a mate as they could *'high five and stuff'* in different positions and talk about it after. To this I asked if they'd mind seeing each other naked and Jimmy replied that *'the light would be off'*. Frankie and Bakers then said that they got naked with each other quite often. Being naked with another guy was ok as it wasn't gay or anything.
> [Fieldnotes 2nd March 2010]

Even though Jimmy received lot of attention and he was always texting and arranging to meet girls on his mobile phone, he always felt troubled and uncertain of these relationships. He always seemed to want to talk about these relationships with me and seek reassurance, but he never seemed truly happy, worried constantly about whether a girl liked him and was desperately seeking a steady girlfriend and a committed sexual relationship. Although he did talk about sexual fantasies such as the threesome with his best friends, he was less likely to use the friendship to cope with other issues that occurred such as break ups or arguments. One way of coping with this however was through listening to music.

MW	So when you listen to music does it help then?
Jimmy	Well I can relate stuff to it especially with *Beatles* songs, it helps me make my decision if anything
MW	Oh right?
Jimmy	Like there was one girl I didn't see much of as you know
MW	Yeah…
Jimmy	….And there was a song by the *Beatles*, called *You won't see me…* which sounded like what I was thinking at the time…

Jimmy's anxieties continued even when he had begun his second serious relationship with Rhiannon. He spent less time with his friends and more time with her. In fact, he retreated so far from his friends that when he had finished his exams at the end of Year 13, he rarely saw them and only tended to go out when Rhiannon had other plans.

> When I entered the pub, I was a bit later than I wanted and Jimmy was sitting alone drinking a pint of blackcurrant and watching the Spain vs. Paraguay world cup quarter final match. After I'd bought a drink and sat opposite him on the table, we chatted about how quick the year had gone and how he felt different now with Rhiannon and admitted to saying he loved her and that he'd never told another girl this before. Jimmy stressed that he couldn't believe all the time and energy that he wasted on different girls, and said that he was happy now. As we chatted Jimmy mentioned that Rhiannon was in Cardiff that night on a friend's Hen Doo and questioned me on the types of clubs she might go in and what sort of men might go to these place. *[Fieldnotes 3rd July 2010].*

Jimmy, it would seem, is caught between trying to be compliant and work hard and progress to university for a reason he is not quite sure of, but he also struggles with trying to construct his masculinity in a way that is socially acceptable within the context of the community he comes from and his own peer group. He is also struggling with the loyalty to his friends and to his girlfriend and his constant switching brings with it an enormous amount of stress and anxiety.

A true chameleon?

In dealing with these multiple performances of self, Jimmy is involved in a huge amount of code-switching and chameleonising between fronts, but he is also trapped in a stalemate. As Goffman (1959: 37) argues

> when an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it. Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task

or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both.

As I have shown in the above sections, Jimmy experiences various obstacles in performing his masculinity in different settings. While Edley and Wetherell's (1996) study of young men of the same age also found that many were in a similar dilemma, Jimmy differs to these young men as these were middle class, not stigmatised by both media and political discourses and his experiences were intensified due to wider social-structural conditions (Goffman, 1963; Skeggs, 2004; Nayak, 2006; Reay, 2009).

As an academic achiever, by investing in 'mental labour' (Willis 1977) Jimmy would be perceived by the V*alley Boiz* to be in opposition of the cultural norms of the locale and of what constitutes a dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity. But by investing in sports and also by going out drinking with the *Valley Boiz*, alongside sex talk with closer friends, he could maintain an acceptable form of heteronornative masculinity to offset this. However, this was denigrated by some of *The Geeks* and a major consequence of this was that Jimmy couldn't truly fulfil his academic goals. Also, as Connell (1990: 86) notes in the life history interview with the water sports iron man Steve Donahue, being successful as an athlete prevented 'him from doing exactly what his peer group defines as thoroughly masculine behaviour: going wild, showing off, drink driving, getting into fights', but the temptation to participate in these activities was strong .

