

*The Role of the Body in
Men's Biographical Narratives
Sport, Food and Work*

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Submitted for the degree of Ph.D

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ABSTRACT

The role of the body in men's biographical narratives: sport, food and work

Contemporary society is increasingly concerned with matters relating to health and body image, a concern which applies equally to men and to the male body. This thesis presents findings of a qualitative sociological study exploring perspectives on health and experiences of embodiment among a sample of Dutch men at different stages of the life course. The focus of the research was to examine how male embodiment related to ideas of masculinity through the life course. Respondents were selected to meet the criteria of age – between 20 and 40 years old – a period identified as being a significant stage of the life course because it is marked by transitions from youth to adulthood and from early adulthood into middle age. The narratives of these men were also found to reflect other life course transitions such as the development of personal relationships, progression and promotion at work and the increasing role of social and family commitments. These other transitions were found to be important in situating individual changes in the experiences of embodiment and physicality. The thesis develops an account of male embodiment that highlights the importance of time and location in men's narratives of themselves. This situated-ness is discussed in relation to three important dimensions of male life: sport, food and work. By placing these dimensions within the context of time an important finding of this study emerged, namely the existence of an idealised body within individual biographical narratives. This ideal was often a point of reference as individuals negotiated the male life course and its many transitions. The conclusion of this thesis is that men's narratives of embodiment are constructed in relation to developments over the life course rather than by reference to simple discourses of masculinity.

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Chris McGowan.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of men

During the decades leading up to the beginning of the 21st century issues relating to men and masculinity have become the centre of considerable popular and academic interest. The assertion of a crisis afflicting men and masculinity has been well publicised as has the ‘evidence’ which shows men to be in the forefront of social concerns about jobs, changing family patterns, failure in school and violent crime. (Beynon 2002) Similarly masculinity has been successfully problematised by academics and increasingly men are presented simultaneously as “both cause and symptom of a society in crisis.”(Coward 1999:52). As ‘traditional’ masculinity has become unfashionable and viewed as a highly damaged and damaging condition, men’s health has also become portrayed as problematic. Media coverage endorsed by recent health research emphasise the sorry state of the ‘male condition’, the more well documented aspects of which are summarised by Lloyd (1996),

“For every age group, male mortality is higher than that of females, life expectancy is lower for men, men tend to use primary health services less than women, are more likely to delay help-seeking when ill and are more likely to adopt health damaging or ‘risky’ behaviours, for example smoking, drinking, violence and fast driving.”

The ‘crisis’ situation may provide the social and cultural background to this thesis, but is only one facet of a much more important research topic; namely, the nature of modern men’s relationships with their bodies and how this changes over time. Such a

focus is needed because it is in this relationship that assumptions about both masculinity and the lifecourse are situated, articulated and become the basis for social action. Considerations for improving the health of men need to be understood within this context rather than seeing men as a 'monolithic, homogenous identity' (Wiegers 1998) and expecting men to "change, abandon, or resist aspects of masculinity" (Sabo & Gordon 1995:16).

Singular masculinity and individual men

Closer examination of the widely cited statistical data on gender differences in health reveals how quantitative research fails to recognise the diversity among men.

Overlooking the plurality of masculinities that exist, most writing exclusively and extensively refers to the most culturally dominant form of masculinity - that of white, middle class heterosexual masculinity. This thesis, whilst exploring the ways in which masculinity has become singularly defined, also seeks to challenge this 'traditional standard' of manhood. The work presented here subsequently draws upon and corresponds with more recent research perspectives that alternatively refer to and identify the 'plurality' and 'diversity' of current masculinities:

"Within the one school, or workplace, or ethnic group, there will always be different ways of enacting manhood, different ways of learning to be a man, different conceptions of the self and different ways of using a male body."

(Connell 2000: 10)

Developing this point, Connell (2000:194) argues that there is "no single pattern of men's health problems" yet within the current social and medical debate centred on

men and men's health there is little that relates to the individual ways in which health is experienced. The primary objective of this research was to move beyond this one dimensional and generalised portrayal of men's health where 'men' are viewed as a collective group adopting similar health damaging behaviour and sharing the same poor health outcomes. Rather than add to the proliferation of quantitative and statistical research, an empirical approach was selected to further explore perspectives of health among men, thus attending to the present deficit as surmised by Watson (2000:4),

“It is clear that current debate around men's health, and perhaps men's place in society, is crippled by the lack of attention paid to personal accounts and perceptions of maleness.”

Attempting to redress this neglect, the research project is based on qualitative data gathered from in depth interviews with a selected sample of twenty Dutch men aged between 21 - 40. Here the purpose was to vocalise the unique and individual accounts of ordinary men living 'real' lives.

Health and the body

In so doing, the use of the phenomenological perspective allowed another overlooked and taken for granted feature - that of the body - to be alternatively positioned as the primary location and facilitator for experiences of both health and maleness. Not only has the body become central in representations of health and well being, the subject of the body and issues of embodiment are of increasing academic interest. As Frank (1990:131) surmises, “bodies are in, in academia as well as popular culture.” Yet

whilst a sociology of the body has developed, there has been little investigation that acknowledges the importance of the body as a mediator of daily actions. Nettleton & Watson (1998:2) contest,

“Given the centrality of the body to everyday life, and the fact that it is something that all humans share, it is surprising that there has been so little empirical investigation into the body as it is experienced by human beings, who both have and are bodies.”

Feminist analyses of the body

Paradoxically, while the literature on the body is still largely devoid of the practical experiences of embodiment, the feminist perspectives have acknowledged the relationship between bodily processes and social relations and in so doing have exposed the significance of embodied social action. Feminist writers have challenged the reduction of women to their bodies associated with the historical equation of women with the body and men as the mind. Although concentrating on women, feminist thought has established both men and women as equally embodied social actors. This thesis therefore draws on this literature and in particular the extensive detailing of the objectification of the female body. This is important because it is in this work that the male body emerged as a medium through which masculinity is constructed and represented, indicating power and strength; “celebrated as manly spectacle in opposition to womanly gentleness and beauty.” (Beynon 2002:65)

The male body

The growth of consumer culture in western society has led many to argue that

idealised male bodies are becoming more visible and represent an increasingly dominant and desirable masculinity.

“Advertisements celebrate the young, lean, muscular male body and men’s fashions have undergone significant changes in style both to accommodate and to accentuate changes in men’s physiques toward a more muscular and trim body.” (Gross, 1985)

As men are now subjected to societal pressures in terms of physical appearance, it is assumed that men will adopt similar attitudes and behaviour towards their bodies as women. In taking men’s bodies as the subject, this thesis explores whether dominant feminist perspectives concerning the female body, can be so simplistically ‘transferred’ and applied to men and the management of their bodies.

Men’s accounts - rather than assumptions - of embodiment

It is for these reasons that this study has taken its point of departure the role of male embodiment. Concerns over male body image together with the overstated ‘crisis’ of masculinity have brought the male body to increasing prominence as an explicit topic for investigation. While this has also revealed how much about men is both generalised and based on conjecture, Morgan (1993) notes how the focus on men in recent years has enabled three basic assumptions to be challenged. These are the tendency to see men and masculinity as ‘the’ body; the tendency to deny or undertheorise men’s bodies; and the tendency to see men and masculinity as separate, such as ‘minds’ using bodies. This thesis - where individual men feature as the subjects of empirical inquiry - is in part a response to these assumptions where

men and all things male have been regarded and portrayed as the norm and where the underlying use of the terms 'men' and 'masculinity' are generalised, singular and reductionist. Additionally, the research offers an alternative to feminist approaches that infer that men will follow women along a continuum of bodily concern and associated problems.

Rather than assume or predict, the thesis is centred around men's individual accounts of embodiment in everyday life which found to relate to social factors which differentiate, impact and pattern masculinity in modern society. Of particular interest is how circumstances and social relations influence men's experiences and perceptions of the body as they enact manhood in their everyday lives. The study situates men's relationships with their bodies within the context of the lifecourse as men's embodied experiences are subject to change throughout the progressive 'stages' of life as men pass from youth to middle age.

The research is set within the broader context of existing work, drawing upon and shaped by dominant perspectives of health and the theoretically driven sociology of the body. Starting with the emergence of the body, the thesis deals with a number of key themes that relate to the role of the female and male body both traditionally and in contemporary society, the changing definitions and representations of masculinity and to the popular conception of the lifecourse. Each of these comprises a chapter in the initial part of the thesis and provides the frame of reference for this study. By combining the theoretical literature with the accounts of those interviewed, a richer understanding of the issues surrounding male embodiment within the context of health emerges.

Chapter 1

THE EMERGENCE OF THE BODY

Aspects of human embodiment are central to the development of sociology as issues such as social mobility, racism, social inequalities in health, globalisation are all concerned with the movement, location, care and education of bodies. As Shilling (1993: 20) determines, “People are shaped by the classification and treatment of their bodies as belonging to a particular race, sex, class or nationality.” Yet it is only since the mid 1980s that the body has moved away from being an ‘absent presence’ and has come to prominence as a distinct and valued area of study as a sociology of the body has evolved.

Theoretical perspectives of the body

Thomas Laquer (1987, 1990) argued that until the eighteenth century the body was perceived as an ungendered, generic entity with the male body representing the norm being regarded as the “perfect form of the species” (Nettleton 1995:105). The female body possessed all the same parts but these were arranged in a different and inferior way. (Shilling 1993) This ‘one sex/ one flesh’ model recognised the importance of bodies where they were viewed as a receptor as much as a generator of social meaning. The idea of distinct physiological and anatomical difference between the sexes emerged throughout the eighteenth century and naturalistic views developed which have come to dominate Western culture ever since. Although remaining distanced from society the naturalistic perspective places the body as the pre-social, biological basis for social relationships and inequalities. This belief has subsequently become the foundation for socio-biology offering the gene as the basic unit of

explanation, where all human behaviours, actions and differences can be defined in terms of their biological basis.

In contrast, the social constructionist approach rejects the idea that the body can be analysed as a biological phenomenon and advocates the body as a receptor rather than a generator of social meaning. Instead of being the foundation of society the character and meanings ascribed to the body are social products and the shape and potentiality of the body differ according to social environment (Turner 1996).

The anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) developed the idea of the body as a receptor of social meaning and symbol of society and believed that ideas about the human body correspond to prevalent ideas about society. Douglas (1966) suggests that conceptions of hygiene, cleanliness, dirt and pollution are intertwined with concerns of societal order and control and uses this example to illustrate the way in which the social body constrains how the physical body is perceived and experienced.

The most influential social constructionist approach is that of Michael Foucault (1979, 1981) who regards the body as wholly constituted by discourse where the body vanishes as a biological entity becoming a socially constructed product. Foucault (1979) examined the transition of the 'body as flesh' to the 'mindful body' and is noted for his studies of punishment in the prison system. Foucault (1979) believed the body to be the ultimate object of all external intervention where the practises of power and knowledge aim towards a 'disciplined body' - that is, the ways in which individuals internalise modes and rules of behaviour, emotion and thought and practise them in everyday life. As Falk (1994: 5) explains, "every characterisation of the human body is turned into an ordering intervention" and within the modern disciplinary systems of power and knowledge, it is the mind which becomes the true 'locus' of power.

These two dominant and polarised perspectives on the body reflect the dualistic mind/body approach established within the traditional sociology.

An alternative and more recent approach to the body is that which concerns the 'body as lived' and phenomenological sociology includes not only the physical body but also the mind and the person relating the self, identity and the body. Leder (1992:27) argues that biomedicine has focused on the 'body as machine', concentrating on the physical aspects of the body to the neglect of the mind and the person. Merleau - Ponty (1963:3) stresses that the central task of phenomenology is to "re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and its world". Merleau - Ponty argued that all human perception is embodied:

"We are in the world through our body andwe perceive that world within our body....by thus remaking contact with the body we ...also...rediscover ourself." (1962:206).

Although obvious that "all human beings both are and have bodies" (Nettleton & Watson 1998:2) Leder (1990:1) suggests that, "in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives it is also essentially characterised by absence". The 'taken for grantedness' of the body is apparent in the way that sociology has regarded the body as an absent presence in everyday life and disregarded the issues of human embodiment. Given that the body is fundamental to daily life the use of the phenomenological approach serves to redress this neglect while being concerned with the 'lived' body - "not simply a thing in the world but an intentional entity which gives rise to a world." (Leder 1992:27)

The sociology of the body has developed based on these three theoretical and conceptual perspectives: the naturalistic approach where the biological basis of the body is the primary focus, that of social constructionism which is concerned with society and the mind and the phenomenological approach which centres on the embodiment of human agency. All three approaches are found to contribute to the more recent increasing theoretical literature within which the body has become an area of study in its own right.

Health, the body and the self.

Shilling's study 'The Body and Social Theory' (1993) analyses the current interest in the body and discusses the social and academic changes which have formed the context where the body is recognised as a valid object of study. Shilling (1993:31) cites the rise of 'second wave' feminism in the 1960s when women increasingly took control to 'reclaim' their bodies which motivated people in general to regard their bodies as individual possessions integrally related to their self identities. Secondly, Shilling refers to the demographic changes which have focused attention on the needs of the elderly in Western societies. As medical advances have helped create much greater life expectancy rates, medical services encounter more problems concerning the health and well being of the elderly. Nettleton (1995:102) includes the advent of the AIDS epidemic in publicising the body which in contrast to these developments, represents the limitations of medical technology where, "within an era characterised by an ageing population it is difficult to come to terms with the death of young people" (Nettleton 1995: 102). The final factor concerns the rise of consumer culture linked to the changing structure of modern capitalism where the shift from production to consumerism encourages the individual to work hard at consuming.

“The body in consumer culture has become increasingly central and has helped promote the ‘performing self’ which treats the body as a machine to be finely tuned, cared for, reconstructed and carefully presented through such measures as regular physical exercise, personal health programs, high fibre diets and colour coded dressing”. (Shilling 1993:35)

In contemporary western societies such self-care regimes as Shilling (1993) describes are not simply about preventing disease but are also concerned with an individuals physical appearance and the importance of how our bodies appear to ourselves and to others. Goffman (1963) discusses the significance of bodily appearances and physical actions such as facial expressions and gestures noting that similar meanings are ascribed to them by individuals within a society and adds, “we possess shared vocabularies of body idiom which provide us with a common means of classifying embodied information”. Goffman (1963:35) refers to the importance of managing the visible body where individuals are required to be ‘on stage’ producing consistent performances during social encounters and interactions.

Health has also become increasingly associated with what Goffman (1969) terms the “presentation of the self” where the body has become a project to be worked upon as part of a person’s self-identity. Shilling (1993) refers to the body as “entity in the process of becoming” and cites developments in medical technology whereby the human body can be readily transformed and recreated through surgical interventions. New reproductive technologies question the definition of ‘infertility’; life support machines raise difficult moral and ethical issues around the meanings of ‘life’ and ‘death’; the growth of cosmetic surgery, the use of heart valves and pace makers have

blurred the boundaries between 'human' and 'non - human'. (Lupton et al 1997: 6)

Turner (1996) surmises that as the embodied self becomes the project of consciousness in modern societies, the ageing of the human body is viewed with abhorrence by a society which values youth and vitality: "death becomes a threat to the stability of the system grounded on a view of the body beautiful, the body as pure fluidity and creativity" (p. 21). This 'new self' presents as far more mobile, tentative and incomplete than the bureaucratic image of the disciplined self as portrayed in the work of Foucault (1979) and "corresponds to and is produced by a new uncertainty, differentiation and fragmentation of the risk society" (Beck 1992). In this time of uncertainty and heightened self- reflexivity bodies are viewed as highly amenable to change and the various ways of disciplining the body offers a way of regaining control. As Shilling (1993:5) states, "At a time when our health is increasingly threatened by global dangers, we are exhorted ever more to take individual responsibility for our bodies by engaging in strict self care regimes."

Food and the body

The control of diet offers one such way of 'disciplining' the body which, as a central feature of the government of the body, brings attention to and is relevant to the sociology of food and eating. The importance of dietary management is historically expressed in the discourses of religious asceticism and medical regimens although in contemporary western societies it is now a prominent feature in lay discourses concerning sexual attractiveness and body shape. Traditionally, rigorous control over diet involved practises such as consuming the most meagre and most bland amounts of food together with the denial of meat or sweet foods and were typical of ascetic practises adopted by religious followers. Such commitment and self-discipline was

believed to prove their ability to override temptations of the flesh, including both appetite and sexual desire. (Lupton 1996).

Coward (1989) observes that as health has replaced sexuality as the new moralising category for power to be exercised, food has replaced the significance of sex as a major source of anxiety about the body. Dietary choices and food preferences may now be made on the basis of assumptions about the appropriate shape and size of the body as well as its physical health. Lupton (1996:137) refers to the popularity of dietary regimes in modern society where asceticism is designed to produce an acceptable social self which suggests that, “limiting one’s food intake is an effective way of demonstrating self discipline”. This contrasts with the important meanings ascribed to as contributing to the project of the self as a knowledgeable and valuable consumer: “Variety, novelty, abundance, innovation, self indulgence and excitement in eating are desired and valued by many people as part of constructing and presenting the self.” (Lupton 1996:155). Relating ‘Food, the Body and the Self’, Lupton (1996) emphasises the strong connections between food choices and practises, the emotions, embodiment and subjectivity. Lupton (1996) illustrates the distinct but often contradictory associations around what is labelled ‘good’ and ‘bad’ food.

“Good food is associated with being nutritious and healthy, with self control and discipline.....it is solid but light, clean and linked to slimness. Bad food is polluting and fattening...it is heavy and weighs down the body.” (p. 154)

However, in contemporary consumer society it is widely believed - and advertised - that the appropriate diet produces a healthy body and Lupton (1996) affirms that as

the attainment and preservation of good health is perceived as a moral accomplishment. The achievement of a slender body represents the privileged values of self-control and self-denial, “working towards the idealised slim, long living youthful body that is so valued in western societies.” (1996:137). The outward appearance of the body is understood as demonstrating inner worthiness and personality of its owner so there is a high degree of preoccupation with bodily presentation and management. Turner (1996:230) concurs that the question of diet is inextricably bound up with the problem of modern personal identity, where a good body image is important for a good self image: “the role of diet has been reversed because we diet in order to express our sensuality and sexuality.”

As topical interest in the relationship between body image and diet has increased Beardsworth & Keil (1997) offer that it has also revealed four major perplexities for sociologists. Firstly, as food supplies become more secure and plentiful, an increasing and substantial percentage of the population is on a diet with the aim of achieving weight loss and therefore attempting to avoid eating the abundance of food and dietary choices now available. Secondly, as the average body weight increases in the general population the preferred and proposed ideal body image as portrayed by the media and the advertising industries becomes slimmer, more slender and often underweight. The third problem acknowledges the rise over the last twenty years in eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa which not only damage and threaten health but can also result in the death of the sufferer. The fourth problem points to the evidence which reveals that most of those involved in dieting and suffering from eating disorders are women - the people who are normally responsible for the purchasing, preparation and presentation of food. These inconsistencies persist as recent studies reveal that as the English are becoming the fattest people in Europe, the

fastest weight gain has been among women, 20% of whom are officially classed as obese. (International Task Force in Obesity, June 1999). In direct opposition is the evidence that shows 60- 80% of women are on a diet at any one time (Young, 1994). It is important to question why it is women who appear particularly vulnerable to the prevalent preoccupation with fat, diet and slenderness and to understand why, as Meadow & Weiss (1992:178) propose, “food and eating are a metaphor for what is required of a woman in today’s society”. To further comprehend this summation it is necessary to consider the traditional definitions of femininity that have originated from the split between mind and body, central to the differentiating representations of men and women. The powerful influence of the mind/ body dichotomy is shown to pervade religious, educational, economic, family, legal and political institutions resulting in western societies’ prescription of what it means to be female. The following section examines the historical and cultural pressures that have authorised, allowed and manipulated the control and definition of women primarily in terms of their bodies.

Chapter 2

THE CONTROL OF WOMEN'S BODIES

Woman as the body, man as the mind

Synnott (1993:38) argues that cultural rules have controlled women's bodies throughout history based on the biological differences between men and women where the sexes are "polarised and opposite, at war in a classic example of dual symbolic classification." The notion of a split between mind and body dates back to ancient Greece. Aristotle in the fourth century, asserted that males were superior to females who were seen as imperfect versions of the ideal form of humankind, described as "mutilated males" who were emotive and passive prisoners of their body functions. Aristotle defined hierarchical dualisms determining that the soul ruled the body and reason was preferable to emotion. The mind, which only a male could possess, was believed to be connected to the divine soul - therefore the female was incapable of reason (Hesse- Biber 1996).

The attitudes and values of Greek society continued to some extent within the Christian theology which subsequently influenced the Cartesian perspective of the body. Descartes drew a significant distinction between the soul and the body regarding the body as a machine directed by instructions from the soul. Similarly in Christianity the role of asceticism was to free the soul from its entrapment in the human body and disciplinary practises were adopted, such as diet and meditation, in order to produce the rational self. Within this ascetic tradition the body was viewed as a threatening, difficult and dangerous phenomenon supported by the Christian definition of the body as evil illustrated by mankind as a sinful creature, fallen from grace. Firmly established by the story of Adam and Eve, Christian teaching

traditionally associates women with the dark side of human existence and female sexuality with moral and religious temptation characterised by matter and passion whilst men are defined by the spirit and reason. (Turner 1996)

The development of the social and natural science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries served to reassert the superiority of men and the inevitability of female subordination in the public and private life. Knowledge required objectivity and in order to ascertain the truth, it was thought that science should remain detached from all emotional and personal considerations. The image of the dispassionate scientist whose mind transcended his body defined science as a male pursuit while the object of scientific knowledge - that is nature - was determined as female. As such the body continued to be viewed as occupying a lower order which could interfere with the pursuit of the truth and again reinforced women as being incapable of scientific thought. (Hesse - Biber 1996) Shilling (1993:44) contends that “to be a woman was to have a body and mind which were unable to withstand the rigours of physical and mental exertion” adding that the position of women in society has been undermined repeatedly by attempts to define their ‘unstable ‘ bodies as both dominating and threatening their ‘fragile’ minds.

The early capitalism of the nineteenth century relied on the external control of women’s bodies where women were valued as decorative objects and as a showpiece of their husbands’ wealth. Thorstein Veblen (1899) observed that of the absolute feminine beauty,

“the ideal requires delicate and diminutive hands and feet and a slender waist.

These features go to show that the person so affected is incapable of useful effort and must therefore be supported in idleness by her owner. She is

useless, expensive and is consequently valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength.” (p.107)

Fallon (1990:85) describes the alternative model of the female ideal of the nineteenth century as being “the bigger, bustier, hipper, heavy- legged woman found among the lower classes, and actresses and prostitutes” but the most admired was the fragile creature submissive to her spouse and subservient to domestic needs.

Subsequently as social power became less dependent on the sheer accumulation of material wealth and more associated with the ability to control and manage the labour and resources of others, so excess body weight came to be seen as reflecting moral or personal inadequacy or lack of will. (Bordo 1993) These changes were mirrored by commercial representations of women as the nineteenth century curvaceousness was replaced by the slender ideal, which became the dominant image for most of the twentieth century. As patriarchal interests characterised women as wives, mothers and commodities complementing an economy relying increasingly on domestic consumption, capitalism motivated producers to create new needs and exploit new markets most of which centred around the body and its functioning. Advertising was crucial in defining women as the primary consumers and promoted insecurity by encouraging women to adopt a critical attitude to the body, self and lifestyle. As long as a woman viewed her body as an object, she was controllable and profitable. (Hesse-Biber 1996)

The ‘thin’ ideal

The rise of the mass media and film also contributed to the imposition of more general standards of beauty and fashion in the west and as the media focused on high status

groups it was their standards which became widespread. In the 1950s films and magazines exalted the 'hour glass' figure immortalised by Marilyn Monroe but the emphasis on slimness returned in the 1960s - the era of Twiggy.

Other related forces influenced the re-emergence of the thin ideal, notably second wave feminism, which included feminist criticism of patriarchal social organisation and the transformation of women in the public sphere. The body came to prominence as women 'reclaimed' their bodies from male control and rejected the traditional roles and practises of western culture. However, Hesse-Biber (1996:28) contends, "as women were demanding more space and gaining social, economic, political resources the pressure to shrink in body size returned" signalling the commencement of the contemporary preoccupation with thinness. Whilst the availability of reliable contraception and more liberal legislation regarding divorce may have bolstered women's quest for equality other factors were less advantageous. Beardsworth & Keil (1997:178) cite the new youth culture of the 1960s with its emphasis on the natural youthful look: the move towards a more androgynous body image: greater career opportunities in the labour market where a 'motherly image' would be positively disadvantageous: the fitness movement and ideas about the way in which exercise can alter the look of the body. Influenced by the mass media the images portrayed of thinness became associated with the attributes of femininity, success, desirability, sexuality and self-control. Women were not only motivated by a desire to be physically attractive but also to achieve personal, social and material success (Ogden 1992). As Seid (1989: 257) comments, "The imperative to be thin became monolithic as fashion's decrees were reinforced and pushed by all cultural authorities.....until the concept became so internalised that no reinforcement was necessary."

The shift from external to the internal control of women's bodies emerged as the diet, beauty, cosmetic, fitness and health industries of twentieth century capitalism together with modern patriarchy coerced women to be thin through self imposed practises and rituals. Lupton (1996) states that women in particular are attracted to the self-discipline of dieting which equates and represents control over the body conquering hunger and the desire for food. "Dieting", Wolf (1990:190) substantiates, is the essence of contemporary femininity. Denying oneself food is seen as good in a woman, bad in a man....the current successful and 'mature' model of femininity submits to a life of self denial in her body." Whilst women become pressured to maintain a sexually attractive figure and feel obliged to restrict their food intake, this conflicts with their maternal role which dictates that women feed their families nutritionally and socially satisfying meals. (Beardsworth & Keil 1997) Oakley (1992:42) asserts, "women are expected to prepare food as an act of love and caring but not to eat it." A number of studies (Charles & Kerr 1988; Murcott 1983) verify this and indicate that men exert control over the family diet and claim that, "the privileging of men in terms of food provision is a symbolic representation of the subordination of women within the family, a concrete expression of their position as servers and carers of men". (Charles & Kerr 1988:84). Wolf (1990) concludes that women's eating is a public issue and the fact that women eat less and differently from men reflects that dietary practises are linked to the sexual division of labour in domestic life.

Established family customs and the mass media subsequently continue to benefit ruling patriarchal interests even as women's independence has threatened the traditional way in which both men and women focus their lives. Hesse-Biber (1996:32) refers to the 'predictable backlash' of feminism claiming that as women

became increasingly absorbed in controlling their bodies through such self-improvement activities as dieting and exercise they lose control over other areas of selfhood that might challenge societal norms.

‘Damaged’ bodies

The feminist analyses of both Orbach (1988) and Chernin (1983) examine this further being concerned with the problematic relationship between women and food and how, as a consequence of women’s relative powerlessness in patriarchal society, women’s bodies become ‘damaged’. Offering an alternative view of the naturalistic perspective of the body, feminist theorists argue that although the body provides a basis for the construction of patriarchal social relations, these relations can themselves shape the bodies of women. Orbach and Chernin propose that women’s bodies have natural sizes and shapes but these are disrupted and distorted by social pressures which become internalised and find expression in eating disorders. As women come to regard the body as the only sphere over which they can effectively exert control, food intake and the need to reduce body weight can become obsessive promoting erratic eating patterns and behaviours as natural hunger mechanisms are interrupted.

Orbach (1988) focuses on compulsive eating and cites two major forces which contribute to the cycle of over eating and starvation altering bodily development. Firstly, the supposition that a woman needs a man to fulfil her role as a wife and mother, therefore to succeed as a woman she has to consider herself as a commodity valued by her appearance and presentation. In so doing she becomes a prime target for the fashion and diet industries which promote a strong and limited image of the ‘ideal’ female figure - predictably thin, or at least, free of any excess fat. Women then become trapped in a spiral of dieting and unhealthy eating. Orbach (1988) contends

that women react against these pressures and that becoming fat serves to avoid being marketed and attaining this ideal. Women then become, “unnaturally fat ... as a symbolic way of rejecting the way society distorts them” (1988:44) Secondly, Orbach suggests that women, throughout the years of motherhood, undervalue and fail to recognise their own needs as they prioritise those of the family. Consequently eating becomes a substitute for their real emotional and intellectual needs. Considering those who do work outside the home, Orbach (1988) maintains that many women neutralise their sexuality by remaining fat to ensure that they can be taken seriously and cannot be treated ‘frivolously’ as sex objects by their male colleagues.

Chernin (1983) writes of the ‘tyranny of slenderness’ facing women in contemporary society which restricts social and physical growth and expression. As the women’s movement threatened men’s dominance, Chernin (1983) argues,

“The requirement that women remain arrested in development becomes more visible and more severe. In this age of assertion men are drawn to women of childish body and mind because there is something less disturbing about the vulnerability and helplessness of a small child - and something truly disturbing about the mind and body of a mature woman.” (p. 95,110)

In contrast to men who are taught to take pride in their bodies, women are conditioned to adopt an attitude of dislike and consequently get caught up in various efforts to reduce them. This is evident not only in the increase of cosmetic surgery and liposuction but also in the rise of anorexia nervosa. Bordo (1993) explains that the anorexic syndrome emerges, not as a conscious decision to get as thin as possible but as a result of commencing a diet fairly casually and then ‘getting hooked’ on the

feelings of accomplishment and control. The ability to control hunger, for the anorexic, signifies control over her body and her life and deliberate starvation is also seen as a demand for freedom. Bordo (1993: 201) describes anorexia as the creation of a rigid defence against the desirable products of consumer culture. Addressing the contradiction referred to earlier by Beardsworth & Keil (1997:174) citing the 'paradox' of an anorexia epidemic despite the increase of the overweight majority, Bordo (1993) claims that far from being paradoxical the co-existence of anorexia and obesity reveal the instability of the contemporary personality construction. Describing the difficulties of finding a balance between the producer and consumer sides of the self, anorexia is viewed as extreme self denial and repression of desire whilst obesity represents an extreme capacity to capitulate desire.

Perceptions of female fatness

Whilst neither anorexia nor obesity is accepted as the appropriate response, cultural attitudes toward the anorectic may be ambivalent but reactions to the obese are not. Meadow & Weiss (1992:133) acknowledge that "fat oppression, the fear and hatred of fat people, remains one of the few "acceptable" prejudices still held by otherwise progressive people". This aversion to fat, uncontrolled, uncontained bodies is such that the sight of obesity may arouse feelings of disgust and revulsion and is understood as "unhealthy, deviant, out of control, a moral failure." (Lupton 1996:137) Wolf (1990:187) defines fat as a female characteristic which traditionally represented sexuality, fertility and desire in women.

Once considered an attractive attribute, female fatness in modern western society is viewed with sympathy and distaste indicative of "sexual ambiguousness and emotional sloppiness."(Schwartz 1986:18) The perception that fat also equates with

weakness serves to reinforce women's position of powerlessness in capitalist society where control is exerted over women by ideologies that define female beauty in terms of unnatural slimness. Wolf (1990) contends that the 'thin' ideal is not beautiful aesthetically but beautiful as a political solution and Synnott (1993:221) concurs that bio politics reflect the power of the male gaze over female bodies. "It seems that men look and women are looked at...men are shown to be in control of the gaze, women are controlled by it. Men act; women are acted upon. This is patriarchy." Berger (1972) notes the imbalance between male and female power within patriarchal culture where women are positioned as the passive object of the look and come to internalise this look which carries relations of domination, surveillance, access and control. Synnott (1993) concludes that gendered bodies are produced through cultural norms governing women's behaviour and appearance in the discourses of beauty, diet, exercise, cosmetics, fashion and food. Women are urged to regard their bodies as malleable, needing to be shaped, moulded and remade into a male conception of female perfection, confirmation that "women have always defined themselves in terms of an external ideal which simply reflects the norms of the times." (Meadow & Weiss 1992:96)

Although it is primarily women who have endured the concentrated focus on health and body shape the current obsession and 'norms' are no longer gender specific and whilst feminist discussion centred on the body as a basis of female oppression, feminist thought did not exclude men's bodies. In contemporary western society it is not only women who are the subject of social expectations in respect of their physical representation and consequently men are increasingly drawn into the pursuit of attractiveness. The associated recent literature is reviewed more fully in Chapter 4 and

reveals how men no less than women have fallen victim to the 'beauty myth' focusing on the increasing pressures affecting men to conform to an aesthetic ideal.

The inter-relatedness of these subjects and the changing nature of gender roles have contributed to the development of men's studies which alternatively examine the embodiment of masculinity whilst addressing a broad range of issues pertinent to men.

These areas of increasing interest and research are based on the present conceptions and definitions of masculinity. It is therefore necessary to examine the construction of masculinity and the ways in which history, ethnography, psychology and other social sciences have contributed to current frames of knowledge. Significant social change is shown to have unsettled the foundations of dominant constructions of the masculine and together with the wide range of responses manifest in the current 'crisis of masculinity'. This now becomes the theme and is explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A 'CRISIS OF MASCULINITY'

In contemporary western society traditional forms of affirming male identities are no longer readily available to many men and this has developed into what many writers refer to as a renewed 'crisis of masculinity'. Whilst this notion of a male crisis persists the briefest historical survey will show that masculinity has always been in one crisis or another. Indeed, Kimmel (1987) argues that the whole idea that men's natures can be understood in terms of their masculinity rose out of a crisis.

"Masculinity to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of those practices in bodily experience, personality and culture....terms such as hegemonic and marginalised masculinities name not fixed characteristics but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relations."

(Connell 1995: 71, 81)

Referring to the notion of change, Hearn (1999) suggests that the presence of change should not be confused with any general assertion of a so-called 'crisis in masculinity'. According to both Badinter (1995) and Kimmel (1987) there have been two such earlier 'crisis in masculinity' in modern history, such as in France and Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in Europe and the US at the turn of the century. At both times the respective social orders appear to have produced a relatively coherent set of 'norms' for manliness even though the fragility of those

norms was made apparent by the reaction of those groups most threatened by change. The first period involved only the dominant classes, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie as women questioned the institution of marriage and demanded “not only the equality of desires and rights, but also that men be gentler and more feminine” (Petersen 1998:19). In contrast the second ‘crisis period’ involved mainly industrial working class and middle class men whose work which was redefined by the process of industrialisation with the resultant decline of the significance of physical strength. Opportunities were no longer provided for the demonstration of qualities that were seen to underpin male identity such as strength, agility and initiative. (Badinter 1995: 10-15) In this era, white middle class men especially perceived a threat to the meaning of hegemonic masculinity and to their sense of empowerment in relation to women and to lower class men brought on by a combination of changes. These additionally included the modernisation of social life and the rise of the organised feminist movements. The traditional foundations of gender identity - control over one’s labour, ownership of the products of labour, geographic and social mobility, domestic dominion over women and children - were eroding. These changes were also reflected in private life. As the structural foundations of traditional masculinity diminished, it became apparent that women had taken over the ‘making of men’ and the subsequent ‘feminisation of culture’ included women’s control of the chief institutions of childhood socialisation - the church, school, home. As most boys were increasingly separated from their fathers and left in the care of their mothers and female school teachers, these resultant changes led to fears among middle class men of social feminisation. Whilst the first crisis period ended with the advent of the first world war which provided men with the ultimate homosocial institution within which to prove their manhood, men continued to seek similar solutions:

“In short, masculinist responses to men’s fears of social feminisation resulted in men’s creation of homosocial institutions in which adult men, separated from women could engage in masculine activities, often centred around the development and celebration of physical strength, competition and violence.”

