

Where the boys are— teenagers, masculinity and a sense of place

Aoife Curtin and Denis Linehan

Department of Geography, University College Cork

ABSTRACT

Recent research on the social and gendered geographies of children and young people is filled with new insights into the social and cultural conditions under which their presence in urban space is moderated and their identity constructed. This study seeks to contribute to this research area, by exploring the ways in which teenage boys acquire and maintain a particularly gendered sense of place. The paper demonstrates that this sense of place is regulated by the support structures of all male schooling, by patriarchal family structures, and through the marshalling of the boundaries of heterosexuality amongst the boy's peer group. The paper concludes that due consideration of these issues needs to be evaluated if the experience of teenagers in urban space is to be effectively understood by social geographers.

Key index words: masculinity, teenagers, performance, Cork.

Introduction

Recent research on the social and gendered geographies of children and young people is replete with new insights into the social and cultural conditions under which their presence in urban space is moderated and their identity constructed (Matthews, Limb and Taylor 1999; Valentine, 1999; Aitken, 2000; Philo, 2000). The contemporary Irish city presents productive ground for thinking through questions of childhood, gender and place, but unlike their peers in the social sciences, where topics such as the diversity and inequalities in the urban experience of children and teenagers, childcare provision or child-abuse have been critically engaged, few Irish geographers have addressed the issue of children's geographies (Morgan and Grube, 1994; Holliday, 1997; Department of Health and Children, 2000; Canny, 2001; Fanning, Veale and O'Connor, 2001; Ferguson and O'Reilly, 2001; Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). There is as consequence large gaps in our knowledge about how Irish children and teenagers use and interpret urban space, how play is organised, or how teenager's entry into the world of adulthood is geographically mediated. As has been suggested in the editorial to this volume, this vacuum in our understanding reflects the lack of interest in feminist approaches to the human geographies of Ireland. But the invisibility of children and teenagers in the Irish geographical literature also suggests that the treatment of the social and cultural geography of the urban has been caged for too long in empirical frameworks, and requires some theoretical enrichment. Fortunately, through their engagement with social theory, social geographers have demonstrated that they have important contributions to make in unveiling the urban experience of 'invisible others' (Kitchen, 1999; Bell and Binnie, 2000). Spacing childhood from these new perspectives therefore, can offer many opportunities to inquire into the condition of Irish society, and to map social and cultural transformations in the urban environment.

This paper seeks to contribute to this research area, by exploring the gendered identities of teenage boys in Cork. In contrast to recent studies on the geographies of adolescents, the paper is not concerned with issues of territoriality, or mapping the activities of the participants of the study in time and space. Instead, the aim is to consider the ways in which teenage boys acquire and maintain a particularly gendered sense of place. The contention is that in order to understand the urban experience of teenage boys, it is necessary to query how their interpretation of place is negotiated through their masculinity. As will become apparent below, this inquiry has been stimulated both by the research results themselves and the nature of the literature about young people and cities. Hence, the 'place' in question in the paper is not a particular locality or community, but refers to a largely unconflicted sense of inclusion in the urban scene. Tracing that geography of inclusion, considering its condition and the processes through which it is sustained forms the basis of the paper. The first section will explore the potential of performative theory to map the subtle social geographies of gender and identity. In the second part of the paper, the role that schooling plays in forming the boy's sense of inclusion is considered. The third element of the paper demonstrates the ways in which gender roles and sexuality are mobilized to sustain hegemonic masculinities and senses of place amongst the participants in the study. The paper concludes with comments about how this material can be used to inform an understanding of the urban experience of teenage boys in the city.

