

**FROM TARZAN TO THE TERMINATOR: BOYS, MEN
AND BODY IMAGE**

A WORK-IN-PROGRESS PAPER

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The consequences of having large numbers of young men who are under-educated, unemployable and who hold little responsibility in society are potentially explosive – and a tragedy for the individuals concerned as well as the community in which they live.

Bradford, 1999:1

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INTRODUCTION

In a brief visit to Stockholm earlier this year, I happened to find a Nazi military officer's hat in an antique store. It bore the sign of the swastika and a death's head – the emblem of the SS, I am told. It made me think about why the Nazi regime was really so evil. Among all the horrors of arbitrary arrest, the singling out of gays, Jews, trade unionists and troublemakers of all kinds, the shunting of such people to concentration camps, and studied acts of war and State terror, there was one more. It forbade dissent. There was an official view: the view of the Fuhrer and the Party. Anyone who dissented was liable to whatever penalties the State chose to use.

In my reading of history there have been many regimes who disliked dissent. In today's world we have to be careful lest we, too, drift into similar pitfalls. I do not want to use the phrase 'political correctness' as it is too blanket a phrase and covers a wide spectrum of views; Pauline Hanson, among others, has used the phrase without a lot of understanding. But I find it ironic that when many academics write about masculinity, they claim a pluralist view. They say that they wish not to imply a monotonous regularity among men, and so they talk about masculinities. They consider a feminist perspective, but do not seem to have anything intelligent to contrast this with (see Trudinger *et al.* 1999; Connell, 1990). In academic writings and journals there is a careful acknowledgement of the good work that feminists have done, in bringing masculinity to our attention. There is much bowing to the authorities in the matter, while the name of Bob Connell is taken very respectfully. Writing about men and boys is incredibly guarded. And each article sounds very much like the next. Accepting ideas as sacred dogmas is not appropriate to universities, though as Karl Mannheim argued, it is all too common in them (1991:41.)

I am not hostile to these views. I am worried about their homogeneity. This prevailing view is a view of the world which – in many respects – I share. Of course there are different ways of being a man. My book *Fathers, Sons and Lovers* explored this, with many examples of men who differed from prevailing norms: being a heterosexual man who worked on the railways or the farm and acted as head of a family. And for those who missed this point, and many footnotes detailing the academic research on the subject, there were two chapters detailing the lives and feelings of men who felt they were different from other men in important respects. But I don't wish to see views of gender which are virtually indistinguishable from each other. While I respect Connell's work, my life experiences and view of the world are probably very different from his. So our writings about men and their lives should be different. And I rejoice in this difference. Unlike some other academics, I see some merit in a men's movement. I want to see men actively working to improve the education of boys. I would like to see us raising boys who can be sensitive to their own needs and those of others, aware of the riches that history and music offer as well as what is offered by the gods of Rugby League. Perhaps some of the similarities in views occur because we academics are really very timid people who are afraid to express ourselves in our own ways.

In this paper I do not start with accepted ideas (theories??) of masculinity and femininity. My starting-points are the phenomena of Tarzan movies and contemporary bodybuilding. My conclusions - or what is called, a little precociously, theory – come later on. I am by training a historian, and most historians assemble the data before making generalisations. And I will return to the idea of Nazism, for it becomes tangled up in presentations of the body.

TARZAN: IMAGE AND REALITY

In an interesting review of male bodies in Western art, Kenneth Dutton examines a number of concepts closely related to presentations of the male body in contemporary society. One aspect of his book concerns the cult figure Tarzan.

Edgar Rice Burrough's adventure novel *Tarzan of the Apes* was published in 1914. In January, 1929 the first Tarzan comic strip appeared. The illustrator was Harold Foster, who drew a lithe, slim Tarzan. But once taken over by the illustrator Burne Hogarth, Tarzan began to sprout muscles; as Dutton observes, had become a bodybuilder with massive biceps and a huge chest (1995:254). The cult of the superhero had arrived in force, just at the time of the *Übermensch* type described by Nietzsche and presented in Germany by Hitler, in Italy by Mussolini. There were clear racial markers in the ways that the white Tarzan marched confidently among the brutish [sic] jungle-dwelling blacks. In its probably-conscious racism, the Tarzan myth would be a good runner-up with *Gone with the Wind*. Blacks are basically stupid and superstitious, foreigners are evil, but the human race is saved through the power of a strong white man (usually with a Californian accent) striding powerfully around to save (white?) civilisation from evil. Pottinger finds a more conscious racism in Burrough's belief that breeding tells:

It was the hallmark of [Tarzan]'s aristocratic birth, the natural outcropping of many generations of fine breeding, an hereditary instinct of graciousness which a lifetime of uncouth and savage training could not eradicate

Burroughs cited in Pottinger 1999:30.

The first appearance of Burrough's tale was called 'Tarzan of the Apes: A Romance of the Jungle'. I have read some of the text, and it is too silly to bother a serious audience with (Tarzan learns to wield a knife, learns that he is a boy, learns to read etc etc). But what might have been clearly a romance in print became blurred with reality on the screen.