(Messner 1997: 9)

Some of these were institutions in which fathers hoped to initiate their sons into manhood through physical activities that were viewed as masculine returns to “nature”. The purpose of such activities was to counterbalance the “feminising” effect of modern urban social life which threatened to undermine both the traditional family unit and established identities. Additionally anti feminist organisations directly attempted to maintain patriarchal control of the state in response to the rise of the organised women’s movements which petitioned for equality and empowerment. (Messner 1997).

Prior to these crisis periods, the public sphere had always been dominated by men who also enjoyed virtually arbitrary power in the private sphere and did so through the universal belief that they were naturally quite different to and superior to women. MacInnes (1998) proposes that masculinity was a resultant ideology produced by men as a result of the threat posed to the survival of the patriarchal sexual division of labour by the rise of modernity. “Their monopoly of power, resources, and status which they had previously been able to claim directly by virtue of their sex, they now had to assert was due to their socially constructed gender identity which expressed some undefined natural difference.” (1998:45) The emphasis on these ‘natural differences’ between men and women originated with religious and medical authorities but were now supported by new biological and social science theories

which grounded social differences in the 'natural order of things'. (Kimmel 1987) The deluge of academic social science work which appeared at the end of the nineteenth century was in part an effort at historical restoration; "to rescue a model of masculinity that structural change had rendered anachronistic and reapply it to re-establish traditional power relations between women and men and between some men and other men." (Kimmel 1993) It provided the empirical measures for masculinity by confirming that it could be demonstrated by the display of the various gender appropriate traits, attitudes and behaviours. It became the task of social science's task to enumerate those traits and attitudes, and then generalise them as the 'normal' traits associated with adulthood thus problematising women and 'other men' - such as black men, gay men and non-native born immigrant men. By marginalizing women and 'others' and reasserting the dominance of white middle class men, academic social science is shown to possess a gendered character.

"The guiding metaphors of scientific research, the impersonality of its discourse, the structures of power and communication in science, the reproduction of its internal culture, all stem from the social position of dominant men in a gendered world. The dominance of science in discussions of masculinity thus reflects the position of masculinity in the social relations of gender."(Connell 1995: 6)

This is reflected in the three main projects outlined by Connell (1995) which contributed to the development of a science of masculinity during the course of the twentieth century. The first of these projects is based in clinical knowledge and refers

to the emergence of Freudian psychoanalytic theory at the beginning of the twentieth century which made apparent the potential for a science of masculinity. The second approach subsequently evolved in the 1950's centred on the 'male sex role identity' model of masculinity, summarised by Kimmel (1993) as "that static, ahistorical container of attitudes, behaviours, and values that are appropriate to men and define masculine behaviour." The use of 'role' as a technical concept in the social sciences conveniently linked the idea of a place in social structure with the idea of cultural norms and anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists easily and similarly adopted the concept. The third project involves more recent developments in anthropology, history and sociology where over the last decade international social science research has expanded dramatically and moved in new directions reaching conclusions which differ significantly from older ideas of the 'male sex role' and even more from conceptions of 'masculinity'.

In taking 'men' as the subject of this work, it is (briefly) worth noting how - over the course of the last century - each of these projects has contributed to the knowledge, understanding and the subsequent construction of the 'science of masculinity'.

Psychology - the Oedipus Complex

At the turn of the last century Freud attempted to construct a scientific account of masculinity presenting the revolutionary argument that human sexuality was not a biological product of complementary 'natural' drives invested in male and female bodies but was essentially cultural and symbolic and therefore learned and social. Linking gender identity with sexual organisation rather than biological sex, Freud's account is illustrated by the development of a boy's Oedipal complex where,

“A boy must separate from his mother in order to join the superior ranks of manhood and the separation is steeped in fear and contempt - fear of castration and thus ending up a woman, and an inculcated contempt for women would make that the worst fate possible. So the mark of “normal” healthy development of masculinity becomes the ability to separate from and reject that which is feminine.” (McLean et al 1996:87)

The establishment of masculinity within Freud’s psychological framework is heavily predicated on not being a woman. Subsequently within psychoanalysis the essentialist definition of what is ‘masculine’ is not rooted in biological maleness but usually “picks a feature that defines the core of the masculine and hangs an account of men’s lives on that” (Connell 1995: 68). Freud equated masculinity with activity in contrast to feminine passivity and as such it is this ‘essence’ of masculinity which has later been portrayed as risk taking, responsibility, irresponsibility, aggression and Zeus energy. Craib (1989) argues that, “the existence of these common features is attested to by the persistent recurrence of the same qualities in studies of masculinity”. This is evident within the subsequent development of the sex role theory where ‘men’ are universally categorised and defined by a set of generalised common experiences.

Sex role theory - the male script

Around the 1950s and 60s sex difference research encountered the concept of the ‘social role’ which consequently led to the development and largely uncritical adoption of the ‘sex role’. The most common approach of the way in which the role concept can be applied is to gender, where being a man or woman means enacting a general set of expectations which are attached to one’s sex - adopting the ‘sex role’, be

it the male or the female. Masculinity and femininity are easily interpreted as internalised sex roles and as the product of social learning or 'socialisation' (Connell 1995: 22). Sex role theory had progressive implications in demonstrating that masculinity and femininity were socially scripted behaviours rather than biologically based male and female essences. This initial attempt to create a 'science' of masculinity centred on the idea of a male sex role which inadvertently legitimised and normalised dominant forms of masculinity and femininity whilst marginalising others. The work of psychologist Robert Brannon (1976) provides an example in specifying four main rules of the male script: "No Sissy Stuff"- avoid all behaviours that even remotely suggest the feminine; "Be a Big Wheel"- success and status confer masculinity; "Be a Sturdy Oak"- reliability and dependability are defined as emotional distance and affective distance and "Give 'Em Hell"- exude an aura of manly aggression. These categories of characteristics demonstrate not only how the male script is socially constructed but also how the male sex role is both oppressive to women and harmful to men. Whilst serving as a means of securing women in subordinate positions Pleck (1981) argues that the popular sex role definitions of masculinity which imply activity, mastery, rationality and competence reveal 'built in dangers' and limitations equally to both sexes as,

"the concept of sex role identity prevents individuals who violate the traditional role for their sex from challenging it: instead they feel personally inadequate and insecure." (p.160)

Ethnography - 'making a man'

An alternative research method characteristic in the early twentieth century was that of

ethnography, which also considered issues debated by feminism, psychoanalysis and sex role theory. Ethnographical accounts which initially documented and detailed the lives of women, was followed by research on masculinity, some of which focused on the cultural imagery of masculinity. Through ethnographic methodology, “cultures so dissimilar as to seem totally unrelated on examination proved to use variations on the same theme when it comes to ‘making a man’.”(Gaylin 1992:24)

Later ethnographical accounts provide such examples including the work of Gilbert Herdt (1987:203), who observes and describes the lives of Sambian tribesman, noting that: “men are manly and they must be that way. Warfare demands it, hunting requires it, and women expect it.” Similarly Gilmore’s (1990) ethnographic work on masculinity - ‘Manhood in the Making’ - concludes that manhood is difficult to achieve; therefore its achievement needs to be marked by rites of entry: “so long as there are battles to be fought, wars to be won, heights to be scaled, hard work to be done, some of us will have to ‘act like men’”. Corresponding with Freudian psychology, masculinity is presented as a defence against regression to pre-Oedipal identification with the mother and sees this need to “make a man” as an almost universal phenomenon rediscovered in each new and diverse culture that has been explored. This concept of manhood as something that must be attained, earned, something that is precious and fragile, something that must be defended and is distinct from the basic concept of femininity. (Gaylin 1992)

Invisible Masculinity

The modern sociology of gender however contests the frequently shared findings of ethnographical research, and argues that there is no masculine entity whose occurrences in all societies can be generalised. Masculinity is not a biological entity

that exists prior to society, just as gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction but is constructed in interaction (Connell 1995). This is also a primary concern of recent work on masculinities (Messner 1992; Klein 1993) which show how masculinity has been allowed through societal structures and institutions to conveniently remain 'invisible', and thereby reinforce hegemonic masculinity as the dominant power. Offering a new approach, several social science disciplines have examined the changing definitions of masculinity and provide evidence of diversity and transformation. The common themes for this new work include the construction of masculinity in everyday life: how conceptions of masculinity are enmeshed in the history of institutions and economic structures: the significance of differences among masculinities: and the contradictory and dynamic character of gender. (Connell 1995)

Whilst acknowledging the rapidly growing interest in men and their lives, Petersen (1998:7) argues that there remains a need for an epistemological critique. This should aim to show how the frameworks of knowledge about the masculine have historically evolved and how they structure what is known and what can be known about men and their experiences. Such an analysis appears to be lacking in men's studies which fail to critically examine 'man made explanations' of the world.

Similarly Connell (1995) argues that the central theme of a new men's history could only be what is missing from the non-gendered history of men and identifies this as the 'idea' of masculinity. Whilst academic historical writing has always been about men, books about men are not about 'men as men' and do not explore how the experience of being a man structured the men's lives, or the organisations and institutions they created, the events in which they participated. Men have no history as gendered selves and no work describes historical events in terms of what these events meant to the men who participated in them. Kimmel (1993) states that the historical

construction of masculinities and the reproduction of gendered power relations involves two separate dimensions, each of which was rendered invisible. The first by classical social theory, and more recently by the academic discourse that made 'sex roles' appear as historically invariant, fixed, static and normal, marked by same vagueness of scope and by a high level of generality. Hearn & Morgan (1990: 7) add, "When we refer to the invisibility of men we are writing about invisibility constructed through and within a wider framework of male dominance."

Kimmel (1993) argues that if there has been an invisibility of men in sociological and other research this may not be entirely accidental finding that the invisibilities of men may serve men's interests in keeping their activities apart from critical scrutiny, by other men as well as women.

"Heterosexual men have taken refuge in this idea that our sexual identities are absolute. The dominance of heterosexual masculinity, the ideologies that supported it by silencing the experience of others, the power structures and privileges that it disguises, the active, daily subordination of gay men, the persecution of effeminate men and the racism of men's colonial legacy - all those have been sustained by its capacity to remain beyond question, its contradictions out of sight. Heterosexual masculinity shifts its problems and anxieties defining them as belonging to others." (Chapman & Rutherford 1988:23)

Whilst male dominance over women appears relatively straightforward, men's power over other men concerns differential access to class, race, ethnic privileges or privileges based on sexual orientation. This is evident in the power exercised by upper

and middle class men over working men, the power of white men over non white men, the power of straight men over gay men. The construction of “hegemonic’ masculinity is shown to be characterized by sexism, racism and homophobia.

Kimmel (1993) contests that as social science began its quest for acceptance as a legitimate science, these characteristics were “operationalised by social science and called masculinity.” White middle class heterosexual masculinity consequently emerged as the normative, against which both men and women were measured and through which success and failure were evaluated. As such it was this version of masculinity - enforced, coercive, laden with power - that academic social science declared to be the “nominal” version: “it is precisely through the process of making a power situation appear as a fact in the nature of things that traditional authority works” (Kimmel 1993). In contrast to sex role theory that failed to address issues of power by obscuring structures of race, class and sexuality, academic social science alternatively made this power situation appear as a fact in the nature of things.

Institutionalised Masculinity

It is clear that definitions of masculinity are deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures and a more incisive approach has emerged in research and writing that which goes beyond the cultural norms of manhood to explore the institutions in which they are embedded. Gender as being socially defined is learned through the institutions that organise everyday life and this also implies a certain social regulation; even an exploitation of gender identity. In western society particular masculine ambivalences are systematically reinforced by major social institutions with their explicit emphasis on masculine qualities which “penetrate to the core of a mans personality.” (Tolson 1977:46) The family, school, and the peer group

together make up the primary context of masculine socialisation and the foundations of masculinity are laid down in boyhood as a boy's emerging sense of himself is directed into socially acceptable behaviour. His taken for granted 'masculine presence' is shaped by the systematic process of 'gender -identification'. (Tolson 1977: 22)

As gender is constructed within institutional and cultural contexts, Connell's (1996) research into gender issues reveals how schools are 'active players' in the formation of masculinities. As with corporations, workplaces and the state, gender is embedded in the institutional arrangements through which a school functions and Connell draws on theoretical work on gender which illustrates different components of a school's gender regime and which is founded on four types of relationships. Firstly Connell (1996) identifies those of power relations, which includes supervision and authority among teachers and patterns of dominance, harassment and control over resources among pupils. Here, masculinity is associated with authority with the concentration of men in supervisory positions.

The second relationship concerns the division of labour which refers to work specialisation among teachers and the concentration of women in domestic science, language and literature teaching and men in science and mathematics.

The third is that of patterns of emotion or the 'feeling' rules for occupations which can be found in teaching and often associated with specific roles within a school where those in higher authoritative positions are viewed as 'strict' and 'tough'.

"A boy must become inexpressive not simply because our culture expects little boys to be inexpressive but because our culture expects little boys to grow up to be decision-makers and wielders of power." (Sattel 1976: 470). Finally, relationships of symbolisation. Although schools import much of the symbolisation of gender from the

wider culture, they also adopt their own symbol systems - uniforms and dress codes, formal and informal language codes and more importantly the gendering of knowledge with certain areas of the curriculum being defined as masculine and feminine. Connell (1996) states that it is through these intersecting structures of relationships that schools create institutional definitions of masculinity and that while such definitions are impersonal they exist as social facts: "pupils participate in masculinities simply by entering the school and by living its structures".

The construction of masculinity through sport also illustrates the importance of the institutional setting. Sport is regarded as a male institution in the values and behavioural norms it promotes and ultimately naturalises -a combination of power, symbolisation and emotion - both on the field and in organisational hierarchies.

While contemporary Western culture offers and promotes opportunities to pursue increasingly diverse and varied sports, those that directly define a pattern of aggressive and dominating performance, such as competitive team games, portray the most admired form of masculinity.

"The importance of confrontational team games in the hierarchy of sports, the continued acclaim we afford the men who shine in them, mean that these games continue to offer important opportunities for masculinizing practices. The major games continue as institutions through which the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and through this male hegemony is actively pursued. These games are typically institutions in which physical strength and fighting skills are celebrated and in which male solidarity (especially among aggressive, dominating males) is also celebrated and which therefore reinforce

constraints on boys experimenting with other ways of being male.” (Messner & Sabo 1990:28)

Connell (1995: 36) writes that what is true of sport is also true of the workplace in general. Work is the institution that most defines the majority of adult males and male role literature takes it for granted that being the breadwinner is a core part of being masculine although the making of working class masculinities has different dynamics from the construction of middle class masculinities. Donaldson (1991) observes that hard labour in factories and mines literally uses up the worker’s body and that destruction, as proof of the toughness of the work and the worker can be a method of demonstrating masculinity. This is not to imply that manual work is destructive but that it is performed in a destructive way under economic pressure and managerial control. Alternatively middle class masculinity can be measured by the prestige and power a position bestows. Academic, business and political positions often serve through their influence and status to enhance the self-esteem of the man who holds them. Pleck & Sawyer (1974:94) refer to men’s need to work in the ‘adult hierarchy of worth’ as serving and meeting the needs of the economic institutions of society. Similar ‘feeling rules’ apply as those learnt in school,

“At the same time that jobs exploit men’s desire to get ahead, they also take advantage of their capacity to stay cool and unemotional. On most jobs ‘feelings are considered a nuisance’ - emotions only get in the way of doing the job. To the institution the job is the important thing; the welfare of the individual is necessarily secondary. Institutions have defined jobs so as to

generally separate our work and our emotional lives.” (Pleck & Sawyer 1974: 95)

While the differences between the meaning of masculinity within working class life and middle class life are important, it is not the only pattern of difference that has emerged. It has become increasingly clear that different masculinities are produced within the same cultural or institutional setting.

Manifold Masculinities

In the last ten years international social science research has expanded dramatically, progressing in new directions and Connell (1996) reports that a picture is emerging that differs significantly from the older ideas of the “male sex role” and even more from conceptions of “natural masculinity”. At the same time, men have been experiencing important changes and it is therefore significant to consider the major conclusions of this research prior to exploring the current male crisis. Connell (1996) classifies the findings as follows:

1. *Multiple masculinities*. It now must be recognised that there are different types of masculinity and no one pattern is found universally. Different cultures and different periods of history construct masculinity differently and there can be more than one kind of masculinity found within a given cultural setting. Within middle class life one version of masculinity is organised around dominance (emphasising leadership) another version organised around expertise (emphasising professionalism and technical knowledge).

2. *Hierarchy and hegemony* - while there are different masculinities there are definite relations between them. Some masculinities are more honoured than others and others

are actively dishonoured like homosexual masculinity's within western culture. Some are shown to be socially marginalised, for example, disempowered ethnic minorities. Others are exemplary, symbolising admired characteristics such as the masculinities of sporting heroes.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to that which is culturally dominant and represents a position of cultural authority and leadership not total dominance. As previously shown it is usually highly visible and generally referred to as the 'male role', expressing a successful strategy for the domination of women. It is also constructed in relation to various marginalised and subordinated masculinities (gay, black working class) as Messner (1997) surmises,

“men share very unequally in the fruits of patriarchy; hegemonic (white, middle and upper class heterosexual) masculinity is constructed in relation to femininities and to various (racial, sexual and class) subordinated masculinities.” (p. 8)

3. *Collective masculinities.* The gender structures of a society define particular patterns of behaviour as 'masculine' and 'feminine' and whilst at one level these patterns characterise individuals these patterns also exist at collective level.

Masculinities are defined and sustained in institutions, such as schools but are also defined collectively in the workplace and in informal groups such as street gangs and impersonally in culture. Aggressive masculinity is also shown to be created organisationally by the structure of sports culture with its pattern of competition, training, and steep hierarchy of levels and rewards.

4. *Active construction.* Masculinities do not exist prior to social behaviour, either as bodily states or fixed personalities but come into existence as people act. They are accomplished in everyday conduct or organisational life as configurations of social practice, in the way gender is 'performed' in everyday life. Connell (2000) observes that,

“From body builders in the gym, to managers in the boardroom, to boys in the elementary school playground a whole lot of people are working very hard to produce what they believe to be appropriate masculinities and have them recognised by other people.” (p.178)

5. *Layering.* Masculinities are not simple, homogeneous patterns and the research on gender detailed in both ethnography and psychoanalysis reveals contradictory desires and logics. The layering of desires, emotions or logics may not be immediately obvious but such contradictions are sources of tension and change in gender patterns.

6. *Dynamics.* As different masculinities exist in different cultures and historical time periods it is evident that they are amenable to change. Historians have defined the changes in masculinity as struggles for hegemony and in acknowledging that masculinities are composed historically it must also be recognised that they can therefore be decomposed, contested and replaced.

The renewed male crisis

These changing definitions feature strongly within recent work on men and masculinity although MacInnes (1998:14) notes that a consistent list of terms appears in descriptions of the 'essence' of masculinity such as hard aggressive, strong,

dominant, remote, powerful, fearful of intimacy, rational, unemotional, competitive, sexist. Craib (1987) surveys literature on masculinity male roles and identity and concludes:

“The qualities of masculinity however seem invariable, and are associated with the male as the breadwinner, provider, worker, the active and public half of the species: a man is strong, aggressive, rational, independent, task orientated, invulnerable and successful. (O’ Neill 1982) Such qualities are listed whether the work is based on attitude surveys or whether it is theoretically derived, whether it is concerned with identifying a cultural stereotype, a sex or gender role or the male identity - a man’s sense of himself.”(p. 723)

Typical of what Connell identifies as ‘hegemonic ‘ masculinity Harry Christian (1994) further defines hegemonic masculinity as a set of male chauvinistic attitudes. These are based on the belief in an innate difference between men and women, belief in the natural superiority of the former to run the public world and rule the private one, and a belief that sex is the only non demeaning way for men to be intimate with women. Craib (1987) cites a similar stereotypical list of features that describe what might have been portrayed as ‘manly’ half a century ago and suggests:

“It is striking this work shares a conception of masculinity with work that predates modern feminism. The difference lies in the evaluation. Whereas masculine qualities were once seen as normal and good they are now seen as politically and morally wrong. As perhaps in crisis and as damaging for all concerned.” (p.724)

In accordance with the findings of Craib (1987) the public evaluation of masculinity has undergone a profound shift. MacInnes (1998:47) contends that what were once regarded as male virtues (heroism, independence, courage, strength, rationality, will, backbone, virility) are now viewed as masculine vices (abuse, destruction, aggression, coldness, emotional inarticulacy, detachment, isolation, an inability to be flexible, to communicate, to empathise, to be soft, supportive or life affirming). This reflects in part the current 'crisis in masculinity' and it has become something of a cliché to argue that now is 'a bad time to be a man'.

While comparisons between men and women in the 19th century and 20th century reflect both major continuities and major changes, Hearn (1999) argues that men's general power as the dominant social category has remained virtually unchallenged. While changes abound in law, work, citizenship, personal relations and so on, there has been a widespread stubborn persistence in men's dominance - evident in politics, business, finance, war, diplomacy, the state, policing, crime and violence generally, heterosexual institutions and practices, science, technology culture, media and many other social arenas. At the same time, men's power is being constantly challenged, fragmented and even transformed and the experience of being a man is subject to questioning and acute fracturing. Men's continuing privilege has also been undermined by the development of modern industrialist capitalist society generally and in particular by its transformations over the last half-century. As Kimmel (1993) states, "men's situation and particularly men's power is a complex mixture of change and no change."

Change features strongly in the development of the current 'crisis of masculinity'. This began in the 1960s when the 'masculine myth' was brought into question by changes relating to work and family relationships together with the resurgence of

feminism. Chapman & Rutherford (1988) claim that the reality of men's heterosexual identities is that their endurance depends on an array of structures and institutions and when these shift or weaken, men's dominant positions are threatened. Therefore the changing nature of work and the disruption of the work culture with the decline of the manufacturing industries and the subsequent de-skilling of traditional male jobs are changes that have undermined traditional working class masculinity. Similarly the high levels of male unemployment and the growing jobs sector employing part time women have changed the face of the labour market and had a corresponding effect at home.

“The past decade has seen the increasing exposure of child sexual abuse and men's violence against their wives. The changing position of women in many different spheres is undermining the certainties of the past. These developments and other structural changes have all contributed to the questioning of taken for granted assumptions about men's role and function in life.” (Chapman & Rutherford 1988:23)

It is within this disintegrating ideology of masculine authority that feminism and a radical sexual politics have evolved and encouraged the shifting of attention on men who have consequently become the subject of growing political, academic and policy debates. Hearn (1999) states that whilst this in some respects is not new, what is different is that these debates are now more explicit, more gendered, more varied and more critical. At their base is the assumption that men, like women, are not ‘just naturally like that’ or ‘just bound to be that way’ but rather are the result of historical, political, economic, social and cultural forces.

These challenges of gender politics and feminism produced a fragmentation in male identity by questioning its assumptions and new images of masculinity are produced with the intent of redefining a dominant masculinity in order to preserve male superiority. These new images have been represented in varying guises shown by the diverse responses of men to feminism. Hearn (1999) suggests that since the early seventies there have been 'anti - sexist ' men and 'pro- feminist' men, to be followed in the eighties by 'wild men ' and mythopoetic men and the media creation of the 'new man' as previously referred to. The Nineties have brought 'newish man', new lads, and 'men's rightist' and now 'post new men'.

Chapman & Rutherford (1988:28) propose that the representation of different masculinities has produced two main idealised and conflicting images which correspond to the repressed and the public meanings of masculinity. 'Retributive man' represents the struggle to reassert a traditional masculinity - a tough independent authority. 'New man' in contrast is,

“an expression of the repressed body of masculinity. It is a fraught and uneven attempt to express masculine emotional and sexual life. It is a response to the structural changes of the past decade and specifically to the assertiveness and feminism of women.”(1988:32)

The authors maintain that the reactionary emergence of the new man has been to reinforce the existing power structure by producing a 'hybrid' masculinity, better able and more suited to retain control.

“New man represents not so much a rebellion but an adaptation in masculinity
..... a ‘patriarchal mutation’ - a redefinition of masculinity in men’s favour, a
reinforcement of the gender order, representing an expansion of legitimate
masculinity and thus an extension of its power over women and deviant men
and as such new masculinity like the old relies upon an unequal positioning of
values. Men change but only in order to hold on to power not to relinquish it.”

(1988: 235/ 247)

It is clear that one of the features of patriarchy is its resilience and its ability to adapt in order to survive; undermining threats to its symbolic order by incorporating their critique and adjusting its ideology. Brod (1990) argues that the sense of a crisis of masculinity arises not from the decrease of patriarchal power as patriarchal imperatives for men to retain power over women continue to remain, but rather from the disjunction between the facts of male public power and the feelings of individual male powerlessness. Connell (1995:84) identifies three broad areas in which the current gender order exhibits “crisis tendencies” where the construction or integration of masculinity was under pressure. The first of these concerns power relations which shows the most visible evidence of crisis tendencies. “The historic collapse of the legitimacy of patriarchal power and a global movement for the emancipation of women” as feminist movements have challenged and contested men’s institutional power and the ideas that support this power. Secondly Connell argues that production relations which have reflected massive institutional changes, particularly the post war growth of married women’s employment which has created a series of tensions and inequalities. This increase in low paying service sector jobs occupied primarily by women and immigrant workers has been accompanied by the notable decline within

the last two decades of deindustrialisation and in the number of stable unionized, family wage paying jobs for blue-collar men. Production masculinity is traditionally associated with being the breadwinner yet this definition has lost credibility, as structural unemployment was shown to have become a harsh reality for many of the young working class men featured in the work of Connell. Finally, Connell (1995:85) asserts that 'relations of cathexis' have notably altered with the stabilisation of lesbian and gay sexuality as a recognised and public alternative within the heterosexual order. The increasing existence of gay and lesbian communities, marriages and families, tends to destabilise the previously taken for granted assumptions around sexual orientation, gender, families and masculine institutions. Connell (1995) found other crisis tendencies to be apparent among the affluent. Hegemonic masculinity is culturally linked to both authority and rationality, both of which are key themes in the legitimisation of patriarchy. Authority and rationality however have become divided within changing economic relations and technologies. In sum, Connell's work effectively demonstrates how individual men who are situated differently in relation to crisis tendencies in the gender order have responded, by constructing various identities and practices of gender and sexuality.

Rather than focus on individual men Messner (1997) alternatively examines men's organised responses and in so doing identifies eight major tendencies in groups which have attempted to engage in a conscious politics of masculinities. These include men's liberationists; men's rights advocates, radical feminist men; socialist feminist men, men of colour, gay male liberationists, Promise Keepers (Christian), and the mythopoetic men's movement. The concerns and issues raised by the latter group have featured prominently in current literature on men and masculinity, and is reported to have grown with astonishing rapidity in recent years. Much of this relates

to the publication of Robert Bly's book 'Iron John' (1990) which allowed "men to feel that they could reclaim a masculinity while giving them a way to avoid the charge of being 'macho'." Messner (1997) questions why it is that Bly's mythopoetic men's movement attracted so many predominantly white, college educated, middle class, middle aged men. Kimmel & Kaufman (1994) suggest that psychologically these men were the most affected,

"For these were the men who believed themselves entitled to the power that attended on the successful demonstration of masculinity. These men experienced workplace transformation as a threat to their manhood and the entry of formerly excluded 'others' as virtual invasion of their privileged space." (p. 262)

The attraction then lies in the dominant themes publicised by the men's movement which are congruent with the current shifts taking place within current constructions of hegemonic masculinity rather than distinctive of any sort of radical break from "traditional masculinity". The idea of a 'true' nature of men or finding a 'deep masculinity' is one of the main considerations in the men's movement which acknowledges and celebrates men's difference from women. In order to emphasise and reinforce men's separation from women the discourse of the men's movement attempts to recreate the lost identity of the 'male warrior' although within Western culture a language of warrior and wildness carries its own histories and meanings. The images of warriors brings images of men as 'fighting machines' which strengthens the idea of men's bodies as being instruments or mechanisms under their control. It has been shown that men grow up with an instrumental attitude towards their bodies: "our

bodies are things that we do things with in order to prove to ourselves and to others that our masculinity is intact.” (Connell 1995: 45) This reinforces the notion that ‘manliness’ is always having to prove ones manhood.

However as debate around the current male crisis reflects, the ways to prove ‘manliness’ have narrowed considerably. The warrior figure has been shown to provide a model for contemporary manhood further supporting the idea that for many men the performance of manhood has become equivalent to proving that they are not women, and emphasising their biological sex and physicality. This serves to sustain the myth that men are biologically superior to women,

“The social definition of men as holders of power is translated not only into mental body images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, postures, the feel and texture of the body. This is one of the main ways in which the power of men becomes ‘naturalised’, that is, seen as part of the order of nature. It is very important in allowing belief in the superiority of men, and the oppressive practices that flow from it, to be sustained by men who in other respects, have very little power.” (Connell 1987: 85)

Complementary to this analysis is that of Berger (1972) who maintains that a man’s presence (be it fabricated or real) is dependent on the power he embodies. This power is always an active power which can be exercised on and over others. If a man’s physicality is unable to convey an image of power he is found to have little presence precisely because the social definition of men as holders of power is not reflected in his embodiment. Connell (1995:45) asserts, “true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies” and it is the male body which is now exposed

as the object and site of power. Focusing on the importance of the male body in the construction and reaffirmation of masculinity the next section reveals how masculinity is increasingly portrayed in contemporary western society as the antithesis of the macho savage warrior previously described. As Gaylin (1992:247) clarifies, “when a man tones his muscles, it is for narcissistic reasons, not for physical assault.”

Chapter 4

IN RELATION TO THE MALE BODY

The historical construction of masculinity is bound up with Christianity's attitude to the human body advocating the separation of the superior spirit to the weak flesh and the dichotomy of the mind and body is a central idea in framing perceptions of what is perceived as masculine and feminine. Whilst it is evident that western culture values women by appearance, men are assessed in terms of power, ambition, aggression and dominance in thoughts and actions - qualities of the mind. As Crawford et al (1992: 17) reiterates, "maleness is associated with order not disorder, with the mind not the body, with knowledge and the subjection of nature."

An alternative perspective is presented in the work of evolutionary theorists who support the naturalistic conception of the body, claiming that men's bodies are the bearers of natural masculinity produced by evolutionary pressures and that inherited with masculine genes are tendencies to aggression, competitiveness, political power and hierarchy. Connell (1995:52) however dismisses the claims of socio-biology as "fictional" citing the lack of evidence of strong biological determinants and maintains that both biology and social influence combine to produce gender differences in behaviour.

These opposing theoretically determined and dominant meanings of masculinity imply that the body is produced as instrument of will whilst reaffirming representations of 'true masculinity' - thought to proceed from and to be inherent in men's bodies. (Connell 1995: 45)

The masculine body

An ideal version of masculinity developed as bodies came under increasing scrutiny during the eighteenth century which encompassed the whole personality and “set a definite standard for masculine looks, appearance and behaviour.”(Mosse 1996). The idealised and favoured standard constructed for comparison and evaluation became that of the white, middle class, heterosexual, European male body and in the nineteenth century as cultural forms that have come to shape ‘manhood’ began to emerge, masculinity was increasingly defined in terms of vigour, competitiveness, bodily strength and assertiveness.

During the second half of the nineteenth century sporting institutions and clubs came to be recognised as sites for disciplining and advancing male bodies in cultivating qualities such as competitiveness, physical aggression and strength, these attributes viewed as being inversions of the “feminised Victorian society” (Peterson 1998:47). Peterson (1998:48) refers to the traditions of organised sport which endorse the belief that the strengthening of the body serves to fortify the will and build character, “sorting the hardy masculine types from the feminine gentle types thought less likely to succeed.” Nettleton & Watson (1998:165) contend that as men came to be defined by their physiology and other related behavioural characteristics “the male body is seen to have a narrow and partial presence”. Chapman (1988) suggests that culture has alienated men from their bodies and sexuality and this ‘distancing’ is reflected in the instrumental attitude adopted by men towards their bodies. Men refer to having ‘power over’ their bodies and believe that “bodies are things that we do things with in order to prove both to ourselves and to others that masculinity is intact.” (Connell 1995)

This approach prevails throughout the increasing literature of the sociology of sport where, as previously shown, masculinity is clearly defined as “notions of muscularity, strength and power emerge wrapped up with generous helpings of fearless domination which produce images of the ideal man.”(Mac an Ghail 1996: 131) As Connell (1983) observes, “an adult male is presumed to occupy space and to have a physical presence in the world and that presence is dependent on the power which he embodies.” Seymour (1998) verifies that as sport is so thoroughly masculinised it acts as a vehicle for the construction of masculinity and power embedded in particular bodies. This serves dominant interests by reinforcing the inferiority of women and supports male bodily skills sanctioning aggression, force and violence as expressions of maleness. The dominance of the male body is also established by other characteristics related to sport such as team play and co-operation combined with determination and timing. These serve to advantage men in social situations where men’s association with their physicality similarly encourages them to use their bodies more powerfully. Considering the effects of disability to embodiment, Seymour (1998) notes,

“The physicality - masculinity connection is central to patriarchy; it is a focus sanctioned by the able bodied world. Continual reaffirmation of the body by comparison with the bodies of others is the substance of men’s culture from earliest childhood. Discipline, strength, control, tenacity, endurance and competition are values associated with men’s bodies that are understood and shared in society.” (p.92)

The association of such traits as confidence and strength establish the male sex role as the dominant role whereas women are associated with the negative characteristics of prudishness, frivolity and complaining (Mac an Ghail 1996). Archer & Lloyd (1985) comment on the opposing distinctions of the masculine and feminine role and list contrasting attributes such as courage / timidity, roughness / tenderness and self-reliance/ dependence and Wilson (1987) suggests that, “the physical and temperamental differences between men and women are amplified by culture into universal male dominance.”