Masculinity, performance and unmappable geographies

A number of recent studies have demonstrated how young people's use of urban space is often gendered and consistently points towards a geography of inclusion for boys (Cotterell, 1991; Robinson, 2000). When playing or 'hanging out', boys have been shown to dominate public space and inscribe it with masculinist intentions (Lieberg, 1995; Pearce 1996; Cressida, 1997; Tucker and Mathews, 2001). For example, in a study of adolescent girls recreating at public swimming pools, it was found that to escape the gaze of boys they adopted strategies that included staying in groups, swimming at remote venues or avoiding pools altogether (James, 2000). Indeed, exclusion from public space meant that for some adolescent girls, their bedroom becomes a more significant site for social interaction with peer-group than more public recreational areas (James, 2001). These studies suggest that teenage boys can acquire the social power to claim space and make it in their own image. As a consequence, girls are often placed on the margins of 'boy-space' and are left to feel like the "wrong gender in the wrong place" (Skelton 2000). These studies moreover support the idea that spatiality and identity are mutually produced and establishes inescapably that the experience of places is tied up with, both directly and indirectly, gender relations. In particular, this research draws attention to the cultural politics of masculinity, which in itself has become the focus of a significant body of work in social geography (Longhurst, 2000). To interrogate these issues, the paper turns to recent work in social geography that has emphasised the way identities and sexualities are lived out and performed in particular places and spaces (Binnie and Valentine, 1999). This emphasis on performance reflects the increasing range of work in geography that has sought to reconfigure the ways in which the making and experience of place is conceptualised (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). Emerging from a diverse range of perspectives - ethnography, phenomenology and cultural geography, in broad terms this work departs from humanist treatments of place and stresses the centrality of everyday and lived experience to the creation of identity.

Following the work of the social theorist Judith Butler, it has been argued that identities are constructed through performance. Far from being an essential category, gender is conceived as a 'regulated fiction', that requires constant reaffirmation through ordinary and everyday acts, that in themselves relate to powerful discourses about appropriate or socially sanctioned gender roles. Boys therefore are encouraged to act in accordance with rules and regulations set by society and culture so that they can successfully secure a place amongst 'the lads' in the community of their peers. In destabilising the concept of gender, Butler draws attention to how it requires constant maintenance and re-performance. Rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender is regarded as a fluid variable that shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times. It is for these reasons that gender is regarded as a performance; what individuals do at particular times and space, rather than a universal 'who you are'. Critically, in terms of the practices of social geography, the performance of gender is something that can be regarded as subtly spaced and placed. Hence, in terms of masculinity, it can be argued that becoming a man is "a complex process of learning and doing within shifting sets of social constraints" and requires the accomplishment of culturally appropriate and geographical contingent versions of masculinity (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; 89). So, in New York for instance, Schneider has demonstrated that in socially excluded neighbourhoods, masculinity was created on the streets by showing fearlessness in confrontations, and adeptness in the performances of street life (Schneider, 1999). Masculinity in that context rested on image, honour, and reputation, all of which were negotiated and performed before a public audience.

Whilst Butler has been criticised for neglecting the significance of space in her own work, the sensitivity of contemporary social geography to questions of gender, sexuality and the body, has facilitated the rapid translation of her ideas into the discipline. Indeed, making links between performance and space has been critical in shaping a new social geography of identity. In arguing for instance that "public space is just not 'there' ", but is something that is actively produced through repeated performances, Valentine draws attention to numerous social strategies and discourses that collude to make space as it is (Valentine, 1996). These geographies of performances are necessarily subtle, flexible and mundane. Indeed, they can be so subtle, intimate and rapidly changing, that they often present a set of unmappable geographies. This unmappability is implicit for instance in Krenichyn's argument that, "from the classroom to the home, teenage boys negotiate their self-concepts and gender identities, changing their performance of masculinity depending on the places and spaces that they inhabit from one moment to the next" (Krenichyn, 1999). Nevertheless, one of the key tenets of performative geography stresses that by creating the places where individuals daily enact socially prescribed gender roles, certain sites can function as performative arenas that actively shape masculinity and femininity, and can reinforce gender differences. McDowell's study of merchant banks in London for instance, where she established that masculinist discourses radiated out into almost every practice in the bank's working environment, stands out as a classic statement about the relationship between gender identity, performance and space (McDowell, 1997). But equally, in terms of this study group, it became apparent that learning to be masculine is also carefully spaced. It became clear for instance, that to be amongst 'the lads'— in the social spaces of the peer group— offered security whilst simultaneously creating a space inscribed with masculinist norms. As such, the value of what has come to be known as 'performative geography' lies in its ability to uncover how identities are constructed and it can be used as a powerful conceptual tool to unpack the ways in which identity and sexuality are placed and spaced. It is then, reflecting upon this question of performance, that the gendered sense of place and the social geographies of masculinity are pursued in this paper.