Jimmy's multiple performances were not fixed dualities, but were fluid and changed in specific spaces and in different interactions. Jimmy has the ability to chameleonise, to be able to present himself in different ways and to shift the cultural and local ideology of what it means to be a man in diverse situations to varying degrees of success. Nonetheless most of Jimmy's anxiety is attached to the hyper performance of his heterosexual masculinity. The ability to code-shift, to alter the dominant masculine identity, produced the most difficulties and was accompanied with a high level of stress. In the absence of other transitions associated with masculinity—such as industrial work place—the key signifier of an adult masculinity for some young

men, including Jimmy, seems to be stability through 'coupledom' and a heterosexual relationship.

Conclusion

In August 2010 Jimmy received an A in P.E and two C's in his sciences. Despite getting the grades he decided to reject his first choice of UWIC, to study at the University of Glamorgan which was closer to Cwm Dyffryn. His rationale for this he told me was that this way he could keep his part time job at *Dominos Pizza*, be close to his girlfriend Rhiannon and stay at home. His running had petered out and although he planned to start again when he went to university the following month, I felt that this would be difficult with the new pressures he would face when becoming an undergraduate.

In this chapter, I have drawn together many of the other themes that have crisscrossed this thesis. Jimmy's story highlights the challenges and conflicts that accompany the multiple performances of masculinity adopted by one working-class man in a post-industrial community. I have shown how those who adopt different pathways to the traditions of the locale like Jimmy, are demanded to adopt multiple subjective positions to decrease the risk of becoming alienated. His performances of masculinity alter across different spheres, within and outside the school gates. It is not only the dominant versions of masculinity that Jimmy feels he has to adopt which are disturbing about his story. What is also disconcerting is that he cannot fully achieve his goals, and future desires due to his disadvantaged social class position and the pull of the locale. There are glimmers of hope in his story, however, as he has a very close relationship with some other young men and despite acts of macho bravado, this is a small platform for discussing many of the issues he finds troubling in his life. In detailing some of these issues and problems, the case study presented in this Chapter contributes to the literature on young masculinities by outlining the importance and pull of heterosexual relationships and also allows for the intimacies and anxieties that can occur between male friends to shine through.

Part III

Chapter 9

Conclusion: Growing up into Uncertain Futures

Introduction

The restructuring of the economy and the de-industrialisation process that has occurred during the last thirty years in the South Wales Valleys have had a direct impact on the lives of white, working-class men and altered traditional transitions from school to work. Given this background, in the introductory Chapters I explained how I was interested in the ways in which young masculinities, within a specific Welsh locality affected by such changes, were performed across a variety of educational and leisure spaces. I focused in part on how Erving Goffman's work on the performance of self, social behaviour in public places and the framing of social identity were central to the theoretical basis of this thesis. Using his dramaturgical framework and through a longitudinal ethnography, this study has shown how living in a community of social and economic deprivation, demanded multiple masculinities to be performed within different educational and social contexts. I have also explored how history and place impacts on the formation of masculinity and future decision-making.

I asked the following research questions

1. How are young working-class men living in the Valleys adapting to change in insecure times and making sense of their position as they make the transition to adulthood?

2. When young men are left with the historical legacy of industrial labour, do they perform and articulate traditional forms of masculinity in particular ways and by different means?

3. In educational contexts, how do academic and/or vocational subjects impact upon specific classed masculine subjectivities?

4. What are the broader social and spatial networks within the community (e.g. family, sports, nightlife, fast cars, music, sex) that mediate the identities of these young men and how do space and place impact who they can be and become?

I conclude by drawing out the following key arguments and discussions. First, my ethnographic work addresses the multiple, nuanced ways young men's lives are lived in a specific deindustrialised place. I have explored the demands on a cohort of young men to perform multiple masculinities in a variety of settings and spaces and through different peer group interactions, as they make different transitions through post-16 education and into the world of work. However, I have suggested further that there is also a degree of code-shifting or chameleonising occurring, where individuals can adjust and alter performances with different audiences. Second, I have shown that different academic and vocational pathways frame the definition of the situation for these young men, learning what roles are expected of them when studying a certain subject or course and what is also expected of people around them. This ultimately results in classed and gendered implications that impact on their future life chances. Third, I have argued that outside education institutions, the legacy of the region's industrial past and the working-class cultural milieu of the locale, were re-embodied and retraditionalised in different ways across other local sites and spaces. I conclude by showing that these young men continue to carry the legacy of industrialisation and that, to truly understand their lives, it must be acknowledged that masculinities are relational, shaped not only by social, economic and cultural forces, but also by the specificities of place and the spatial features of the South Wales Valleys.