The body at work

The characteristics ascribed to the male role and male identity are largely located within the culture of work and relate to the governing definitions of work in the modern Western world where the only employment of substantial value is that which is paid and in the public domain. Male success equates to paid labour as this establishes the man as the breadwinner and reaffirms his position as head of household. Peterson (1998) refers to these heavily gendered connotations of the working body and the body at work where the portrayal of a ‘real man’ is one who not only undertakes hard work but also is seen to be at work. Pahl (1995) purports,

“The ideal that men sacrifice themselves or ‘do it all for the family’ is strongly rooted and has provided a powerful support for the institution of reproductive heterosexuality while serving to relieve men of a major responsibility for childcare and domestic labour.” (p.190)

The recent transformation of work through major structural change in employment and unemployment has been extremely significant for men and is one of a number of social and economic changes in the last two decades which have challenged masculinity. Whilst once believed to be at the pinnacle of the natural hierarchy of things, Chapman & Rutherford (1988:11) argue that these changes have “now exposed masculinity for what it is; a subjectivity that is organised within structures of control and authority.” As women gained economic resources and positions of authority the concept of the working body/ body at work became increasingly politicised and the significance of the public/ private division of labour for the domination of men over women became apparent as the non-visible, unpaid work undertaken by many women in the private sphere was recognised. (Peterson 1998) Such traditional forms of male power and superiority instrumental in controlling women were increasingly threatened as feminism and radical sexual politics centred on the embodied existence of women. Synnott (1963) argues that,

“Feminists have effectively challenged the male definitions of women as inferior and unequal ...they have rejected the legitimacy of patriarchy. They have detailed the oppression and exploitation of women, the objectification, infantilisation, degradation, fragmentation and prejudice against women; and they have also protested against the idealisation, glamorising, romanticisation and ‘pedestalisation’ of women. Women have reconstructed men.”(p.61)

Images of the male body

Shilling (1993: 34) surmises that as the ‘feminisation of life and the politicisation of the body’ emphasised the surface of the body, attention was also focused on the power

and force exercised by male bodies. Consequently, men were increasingly incorporated into issues and concerns relating to their bodies and throughout the 1970s and 80s 'men's studies' developed concerned with the embodiment of masculinity. These have included research of male body images and Mishkind (1987) argues that men have become increasingly fixated with male body images and describes the idealised representation of the perfect body type to which they aspire as the 'muscular mesomorph'. Mishkind (1987) identified three social trends which have influenced this preoccupation. Firstly, the destigmatisation of gay men as failed men and their subsequent acceptance as the weak, effeminate, weak wisted sissy has been replaced with the new stereotype of the gay macho body builder who takes pride in the physical appearance of his body. This, Mishkind states, has increased men's overall concerns with body image and also validated these concerns. Secondly, Mishkind proposes that as cognitive, occupational and lifestyle differences are no longer distinct between men and women, body image has become one of the few areas where men can differentiate themselves from women and adds "one of the only remaining ways that men can express and preserve traditional male characteristics may be by literally embodying them." The third related trend refers to the decreasing importance of the 'breadwinner' role which helped to shape men's identity. This has been replaced with an increasing emphasis on self-identity which has at its centre a concern with the body.

Gerzon (1982) identified five types of traditional archetypes of masculinity throughout history - soldier, frontiersman, expert, breadwinner and lord. As frontiersman and lord are no longer available roles and those of expert and breadwinner are no longer exclusively male, Gerzon proposes that as these categories cease to exist it is only the image of the strong, well-muscled soldier that presents an

opportunity to maintain masculinity. Seidler (1997) comments on the continual erosion throughout the 1990s of these many traditional supports of masculine identity across different social classes, races and ethnic identities. Masculinity has come to be viewed not only as a privilege but “wounded and in need of healing” afflicted with “restrictions, disadvantages and general penalties attached to being a man.”(Field & Taylor 1998). The concept of a male crisis has subsequently become a dominant theme reflected in many current issues and Faludi (1999) cites the familiar accounts of underachieving boys, deserting fathers, Viagra, the boom in male plastic surgery, cosmetics for men and the increasing rates of young male suicide and crime. Echoing Gerzon, Faludi (1999) relates these issues to changes in modern society as the male domains of politics, religion, the military, the community and the household no longer offer identifiable roles for men. As men increasingly feel threatened by the uncertainty in relation to work and family life they can no longer prove themselves in the role of breadwinner or father and they take refuge in their own body. Faludi (1999) suggests that all that is left for men to obtain masculine confidence is the physical and the development of a hard body honed by hours in the gym has become the proving ground for many contemporary masculinities.

The fit body

The growing emphasis on physical attractiveness is evidently applicable to both sexes, and amplified by the medical establishment which links a trim body -undetermined by gender - with health. Men and women are now vulnerable to health related practises which were once more closely engendered and as “looking healthy is the external manifestation of the desired healthy state, so the body symbolises the extent of ones self corrective behaviour.” (Featherstone 1982) As public health discourses condemn

the 'middle aged spread' or 'beer gut' linking abdominal fat in the masculine body with the loss of control, youth and dignity, Lupton (1996:138) notes the importance of maintaining a slim, well-toned, muscular physique as a sign of self control and physical attractiveness. White & Gillet (1994:20) emphasise, "practises of the self such as fitness routines, body building and dieting are a means to redress feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy through pursuit of this hegemonic masculine form." Mac an Ghail (1996) suggests that satisfaction with outward appearance dominates inner feelings and is representative of social relations, value within society and social acceptability. Sport and exercise also play a central role in enforcing the ideal that to 'look good' is to 'feel good' and physical fitness is symbolic of a "pride in oneself, a sense of cleanliness and purification against the evils of tobacco, alcohol and the bodily abuse of daily life." (1996:131)

Associated with these messages is the consumer and commercial interest in the body and its depiction in the media and advertising where the body is prominent as the central focus in its ability to match popular ideals of youth, health, fitness and beauty. Consumer culture connects with sports culture as both employ the body as a means of expression. Hargreaves (1987) comments,

"A good deal of the strength of consumer culture resides in its ability to harness and channel bodily needs and desires for health, longevity, sexual fulfilment. Sports culture's stress on play, contest, strength, energy, movement, speed and skill allow such themes to be given a particularly vivid, dramatic aesthetically pleasing and emotionally gratifying expression. To be sportive is almost by definition to be fit, young and healthy." (p.134)

From this perspective the male body, as an outward symbol of the self must be marketed to others and “men as well as women are increasingly evaluated in terms of how they measure up to the media images of attractiveness rather than achievement in work.” (Hesse- Biber 1993:103).

The visible male body

Dutton (1995) concedes that men as much as women are now subject to social expectations in respect of their physical presentation influenced by the “visible world of the twentieth century” and similarly affected by a “modern preoccupation with self observation and concern for favourable observation by others.” (p. 321) Dutton (1995:330) maintains that female empowerment has resulted in the radical re-evaluation of the male body as the object of the ‘devouring gaze’ and that the images chosen to represent the objectified male are those most suggestive of male power and dominance best portrayed by the muscular male body.

As men’s bodies and male body images come to the fore, Chapman & Rutherford (1988:32) reason, “for men to put their bodies on display contradicts the codes of who looks and who is looked at. Men have held the power of the look, the symbolic owning of women’s bodies. Reversing the gaze offers the symbol of men’s bodies on offer to women.” Although referring to the past-time of ‘girl watching’ Paglia (1991) remarks that western culture has a ‘roving eye’ which is fixating on the male body increasingly presented as a commodity to be looked at through the culture of style and fashion. Consequently men are experiencing pleasures and concerns around the body previously branded as taboo or only for women.

The increased visibility of ‘ideal’ muscular physiques in popular culture and entertainment has caused men to feel increasingly uncomfortable about the look of

their bodies and many young men suffer similar anxieties about appearance as women, aspiring to be the 'right shape'. Franzio & Shields (cited by Mishkind 1987:61) found three central areas of concern in their analysis of men's bodily dissatisfaction and satisfaction. 'Physical attractiveness' was the first of these and includes the face and related features which contribute to making a man appear 'handsome' or 'good-looking'. The second dimension is that of upper body strength which involves the muscle groups of the biceps, shoulders, arms and chest - the development of which is believed to improve physique and indicate strength. Thirdly, 'physical conditioning' which reflects overall physical fitness and concerns stamina, energy level, stomach and weight. These three dimensions illustrate how men could achieve what they perceive as the 'ideal' body although facial appearance is viewed as less subject to change than the body.

The desired 'muscular mesomorphic' ideal can be attained through various forms of body shaping and one such method of bodily improvement and remodelling showing increased male interest is that of cosmetic surgery as growing numbers of men are having chest implants to achieve a more muscular appearance. (Shilling 1993:6)

Considering the increasing amount of male procedures Hesse-Biber (1993) suggests that older men who were once young and secure about their body images may be subject to fears of devaluation. Images of success in contemporary society are associated with external presentation and men are no longer appraised solely for their social achievements such as wealth and power. Hesse-Biber (1993:105) affirms,

“As a man usually achieves his greatest economic success in his fifties or sixties he needs a physical appearance that is consistent with his power and place in society. He must stay physically trim, must not have loose skin, not

have anything to suggest infirmity, His looks must maintain his power because we are all judged by the vigour of our appearance.”

Dutton (1995:273) labels this phenomenon ‘healthism’ symbolic as a particular form of ‘bodyism’ referring to the concentration on the outward appearance of the body as distinct from the control of the inner body in earlier times. ‘Healthism’ is characterised by a preoccupation with ascetic practises aimed at the achievement and maintenance of an appearance of health, fitness and youthfulness.

The body building scene is one such practise illustrative of the so-called body boom experienced in western cultures as appearance becomes a “more important motivation than reality” (Dutton 1995: 273). This growing participation sport involves specific training techniques including weight lifting and adherence to specific dietary regimens in the development of the physique for aesthetic effect and extols the popular belief that “muscularity enhances the look of the male body - therefore the bigger your muscles the more attractive you become.” (Dutton 1995:273).

This perception is further endorsed by the advertising industry where “the sexualised muscular male body is increasingly positioned as an object of consumption which presents the body as a ‘vehicle of pleasure’ and as a site for constant self improvement.” (Featherstone 1982) The process of bodybuilding is also representative of the image frequently used within the terms of late modernity of the ‘body as machine’ where the body is thought of as an instrument that has to obey the dictates of the mind. As such it “can be trained, maintained and fine tuned through health check ups, exercise and diet.” (Shilling 1993:37). Control of the body through diet and nutrition is an important part of the training of body building and food intake is subject to a rigorous self monitoring process. Lupton (1996”139) adds that whilst

“this masculine ideal body does not privilege the slender, fragile body that typically represents femininity it does equally avoid any hint of fatness.”

Although dieting also offers a different route to self-improvement by altering body shape, “men cannot easily be sucked into dieting because of the persistent belief that a big, strong body is masculine and sexy...a big body gives the illusion of power and sexual vigour.” (Seid 1989:116). For men the term 'heavy' historically equates with muscularity while in contemporary society a slim, well-toned muscular physique is important as a sign of self- control and physical attractiveness. Looking good in modern society means looking sexually attractive and while this for women has come to mean being thin, Lupton (1996: 139) suggests that similar discourses revolve around the masculine body. As value and meaning is ascribed to the individual by the shape and image of their external body men are becoming increasingly concerned about their body build and physical appearance. These concerns are examined throughout the following study reflecting the ways in which men are experiencing and reacting to the present preoccupation with masculinity portrayed by the aspirational images of the male body. As male embodiment has become a popular topic for social analysis, themes relating to physical activity such as sport, exercise and body-building are widely pursued as popular subjects for research, whilst the sexual division of dieting remains apparent as matters pertaining to food continue to be approached primarily with reference to women and the female body.

In contrast, this study combines the issues of food and diet with men, questioning the assumption that men express control and experience the body exclusively by the implementation of physical activity. In seeking to understand how men perceive and acknowledge their bodies in everyday life, the importance of diet and the meanings attached to food are recognized and correlated to the experiences of embodiment at

significant stages of the life-course as identified by men. Although alternative methods of bodily control and management are investigated, the theme of diet is brought to the forefront throughout the narratives of men as it becomes evident that food is also symbolic for men who are found to increasingly recognise and incorporate diet as a form of control over the body. Male consumers now constitute a rapidly expanding market receptive to diet books and products as body obsession and anxiety regarding external representation is promoted in men as well as women.

As Turner (1991:23) proposes, “we diet in order to express our sensuality and sexuality and asceticism is designed to produce an acceptable social self, particularly a self that conveys sexual symbolism.”

Contrary to once popular beliefs based on traditional conceptualisations the findings recounted in this study confirm that in modern culture this applies with increasingly equality to both men and women. The growing interest, awareness and vulnerability of men is further explored in this analysis as the opinions, attitudes and experiences of a group of men are presented. Whilst based on perceptions of health and the body, the initial topics identified for the research focus are those commonly associated and much publicised areas of food and diet, body image and body maintenance. The lived experiences of the respondents are examined in relation to the social relations and circumstances in which men are embedded, considering the ways in which individuals both make sense of and live with their changing bodies, in different spaces and at different times. The space and time selected for the purpose of this empirical study is perhaps the most significant stage of the lifecourse marking the transition from youth to adulthood and the onset of middle age. Pilcher (1995:81) describes adulthood as the central lifecourse stage - defined as a status that children and young people

impatiently desire and that old people struggle to retain. Referred to by the commonly used term 'grown up', the conception remains that adulthood is a largely unproblematical status and Pilcher (1995) argues that this presumption is mirrored in sociology's neglect of it as a stage in the lifecourse: "there are sociologies of childhood, youth and of old age but there is no equivalent sociology of adulthood." (p.82). Whilst it is evident that adulthood is taken for granted and little consideration has been given to it as a significant stage in the lifecourse, central to this is the concept of the lifecourse and in considering how adult behaviour is culturally conditioned and socially defined, it is perhaps important to expound on the lifecourse perspective itself.

Chapter 5

LIFECOURSE, LIFESTYLE AND THE POSTMODERN BODY

The lifecourse perspective has become increasingly influential as a way of approaching the sociological study of age. Any definition of the characteristics of the lifecourse is a social construction derived from analysis of social interaction between individual biographies and their socio - cultural contexts. (Backett & Davison 1995)

Pilcher (1995) suggests that the characteristics of the life course approach are best illustrated by comparisons with the previously dominant conceptualization of the span of human life: the lifecycle. The lifecycle refers to the developmental stages that individuals experience over time. As individuals grow older, they progressively develop in physical, psychological and social terms and sequentially move through the fixed stages of the lifecycle - infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood and old age.

Pilcher (1995:18) argues that as the lifecycle is rooted in the disciplines of biology and developmental psychology, it fails to take into account the influential impact of social contexts. Consequently individual development is artificially isolated from its social context, and the lifecourse is not fully taken into account as a social institution in its own right. (Featherstone & Hepworth 1988:371).

The construction of the lifecourse

The modern sociological construction alternatively portrays the lifecourse as “fluid, labile and essentially interactive”, allowing for flexibility and variation between people and their environments. (Backett & Davison 1995). Correspondingly, Hareven (1982a) offers the following definition, summarizing the central characteristics of the lifecourse:

“The lifecourse approach provides a way of examining individual as well as collective development under changing historical conditions. It shifts the focus of study of human development away from stages and ages to transitions and the timing of life events. Rather than focusing on stages of the life cycle, the lifecourse approach is concerned with how individuals and families made their transitions into those different stages. Rather than viewing any one stage of life, such as childhood, youth and old age or any age group in isolation it is concerned with an understanding of the place of that stage in an entire life continuum.” (xiii)

The lifecourse approach reveals that the ‘ages and stages’ and the intervening transitions have culturally determined foundations which vary by historical context. Allat & Keil (1987: 1) propose that, in contrast to the concept of lifecycle, the preferred concept of the lifecourse permits the “the interaction of the individual with social structures which are subject to historical change” and views the lifecourse as interconnected with other parts of the social structure, especially those relating to employment, the family and households. The lifecourse approach therefore is responsive to the ways in which institutions act to structure stages and transitions throughout an individual’s life and additionally allows for individuals negotiating their way through the various structuring institutions.

Sociological analysis of the lifecourse as a social institution makes it possible to demonstrate the ways in which this institution changes alongside other changes in social institutions associated with the process of western modernization. Reviewing the process of modernization, Featherstone & Hepworth (1988:371) note how the

status of the family in pre modern European societies was of greater significance than chronological age in determining questions regarding maturity, independence of action and power.

In present day society such elements tend to be firmly categorized according to chronological age and life stages such as schooling, marriage, parenthood, retirement have become institutionalized brought about by the historical processes of industrialization and modernization. Meyer (1988) argues that the lifecourse in modern societies is a conscious and purposive cultural product where human action involves the enactment of cultural scripts. Meyer (1988) maintains that much modern sociological research explains human action in terms of the social interactional and organisational structures in which both humans and their activity are embedded - "people are not viewed as classic individuals but as interpenetrated members of a peer group or an organisational system." (p. 53)

Fundamental assumptions of how individuals experience and make sense of their surroundings are challenged within current debates between modernists and postmodernists. Modernist thought located in the Enlightenment period, presumes the existence of externally certifiable realities that can be revealed through rational thought and scientific study. In contrast postmodernists argue that social life is not an objective reality awaiting our attention; that society, organizations, communities and families and individuals do not exist beyond our subjective experience of them. That is, they are realized or constructed through our conversation, thought and writing (Watson 2000:6). Featherstone & Hepworth (1983:372) add that sociologists of post modernity argue that the notion of the deconstruction of the lifecourse arises not merely from a heightened theoretical sensitivity but also in response to perceived social changes. As the lifecourse evolves as increasingly de- institutionalized and

lacking differentiation with less regard to age specific role transitions and scheduled identity development, what appeared to be relatively clearly defined stages and the characteristic behaviour associated with those stages will subsequently become less distinguishable.

“Adult life is a process which need not involve predetermined series of stages of growth. The stages or hurdles can be shifted around or even discarded. Yet we must be careful not to adopt a view of the lifecourse in which culture is granted the overarching power to mould nature in any form it chooses. Human beings share with other species an embodied existence inevitably involving birth, growth, maturation and death.” (Featherstone & Hepworth 1983:372)

The ‘post modern’ body

Although postmodern theorizing is far from being an everyday reality, the increasing awareness of resistance to the notion of middle age or midlife provides a valuable example of the capricious stages of the lifecourse. Referring to the interconnections between ageing, the lifecourse and embodiment Featherstone & Hepworth (1983) refer to one dominant issue - which is a pertinent feature of this study - that of the positive evaluation of youth and a revulsion towards or fear of physical decline. In contemporary culture the prospect of prolonging the ‘plateau like’ phase of adult life is offered, with continued relatively high consumption of the pursuit of consumer culture lifestyles, body maintenance and styles of self-presentation and where fit, well-groomed bodies serve to enhance the social power and status of the individual.

“Chronological age then becomes discredited as an indicator of inevitable age, norms and lifestyles and a new breed of body maintenance experts optimistically prescribe health foods, dieting vitamins, fitness techniques and other regimens to control biological age which is argued is a true indicator of how a person should feel.”(Featherstone & Hepworth 1983:372).

As the ‘ages and stages’ model of the lifecourse is likened to the ticking of a clock (Gubrium 1995), similarly the appeal of adopting these ‘feel good’ regimes, lies in the belief that the ageing process can be, if not reversed, at least delayed - upholding the potential of ‘turning back’ the clock. Gubrium (1995:8) proposed the image of the ‘ticking clock’ to represent the institutionalized framework of the lifecourse where “the ordinary features of everyday life provide the substance of meaning from which individual selves are constructed.” However, within post traditional societies self-identity and the individuals sense of self are no longer certainties, as identities cease to be derived from our traditional place in society - be it class, family, gender or locality. Nettleton & Watson (1998) maintain that as the self is embodied so the regularised control of the body is a fundamental means whereby a biography of self-identity is maintained. As Giddens (1991) exemplifies:

“The body used to be one aspect of nature, governed in a fundamental way by processes only marginally subject to human intervention. The body was a ‘given’, the often inconvenient and inadequate seat of the self. With the increasing invasion of the body....all this becomes altered. The body like the self becomes a site of interactionOnce thought to be the locus of the soul..the body has become fully available to be ‘worked upon’ by the influence

of high modernity.....we find more and more guidebooks and practical manuals to do with health, diet, appearance, exercise, lovemaking and many other things.”(p. 218)

The influence of modernity is obvious within consumer culture as individuals are persuaded that with effort and bodywork they can achieve a certain desired appearance. Saltonstall (1993:33) states that ‘ the production of health for the self involves personal responsibility for body maintenance’ - a message reinforced as advertising, features and articles in the media require that individuals to assume self-responsibility for the way they look. “The wrinkles, sagging flesh, tendency towards middle aged spread, hair loss etc. which accompany ageing should be combated on the part of the individual - with help from the cosmetic, beauty, fitness and leisure industries.” (Featherstone 1982:178) The human body is included in the ‘postmodernist’ preoccupation with the visual surface of things and Dutton (1995: 369) comments that while the growth of technology accompanied by sedentary lifestyles has reduced the need for physical effort, paradoxically the vogue for physical exercise has increased. Images of success in the competitiveness of a consumer society are associated with youth, vitality and fitness and combined with the fear of ageing, these factors have led to an escalation of the ‘fitness industry’ which seeks validation by reference to the visual outcome it produces.

The fitness of the ‘post modern body’ is referred to by Bauman (1988) who contests that postmodern body is evaluated by its capacity to consume - that is the ability to be aroused, readiness to absorb new sensations and openness to new, untested and therefore exciting experience. Bauman (1998) views the body as a receiver of

sensations possessing the capacity to be stimulated and, as such, portrays the body as an instrument of pleasure.

“That capacity is called fitness - obversely the state of unfitness stands for apathy, listlessness, dejection, lack of stamina..... To keep the body fit means to keep it ready to ingest, absorb and be stimulated.” (p.226)

Bauman cautions that the truly fit body remains plagued by anxieties and doubt and subsequently those in pursuit of fitness need,

“ever new recipes for pinning down their troubles as the prescription of yesterday are bound to be discredited...the plight of fitness seekers is not dissimilar to that of the beauty and charm seekers stumbling from one promising product to another and discarding them as one after another as the promises one by one fail to come true.”(p. 227)

This uncertainty in relation to the body is reflected and reiterated by Nettleton & Watson (1998:7) who state, “we perceive our bodies to be more pliable and are actively seeking to alter improve and refine them”. Ironically Shilling (1993) offers an antithesis proposing that the more we know about bodies, the more we are able to control, intervene and change them, the more uncertain we become as to what the body actually is. Endorsing the body as a project Shilling (1993:5) maintains the body is in a continual state of unfinishedness to be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual’s self-identity.

The theme of uncertainty and doubt pervades the concept of the lifecourse where biographical narratives become less reliable and alternatively tend to be flexible and continually revised. In their work on the lifecourse Backett & Davison (1995) found it apparent that individuals are aware on a common sense level of shifting boundaries of the perceived stages: and that acceptable and unacceptable exceptions to culturally defined expectations continuously present themselves.

The concept of lifestyle

It is also important to consider the associated concept of lifestyle which represents the framework in which individual life is set and is constructed by the standard reactions and behaviour patterns that are developed through processes of socialisation. The concept of lifestyle was addressed principally by Weber who stressed the importance of 'style of life' in the evolution and maintenance of status groups and emphasised lifestyle as means to social differentiation. (Abel 1991:900). In this conceptualisation the two fundamental components of life style were structured conditions - expressed by Weber as 'life chances' - and personal choice - expressed as 'life conduct'.

Refining the notion of lifestyle Giddens (1991:81) regards it as an essential feature of the culture of high modernity as "it implies choice within a plurality of possible options and is 'adopted' rather than 'handed down.'" The working definition of lifestyles as cited by WHO (1985) reinforces this perception, attempting to cover the multitude of background factors in describing lifestyles as, " patterns of behavioural choices made from the alternatives that are available to people according to their socio- economic circumstances and to the ease with which they are able to choose certain ones over others."

Warde (1997:10) suggests that in embracing a particular lifestyle an individual finds a form of self-identity and this is particularly relevant to the previously discussed predicament of modernity and post modernity where individuals are required to construct their own selves. Lifestyle becomes increasingly important as individuals engage in a conscious project of autonomous, reflexive self-creation:

“The new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle.” (Featherstone 1987:59)

Hebdige (1988) adds further emphasis, identifying the term ‘lifestyle’ as the definitive mode of consumption and refers to the “new consumer sensibility characteristic of modern consumption where consumers are seen to bring a more stylised awareness or sensitivity to the process of consumption.” This is reflected in the process of inventing and consciously creating a personal identity where consumption is considered central as individuals are able to define themselves through the messages transmitted to others by the goods and practices they possess and display. Within consumer culture, as has been noted, the body is regarded as an example of one such ‘good’ to be displayed as the appearance of the body has become central to notions of self identity. The maintenance of the body is characterised as one such defining ‘body practice’ emphasising regular servicing and care of the body for maximum efficiency. As body maintenance is subsequently endorsed as part of the consumer lifestyle it is firmly established as a virtuous leisure time activity which will reap further lifestyle rewards resulting from an enhanced appearance: “body maintenance in order to look good

merges with the stylised images of looking good while maintaining the body.”

(Featherstone 1982:184)

Lifestyle is a much used concept in the fields of health promotion, preventative research and health and behavioural research where the emphasis on lifestyle choices is reinforced by messages offered by health education which increasingly assume individual responsibility for preserving health and avoiding ‘risk’. Self-indulgence and lack of self discipline are viewed as reasons why people become ill with such diseases as coronary heart disease, diabetes, lung cancer and cirrhosis of the liver, which have been strongly linked to diet, weight, tobacco and alcohol consumption. Coward’s (1989:147) comments relating to diet illustrate the influence of lifestyle choices in relation to food, “what we eat is about choices....between illness and health, the perfect body as opposed to the obese, unhealthy or diseased body.”

While lifestyle has become a favoured term in health research and practice to encapsulate the differences in beliefs and practices between different groups of the population, Backett & Davison (1995) argue that in so doing ‘lifestyle’ has become useful in providing the ill defined link between epidemiologically designated health risk factors at the individual level and preventive medicine or health promotion at the population level. Coreil et al (1985:428) are equally critical of the popular concept of lifestyle as a “catch phrase” which “paradoxically grew out of a scholarly tradition which gave primacy to context and meaning. Current discussion of lifestyle and health largely ignore systemic influences and focus almost exclusively upon individual responsibility.” This concept of lifestyle differs significantly from that developed by WHO (1985) where lifestyle is understood as a sociocultural phenomenon arising from interactions between patterns of behaviour and specific life situations rather than individual decisions to avoid or accept certain health risks. This

conceptualization advocates that individual practices are only elements of culturally and socially determined behavioural patterns. Dean (1989) suggests that the discrete practices of individuals are more appropriately defined as self care behaviours, while collective behaviours and their interactions with cultural, social and psychosocial factors may more significantly be considered lifestyles. Lifestyles in this conceptualization are defined as patterns of social interactions and attitudes with behavioural components.

Exploring lay perceptions of lifestyle Backett & Davison (1995) found the concept of lifestyle to be grounded in historical, environmental and biographical contents and that respondents expressed the term in reference to an overarching framework within which individual and group life is set: “lifestyle is the point where givens and chosens meet; it appears to encompass both the conditions within which people exist and the things they do within these conditions.” (p. 631). The authors concur that in lay terminology the concept of ‘lifestyle’ mirrors that of health professionals, portraying health as a reflection of individual and culturally based values involving behavioural and consumption choices whilst alternatively regarding such choices affecting health as strongly correlated with social and structural conditions.

Dean (1989) recommends that the most productive approach to the health impact of lifestyle is that which focuses on gender differences in behaviour and attitudinal variables. The different experiences of men and women come directly from cultural values and social learning and indirectly from attitudes, values and behaviours pervading dominant social structures and institutions. As no other characteristic is subject to the same degree of cultural and social learning, gender linked experiences located within specific social situations in which people currently live may also exert major influence on behaviour.

This is evident in relation to health outcomes where gender remains the most common explanation for differences between men and women. The central issue that has attracted concern is the fact that at every stage in the life of a male he is more likely to die than a female of equivalent age. At different stages different hazards affect boys and men, and different risks are taken by them - accidents as a child, suicide and motor vehicles as young men and the effects of diet, smoking and sexual habits in later life. (Hearn 1999). Verbrugge (1985) extensively examined the accumulation of evidence collated from empirical research which highlights male disadvantage with regard to mortality data and possibly morbidity. Her central theoretical perspective confirms much social science theorizing in surmising that sex differences in health derive from differential risks acquired from sex roles, stress, lifestyles and preventative health practices. The work of Verbrugge illustrates how both medical and social research supports and influences the orthodox professional perspective where the commonest explanation offered is that men adopt and maintain lifestyles that are more likely to be shaped by risk taking and lack of self care. Public health policy statements in the early 1990s recognized these issues and whilst stressing the importance of individual health behaviours and lifestyles in determining health outcomes, reflected concerns regarding the problem of men's health. As Kenneth Calman, the Chief Medical Officer at the time, acknowledged:

“Men must now be brought up to be more aware of their own bodies and not be reluctant to seek help...it must be brought home to them that many of the risk factors to their health - such as smoking, physical inactivity, poor diet, excess alcohol consumption, unsafe sexual practices and risky behaviour likely to lead

to accidents - are preventable. Thus the scope for men to improve their health, and to prolong active, healthy life is considerable.” (1993: 6,106)

The fundamental role of gender in social learning and development means that social networks, social support and socio-economic factors affect behaviour and thereby health differently among men and women. Social norms make it more appropriate for men to smoke and drink as well as encouraging more direct risk taking. Social norms also influence stress behaviour and men are considered more susceptible to respond to stress producing problems by using more tobacco or alcohol or by simply ignoring them. (Verbrugge 1985). Ross & Bird (1994) propose that although compared to women, men’s relation to the means of production - their paid and unpaid labour - improves their physical well being, conversely men’s relation to the means of consumption, or lifestyle disadvantages men. Men’s access to the goods and benefits that come with advantaged position may worsen health if advantage is accompanied by cigarettes, cars, high fat foods and values and norms associated with smoking, weight or passive leisure time activities. Kimmel (1987) maintains that through the impact of such sex role norms and gender socialization men encounter an “array of proscriptions and prescriptions.”

Dutton (1995:370) verifies that in no sphere are the uncertainties and contradictions of modern society more clearly evident than in that which affects male and female gender roles. This is apparent at a time when what it means to be male is being challenged and the specific behaviours and beliefs which purport to be traits of ‘maleness’ and indicative of ‘masculinity’ are among those factors identified as being strong determinants of unhealthy lifestyles. Watson (2000:32) additionally stresses the influence of a gender bias noting the normative role that the male occupies in both

medical and social spheres where, “the use of white middle class heterosexual men as the reference group against which the health experiences of other population groups can be compared.” This makes it difficult to distinguish men’s health as a separate field of concern and Ekenstam (1998) comments that, “masculinity is not only a risk factor in disease aetiology but it is also among the most significant barriers to men developing self awareness about health and illness.” Lloyd (1996:9) similarly argues that in presenting men as a ‘control group’, the literature on gender differences fails to explore why men behave as they do, preferring to compare and contrast the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs to those of women. Consequently men have come to be defined and even constrained both by their physiology and related behavioural characteristics. Despite a wealth of clinical, epidemiological and psychological research still very little is known about how the human male will personally experience health throughout his lifetime and in particular, how learning to be a man and changing experience of health interact: “within the parameters of professional knowledge and understanding the subject of male embodiment has remained largely unproblematic, fixed and immutable.” (Watson 1998:164) As assumptions about men’s experience of health have rarely been critically challenged this common perception of male embodiment contributes to normative constructions of the male body and behaviour which Watson et al (1996:170) maintain are “disempowering at the level of individual experience.”

This research alternatively addresses the individual experience and seeks to explore some of the ‘spaces, silences and tensions’ of male embodiment which are themselves interrelated with broader social changes that shape the knowledge of the body.

Chapter 6

METHODOLOGY - THE BODY REVEALED

Missing bodies?

The literature reviewed in the previous chapters reveals how sociology has recognised the centrality of the body to social life where, influenced by post modern and feminist theory, the human body has become the dominant theme of much theorising. Critical of the limited approach to the body offered by biomedicine, sociology has alternatively sought to examine the diverse and unique experiences of health and illness. Yet in seeking to present an insight into and understanding of the social realities of health and illness, sociological research has focused primarily on the structural, cultural and material aspects of health and not the phenomenological elements, especially those related to the body. (Saltonstall 1993) Although the body has moved away from being an 'absent presence', Nettleton & Watson (1998:2) propose that the sociology of the body has "ignored the voices that emanate from bodies themselves" and has yet to 'come to terms' with lay interpretations of the embodied experience. Given that the body is fundamental to everyday life there is a noticeable absence of empirical investigation into the bodily experiences of ordinary people. This reflects the 'taken for grantedness' approach to the body as has often been supposed by contemporary theoreticians where the existence and importance of bodies is easy to ignore, simply because they are naturally thought of and accepted as simply being part of ourselves - all human beings both have and are bodies. Watson (1998:176) asserts that the sociology of the body "is theoretically driven; that it bracketed out the individual; and that it was largely devoid of practical experiences in everyday life."

In providing an overview of sociological theory on the body it is obvious that the single most influential characteristic of the body is that of gender, which fundamentally determines perceptions, behaviours and position in most societies. The different experiences of men and women are shown to come directly from cultural values and social learning and indirectly from attitudes, values and behaviours pervading dominant social structures and initiations. Whilst the subject of gender features prominently in sociological literature and research relating to health and illness, the focus remains on the lay experiences of women and issues related to female embodiment. Exposing the links between food and the body, the growing literature on the sociology of food addresses sociological aspects of eating disorders which details the complexities and difficulties encountered predominantly by women. The discourse of dieting is consequently presented as a gendered discourse which involves connotations of deprivation, punishment and denial in order to control the female body. Cultural norms are shown to produce gendered bodies in governing women's behaviour and appearance, which are reflected in the discourses of beauty, diet, exercise, cosmetics fashion and food.

Yet as contemporary western society fixates on matters relating to health and body image it is apparent that this current fascination applies increasingly to men and the male body. Furthermore as masculinity has become the subject of recent theorising with the development of men's studies, men's health has generated increasing media interest. Reports of increasing stress, declining fertility, Viagra, rising obesity, prostate and testicular cancer together with higher mortality rates for men, contradict the favoured portrayal of masculinity as a privilege, conversely indicating that men adopt lifestyles and behaviours that are damaging and dangerous to health. Watson (2000) contests that current medical and social debate around men's health is undermined and

under-informed by a failure to explore men's perceptions of health and maleness as a personal, cultural and social phenomenon. Watson (2000: 4) identifies men as a cohort "crippled by lack of attention" finding that many of the issues relating to men's health disregard the personal experiences and accounts voiced by men themselves and there is scant evidence detailing the health encounters unique to men throughout their lifetime. This is reflected in the arena of health promotion which whilst increasingly targeting men in promoting matters related to men's health, exhibits an absence of knowledge grounded in the everyday experiences of men. As Watson (2000: 141) asserts, "men are visible in the concerns of public health policy and literature but invisible in practice."