“He became himself”– masculinity and social spaces of inclusion

The results upon which this study is based draw upon a social survey and focus group interviews with male transition year students (15-16 years of age) in four predominantly middle class schools in Cork (Curtin, 2000). Permission from the schools was acquired before conducting the study and participants engaged with the research on a voluntary basis. For ethical reasons the participants names have been changed and the particular schools in the study are not individually identified. This research permitted the opening up of seemingly mundane geographies of these young people’s experience in order to explore how and where attitudes and beliefs about masculinity are manifested and how these beliefs were reflected in the identities of the teenagers involved. Initially, the study was interested in qualifying any conflict these teenagers might be facing due to shifting social roles for men in Irish society. Much of the literature in gender studies have highlighted a ‘crisis’ in masculinity, whereby for men traditional social roles in terms of their sexuality, employment and personal relationships have been challenged and transformed (Jackson, 1998). Given the diversity of different masculinities, it is difficult to make a unilateral statement about the nature of this crisis, and as Ní Laoire has argued, it is critical to understand this phenomenon in contingent and contextual circumstances (Connell, 1995; Ní Laoire, 2000). Typically however, it has been characterised in terms of a sense of loss, confusion and frustration that can also manifest itself in poorer physical and mental health (Connell, 1995). However, in contrast to what one might expect about reports on a prevalent male identity crisis, one of the unexpected results of this research was that participants did not exhibit conscious anxieties or concerns about their identity as ‘men’. In general, in both the questionnaire and focus group analysis, the boys appear outwardly unconflicted about their masculinity. The emergence of new discourses of masculinity and gender relations that contest men’s monopoly of the labour market, or challenge their tradition roles in the family, had not it seemed entered the world-view of the majority of the participants in the survey.

It soon became apparent that these perspectives reflect the profile of the group of adolescents that formed the sample. All (obviously) were still in school, most came from nuclear families, and none could be defined as socially excluded. Moreover, for the majority, they live in an Ireland where emigration is an unknown and full employment a reality. Sixty two percent of the participants engaged in some kind of part-time work, a figure that would have been unrealistic in the depths of the Irish recession during the 1980s. A further sixty two percent of the participants played for a local sports club and forty percent of these reported they did so to maintain a family tradition or to represent their local community. Seventy six percent of the boys claimed to have or have had a girlfriend. Moreover, ninety percent of the respondent reported that they intended to continue onwards to third level education. The majority of these envisioned themselves in traditionally male dominated disciplines, such as engineering, business and science. It seems then, that these teenage boys know who and where they are. They are in place, rooted and included in the urban institutions in the city, such as the school, in part time jobs and local sport clubs.

Once these circumstances were established, when the boys were asked about their definition of manliness, it came as less of a surprise that traditional male sex roles were still very relevant. Throughout the interviews, these cultural norms were illustrated in the ways the participants discussed their ideas on what being a ‘man’ means. It was revealed that for most of the participants, emotional and physical strength and bodily performance was central to their sense of a masculine identity. This was very well illustrated in the way in which the

boys spoke about male role models. For example, because of his local connections, the Premier League footballer Roy Keane was praised and admired by many of the participants in the study for his manliness. Keane presents a classic version of hegemonic masculinity: physically fit, successful, powerful and emotionally strong. He was variously praised for being a good family man, for rising above the disadvantages of his working class background and for his physical game on the football pitch.

Mark: *“I’d pick Roy Keane, ‘cos like people say his parents were badly off, unemployed like. He worked his way up there and then he bought his parents a house...”*

Alan: *“Look at what he achieved like, he was nobody when he was younger like, he came from Mayfield like, and the other people there just grow up and go on the dole. He did something with his life”.*

Mark: *“Yeah, like, he’d so many different influences in his life and he overcame them, and became original, d’you know? He didn’t become his father, he didn’t become his mother, he didn’t become his uncle or whatever d’you know? He became himself”.*

In becoming ‘himself’, Keane represents a coherent narrative of masculine self-identity for Mark. In becoming ‘original’, the footballer is represented as ‘his own man’— secure, successful and in control. In these ways, the survey results revealed that a heteronormative and hegemonic notion of masculinity was a powerful and lived sensibility amongst the participants in the study. These values were affirmed elsewhere in the response of the survey, broadly in terms of the life choices they expected, and specifically in terms of the boy’s certainty about family life and career options. For instance, when talking about careers, none of the boys imagined himself as a full-time ‘house-husband’. All assumed their natural place was to go ‘out’ to work, as indeed, many of them had already achieved. Heterosexuality was also a given. Most of the boys saw themselves as married with children. When asked to describe their definition of masculinity or ‘a man’ a majority emphasised the ability to provide for a family. The boys held on to the traditional good-provider role as one that they must aspire to, in order to be recognised as adequately and sufficiently masculine. In addition, many of the boys saw distinct phases in their life— one where they characterised themselves as ‘wild’ and another where they are ‘steady’, which would eventually bring them to that condition and ‘order’.