Front and back regions and the chameleonisation of masculinity

One of the most interesting significant findings that has emerged from this thesis is that in the deindustrialised community of Cwm Dyffryn the performance of masculinity, for these young men as they progressed into adulthood, was a difficult and often frustrating experience, with varying consequences for them and others around them. While I acknowledge that there are limitations in using typologies or

friendship groups (see also Francis, 2000; Swain, 2006; Mendick and Francis, 2012), they have been drawn on as a starting point for outlining these young lives and employed as a heuristic device in order to act as a cross referencing point to the wider field of masculinities research. In Chapters Five and Six, for example, I used this approach to centre on two broad white working-class friendship groups which I termed the *Valley Boiz* and *The Geeks,* whose lives seemed to highlight oppositional positions in the school hierarchy which also continued outside the school gates. *The Geeks* were the academic achievers of the year group and performed a version of masculinity that was seen as non-hegemonic in the locale. This geek masculinity was based on educational success and was combined with an interest in reading comic books, and playing computer games. They appeared less interested than some of their peers in drinking heavy amounts of alcohol, driving fast cars, playing sports, and presented themselves as more anxious about their futures. For many, educational success offered a way to get out of Cwm Dyffryn and to escape the rootedness of 'place'. The other group of young men I identified were the *Valley Boiz,* who performed a more traditional localised 'hegemonic' form of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and at first glance seemed in opposition to the previous group. They tended to study more vocational or non-exam based qualifications, enjoyed playing sports and participated in other spaces of working-class masculine production such as drinking large amounts of alcohol, going out 'on the pull' and engaging in 'risky' leisure pursuits such as fighting, driving cars very fast and taking soft drugs. In opposition to *The Geeks* higher educational aspirations and desires to escape, the *Valley Boiz* sought to preserve the industrial heritage of place by performing their masculinities through retraditonalising discourses (Adkins, 2002).

While character types exist and are useful as a starting point, I argue that this detailed ethnographic work has shown how the complexities and multiple ways working-class young men's lives are lived out in the specific spatial context of a former coal mining community. As Schrock and Schwalbe (2009: 282) indicate 'learning to signify a masculine self entails learning how to adjust to audiences and situations and learning how one's other identities bear on the acceptability of a performance'. This, as Goffman (1959) suggests, is a dramaturgical task and the oppositional performances of masculinity can in fact be separated into front and back performances which the

young men alternated between with varying degrees of success depending on the situation, the audience and locale. As I showed, it was possible for one of the *Valley Boiz*, for example Hughesy or Jonesy, to retraditionalise older forms of working-class masculinity through risky leisure pleasures and certain educational subjects but to also perform a 'softer' side through intimate stories with close friends. I have also shown that it is also possible for *The Geeks* to be seen as academic achievers and to be perceived as 'softer' and therefore as a subordinated group, but to still perform (within certain contexts away from the glare of the larger peer group and confines of the school and town) a more traditional form of masculinity similar to that performed by the *Valley Boiz* from whom they often distance themselves. For example, as I highlight in Chapter Six, on one occasion *The Geeks* visited a strip club on a night out celebrating an 18th birthday, thereby performing a more traditional, hegemonic form of masculinity accompanied by compulsory heterosexuality, machismo acts and the objectification of women they had paid to dance for them. A shift between a front presentation of self and back performance seemed evident in different ways by both groups of young men. This shows that while front performances of masculinity may shift and adapt to living in new times (Dolby, Dimitriadis, and Willis, 2004), older legacies of masculinity still endure and weave in and out of their narratives. These legacies not only have implication for the young men themselves and their projected futures, but for the girls and women around them (see Ivinson and Renold, 2012). Frankie's re-telling of his sexual gratification (Chapter seven) came at the expense of the girl he was with, providing a graphic illustration of these implications.