With the advent of the cinema into Western culture, audiences were taught to enjoy a new form of indoor entertainment. One of the most successful early silent movies was *Tarzan of the Apes* starring Elmo Lincoln (Dutton 1995:153). Later Tarzans were Johnny Weissmuller and Buster Crabbe, both champion swimmers who showed off to audiences their superlative athletic physiques. Dutton rightly points out that the story has been one of the most enduring in the movies, - about 53 official versions, not counting Mexican and Indian rip-offs, says Pottinger (1999:30). The story endures, with barely a diversion from the usual theme of Tarzan defeating evil white hunters, gun-runners and suchlike and allowing peace to reign in the jungle, Dutton observes. (1995:158). Movie guides show a huge range of screen Tarzans from the earliest, Elmo Lincoln, to Miles O'Keefe and Caspar van Dien. Each movie Tarzan shows us what the idealised male physique looked like in the era in which the movie made. Weissmuller was fairly solid, growing heftier year by year. Miles O'Keefe was a powerfully-pectoralled lust object for well-upolstered Bo Derek. The Disney cartoon Tarzan of 1999 skateboarded through the jungle like a late-developing, leanly muscular adolescent. The cinematic Tarzan is an invention of Southern California, says Pottinger (1999:30). One can imagine Tarzan swinging out of Muscle Beach, Los Angeles, in his private Lear-Jet, an acceptably white and bosomy Jane and chimps by his side as they all head for their jungle home in the treetops. Far better for Tarzan to have a white.

heterosexual mate than any of the other possibilities: Apes? Black women? Zebras? The mind boggles at the possibilities, all rejected in favour of a domestic white middle class one acceptable to the clean-minded citizens of Middle America.

What the Tarzan movie offers us is an image rather than substance. The image says 'I have power, I look good, I am superior to lesser mortals. Women like me because of these things and men look up to me'. We have here many of the elements of dominant twentieth-century masculine psychology: men who are clearly and unambiguously heterosexual, all-conquering and untroubled, lording it over those assumed to be inferiors. Such a man might be appealing to men who know all too well their physical failings, their fear of old age, their fears of other races and their all-too-mortal bodies. (Not to mention black men, with all those stories in popular mythology about their larger equipment). Never mind the fact that Weissmuller grew fatter with every Tarzan movie he made. The problems of being a man who acts as a man can trouble actors, as Bingham emphasises in a chapter called 'I'm Not Really a Man, But I Play One in Movies' (1994). The person behind the mask may have doubts and uncertainties which are never known to the audience. But let us be powerful at least in the movies: reality will return when the lights come on again. Never mind the absurdity of the whole story of a white aristocrat raised by apes living in the treetops. Never mind the lunacy of exposing tender white legs and buttocks to the attacks of prickles, leeches and spiders. It was Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief' all over again. Tarzan looked good and it was the look that mattered.

I will return to these themes later in this paper: an image of masculinity which reassures men (and women??) in a troubled age; the latent Nazism implicit in an anxiety about bodily perfection; and the raising up of simple middle-class domestic values over other, more problematic and worrying ones. The idea of masculinity as a drama in which men cannot stop acting is one I have explored elsewhere (West, 1996, 2000a).

BODYBUILDING: THE POINT WHERE GAY MEETS STRAIGHT

I want now to look at another twentieth-century cult – that of bodybuilding. Dutton's book puts a number of arguments about the pastime, which I can best express as a series of paradoxes, or perhaps contradictions.

1. The first paradox has to do with what is masculine. The gym-toned male body has been one of the most common representations of masculinity since the 1990s. Yet bodybuilders both affirm and contradict masculinity (1995:293) for instance, in their shaved bodies. These bodies bulge with muscles, yet one of the signifiers of masculinity is hair – particularly, the tapering line of hair from pectorals to navel and pubic region. This is not to say that bodybuilders are androgynous, nor again non-sexual. A bodybuilder's body – or as Dutton calls it, the body built – offers glimpses of some aspects of masculinity, while denying others. Dutton refers to the traditional scholastic philosophical phrase *expressio unius rei est exclusio alterius* – to state one quality is to imply its absence. Margaret Walters has observed that for all its super-masculinity, the bodybuilder's exaggerated breast development, as well as his dedicated self-absorption, can make him look unexpectedly, surreally feminine (in Dutton 1995:295). One need not agree with this comment, nor with the reasoning that self-absorption is for some unknown reason feminine, to find food for thought in the description. Many of the men interviewed by Watson in the UK reject bodybuilders as suspect and unmanly (2000:93ff). I wonder how many of these men see bodybuilders and say, as I do, 'there is no way that I could ever look like this, or take on this lifestyle'. And this might well be a view representative of many males.

There are some elements worth noticing in the above. First, the emphasis on how the body appears. The emphasis is on appearance, not function. The contrast with an earlier era, when men had muscles to till the earth or work machines, is important.

When I interviewed men who grew up in Penrith throughout the twentieth century, many spoke of the need to be strong. But at least until the 1960s – and probably beyond it for the majority until the 1980s? – the stress was on function. Paul Rogers who grew up in the 30s says ‘A man’s life was all about work – and a bit of sex was his hobby’ (West 1996a:42). Many spoke about being breadwinners, as did Brian Boland who grew up in the 1970s (1996a:49).

The second thing worth noticing is the conscious discussion of masculinity after about 1990. Once again there is a clear break from a past, in which masculinity was rarely discussed as such. It was too obvious.

2. According to some readings of evolution, Western man no longer has the muscularity found in civilisations like the Maoris or the Tahitians. His unconscious race memory leads him into a kind of nostalgia for a more primitive, more muscular existence (Dutton 1995:178). This seems a dangerous theory to me, as it tends to lead us down the sticky path of arguing that men are basically still in the cave.

I prefer the argument that as the western world in the twentieth century became more dependent on technology, it retained an affection for imagery of a more physical age. And as Dutton argues, it has been a century obsessed with the visual world. No event seems real unless accompanied by visual images; never mind how far the images are concocted in laboratories, actors caked in make-up and backdrops painted in to convince us that ‘this is the real thing’. News, infotainment and fiction blur in the wonderful world of television. *Sylvania Waters* was a few slices of life videotaped as they were enacted in a house in the Sydney suburb of Sylvania Waters; but many thought it was a scripted soap opera, and some wrote in to the ABC complaining of the poor standard of acting. One wag felt that the parrot’s performance was excellent, and the dog’s wasn’t half bad. The current affairs shows have been caught fictionalising a number of events in the name of fact, as happened in the streets which the current affairs cameras told us was Barcelona but was really somewhere else. The TV series *Frontline* satirised these events so successfully it was difficult sometimes to separate the satire from the real (??) events. The skylarks on the *Jerry Springer Show*, with participants induced by notoriety or financial gain to yell at and punch each other are another example in which reality blurs with imagery concocted for TV entertainment.