Kevin: *“Like, when you think about it, you said what point is it when you do become a man, like, I think it’s fairly obvious anyway that it’s when you have a child like. Like, when you’re in your late teens, you’re like wild like, you’re just getting used to the place like, and then if you got a girlfriend, you’re gonna like, you’re always gonna be nice to her like. You’re gonna get engaged then, when you have a baby then, it all clicks, d’you know what I mean like? That’s when your life gets in order. Then, you know what you’re gonna have to do”.*

On consideration of how such values are produced, it is difficult to escape the fact that these apparently comfortable senses of their own masculinity reflect the significance and strength of certain masculinist discourses in the immediate environment, the schools themselves. As Philips has noted, “...masculinities are spatially constituted; they reflect the characteristics of the spaces in which they are constituted” (Phillips, 1997:18). For Mac an Gahill, schools are important social spaces, and outside the family, are key sites for identity construction. He notes that within schools “the administration, regulation and reification of gender roles is institutionalised through social and discursive practices of staff rooms,

classroom and playground microcultures” (Mac an Ghaill, 1994:9). Through the focus group interviews it became clear that through ordinary and mundane practices, such as encouraging physical fitness, participation in games and competition, the schools induct boys into certain forms of masculine performance. The schools in this study were all long established single sex schools, offering a “no nonsense education” and run largely on Catholic ethos and are typical of this type of educational establishment throughout Ireland. In three of the four schools, sport held a privileged role and meshed with the school’s sense of its own identity. These masculinist traditions were reflected in certain stereotypical visual representation of histories of the school: photographs or portraits of founding fathers, successful alumni and trophy cabinets displayed prominently on the entrance to the schools. The influence of these traditions was reflected nationally in the rejection of a national educational programme, entitled “Exploring Masculinities”. In bringing attention to issues about sexuality and identity, this programme was drawn into significant controversy, with some dismissing it as an attempt to insert “feminist ideology” into the social space of the school (Waters, 2000). None of the schools in the sample had adopted this programme.

This does not mean however that the schools exerted an entirely powerful influence on the identities of these kids. In ways that reflected the boy awareness about masculinity as a performance, they were conscious, and indeed often critical about how certain kinds of masculinities are privileged over others. The emergence of different peer groups within the schools allowed them to play with different versions of the masculine ideal i.e. between sporting and ‘cool’. However, it did become clear that many of the teenagers were quite content with the traditional nature of the school culture, a situation that underlines the significance places play in facilitating the performance of identity. The manner in which the school helped create a geography of inclusion was particularly well regarded. For example, many of the boys expressed a belief that they would feel uncomfortable being in the company of girls within the classroom, suggesting that the construction of certain versions of masculinity can only be performed comfortably in the company of male peers.

Eoin: *“It’s better like if it’s for school like, I know it’s good to have girls and everything, but for school...”*

Aidan: *“You’d never concentrate!”*

Sean: *“A good laugh like...a good laugh with all the lads, and you can say things in our class like that, gee, you just would not...”*(laughter)

Brendan: *“You’d be much more queer about what you say and stuff...”*

Sean: *“You can act differently, like, you can act yourself, you know?”*

Aidan: *“Definitely like the stuff you’d say inside in the classroom here, is gonna be a lot different to what you’d say in a mixed class like”.*

Eoin: *“Yeah, when you’re in school like, you tend to mess more like, the lads. If you’re around girls, you’d be wary about making a fool of yourself now like. You just try and act more cool if you’re around girls like”.*

Sean: *“They (girls) probably wouldn’t curse or stuff as much”.*

Conor: *“If you go up to a fien’ [guy] or something, you call ‘em “queer” or something like that. You wouldn’t really say that to an’ ol’ doll [girl]. Girls would give you a slap”.*