At the individual level, these implications can be further broken down and the consequences and difficulties of trying to keep both front and back performance close and to occupy multiple subject positions are illustrated in Jimmy's story. I suggested he tried to chameleonise between performances and tries hard to hold his fragmented self together across different spaces whilst being pushed and pulled in different directions by competing transitions (see also Lucey et al, 2003; Walkerdine, 2009; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). His story highlighted the dilemmas faced in trying to achieve academically and gain entrance to university, to work hard beyond the school by trying to become a successful athlete and to also achieve a socially valued form of masculinity that enabled him to fit in with his wider peer group and keep him connected to his close friends. For Goffman, reality is context dependant, which then

bounds or frames experiences and shapes the self or performance of self in different contexts. I propose that this could be one reason why young men who operate in or across multiple frames need to chameleonise their masculinities to a greater extent than others. Jimmy, for example, performs his masculinity across multiple frames of experience (academic, sporting, musical etc.), so within one body he has multiple, simultaneous points of reference from which to interpret experience and shift from one version to another. Yet this process is extremely difficult to do and not all young men can achieve it.

What is clear from this study is that despite structural inequalities, the performances of these young men's masculinities are played out in different settings with different people (peers, family, teachers, and the researcher!) and some are able to chameleonise their masculinities to greater degrees of success than others. Using ethnographic methodology has proven a valuable tool for enabling the performances of young working-class masculinity to come through, highlighting how an interview-based study alone would not have been unable to capture the richness of the data collected. Ethnography captures the messy complexities of life as it is happens. In contrast, interview-based studies can reflect only participants' accounts of events, rather than actually observed situations and consequently can account only for what seems important to the interviewee in the context and at the time of the interview.

Academic and vocational 'frames'

I have taken the perspective in this thesis that these young men's performances of masculinity are played out as dramaturgical tasks. However, these performances of self (and therefore gender) occur not only within social interactions between individuals but also within the wider culture of a given social setting. It is these frames, that Goffman (1974: 574) suggests construct the meanings and interpretations of a given situation and how 'we think we should show ourselves within a given context and how we should perform in a specific manner'. This therefore allows us to see how we 'do gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) through social interaction and how this social interaction is framed through specific contexts alongside wider social, economic and cultural histories. In general, therefore, it seems that Goffman's 'frame analysis' framework can be applied to both academic and vocational courses, where

the forms and content of the courses, alongside the interactions between students and teachers, frame and therefore sanction and validate performances of masculinity and corresponding educational subjectivities.

When this research began in the spring of 2008, I was interested in the different school subjects that the young men took as part of their GCSEs. As they grew older and progressed through their post-16 educational pathways, I wanted to investigate the impact of these choices alongside the formation of their educational subjectivities further. Throughout my time at Cwm Dyffryn it became clear that different school subjects elicited different meanings for the young men. In Year 11 academic subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science, supported by languages (French and Welsh) allowed *The Geeks* to display their academic capital through achieving top grades which gained teachers support and favour. The vocational subjects that the school offered such as the BTEC qualification in sport, GCSE in Physical Education and Design Technology allowed others such as the *Valley Boiz* to adopt a hegemonic position and to subordinate others by drawing on traditional discourses of masculinity that were sanctioned by the industrial heritage of place. As the young men moved through the Sixth Form, these choices again divided the year group, even though the numbers were much smaller.

In Chapter Seven I moved away from the school to show how three different vocational courses provided frames for the construction of masculinity in different ways. For Ian and Bakers their vocational courses, both mechanical subjects, provided the platform for the affirmation of a specific form of masculinity based on the shop-floor culture of industrial workplaces. The language used by teachers was often sexist, with gendered examples used within the learning environment both in vocational classes and the more theory-based lessons. In Frankie's case I showed how the subversion of masculine identity was possible in one particular 'feminine' course, equine studies. However, beyond his course, Frankie used other ways to reaffirm his identity by indulging in a showy, hyper performance of masculinity displayed through the risky driving practice of the 'boy racer'. By focusing on both academic and vocational routes at post-16 level, this study contributes to our knowledge of young working-class men's educational choices in the context of social transformation (McDowell, 2003; Nayak, 2006; Richardson, 2010).

Beyond educational institutions and the legacy of industrialisation

Throughout this thesis I have argued that to truly understand the performances of these young men's masculinities, multiple spaces, processes and practices of interaction must be taken into account. As has been evident for these young men, the legacy of Cwm Dyffryn's industrial heritage impacted on their identities beyond schooling in different ways and was re-embodied and retraditionalised in different ways across other local sites and spaces. Although the concept of what it means to be a man from the South Wales Valley has altered over time, the localised hegemonic versions of white working-class manhood still exists, despite the complete closure of coalmining in the area. It would be a mistake to think that just because, in the occupational sense, times have changed, symbolic associations with the industry have disappeared. There are consequences for those who perform their masculinity in a locally specific way or those who diverge from the script.