The objective of this study is to redress this imbalance, initially exploring perspectives of health and experiences of embodiment among men pertinent to their perceived stages of the lifecourse. Referring to the cultural construction of bodily ageing and the social organisation of an individual's passage through life, the position in the lifecourse has been defined and researched in terms of social, demographic, psychological and biological markers. (Backett & Davison 1995) It is apparent that men are aware on a common sense level of shifting boundaries of the perceived stages: and that acceptable and unacceptable exceptions to culturally defined expectations continuously present themselves. The associated concept of lifestyle is also significant, where behavioural practises are shaped by values and beliefs learned in specific cultures, and by opportunities and constraints defined by specific social and economic situations.

In examining how men experience their bodies and how they articulate their experiences with reference to the lifecourse and to lifestyle, the phenomenological approach was considered the most appropriate framework for this analysis. The focus

of this perspective being the concept of the 'lived body' and the notion of 'embodiment' where the self and the body are not separate and where experience is invariably embodied. The body is viewed not as an external entity but is experienced in practical ways when coping with external events and situations. (Nettleton & Watson 1998:11) Employing this approach offers an alternative way of deriving theory from the 'bottom up' (Frank 1991; Connell 1995) - that is, theory extracted directly from the personal experiences and practises of men. Accordingly, the following analysis explores the nature of male embodiment adopting a grounded theory interview method.

Whilst addressing the particular themes in relation to men as outlined previously this study also endeavours to attend to the conspicuous deficits that have appeared as the sociology of the body has evolved. Not only by addressing the neglect of the personal experience of bodies as witnessed by individuals in daily life but, more importantly, in 'allowing' those bodily encounters voiced by ordinary people to be heard. In this instance realising those noted by their absence - the 'lived' accounts and embodied experiences distinctive to men.

The body revealed

It has been noted that men as a subject are 'missing' and remain, as noted by Hearn & Morgan (1990), "relatively invisible as an explicit focus in mainstream research and theory." In contrast the presence of men has dominated sociology and a provisional response to sociology's traditional neglect of the body is simply that it was a male sociology. (Featherstone et al 1991: 40) Frank (1991) proposes that 'bringing bodies back in' is, as a theoretical and empirical research program, made thinkable and imperative by the practical program of women bringing themselves back in. Eichler

(1988:5) notes the gendered nature of the theories and practices of research based upon male norms and where “women are seen as passive objects rather than subjects in history, as acted upon rather than actors.” According to feminist critiques, sociology, social policy and other social sciences have, like the natural sciences, perpetuated this belief. Feminist analysis has however developed in contrast to many of the dominant ways of viewing knowledge based on using the disadvantage of women’s exclusion from the public arena by men and turning that into a research advantage. Evidence of such an advantage is discernible as the biographies and experiences of women become central to the production of unbiased accounts of the social world, which are then situated within the wider context of women lives in general.

The literature reviewed concerning the female body reveals how feminist critiques brought the experiences of women to the fore and May (1997:23) suggests that women’s experiences become a starting and finishing point for research which aims to assist the process of ‘breaking out ‘ of a positivist paradigm. Recognising that women are subject both to material oppression and lack of symbolic representation brought feminists to advocate the strategy of ‘speaking the/from the’ body, contesting for the creation of new forms of representational practice which ‘provide women with nonpatriarchal terms for representing themselves and the world from women’s interests and points of view.’ (Grosz 1994:188) Women have a view of the world that is different to that which currently dominates as a consequence of the way in which women experience their bodies:

“ Because their bodily processes go with them everywhere, forcing them to juxtapose biology and culture, women glimpse every day a conception of

another sort of social order. At the very least because they do not fit into the ideal division of things..... they are likely to see that the dominant ideology is partial; it does not capture their experience... When women derive their view of experience from their bodily processes as they occur in society they are not saying 'back to nature ' in any way. They are saying on to another kind of culture, one in which our rigid separations as oppositions are not present.”

(Martin 1989:200)

By integrating the biological and the social, the work of Martin (1989) provides an example of how the feminist perspective deconstructed or at least reduced the strength of the opposing dichotomies between sex and gender, nature and culture and biology and society: “the corporeal boundaries which popular and academic thought had posited between ‘men’ and ‘women’.” (Shilling 1993:33) Feminisms, whilst acknowledging the relationship between bodily processes and social relations, identified what are assumed to be the most ‘personal’ aspects of people’s lives and experiences. (May 1996) As such Martin’s analysis combining naturalistic, constructionist and phenomenological perspectives, is additionally representative of feminist theory in exposing the significance of embodied social action. (Nettleton 1995:124) While the literature on the body is still largely devoid of the practical experiences of embodiment, the work and activities of feminist writers not only served to highlight the importance of the body for sociological analysis but also revealed the need to take into account the lived experiences of both male and female bodies.

The body as 'lived'

In sociological theory the body has traditionally been regarded as little more than simply a surface upon which social and cultural meanings are bestowed. The rise of the body in consumer culture as a bearer of symbolic value has resulted in an emphasis on selfhood showing people to be increasingly concerned with issues of self identity expressed through a concern with image and fashion and the presentation of self through the appearance of the body. Noting the explicit role played by the body in the construction of the self, Oleson et al (1990) propose a new concept of self, that of a "physical self" where the body is viewed as a changeable form of existence to be shaped and treated as malleable to individual needs and desires. Freund (1990:471) surmises that the embodied self is 'intimately meshed with social life' and that consequently bodies should be studied as "living, acting entities...it is at the point of personal biography...that exchanges between social life and a 'dynamic unconscious' take place and hence the point where mind, body and society meet."

The phenomenological perspective, which focuses on the 'lived body', advances the idea that human beings and their consciousness is invariably embedded within the body. In so doing, this approach offers the possibility of a sensitive analysis between the self, identity and the body and affords an alternative perspective to those which have shaped popular existing conceptions of the body. The phenomenological approach, which is considered more appropriate and relevant to this study as it supports the human being as an embodied social agent. The perspective offered by phenomenology highlights the importance of the lived body as an intentional entity which both constructs and is constructed by the lifeworld:

“the lived body helps to constitute this world as experienced. We cannot understand the meaning and form of objects without reference to bodily powers through which we engage them - our senses, motility, language, desires. The lived body is not just one thing in the world but a way in which the world comes to be.” (Leder 1992:35)

It has been shown that in the context of everyday life the existence and actions of the body are presumed - obvious in the ‘taken for granted’ attitude possessed by many. Yet whilst bodies are an assumed presence in the daily routines of individuals, the evidence and importance of the body in everyday life is strikingly apparent as the following research reflects, suggesting that perhaps bodies are not quite so ‘taken for granted’ as contemporary theoreticians infer.

The grounded theory approach

An empirical method of gathering data was employed throughout the following analysis in seeking to reflect the individual experiences of embodiment and was selected as it represents a method of research which lacks, or more usually has not referred explicitly to, theory guiding its data collection procedures. Relating to empiricism in attempting to “discover what is going on rather than assuming what should be going on”, the grounded theory approach, first outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) provides the most suitable means in excavating lay knowledge from everyday experience. Frank (1991) proposes that theorising should start from the body up and accordingly the abstract claims of the sociology of the body may, or may not, become more corporeal if they are grounded in the lived experiences of ‘real people’ as opposed to those of absent theorists. In reflecting the experiences,

meanings and understandings of people in their everyday interactions, grounded theory is particularly useful in making sense of informant accounts that contain subjective phenomena that are best interpreted from the perspective of the informant. (Layder 1998) Grounded theory has become well established in qualitative research, and maintains that theoretical concepts and hypotheses must emerge from the data as it is uncovered or gathered in the research process itself. Rather than relying on surveys and structured interviews and identifying external variables, the grounded theory approach demands much more rapport and empathy with those individuals studied in order to represent their understandings and social experiences authentically. Grounded theory reflects the everyday realities of which ever group of people it is about - in this instance, men - and its relevance and validity can be measured if it is understandable or makes sense to those whom it attempts to represent (Layder 1998:18). In reflecting data that “displays cultural realities which are neither biased or inaccurate, but simply real” (Silverman 1985), accounts provided by individuals in revealing their daily experiences contain their own integrity. In this respect grounded theory is particularly appropriate as it acts on the basis of identifying and verifying the consistency of categories and their properties through a process of constant comparison within and across data. Categories are thus developed which serve to illuminate the data and evolve into more general analytical frameworks with relevance outside the setting.

With regard to the assertion of Frank (1995:187) that empirical enquiry must ‘grapple with theoretical issues’, the following analysis concerning the embodied experiences of men adopted the method of grounded theory as a means to address what can be identified as the limitations with current theorising about embodiment and the neglect of men’s personal experiences of health within qualitative research.

As advocated by Watson (2000:8), “in exploring the issues of practice that are deeply embedded in the everyday world of informants, grounded theory provides a means of discovering and expressing something of the hidden side of men’s experience of health.” Exploring the embodied experiences of men in daily life reveals that much knowledge and understanding is ‘supposed’, especially in issues pertaining to men’s health. Watson (2000:2) notes the absence of knowledge grounded in the daily experiences of men and the “failure to explore men’s perceptions of health and maleness as a personal, cultural and social phenomenon” reaffirmed by “the lack of attention paid to personal accounts and perceptions of maleness.”

Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling is closely associated with the inductive - deductive process characteristic of the grounded theory approach. Theoretical sampling is central to this method of analysis in that it allows cases to be sampled that either serve to confirm or refute existing theories. Glaser & Strauss (1967: 62) clarify, “theoretical sampling is done in order to discover categories and their properties and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory.” This approach avoids attempting to obtain a representative sample arguing that the sampling should be entirely governed by the selection of those respondents who will maximise theoretical development. As such the basis of theoretical sampling is the selection of events, people settings and time periods in relation to the emergent nature of theory and research. Questions about which people or which events or activities should be included or how many people should be examined cannot be answered prior to the research, especially if the aim is to generate theory. The inductive element of grounded theory is based on the emergence of theory from the data whereas the deductive process allows the theories

to be modified whilst taking into account the negative case. Subsequent data collection can then be collated on the basis of the emerging theories in order to develop the theory and the conceptual ideas considered most productive. (Layder 1998) A basic objective of theoretical sampling, according to Glaser & Strauss (1967), is to preserve the 'grounded' nature of the theory that is generated by ensuring that the theory is constructed in a truly emergent way and not imposed on the data.

In this analysis, theoretical sampling followed an initial sampling of a small number of men interviewed as a representative group for an exploratory pilot study collating empirical data concerning men's health beliefs and behaviour in relation to the body.

The sociology of the body has reflected and generated interest in analysing the ways in which bodies are socially constructed and experienced in modern society and illustrates the new emphasis on how people present themselves and appear to others.

The pilot study focused on these concepts of the body and sought to associate men's perceptions of health with their physical bodies. The three themes of health, the body and their association with men and the male perspective formed the framework of this initial study. In exploring these central themes further, the research was 'ordered' around the associated and much publicised areas of diet, body image and body maintenance. A semi-structured interview technique was utilised for the pilot study where questions were specific in relation to these topical areas. Analyses of these early interviews revealed not only similarities but highlighted the differences among men.

In contrast to the broadly based pilot study and following the 'deductive process' of the grounded theory approach, the differences which emerged became the material and subject of the subsequent analysis which was 'narrowed down' in order to develop emerging theories. Although it was found the opinions, attitudes, experiences and actions of the men interviewed differed, these variations were not so much determined

by chronological age but their perceived stage in the lifecourse which they categorised in terms of relationships and their position at work and the commitments demanded in both areas. This was especially significant in relation to diet and their relationship with and the use of food. For this reason, the empirical data reported in this study is collated from the following qualitative study where, while remaining centred on the health beliefs and behaviours relating to men's embodiment, the focus is more defined in examining the area of food and diet over a chosen 'time and space' of the male lifecourse.

The participants

Data was collected from a sample group of twenty men employed at a computer company in Emmen situated in the North Netherlands. A letter of introduction was sent explaining the purpose of the research project to all male employees with information provided regarding the likely duration of interviews and issues concerning confidentiality. Those men who were selected as interviewees were born in the Netherlands and the majority had grown up in Emmen and continued to live locally. Those who took part were similar in terms of upbringing and educational background and held similar 'middle class' values and lifestyles. The respondents occupied various white-collar positions, mainly managerial and technical and were in full time employment.

As the study examines and focuses awareness on the experience of male embodiment it was found necessary to facilitate the articulation of lay ideas about and experiences of the body that have previously been under researched or treated as inexpressible.

Howson (1998:237) states that embodiment refers to "a dialectical process between embodied experience and the language available to articulate such experience. Hence

the notion of embodiment refers to a process of transformation and mediation in which embodied experience is authentic and articulated through cultural categories.”

As discussed earlier, one such cultural category is that of the life course and it is within a ‘chapter’ in the male lifecourse that this study explores the embodied experiences of men. Reference to certain stages of the lifecourse and the associated characteristics of that stage provided a valuable means of approach in accessing lay accounts of embodiment. As Watson (2000: 7) suggests it is the interdependent biological, psychological and social processes relating to the embodied lifecourse which are encapsulated within personal narratives wherein people “create and sustain their sense of self and explain unfolding biographical experience.” For that reason, the men chosen to participate were specifically selected to meet the criteria of age - between 20 to 40 years although the majority were aged around 30. This period is identified as a significant stage of the lifecourse which marks the transition between adolescence and youth, entering adulthood and the progression into middle age. In interviewing men of this age group, the data reflect a variety of demographic stages in the lifecourse - those men who are single, others living with partners and those who have families. Focusing on men meeting this particular age category enabled further exploration into issues concerning life course transitions such as personal relationships, progression at work, marriage and parenthood and how these might effect self and body image. The pilot study had previously served to recognise that related to these stages of the lifecourse, men experience important changes which impact their beliefs and behaviours concerning health matters. It was found that in focusing on the ‘biographical experience’ of men, the empirical findings concerned with lay perceptions of the male body and health serve to emphasise how little knowledge and understanding has been derived within medical and sociological

research, from the personal accounts of men. Until recently, where health disadvantage has been linked to gender, the focus has typically been on women rather than men (Arber 1990) and little evidence is found to support that the health beliefs and health issues pertinent to this male age group have previously been explored - unlike those of women.

Qualitative research

While research on health and illness is quite commonplace, empirical work which directly addresses people's perceptions of the body is still quite limited and consequently it is recognised that there are different ways of researching the subject of embodiment and the need to "develop culturally acceptable and sensitive ways to ask about bodies." (Watson et al 1996). Accessing the 'lived experience' of the body empirically presents difficulties in that by attempting to 'bring the body back in' in the interview situation is addressing something inherently personal, private and intimate - akin to "almost like asking someone to get undressed in front of you." (Nettleton & Watson 1998:145). People deal with their health and bodies in a variety of ways, and ignoring them or keeping them covered up, actually and metaphorically are two obvious practices. For the purpose of this study the male participants were required to bring their attention to their physicality, potentially problematic when as Mead (1949) has noted "we are trained by our society to keep our bodies out of our minds." It was recognised that male embodiment and experiences are a sensitive area to probe and that the male body being so 'taken for granted' in the events of daily life could make pertinent issues difficult to question and to discuss. Focusing on the body and health made this task more permissible and acceptable and the 'testing out' involved in the pilot study assisted in providing the appropriate language and

everyday concepts with which to proceed. Typically, interviews commenced with a general question concerning health, for example: "Do you consider yourself to be healthy?" which the interviewee was able to answer easily and used as a form of entry in proceeding to more difficult or sensitive topics. The varied and diverse responses revealed by lay conceptions of health were employed to provide the starting point and foundation of the study. It was found that respondents made regular reference to biographical, social and cultural factors in order to explain states of good health, illness and the rationale behind their associated beliefs and behaviours. As the research involves the examination of meanings and interpretations which people apply to their daily routines, an appropriate methodology was necessary. Thomas (1949:301) proposes that it is essential in the study of people to know just how people define the situation in which they find themselves: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." Similarly it was recognised that the research questions needed to be addressed in their real setting using an exploratory approach able to delve into complexities and processes.

Defined as much as a perspective as a method, a qualitative method of research was selected as the most suitable and logical methodology being recognised for its strength in producing depth and detail by the use of words in descriptions and categories rather than displaying numbers and statistics characteristic of quantitative methods. Again, a semi-structured interview technique was chosen although rather than apply the 'fixed' questions as in the pilot study, pre-selected subjects were introduced on which interviewees were 'allowed' to expound, referring to and drawing upon ideas and meanings with which they are familiar. In allowing the meanings that individuals attribute to events and relationships to be understood on their own terms it thereby provides a greater understanding of the subject's point of

view (May 1997:112). Thus flexibility and the discovery of meaning characterise qualitative research where the interviewer can also “have more latitude to probe beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewee.” (May 1997: 111). The research for this analysis fundamentally consists of ‘dialogues’ with twenty men and as the interviews were situated within their working environment, the duration depended on the respondent’s schedule and the time they felt able to spare. The majority of the interviews lasted for one hour although if respondents were particularly forthcoming on a specific issue or question they were allowed to talk at length. Core questions were used to define the areas to be covered based on the objectives of the study although the exact wording and sequence of questions was left open and determined during the course of the interview. This allowed for the respondent’s replies to lead, taking the form of ‘guided conversation’ although the format of the interview was largely dependent on the atmosphere and the degree of rapport between the interviewer and respondent. Kahn & Cannell (1957:149) refer to ‘conversations with a purpose’ the aim of which is to elicit the respondent’s subjective view of the world - to tap into their experiences and the meanings with which they construct their everyday lives.

It was found that some respondents were more talkative and forthcoming than others who preferred or perhaps were not used to sharing such details of their daily lives. This revealed another aspect of the status of the data in that many of the issues discussed in the interviews would not normally be included in the dialogue of the respondents with others in their immediate domain. The purpose of the interviews was to enable both the informant and researcher to move beyond ‘public’ accounts of health, self and the body to access more private and potentially sensitive health narratives. The researcher as such occupies something of what Watson (2000: 12)

describes as a 'privileged position' receiving personal information that would not normally be shared.

An important consideration throughout the interviews concerned the use of the English language. Although all the interviewees were fluent English speakers, it was nevertheless their second language and it was found important to use terms which featured in the person's own 'English' vocabulary when framing supplementary questions. Although these are minor, there are some English words which feature frequently throughout Dutch conversation but the 'true' definition and meaning is altered somewhat in the process of translation. Grammatical differences are also common and it was therefore necessary to be both sensitive and familiar with the language, terms and concepts used by the interviewee. To some extent this reiterates further the choice and use of qualitative methodology which tries to capture what is happening without being judgmental and to represent people from their own perspectives so that their views can be heard and understood. An additional related concern is that of participant validation, of particular significance in this study where there is obvious potential for misunderstanding. This is an essential part of the research process in qualitative research in providing participants with the opportunity to make their own assessments of the validity of the findings. Secker et al (1995:77) insist that data collection, "involves engaging in an active dialogue with research participants to check that we are understanding them as accurately as possible." Each interview was recorded by tape and later transcribed at which stage each informant's name was replaced with a suitable (Dutch) pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The process of coding the data followed in order to 'manage' the collated information. Labels were applied to particular extracts from the interviews in order to be able to identify them as belonging to various descriptive or analytical categories.

Initially the respondents were categorised according to their age, which also coincidentally matched their relationship status which traditionally follow on temporally, that is, those younger respondents were found to be single status or with a girlfriend, those a little older were married or living with a partner and of those situated in their thirties it was more probable that they were married with children. Seven of those interviewed were married, four were living with partners, seven had girlfriends and two were currently single. Four of those married had young children. Various themes occurred in relation to these categories which determined the kinds of lifestyles led by the respondents and were typically described in association with three demographic stages in the lifecourse. The most notable and unexpected theme to emerge was that of food - cited as a way of 'controlling' the body. Other central themes to emerge from the narratives of the respondents were those of sport and work. These featured prominently throughout men's lives in providing the medium whereby masculinity is both constructed and enacted and therefore were found important in determining and influencing experiences of the health and the body. The body as an assumed presence, and generally one 'not spoken about' as an entity in itself is nevertheless significant in the everyday lives of the respondents, who relate differing bodily concerns which are deemed applicable at certain ages and stages of the lifecourse. Although the men revealed no aspirations to achieve the much-hyped muscular mesomorphic representation of male bodily perfection, their accounts relating to notions of the physical self exposed an alternative idealised image. This is explored further in the following chapter, which shows how men's lives are ordered to some extent around their 'bodily selves', as they express an awareness of their physicality in relation to health and -although seldom admitted -, to outward appearance.

Chapter 7

A DISTINCT 'TIME AND SPACE'

Positioning the body

The wealth and extent of data generated by the conversations with the interviewees confirms that, "interviews yield rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings." (May 1997:109) as the narratives recorded reveal how male embodiment is organised as an ongoing concern in their everyday lives. Additionally reinforced is the advantage of using the 'loosely' semi-structured interview technique where, "a phenomenon like rambling can be viewed as providing information because it reveals something about the interviewee's concerns." (Bryman 1988a: 47). This method not only enabled certain areas of the men's lives to be explored in greater depth but also proved effective and necessary in exploring and disconfirming preconceived ideas. Whilst researching the subject of men's experiences of embodiment it was initially presumed that the respondents could be systematically categorised into three definitive groups pre-determined by chronological age. It was reasoned that these three age brackets would neatly - and conveniently- equate with clearly distinct positions in the lifecourse. Accordingly the first group would consist of respondents aged twenty to twenty five years being those representing youth and 'singledom': the second group would include men aged twenty five to thirty five typifying the passage into the realm of adulthood and leading a more 'settled' life: and the final group of men aged thirty five and over were those more likely to be in a secure position in terms of work and family presumed to be represented by those 'long-term marrieds', having accumulated varying family and social commitments. It soon became apparent while analysing the data that

chronological age was not in itself an important classification and the narratives of the interviewees verify that numerical age does not provide any actual or significant structure to the daily pattern of their lives. More often respondents were found to alternatively allude to biographical, social and cultural factors to explain varying aspects of embodiment and conceptions of health and associated beliefs and behaviours. As Clausen (1986) concluded from a study of the middle aged:

“How one views oneself will depend upon social class background, on the degree to which physical strength and appearance are highly valued attributes, on actual physical condition and health and on ones future prospects as compared with ones past accomplishments.” (p.152)

As previously noted, the data shows that respondents placed particular emphasis on the existence of a set of structurally defined but culturally experienced life stages, which were neither determined by chronological age or concurrently progressed with age. This is reflected within the reasoning of post-modern theorists who suggest the emerging de- institutionalisation and a de - differentiation of the lifecourse, with less significance than in the past being placed upon age specific role transitions and scheduled identity development. As Featherstone & Hepworth (1988: 372) argue, “Postmodern change...will lead to some blurring of what appeared previously to be relatively clearly marked stages and the experiences and characteristic behaviour which were associated with those stages.” Alternatively stereotypes of different aspects of the lifecourse provided powerful sources of cultural meaning as a grounding for behaviour and actions concerning the body and these were expressed and referred to in a number of ways. Firstly respondents identified cultural versions of

physiological ageing which marked the bodily development (or degeneration) of their physical selves such as childhood, youth, middle aged and old. The second aspect referred to demographic status: whether respondents were single, with a girlfriend, living with partner or married, or 'settled down' which usually implied long term commitment to a partner and / or a family. These culturally based identities were additionally expressed in terms of work and occupation: such as being at school or college as a student, followed by progression into the workplace and making a career, and later achieving a higher status or pursuing greater personal satisfaction by perhaps embarking on a change of career. As these varying aspects emerged from the data, it became increasingly clear that categories divided by age would prove inept whilst analysing the interview material. Hess (1988:18) notes that birth cohorts may experience lifecourse stages similarly because of collectively held social and historical events but adds a cautionary note of warning: "against false stereotypes, simplistic cohort-centric notions of fixed life stages and against committing the lifecourse fallacy, of interpreting cross sectional age differences as changes resulting from the ageing process." Meyer (1988:13) argues that culturally given rules about passing through the lifecourse are central to the major social institutions and that these are constantly reaffirmed and negotiated in interaction with significant others. This is particularly relevant while exploring the experiences of male embodiment and relates to the specific themes which define masculinity and the issues that men confront over the course of their lives. Throughout the interviews, references to the three stereotypes identified previously are located within definitions of masculinity, the meaning of which is not constant but will change throughout the lifecourse. Different issues concerning the body, health and the self emerge for men at different times of their lives just as the ways in which men's lives themselves change over a period of time.

As men's conceptions of the body and self - the 'physical self' - were examined over a distinct time and space, these categories of the lifecourse were found to be continually reinforced as respondents related experiences of embodiment.

Having determined these social and cultural groups to be of greater significance than the measure of age, it was more appropriate then to abandon any organisation according to age and re-classify the interviewees in relation to whatever 'social group' or 'lifecourse stage' that they perceived themselves to be positioned. Although the age of each individual was noted and remained relevant, it could not be used, as first supposed, as a predetermined and inflexible, fixed factor on which the categories could be formulated. Contrastingly four loosely defined but successive stages were identified throughout this time period in the male lifecourse although it was clearly evident that where notions and beliefs about the body were central, two prominent categories initially emerged. These became apparent as the men considered general questions relating to their health - which, as previously explained, were used as a 'safe means of entry' to further discussions centred on and around the body. Almost all interviewees cited a period in their lives when they regarded their body to be "at its best". The majority of respondents recalled a time where the combination of lifestyle, activities and behaviours characterise the carefree image of 'young and single' maledom and within this location the body was deemed as being in peak condition. The idealized male form was thus viewed as youthful, active and sporty which mirrors the image presented within popular culture and the media where "the new emphasis is on keeping fit, the body beautiful and the postponement of ageing by sport." (Featherstone 1982:170). For the informants possession of such a physique was inevitably at a time prior to steady employment and becoming encumbered with personal and social obligations. As Watson (2000:95) reiterates, "such images are

representations of the physical body as it is remembered as being at points prior to assumption of the adult social self enmeshed in a web of social obligations.”

The embodied experience of youth

In relation to this perception of the body, the first category identified consisted of the younger respondents or those whose lifestyle reflected that associated with youth. The narratives of these interviewees reflected experiences of change and growth as they developed from being adolescent boys into adulthood. In terms of the cultural stereotypes described these respondents were single or in a casual relationship and were comparatively new to the workplace occupying more junior positions.

Unanimously these respondents viewed and talked of their bodies in a singular way connected to physical activity and sporting achievement. Most of these men remained very sports orientated, yet continued to refer to a time - in most instances not so previous- where the body was constantly experienced and understood through physical activity and sport. This excess of sport and exercise was frequently situated within childhood and adolescence and for most respondents this represented a time of great satisfaction and enjoyment when their everyday lives consisted of experiences and actions involving their physical selves. Depicting a time portraying physical excellence achieved through frequent sport and activity therefore equated with perceptions of an equally idealised stage in life - that of carefree, teenage youth. This is summed up in the words of Bert (22),

“It was great then...I would go to school..not think about that much really and they were short days so there was so much time. I always spent it involved in something sporty....with my friends and it was fun. I suppose I was living my

life everyday through my body doing something ...always active. It's just what we all did. It's a shame it doesn't stay that way."

There was an obvious sense of reluctance felt among this group of interviewees who, on finding that, as they became less able to continue with their sporting pursuits to the same extent, also gradually but increasingly felt distanced from this admirable image of their very recent past. Frequently feelings of real regret and loss were noticeable as the informants talked of having to decrease such activities which were now deemed inappropriate as they entered the more serious 'adult' world of work with its associated responsibilities. As Aryan (22), comments,

"I used to exercise about 300 days of the year. Every day I was doing something....from age five until grown up. Running, training, all kinds of things. Then I went to college, then I moved into my house and then started to have less fun around work. I used to do a lot of windsurfing...that was really what I enjoyed the most and most of my time was getting out on the water and spending hours and hours ...well days and days at it."

Connell (1995:54) states that sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture and "provides a continuous display of men's bodies in motion".

In such overt presentations and performances associated with masculine identity the activeness of the youthful body is frequently shown to be presumed and reflects the 'taken for grantedness' of the body. Throughout the interviews, it is obvious that this grouping of younger men had given little thought or consideration to their physicality while immersed by it. It was only as this changed and their lifestyles began to follow

an alternative route, that they realised how much of their time and efforts when growing up had been consumed by physical activity. For Michel (25) this assumed attitude altered abruptly when he became ill with glandular fever at the age of twenty,

“Before I was ill I was at my best. From nature I am very busy ...there was no stopping for me. I used to do a lot of handball and soccer - I mean a lot of it and I had a very good condition. I didn't really have to think about it but I know that I felt fit and, well, not really for appearance but I know that I looked and felt good. ...Looking back it all seems much easier when you are young...life is more your own.”

These comments also reflect the notion of simplicity that is attached to this period of the lifecourse when it appears that the main concerns of self and identity are largely expressed through physical activity. As the recollections of Edwin (26), further demonstrate:

“When I was younger...late teens I suppose, I was so active. Almost every day I was doing soccer and training. I really worked my body then and I enjoyed that. I miss it but that is not my emphasis now. I did a lot more sport in the past because I had the time to do it. Now I am busy with other things.”

Messner (1990:99) argues that through sport boys learn cultural values and behaviours such as competition, toughness, winning at all costs which are culturally valued aspects of masculinity. Indeed, many of the comments noted reflect the observation that, “many mensense the absence of the testing of strength that direct physical

competition represents. They miss it as a ready affirmer of masculinity.” (Gagnon 1974:144). These younger men were encountering with an increasing awareness the extent that work and other social commitments had already begun to impact their everyday lives. What distinguished this grouping of interviewees was the ways in which they responded to this realization. Many of the younger respondents were found to rationalise their decreasing experiences of the body in sport and exercise as a temporary measure while it was necessary - for the moment - to prioritise other concerns. As Rene (23), reasons,

“For five years I did a lot of martial arts. Now in this last year I do a lot less due to the moving (house). Now I am busy working on the house and the garden. I suppose the physical labour is there but not the enjoyment factor.

Doesn't worry me, sometimes I miss it but I am so tired. I also swam about four or five times a week, with training. In the beginning I missed it.

I know my condition is getting less - my endurance is not so good, not keeping up the pace. But I'll get back to it - no problem. When all this work is over I'll soon be like I was before. It will be easy on me ...I just do it for myself and I will soon get back into shape.”

Others remain determined to retain the style of their adolescent lifestyle in terms of sporting activities and insist that the demands and obligations associated with adulthood will not alter their personal priorities. For Sape (21) - one of the youngest interviewees - sport continued to dominate time spent outside of work and had become of greater importance due to the sedentary nature of his job.

“I play soccer twice a week..in the summer I swim and play tennis. In the winter I skate. I also do cycling, push ups, weight lifting. I have too much energy...I like to exercise. I am sitting all day long - eight hours every day - by my desk - that part I hate. I want to keep my sporting up to stay in shape and to feel good. I think I would feel bad in myself if I cannot. It is in my control to do it...so it is down to me to find the time, the self-discipline. I have been playing soccer since I was six ..so sixteen years. I wouldn't like it if I couldn't do it.”

Jeroen (24), steadfastly remains determined to follow the schedule dictated some years before and in so doing so proves not only his commitment but also his resolution that this for him has not and will not change despite the demands of work.

“I play football and I train two or three times a week. Yes, it is very important to me...I have been going since I was very young and I am committed to my team. If I have to work late...well I try not to..but sometimes you have to , or have a meeting ..then I have to miss it, well then that's not good ...I don't like it. It doesn't make me feel good. I could always drop to less training but I am not going to do that.”

Embodied experiences of times past - the body “at its best”

In contrast the second categorisation of interviewees concerned those men who had progressed in all three areas - in terms of physiological ageing, demographic status and work and occupation. These more mature men could be described as those confronting a different yet just as significant pivotal stage in the lifecourse commonly

referred to as 'middle age'. These informants had established their position at work, were more likely to be married or in a long-term relationship, some with children. The physical active body had become a lesser concern in their everyday lives which had become increasingly centred around work and family matters. For these men the acquisition of such responsibilities justified having less time and less inclination to sustain or pursue the sporting lifestyle of their youthful yesteryears. Their remarks correlate to the findings of Watson (2000) who notes that marriage and parenthood appear to mark points of closure and the start of a process of 'letting go' or a 'losing' of the physical body. There appears a gradual constraining of the physical body by economic and social obligations:

“To settle down socially can be linked to a physical 'settling down' which may be marked by a change in the nature of one's embodiment. The 'normal everyday body' may increasingly be perceived as a functional (indeterminate shape) body rather than as a physical (defined shape) body.” (Watson 2000: 90)

Hence, these 'older' men similarly reflected back to a time when their bodies were at their best but were more assured in their self-judgements of their own period time or age of being at their physical premium. As Connell (1995:53) verifies, “bodily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are.” Whilst having to varying degrees allowed their body to 'go', the respondents frequently referred and most certainly 'preferred' to talk of their physical bodies with extensive and detailed reference to times past.

This memory of the body 'as it was' frequently recurs in participant narratives where they compared their physical state now with how their body used to be "when I was young", "in my teens", "before I started working" or "before we had children."

Current physical condition could be therefore be legitimised by former conduct of the body at the time when the respondents considered themselves to be at their bodily ideal. As Norbert (36), explains,

"No, now I am not in good condition. Through lack of sport. Twenty years ago when I was 18 I was at my physical best. I did kick boxing and a lot of other sport. I was really very fit and one of the better ones with the kickboxing. I haven't done it for years now...there is no time for sport ...when you do it you should do it three or four times a week so it is time consuming. I would like to now but when I come home from work I have the children and lots of other things going on."

Benny (37), recalls how he elected to 'drop' down into a lesser (in terms of both skill and demands) team owing to an increasingly difficult to determine work schedule:

"Before I started working I was in good shape...always running and busy training. I was younger, fitter had more time to spend with sport. After I started work then there is less time...with travelling and meetings and just work. I was always a first team player but for that you have to attend the training - twice sometimes three times a week and play the match at the weekend. You have to be there every week. I couldn't do it anymore. I never could be sure I could get there. With working more going on into the evenings I couldn't keep

to that. I had to drop down to the second team where it doesn't really matter so much."

It is interesting to note that this decision is totally founded on time restraints and related to work and that there is no suggestion that ageing has effected physical fitness or has in any way contributed to such a change. Similar comments appeared in the dialogue of Jacco (38),

"I felt at my best around twenty ..to twenty five. That time when I finished being a student. Well after that I went into the military for one year, so there was a lot of sports and I kept it all up for one or two years. Very disciplined. But then with getting a serious job and getting more settled. Well, it gets hard to find time. I had to stop."

For the majority of these older men, understanding their physical bodies in their present tense could only make sense by explaining the physical capabilities attained in their youth. Having been very active when younger made the present lack of exercise, lack of interest and motivation in anything involving a physical aspect more acceptable to their present situation. At this stage of the lifecourse it is apparent that such experiences are no longer culturally appropriate or necessary in the construction of masculine identity.