Brendan: *“Men would probably take it as a joke, but you just get a slap then off the girl”.*

These comments reveal very effectively how places are bound up with gender relations. The school for these boys, becomes a 'back-region' were they could both perform as 'themselves' and 'concentrate' on the rational tasks of their school work. These remarks also demonstrate that the boy's sense of security is based upon the exclusion of girls. Suggesting that girls would disrupt the understanding between boys by being unable 'to take a joke' is symptomatic of such exclusion. It seems that marking out boundaries and securing spaces helps these boys to articulate their masculinity. As Michael put it: "all it takes is one little small comment to make you feel like stupid. You can be more comfortable when you're around guys all the time...in the school environment". In addition, represented here, and elsewhere through the focus group interviews, it becomes clear that the performance of masculinity seems to require the boys to behave in a manner deemed appropriate depending on the company that they are in. The boys need to change and vary their performance of masculinity, both in the company of their male peers as well as that of the opposite sex. The reasons for these changes in performance are very similar in that they are one of the consequences of the need that most young males share to impress and prove their masculinities in order to be accepted by their peers, whether male or female, by behaving in a manner deemed adequately and acceptably masculine. In this sense the schools and the peer groups within them, provide a performative arena for the making of masculine identities.

Gender roles, sexuality and space

An exploration of the ways in which teenage boys develop a matrix of heteronormative expectations about their social role seems to have important consequences for how boys develop a gendered sense of place. Insight into this issue appeared in that element of the survey and focus group work that queried the participant's attitude to domestic activity in the home. The participants in the study were aware of the apparent dichotomy between the private or 'inside' domain of the home and the public world of work and the street. For the majority, their experience of the domestic has largely demonstrated that their mothers are responsible for domesticity and care-giving, and the public domain outside the home, usually that of the workplace, is for the most part dominated by their fathers.

Bill: "*Normally the woman does the inside work; the dinner and cleaning of the house, and the man will do the outside- the garden...*"

Patrick: "*In my house now like, outside it's very 50:50, 'cos they both work full-time, but then when they come back, if I ask my dad something, he'll just go "ask your mother", d'you know?"*

Gavin: "*Like there's a baby in my house now like, my brother and my dad does all that stuff, you know? I don't think that it's about mascu...well, it is about being masculine for about seventy-five percent of men, but my dad, he goes shopping with my mum*".

Mike: "*My dad's the total opposite like, he wouldn't drive the buggy at all, he doesn't go shopping or anything like that like*".

Patrick: "*Same as my dad...like I respect my mum so much because like she was a housewife you know, until my brother went into first or second year. Now, she's got a job, plus she's doing the housework...it's just...I have so much respect for her for doing that. My dad just kinda is the boss at work, so he works late hours an' all that, plus he's kinda involved in the [local GAA team], and he plays golf like. I dunno, he doesn't do much in the housework way, like he'll always be telling us to clean our rooms an' all that stuff, but he doesn't do much actual housework*".

What became apparent in this dialogue, as Keily has previously established, is that housework remains largely defined on gendered lines within the boy's homes (Kiely, 1996). It became clear also in the responses of the boys, that most described their mothers as the more dominant care-giver in the home, maintaining that she is the one who has 'final say' over their actions. This was a view sustained despite the fact that the mothers of sixty percent of the sample worked outside the home. Its arguable that the ways in which boys mark out these distinctions in the home has significant consequence for the social constitution of gender as well as that of place (McDowell, 1999). These types of gender relations, which in themselves, support the division between the public and private, play an important role in the social construction of gender divisions and identities (Bondi, 1998; McDowell, 1999). Moreover when Mike observes his father will not 'drive the buggy', he observes a position his father takes in public, on the street, where it seems to him to be unmanly to push his children in the pram. It is these kinds of ordinary, unremarkable gestures that Butler alludes to when she talks about the significance of bodily performances to the construction of gender identities. In this sense then, the boy's gendered sense of place was clearly structured by the patriarchal processes at work within the family.