Young men like Hughesy, Tomo, Brad and Davies continued to display the traces of the locale's industrial culture that was socially embedded through other cultural values and leisure pursuits that interlinked with their educational aspirations. Their family biographies show the history of manual work in the region and were an influence on some of their future aspirations. For others like Bakers and Frankie, their cars were used as a way to rework traditional masculinities and their reckless driving and speedy pursuits enabled an exaggerated performance to take place. Those who wanted to escape the area by being academically successful, like Sam, Sean and Alan, had to do this alongside the pressure to conform to 'normal' expectations of manhood and deal with the pressures to drink large amount of alcohol, take part in heterosexual discourses and deal with the working-class signifiers they carried with them on university preparation days. What is evident for all is that place-based identities continue to be of significance for these young men. By situating the performances of these young men within a spatial context, I have shown that place is centre stage in the performance of young men's masculinities, something which other studies with young men do not always consider.

Implications for policy and practice

This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding that the performance of young masculinities is a highly socialised and complex construction. Despite some evidence of agency or code-shifting in the narratives presented here, more dominant versions of masculinity cannot be negated and impacted on how the young men saw themselves. A culturally dominant version of masculinity, based on toughness, heterosexuality and physical capital, was the overriding default reference point, but what was also clear was that these boys could, when given the chance, also be articulate, thoughtful and expressive. I suggest that enabling them to talk more in educational spaces about how masculinity is constructed could provide further opportunities for boys to negotiate and re-negotiate what it means to be a man and to reflect on social conventions.

Another implication of this study is that education and wider youth policy needs to consider the specificities of place in young people's educational decision making. In the current economic climate, employment opportunities for young men from deprived post-industrial communities like Cwm Dyffryn are limited at the local level. I feel there needs to be a greater link between those who work hard within schools to get their students into higher education and those practitioners who could assist them to discuss a wider range of further opportunities beyond education, even if unfortunately this means leaving the locale. Policy makers also need to recognise the enormous potential that young men can exhibit if given wider access to opportunities that they are unable to afford themselves. Furthermore the changes to the 14-19 curriculum in Wales, which were first instigated ten years ago, still fall far short of providing students with clear guidance for their futures once they have gained their educational qualifications and despite the promises of providing a holistic education, there is still an academic/vocational divide. Finally if there continues to be a lack of real investment in the area, then those young people who can will have no option but to leave and look elsewhere for work and create lives outside the Valleys. This outward migration could then have a drastic impact on the communities. There is a real need to understand what this means to young men themselves and for future generations.

Limitations and future research

While I feel this study has many important implications for understanding young men and masculinities in marginalised places and useful suggestions for policy makers, there are also some limitations in what I have presented here. Were I able to undertake this study again, I would pay attention to the lives of the young women in the young men's lives. Although I met girlfriends on nights out and chatted to female friends at the main school site and at the colleges I visited, few of those conversations are recorded here. These could have provided another perspective and allowed for a different insight into the lives I have presented here. I also feel that I should have tried harder to contact those young men who left school from the original year group after their GCSEs and didn't return to school. It would have been interesting to have seen how Shenkin and Craig coped with life in the armed forces or how *The Emos* (Ward 2012) who left school after their GCSEs, found college life.

I believe future research needs to be conducted into these young men's lives as they grow older. I would like to revisit Cwm Dyffryn and see how *The Geeks* coped with university. Was it all they hoped it would be? Did Sam and Sean feel that they escaped or was the pull of the locale too strong? Did Brad like working with his father or was the reality of manual work a painful discovery? Did Frankie finish his equine studies course and progress into horse management? I think it would also be interesting to see how other young people in the area cope with the growth in university tuition fees and if this has an impact on opinions about higher education. Finally, I believe further in-depth research into young working-class men's masculinities, needs to be carried out in other parts of Wales to explore how the role of 'place' differs across the country. This could then be supported by comparative studies between Wales and the rest of the UK and other counties such as Australia.