My point is that in the present time, image is everything. Here is one of the connexions with the enduring Tarzan movies. It doesn’t seem to matter whether something is true, or whether it actually happened. If we see something, we believe it. Australian cameras show us events which might have occurred in Katmandu or in Punchbowl. We don’t have much idea of their basis in reality. The picture is everything.

3. In a well-known book, Naomi Wolf attacks contemporary ideas about being a woman. She says that images of physical perfection oppress and enslave the majority of women who do not look like Elle Macpherson or Naomi Campbell. Images of supermodels limit and define women and keep them under the power of those who profit from them in beauty salons, diet clinics and tanning salons. By pitting women against each other, the economic beneficiaries of the beauty myth deny women solidarity among themselves and power in society.

Men, too, are divided by an emphasis on the perfect body. Giving untoward praise to one man’s appearance lords him over all the rest of us, encouraging feelings of inferiority and poor self-esteem. We can see this in the competition which ask us to proclaim League’s Sexiest Man. The bodybuilding magazines, too, are full of statements like ‘Only the Strong Shall Survive’, which are nearly superfluous given the predominance of pictures of men with muscles bursting out of arms and chests.

This is sometimes called **body fascism**, meaning that all power goes to the man who has the body deemed to be physically perfect. The beauty myth might be said to encompass penis enlargement, pectoral implants, hair-loss treatments and tanning salons. The cult of the beautiful male body clearly takes men into the realm which some women have inhabited for many years. So that although theoretically bodybuilders have more massive, therefore more masculine bodies, they are becoming more like some women in their quixotic search for perfection.

4. The rhetoric of the bodybuilding magazines is that of hardness. 'Get rock-like arms'; 'Pecs of iron, abs of steel' and presumably the dick of death and so on. Yet men's bodies- rather like women's bodies- are not hard. Flesh is soft, however pumped-up it becomes. A penis becomes hard for a time, but that is not its normal state, outside of a man's dreams. The rhetoric flies in the face of reality, much as we saw with Tarzan: the young muscular man on the screen, forever young on celluloid, is watched by men and women fully conscious of their own mortality. Human life – and all life – is predicated on death. Life and death exist together until we get to the Christian Heaven or the bodybuilders' Valhalla.

The imaginative power of the muscular body to suggest a visible embodiment of strength and authority appeals both to the USA, with all its rhetoric about equality, and self-confessed totalitarian Nazism. *Triumph des Willens* (*The Triumph of the Will*) used strong, handsome Aryan soldiers to present a powerful German face to the world.. It was for this reason that a contemporary account accused the film's maker, Leni Riefenstahl, of using a Fascist aesthetic, one which excluded the imperfect and dissonant in favour of Aryans, blue-eyed well-muscled youths and buxom blonde maidens. (Boyes, 2000). In the 90s the Hollywood movies used Schwarzenegger and van Damme to embody physical, embodied strength. If the USA could not win the Vietnam War or the Gulf War, it could replay them as *Rambo* or as *Hot Shots II* in which history was rewritten as America smashed its enemies and surged on to victory. More recently, we have heard that a movie about a how a submarine saved the war for the Allies by finding a German code was based on a true story. Except that in the historical story it was the British, not the US, who discovered the code.

Triumph of the Will is an apt title for much of today's infotainment. It is the triumph of the will over an imperfect reality which did not adequately reflect the success of American military might and masculinity in a soldier's uniform. If reality does not work out satisfactorily, then let's do it again and get it right on the screen. It keeps the people happy.

Young males are particularly taken by muscular versions of masculinity, especially if they grow up without a father in their lives (West, 1996a:21ff; 2000b). For a movie to be successful among under-25 males, says Dale (2000:15) it must have three elements: destruction of property, gratuitous nudity, and disrespect for authority. Arnold Schwarzenegger specialises in exactly these elements, Dale says. Schwarzenegger represents the coming-together of all these themes mentioned in this paper: a muscular presentation of masculinity, its attractiveness to younger males, and implicit or explicit Fascism.

The connexion between bodybuilding and Fascism is more than accidental. On power, Schwarzenegger said

My relationship to power and authority is that I'm all for it. People need somebody to watch over them and tell them what to do. Ninety-five percent of the people in the world need to be told what to do and how to behave

Cited in Dutton 1995:224

Whether this really demonstrates the man's totalitarian sympathies, the comment is unsettling to say the least. It should be remembered that Schwarzenegger has pioneered the acceptance of bodybuilding and made it respectable. He gave the American psyche something it needed: muscular masculinity in an age which was turning to work based on mindpower, teamwork and the electronic keyboard. As more and more jobs in society go to females rather than males (Herald, 14 July) we can expect to see more of this nostalgia for a more masculine past.

Klein in *Little Big Man* wrote a savage account of American bodybuilders, based on a gym in Venice, California between 1979 and 1985. Notice again the untoward emphasis which Southern California has on US and hence world images of masculinity. Klein saw bodybuilding resting on narcissism, fascism and economic exploitation of the weak by the powerful. He saw the bodybuilding culture relating to the world through an arrogant view of themselves as some kind of master race (Dutton 1995:226). Being physically big, said Klein, was a compensation for the lack of self-esteem which haunted many if most bodybuilders. Dutton comments that this seems somewhat over-simple given the wide range of people who take up bodybuilding. One can distinguish between those who take it up in prison, perhaps as a method of staying physically fit and somewhat sane; a businessman who uses a gym for recreation; an adolescent boy who feels the need to strengthen a body he feels is physically weak; and so on. There are many variations within male bodybuilding, leaving alone the women who take up the sport.