Following on from this, a sharper set of insights into the boy's notion of their social location came into focus when the participants engaged with questions of sexuality. This is a factor that has been found to have profound consequences for the regulation of the masculinity of boys within a peer group context (Delph-Janiurek, 2000; Martino, 1999). Male peer group networks have been identified as one of the most influential arenas for the construction and regulation of masculinities (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1997). Cameron has found that interaction amongst male peers is often characterised by impersonal topics and the exchange of general information, such as joking, trading insults and sports statistics, and thus require boys to their discussions on often in a competitive manner (Cameron, 1997). These gender performances involve the continuous rebuff of feminine and homosexual attributes or behaviours (Martino, 1999). Peer-talk in particular is peppered with homophobic put-downs, that whilst framed as 'good-humoured', remain exclusionary (Lyman, 1987). It became apparent through the interviews that homophobia functions in boys' lives as a means of confirming masculinity. For example, when asked what they might do if a friend disclosed his homosexuality, 70 percent of the participants reported they would avoid him or "avoid the issue". Only 30 percent said they would be "ready to stand by" a friend if he revealed he was gay. Such beliefs were widely lived in the study group. Public displays of masculinity are critical here. For Richard:

"Ah, you have to be intense, every man has to be intense, 'cos if you're not like, if you're too laid back like, you'll be called feminine like you know? That's the truth like, I mean there's fellas laid back, very laid back in our class, and a bit on the feminine side like".

Other participants expressed a belief that to be seen performing well within the classroom can be considered characteristic of femininity, and therefore homosexuality. Tom, for example, felt a pressure to alter his schoolwork as consequence: "'Cos you know you might fall down in your schoolwork, 'cos they might think you're a faggot or something', if you're doing well". These values were translated also in how the boys envisioned the communication of their emotional life. There was a consensus that men should not display feelings. Somewhat typically in terms of modes of masculinity that were being constructed here - self-revelation, softness or sensitivity - were regarded as 'gay'.

Edward: *“Men don't really express their feelings like...because no other man cares like”.*

Eric: *“We don't see the point in expressing our feelings I'd say”.*

Tom: *“If a guy started saying, you know, “I feel this way”, it would be like “shut up”! It would like! Because they don't express things, its kind of gay, but they express things like anger if they want to like, if they hate someone, they like fight ‘em”.*

Interestingly, the use of mobile phones allowed the boys to circumvent these rules about showing feelings in public, or amongst one's peers. Eamonn remarked that the phones presented opportunities to express love and affection, “Cos you can say whatever you want without sounding like...you'd text what you'd never say...cos it'd make you sound like a fuckin queer like. You can get away with so much with texting like.” It seems that in facilitating the escape from surveillance of his peers, the communicative spaces of texting allow these teenage boys to circumvent the heteronormative rules of public space. However, the focus group interviews also revealed that in terms of everyday discourse, the exclusion of feminine or gay attribute through name calling or ‘slaggin’ is characteristic of peer group interaction. Such misogynous and homophobic affirmations of masculinity have historically been used to label people and actions as ‘out-of-place’, and help to make public space ‘straight’. Considered discursively, terms of abuse are social categories deployed to facilitate appropriate masculine behaviour and are a form of closure that proscribes non-masculine behaviour (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). When these teenagers call one another ‘queer’ they normalise public modes of heterosexuality. This was illustrated by the way in which Sean, describes the way his brother taunts him because he reads books, an intellectual pursuit ridiculed by his brother whom he describes as filling a more macho masculine role, that involves violence and drinking:

“One of my brothers now is like that, he's just a pure...talks about how he laps onto [aggravates] people on the street... he's a complete messer. But like he's unemployed now, so, he just has to get his act together. All he talks about his drinking now, and I kind of read books, but like nothing too intellectual, but like he calls me faggot an' all that craic”.

Sean's remark “all that craic” demonstrates his own self-awareness that the masculinities here are contested. But such demands to maintain heterosexuality are lived throughout the participants in the study. Through such ordinary and everyday performances, played out in schoolyards and corridors, at bus stops, and dozens of other micro-spaces in the city, they bring one another into line and learn in whose image public space is made. Moreover learning to ignore or ‘take’ abuse is to show strength or coolness. It is an effective way of teaching them to control their emotions— one of the primary values of hegemonic masculinity (Lyman, 1987). These results seem to suggest that the current hegemonic form of masculinity is one that is inherently heterosexual, and that its performance is constantly monitored by those who partake in it. Hegemonic heterosexuality requires constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealisations, but this effort goes hand-in-hand with an anxiety that its idealisations can never be finally or fully accomplished. As the experience of these teenagers show, in constantly monitoring themselves, and making distance between themselves and what is regarded as ‘queer’, this version of masculinity is consistently haunted by the domain of sexual possibility that must be excluded and ignored (Butler, 1993).