The young therefore healthy body

A further difference between the two groups emerged in matters concerning health and the body. Just as the body is a taken for granted presence throughout childhood

and youth, good health is also a 'given' state, referred to as a characteristic associated with a youthful body. Good health, like an active young body, by those who possess it, is subsequently barely worth reflection:

“Health - I don't think about it at the moment. I'm just too busy with everything else. Health I would say is feeling good. If my body is without any pains or illness. At the moment I am doing so much stuff that I need to do - trying to get on here at work and then at home all the building and work that needs doing on the house - because I can do it easilyOK I get tiredbut then I would still say I am healthy.” (Rene, 23)

It was also easier for the younger men to perceive good health as an assumed condition, distanced and set apart from behaviours and actions that are regarded as damaging to health. The young body was seen as a healthy one, and therefore unaffected or at least better able to deal with toxins and physiological abuse. Aryan, (22) with the assuredness of youth, is able then to maintain a state of 'healthiness' whilst referring to his enjoyment of smoking by viewing it as an unrelated unhealthy behaviour.

“In my mind I am still young and I think I am healthy but not behaving healthy. In my mind being healthy is never having a problem with physical health. Unhealthy behaviour is smoking, not eating good and the lack of exercise. I smoke and I am enjoying the smoking though. I only started a couple of year's ago..quite late on. Sometimes I think, “Oh, I smoke too much” but it

is one thing I don't want to stop. I don't feel any worse.... I know I will miss it. I like that cigarette.”

An interrelated theme was the notion that the young body could easily achieve a balance in its intake and output. Another commonly identified unhealthy behaviour related to diet and the consumption of stodgy, fatty, convenient but enjoyable junk food. This though was regarded as permissible and in some instances necessary - in maintaining a characteristically active, busy or sporty lifestyle:

“My health is good but I suppose that what I eat is not so healthy. I eat chips and a lot of fat things. I snack when I am hungry on all the bad stuff but then you would never know. Its unbelievable how I burn it all off...I can eat what I want but I really burn it off so fast.” (Bert, 22)

At this lifecourse stage a lack of attention to diet, and excesses of eating, drinking and smoking were regularly described by respondents as balanced out by being more physically active, less stressed, having fewer responsibilities and having a younger, more resilient body:

“When you are young you can eat anything, go out drinking ... you can do anything and your body doesn't show it. You are always on the move and using it up. When you are older and you are not sporting they you will grow and you will feel it more so that way you become more aware of your shape and of your body.” (Jeroen, 24)

Whilst the intake of fast food was mentioned with regularity as ‘unhealthy’, inclusion of such food was also allowable whilst no noticeable visible or damaging felt effects were consequently produced. Hans (26) was happily defiant in confessing his preference for fast food,

“I eat too much rubbish food but so what? I enjoy it and I am still slim and healthy so why not? Its probably what I eat most days after work...fries and a burger ... it fills me up, tastes good....I’m not so keen on all the vegetables anyway.”

An increasing awareness of health

As respondents advanced through the life course, many voiced an increasing awareness of health - sometimes due to experiences of illness which had endangered their health. It was evident that Michel’s episode of poor health resulted in a more serious attitude towards his own well-being:

“Health means watching the kind of food I eat, the sports that I do. Smoking - well I am quitting. I have to cut out the fast food and rely on it as much as I used to. Yeah, I am trying to change and look after myself a bit more. I see my health as being completely in my own hands, depends on your lifestyle...if I compare it with a couple of years ago then it is much better. Just takes time to learn and go through some stuff of your own.” (Michel, 25)

Saltonstall (1993:33) states that the “production of health for the self involves personal responsibility for body maintenance”. Marcel (30) had suffered from

testicular cancer when aged twenty and as a result felt a strong sense of responsibility in looking after his health:

“I have a feeling that life has been given back to me through technology and if it had happened to me thirty years ago I would have died. That is why I care more about my health and I feel bad now when I abuse my body with bad food.”

In exploring the phenomenological, embodied aspects of health, the comments once more correlate to those of Saltonstall (1993) who found health to be grounded in a sense of self and a sense of the body both of which are tied to conceptions of past and future actions. “This lived experience entails simultaneous processes of interpretation and communication: interpretation of one’s own and other’s particular bodies and communication of one’s self as healthy and as a member of a social group.” (p.7)

This is additionally reflected in the dialogues of the respondents which indicate that increasing maturity had bought a heightened knowledge and self-interest. As mentioned by Edwin, (26)

“I am much more aware of my own health now. I think about it more than I used to. I did more sport in the past because I had more time. Now I am more aware of it, but then I was completely unaware of the side effects of not doing it. I never did sport because I knew it was good for me - just I had the time. The whole difference now I am more aware of its importance but I have less time and am doing less.”

While becoming not only much more aware of their own health but also more knowledgeable in matters relating to health, the respondents included in the second group more readily identified the detrimental outcomes of certain behaviours and to admit the effects of these to their state of health. Perhaps this was also due to the fact these were becoming less easy to ignore as Casper (39), a heavy smoker, reflects:

“When I was seventeen I felt really good with myself...I did a lot of sport and no smoking. I started smoking at eighteen and then I stopped with the sport. All went downhill very fast. Because of the work too, I was doing shifts. No sport and the smoking means disaster. Maybe you don't see it at the time but later ...but then it is too late. Harder to start back with the sport and impossible -for me - to stop with the smoking.”

While the younger respondents appeared to effectively observe health as a state which could continue to be maintained separate from (and despite) health related behaviour, other - typically the older interviewees - conceptualise health and health related behaviour as one and the same. As with Casper, health was referred to as the product of certain behaviours which individually or collectively contributed to or militated against 'being healthy'. Eating, drinking, physical activity and smoking were articulated as part of everyday living and for Casper, smoking and the lack of sport whilst acknowledged as unhealthy, appear as acceptable factors integral to his everyday life. Yet while the potential damage is recognised it is explained away in his remarks that it is 'too late' and 'impossible' to change. This sense of both dismissal and resignation is echoed in the comments of Jan (40), the oldest of the men interviewed:

“I have no need now to get fitter. I know it will keep getting worse as I get older. I just live day by day as happy as possible. Don’t worry now about exercise. If I get thicker I get thicker. I see all those people running round in the street - good for them! It is not for me. I am not a typical Dutch guy - no ice skating, no football. I skate with the children - more for fun, not sport. The same reason I cycle - for the kids - if they weren’t there, I wouldn’t do it.”

It is interesting to note how Jan feels that he has reached a stage in the lifecourse where fitness is no longer a requirement. Any physical activity undertaken is performed merely to fulfil family obligations. In contrast to other quotes cited, Jan, whilst appearing to accept responsibility for his health and body, justifies his lack of concern by expressing a sense of fate. Just as getting older is an unalterable condition, equally deteriorating physical fitness is also predetermined and therefore to be expected.

Health - incorporating mind and body

A recurring theme appearing throughout the interviews and common to various stages of everyday life, was the frequent conceptualisation as health as a resource that allowed the respondents to live and work productively. This correlates to the work of Herzlich (1973) who initially identified the concept of health as a ‘reserve’ which enabled the individual to overcome or cope with any afflictions and maintain good health. In the context of this study this meant being able to deal with situations and obligations which informants confronted regularly in their everyday lives and this was often seen to incorporate both the mind and the body bringing together a sense of emotional, mental and physical well being. This was felt from respondents such as

Rene, who in his early twenties typifies the members of the first group, making the transition into adulthood and being a relatively new employee whilst also in the process of moving into and renovating his own house:

“If I can do all that I need to do without any problems then I am healthy and if my body does what it needs to. The body is only the tool of doing things. If you set your brain to something then you can overcome anything.” (Rene, 23)

Mark, although an older respondent and with a well established position in terms of both career and personal life, holds similar views:

“To be in good health means that I can have an outstanding performance at work, that is needed in the company. Because what I am doing is like top sport...yes it is like a professional sport and you need to have a body that is in shape as well as a brain because one is no good without the other.” (Mark, 33)

Conclusion

Many other repeated themes appeared throughout the narratives of the men regardless of their position in the lifecourse but responses and reactions to these differed in relation to social classifications. In focussing not only on motivations and reasons but also social identities and how these are constructed within the social settings in which individuals live and work, analysis of the interviews revealed the two principal groups as described. These initially emerged strongly in matters relating to conceptions of the ‘ideal body’ and health. Gravitating around these but situated at differing lifecourse stages were two additional ‘subgroups’ of respondents. One of these secondary groups

consists of respondents who fall between the stages of youth and middle age and includes those men who, rather than resist the additional responsibilities of adulthood, have accepted them becoming more committed both to work and career progression and to personal relationships. At the other end of the spectrum is the fourth group represented by those respondents who have 'settled into' middle age and feel secure and comfortable having reached that time in their lives. Like Jan, these respondents have achieved and maintain their own masculine identity and sense of self through avenues other than the physical and have no desire to change or rediscover their bodies through any form of bodily control. Typically these respondents include the older men, more likely to be married and occupying a more senior or managerial position at work. As these four general cultural categories appeared and were found to give meaning to informant beliefs regarding the body, health and the self, they were used to provide the framework for the subsequent coding of the interviewee transcripts. Focusing on the ways in which different respondents related their experiences according to their circumstances and position in the lifestage served to further enhance comparisons between their individual accounts. As the interviews were compared, similarities were noted and these were classified under various headings in order to understand how men over a specific time and place recount varying experiences concerned with embodiment in their everyday lives. By 'simply listening' to the conversations it became obvious that the dialogues recorded are not only unique in revealing personal experiences but also in the way that these are articulated. While it was recognised that respondents may have been selective in disclosing personal and sometimes sensitive information, core elements remained consistent and appeared repeatedly in informant accounts around which the interview data could be ordered. As analysis of the data revealed a number of recurring issues

the process of coding was carried out by provisionally labelling similar themes as they appeared and by highlighting the relevant sections of the interview transcripts.

Accordingly the examples of coding utilised here include, among others labels such as, 'body at its best...ideal', 'perceptions of health', 'healthy/unhealthy behaviour', 'the importance of sport and exercise', 'body image', 'weight and its significance', 'food and diet', 'guilty feelings ..excuses', 'the influence of work', 'views on women and the female body', ' thoughts on popular male images.' Although somewhat disordered, the importance of these rather vague labels enabled a segment of interview data to be identified as belonging to a certain category. These categories were found to continually overlap, intermingle and contradict but to retain significance throughout the various situations and stages that these respondents were enacting and experiencing embodiment in their everyday lives. Correspondingly Connell (1995: 56) writes of the plurality and diversity of bodies, adding: "Every one of these bodies has its trajectory through time. Each one must change as it grows and ages. The social processes that engulf it and sustain it are also certain to change." Certain 'social processes' were evidently important influences on men and their bodies through which respondents were found to create and sustain their masculine identity and sense of self whilst voyaging through the time and space selected here. Appearing frequently in men's accounts as dominant and specific factors pertaining to the construction of masculine identity these social processes were not in themselves 'emergent' but undoubtedly powerful and effectual forces in shaping the lives of the respondents and in contributing to their everyday embodied experiences. The analysis is subsequently presented in the following chapters which relate to the social and institutional locations of sport, food and diet and work.

Chapter 8

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A 'PHYSICAL' MASCULINITY: SPORT AND THE MILITARY

Connell (1990:83) defines hegemonic masculinity as the “culturally idealised form of the masculine character” which is characterised by “toughness and competitiveness, the subordination of women and the marginalisation of gay men.” Sociological evidence as reviewed in Chapter 3 indicates that within the sphere of sport this dominant form of masculinity continues to prevail. Although the possession of physical strength no longer determines social and economic positions within advanced modern societies (Pleck & Sawyer 1974:142), Bryson (1990) argues that sporting prowess remains positively valued and adds,

“Sports very physical nature gives it special significance because of the fundamental link between social power and physical force. Sport is a major arena in which physical force and toughness are woven into hegemonic masculinity and the resultant ideology transmitted.” (p.173)

Accordingly, Messner (2001:88) maintains that organized sport has “served to bolster a sagging ideology of male superiority and has helped reconstitute masculine hegemony” and has become one of the central sites in the production of masculinity where a “regular and routinized forum for the promotion of a learned and generated masculinity is provided.” (Horne et al 1999: 117).

The findings of this study reflect the importance of sport in the construction of masculine identity, as nineteen of the twenty respondents recounted boyhood participation in sports. Their accounts reveal how through the disorganised games of childhood and later more competitive adult organised activities, involvement and ability in sport is unquestionably accepted and endorsed as a measure of manhood. The experiences related throughout this chapter clearly support the argument that sport socializes boys to be men (Lever 1976; Schafer 1975) providing further confirmation that, “ through sport, boys learn cultural values and behaviours such as competition, toughness, and winning at all costs which are culturally valued aspects of masculinity.” (Messner 1990: 99)

Whilst competitive and gender segregated team sports such as football and rugby, has become an important element of physical education in schools in Britain, similar sporting activities in the Netherlands take place outside of the school curriculum. Reflecting themes central to Dutch culture, Van Essen (2003:68) notes that within schools the “segregated and different” adage has been replaced by “together and equal” and adds, “due to Dutch tradition gender issues are seldom taken into account.” Humberstone (1990:203) confirms that the alternative practise of established sex segregation implemented in British PE lessons does little to create understanding between the sexes, “it augments attitudes that announce and celebrate the stereotypical polarities of masculinity and femininity in sport, co-operation between the sexes is stifled.” Rather the aim within the Dutch educational system is to provide a broad introduction to sports culture as both boys and girls are given the opportunity to try out a variety of activities including traditionally gendered sports such as aerobics and football. “The emphasis here is that both sexes can participate and learn to accept each others capacities.” (Aartsma 1994). Children are then

encouraged to pursue those sports or activities that they prefer or that they have a natural affinity towards but this takes place outside of school, usually in clubs situated locally within their neighbourhood. Outside the school environment a wide array of adult organised team sports are available which range from football, volley ball, tennis, skating, swimming, sailing to name but a few. (All such activities are alternatively the responsibility of and managed by local councils or privately run, subsidised by parental contributions and local sponsorship deals). These numerous and diverse activities are offered to both boys and girls and operate in mixed groups which remain the norm until children reach secondary school age (which in the Netherlands is 12 - 13 years). While “gym lessons” are firmly incorporated into the Dutch co-educational tradition, it could be argued that the sex segregation traditionally found in British school P.E. lessons is merely ‘transferred’. Gender distinctions now arise when children reach early adolescence and segregation is commonly found in competitive and team sports as girls and boys are divided into separate teams and clubs.

Influential Introductions

Sports facilities in the Netherlands, which are well provided and generally of a high standard, are well attended and supported by the community, and locally run clubs are considered important not only in providing sporting opportunities for both children and adults, but for sustaining community and social relations. In many instances, boys may be introduced to a certain football club due to parental involvement- it may be that the father once played for that club and remains an active participant in the organisation, or has retained social links there with other parents. For those men in this study, in recalling early ‘sporting ‘experiences, an influential male figure such as

a father or older brother often featured in casual references made in regard to that time. Sape (21) having four brothers, talks of their football involvement in terms of a family activity,

“I have been playing soccer since I was six. I have four brothers and we all played for the same club..but in different teams. Any evening in the week one or two of us would have training and on Saturday we would all be playing matches...really took over the family at the weekends. I don't see it as being...that I had to be better than them...we weren't playing against each other, it was just something that we all did. Being different ages, different teams we could support each other.”

His father, who was now a coach at the club, similarly encouraged Bert (22),

“My dad took me along from when I was very young. I used to just watch the boys and run around playing at the side with a ball. I just had to wait until I was a bit older then I could join my first team. It was hard sometimes with my father there. He used to play for the club too ..and he was a good player when he was young ...other people there often like to tell me! Always made it into the A team, so I wanted always to do well..even when he wasn't watching.”

Having been introduced to organised sports by older brothers, fathers or friends, once involved the men found themselves playing within an exclusively male world.

“ ... sport doesn't just play a part in shaping emotional and social lives. It also locks many boys into an aggressively virile culture through the masculinising of their bodies.Boys quickly develop a gendered sense of masculinity in their bodies through the social meanings and relations they meet in a world that is organised in the interests of male power.”

(Salisbury & Jackson 1996: 208)

Although the quote of Salisbury and Jackson (1996) refers to school sports, Messner (1992) similarly emphasizes that when boys start playing competitive sport they are not just learning a game, but entering an organized institution where the production of masculinity is marked by the hierarchical competitive structure of that institution.

“Though the separate (and unequal) gendered world of boys and girls comes to appear as ‘natural’, it is in fact socially constructed.” (p. 92). Organized sports have since become well established as a primary masculinity validating experience, “where boys learn to achieve a successful male identity by competing and where they must constantly prove themselves in order to gain acceptance.” (Harris 1995:121)

From childhood play to adolescent sport

The importance of sport throughout boyhood and youth was repeatedly confirmed throughout the narratives of the men interviewed, its significance further firmly established as all but one of the twenty respondents made reference to their involvement in a sporting activity. Although football was the most popular choice, other sports performed reflected a diverse range of interests and activities such as handball, windsurfing, horse riding, judo, squash and tennis. Sports and a high level of

physical activity is a dominant feature of many childhood recollections of boyhood, stated as a positive and accepted fact of being a male youth.

“I always did a lot to sport. I was the kid that did too much. When I was young, after school, always doing something - football, tennis, swimming. My mother was always worried I was doing too much....but I just was always off with my friends ..always on the go.” (Berand, 34)

“When I think back to my time at basis (primary) school, well my whole time outside school was completely active. I would cycle to and home from school, and that would take forty-five minutes, then I would eat and be out again with my friends. Football most daysor skating in the winter...there was more chance then....and round at the pool in the summer. It’s what we all did then.” (Maurice, 34)

Maurice describes his journey to school - a forty five-minute cycle ride - as a customary part of his daily life. Although it might seem obvious, it is important to mention here the cycling culture inherent in the Netherlands as the majority of the men interviewed - if not all would undoubtedly have journeyed by bike, not only to school but almost everywhere. A daily jaunt of forty-five minutes to school - one way - is not unusual and in daily life, especially for children but also for many adults, the bike remains the primary means of transport. For the Dutch, cycling is just that, considered on a par with walking, as the ‘natural’ mode of travel - and is not thought of in terms of serious sport or exercise. It is in other ways then, that being physically active and sporty was routinely remembered as a central part of childhood and

understood as being “just what you do with your friends” outside of school hours.

Whilst primarily thought of in terms associated with socialising with friends, playing and having fun, the element of competitiveness could also be recognised. As Michel (25) recalls,

“Even then, maybe especially then, I know I wanted to be really good at what I did. I was the sort to try out everythingand I wouldn't like it if someone was better at it than me. So that would be a challenge...to get better at it. Just when we were all messing about playing, kicking a ball around... I would like to be the one to score the most goalsor the one who could run the fastest. I knew I was good...fit....but I would always push to go faster, to go that bit more.”

Coakley (1983) proposes that when children play informal games there are four primary elements of interest: action, involvement, maintaining a close score and opportunities to reaffirm friendships. Important distinctions arise between game playing and organised youth sport as the aim becomes performance orientated, often involving factors such as dominance over opposing teams, and emphasizing toughness and hard disciplined work over spontaneity, expression and creativity.

“In many ways adult organised youth sport may be seen as a denial of childhood and youth.” (Horne et al 1999:149)

In the accounts of the interviewees, sport - as opposed to recreational fun and games - became far more significant as the men grew up and as the role of sport became less of an extension of childhood play. It is also at this time as children enter their teenage years that sports clubs and facilities become increasingly gendered in Dutch society

and boys and girls are separated into different teams, based primarily on the emerging and increasing differences in physicality and strength. Increasingly viewed as “a masculinizing practice”, sport is a determining feature of adolescence through which boys develop into men, where it becomes ‘natural’ to equate masculinity with competition, physical strength and skills. “Becoming a man” is something that boys - in particular adolescent boys - work at, and Messner & Sabo (1990) suggest that such work is the result of a process of interaction with adults, peers and social institutions.

“These specific socialization practices need not be seen as natural but rather as collective (and mutually reinforcing) practises, through which patterns of empowerment, habits and self expectations of domination are successfully encouraged in successive generations of boys.” (p. 22)

The dominance of football

Upon entering adolescence, most of the men had committed time and effort to a favoured sport, usually selected by being the sport they felt to possess a natural ability or talent for. Football dominated as the favoured sport of the respondents, hardly surprisingly, as football has been theorised in relation to issues around gender and, in particular, constructions of masculinity. Indeed, Epstein (1998:7) observes, “football is a major signifier of successful masculinity”. The ways in which football has been conventionally ‘played out’ reflects those practices associated with attaining and sustaining hegemonic masculinity and is evident in the literature on football (Robins 1982; Dunning et al 1988; Murphy et al 1990) where the use of terminology reflects characteristics currently associated with hegemonic masculinity. Kenway & Fitzclarence (1997) suggest that,

“ At this stage in Western history, hegemonic masculinity mobilises around physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, certainty, control, assertiveness, self reliance, individuality, competitiveness, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline, reason, objectivity and rationality.” (p.121)

Similarly, these characteristics are present in the following quotation from Dunning et al (1988) who argue that football requires,

“a fine balance between a number of interdependent polarities.....the polarity between force and skill, that between providing scope for physical challenge and controlling it, that between individual and team play and that between attack and defense.” (p.4)

The strong connection between football and the portrayal of masculinity was evident in the interviews - those men who had become football players did not appear to regard this as a ‘choice’ but rather the obvious, natural choice of sport for men to be playing. Conversely, those respondents who had opted for a different sport or activity often felt it necessary to justify or offer an explanation for preferring an alternative to ‘the norm’. As Rene (23) explains,

“I started with martial arts because I was a really aggressive boy. It was a good outlet for me. Since I’ve been doing it - over the years now- a lot of my aggression has gone, I have learnt how to control it. Maybe that is why football had no pull for me....I hate football. It is nothing for me, just kicking a ball about, cannot see the point in it.”

In his disregard of football, “nothing for me”, Rene appears to be contesting it as a signifier of masculinity, as football would not be able to provide a sufficient release for his excess of aggressiveness - one of the most valued characteristics of men’s sports and strongly associated with representations of masculinity. In this respect, it appears that Rene views his aggressiveness - which can only be effectively, channelled through martial arts - as certainly equal to or indeed superior to those displays of masculinity offered by playing football. Similarly though, both sports support the comments offered by Salisbury & Jackson (1996) in that “boys have to learn to go for aggressive performance, success, superiority over women, emotional stoicism, physical strength and goal directedness.”

Stefan (28), who is a keen horse rider, offers a rather different alternative. Although he started to ride as a child for pleasure and fun, competing in dressage events soon became more important,

“I’ve always loved to ride and work with horses. But I also like to compete and perform very well with the horse. I don’t even think of it all now as sport, or exercise ..yes it is still pleasure...but also hard work. Now horse riding is like a profession for me...teaching and making money from it. It is all just my other profession...just my other job.”

Stefan had achieved championship status as a teenager, which in turn led to a second career opportunity not only in teaching but also judging competitive dressage events. Although Stefan remains modest about his success in his chosen field of activity, there is a sense that his horse riding has become legitimized by becoming ‘a profession’. Throughout the interview he generally refers to horse riding in terms associated with

work and money rather than relating this activity to aspects of his own physicality, other than the odd comment, “for horse riding it is very much better to be tall and small.” Despite his achievements and the amount of time and effort invested, Stefan emphasizes other sports when talking of sport and youthful activity.

“At home I still have weights, I used to go to the gym...now I have no time. I used to do boxing...had private lessons. It’s a great way to express yourself, it was great to be able to feel everything.”

Whilst the promotion of numerous other sports offers many new opportunities for the development of strength and skill to “people who do not normally shine in confrontational games, to smaller men and to women”, Stefan’s example is representative of Messner & Sabo’s (1990) observation that,

“At the same time the continued place we accord to confrontational team games in our hierarchy of sports and the continued acclaim we accord to the men who shine in them, mean that these games continue to offer important opportunities for masculinising practices.” (p. 28)

There is no denying Whitsons claim (1990: 28) that the major games - such as football - continue as institutions through which the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and, through this, male hegemony are actively pursued. Although Rene and Stefan are not footballers, their quotes are illustrative in their references to martial arts and boxing, that these games are typically institutions in which physical strength and

fighting skills are celebrated, where male solidarity is also celebrated and which therefore reinforce constraints on boys experimenting with other ways of being male.

A powerful performance

The importance of sport and the importance of the body are obvious in the formation of gender identity especially in childhood and adolescent years. Connell (1983) argues that body sense is crucial to the development of male identity and suggests that to learn to be a male is to learn to project a physical presence that speaks of latent power.

“It is integral to the reproduction of gender relations that boys are encouraged to experience their bodies, and therefore themselves, in forceful, space occupying, even dominating ways.” (Sabo & Messner 1990:23)

Indeed, all of the respondents bar one, recalled a very active, sporty youth where physical activity dominated much of their leisure time. Sabo & Messner (1990) suggest that for adolescent males for whom other sources of recognized masculine authority (based on earning power, adult sexual relations, fatherhood) are some ways off, the development of body appearance and body language that are suggestive of force and skill is experienced as an urgent task. Not only were high levels of involvement apparent, but also the high level of achievement in that whatever sport was chosen by the men when younger, it was equally important to perform well. The following comments are typical examples,

“I was an excellent runner...nearly always came first, way ahead of the others. I had a very good condition..it was easy for me.” (Berand, 34)

“I was a very good player, my levels of fitness were very high. I had the chance to do professional sport, which a part of me would really have liked. But I let it go...I was not prepared to put all those hours into it.” (Michel, 25)

You have to be aiming to win. If you really want to win, and you think that way, then you will...that’s what I try to keep thinking anyway.” (Wim, 26)

“ I was a real fanatic...I still am, like when I do sport I want to win and I want to be 100% fit. It has to be competitive, that is what I enjoy. I like to be physically active but also I have to win...no good going half way.”

(Edwin, 26)

There is a notable change of emphasis in the role of sport during adolescent years as the importance of success and winning becomes just as vital as the social and friendship factor where being better than others - in fact beating them - is the key to acceptance. Horne et al (1990: 140) suggest that participation in sport involves a process of identity construction and confirmation which occurs over time and depends upon a number of processes, including the acquisition of knowledge about a sport, being associated with a sport group, learning the values and perspectives of the group and earning the acceptance of those in the group so that ones identity as a participant is affirmed and reaffirmed over time. The institution of sport tends to encourage the development of what Schafer (1975) terms “conditional self worth” where as boys become aware that acceptance by others is contingent upon being good - a “winner” - narrow definitions of success, based upon performance and winning becomes increasingly important to them. Jeroen (24) explains,

“For me football, the social and the physical side is very important. I like to work my body and have a good condition. Of course there is the great feeling when you have a good match, it is always good to be the winning team.... especially if you are the goal scorer or you are the one who makes that difference. It’s a very special feeling.”

Adulthood and adaptations

Having left adolescent years behind, the younger, single men interviewed continue in their attempts to remain highly committed to their chosen sport, attempting to maintain the training schedule determined some time before. As their time becomes increasingly dominated by the dictates of work, this appears to become a difficult struggle,

“I play indoor soccer ...with matches at the weekend but I need to train in the week. Getting much harder to now to get the time, sometimes I am sitting here still at 7 in the evening. Then I have to miss the training...then if I miss the training I don’t always get to play the match. Don’t like that at all” (Sape, 21)

Wim (26) has reluctantly found it necessary to alter his training routine due to work pressures,

“I train now twice a week, a match once a week. It used to be three times a week that I went ...it had to decrease so one day less with any exercise. With work it is constantly decreasing, especially lately..sometimes just once a week.

That is not enough. I don't like feeling that I am not as fit as I could be just because of work matters....not really through my own choice.”

The second categorization of interviewees concerns the men who have ‘moved on’ in relation to the life course and in so doing so had come to accept that their levels of activity and commitment to sport would never be the same as it once was. Benny (37) has found it necessary to make certain adjustments,

“Time is a problem with work. The training I do now is on a Saturday afternoon. The match is Sunday. Weekends are now the only time, in the week you never know when you are going to be finished. The first team where I used to be, you have to train three or four times a week. So I go back one. No, not any more it doesn't bother me. Work is important, takes priority. I can always look for other things to do. Like cycling. I've always done some sport - football first, then handball. I like the challenge and I like to do it. Nice to do with friends. I still play to win but not so important now. Not like it used to be. Now it is not the main reason - more just to play the game and have some fun.”

For these men, the competitive element is now perhaps not so necessary. They have become more established in their work positions, family and relationships and consequently their priorities have changed. For Maurice (34) although the need to exercise remains important, his reasons for doing so have now changed quite radically.

“I stopped playing soccer and I will start with the jogging. When you jog it gives you much more pleasure. You win or lose playing soccer. When you jog it is just you. Soccer is more result based. Jogging will be for myself. With the soccer I was training and playing, nearly on the field every night. More just for me now, more about recreation and relaxation.”

Mark (33) also feels that as his free time is limited, there are plenty of other concerns that need his attention and effort. Any serious commitment to sport has been relegated to the past,

“I have done cycling, football ..yes and all that but now I just do stuff with the kids and cycle for the shopping. Now it is for recreation more than sport. I used to exercise a lot. Less time now with the family and with work. My energy right now is used up with decorating the house. If I wasn't so busy with other things, or when I do have time then yes, I still like to run, swim or cycle. But it's not so important. It is all a matter of having the time.”

Injuries and excuses

For others, increasing injuries were cited as a common problem and as a result sporting practices had either been abandoned or substituted. Edwin (26) was finding recurring injuries a source of real frustration,

“I really miss playing soccer. I would still like to do it but I can't because of my injuries. I damaged my knee now six months ago and now I cannot play. I feel a lot of frustration over that. I am looking at alternatives to what I can do

and I have invested in a rowing machine to work on at home. I wanted something that would still give my body good training.”

Many respondents recounted instances when the physical body, or a part of their body had become injured or damaged through sport. “Knees”, “groin”, “ankles” were commonly those areas cited which had suffered most and featured prominently in the sporting histories or some respondents, accounting for “time out” from their usual training routine. Accepted as part of sports culture, such injuries - while a source of disappointment - were also talked about with a sense of pride and perhaps viewed as a different kind of accolade earned on the field. Synnott (1993:166) argues, “Pain is something not to be avoided for some men, but to be endured and even sought out. ‘No pain, no gain’ is the motto of athletic training.” Aryan (22), who delights in the thrill of windsurfing, frequently mentioned his recurring ankle problems which is initially referred to as a restriction, limiting his choice of activity,

“I have had a few physical problems. Well, I have broken my ankle now six times, it limits me in what I can do. I can’t do anything without thinking about getting on the ground - it is what has kept me away from tennis, football, volley ball.”

Later in the conversation, the broken ankle is mentioned in terms of achievement, gained whilst performing a challenging feat,

“Windsurfing is a difficult sport. Physically it is hard and you have to be skilful to do some of the jumps and stuff. It is how I broke it (ankle) twice

.....with windsurfing doing extreme jumps.”

And in considering the decreasing amount of time spent exercising, the ankle provides a worthy excuse,

“I will always have to be careful with my ankle. Only my muscles which are keeping it together.”

For those men who had advanced in terms of years, work and family, both time commitments and health problems were clearly influential and useful in providing a legitimate excuse for their current lack of exercise. Rein (32) offered a combination of contributing reasons which preventing him from maintaining any regular sport,

“I do nothing now on a regular basis although I would love to. Due to time it all became a problem. At this moment I would love to do squash but I cannot because of my allergic reaction to all the dust there. When I go in there for twenty minutes and start running and running and my airways are so open all the dust gets in there and I get a reaction....then I get a cold for three straight days in a row. I would love to do the running but when can I do it?”

Although the men of this group are able to easily justify discontinuing sport, their decisions or choices - or where they feel they have had no conscious choice - do not always sit comfortably. Feelings of guilt were often expressed,

“I want to be doing sport but I just don’t have time anymore. When I come home from work there are the children and lots of things going on. I think every week about it..that I want to be back doing it. So that’s why I cycle to work. It’s the best I can do at the moment. I am always complaining about it and I do feel guilty. I would feel much better if I exercised.” (Norbert, 36)

It is interesting to note the inclusion of cycling which also features in the responses of Mark and Benny cited earlier. In contrast to the ‘taken for granted’ attitude expressed in childhood and youth as regards cycling, these ‘mid life’ men now speak of cycling more in terms of physical exercise and an activity that they have chosen to do to increase their level of fitness. Whilst still not regarded to be in the same league as sport, cycling is now considered as an activity that their demanding and busy lifestyles can more easily accommodate. Other respondents in this category voiced a similar sense of obligation to stay in condition and felt they ought to be doing more. Reflecting the popular idea of an association between a healthy body and a healthy mind, themes of balance and control resurfaced:

“I used to have the right balance between body and brain ...but the balance has gone with my body. I used to be on both sides. My father still has the right balance and he is sixty ...but he still sports four times a week. It gets harder to find it, I can’t seem to find any routine and I feel bad about it.” (Marcel, 30)

“I should get my working hours more organised so that I could do more squash or tennis. You really should do something to keep healthy and always try to keep the right balance.” (Berand, 34)

Linder (1970) suggests that the increasing tendency to use free time for 'maintenance work' places greater demands on the individual and makes the current state of bodily performance essential if individuals are to get the most out of life. In their search for a 'balance' both Berand and Marcel reinforce Linder's observation, " the hectic pace of life increases the need for 'human servicing.'" (1970:40).

Of the men interviewed, it was those that fell into the final category who were more likely to have abandoned the struggle to maintain a 'balance' in their lives and less likely to experience the need for 'servicing' their body. The quote from Jan (40) cited in the previous chapter, reflects a resigned acceptance at his age and lifecourse stage as, "I have no need now to get fitter." Jacco (38) has also come to accept a decreasingly level of activity but as physical issues become increasingly less relevant in his everyday life, he focuses on other aspects such as the benefits of maturity,

"Ageing, getting older, it doesn't really bother me - in some ways it would be nice to go back, but getting older has its advantages. You have to accept body changes whether you like it or not. Maybe you feel just more comfortable with yourself, doesn't mean I don't have to try but I feel more happy in myself...it is a good feeling. Yes I could do more with sport but it really doesn't matter to me so much. Other things are much more important to me now."

Men in the military

For these men located at the further end of the spectrum of those interviewed, sport is relatively unimportant and no longer a necessary medium in sustaining a sense of masculine identity. References to time spent in the military also featured in Jacco's account, where sports and physical activity were central to daily life - "there was a lot

of sport and I kept it all up for one or two years.” Having ‘done all that’ to such an extreme when younger, is rationalised as not only having ‘done his duty’ nationally for his country but he has ‘done his duty’ physically in terms of sporting measures.

As National Service remained compulsory in the Netherlands until 1996, other respondents had also ‘served their time’, but offered contradictory accounts of their ‘physical’ and related experiences. Mark (now 33), was conscripted at the age of 21 and joined the Green Berets, and recounts his experiences with great enthusiasm.