Many of the men I interviewed in *Fathers, Sons and Lovers* talked of the need to prove themselves: to demonstrate their masculinity. This often took the forms of perform, protect and provide for their families: nearly all men worked, and work was something that men did. But men and work are no longer synonymous; and proving now takes other forms. In one chapter, Dutton examines sexuality as it intersects with muscular bodies and cites Rochlin's theory that proving oneself came from a feeling of vulnerability and instability of identity among men. Being a successful male meant demonstrating superiority over other men, including homosexuals, seen as men who have failed to be men (1995:235). This idea of homosexuality as failed masculinity is rejected by Jonathan Dollimore, who adds that heterosexual masculinity involves intense anxieties about, and probably fears about the same sex (Dutton 1995:235). These are interesting speculations, but can they be demonstrated satisfactorily?

BOYS' IDEAS OF MASCULINITY

A male's sense of masculinity might change considerably as the child identifies himself as a boy, turns into an adolescent and then a man, before moving on to settled mid-life, older age, and death. In an unpublished paper, Greg Flood writes of what boys thought of masculinity. He surveyed boys by visiting classes and asking them what it meant to be masculine. The answers were as follows. I have reproduced only the youngest and the oldest classes' responses.

YEAR NINE (14-15 years)

- Men are physical – they are strong, muscly, heavily built.
- Men are interested in sex, their penis, fast cars, sports, hanging out with the boys.
- Men lead in the family. They are responsible, brave and are in control.

YEAR TWELVE (16-18 years)

- Men take care of families. They must take control.
- Men hold higher positions than women.
- Boys' idols are sporting identities
- Boys enjoy the violence in games such as the State of Origin football matches. It is unacceptable to walk away from a fight.

- Aggression is a form of release. It's like the devil coming out. Aggression taps into a man's primal instincts.
- Cars give a man control and power over others.
- There is some tolerance of homosexuality in some of the older boys, but not all.

This summary of the boys' ideas has been aggregated from many responses. It might tell a different story if the strands were differentiated, as I did when contrasting boys keen on swimming with boys keen on Rugby League, and boys who disliked sport (West 1996b). Nevertheless, Flood's account shows that as males get older, they expand primitive ideas of masculinity. This compares well with the ideas expressed by males from 12 to 60 in my book *Fathers, Sons and Lovers*. What seems horrifying – one man loving another – to many at 14 is more accepted, as if 'that's life' to a man by the time he is 20 or 21. [For an interesting example, see Mike in West (1996) who expands and refines ideas of masculinity as he expands his social circle.]

Boys I have interviewed admire the big bodies they see. Asked about images of men on TV, Mark said boys were used to seeing men 'terminating each other and taking drugs'. Many of the boys interviewed admire Schwarzenegger, van Damme, and sometimes, Mike Tyson. (West, 1996b, West, 2000)

This is part of growing up male, but most people move beyond this – as do the men interviewed by Watson. We realise that life is about more than having big muscles.

The adult bodybuilders have not moved from this adolescent view of the world. They want to be bigger, bigger, bigger.

THE SIGNORILE REPORT ON US GAY MEN

What of the overlap between the bodybuilding life and that of gay men in the inner cities of cities like New York, Sydney and London? Michelangelo Signorile is an American journalist who has done a survey of gay culture in the USA. He argues that there were destructive patterns to gay culture in the 1970s, but there are other, possibly more destructive patterns in the 1990s. Gay men had their own terms for the intense, hard-driving life they were immersed in or tangential to; 'the homo rocket to hell', 'the hot boy party life', or just 'the gay scene'. In reality it was not all of gay culture but one aspect of it – white, middle class, perhaps upper middle class. He argues that straight people pass through a version of it but most 'settle down' in suburbia and raise children. I wonder about this as it seems too unproblematic to be believable. It does not take in the accounts of suburban men who live 'normal' married lives yet have sex with other men, as detailed in West (1996a). Nevertheless, the case studies are compelling.

Here is Chris, a hairdresser at a trendy place in New York and member of an exclusive gym. Listen his account of 'working alongside the top 5 per cent' [sic]:

I want to be physical perfection in the eyes of gay men – totally physically appealing, like the ultimate. The perfect tits and butt, bulbous biceps... I want to know what it is like to walk down the street and have everyone look at me, absolutely everyone.

I'm hoping it will boost my self-esteem. I don't know how to boost my self-esteem now. My feeling is 'have a great body and people will admire you'.

It's like we're trying to get to the promised land – that's what we believe the perfect, masculine, muscular body is – and what we're trying to find in the promised land is confidence, a sense of self, power, and control.

Signorile 1997:8).

This style of gay masculinity is looking the part of the perfect man. The language is certainly that of stereotyped masculinity of a rather obnoxious kind. There is no qualifying sense of being gentle, or being compassionate, or a sense of wonder. It's a kind of Tarzan-like masculinity because it is all on the surface. And the need for control, of making men want me, comes from a lack of self-esteem. The

same was identified by Sam Fussell in his sardonic account of bodybuilding, though this account is far from unproblematic as it is carefully distanced, the account of a converted ex-bodybuilder. Normal people experience joy, pain, loss, despair, exultation and just feeling ordinary. The men who take up bodybuilding seek to push aside all such emotions. In the Valhalla of the muscle gods, all is joy. The bodybuilding magazines radiate strength, a mindless kind of health based on how everything looks, how women will be impressed. Perfect muscularity and perfect masculinity are the same one-ness with complete fulfilment.

It's a far cry from the Graeco-Roman ideal of *mens sana in corpore sano*. Whatever happened to the idea that men should have a mind – that they should dream about a better world (not about their own bigger pecs?) Is this all men are left with in the year 2000, sitting on our athletic bottoms waiting excitedly for the Olympics and the Triumph of the Great God Sport?