Conclusion

Through a reading of performativity, this paper has briefly explored several questions about the socio-spatial relations of masculinity. The construction of identity and sexuality is as complex, as it is diverse. But by demonstrating the significance of place and context, social geographers can continue to make important contributions to how social scientists understand the question of masculinity (Ní Laoire, 2001). In this light, this paper has queried the construction of teenager's identity in Cork and addressed the manner in which aspects of their masculinity and their spatiality seem to be co-constructed. In contrast to other potential groups in the city they could be compared to, such as the homeless, asylum seekers, or gay and lesbian individuals, the teenage boys in this study find themselves fundamentally 'in place'. Critically important in their world-view is the absence of what Giddens has called the 'tribulations of the self' (Giddens, 1992). On the surface of things, it appears these boys are unconflicted about their masculinity. The lack of these dilemmas reflects a form of social power that will in turn influence their sense of place. Amongst the study group, masculinity shaped how boys view themselves, how they treated other boys and girls, and how they presented their public selves amongst their peers. These notions of masculinity are not theoretical abstractions. Masculinity becomes enmeshed in public acceptability, and in doing so, becomes the basis upon which disposition in public space is made. So for example, the security of the boys means that, unlike their female peers, they are not socialised into having a conflictual relationship with the city. The street, in a sense, is theirs. However, it is clear also, that whilst the teenagers in this study perform as heterosexual males, this is based upon the exclusion of others, and is articulated by a distinct politics of difference. Their sense of place and their security is based upon the exclusion of girls, the rejection of alternative sexuality, and is held together by dreams of patriarchal success as heads of families and fatherhood. As such the paper has demonstrated that masculinity emerges as a powerful source of identity, legitimacy and social power. It follows that due consideration of these issues need to be taken on board if the experience of teenagers in urban space is to be effectively understood by social geographers.

References

- AITKEN, S. (2001) *Geographies of Young People: the morally contested spaces of identity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- BELL, D. and BINNIE, J. (2000) *The Sexual Citizen*. London: Polity Press.
- BINNIE, J. and VALENTINE G. (1999) Geographies of sexualities: a review of progress, *Progress in Human Geography*, 23(2), 175-187.
- BONDI, L. (1998) Gender, Class and Urban Space: public and private space in contemporary urban landscapes, *Urban Geography*, 19(2), 160-185.
- BUTLER, J. (1993) *Gender Trouble - Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. UK: Routledge.
- CANNY, A. (2001) The Transition from School to Work: An Irish and English Comparison, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 4(2), 133-154.
- CRESSIDA, M. (1997) Spatial Politics: a gendered sense of place, In: Redhead, S. (ed.) *The Clubcultures Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- COTTERELL, J. (1991) The emergence of adolescent territories in a large urban leisure environment, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 11(1), 25-41.
- CURTIN, A. (2001) Where the Boys are: new perspectives on the social geographies of adolescent males in Cork City. Unpublished M.Phil. thesis, University College Cork, Ireland.
- DAWSON, G. (1991) Lawrence of Arabia, Imperial Adventure and the imagining of British Masculinity, In: Roper, M. and Tosh, J. (eds) *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*. Routledge: London.