“I wanted to go. I really enjoyed the outdoor life that it offered. Full of challengesI loved having the chance to do things like rock climbing, the hiking, the assault courses...all that. I went to Germany, Scotland and Norway I think ..for different training exercises, it was hard work but good. Yes it was a strict physical program but just as tough - if not more so - mentally. It was a tough routine but I loved all the outdoor stuff and I was in the part of the army that did a lot of that.”

Like the institution of organised sport, military traditions play a powerful role in modern concepts of masculinity and continue to be grounded in notions of bravery, courage and aggression. Harris (1995:119) observes that, “real men accept danger and confront trouble. Part of becoming a man requires overcoming fears.” Mark’s experiences reflect this sense of ‘manly development’ to some extent,

“ When we first arrived, there we were, a couple of guys standing shivering in the cold, bit scared, didn’t know what to do ...just stood in the rain, not sure about anything. If you had seen us just half a year later though, like different

people, we would have been prepared...got a shelter up, no problems...could have coped with anything thrown at us.”

For Mark, the challenges, and the sense of adventure were definitive aspects in making his allotted 14 months in military service, a positive experience. Whilst acknowledging the harsh disciplinary actions and the strict hierarchical system as the down side of army life, he chooses to focus on the fact that this has contributed to, in his own words, his sense of “resourcefulness.”

“I didn’t like the hierarchy at all...you felt you had to look up but from the outside...that got better though later on. I wouldn’t say it has ‘disciplined’ me for life...but there is more a sense of control. I feel that now I take a more practical approach..you know that I could deal with any circumstances.”

Mark found his compulsory 14-month stint in the army exciting, tough, challenging and revelled in adhering to the traditional portrayal of the military image - man of action, physically and mentally fit and prepared for any eventualities. Conversely Marcel (30) recalls his time of National Service very differently.

“Yes, had to go when I was twenty one. Just out of school and I was about to start more study, doing economics. I was really disappointed, I didn’t want to go at all. Had to cancel all the plans for study. I didn’t like it at all....14 months doing nothingfor just fl800 a month for no further investment in your life.”

Marcel was assigned to the staff section and worked primarily in administration although basic training involved the same physical exercises, memories of which contrasted greatly to those expressed by Mark.

“It would be easy to romanticise everything when you think back. But no, it really was not nice at all. For three weeks at a time we would go to Germany for training. Living outside, all weathers...usually rainy and cold. Away from the family, shaving outside ...washing in cold water...what’s good about it?”

Marcel remains resentful that two years of his life had been ‘wasted’, although he felt that the experience gained in such an environment, with a rigid hierarchical structure and disciplinary rules and regulations, had taught him valuable lessons for ‘civilian’ life,

“All the politics that go on ..well you learn to fight for yourself...you fight them back with their own rules. They try to make your life hard but you just have to come up for yourself and hit just as hard back using their own regulations.”

It is interesting that Marcel, while recalling these aspects which relate to non-physical tactics, uses dialogue peppered with violent, physical connotations - “fight back”, “hit back hard”. Yet for a large part of the time, Marcel carried out administrative duties, and was office based - in direct contrast to the popular ‘action man’ image associated with military service. The language adopted and choice of words however reflects the physical hostility and bodily aggressiveness commonly allied to the macho, warrior

ethos. (Humberstone 1990: 202) Although compulsory, not all men had to do military service and Marcel likens the selection process to a “lottery..if your number came up then you had no choice.” Considering those who were not chosen, Marcel alternately considers them to be fortunate in having been spared the experience, but continues to use this against them in certain situations,

“Only when you are with a bunch of guys and talking man stuff. It might come up and you talk about it ...there are always stories...and of course they get made into something more. The one who wasn't in it ..yeah, he usually gets called a wimp..or is there something the matter with him....gets some fun made of him.”

Military discipline develops the notion of an “appropriate masculinity” and promotes the male virtues of strength and domination, toughness and heroism (Mrozek 1983). This “cult of masculinity” (evident in Marcel’s reference to “talking man stuff”) is similarly promoted through traditional sport, includes the “denigration of wimps.” (Humberstone 1990:202). Playing sport, particularly those sports connected with aggression and toughness, distances the participant from possibility of being labelled a “sissy” or homosexual. (Young & White 2000:123) Within the military, any sign of weakness, vulnerability, or even sensitivity can be interpreted as a sign of homosexuality, and hence of “failed masculinity”. (Britton & Williams 1995). There was clearly no such indication relayed throughout the accounts of both Mark - “not always easy, but I can honestly say I had an overall good time” and Marcel - “I had to push myself but no it wasn't that hard for me.”

Whilst both men mentioned 'difficulties', for Mark these represented challenges to be tackled, while Marcel related problems due to a lack of motivating factors and tasks. Marcel refers to his time of conscription as a temporary and unwelcome interruption in his plans to "get on in life" and for him, which provided little opportunities for real physical (or other) challenges. Jacco recounts his time spent in service when considering sports involvement but not with any sense of enjoyment or achievement - it was just what you had to do as part of the training and drill. Alternatively Mark portrays his brief spell of military life as very active and being outdoors, finding the features which distinguish military life from everyday civilian life immensely satisfying - the discipline and control of the body, the exposure to risk and the sheer physicality.

The only environment to offer comparable experiences within a civilian lifestyle is that of organised sport within which offers many parallels to military life. Both the organised culture of the military and the institution of organised sport instil physical and mental toughness, obedience to authority and loyalty to the team. The organised culture of armies, like that of sport, is also heavily gendered and likewise the military and sport do not just reflect but actively produce particular versions of masculinity. Both endorse Connell's (1995) notion of hegemonic masculinity, in which one form of masculinity (which includes being exclusively heterosexual and physically powerful) maintains the ideal, dominant form of masculinity. Phillips (1980) and Mangan (1987) have identified strong links between traditional sport, the constitution of acceptable masculinities and imperial ideology and Humberstone (1990: 202) asserts that the cult of masculinity, celebrated through traditional sport, has provided for a blind acceptance of the "virtues of warring." Men predominate in war like conduct within the sphere of sport and body contact sports such as boxing and football

almost exclusively practised by men, involve ritualised combat and often physical injury. As Messner & Sabo (1990) surmise,

“In western culture, sport...ritualises aggression and allows it to be linked with competitive achievement and, in turn, with masculinity.sport has become one of the most important sites of masculinizing practise in cultures in which other kinds of physical prowess have become devalued and in which direct aggression is officially legitimate.” (p. 27)

Conclusion

The quotes of the respondents relating to the subjects of sport, physical activity and the military are shown to adhere and support the idea of a hegemonic masculinity. While the hegemonic form of masculinity refers to “that one form of masculinity rather than others that is culturally exalted.” (Connell 1995:77), Connell (2001:216) adds that “different masculinities exist in definite relations with each other, often in relations of hierarchy and exclusion.” Relations of hierarchy were found to apply within the context of this study as the respondents recounted their sporting experiences, with football attaining the “highest score” as the most favoured sport, and retaining a significant position throughout the men’s lives as they pass from childhood to adolescence and finally as they become adults. Other most popular sports mentioned and elaborated upon by the interviewees include martial arts, boxing, windsurfing. These sports, together with football similarly reflect the “toughness and competitiveness” referred to by Connell (1990) as one of the determining features associated with hegemonic masculinity. Hargreaves (1994:145) comments that competitive sports are celebrations of physical differences between males and

females: “The idealised male sporting body - strong, aggressive and muscular - has been a popular symbol of masculinity against which women, characterised as relatively powerless and inferior have been measured.” Within the context of this study, sport is additionally shown to be a ‘male preserve’ (Dunning 1986) as none of the interviewees made any reference to women or to female participation in the sports mentioned. While this cannot be taken as approval for the “subordination of women” it is obvious that the absence of female participation is naturally assumed and presumably preferred. The fact that women fail to feature (in both the dialogue and the sports) may be due to the premise, as stated earlier, that “gender is not considered an issue in Dutch society”, but for whatever reasons, the sports that these men have chosen to play, traditionally (and often exclusively) remain male domains. The responses of the men interviewed substantiate the observation by Whitson (1990) that,

“Sport serves an important role in the construction of male solidarity, an institution that encourages men to identify with other men and provides for the regular rehearsal of such identifications.” (p.21)

The findings show that there remains a fundamental association between sport involvement in boyhood and dominant (that is, heterosexual) masculinity in adulthood. As Young & White (2000:123) note: “To relinquish the opportunity to participate in the sporting rite of passage.... is to risk estrangement from other boys.” Similarly, Klein (1999: 47) refers to the ‘force’ of the military in constructing images of masculinity in society, “ Usually, military service can be described as rite of passage to male adulthood, teaching toughness, and trying to eliminate what is regarded to be effeminate.” Connell’s (1990) third defining characteristic of

hegemonic masculinity is that of the “marginalisation of gay men.” As to be expected the subject of homosexuality did not enter into any of the narratives, as the sports discussed are largely those which promote homophobic behaviours and attitudes. Football, for example, is not only regarded an ‘all- male’ preserve, but the type of maleness boys are expected to exhibit is closely defined in terms of sexuality. As Parker (1996:13) states, “it takes heterosexuality for granted and dismisses as deviant any alternative form of masculine representation.” This could equally and easily apply to the military, which also advocates hegemonic masculinity and both supports and implements the principles of this dominant representation of manliness.

For the men in this study it is evident that both competitive and team sports, and to a lesser extent military experience, have played and continue to play a significant role in shaping and disciplining male bodies and identities. Rather than being indicative of any increased narcissistic concerns amongst men regarding their bodily appearance, involvement in sport is shown to be an important expression of male physicality in terms of power, strength and endurance. The accounts also show how sport becomes less necessary and of decreasing relevance in everyday life as the men advance in terms of life course stages progressing not only in age but in other areas of life, where success and satisfaction are unrelated to physical activity. For some of the men, this is indicative that they are no longer so concerned about their fitness and physical bodily condition as such, and acknowledge these changes as part of the process of ‘getting older’. Others are not so ready to accept that they are not so young or as fit as they once were but feel frustrated and to some extent ‘trapped’ by the confines that accompany the responsibilities of adulthood. By way of response, at the time of the interviews, a number of the respondents had found an alternative method unrelated to sport and physical exercise which offered an alternative means in exerting some

control and influence over their health and their bodies. Consequently the theme of the next chapter is that of food and diet.

Chapter 9

SHAPING THE MALE BODY: DIETARY PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES.

“Food and eating habits are banal practices of every day life; we all, as living beings must eat to survive. This apparent banality is deceptive. Food and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self, and our experience of embodiment, or the ways in which we live in and through our bodies.”

(Lupton 1996:1)

That food is crucial for human survival is an obvious fact. Of greater significance within the context of this study are those practices and meanings attached to food and eating which, as Lupton (1996) argues can be seen and understood as expressions of personal identity and the self. While this aspect is undoubtedly recognised within the current literature on the sociology of food as discussed in Chapter 1, the governing focus remains on the complex and contradictory relationship between women and food. Feminist research has been shown to reveal how the meanings and role of food for women in contemporary western society has become a central theme, as many women feel obliged to restrict their food intake in order to maintain the ‘thin ideal’. As slimness is equated with sexual attractiveness, it is also legitimised by the medical profession as being healthy yet these views do not fit with the ideologies of motherhood and maternal care. Many women experience a constant struggle between depriving themselves and feeding their family and conclude that food is a tempting enemy for many women, against which they feel obliged to practice self-denial (Charles & Kerr 1986). Meadow & Weiss (1992:125) offer a more graphic portrayal:

“Food is a destructive lover, a double edged sword. At the same time it offers immediate gratification and comfort, it insidiously builds up a layer of fat that society states is guaranteed to make one unlovable.”

Accordingly Cline (1990:187) describes food as a “source of danger for women” and describes it as a tragedy that “there is hardly a woman in the West between adolescence and old age who does not desire to alter something about her shape and size.” This statement was repeatedly reinforced in the accounts of the respondents as the subject of food and eating inherently prompted the men to talk of the experiences of their own womenfolk. Although it is not the objective of this study to explore the relationship between women and food, it is clear that this connection was significant in affecting the everyday lives of the men as similar beliefs as those detailed above were strongly and frequently echoed by the respondents. On introduction of this topic, it was usual for the interviewees to instantly make reference to and include their (female) partner in their dialogues. It was evident that for the majority of the respondents, the broader issues attached to food, eating and other dietary concerns are innately highly gendered and customarily viewed as being a “female thing.”

“I never really think about it”- women as purchasers and providers of food

The conflicting meanings of food for women were evident as the respondents considered their own daily diets, as mothers and girlfriends were frequently mentioned as those both “obligated” and expected to provide the main meals.

The youngest interviewee - Sape, aged 21 and living with his parents, provides a good example,

“I never really think about it. Well, I don’t have to. My mum shops and does all the cooking. I only cook or have to bother when my parents are away.”

For those who have moved on and are cohabiting, girlfriends have either assumed or been allocated the duties concerning comestibles as the lifestyle changes of Hans (26) illustrate,

“A year ago when I was on my own I was eating mainly beans and potatoes and ..just things I could quickly make hot. But now my girlfriend, she does all the cooking and makes wonderful meals. Every day now we eat normal food...potatoes, meat, groceries...it’s much better now.”

The comments of Rene (23) reflect the dualities involved for many women,

“My girlfriend does the cooking...and most times shops for food. It is easier for her after work. I really don’t think much about what I eat. But I do have some influence otherwise we would be eating green foods all the time. I don’t like salad...but she does and she is always careful with what she eats.”

For these three men, the provision and preparation of food and meals is given little thought and both Sape and Rene express a “taken for granted” attitude in that they “never think about it.” Their remarks illustrate the following observation made by Bordo (1993),

“In the necessity to make such a division of labour appear natural we find

another powerful ideological underpinning...for the cultural containment of the female appetite: the notion that women are most gratified by feeding and nourishing others, not themselves.” (p. 118)

The generational and lifestyle differences between Sape’s mother and Rene’s girlfriend further confirm that, “despite the increasing participation of women of all ages and classes in the “public” sphere, her “private” role of nurturer remains ideologically intact.” (Bordo 1993:119)

“Typically female” - women and dieting

In the same way that women were largely viewed as being “in charge” of all things culinary, the comments of the respondents reflected how it was perceived as ‘normal’ for women to be concerned with dieting, weight and body image. Notably, this controlling concern was expressed as being a standard female trait by the interviewees. As Aryan (22) describes his girlfriend,

“Always, typical female –“look at my arse...it’s growing as I eat this!” She does diet and she shouldn’t. She is perfect. I am laughing always at her diet...there is really no pressure from me. Always on and off the diets. She has that cycle going on ...at 22...really she is a bit obsessed with it. She doesn’t feel confident enough in herself. If she is bending over and her belly is there, well, it matters to her. I don’t care at all ...to me that is completely normal. Nothing to do with me. It is just a female thing. More women feel like that.”

While accepting that women are generally found to be dissatisfied with their bodies,

shape and weight, most of the men also seemed quite perplexed by their behaviour and beliefs around food and their bodies. In their roles of husbands or boyfriends, they maintained that whilst it was not that important to them, it remained an issue for their partners despite reassurances and positive affirmations of their feelings towards them. The accounts of the men in whatever type of personal relationship - be it casual, cohabiting or long term, offered similar descriptions of their partner's behaviour regardless of age or social circumstances. Their words serve to reinforce the observations of Germov & Williams (1996:643), "Body regulation is the most absorbing of tasks since the achievement of the thin ideal is an impossible goal for the majority of women; therefore the self discipline and self surveillance required is ever more vigilant."

Michel (25) remains puzzled by the driven behaviour and actions of a previous girlfriend,

"In my last relationship my girlfriend was really busy with her body...she was obsessed. She had a problem really. Totally not happy with herself....didn't come from me, I couldn't understand it ..she looked great as far as I could see. She always had some pressure from parents though...well, she had that operation to suck her fat out...that's really bad."

Edwin (26) has been with his current partner for two years and has grown accustomed to her 'on - off' dieting habits,

"My girlfriend is more concerned (than me) with how she feels and how she looks. If she looks good, then she feels good. She is very often on a diet.

Watching her food ...but she lost a lot of weight with the shake diet..the drinking one. She goes in waves....that's the best way to describe it really...either up or down with the dieting, always trying a different one.”

The comments show how dieting for women has become so common that it is regarded as the norm and accepted, although not necessarily understood, by men as a female preoccupation. Living with women who appear to be in a perpetual state of disordered eating, who exhibit a cycle of ‘yo-yo’ dieting, was found to be the rule rather than the exception. Jacco (38) has been married for 10 years and is resigned to his wife’s problematic relationship with food and her body,

“She is more body conscious with sport and a way with food. Often on a diet. She is suffering from overweight....it makes her unhappy putting on the weight. She sees it as unattractive..it doesn’t bother me at all although I do see how it bothers her. Now she is on a diet with the help of the doctor. She has been on several diets but she has a tendency to easily gain weight. She has always told me that it was very difficult to watch other people eat and know that you can’t. Finally though she has accepted that she will never be stick thin, and that is one good thing.”

It is clear that Jacco is sympathetic and whilst his use of the words ‘suffering from overweight’ enforce how his wife’s problems have become medicalized, they could equally apply to the distress caused by eating and/or dieting that his wife has continued to feel in her personal ‘pursuit of thinness’. Casper (39), another long term married, is less tolerant and alternatively views his wife’s preoccupation with dieting

as a type of 'female indulgence' and a waste of time and effort,

“She has a weight problem, it is up then down all the time. She is on and off with the diets for years. When she is on the diet then she is eating less or cutting out the fat stuff. Often she is doing it with a friend. But they are all the same, talking about what they can have and what they can't have. I think it is a waste of time. All that time spent on and off, up and down. But she is happier with things when she feels that she is not so heavy.”

“There is a distinction between us” - mind and body dichotomy

The work of Orbach (1986) and Chernin (1981) shows that dieting can be a positive experience and source of pleasure for some women, resulting in enhanced satisfaction with appearance, social recognition and acceptance through compliments of others and the achievement of personal goals of self-discipline. It is obvious through the quotes cited above that while men are alternatively perplexed, frustrated, accepting or sensitive to the problems that women experience with food and their bodies, that the men themselves do not - and perhaps cannot - empathise. The split between mind and body clearly remains a central idea within western culture where women continue to be judged in terms of appearance and attractiveness - qualities of the body. As Hesse-Biber (1996:29) claims: “ Women are socialised to rely on their “natural” resources...the stakes of physical attractiveness for women are high, since appearance, including body weight, affects social success.”

Those men who have a stable relationship appear somewhat baffled by the continual quest for bodily satisfaction sought by their partners, simplistically believing that a secure relationship offers proof that their women are loved, valued and are sexually

attractive. Having attracted a member of the male sex, they fail to understand why their women continue to play the dieting game. Wolf (1990) contends that,

“The reward is linked to ‘regaining control’ over one’s body and reinforces the beauty myth; based on the notion that there is only one acceptable form of female beauty and all women should strive to achieve it.”

What men do not see, as the findings here show, is that social control over women’s appearance is not only perpetuated by men but also by women. Women place themselves under a form of self-surveillance by adopting male values of the ‘ideal’ female body and reinforcing the thin ideal on other women. Bartky (1990 cited by Germov & Williams 1996) elaborates by drawing on Foucault’s notion of micro power relations to theorise why some women impose a constant body surveillance on themselves and other women,

“The dispersion and anonymity of patriarchal power relations through internalization, makes the aim of overturning the thin ideal a difficult task; the demons are within and power is exercised through and by the very individuals who are the subjects. The internalization of the thin ideal by individual women constructs a self -policing Panopticon where women perceive themselves to be under constant scrutiny. Such self regulation does not occur in a vacuum and is externally reinforced by structural interests such as the fashion, weight loss, fitness, health and cosmetic industries.” (p. 642)

Of the respondents only Edwin (26), accustomed to his girlfriend's eating and exercise "waves", voiced an awareness of the different influential forces for men and women,

"There is a distinction between us, she is more conscious of how she looks, with me it is how I feel. She puts pressure on herself to look - not from me - may be her perception that there is pressure. Yes there is more emphasis on the way people look now...also for men. I believe that but I don't feel it. I think she does. I don't feel pressured from what I see on billboards or in magazines. For example if I am rowing I put a list of the times in front of me..not a picture of a guy with big muscles on the wall. I motivate myself by wanting to be the first one, the best. That is what stimulates me ...not the way I look. But for my girlfriend, she would stick up a picture. Women are more receptive to that."

Correspondingly Hesse-Biber (1996) surmises,

"Many women willingly embrace the mind/body dichotomy, partly because the woman who invests herself in her body often reaps enormous rewards and benefits. Ignoring investments in one's body can mean the loss of both self-esteem and social status." (p. 29)

It is clear that men, valued in qualities more of the mind, do not need to 'invest' in their bodies in the same way to gain a sense of achievement or recognition. Germov & Williams (1996:637) argue that, "success is still measured by a woman's appearance, where economic success needs to be matched with 'body success.'" It is also clear that for many of the men who have settled into a steady relationship, this in itself is

evidence of their own worth and desirability. For men, as they progress along the lifecourse continuum, measures of the physical - 'body success' - become increasingly less relevant as their self status is maintained and reinforced by other social aspects of male roles. For women lifecourse events and experiences are physiologically grounded by bodily changes such as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause. Watson (1998) proposes that for men, it is social and cultural events and status such as marriage or parenthood that "appear to mark points of closure" and contribute to a start of the process of 'letting go' or 'losing' the physical body. "It could be argued that this 'settling down' phase is marked by a shift in the nature of the primary way in which individuals experience themselves as embodied." (p.172)

While associated with a sense of 'physical' loss and a slackening of 'control' of the body this transitional period rarely features issues of food and eating as important factors which relate to the masculine sense of self. As discussed in the previous chapter the 'loss' for men is more commonly applied in connection with opportunities to undertake sport and exercise afforded by the young single lifestyle. It is within this sphere that masculinity is expressed through physical control of the body and where a sense of 'embodiment' dominates as men's experience of health is for a time, grounded in the body. The rationale of Benny (37) is characteristic,

"When I think I am growing then I do more sport. I don't worry about food. I eat good. I never diet. The only way is to increase with the sport. My wife now is also exercising - she has realized that dieting doesn't work. If I have been away at a show I know I will have put on weight, so I try to be more active. I will walk more, cycle, then I will feel better in myself for keeping active."

“Something had to be done” - the Montignac Men

Although food and eating were not considered an appropriate means of body regulation by the majority of the men, the interviews revealed that four of the respondents were firm believers that “the appropriate diet produces a healthy body.” What Lupton (1996:137) terms “the food/health/ beauty triplex” has surprisingly permeated the barriers of maleness as the narratives of these four men were shown to allude with the reasoning that: “just as the attainment and preservation of good health is perceived as a moral accomplishment, the achievement of a slim body represents the privileged values of self control and self denial.”

Although it is more acceptable for men to ‘lose’ the physical body over time as personal relationships and work commitments begin to take precedence and become of greater value in portraying masculine identity, for some of the respondents in this study, body image became more significant at this time in their lives. These were men who had once been very active throughout youth and young adulthood but had ‘sacrificed’ their involvement with sport. Rather than continue to invest time and effort on the ‘physical’, they had concentrated more on ‘mindful’ matters in terms of career development and in emotional concerns as personal relationships developed and matured. As work and other obligations came to dominate their time, these men appeared to have reached a point where they felt a sense of having ‘lost control’ - although not directly in relation to their bodies. The positions in the company occupied by these four men were managerial and therefore demanding, in that their working lives no longer adhered to the five day, forty hour week. As working time increased, so too had their social responsibilities and similarly the pattern of their daily lives had become ‘dictated’ by social and cultural expectations. Despite occupying positions of authority within the company and having acquired a certain

successful 'standing', these men were at the same time aware that their physical body and health status had also changed but in contrast, not for the better. Both visibly and in terms relating to health, these men were not yet ready to 'let go' of the physical and whilst having achieved a respectable masculine identity in other areas of their lives, this aspect clearly remained significant. The following observation of Shilling's (1993) is fitting:

“Investing in the body provides people with a means of self expression and a way of potentially feeling good and increasing the control they have over their bodies. If one feels unable to exert influence over an increasingly complex society, at least one can have some effect on the size, shape and appearance of one's body.” (p.7)

In a similar way to women, these men desired 'body success'. Now unable to commit time and effort to sport to reclaim an acceptable physical condition, these four respondents were conscientiously and enthusiastically following a food combining diet based on an eating plan written by Michel Montignac entitled: "Eat Yourself Slim or The Secrets of Nutrition" (1996). The proposed theories and regime of the Montignac Method had become something of a phenomenon in the Netherlands, with the book remaining a best seller for many months prompting a huge discipleship. While the majority of readers were women, the diet obviously had 'man appeal' and finding four of the twenty men interviewed committed to such a diet was considered quite remarkable and extremely fortunate in terms of providing unique research material. What was also unusual was that these men had not been coerced into the diet: none were following medical advice, none had been nagged or prompted into it by a partner

and it was not undertaken as a competitive, group effort. All four men had individually bought and read the book and subsequently decided to adopt the regimen promoted. The most influential factor had been the successful results achieved by Rein (32) who was the first to convert to the diet.

“I started this way of eating eight months ago...10% of Holland is on this diet and it is a major change of how people lose weight. Over the years I had gained a lot of weight and gained kilos....I used to do a lot of sports but that had drifted away. Over time I had changed a lot and I got to a stage where I was feeling too fat...I felt something had to be done. I couldn't run up the stairs anymore at my age so something was definitely wrong. I was searching for something quick and easy. I thought about losing weight before but it seemed a real hassle....then I read this book and it made sense. I started to follow the plan and I soon saw the result.”

Rein's remarks of “drifting away” clearly illustrate how the physical experience through sport is lost as time passes and how, consequently, he acquired a poor body image. An inferior level of fitness accompanies his complaint of “feeling too fat.” Rein was obviously not ready to admit these perceived normal indicators of ‘middle age’ as acceptable changes “at my age”. Alternatively he is clearly much happier to parade a positive body image and is delighted by the physical benefits that his efforts have produced.

“I feel younger...I can concentrate better, I have more energy, not so tired all the time. I have real self-respect that I have achieved something. I like the way

I am, the way I look now...it has all come together. My clothes aren't so tight... I just feel much more positive .a big benefit of eating better is looking better.”

Mark (33), Berand (34) and Maurice (34) - similarly positioned in terms of life course - were also keen advocates of the Montignac method having observed and been impressed by the visible changes in their colleague. this eating plan based on combining different types of ‘good’ food in the correct order, equated to a ‘healthy’ diet. Maurice describes the benefits in terms of ridding his daily diet of ‘bad stuff ’ and in terms of kilos lost,

“Now I eat much more healthily...being with the Montignac. I used to eat a lot of sweet stuff..that’s the big difference for me. I have cut out sugar completely and drinking Coca- Cola and all that bad stuff. I am much better and I feel good at the moment ..well I have lost about 3 kilos already.”

All of the men were quick to emphasise that they were not on a ‘diet’ but were making necessary changes in improving their eating habits ‘for life’. Notions of ‘being on a diet’ remain closely associated with women, represented by ‘calorie controlled diets’ linked to the controlling of the female body.

Watson (2000:86) observes that management of weight through active dieting is perceived as inappropriate, ‘not manly’, something a man should not be seen or acknowledge doing. Characteristically, female dieting is understood as self-denial and starvation and it is easy to see why the men do not view the Montignac regimen in a similar way. Berand (34) emphasises the differences,

“I now have a healthy diet which is nothing to do with counting the calories in every thing. With the Montignac it makes you aware of what you eat.

Separating fat from carbohydrate and learning what is bad fat. I have changed my eating habits a lot. “I now have a healthy diet which is nothing to do with counting the calories in every thing. With the Montignac it makes you aware of what you eat. Separating fat from carbohydrate and learning what is bad fat. I have changed my eating habits a lot. I was definitely influenced by Rein who I saw losing weight but he was still eating. I have been on a (low) calorie diet before but you feel terrible after the first week, always hungry and empty. It is not healthy...when you quit you just put it all back on again and get bigger in the end. With this way, when you are hungry you eat, always three meals a day.”

As noted earlier, this method was unusual in that it appealed to men. Conceptions of dieting mentioned throughout the responses included visions of unappetising meals consisting of ‘light food’ such as salad and fruit, accompanied by feelings of hunger. Deprivation and starvation are commonly assumed characteristics. In contrast, the Montignac method proved popular as it was not governed by calories or by abstinence and appealed to the ‘rational thinking’ of men by explaining in a scientific manner how different foods interact with one another when consumed. By eating the ‘right’ combinations, the men could therefore continue to enjoy three meals a day which consisted of ‘suitable’ food (for male consumption) such as meat and potatoes (although not to be eaten simultaneously!). Another pleasing bonus was the allowance of alcohol - although red wine had to substitute for beer. These factors were confirmed to be effective motivators for Rein (32),

“This food combining is a real hit...you don’t combine fats with carbohydrates, you don’t combine fruit with other quick digesting food which is very important to your body. It is all about managing your daily habits of what you eat and in what form. The main thing is to have regular meals...I think that is very important, the key to it. To have a regular basis.”

Mark (33) similarly reasons,

“This diet is quite individual and easy to apply. Rein’s example pointed it out to me. It is excellent..leaves you with all the good bits. You can skip potatoes at one meal but eat the meat. Can’t eat my sandwiches with cheese but I can eat the cheese another time. You are never hungry and you are not supposed to be. You can still drink but just red wine, no beer, no spirits. The beer was the hardest part.”

By following this regimen the respondents have found that by exerting quite strict control over their consumption habits, they feel that they have regained control of their body. In a similar way to women, they now notice the effects of what they eat by regular monitoring of their weight.

“Now I have been on the diet for three months and I have lost 15 kilos. Now I am about 90 kilos. I weigh myself once a week. If my weight is going up then I stick more to the diet. I like to stick around 90 - that is my target.”(Mark, 33)

“Before I started I was 88 kilos. Now I feel better and healthier at 80 kilos. I took the decision to lose the 8 kilos and I did it this way in one month. My

ideal weight is 80 kilos. I feel good at this weight. Now I weigh myself every morning..used to be once a month. But now if you eat some bad stuff you want to see what happens. If a couple of days you are not so strong then you see that you start gaining weight.” (Berand, 34)

Edwin (26), whilst not named as one of the ‘Montignac men’ having only recently decided to follow suit, had become more aware of his own weight gain in recent years, in contrast to his colleagues who were noticeably ‘shaping up and slimming down’. However in contrast to the other men, he was experiencing difficulties following the Montignac method,

“I am trying the Montignac because I want fast results. I have seen that it works for the others but it is hard to stick to. It is hard always having to watch everything that you eat. Always having to be aware of the combinations is not very easy to work into your everyday routine.”

Having persevered and achieved successful results, the ‘true’ Montignac men were rather dismissive of those who struggled or remained impervious to it.

“For people who are not doing it or not making it I cannot understand it so much, as for me it is not so difficult. I suppose that some people have such bad eating habits that they are just so used to it.” (Rein, 32)

“You should be able to make decision about what you want to achieve with your own body. I am really pleased....the way I achieved it is no big thing but

I am really pleased with the result. Now I tell other people but they do it the wrong way. With me it is a lifestyle change, not an obsession.” (Berand, 34)

Possibly Edwin could be seen as displaying more obsessive tendencies towards his body and in expressing his concerns regarding weight. Having previously achieved a temporary weight loss with the method favoured by his girlfriend, he was now keen to try an alternative means to achieve his ‘ideal’ weight but offered different reasons, rather contradictory to his comments cited earlier,

“In the last two years I had gained 4 kilos. I have tried the Slimfast diet to lose weight and I lost 3-4 kilos in a fortnight but put it all back on again. I do watch my weight ... I like to stay at 88 kilos - I use this as a guideline to how I feel. I don’t want to end up like my dad who has got quite big. I don’t want to be overweight. For me I have to stay below 90 kilos. That is why I weigh myself every day to make sure that I don’t get above that. Two years ago I was 80 kilos, now I am 88. I am not fat or overweight but I feel, well, 90 kilos is the limit. I would be worried if I went over that and I would really do something about it.” (Edwin, 26)

It is interesting that for Edwin, one of the respondents injured through sports activities, “really doing something about it ” now relates to food and eating rather than sport. Being a football player he had previously been able to exert through exercise a form of control over the body, but now aware of weight gain, was resorting to a different approach. For the other men, time limitation was an important factor as

increasing social and work commitments lessened the opportunities for sport and exercise less. As Rein (32) comments,

“I have a lifestyle where all my time seems to be with work and trying to fit in more time with the family. This combination plan was ideal for me..something that I could do without losing more time.”

Mark (33) argues that he now has more time as a result of the physical benefits of the diet,

“I now have far more energy. I need less sleep and I feel much better. I have more time and now I have a better condition ...I can get more things done.”

It was clear that for the Montignac men, in contrast to women who diet, that the loss of weight was not the singular most important achievement. Although used as a means of measurement, maintaining the correct weight was seen to reflect a healthy body.

Shilling (1993:5) notes that as health has become increasingly associated with appearances, “self care regimes are also concerned with making us feel good about how our bodies appear to ourselves and to others.” This was evident as these four respondents expressed how they felt having rediscovered a sense of self identity through regaining controlling of their physical selves,

“I now want to look after my body for health reasons. Being successful with the diet has made me feel proud of my body.” (Mark, 33)

“Now my outward appearance mattersnow I feel good, I look younger, more the shape and condition that I used to be. I got sick and tired of people making remarks like ‘Berand, you’ve grown’ or ‘you look well’ which means you look big. Gets very frustrating.” (Berand, 34)

“I didn’t want to grow fat for health reasons. I still want to look good. I feel that now I am eating a lot healthier and it shows.” (Maurice, 34)

These men changed their outward appearance by exerting disciplined management of the body through practises of food and diet. In adopting an alternative to the more traditional “cults of physicality” such as football and weight training, their examples similarly serve to show how,

“The physical sense of maleness experienced by many men comes not just from the symbolic significance of the phallus, or even simply from the images of power frequently attached to the male body by popular culture. It also derives from the transformation of the body through social practises.”

(Connell 1983:1987)

“Now I get the stuff” - men and shopping

Another major difference emerged throughout the interviews which distinguished the Montignac men from the remaining respondents. While it has been noted earlier that the purchase and preparation of food is the major responsibility of women, these four men had chosen to become much more involved in this area. Having studied the various qualities and properties of food stuffs, they were no longer content to take a

passive role and merely eat the recommended food, but they were now more actively concerned with the shopping, preparation and cooking aspects,

“I’m still a terrible cook but I help with the shopping. But now I look at the products a lot more closely ..I check out what I am eating. I am much more influenced by health scares and much more aware of what I am putting into my body.”