All this brings us to a series of questions:

- What are men like who live in and around gyms? What is their sense of themselves, and of others?
- How are men who identify as straight different from men who identify as gay, e.g. in the context of a gym?
- Are gym aficionados - or gym rats as they call themselves – examples of immature or imperfect men?
- Do men living in an area such as Bondi in which there is much attention to men's bodies behave differently from men in other locations?
- What is it about masculinity that won't let men feel their full humanity, but induces them to run away into extremes and stereotypes?

THE PROJECT

The project under discussion was a follow-up to other studies. The chief of these was published as *Fathers, Sons and Lovers: Men Talk about Their Lives from the 1930s to Today* (Finch, 1996). I wanted the present project to go further than this. It seemed to me that so much had been written about men, but too much about masculinity was taken for granted. For instance, what happens when a man feels desire? Does he feel excited or helpless? In control or scared? And what human feelings lie under the desire to be more attractive? Again, these ideas have been explored by Fussell and by Klein, among others. But almost nobody puts himself in the picture (and I mean emphatically that male writers include themselves out). Fussell is an interesting case because he is describing how he acted, and what a fool he was to do this mad adventure into bodybuilding. Having said that, I don't wish to denigrate his quite interesting study of bodybuilding with its nuanced ironic subtext. I simply felt the need for something more complex and richer in meaning. Above all, I wanted to explore men's feelings – including my own feelings – about men who are physically large and/ or physically strong and/or physically attractive.

I have planned to talk to men in three locations. To date interviews have been done in two of these. The first, **Bondi**, is almost self-evidently a scene in which there is display of the male body. Bondi's lifesavers are known around the world. Not for the first time, an icon of masculinity – the sun-bronzed, muscular lifesaver apparently carelessly clad in a small pair of briefs – has become a gay icon. You can buy postcards of Aussie lifesavers on Oxford Street in Sydney and probably in many parts of the world. (For some unknown reason Tarzan has not become a gay icon, as far as I am aware). I wanted to know how men in this location felt about their own bodies, whether they saw themselves as attractive or not. Significantly, underneath the trendy, obvious strong young Bondi masculinity there is a much older, down-at-heel, casual working-class masculinity.

The next location is **Byron Bay**. The beachside location may seem to some very similar to Bondi. But Byron Bay has a far-from-the-city quality to it. People came to Byron, I was told, to get away from the city, or a failed relationship, or some other problem. (Bondi, on the other hand, is very much the beachside part of Sydney city.) Byron Bay has a lackadaisical, careless aspect to it (although my research has found some complications behind this veneer). Byron Bay has a profusion of beliefs, an apparent tolerance of a wide range of lifestyles and a reputation for tolerance of a wide range of drugs.

Finally, I plan to seek out a location markedly different from these. The idea is to go to a country town far from the coast, in which some of the old masculine values apply.

In each of these, men and sometimes their partners will be interviewed. A short series of questions is planned. They range from the simple to the complex. Why do you live here? How old are you? What happens when you see someone you like? What kind of men do they like in this town? The researcher's experience, and reading and re-reading of life history literature by Levinson and others, suggests that men and women enjoy having an audience. Pains are being taken to avoid telling the interviewer too much about the researcher, so that the error of 'telling him what he wants to hear' can be avoided.

From the material produced so far, two case studies have been selected. Each of these men has strong connexions with the body culture discussed so far. There are others who are less body-focused, and more work-oriented. One of the men presents as gay, the other is straight, but I do not assume that any interviewee always tells me the whole truth about himself about his sexuality or anything else.

CASE STUDY: SIMON

Simon lives in an apartment which he rents for \$150 a week in the main street of Bondi near the Post Office.

It has a bedroom/living room, a tiny kitchen, a bathroom and is close to the centre of Bondi Beach. He has a tattoo on his bicep. He is short but well-defined, handsome with brown hair and eyes and white teeth, and fairly muscular. I will present some sections of the interview only. All names have been changed to protect people involved.

I've lived here in Bondi 5 or 6 years...an old timer. I was in Double Bay a couple of years and I've lived in Surry Hills. I always come back because of the beach. It has a masculine feel here, it's quite real.

I worked the past 12 years in make-up for film, TV, magazines. I lived in Double Bay and Darlinghurst where all those people live. Here it's more raw, not what you look like or what you do or what you earn. Here social status doesn't matter.

I like the beach. I body surf, ride a boogie board. I love the sun. Water doesn't hem you in. Concrete stifles me. This is the outermost side of Australia - ocean and sky.

The men in Bondi are homophobic. It's fairly closeted here. It's not spoken about. 45% in the cafe are hetero - they don't know my story. I'm more comfortable in Darlinghurst. Often I like someone, like the guy who came in and teaches surfing. I look at him and part of me says I wonder if he knew what my story was would he still want to teach me surfing?

I call myself homosexual. I don't call myself gay. I'm reading a book Anti gay at the moment. I'm not about never saying no. I'm not that different in Bondi from Darlinghurst. I'm not really flamboyant; I don't alter myself. I'll comment on other guys to the girls at work, but not the guys.

Here we have some contradictions. Simon likes living in Bondi, loves the beach, enjoys the air, but he feels he can't tell people his story. In some ways he works hard to fit in. He goes to the gym, he surfs, he has the tattoos that many men his age have. And he says he likes it here. Yet he says the men here are homophobic. He feels more comfortable in Darlinghurst, so by implication he seems to feel somewhat uncomfortable in Bondi.

Simon has recently come through a breakdown, after which he went to rehabilitation.

I lived as a make-up artist [the flat has a lot of make up sitting in jars and tubes etc]. I took drugs. My friends were all well off. I wore designer clothes all the time for 12 years. I was addicted to alcohol and tranquillizers. Detoxing was just too horrific. Then I lost everything -I was homeless. Friends abandoned me. The family wiped me, they couldn't handle it any more. My boyfriend abandoned me - I had one disastrous relationship after another.