- DELPH-JANIUREK, T. (2000) Walking the Walk and talking the talk: bodies, conversation, gender and power in higher education in England, *Social and Cultural Geography*, 1(1), 83-100.
- DEPARTMENT of HEALTH and CHILDREN (2000) *National Children's Strategy*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
- FANNING, B., VEALE, A. and O'CONNOR, D. (2001) *Beyond the pale: asylum-seeking children and social exclusion in Ireland*. Dublin: Irish Refugee Council.
- FERGUSON, F. and O REILLY, M. (2001) *Keeping Children Safe: Child Abuse, child protection and the promotion of welfare*. Dublin: A&A Farmar.
- GIDDENS, A. (1992) *The transformation of intimacy: sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies* Cambridge : Polity Press.
- HANAFIN, J. and LYNCH, J. (2002) Peripheral voices: parental involvement, social class, and educational disadvantage, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23(1), 35-49.
- HOLLOWAY, S. and VALENTINE, G. (eds) (2000) *Childrens' Geographies: playing, living, learning*. London: Routledge.
- HOLLIDAY, L. (ed.) (1997) *Children of 'The Troubles': our lives in the crossfire in Northern Ireland*. New York: Pocket Books.
- JACKSON, D. (1998) Breaking out of the binary trap: boy's underachievement, schooling and gender relations, In: Epstein, D., Elwood, J., Hey, V. and Maw, J. (eds) *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement*. Open University Press: Milton Keynes, 77-95.
- JAMES, K. (2000) 'You can feel them looking at you': The experiences of adolescent girls at swimming pools, *Journal of Leisure Research*, 32(2), 262-280.
- JAMES, K. (2001) 'I just gotta have my own space!': The bedroom as a leisure site for adolescent girls, *Journal of Leisure Research*, 33(1), 71-90.
- KIELY, G. (1996) 'Fathers in Families' In: Macarthy, C. (ed.) *Irish Family Studies Selected Papers*. Dublin: University College Dublin.
- KITCHEN, R. (1999) Creating an awareness of others: highlighting the role of space and place, *Geography*, 84(1), 45-54.
- KRENICHYN, K. (1999) Messages about adolescent identity: Coded and contested spaces in a New York City high school, In: Teather, E. (ed.) *Embodied Geographies: Spaces, Bodies, and Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge.
- Ní LAOIRE, C. (2001) A matter of life and death? Men, masculinities and staying 'behind' in rural Ireland, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 41(2), 220-233.
- LONGHURST, R. (2000) Geography and gender: masculinities, male identity and men, *Progress in Human Geography*, 24(3), 439-444.
- LIEBERG, M. (1995) Teenagers and public space, *Communication Research*, 22(6), 720-744.
- LYMAN, P. (1987) The Fraternal Bond as a Joking Relationship: A case study of the role of sexist jokes in male group bonding, In: Kimmel, M.S. (ed.) *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*. California: Sage.
- MAC an GHAILL, M. (1994) *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- MARTINO, W. (1999) Interrogating the dynamics and politics of adolescent masculinities in school, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(2), 239-263.
- MATTHEWS, H., LIMB, M. and TAYLOR, M. (1999) Young people's participation and representation in society, *Geoforum*, 30(2), 135-144.
- McDOWELL, L. (1997) *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- MORGAN, M. and GRUBE, J. (1994) Drinking Amongst Post Primary School Pupils. Dublin: ESRI.
- PHILIPS, R. (1997) *Mapping Men and Empire: a geography of adventure*. London: Routledge.
- PHILO, C. (2000) 'The corner-stones of my world' – Editorial introduction to special issue on spaces of childhood, *Childhood*, 7(3), 243-256.
- ROBINSON, C. (2000) Creating Space, Creating Self: Street-frequenting Youth in the City and Suburbs, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3(4), 429-443.
- SCHNEIDER, E. (1999) *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in postwar New York*. USA: Princeton.

- SKELTON, T. (2000) Nothing to do, nowhere to go: Teenage girls and public space in the Rhondda valleys, South Wales, *In: Holloway, S. and Valentine, G. (eds) Childrens' Geographies: playing, living, learning*. London: Routledge, 80-99.
- TUCKER, F. and MATHEWS, H. (2001) They don't like girls hanging around there: conflicts over recreational space in rural Northamptonshire, *Area*, 33(2), 161-168.
- THRIFT, N. and DEWSBURY, J. (2000) Dead Geographies and how to make them live, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18, 411-432.
- VALENTINE, G. (1997) 'Oh yes I can.' 'Oh no you can't': children and parents' understandings of kids' competence to negotiate public space safely, *Antipode*, 64, 89.
- VALENTINE, G. (1996) The Production and Transgression of Urban Space, *Urban Geography*, 17(3), 25-42.
- VALENTINE, G. (2000) Exploring children and young people's narratives of identity, *Geoforum*, 31(2), 257-267.
- WATERS, J. (2000) 'Big Mac Feminism' on the Education Menu', *Irish Times* 24/10/00.