(Rein, 34)

Lupton (1996:59) argues that while women are the main food providers and preparers in the family context, they do not necessarily exercise their own preferences when deciding what to cook. As the partners of these four men had not (yet) become advocates of the Montignac plan, shopping and ‘checking out’ various items in accordance to their men’s preferences may have proved difficult. The men appeared to have freely chosen to help in this way but it may have presented an easier option in reinforcing their own choices for daily meals. Just as they had reasserted control of their bodies and their health through food and eating, perhaps they wished to take a more active control of the shopping trolley.

“Now we shop together on Saturdays and this has changed. I normally push the cart and my wife fills it up. Now I get the stuff. If I am out of food for the diet then I will shop on the way home. The cooking too has changed. I normally don’t like to cook but now I do. I do more at the weekends - I never used to.”

(Berand, 34)

“Now I cook at the weekends, although my wife still makes most of the decisions about what we eat and what we buy. I am more a part of that now - I have more interest. I would stop eating something if I found that was bad. I really notice the combinationsalthough when we go out I eat what I like.”

(Maurice, 34)

By following the regime more strictly at home, Maurice feels justified in eating what he chooses on social occasions when dining out. Berand (34) displays a far more disciplined attitude and expressed feelings of guilt and frustration when tempted to indulge in foods viewed as being ‘bad’ or ‘forbidden’,

‘I stick to the diet when we eat out. It’s not so easy when you have to take customers out, and they notice how you are eating. But for me I either do it or I don’t do it. I am sometime tempted to eat cake or nice things but if I take something bad I feel miserable after...makes me feel like a loser and think....why did you do it?’ ”

Deviation from the plan was associated with lack of control although Warde (1997) argues that,

“People eat in social situations where even the most self disciplined feel bound to relax their abstemious personal regimens. Social interaction requires compromise. They then feel guilty. A quasi - moral conflict arises between the imperatives of asceticism and conviviality, tomorrow and today, control and abandon.” (p. 194)

Mark (33) experiences similar feelings when his self-surveillance lapses,

“I do sometimes need more control. I feel very responsible now about what I eat and I feel like I’m watching all the time. So I do feel bad when I eat poorly but the next day I take control again and will be a bit stricter.”

The narratives of these four respondents show that it is not only women who are susceptible to exercising control of the body through dietary practices. While these men do not strive to attain the ‘thin ideal’ as promoted for the female body, their actions and words reflect the comments of Beardsworth & Keil (1990:85), “Slimness is part of the demonstration to others of individual success, with fat associated to lack of control - (‘letting oneself go’) and thus moral failing.” Their weight loss and other physical changes symbolised a healthy body of which they were proud, and which had been accomplished by adapting the way they consumed their food.

“You never see a fat person being successful” - and other widely held beliefs

Similar themes emerged throughout the narratives of the remaining men who uniformly expressed strong feelings about being overweight. Typical comments included:

“You never see a fat person being successful.” (Marcel, 30)

I would hate to be overweight. When big people start to move around they almost fall over.” (Bert, 22)

“I don’t want myself to grow fat and if I was I would immediately do something about it. When you are fatter there are more problems...with your health and with your appearance.” (Jeroen, 24)

The unanimous opinion voiced, was that it was unacceptable for anybody -male or female - to be fat. Discussing such prejudices, Lupton (1996:139) argues that the cultural aversion to fat and uncontrolled bodies is such that the sight of obesity arouses feelings of disgust and revulsion. The negative comments made by the men in relation to fatness reinforce the definition of Hesse - Biber (1996:11), “ to be fat is to be ugly, weak and slovenly: to have lost control, be lazy, and have no ambition.” Sape (21) talking of his brother provides an apt portrayal,

“I don’t ever want to be like him....sitting at home watching TV all the time. He works just 8-4, then home, dinner, TV. That’s it. He’s getting very heavy, doing nothing. Not at all sportive. He is very lazy, doesn’t care, doesn’t even want to change it.”

To be fat visibly endorsed a state of being unhealthy and most men verbalised this. Accordingly the importance of a healthy diet was acknowledged, although other various interpretations not directly related to the outward appearance of the body were offered. As the respondents focussed on their own dietary patterns, they considered the reasons why they labelled their eating habits to be ‘healthy’ or ‘unhealthy’. A popular belief was the idea of a ‘balanced’ diet although opinions varied as to what this meant:

“I should have more variety in my diet....I don’t eat enough fish or chicken but always have meat. If I had more fresh vegetables it would be a better balance.”

(Jeroen, 24)

“My eating is balanced in the way which I have been taught and grew up with ...potatoes and meat in the evening meal...typical Dutch food.” (Rene, 23)

Just as the inclusion of meat in the Montignac method was a significant factor, similarly the majority of the respondents thought meat an essential element in the main meal of the day. As such meat characterises the ‘cooked dinner’ and is considered a necessary contribution to dietary ‘balance’. Bourdieu (1984:192) argues that as the male body is understood as powerful big and strong, accordingly, “Meat, the nourishing food par excellence, strong and strong making, giving vigour, blood and health, is the dish for men.” Adams (1990:186) also notes the associations between meat eating and masculinity and concurs that the consumption of meat represents virility and male physical strength: “Whilst meat purports to symbolise male dominance, then vegetables are seen as less desirable and less potent and ‘vegetable’ suggests monotony, dullness and inactivity.” The following comments from Aryan (22) confirm this portrayal of vegetables as uninspiring and unappetising,

“I do not like raw vegetables and I refuse to eat anything that looks like a raw vegetable. Therefore my diet is not so good ..I am not getting the vitamins that I should. Don’t much like them cooked either. I like meat, potatoes and gravy. I like potatoes but that’s about it. Don’t like fruit either -too cold.”

Conversely the current emphasis on healthy eating extols the morality of eating fresh vegetables and fruit whilst recent trends indicate a reduction in meat consumption resulting from recent food anxieties and negative publicity. The respondents acknowledged these factors, many of whom, unlike Aryan, considered the inclusion of vegetables important and regarded the amount consumed as a means of restoring a sense of balance to the daily diet.

“I try to eat more healthy foods. At least once or twice a week I must have fresh vegetables. I try to eat an apple or banana also every day instead of cake. Not enough, it should be more I know.” (Wim, 26)

Marcel (30) was more committed to eating healthily but admitted that he had become more vigilant after his encounter with illness,

“Now I always eat a certain amount of vegetables every day. I eat whole grain bread. I take care and try to eat in ‘healthy’ restaurants. I eat a lot of raw or just cooked vegetables, so there are more vitamins. I have been thinking recently of going vegetarian ‘cos meat isn’t really all that good for you. Often now I skip 1 or 2 days without meat.”

Lupton (1994) notes that the discourse of health and fitness has been incorporated in commercial practices whereby certain foods are deemed ‘healthy’ such as low fat milk, low cholesterol margarine and lean meat which are presented as aids to physical perfection and preservation of a youthful appearance. Correspondingly public health

messages emphasise the risks and benefits associated with consuming certain foods while avoiding others. Within this discourse of health and nutrition, “individuals who fail to take up the warnings of health promoters are portrayed as lacking rationality and proper self control.” (Lupton 1996:74).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the four men who had altered their eating patterns in accordance with Michel Montignac also took more notice and were more receptive to health education messages regarding food and diet. As illustrated by Berand (34),

“It makes a lot of difference if you eat white or brown bread. Same with rice. Skip the white, stay with brown. Much better for you.”

All four agreed that they would make necessary adjustments to their diet if advised to do so or if they believed that an alternative would be more beneficial to their health. Others, like Jacco (38), were not so convinced,

“I take no notice of health promotion....it is something different every week that you should or should not eat....it has no effect on me or what I do.”

Warde (1991:9) suggests that official health- orientated dietary advice together with traditional practices and beliefs of culinary culture and consumerist ‘taste’ for novelty are three forces which have each influenced public attitudes and practices and that the contradictions between them have resulted in a ‘mire of uncertainty’. Constant debate and dispute between the experts when reported through the mass media can convey to the public a sense of confusion, indecision and even incompetence. (Beardsworth & Keil 1997). Confirmed in the remarks of Jan (40),

“I think that I am more knowledgeable about what is good for me so I don’t listen to them. Most of the time it is unproven. We are always being told to eat low fat products....I think that low fat means ‘tastes horrible’ so I’ll never change to that.”

“I’ve never been on a diet - not at my age” - food and diet and the life course

The informant accounts describing aspects and attitudes to food and diet revealed that the respondents fell into similar groupings grounded by lifecourse stages. Just as the previous chapter describes how conceptions of the physically active body are related to appropriate ‘seasons’ of the lifecourse, similarly ideas around food, the body and health were noted. The younger, single, less work orientated respondents were less likely to take much notice of what they ate, considering food (of any description) to be fuel for the body. Managing to maintain a sports regime, bodily control through diet was not a plausible option. Sape (21) reacts characteristically,

“I’ve never been on a diet...not at my age. Is that old fashioned now? Well, the dieters they are all around 30 - 35. If I feel I get heavier, then I exercise more.”

Food choices made by the ‘youthful’ category of interviewees were more often based on personal taste and convenience. Fast food was frequently consumed and whilst fleetingly dismissed as being ‘junk’ and ‘not that good’, nutritional quality was not of any serious consideration in the everyday eating patterns of these men.

For those respondents who had reached the next ‘stage’, references to ‘healthy eating’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ foods more frequently appeared, as they had become more aware of

dietary balance and health issues which concerned food. This for some respondents meant making minor changes to their daily diet to restore 'balance'.

For those others situated on the verge of 'middle age', more drastic measures were adopted as illustrated by the four men sold on the Montignac method.

Another emergent group were those men who had continued to eat similar foods as they moved from one stage to the next, with little regard for amount or content until, like Marcel, a threat to their health had occurred. Although diet did not contribute to Marcel's illness, it forced him to consider the beneficial effects of eating certain foods whilst omitting others. Alternatively Casper's (39) experience is directly related to diet, much to his dismay,

"Diet - I didn't bother at all until two years ago. I had the worst eating habits, working shifts, one real meal a day. Never ate breakfast. Ate a lot of cookies and chocolate...lunch would be packets of butter cookies. Well, I am not fat at all..everyone was always really surprised at me. Then it was discovered during a routine check that I had a very high cholesterol. So I am on a diet - for me now two years, low fat. Sent to a dietician. For me it was a lot of changes - no more cookies. No chocolate now, no chips. I miss it all but it is forbidden. No cakes and all those fatty things. Now more vegetables, fish...less meat. It's a big change and for the rest of my life. I don't like it...it hasn't made me feel any better!"

Evident in Casper's account is the assumption that a slim body equates to a healthy body - regardless of the 'bad' food consumed. Likewise Stefan's (28) physical

appearance implies good health but he too has encountered problems that are affected by diet and consequently has to monitor what he eats.

“People just think with how I look and what I do (horseriding) that I am very fit, very healthy. But I have to be careful. In the past I had stomach problems caused by eating the wrong things....never a balanced good diet. Now always a lot of cabbage, rabbit food..I have to make myself eat three times a day..the right things...cannot have too much fat foods then I get ill. I was a fat baby but now I am probably underweight. I don't want to get any less...that's not good for me.”

While concerns about being underweight were not the norm for the men of this study, it was not only Stefan who felt this opposing image to be inappropriate for men. Michel (25), whose health had been previously impaired by glandular fever, was actively attempting to put on some weight by following a rather different eating regime,

“A bit more weight for me would be just right...in the chest and shoulders. Now I am trying stuff to build me up, yes it works. I was 62 (kilos) ..now I am 66. Friend of mine is working in the chemist and we were talking about it ..he gave it to me . I take it every day, egg concentrated powder...you have 25 - 50 grams a day. It really helps.”

In contrast to the other ‘young singles’, Michel admits to “really hating’ exercise and the alternative method of gaining weight by building up muscle - the gym experience

- was one which held no appeal. Hans (26) also experiences similar bodily dissatisfaction,

“Now I try to eat more and more. I am too skinny. I eat good meals ...I never was a big eater with chocolates and cookies. What can I do? I tried fitness but I lost 1 kilo so I quit. Tried it to get more body but really its for losing weight and getting muscle.”

Just as men deride fat and obese bodies, the ‘too thin’ body is also an undesirable representation of masculinity. Mishkind et al (1986:549) contend, “Men care a great deal about their body build and they aspire to a widely held ideal of physical attractiveness, the muscular mesomorph.”

In the context of this study, it is Norbert who offers an opposite perspective. At 36, married with two young children, he has not succumbed to any diet, nor has he experienced any health problems. Consequently he continues to enjoy indulging in foods that other respondents, whose lives reflect similar circumstances, have either chosen to or had to sacrifice. Unusually here is that Norbert talks of his ‘unhealthy’ eating habits without apology or any sense of ‘wrong doing’,

“I eat chips and a lot of fat things and I drink beer. I eat lots of different foods but I get hungry late at night and start to eat all the snacks. I have always enjoyed the fat stuff. Even the beer I like is the one with the most calories. My weight has gone up a bit but not so much. I think I have a high metabolic rate...don’t have any health problems.”

The relaxed attitude expressed by Norbert and the contrasting self - disciplinary conduct shown by the other respondents in relation to food, reflect the contradictory consumption behaviours which prevail in contemporary society. As food supplies have become both more plentiful and more secure, subsequently the increasing choice and availability of food accompanied by strong commercial messages encourages people to 'indulge' and to eat more. Lupton (1996:151) contends that, " in commodity culture the values of release, of self indulgence through the consumption of goods such as food products, are constantly reaffirmed." No more certain affirmation is that provided by the increasing proportion of obese people which continues to rise in western societies and this reflects another inconsistency associated with food and eating. As the cultural ideal of slimness is promoted increasingly as a symbol of healthiness, the data suggests that the average individual is moving farther away from this ideal. (Beardsworth & Keil 1997). Warde (1997) surmises,

"Narcissistic tendencies, which thrive on the relaxation of rules governing food intake, are encouraged, as people seek pleasure in the choice to indulge their fancies. But, on the other hand, matters concerning the presentation of the body seem to require regimentation and self -discipline, which is the primary motif in programmes for a healthy diet." (p. 95)

Conclusion

It has been shown that health is now a dominant value in discussions of food although, as the accounts reveal, there are many various interpretations of what constitutes a 'healthy diet'. The interpretations offered by the respondents are shown to vary in accordance with their life course position and their health experiences. Food, for the

younger men interviewed, provided a source of energy and was quickly burnt off and eating served a specific purpose in “filling them up”. For most of this group, their daily diet consisted of eating meals that had been bought and cooked by a female ‘other’ - regularly supplemented by the inclusion of ‘fast’ foods. While classifications of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ food were recognised, the dietary value of food content was not given that much consideration. Meals were more likely to be judged in terms of taste, personal preferences and by the inclusion of meat as the major constituent of the main meal of the day, around which other foods are arranged. This latter finding was reinforced throughout the interviews and was echoed by not only the younger men, but remained a constant feature of the male diet regardless of time and circumstances. As Blaxter & Paterson (1983:97) surmise, “meat is often referred to as a synonym for ‘good, solid’, food.”

Notions of a dietary balance featured as men continued to journey along the life course, developing an increased knowledge regarding the effects of food and eating - both negative and positive. While this was grounded in professional theories of nutrition, the concept of a balanced diet meant different things to different respondents. As Fischler (1986) observes,

“A true dietetic balance seemed to result from equilibria of another nature, as it were, a moral order. What must be balanced was pleasure and health, gratification and duty, appetite and reason.” (p. 961)

The examples provided by the Montignac men show how at a certain point connections came to be made between what an individual eats and that individual’s state of health. The experiences of these four men reflect the morality implicit in

public health discourses proclaiming that healthy food equals a healthy body and where it is the individual's responsibility to ensure that his or her body remains healthy. Here it is assumed that control over food is equivalent to control over subjectivity: "By controlling what one eats, one can control what one is." (Fischler 1986: 949). By reasserting control over their bodies, the Montignac men also felt that they had regained their sense of self and re-established, albeit through their enhanced physical appearance, their self-identity. Beardsworth & Keil (1997) propose that the relationship between diet and health has two opposed aspects: positive and negative. In choosing to adopt the Montignac approach, these four interviewees explain by example the positive aspect in that it is based on the idea that certain food items, combinations of food items or diets can produce beneficial health outcomes. "That is, certain dietary choices are seen as maintaining or actually enhancing, an individuals resistance to disease or as promoting the efficiency or durability of the body." (Beardsworth & Keil 1997:125). In a similar way, the respondents who had experienced health problems were more selective as regards their diet. Alternatively, the account of Casper provides an example of the negative aspect linking diet and health in that his prolonged consumption of foods high in cholesterol with little nutritional value had consequently seriously impaired his long-term health status and prognosis.

While the accounts of the participants show that meanings around food, subjectivity and the body are more usually associated with women and the female body, they are also a feature of men's relationship with food. While for some men food is little more than a necessary requirement for daily living, for others food represents a sense of choice, enjoyment and (although rarely voiced here) an indulgence. The findings unexpectedly and surprisingly reveal that for some men, there is also pleasure and

self-satisfaction to be gained by adhering to measures of self-control by exercising power and discipline over their bodies. Connotations of 'dieting' remain linked to expressions of femininity as the preferred option for men was referred to as 'healthy eating' which therefore produces a 'healthy' body. Whilst this indicates men's increasing attention to appearance, it certainly does not signify any urge towards extremism as exhibited by women's 'damaged' bodies (referred to in Chapter 2). In contrast to the 'thin ideal' of the female body, the respondents' perceptions of a healthy male body was not represented by being 'thin' but correspondingly, was emphatically considered as one not fat or overweight. While food and eating was 'chosen' by some of the respondents as a means of re-establishing a male identity through physical appearance, masculinity is more commonly shown to be expressed in other areas central to the male lifecourse. Hesse - Biber (1996:123) argues that "the split between mind and body is central to our idea of what it means to be male and female - and in our culture, mind is valued over body." As men are equated more to matters of the mind than the body, it is within the environment of work, which now becomes the subject, that men are found to exercise less choice in proving a sense of manliness.

Chapter 10

THE RATIONAL MIND OVER THE PHYSICAL BODY:

‘WORK’ NOT ‘WORKOUT’.

The findings presented in chapter 8 illustrate the ways in which sport socialises boys to become men where the development and display of the physical body is shown to be central in defining masculinity. It has been shown that the physical skills acquired through sport that once served as important indicators of masculinity become less crucial to daily life as adulthood approaches and other sources of recognised masculine authority based on earning power and adult social and sexual relationships take precedence. Pleck & Sawyer (1974:94) observe that as attributes are applied and valued elsewhere, “the physical, social and academic skills on which we assessed ourselves as boys translate into jobs that line us up in the adult hierarchy of worth.” Contrary to those advocating sport, Tolson (1982:47) argues that it is only through working that a boy becomes a man as “he earns money, power and a personal independence from his family.... Through his work a man can feel himself ‘extended beyond his local horizons, becoming part of a vast economic organisation.” Although these references are somewhat dated, more recent studies reinforce the central importance of paid work for many men (Cockburn 1981; Collinson and Hearn 1996b; Faludi 1999) and further establish work as a source of power and resources, a central life interest, and a medium of masculine identity:

“For many men, employment provides the interrelated economic resources and symbolic benefits of wages/salaries, skills and experience, career progress and positions of power, authority and high discretion. Typically, it seems, men’s

gender identities are constructed, compared and evaluated by self and others according to a whole variety of criteria indicating personal success in the workplace.” (Mac an Ghail 1996:63)

The public realm of work defines and reinforces the traditional concepts of masculinity including those cultivated through sport such as competitiveness, control and aggression and toughness. As the men interviewed recounted aspects of embodiment and reflected upon on the progression from ‘teen age’ to adulthood, such traits were found to be alternatively expressed and experienced through a non-physical instrumentality. Throughout this period of the lifecourse, matters which relate to intellect - “the ideal of rational detachment”, replace expressions of the self through physicality. Voicing views which correspond with the Cartesian dichotomy of ‘mind and body’, the respondents increasingly describe their bodies with a sense of separateness as they advance through the stages of the lifecourse. The ‘body’ increasingly presents as a presumed presence, taken for granted as a facilitator to those more ‘mindful’ actions that become the primary concerns of everyday life. In the context of this study, the influence of mind over body or rational thought over physical expression is shown specifically in relation to work. ‘Work’ and all that it implies - was cited in most if not all of the accounts as an overruling factor in determining the pattern of the men’s daily lives. Drawing on the narratives, the purpose of this chapter is to reveal how work, at certain moments in the lifecourse, comes to negate the experiences of the body.

Working to have a life

The younger respondents, relatively 'newer' employees, notice how work and 'mindful' matters are beginning to take priority over the physical as their sporting pursuits become a lesser concern in their everyday lives. Outward expressions of masculinity through sport remain enjoyable but are not so necessary when most of their time is now spent in an environment where 'physical' performance is of little consequence or value. As Rene (23) acknowledges,

“ When I am in a job that demands more time then I will cut back on less important things...the sport will always be the first thing to cut back on. By choice. If you want to get somewhere in life then you have to work, work, work. The philosophy of work is that it eats into your time. If you want to make money, that's how it goes.”

Although the younger men - like Rene - appear to be following the traditional, well established direction in terms of work and career progression which is a constant of the male lifecourse, their accounts reflect various contradictions and uncertainties. These in some ways reflect how, for this cohort embarking on adulthood, the once sureties for men and men's lives are no longer static but subject to change and re-evaluation. As Coward (1999:88) observes, “it is hard to avoid the contemporary inference that masculinity no longer implies an automatic superiority, but almost its opposite - difficulties, problems, inferiority.” It would be tempting - in the current climate - to assert that these men are displaying 'crisis tendencies', in response to the numerous societal changes contributing to the present 'male dilemma'. In truth, their accounts simply illustrate how the situation for young men has altered - at work,

socially and in personal relationships. In attempting to progress in terms of career whilst pursuing a more 'adult' social and personal life, these respondents voice two opposing aspirations. Discourse fluctuates between prioritising work or prioritising life 'outside the office', seemingly attempting at the same time to both fulfil and resist expectations in terms of attaining a masculine identity through work. Having strongly commended the work ethic, Rene promptly counters with the following dialogue,

“When I see for myself opportunities (at work)...then I cut back on sport or other things I enjoy. But if (a job) demands too much from me...more and more hours then I also see that I might not accept that. My personal life is very important. If the job clashes with life at home - I don't want that. This is work but it is just a part of my life. I am at work for the money and the secondly for the enjoyment. If it is no longer enjoyable then I go. The job is here, not at home....and when it comes home with me, then I leave. Simple as that. My personal life is more important than the job. The culture now is to live for your job but I don't like that.”

Aryan (22) expresses similar views as he resolutely defends his personal life but at the same time concedes that work, on occasion, must take precedence,

“If I wake up every morning and I have problems getting into work then something is wrong. My own time, personal space is more important than my work. I am working to have a life not living to work. Of course there are times when work is more important and you skip life a little. Sometimes it needs more time. At the moment I have a good balance .I will try to make sure it

stays that way. I know things change but I am not going to lose my life for the job.”

Aryan and Rene both strongly challenge the ‘working to live’ mentality that presides within the company and which many of their - older and more senior - colleagues display. This is interpreted by these two respondents as a loss of personal freedom commonly demanded within company culture and Rene, whilst wanting the economic and material rewards which accompany hard work, claims that he is not prepared to make the sacrifices expected in order to ‘get ahead’. Rene’s attitude has been further reinforced by his own recent experience of promotion to a more senior position, finding that this was accompanied by longer hours and a working schedule that was less predictable or routine than before. This situation - and the subsequent expectations - presented difficulties for Rene which culminated in health problems,

“At a certain point I started to get hyperventilation problems. Didn’t know how to deal with it. Having no control. I like to have control of a situation. Due to the approach of the team, you go out to a customer...but you can’t say when you will come back. Then it goes into your private time, your relaxation...I just don’t need that every day. Now I have reached an agreement with management. If I couldn’t, then I go and work somewhere else.”

The issue of control is experienced in a completely opposite way by Michel (25) who recounts previous circumstances where the workload became ‘too demanding’. Consequently Michel changed jobs but whilst acknowledging the benefits, he later admits that by reclaiming more personal time, he has ‘lost control’ in terms of

directing his career and working accomplishments. Contrasting excerpts from the interview follow,

“Before work dictated my free time, often I worked six days a week, but now I have more time for myself ...much better for me now.”

“I don’t feel that I am in control of my life...well my work. I can handle much more than I get right now. I want to go much higher than this..don’t feel that I am standing with two feet in my life...I want to go a lot further.”

‘Choosing’ work as a priority

Those men who had ‘got further’ and had ‘moved on’ to the next lifecourse stage voiced different attitudes. The everyday lives of these men were dominated by work and their accounts indicated little resistance to this and alternatively reflected an unquestionable acceptance that career progression and ‘breadwinning’ was their central and necessary purpose. These men had come to understand that as work became more important, personal time and interests were naturally forfeited. With the concentration on career being more a concern of ‘mind’, interests relating to sport and the physical had become increasingly less significant in everyday life. Decreasing experiences of the body were expressed with regret but also with a sense of obligation in terms of rightfully giving time and commitment in order to achieve ‘appropriate’ social and economic benefits. Marcel, 30, reasons,

“Work tends to take over as you get older...although it is what you want to some degree. Like now I am a little overweight...well, when I was younger

this mattered to me more than now. Now work matters..it is more important than what I weigh. I am more materialistic...driven by those things. Women too react to different things when you are older. They have more interest in what you have achieved and what you have acquired rather than how you look or what you wear. Your position and your status, the car and how you live matters more than what you weigh. Yes, appearance still matters but it is more the whole package..it has to reflect what is on the insideup in your head.....not just the outside.”

Marcel has distanced his sense of self from his body, now ‘a little overweight’, alternatively projecting his masculine identity through his status and achievements in the workplace. Watson (2000:92) alternatively suggests that individuals may choose to marginalize the physical body and that this serves as a strategy for neutralising any guilty feelings about not being able or willing to exemplify masculine identity through the disciplining of the physical body. Accordingly, Wim (26) justifies his lifestyle referring to the advantages of positioning ‘mind’ in terms of work status over visible physical condition.

“I don’t feel that I have to compete with younger guys who may look better physically or who are in better shape. Now I put more emphasis on mentally. My lifestyle is now more governed by work. I put a lot of effort and energy into it. At the moment it is very important to me, to fulfil my careerthe emphasis is on my education, my career and selling.”

Once again, it is important for the informants to assert that, as the daily pattern of their lives become ever more dedicated to work, they remain 'in control'. Although Marcel talks of work 'taking over', it is something he has 'allowed' to happen. Similarly Wim (26) continues,

“This is my own choice. You are always 100% responsible for your own choices - no one dictates it - at the moment this is my choice. Of how I want to live my life. It's just temporary, won't be forever and its OK at the moment. This is right for me now...work is my priority. It is progression, part of getting older and wiser, the next phase of my life.”

Living to work?

Giddens (1991:80) argues that “on the level of the self a fundamental component of day to day activity is simply that of choice” but adds that, “it is true that the sphere of work is dominated by economic compulsion and that styles of behaviour in the workplace are less subject to the control of the individual than in non work contexts.”

While the quotes from both Marcel and Wim emphasise the notion of choice in relation to work, other respondents voice a conflicting opinion in that this is not a choice freely made but one instilled by the institution of work. Gaining their identity and sense of worth through their position at work, renders men dependent on their jobs and therefore relatively powerless, bound by the rules which are inherently part of the company culture. Though unspoken, the most severely felt 'rule' is that which assumes ownership of the individual, taking possession of time and energy with little regard to the number of hours worked during the week. Work dictated the pattern of their daily lives and was therefore regarded as a 'restriction'. In dominating so much

of their lives, little private time was left and work was the most common reason given for impeding physical activity. The following comments illustrate how men both regularly cite work and also rationalise that work is the responsible factor in setting limitations,

“Work is stopping me....when I get home it is pretty late then I am too tired. I also believe that your body needs to rest and sit down and don’t bother your body anymore.” (Edwin, 26)

“Time is always a problem with work....Work is important, takes priority....weekends now is the only time I have to do anything.” (Benny, 37)

“I used to exercise a lot...but now I have less time...with work and the travel..hard enough to get time with the family.” (Mark, 33)

“Now I have no time for sport...it is just too time consuming. At the moment work and the children take up my time. I am away sometimes three weeks a month. When I’m not away then after work, sometimes it is so late, just want to relax, watch TV, spend time at home.” (Norbert, 36)

Seidler (1997:187) proposes that men, “seem to do everything to avoid establishing more contact with our bodies, since there seem to be always things that get in the way.” This is certainly apparent as the quotes show that just as work becomes increasingly important and consumes more time and effort, so too does the private sphere as the men develop stronger commitments in terms of personal relationships,

families and the home. With well-defined roles in both public and private placing time limitations, there is little room for the physical aspect which is experienced to a lesser degree as men advance through life. While most of the men bemoaned this fact, there were other respondents who recognised sport as more of an immediate necessity, bringing some respite from the demands of their everyday lives, Maurice (34) reasons

“I should still exercise....it should relax you and get your mind off other things. When you have a stressful job and are always occupied with the company and the business you need to do something to take your mind off it. Now I am working more and more and I am sure I need more recreation and relaxation.”

Marcel (30) also finds it difficult to forgo sport and exercise and notices the differences made by physical exertion.

“I am not exercising enough and I hate that. I notice that I am much more gentle with people when I do exercise. All day I am on the phone negotiating with people and you have to be very tough. Then you go home and have to negotiate with your wife. But I need more than an hour to go home, eat and then sport. But its so important. If I don't do it then I feel more like I explode in peoples faces...it really is stress relief and it makes me feel so much better.”

Marcel now values the benefits of physical exercise in a way which contrasts with those experienced when younger - “more to do with how you look ”- and recounts the

more extreme measures taken in order to incorporate exercise into his current lifestyle,

“Last Monday, Tuesday I am sick (well, I tell them here I am sick) but...I take two days off to work in the garden...hard, physical labour for two days. Then I played squash the next day but still on those evenings I am not so tired. But here working from 8..'til late, on the phone, with those people..I get so tired. Got to find the right balance. So difficult with the demands of work. So driven with work matters. I don't want to feel like I'm driven all the time...like a puppet on a string.”

In the context of this analysis Marcel is not typical of those interviewees positioned in the same lifecourse bracket. Having experienced testicular cancer when younger, Marcel does not take 'good health' quite so for granted. While Marcel attempts to 'keep a balance' in making opportunities for the physical through exercise, among his contemporaries are the “Montignac” men who have resorted to a less time consuming method, controlling their physical body internally through diet rather than externally through sport. What is evident that regardless of the counteractive methods undertaken, for both Marcel and the Montignac men, work is non-negotiable as a defining feature of male adulthood. As Pahl (1995) contests,

“The idea of 'success' for males in the modern West is bound up with paid labours, and with being the breadwinner and head of the household. The idea that men sacrifice themselves or 'do it all for their families' is strongly rooted and has provided a powerful support for reproductive heterosexuality.” (p.190)

Although these older men were socialised at a point where masculinity could be primarily identified with work, their narratives also reflect cultural influences in regard to working time practises and preferences. Vaisanen & Natti (2002:313) researching employment patterns within EU countries, identified one of the main influential components as the effect of societal 'gender arrangements' which "pinpoints the gendered value and attitude systems that operate in the formation of accepted work hour preferences." This is certainly a factor in the Netherlands which has a high rate of traditional (male) breadwinners and (female) dependant spouses and corresponding social security schemes. Data from the Joint Employment Report 2000 shows the male FTE (full time employment) rate is 3.5% above the EU average, whereas the FTE female rate is still almost 4.5% points below. In Vaisanene & Natti's (2002) study the Netherlands is categorised as one of the countries being predominantly characterised by the 'male bread winner with part time work regimes'. This is in part due to the poor development of childcare facilities in the Netherlands but also reflects the fact that Dutch family life (in the sense of the nuclear family) remains strong. Vossestein (1999:70) writing of Dutch society, offers the following explanation, "Many people prefer to raise their kids themselves rather than hire other people to do so. Most families dine together, go out together, go on holiday together usually until the children are about sixteen years of age." While this rather convenient reasoning remains generally accurate, there are other obstacles women - especially those with children - face in trying to work and attain some degree of financial independence. De Wit (1993), writing of women, work and care argues,

"Children's sickness or for that matter of their caretakers, is one of the problems which women, trying to combine work and family care have to cope

with. If a solution within the inner circle - a helpful relative or friend - cannot be found, there usually seems no alternative but to call in sick or take the day off. In many situations the latter is no possible option.....holiday periods usually have to remain reserved for the times the schools are closed. And unpaid leaves are, considering the average women's salary, in many instances something the worker simply cannot afford herself, especially if she is single."

"Letting go" of the body, 'losing' the self

Following the trajectory of these men's lives reveals that it is the physical experiences of the body that are sacrificed and these are best remembered and located in youth. Experiences of the physical body are gradually eliminated as a defining feature in men's lives as the emphasis shifts to concentration on work and fulfilling other social obligations. This corresponds with the notion of 'letting go' identified by Levinson (1978) who found that on reaching a time of 'settling down', men tend to 'lose' the physical expression of masculinity. In concurrence Watson (2000:94) suggests that, "The notion that marriage, fatherhood and work may, in combination or separately, operate to constrain or distort the physical body whilst providing alternative contexts for constructing and projecting the social body." Chapter 7 has previously explored how the image of the 'body of action' becomes located in the men's youthful past as they recollect their 'ideal' physical state at a time prior to full time employment. While the younger men made more serious attempts to retain this aspect of their lives, other respondents had indeed found it necessary to 'sacrifice' the physical in their pursuit of establishing a career and family. The presence of the physical body however was re-acknowledged when a change or difference occurred which demanded attention. Usually this was connected with the ageing process as health problems were

encountered by the older respondents, often after or as a result of many years of neglect. As Jacco's (38) experience illustrates,

"I probably took my body for granted when I had no complaints. You forget it easily. But I had complaints with my back for about nine months. Couldn't sleep at nights, couldn't walk properly, can't sit - really bad. Sometimes the pain was so bad, I was crying out. I had a hernia operation....after two years living with the pain. Now I have changed jobs...before a lot of driving..got headaches and the back pain. There was a lot of stress...irregular hours and working weekends. I don't want that anymore...it makes me feel unhappy at work and in my private life..I had no time."

Jacco had been unhappy in his job for some time but it was only when his health - and physical condition - became seriously affected - that he re-evaluated his position within the company. He has since transferred to a different managerial role, which with his physical health now a major consideration, is more suitable,

"I don't have all that stuff now... makes me feel better, healthier definitely. I have more time to relax and not keep thinking about work. I have more time for myself ...more time to do sports. I try to play tennis now 2 or 3 times a week and lead a more regular life. Impossible in my former job. I was often away..or on call. Now I have regained some control. In the former job, the job was living my life but now I am doing that....and it's a very different feeling."

Self-control or corporate control?