I moved in with my partner James. Then I started drinking, and smashed the apartment. He asked the police to take me away. I was on the streets, went to men's refuges. I went to RPA Hospital and said I'll kill myself if I can't get help. There is a 6 month wait list. There aren't places available. I went to Canberra on their rehab program. I lost everything: family, friends material possessions? What did I want to do? I needed to find out who I was and live a humble life.

Many of his issues had to do with being a man. (Bondi is masculine, he says, and real). But what kind of man was he, and what kind did he want to be?

I felt more accepted by men after going into rehab with 60 guys - nearly all of them were out of gaol. It was freaky! I was a make-up artist from Double Bay who always had women around. Now I was around a pile of ex-criminals with no personal belongings except a razor and a toothbrush. Sitting in a truck with this huge guy one day I realised I was learning how to be a man. Being with men? I don't know. Nobody had taught me how to be a man. With women I'd known who to be - sunny, supportive Simon, gentle and kind. Women are trying to make men the way they want - soft and snaggy. But they love the roughness of men as well.

Simon does not elaborate, but he has raised interesting questions about what women want in a man. He feels sometimes like a man, and sometimes not. And how far does a man who calls himself homosexual identify with men who are- or appear – straight?

When I was working with the Salvos it was a hard day. You have to work 8 or 9 hours a day and it's hard work. It was the hardest work I've ever done in my life. You got up at 5, group therapy 6 till 7, work 7.30 till 5, chapel, eat, go to bed. You got a 1 on 1 session counselling once a week. You had to play sport or get kicked out. You had to find a god - they said "grow or go". I believe in God now. The Bible too, most of it. It was missing before. Without spirituality I was lost.

So I live in this little place, make coffee and go to TAFE 2 nites a week to become a social worker -a drug and alcohol counsellor. That's enough for me. I haven't had a drink or a drug for 18 months.

Where does a gay man fit into a world harshly divided into worlds for 'men' and 'women'? Simon isn't sure.

Bondi is relaxed and I need that. I don't want pollution and all those people.

The men here are masculine. In the western suburbs they act out as masculine. In Darlinghurst they act out in a queery way. They take on women's gestures - well not really women's, its a whole language of its own. It's very false. Doing all you can to detract from what's going on- have an acid tongue. Say things like "I'm over it" "that's so yesterday". You're some little queen from the western suburbs, you've developed this character from them, you've got no role models. You don't know any real men taking risks or going somewhere that's unknown. I don't fit in with leather queens or at the Albury Hotel. I don't feel comfortable around gay men. They play roles. It's too false. I'm uncomfortable. I can't stay in one role all my life. I'm not a gay clone or a leather man.

Gay men worship straights . I wouldn't mind to bed a straight guy. It's supposed to be a common gay fantasy. Part of me thinks homosexuality is a father-figure thing. There wasn't enough nurturing or physical contact. You want that straight guy: if you win him over you must be good. You get a man to desire you. Some guys need that desperately. I used to need it a lot.

Much of Simon's concern is about appearances. Again, he is contradictory: he wants to look good, yet he struggles to be himself. He isn't sure who that self is. He feels like other gay men, yet he's not sure he wants to identify with all that is gay.

I've done steroids. I've had cosmetic surgery. I've had 8 operations on my face, changed my name, put contacts in to change my eyes, I've had bulimia and other disorders, now I think Fuck it! I'm tired of beating myself up. I was avoiding who I was. I surrounded myself with people who were rich and pretty.

Gay guys adore people like Marky Mark - he made all these homophobic comments but he looks good so they all want him. They would suck him off, then he'd give them a black eye and they would wear it like a medal.

Yes it's important for me to be strong and fit. I've gone for guys taller and older, men in touch with their masculinity. I don't go for handsome. Or cloney guys. I go for offbeat guys. I introduce them to the family and they say Gee! They think I'll go for someone like me. I go for an opposite.

Simon wants to be attractive, but he attracted to men who look more ordinary, men 'in touch with their masculinity'. I'm not sure what to make of this.

We're over that pumped up look. It's so eighties. We're over it.

I go to Bondi Gym. It's just like a garage. It's grungy. I've been to Sydney Gym. I don't fit in. I like Bondi Gym - I get charged up from the testosterone there. It's all facade at Sydney Gym. They lift their weights and go home, put on tight sequinned shorts and take their drugs.

I notice other men's bodies. I've got a fat thing. When I was a kid I was quite fat. I look at how slim other men are. I compare my weight with theirs.

In bed I'm passive. For me there's a definite line. If he throws his legs in the air I'm out the door. But it's never happened. Perhaps it's the vibe I give off. Maybe being passive I can pick them. I can tell who is and who isn't. It's called being cocky - having a cock means you can tell. I feel I'm an expert.

What do women like in a man?

Women like a man with broad shoulders, a defined chest, narrow waist and strong legs. [he has this off pat!!] Women look at me more than I find men do. It's flattering, I like it, yeah.

What if you see someone you like?

I feel standoffish, a bit nervous, a bit inferior.

It's like you're invisible in the gym. Nobody says hullo at the gym. They just walk past each other. I left one gym for that reason. I like the trainer in the gym I go to now, Sydney Gym. He's a big Lebanese guy and he yells at me. With gay men it's too soft all the time. I didn't ever have any rough stuff with Dad. If I had a son, that pushing and shoving would be there in a mate-to-mate kind of way. You have to make it clear when to stop, as Steve Biddulph says.

Being with women is difficult for me now. I had a family of women, I never had any men around. Now with women I get neurotic - it's all about appearance. We're all conscious of our appearance. Being around women is like walking on eggshells. I always attract lots of women.

Making yourself presentable, taking steroids...it's all women's stuff. I'm over it.

It's hard to compliment another man. What do you say?

The most difficult part of being a man is contact with other men. I still find it a bit daunting. I don't want to go back to being a woman. When I'm with men I feel alive.