Final Thoughts

In this final chapter I have drawn together the main themes of the thesis. I have argued that there are diverse ways to be a young man within the working-class community of Cwm Dyffryn. I have suggested that to understand the performance of young masculinities, masculinities must always be understood in time and place and that while new times demand new ways of being, not all young men find code-

shifting or transition easy. The ability to shift and hold the contradictions of multiple performances together rests upon some complex familial, social, cultural and historic dynamics. Finally the main point I draw out from this thesis, is how being a young man and thus masculinity, cannot be achieved so easily from educational pursuits as from the former employment practices that shaped the area.

This study contributes to the growing literature on how young working-class men perform their masculinities within the post-millennium era and how they construct their lives in different ways within and beyond educational institutions. My research in a South Wales Valleys community reveals both change and continuity in young working-class lives, and reveals that a high degree of complexity exists when trying to understand performances of young masculinities (see also McDowell 2003; Nayak 2006; Ingram, 2011). Whilst there are undoubtedly instances of 'softer' practices of masculinity being performed, what is always present is the heritage of an industrial and cultural legacy that impacts on acceptable forms of manhood. This must make us rethink the argument that new forms of masculinity are always and everywhere 'inclusive' (Anderson 2009) or that more traditional forms of masculinity are on the decline. What this thesis clearly shows is that despite social transformations, a re-traditionalisation of older masculine discourses is occurring within groups of disadvantaged working-class young men. While many are aware of the multiple performances they must undertake in different settings and with different audiences, this has consequences for their futures and the wider communities they live in.

Epilogue Summer 2012

The 35 young men that began Year 13 in the autumn of 2009 and finished school in the summer of 2010, have had a mixture of futures since the end of fieldwork. Three were to leave school before the completion of their courses (Jonesy, Steveo and Davies) and two of these were to return to the Sixth Form again (in September 2010) to re-sit some of their subjects (Sin and Gavin) due to poor final grades. Out of the remaining 30, fifteen went on to university, thirteen to study for degrees and two to study for HND qualifications. Four of this group left Wales to study (Sam to *Nottingham University* to study English literature, Scott to the *University of Lincoln* to study architecture, Leon and Ieuan to *Portsmouth University* to train to become pharmacists) the rest (eleven) stayed in South Wales. Ruben went to study engineering at *Cardiff University*; Birdy enrolled on a geography course at *Swansea University*; Sean opted to take English literature and creative writing at the *University of Wales Institute Cardiff;* whilst Alan, Nibbles, Nixon, Jimmy, Hughesy, Clive, Bob and Shaggy went to the local university, the *University of Glamorgan*. Unfortunately, after his first year Clive dropped out followed by Jimmy and Sean at the end of their second years. At the end of September 2012, both Clive and Jimmy were looking for work, whilst Sean was working in *McDonald's* and living back at home. Importantly as other studies have shown with working-class young people, only two of this group went to Russell group universities (for a discussion of the importance of these see Ball et al 2000; Reay et al 2005; Breen and Jonsson 2005).

Of the fifteen who finished their courses and did not go to university in September 2010, there was rather a mixed bag of different routes. Bruce and Scud returned to education and went to different F.E colleges. Tomo was successful in gaining a highly competitive paid apprenticeship with a national steel company and others boys entered a variety of jobs. Some of these entailed working with their fathers in different trades such as tiling (Brad) or with siblings in a recycling plant (Cresco). Others went on to become bus drivers (Stig), charity donations collectors (Rhys) and teaching assistants (Dai). Bunk and Ed were unemployed and the positions of the remaining five (Scooter, Simon, Freddy, Carr and Spud) were unknown. Frankie, Bakers and Whippy all returned to complete their courses.

Tragically one of the young men in the thesis died just after his 19th birthday in a horrible car accident whilst driving fast to work one morning, illustrating painfully the risk and cost of driving at high speed. On a happier note, four of the young men (Tomo, Cresco, Stig and Bruce) have become fathers and started new lives with partners. I owe a debt of gratitude to these young men who let me follow them around and write about them, coming in and out of their lives over two and a half years. I hope this account does them justice and goes some way to representing what life is like for a young man in the South Wales Valleys and the difficulties they face growing up into uncertain futures.