Seidler (1989) asserts that men are 'control freaks' asserting their masculinity and defining their sense of identity by controlling themselves as well as controlling the world around them. Accordingly, the issue of control recurs in the narratives of men situated at varying ranks within the workplace and within various points of the lifecourse. The younger, newer recruits to the world of work express their desire to remain in control by refusing to let work dominate their lives and make a highly conscious effort to retain a clear separation between the spheres of paid work and home. Occupying more junior positions in the company, they seek to maintain their sense of self and their masculine identity outside of the working environment and stay determined to maintain their sporting commitments. As Jeroen (24) comments,

“Work is just what I do everyday. Sure, I want to get on and I will. But for now I have a life...which is more my own life...outside of here. That matters to me more than this....my home life, my football..the physical and the social side.”

As the rewards of hard work become more obvious in terms of money and status, the following phase for men is recounted as that where career is a 'chosen' priority as other areas of life - including sport and exercise - become secondary. Petersen (1998:90) proposes that as the body becomes distanced from the mind and therefore the self, “the body is seen to be a threat to masculine identity and therefore in need of control by the mind.” For the interviewees, control is exerted over the body, as matters pertaining to the mind and the 'rational' are deemed more appropriate and the focus shifts to work. Connell (1995:16) argues that “as boys grow up their masculinity is shaped to fit the needs of corporate work” and continues that, “masculinity as a

whole is reshaped to fit the corporate economy and its tamed culture.” This is evident here as most of the younger men interviewed undoubtedly accepted that their destination will involve ascending the hierarchical ladder of corporate culture. For those respondents who are already concentrating on their career development, a loss of control is felt as they are increasingly subjected to the domination and the erosion of the private sphere of home by the public world of paid employment. While the respondents refer to the constraints imposed by their working schedules, this also reflects certain powerlessness to the dictates of the company. Mac an Ghaill (1996:67) writes of the “growing reality for many managerial and professional workers who are employed by ‘greedy organisations’ demanding more and more of the domestic time and space of employees.” As men determine their masculine sense of self through the public arena of work in terms of status, authority, and financial worth, they also express the feelings of being ‘out of control’ and talk of ‘losing the balance’. This is voiced primarily relating to their private and personal space within which the body is located and where any physical expression of masculinity occurs. To an extent, while personal time is compromised, so too is the physical body as the men increasingly discover work as an alternative space for constructing a masculine persona. Pleck & Sawyer (1974:95) contest that “The need to work goes beyond material or psychic satisfactions of the paycheque. Masculinity is also measured by the prestige and power a position bestows.” In the dialogues of the men interviewed, any positive results of hard work in terms of status, money or material benefits are rarely mentioned as work is almost always referred to in a negative way. Offering a view which conflicts with that of Petersen (1998), the younger, inexperienced men alternatively regard work as a ‘threat’ to their private space and this is echoed in their accounts as they voice strong determination to protect this more important aspect of their lives. This is further

enforced as they witness the impact that the working regime has had on the lives of their older, more senior colleagues. As Rene (23) observes,

“To get higher in your work you have to make some sacrifices. What I see around me is a lot of people who cut back on a lot of things, they get higher, then they reach the age of forty to fifty but they are just worn out. There’s no enjoyment, just stress and getting burnt out.”

This predicament is similarly identified by Pleck & Sawyer (1973:95) who maintain, “To the institution the job is the important thing; the welfare of the individual is necessarily secondary to getting the job done.” The experiences described by Jacco (38) are not untypical within business environment,

“When I worked in support I was not even in control of my own weekends. On call...so you jump in the car as soon as there is a problem. It always happens when something is planned and you just have to cancel everything. At a certain stage you get fed up with it, with the evenings ..nights coming home at 2 a.m. Just had enough..let someone else do it - someone younger with no wife waiting. It affects your relationship - my wife gets annoyed...and it affects your health.”

Pleck & Sawyer (1974:95) argue that the work culture “exploits men’s desire to get ahead.” The accounts detailed here show that as men climb the hierarchical structure of work and acquire the accompanying authority and responsibilities, they feel an increasing powerless in relation to their lives outside of the workplace as their private

domain is increasingly compromised. This is reinforced, as experiences of the physical body become secondary and physicality - as an expression of self - diminishes over time. Just as autonomy is exercised less as the demands of the workplace spiral, so too is the body as it becomes more separated and alienated from a sense of self or self-image. As Csordas (1994:139) comments, "it is a truism that our bodies are always present, we do not always attend to and with them." Often, the body is only re-acknowledged when it is impaired, or when a health problem is experienced. As with Jacco, the assertion of the physical then provides a legitimate reason to reassess and change influential factors - such as the working schedule.

Most men have to 'work', not 'workout'

The 'marginalisation' of the physical body emerges as the norm for men as they pass through the various stages of the lifecourse and as men develop in other areas, a concern with physical self-image is no longer considered so appropriate. This again became obvious as the respondents considered popular portrayals of men and the male body prevalent in advertising and the media. As Stefan (28) observes,

"Every guy on TV is shown as a big hunk. Men must have muscles. For me personally...I don't need that socially anymore. I feel more intact. Stronger and more secure and I don't need a 'look' anymore. I think it is all just a media thing. Most guys don't have that look...unless that is what they spend all their time doing. Most men have to spend their time working ...not working out."

Klein (1993) proposes that this phenomenon has occurred due to the changing conditions relating to the conventional model of men's work and argues,

“The erosion of men’s traditional occupationally derived privileges in a post industrial order prompts some to compensate for their feelings of powerlessness by embodying the physical trappings of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Accordingly ‘the muscular body’ becomes synonymous with the culturally idealised masculine/self assured body.” (p. 242)

What Faludi (1999) refers to as ‘ornamental culture’ where manhood is ‘on display’ made little impression here as the respondents agreed that these cultural portrayals of ideal (and highly defined) male body types were not representative of the ‘normal everyday body’. Jan (40) is similarly dismissive of these unrealistic presentations,

“On TV and commercials the guys are always sporty, two day beard, rough type. The body comes over as more important than the face. So controversial-very few men really fit that description. These types very often do not have the higher education, they are not managers, they are not directors and they are not the successful businessmen that they are presented to be. They are definitely not. It’s all commercial.”

These opinions reinforce the mind/body dichotomy, in that those men, who exercise and develop their bodies, are therefore not exercising their minds. The measure of a successful man - for the interviewees - remains associated with his working identity rather than his physical appearance. Those who do possess the ‘ideal’ physique are readily identified as “brawn ..no brains”, whose sole ability is to invest in the body. This is only deemed acceptable at the stage where masculinity is primarily defined by physicality as boys ‘grow’ into men. Marcel (30) reflects on his own development,

“It’s important when you are young...I mean years ago people wouldn’t have reacted to my brains. It was more about how you look....I’ve seen it. I don’t want to be arrogant but I’ve been one of those guys. But now it’s more the total appearance..the whole package. Ten to twelve years ago it was more the outside..like a hollow package, a balloon.”

Mishkind et al (1986) describe the muscular mesomorph as “the embodiment of masculinity which is seen as “more efficacious, experiencing greater mastery and control over the environment and feeling much more invulnerable.” However, a different yet commonly held view was expressed here in that these overt displays of the male body portrayed men who were “not real men” - that is, homosexual. While Mark (34) simply states “beauty is not for men”, Norbert (36) elaborates and rejects the images of the muscular male physique as one which verifies a lack of masculine qualities.

“They only portray the men who train the whole day - that’s it - but not a real man, they are not real guys like you see on the streets. Guys that look like that are using anabolic stuff. When I do it, I do it for real. I know one guy..he’s huge, used a lot of steroids and stuff, but now I see him shrinking. All those years he trained and took that stuff ..then in two or three months it all goes...all to do with lack of confidence. I know guys who have done fitness for 20 years and spent so much time and effort on their bodies. But they have focused on their bodies and not with real life. They look so many times in the

mirror every day. And now men having implants...just not real. But men like that are not real men...most men who look so good are gay....the real macho guys. No, if I do it, I want it to be myself.”

The younger participants - still involved in sport and less likely to have ‘lost it’ in terms of physical condition - were relatively unaware or impervious to these representations of men.

“I don’t really notice the men...they could use monkeys and I wouldn’t notice. Really has no impact...doesn’t matter to me if they use men or what men they use short, fat. I prefer to see women...has more to do with beauty.” (Bert, 22)

“I don’t think it really matters...why not, women have it all the time. I don’t feel that it puts the same pressure on men in the same way. It is about the level of confidence you have in yourself. If you think you look good you probably do.” (Aryan, 22)

Certainly, this group were less inclined to ‘label’ or ascribe particular characteristics in contrast to those older men whose male identity was no longer expressed through the physical and who were more likely to have ‘let go’ of their bodies. As it is the latter group who are less likely to possess a physique which resembles that of the “masculine ideal”, it is in the interests of their own self esteem to stereotype these aesthetically attractive male prototypes and name them as ‘lesser’ men.

Conclusion

The institution of work is critical in defining the majority of adult males as boys develop into men and continue to fulfil the male role expectation. While the importance of sport throughout boyhood and adolescence for this cohort has been previously discussed, it is significant that once a working career has commenced, exertion of the physical body becomes replaced by expanding the intellect and exercising mental energy. As Messner (1990) observes,

“While the young male once found sports to be a convenient institution within which to construct masculine status, the post adolescent and young adult male from a higher status background simply transfers these same strivings and to other institutional contexts: education and career.” (p.102)

This is not so easily accepted by the younger men whose narratives reveal conflicting desires as they attempt to retain a sense of the physical within their private space, whilst wanting to ‘get ahead’ in terms of career and their public persona. The men who have moved on to the following lifecourse stage are alternatively concentrating on career progression and either through individual choice or work induced sanctions have found it necessary to relegate the physical aspects of their lives.

As Seidler (1995) notes,

“We often give up whatever we might have in relation to our bodies, accepting that our bodies have little connection with our identities as rational selves. We learn that the body has to be subordinated to the mind and that we have to exert a rigorous control in relation to it. This helps to shape not only the ways

we learn to think of ourselves as men but the relationship we can have to different aspects of our experience.” (p. 173)

The everyday experiences of the men are shown to be increasingly scheduled by work as it comes to dominate their time and energy and what little remains is allocated to personal relationships and family commitments. Although some of the men continue to recognise the benefits bought by sport and exercise, the common view expressed is that their time is too constrained by work to make any commitment to a physical release possible. Furthermore, as self-identity and status is validated primarily through work, it is no longer deemed necessary to maintain a visibly ‘physical’ masculine image. Whilst aware of the increasing commercialisation and commodification of the male body, the favoured imagery appears to have no real meaning or significance to the interviewees. Williams & Bendelow (1998) argue that,

“Despite the recent upsurge of interest in male bodies, however, it is arguable whether it compares, in any real way, with the long history of objectification of the female body, particularly in consumer culture where ‘idealised’ body images appear to weigh most heavily on women’s shoulders.” (p. 200)

Certainly the respondents showed no indication of any tension or increased concern over body image as a result of media ‘ideals’. The Montignac men are perhaps the exception but even their achievements in terms of ‘rediscovering’ and altering their bodily shape were actualised through mindful control of the body. It was more often found that as men grow older and establish their identity through their position at work and in their family role, the body becomes increasingly ignored, neglected and

taken for granted in the daily toils of existence. Seidler (1997:186), writing of men's bodies observes, "within the culture we learn to treat the body as discrete and separate." For the older men, an awareness of the body re-emerged when health problems, physical discomfort or pain could no longer be ignored as the effects of having a damaged physical self began to affect the rational professional persona. The narratives collated here show that as men get older, and move further from youth and more towards mid life, masculine status becomes increasingly less derived from the embodied sense of self, as once when they were young. As adult men they become subservient to the work ethic which dominates their everyday schedules and through which they ascribe to the traditional construct of white, middle class, hegemonic masculinity. As such their identities reflect those characteristics which serve as the norm for male behaviour:

"The qualities of masculinity, however, seem invariable, and are associated with the male as breadwinner, provider, worker, the active and public half of the species: a man is strong, aggressive, rational, independent, task orientated invulnerable and successful." (O'Neill 1982)

Chapter 11

EMBODIED MEN: IN CONCLUSION

Feminist research exploring medical knowledge about women's health first revealed the ways in which men's health was depicted as the normative standard, commonly portrayed by the existence of a 'universal man', characterised as white, middle class and heterosexual. This conceptualisation of men's health has constructed men as a homogeneous group, largely utilised as a reference group against which other population groups (primarily women) can be compared and judged. This representation has provided a biased and reductionist picture of men's health and Lloyd (1996) argues that in presenting men as the 'control group' against which to contrast women's attitudes, behaviours and beliefs fails to investigate why men behave as they do. Although the advent of men's studies brought about an increased interest in men's health, this also served to emphasise how little is known about how men experience health in their daily lives and throughout their lifetime. In general, the literature on men's health is dominated by epidemiological data and related research into the biological (and sexual) aspects of men's health and related literature on risk. This largest single body of research has served to highlight male disadvantage as shown by mortality statistics and in risk factors such as being overweight, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. Until quite recently the effect of such factors on men's health have been viewed as perfectly normal, ignored as simply the way men 'are'. As the assertions of a contemporary 'crisis' afflicting men and masculinity have increased in both volume and content over the last decade, the precarious health status of men has been explained as being a result of 'masculinity'. Male lifestyles have subsequently become recognised as being dangerous to health and have prompted

media proclamations of an additional “men’s health crisis.” The accumulation of statistical and quantitative evidence concerning men’s ‘risky’ behaviour factors fails to understand the nature of masculinity and the male experience: “in particular, how learning to be a man and the changing experience of health interact.” (Watson 2000:23). Connell (2000:180) argues that “doing sex difference research has become automatic” and does not require any specific thought about the nature of gender or the meaning of gender difference. As such, this disregards how masculinity is constructed and endures in everyday contexts and in individual practise, “where structural and everyday constraints interacting with social values shape and are shaped by the human experience of health, its maintenance and its loss.” (Watson et al 1996:171)

Having recognised the need to move beyond both the feminist influenced approach and the fragmented portrayals of men’s health that currently dominate, the aim of this empirical investigation alternately sought to reveal in greater depth how masculinity and health operate within daily lives. The approach of grounded theory was the method most suited to further explore and make visible the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs concerning health of a cohort of ‘universal’ men. In other words a group of men who typify the ‘norm’ - ever present as the comparative but notably absent in actuality. The twenty men interviewed here were therefore selected as subjects to be viewed in the context of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Defined as a one dimensional social category which captures the dominant cultural ideals of masculinity and serves the interest of dominant male groups (Connell 1987), this stereotypic and narrow definition has been used as a way of explaining the “seemingly irrational behaviour of traditional masculinity, at least as regards health.” (Riska 2002)

Another noticeably under researched and ‘missing’ entity - the male body - was posited as the principal focus of this study, alternatively recognised as being the social

location through which many of the daily concerns and experiences of men, masculinity and health are experienced. Connell (1995:45) notes that “‘true masculinity’ is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies - to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body.” Watson (2000:43) argues that such a simplistic gender ideology contributes to the normative constructions of the male body and behaviour which “are disempowering at the level of individual experience of the body.”

Employing the grounded theory approach to overcome the limitations of current theorising and to confront the resulting deficits, the data collated from the interviews revealed valuable insights into the various facets related to embodiment that contribute to the daily pattern of men’s lives. Placing the body as the central and cultural context through which the men live their lives was found to both create and differentiate various stages throughout the trajectory of the male life course. As Seymour (1998) notes:

“Despite the overwhelming influence of society, it is still the body that feels, the body that experiences events, the body that expresses its concerns. Within the context of society the body remains a vivid, lived presence.” (p.12)

Health, the body and the organisation of masculinity

The most significant findings and those which are unique to this study are those which relate health and the body together with biographical and social factors to the development and preservation of a masculine self-identity within the context of everyday life. Common issues came to the fore in terms of importance for the interviewees, and although these were found to change in terms of significance

throughout the lifecourse, they nevertheless remained constant features surfacing throughout the accounts. Using these themes as a framework for the further analysis revealed how the phenomenological experience of health, self and the body are both constructed and interrelated as men live their daily lives. Sport, food and diet and work emerged as the central areas of convergence within which the respondents were found to maintain their 'placement' and organisation of embodied masculinity appropriate to certain lifecourse stages.

Sport and the youthful 'ideal'

Thoughts of the body bought to mind experiences of the more tangible masculine self, which respondents associated with their 'sporting' youth. This represented a time when the body and physical condition were considered to be at their prime in terms of active performance and appearance. It is within this location that the respondents - however far removed by years or present bodily form from that remembered ideal - continued to 'site' their bodily selves. Physical identity remains 'fixed' in youth and it is this 'idealised image' of the young, fit body which is retained and continues to contribute to the masculine sense of self even as the men mature and progress further into adulthood. This active yet dated image is 'attached' to their current masculine identity and this delusion is only released when the reality of present physical status can no longer be avoided (usually on encountering illness or injury).

The importance of sport was not only identified as a critical factor in the socialising of boys into men, but also significant in the way it served to establish a long lasting physical masculine identity.

Food and the physical self

As the interviewees advanced in terms of the lifecourse and entered into adulthood, other influential factors featured in the structure of their everyday lives. Relationships, career progression and other social factors contributed to embodied experiences, and while for many men - especially the younger group - food and diet were a necessary but relatively unimportant feature, for those on the verge of middle age, the subject of food had come to the forefront of their consciousness. While most remained content to leave matters relating to food organisation and preparation to their female partners, a few of the interviewees were found to have embarked on a method of bodily control more usually associated with women. Rigorously following the Montignac eating plan, four of the interviewees proudly reported their weight loss, and the physical benefits that had resulted from the change in their diet. While they had not recovered the level of fitness that they once had, their appearance matched with that of the youthful ideal, which for these men indicated a real sense of 'healthiness'. The 'diet' and the resulting visible bodily changes had also actualised a sense of control over their bodies and renewed their sense of a physical identity. Beynon (2002:11) asserts "Most men are still culturally propelled to incorporate dominance, whether in terms of crude physical strength or displays of 'masculine' rationality and competence into their presentation of the self."

Certainly the men's narratives illustrate the importance of what Goffman (1969) has termed the 'presentation of the self' where projecting an attractive external appearance has come to be a reflection of an individual's self-identity both regardless of and in view of their other achievements. As Shilling (1993) claims,

“Investing in the body provides people with a means of self expression and a way of potentially feeling good and increasing the control they have over their bodies. If one feels unable to exert influence over an increasingly complex society, at least one can have some effect on the size, shape and appearance of one’s body.” (p.7)

Work and the masculine identity

Correspondingly, another common theme to emerge shows the conflicts that men confront concerning work as most feel that their lives are inevitably controlled by work. The work schedule and the work ethic is shown to consistently dominate the pattern of the men’s daily lives where ever they may be situated in terms of the lifecourse. While the younger men frequently protest and vocalise their feelings of resistance in succumbing to the dictates of work, they continue nevertheless to follow the pattern of their predecessors. Contradictions abound in as far as the younger men obviously yearn to forge a successful career and ‘get ahead’ therefore further conforming to the ‘norm’ of masculine identity. At the same time, they resent and reject the notion of having their lives monopolised by the demands of company culture and are quick to vocalise the importance of their personal and private ‘space’.

For these younger interviewees their private space is equally, if not more so, the place where they are also finding their self-identity as adult men, be it through a continuing involvement in sport, entering into personal relationships or finding and working on their own homes. The inconsistencies apparent in the narrations of these men are evidence of the “inherently fragile narrative of self identity” (Giddens 1991:185) in modern society. As further clarified by Beck (1994),

“Individuals still communicate and play along with the old forms and institutions, but they also withdraw from them, with at least part of their existence, their identity, their commitment and their courage. Their withdrawal, however, is not just a withdrawal but at the same time an emigration to new niches of activity and identity. The latter seem so unclear and inconsistent not least because this inner immigration often takes place half heartedly, with one foot, so to speak, while the (other) foot is still planted in the old order.” (p.20)

The accounts of the younger men certainly reflect the difficulties in contemporary society in creating and sustaining a masculine role or relationship which can no longer be so clearly determined through educational experience, lifelong careers, long-term relationships and fixed sexualities among other factors. As Giddens (1991:186) continues, “A self identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions.”

The more mature respondents did not display the same uncertainties. More secure in their roles at work and at home, and therefore more assured of their masculine sense of self, their accounts were not littered with doubts and protestations, but more of an acceptance that they were following the expected route for the male lifecourse.

Although sometimes reluctantly, these respondents were largely content to follow the conventional and available scripts shouldering their work and family responsibilities and adhering to the traditional male role of provider and breadwinner. Fulfilling this role also justified the lessening experiences of the body in everyday life.

“The sustaining of such a narrative directly affects, and in some degree helps construct, the body as well as the self.” (Giddens 1991:186). Indeed, while concentrating on career and work - matters pertaining to the mind - these men regarded physical identity and therefore the body as being less important. Despite acknowledgements of the ‘unhealthiness’ of occupational practises, work demands usually took priority in terms of time and commitment. When making decisions about allocating their time or efforts little, if any, is allowed for expressing the physical self through exercise. The social norms of making a living and using one’s body for economically productive labour were paramount, even if such activities meant not ‘being healthy’.

The impact of illness

Those men interviewed who were positioned at the farthest end of the lifecourse spectrum, presented rather opposite accounts. Some expressed little concern about their bodies and regarded physical appearance and condition to be of little significance at this time of their life. Having advanced into middle age, the body was regarded as a functional tool, as long as it allowed them to do the required tasks of everyday life then that was sufficient. For others, the fact of being an embodied individual had been brought to the forefront of their consciousness owing to physical illness. In the case of Jacco, years of prioritising work while neglecting or ignoring the body had subsequently taken its toll until he was forced to reassess and alter the pattern of his everyday life, to the extent of changing his job.

Like Jacco, other interviewees who had experienced a threat to their physicality in the form of illness, appeared as those who remained more aware of their bodies and assumed a more responsible and ‘health conscious’ attitude which was evident in their

behaviour. As expected the younger interviews were those more likely to indulge in health damaging activities - smoking, drinking, eating junk food - and although aware of the consequences, considered their youthful advantage a counterbalance to any harmful effects. Those who no longer had the excuse of youth accepted the consequences of unhealthy practises but while these had little or no impact on their daily life, then immediate action was not yet necessary. It was only the interviewees who had decided to reintroduce an element of 'healthy behaviour' into their daily schedule who would now readily admit to feeling the effects of their previous unhealthy habits and the toll it took on their physical and mental selves. For these men the body had become of central importance as the medium for change yet the method chosen (a dietary regime) to facilitate this change could be taken to confirm the populist notion that men are becoming similar to women in their behaviour.

The feminisation of the male body

It is now often asserted that masculinity and femininity are becoming more fluid and that men and women are increasingly occupying a shared middle space (Beynon 2002). This claim is based largely on the enormous economic social and cultural changes throughout the twentieth century that have impacted directly and indirectly on how masculinity is experienced. The rise of feminism, shifts in the structure of work, the advent of consumer society, the rise of the gay movement and changing views on masculinity are among those factors cited as contributing to the overstated idea of a 'crisis of masculinity'. In response to such a crisis situation, "where the experience of being a man is subject to questioning and acute fracturing" (Hearn 1999), it is frequently suggested that men are becoming increasingly preoccupied with their bodies and body image. Faludi (1999) argues that the crisis has been precipitated by

the fact that men have been enmeshed in an ornamental culture of display so that they have been forced to become more like women. Men have certainly become more style and appearance conscious and have stepped into a domain once almost exclusively associated with the feminine. Beynon (2002:125) asserts: "More and more young men are now falling for the 'consumerist promise' that has long seduced young women and are increasingly preoccupied with looking young, fit, healthy and sporty, linking their self esteem to their appearance."

Although there is an element of truth in that selfhood, embodiment and health are intertwined for both men and women, it would be wrong to assume or apply generalised similarities. Saltonstall (1993) notes that,

"The body as the focal point of self construction as well as health construction, implicates gender in the everyday lived experience of health.....

This is not because there is an essential difference between male and female body healthiness but because of social and cultural interpretations of masculine and feminine selves - selves which are attached to biological male and female bodies." (p.12)

Although the data presented here has shown that men are becoming increasingly concerned with their bodily selves, this remains largely in terms of health rather than appearance and corresponds with the concept of the inner and outer body, as introduced by Featherstone (1982),

"The inner body refers to the concern with the health and optimum functioning of the body which demands maintenance and repair in the face of disease,

abuse and the deterioration accompanying the ageing process. The outer body refers to appearance as well as the movement and control of the body within social space.” (p. 171)

The respondents considered their bodies primarily as the medium of action where function and capacity are of paramount importance relating to the ‘inner’ body. Sport and exercise were considered primarily for fitness and the social construction of a masculine identity rather than any superficial effects this might have on their appearance. Hargreaves (1994) notes how acquisition of strength, muscularity and athletic skill has always been empowering for men:

“for huge numbers of men the image and experience of the body are intimately linked to sporting experiences: for the majority of women, the image and experience of the body have little or nothing to do with sports.” (p. 146)

Health was also perceived differently and largely related to how the respondents felt, not to how they looked - although the Montignac men proved to be something of an exception (by losing weight, they reported that they both felt and looked healthier). The latter group are illustrative to an extent of Featherstone’s (1982) contention that,

“Within consumer culture the inner and the outer body become conjoined: the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body.” (p. 171)

Yet this certainly applies more readily to women as representations of the female body have been both targeted and used by consumer culture for a considerable time.

Feminist analyses as discussed in Chapter 2 illustrate how women's bodies have been objectified to such an extent that women can no longer feel confident, comfortable or content with their 'natural' form. Sartre (1969) argues that,

“Women cannot be comfortable in their bodies in the same way that men are and cannot enjoy the same freedom of movement because their bodies are objectified in patriarchal culture and are experienced as such. Women are made to feel uncomfortable in their bodies because they themselves feel captured and caught up in the gaze of the other.” (p. 260)

While male bodies are becoming far more visible in contemporary society, “men are not publicly sexually objectified or ogled in the way women are.” (Crossley 2001: 157). This may explain to some extent why the respondents seldom expressed concern about body image and trivialised the muscular masculine ideal. Aversion to fat and obesity was expressed but in general the men appeared to be reasonably 'comfortable' with, or at least accepting, of their physical form. None of the respondents were seeking to gain a physical masculine identity resembling popular representations of the 'ideal' male body. More often, these images were derided and the male models labelled as being 'brawn with no brains'. These men were far from taking refuge in their bodies - as feminist assumptions suggest - and were far more likely to assert their masculine self in other ways. Exercising intellect through career progression and 'upward mobility' was considered more a mark of manhood than displays of an exercised body. As the respondents intimate, presentations of an 'ideal' male body

were viewed as unrealistic and as such the men were found to resist, reject or find no personal meaning in such an ideal. This contrasts with prevalent media reports which claim that men in modern society are now as susceptible as women - for example

Cook (1999) writes,

“Youth and beauty are revered more than ever and both sexes feel ever more obliged to strive to conform to certain physical ideals. This is damaging as is a society in which people believe they can purchase not only a new appearance but a new identity.” (cited in Beynon 2002:125)

New ‘types’ of men are constantly being invented by the media and ‘new man’ is one such category of contemporary masculinity which Beynon (2002: 118) describes as a ‘media created, media driven construction andthe primary purpose is to make money.’ While initially emerging as a response to feminism, the sensitive, anti sexist caring, sharing ‘new man’ rapidly became ‘commercial man’. In the words of Chapman (1998: 232), “the nurturant tadpole had become the narcissistic toad.”

As images of new man parallel ‘well dressed, muscular masculinity’, Mort (1996: 205) states that, “commercial signposts have come to occupy a prominent place in young men’s narratives about themselves and their place in the world.”

The characteristics associated with ‘new man’ were neither supported or mirrored in the lives of the interviewees, although the Montignac men were embracing something of a ‘re-newed’ identity - but one which emanated youth, vitality and health rather than “iron- pumping narcissism.” (Edwards 1997: ix). The interview data of these men was considered to be something of a rare find, yet also reveals how little is known about food and diet in relation to men. This is yet another area which has been

consigned to 'women's studies' and where more empirical research is necessary in offering up insights into another poorly informed aspect of men's lives.

Comparisons and changes

By investigating ideas about the social and cultural contexts of health held by a particular group of men, this research has attempted to address issues that have been either 'missing' or assumed in literature and research to date. Obviously these emergent issues can only apply to this group of informants and it is questionable how representative this small cohort of men is. Chosen to meet the required criteria of white, middle class, 'hegemonic' masculinity, it would be valuable to compare these men with other cohorts both regionally and cross culturally. Are the Dutch men interviewed here typical of other similar cohorts within both other parts of the Netherlands and other European countries? As previously discussed, the Netherlands has one of the lowest participation rates for women in the labour market in Europe and while a gradual shift is taking place, traditional roles for both men and women remain and the family unit is still strong and highly valued. While opportunities for women are limited and childcare facilities remain inadequate, it is relatively easy for men to remain unchallenged and 'fixed' in their inherited roles. It is not surprising then that the participants interviewed, appear to have followed the pre-scripted masculine role - as boys socialised into men through displays of sport and sustaining masculine identity in adulthood through their professional working role. There are certain parallels found within the work of Harris (1995) who, on interviewing American men found that the socialising 'messages' that emanate from parents, teachers, peer groups, the media constitute a series of scripts by which men live their lives. These are grouped accordingly and direct men to become:

Standard bearers - who do their best and achieve as much as they can

Workers - who become good breadwinners and develop a strong work ethic

Lovers - whether as faithful husbands and partners, or as playboys

Bosses - by overcoming all possible hurdles and taking control

Rugged individuals - who are prepared to engage in dangerous and adventurous acts, having faith in their abilities.

(Harris 1995)

Similarities are apparent and these 'scripts' are also evident within the accounts of the Dutch men. Yet within this predetermined framework of manhood, patterns of masculinity are changing in response to the realities of a changing world.

Giddens (1991) defines these changes in term of lifestyle,

“because it implies choice within a plurality of options, and is ‘adopted’ rather than handed down. Lifestyles are routinised practises, the routines incorporated into habits of dress, eating, modes of acting and favoured milieux for encountering others; but the routines are reflexively open to change in the light of the mobile nature of self identity.” (p.81)

While the ‘routinised practices’ associated with masculinity and the traditional male scripts continue to be followed, there are also noticeable changes. In the arena of sport the need to succeed and perform well continues but as shown here, the sports chosen are no longer restricted to those considered as being exclusively male. While football dominates and provides an example of sport as being - “the most widely available arena for the legitimate expression of masculine aggression and for the display of

traditional and dominant notions of masculinity involving physical strength and courage.”(Waddington 2000:27) - other alternatives such as horse riding, windsurfing, tennis are mentioned here which do not subscribe to the same rationale.

While men’s lives are undoubtedly centred around work, it is recognised that work no longer means a job for life, which not only means that there is more uncertainty attached to the ‘breadwinner’ role, it also offers increased choice and flexibility for men in determining their working persona. Giddens (1991) continues,

“It would be wrong to suppose that lifestyle only relates to activities outside of work....But work is by no means completely separate from the arena of plural choices, and choice of work and work milieu forms a basic element of lifestyle orientations in the extremely complex modern division of labour.” (p.82)

Although the “adoption of lifestyle options become integrated with bodily regimes” (Giddens 1991:82) within the areas of sport and work, the male body is not presented in the dialogue as a primary feature penetrating men’s consciousness. Recognised in sport as the medium through which physical performance is enabled, the presence of the body is taken for granted until damaged through injury. For the adult working man, as physicality is experienced less, the body becomes a lesser consideration in everyday life. It is viewed as a means of getting through the daily grind and rarely ‘coming into’ its own - again, unless there is a threat to health status which manifests in a bodily condition. Reiterating the words of Watson (2000: 145) who notes, “body maintenance incorporates both leaving the body alone and listening to and responding to bodily signs.” Certainly an awareness of the body in matters relating to health is obvious and voiced throughout the accounts here. In many instances it seems that the

men try to take responsibility for their individual health yet feel constrained within their masculine roles which apportion associated behaviours and attitudes which are not favourable to health outcomes. Within a health context, physical affirmation of masculinity is shown to be often impractical within the fabric of daily life. Only when exploring the subject of food was this challenged by the few men who had implemented changes to their diet and even those men were practising a method which extolled a regimen centred around typically male eating preferences.

The research here also contributes in following the trajectory of the male lifecourse - up until middle age at least. It shows that there is more scope for comparisons between men posited at various points within the lifecourse and how men's lives change as they encounter different situations. A further possibility would be to singly develop the themes identified here, linked to embodiment as experienced by men throughout the 'middle years' of adulthood. Marking a period of social, personal and biological change and where most years of life are spent, yet it is a stage often overlooked as a subject of empirical work. As Hepworth (1987:137) contends, "In the late twentieth century version of middle age, the 'bodily betrayals' which are its primary identifiers derive from the fact that for the majority of men and women, there *is* a lot of life left to live." Yet empirically based research tends to emphasise 'bodily betrayals' and the middle years of the lifecourse are "often pathologised, with much focus on ill - health, change and loss." (Cunningham-Burley & Backett-Milburn 1998), rather than explore the everyday embodied realities concerning change, age and health.

More of the normal man and less of the male 'norm'

Implications of this research are numerous and while it is recognised that the findings of such a small sample are not generalisable, it is evident that these serve to

emphasise the need for more investigation. Firstly, as masculinity can no longer be normalised and represented by one homogenous category, assumptions regarding men's health and men's bodies where 'men' are categorised as the 'standard' are increasingly invalid. Just as Connell (1995) has identified the existence of multiple masculinities, so is masculinity embodied in a number of ways within an individual and his social environment. Secondly, as health is increasingly immersed in the 'presentation of the self' and health actions become social actions, it needs to be explored more fully within the context of everyday life: "health is a lived experience of being bodied, which involves action in the world." (Saltonstall 1993:13). Thirdly, while attempting to address areas where qualitative research is lacking - namely men's embodied experiences of health throughout the stages of adult life - has identified other relevant aspects which feature in men's daily lives. The contradictions apparent within the analysis concerning sport, food and diet and work offer opportunities for more extensive research into each of these three areas. Comparative studies could also prove valuable to ascertain whether men's experiences are influenced by or dependant on cultural differences, or even regional altercations.

While there is an abundance of literature and theorising which relates women, the body, food and diet, dieting there is little, if any, equivalent work which relates to men. As men are supposedly mimicking the actions of women as consumer culture renders them preoccupied with body maintenance and appearance, one wonders why there is no similar deluge of empirical work to support these claims. As the subject of the body and in particular mens bodies are increasingly prominent in literature, the media, visual images, and as masculinity is increasingly questioned and challenged, little is offered which connects all that is written or illustrated to the ordinary man living in the 'real' world. The collection of accounts presented here allowed 'ordinary'

men living normal lives to voice their experiences which were found to rarely reflect or reinforce the over familiar, but under proven populist theorising. Yet as the research shows, it is the lay perspectives grounded in everyday living which make for a greater, richer understanding in disclosing the realities of men's embodied experiences.

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