I don't want to say that Simon is typical...of gay inner-city men? We simply don't know enough to say anything like it. However, when I compare Simon with the comments from Signorile, there are marked similarities.

The NSW Men's Health document suggests that there may be something called reverse anorexia, which means men are excessively worried about being big and muscular (1999). Simon suggests some of these disorders.

He also raises the question of belonging raised by West (1996a: 179). In particular, who are my mates/friends? is a real question. And again: Can I be confident? Do people like me? Do I like myself? Notice that Simon is ambivalent about the word 'man'. Sometimes this seems to include him; sometimes it doesn't. Further, there is marked ambivalence about making oneself better. Better seems to mean more physically attractive, whether by means of make-up or by operations, by tattoos or bodybuilding. At bottom, this is Stephanie Dowrick's question: am I an OK person? Do people really like me? Or am I accepted as long as I work out/ work hard to be funny/ try to look normal?

CASE STUDY: BRAULIO

Braulio is from Nicaragua. He has his own business. When I interviewed him, he was about to move out of Bondi because rents had become too expensive. Braulio has been a successful bodybuilder and showed me video footage of a competition he won. He is fairly tall and very powerfully built. He would turn heads in public however he was dressed.

[In Bondi] men take care of their physique. I believe there are more easygoing guys here than the North Shore or the Northern Beaches. There's a lot of mixing here between the guys. There's lots of self employed people, heaps of little businesses, lots of Jewish guys. In the Western suburbs more guys work for someone else

There's a lot of masculine competition. It's an obsession to be big here. If you do your exercises and take drugs you get big. That's a bit different from looking good. I've looked like this all my life. I can see I make guys uncomfortable. An Aussie guy being big is one thing but a black or Brazilian guy, they notice it more. You're a bit apart, not approachable when you're big.

The circles I mix in are work, gym and go to the hotel to play pokies. Guys are super nice to me. When I go out I prefer to talk one on one. I'm no good in a group. You can always have something deeper with one person. In a group you share trivial things.

Braulio likes being noticed, but this has its costs, too. He gives the impression of being relaxed about gay men.

Gays and straights are separate in Nicaragua. I used to think before - people should stay separate. My daddy was against discrimination. When I came here I was ready to approach society at a human level. I stayed with my first girlfriend who was my English teacher. She had a gay guy in a spare room. His boyfriend came over from Scotland for a holiday. So there we were all in together. The first domestic contact [that I had with a gay couple].

When I met these guys I strengthened my point of view as well. People say do this or that with your kids so they don't become gay. I don't mind what my kids become. It's a bit harder for gay guys to find happiness later in life - that's what scares me. Being alone in old age

Fear of being alone was a common fear in the suburban men I interviewed in *Fathers, Sons and Lovers*. And I believe all of us have some parcel of it.

Braulio spoke about steroids and getting big.

People being fit - men in particular, it's more important for them to be fit. In Nicaragua we have that macho machismo. But it's more obsessional here - they go for footballers and footballer bodies. I can get defined . I can get as beautiful as my genetics will allow. A body building contest is a beauty contest. You gotta keep proportions but they go bigger instead of better. Drugs make it a competition of bigness. I can show you when I won the State titles. I was a monster on steroids. But it makes you look inaccessible. People are more friendly when you're smaller. It's my chance to show off and that's what I do. We do things for the wrong reasons - you don't see a huge guy with a beautiful girl. I used to ask women these questions.

He shows me a video of bodybuilding contest & he won it. His wife comes in and watches and the kids come too. Carlo snuggles down by his father's side. If he 'was a monster on steroids', he seems like a good father now. He sings and plays guitar for his kids.

I notice other men's bodies. Most men can't say a compliment but I can. Especially when you're competing they'll say 'you're looking good, man'. What's hard is to go into detail. Latin American men compliment women a lot. A lot of girls like it. Over there, it's more common for people to tell each other they look good. Fitness is a fashion here, so it's opening up. It feels good to win and bad to lose. People who say 'I do it just to compete' are lying.

People like a middle sized body - not too short or too big or skinny but defined. Women want to see your abs. They like bums

['Arms, too' says his wife]

.We guys watch bums.

'We do too', she says.

If I'm walking casually I watch bums and breasts.

I think my best part is my triceps - my arms in general. 'Cause guys ask me about arms. Or they say 'how do I get arms like you'? They say how do I get defined here? They talk to me at Fred's gym after I've competed. They've seen me easily get bigger and smaller. I just lose it dieting. People do comment on your body. It's a dangerous fuel because it's hard to talk about it without looking arrogant. I believe I look good. I'm not a big guy. I'm just 75 Kg. Compared to some bodybuilders I'm small.

I took steroids in 96 through a doctor. I convinced him to help me. I went up in weight. Then the doctor said 'No more from me'. 10 weeks later I took more on my own. Then I stopped and came back gradually to my normal weight.

Guys look at me and I can see 'oh, he's got angry eyes!'. I do my training to look athletic and I dress athletic. Some athletes just look average - [like Kieren Perkins, I suggest] He's got his girlfriend with him and he's afraid she is looking at me. Someone comes at you and it's sure to be a bouncer. Yes, women look at me. Why not have a look? What can I do? If I'm driving, I have a look at a girl. I see a guy, I say he looks good, he has muscle quality.

I'm a very black and white person. Even if a person is beautiful, to feel that attraction, you feel that dialogue...if chemistry makes me believe someone is attractive. I couldn't perform with a girl if we hadn't had a good talk.

Braulio speaks so matter-of-factly about sexual attraction – it's a bit breathtaking He seems very unguarded and I find this engaging.

I find it hard in Australia to have a conversation with young girls. A lot of 45 year old lonely professional women with nothing but a career here. Everyone needs a partner. I'm a Latin American and um er I have a lot of typical Latin American behaviour. I can have an open mind.