Appendix 1 *Young men enrolled at Cwm Dyffryn High School Sixth Form, beginning of Year 13, September 2009*

Name	Post 16 pathway	Main friends/friendship group	Mothers Job *As described by young men*	Fathers Job *As described by young men*	Ethnicity
Alan	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Geeks*	Secretary at local council	Stepfather Unemployed	White
Birdy	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Valley Boiz*	Post Office owner	Post Office owner	White
Bob	2 A-Levels + Key Skills	Freddy, Shaggy	?	?	White
Brad	1 A-Levels + Key Skills 2 BTECs	*The Valley Boiz*	Course assessor at local college	Self employed wall and floor tiler	White
Bruce	2 A- Levels + Key Skills 1 As- Level	*The Emos* (who had all left school by Sept 09, so spend most of time with girlfriend)	Part-Time cleaner	Unknown (did not see father)	White
Bunk	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Valley Boiz*	Admin assistant at local council	Plumber for local council	White
Carr	1 A-Level + Key Skills 1 BTEC	Boys in younger school year groups (Year 11 or 12)	Factory Worker	?	White
Clive	2 BTECs + Key Skills	*The Valley Boiz*	Office Administrator	Electrical fitter	White
Cresco	2 BTECs + Key Skills (1 at local college)	*The Valley Boiz*	Cleaner	Retired bus driver	White
Dai	2 BTECs + Key Skills	*The Valley Boiz*	?	?	White
Davies	2 A-Levels + Key Skills Dropped out before end of course	*The Valley Boiz*	Housewife	Builder	White
Ed	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	Tended to sit alone, very quiet, no close friends at school.	Unemployed	Unknown (did not see father)	White
Freddy	1 BTEC + Key Skills (at local college)	Bob, Shaggy	?	'Works in ASDA'	White
Gavin	2 A-Levels +Key Skills 1 As-Level	*The Geeks*	Housewife	Manager in a hospital	White
Hughesy	2 A-Level +Key Skills 1 BTEC	*The Valley Boiz*	Part-Time work in a supermarket	Bus driver	White
Ieuan	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Geeks*	Housewife	Mineral surveyor	White

Name	Qualifications	Friendship Group	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation	Ethnicity
Jimmy	3 A-levels + Key Skills	*The Valley Boiz*, Leon, Frankie, Ian, Bakers (*Vocational Ladz*)	Ticket sales assistant in train station	Train driver	White
Jonesy	3 A-Levels + Key Skills Dropped out before end of course	*The Valley Boiz*	Absent, lives in France with new partner	'Works in big office somewhere in Cardiff''	White
Leon	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Geeks*, Jimmy	Secretary	Teacher	White
Nibbles	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Geeks*	Dead	Absent Stepfather incapacity benefits	White
Nixon	3 A-Levels +Key Skills	*The Geeks*	Primary school teacher	Driving instructor	White
Rhys	1 BTEC + Key Skills	Cresco, but mainly boys in year group below (Year 12)	Psychiatric nurse	?	White
Ruben	3 A-Levels	*The Geeks*	Midwife	Supply teacher	White
Sam	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Geeks*	Manager in a supermarket	Caretaker	White
Scooter	2 A-Levels	Bob	?	Mechanic	White
Scott	4 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Geeks*	Housewife	Retired mechanic	White
Scud	3 A-Levels +Key Skills	Stig, tended to only socialise with friends from his church	'Stays at home'	?	White
Sean	3 A-Levels + Key Skills	*The Geeks*	Secretary	Self employed mechanic	White
Shaggy	2 BTECs	*The Valley Boiz*	Housewife	Unknown (did not see father) Stepfather scaffolder	White
Sin	3 A-Levels +Key Skills	*The Geeks*	Chinese takeaway owner	Chinese takeaway owner	Chinese
Stig	1 A-Level 1 BTEC (at local college)	Scud, William	Caretaker in old peoples' home	Carer at old peoples' home	White
Tomo	3 A-Levels	*The Valley Boiz,* Trevor	Small factory owner	Housewife	White
Trevor	3 A-Levels Dropped out before end of course	Tomo, others outside school	?	Factory Work	White
Wayne	1 A-Level	Limited time at school, so friends outside it	'Don't work'	?	White
William	1 BTEC (at local college)	Stig, boys in younger year groups (Year 11,12)	Cleaner	Unknown	White

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