In Australian society I see the breakup of the family., That's not about divorce but being with kids in the early years. She helped me out at home when I was setting up the business. Now we've got our contacts. I have to do deals over the mobile and talk fast.

I don't believe in openness around sexual flirting. You can have a boys night out, a night with the girls, OK. Some of her friends ask her 'Are you being dominated by him?' They test you. You don't play games to feed an ego. They believe I'm coming from the jungle. You can do to Nicaragua and see terrible poverty or doctors lawyers, middle class people. They think I've never seen technology. I've seen cable TV and lots of American cars. The idiosyncrasies are different, like religion. Anglo people are less slaves to religion

In some ways Braulio seems too self-obsessed, conservative in his views on marriage, a little full of his importance. He talks a bit too confidently about himself for Anglo-Saxon ears. It seems odd that men strive hard to be attractive and then seem unsettled when people are attracted to them. However, he has achieved a lot for a poor kid from a war-ravaged country in Central America. His body has given him a lot of his self esteem and might continue to do so. He is a man who has used his body to gain friends and people who are more than friends. He is a man attuned to and confident about his body. This does not mean he had no brainpower. I was impressed by his intellect (just in a few flashes) and his sophisticated grasp of English. Some of the words he uses are not at all the words of an average working man who has learnt English fairly late in life. His partner seems fairly understated, perhaps someone happy to sit in his shadow? But she could easily be more interesting than this suggests. Braulio seems very wrapped up in his kids, and does a fair bit with them. This seems worth exploring further. Finally, there is an interesting pride in the work he does, what he has achieved, yet some resentment against the stress and struggle of it. He's a man who has developed his body and his mind, though the body has taken precedence.

CONCLUSION

The project is about midway completed. I have not told the whole story about the two men above. Nor am I fixed in my opinions about the body and its importance in contemporary Australian life. What appears below are some tentative thoughts.

1. Men used to be just men. You were a man so all the rest followed. You got married, raised a family, worked most of your life. If a war was declared, you went off to wherever you were sent. Today men seem far more reflective, almost introspective. After all, men are dissected and commented on in the media. Being a man is far more a conscious thing than it was. Men's lives (and women's too I believe) are focused far more on sex; in many ways this is good, but it does lead to anxieties.

2. Men get labelled today. There are straights and gays and so on and on. If I walk into the gym, people might call me a bodybuilder (if they hadn't seen my skinny arms). If I wear rough clothes, they might call me a feral. If I shake hands I might get called blokey. If I hug, I'm a New Age guy. Men do get categorised, and the men I speak to reflect an uncertainty associated with this, as if to say, 'What kind of man do you want me to be?'

3. As I argued earlier, there isn't nearly enough diversity in academic writing about masculinity. Media comments about masculinity have been pretty pathetic, too, but that's material for another paper entirely. There also isn't enough diversity in ways of being masculine. All I can do in this paper is suggest some of the huge differences. The men I speak to struggle to express their sense of being different: as men who are from Brazil or England or Germany; as men who might have sex with men or with women or with both; as men who are younger or older, less mature or not. All the men I speak to want to belong somewhere, want to have special people in their lives/ partners; want to belong in a family. I am sad that men can't allow themselves (or can't be allowed) more room to be male. Why are gay men so much like each other and so much like men who are straight? At least Braulio says implicitly "well this is me, this the way I am". There are thousands of ways of being a woman in contemporary Australia. We should make room for a thousand ways of being a man.

4. I have looked at the predominance of the body among some aspects of Australian life. And we have looked at two men who are affected by this. Braulio and Simon are two men who spoke to me. Not all of them are as body-focused as these two are. But both these men work hard to become attractive, and then find it messy dealing with the fact that people are attracted to them. That doesn't mean that all Australian men are as strongly body-focused as Simon and Braulio.

Unlike Connell (1990), I find myself sympathetic towards men who are strongly focused on their bodies: this tends to happen after I listen to a man's or a woman's story. But I can also see that interviewees have limitations. I feel that we are in danger of over-emphasising the body in Australia today. Masculinity is about bodies. It also about a mind, about feelings, about loyalty and family. Visitors comment on Australia as sports-oriented. It is true that compared with countries like Sweden and Germany we have more sunlight, superb beaches, and the ability to spend a lot of our lives out of doors. But is that all there is?

5. There are implications in all this for raising boys. The men I interviewed in Penrith grew up alongside fathers. Fathers played football with them, went to church with them, worked alongside them on the family farm. Boys found men in schools who were confident and outgoing. These men helped boys along the path to manhood.

Today boys seem to be left to their own devices. In the absence of father-figures, boys have to make do with the peer group. I don't want to return to the comforts of a nostalgically-viewed past, but I do believe that boys need more guidance than they are generally getting in contemporary Australia. This is borne out by a continuing suggestion in the research that fathers assist successful boys to achieve (Buckingham, 2000).

Without that guidance, males of all ages will drift. And women will rightfully complain that men seem listless and uncertain. Work is increasingly complex and requires people of subtlety, technical competence, team skills and sophistication. As Bradford points out in the preface to this paper, we are all in trouble if we have a lot of boys growing up who feel they have no stake in our community. Australian society needs men (and women) who are intelligently committed to making a better world, not dreaming forever of the Valhalla of the muscle gods.

Tarzan strides through the jungle, lording it over black men who scurry away. In its glorification of the male body image, the Tarzan myth epitomises too much about contemporary masculinity. Similarly, the Terminator blasts away lesser men. And here is a problem for the males in the rising generation. We don't want young Australians simply sitting on their muscular behinds on Bondi Beach, waiting for the concrete to set on a tangled steel stadium. I worry that the Olympics are going to boost the dreams of young Australians to stand on a sporting dais, instead of thinking of more substantial things, like the value of community, family and ideals. We really are in danger of raising a generation of males more mindless than anything we have ever seen. If we rely on Tarzan and the Terminator to inspire our ideas of masculinity, then God help us all.

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