Boy Cultures and the Performance of Teenage Masculinities

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Boy Cultures and the Performance of Teenage Masculinities

Cliona I. Barnes

This Thesis is Submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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School of Media
Faculty of Arts

Supervisor Dr. Áine O’Brien
Abstract

This thesis is a response to negative media and public portrayals of young white working class men in Ireland. It is prompted by the emergence into the public sphere of the Department of Education and Science’s Exploring Masculinities programme, a curriculum initiative designed to counter perceived problematic elements of youthful masculinity. This programme initiated a debate in the Irish media on men and boys, and gave a particular Irish dimension to the international focus on issues and questions about masculinity, social class and youth culture. My research seeks to uncover what lies behind increasingly negative and intransigent portrayals of young white working class men in Ireland who are, through their ‘deviant subcultures’, commonly presented as possessing or embodying a threat to established, middle class social norms and values.

My focus throughout is on uncovering and generating an understanding of not only the material elements of the lived culture of young working class men; but also the effects this often violent and misogynistic culture may have on them, and on the way in which they are represented. The research, which is based on ethnographic fieldwork, seeks to reinvigorate debate on the effects of social class, traditional gender roles and disadvantage on gender identity and youth culture. Therefore, this is a ‘local’ ethnography, informed primarily by a small scale case-study conducted over two full school years with two groups of twelve young men from a disadvantaged, urban Cork City community. This work has emerged from and is supported by a broad cultural studies perspective with an emphasis on the pedagogical frameworks the boys participate in as well as their popular culture and everyday lives. It is presented with a full awareness and acknowledgement of the powerful influences which structure and shape youthful masculinities and cultural identities, taking full account of the community, home and school environments which the boys encounter and live within on a daily basis.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in any other Institute or University.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute’s guidelines for ethics in research.

The Institute has permission to keep, to lend or to copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Signature  

Candidate  

Date
Acknowledgements

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Masculinities: An Institutional History</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Into the Classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing Themselves: Boys, School And Youth Culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life on the Margins: Culture, Consumption and Commodities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squaring the Circle: Bringing (Bad) Boy Culture into the Classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix of Images</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>Tackling Crime? Naming and Shaming on the BBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>EM Theme One: ‘Starting Out’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.02(a-b)</td>
<td>Atypical Role Models’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>‘The Equality Debate’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.04(a-b)</td>
<td>‘The Equality Debate’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>‘Please Leave the Place Clean’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>House Husband in Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>‘What is it to be a Man?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>Amy, Clare and Rhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>Michael, Kenny and John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>Kevin’s Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>Places and Things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>Graffiti referring to Roy Keane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>The Freedom to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.08(a-d)</td>
<td>‘Hanging Out’ Spots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>Boys’ Toys?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>Owen’s Whiskey and Brand of Cigarettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>Celtic Posters in Stephen’s Bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>Tommy Vercetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.05</td>
<td><em>Manhunt</em> Screenshot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>The Central Character – James Earl Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.07(a-b)</td>
<td>Audio Visual Equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>‘Mobiles’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.09(a-c)</td>
<td><em>Buffy</em> Posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10(a-b)</td>
<td>Album covers from 50 Cent and Ludacris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Publicity Shot for Rapper Chingy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>Brendan’s Video Game Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>‘Helpful Tactics’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.03(a-b)</td>
<td>The Realism of <em>GTA</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.04(a-b)</td>
<td>‘Focusing on Mental Health’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.04(c)</td>
<td>‘Focusing on Mental Health’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>The ‘South East Men’s Network’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.06(a)</td>
<td>Gender and Homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.06(b)</td>
<td>Gender and Homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>‘The Murder Hunt’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.01</td>
<td>‘Safe Streets’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Figure 0.01: BBC News Online

Boys, 10 and 11, face Asbo curfew

Two Nottinghamshire brothers are among the youngest in the country to be given anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs). Jamie Bradford, 10, and 11-year-old Liam have been banned from certain areas of their home town of Worksop and given a night-time curfew. Residents complained of stones being thrown, verbal abuse, petrol being lit and criminal damage. Bassetlaw District Council said it applied for an anti-social behaviour order after a lengthy investigation. The order bans the two boys from being in a big group, being out at night, riding a motorcycle and going on any school premises except for lessons. If the boys break any of the terms of their ban they could find themselves in court (BBC News Online 2004).
On 4 May 2005, the ICAA or Irish Coalition Against ASBOs (anti-social behaviour orders) was officially introduced and launched at a press conference in Dublin.¹ The coalition’s first act as a pressure group was to issue a press release stating its outright opposition to the plans of Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell, to introduce British style ASBOs into Irish legislation. Controversial from the outset and deplored by youth groups and youth workers involved with disadvantaged young people, ASBOs were introduced across Britain in 1999. Established in law as part of the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998, they came into force in April 1999.² The orders were designed to address public concerns about a perceived rise in anti-social activities and an increase in lawlessness and disorder among Britain’s urban poor. ASBOs were thus intended to give powers to local authorities and the police to clamp down on a variety of activities that, although technically non-criminal in nature, were causing problems for local communities. Following the introduction of the orders, the phrase ‘anti-social behaviour’ rapidly entered common parlance as shorthand for a range of activities largely associated with young people on council estates and in deprived neighbourhoods. These activities typically range from creating graffiti and noise to loitering, fighting or drinking alcohol in public. Such behaviour is now defined in British law as ‘anti-social,’ a term that refers officially to any action ‘which causes harassment, alarm and distress to one or more people not in the same household as the perpetrator’ (Tameside 2005: NP).

This loose definition of what legally constitutes ‘anti-social’ behaviour has caused much concern in Britain and is already causing concern in Irish communities, both urban and
rural. In England it has meant that ASBOs, although originally intended for use mainly against adults are, instead, now mostly issued to children and young people. ASBOs are issued against individuals for behaviour that falls under the original remit of the orders. This includes serious, persistent intimidation or threatening of neighbours and local shopkeepers, noise offences, criminal damage, trespass and violence. However, as these are usually indictable offences in their own right and as such make up relatively few of the orders handed down, there is existent provision in law to deal with them. Much more commonly issued are ASBOs for less serious and non-criminal offences. Generally perpetrated by teenagers in areas where there are few, if any, resources provided for them, these include littering, disturbing people or just simply hanging around.

ASBOs are presented as being non-discriminatory, wide-ranging and immediate responses to social problems such as these. They have, however, since their inception become directly targeted at the problem presented by the institutionalised alienation of groups of young and vulnerable working class men and boys. The orders are illustrative of a particularly punitive mindset that is focused entirely on the production of results in the short term. Their conceptualisation of the experiences and environment embodied and inhabited by young working class men relates only to incidences of problematic behaviour. This reduction of young working class men to the problems they create for others is, as will be seen throughout this research, increasingly common. Public and popular characterisations of young working class men are predominantly negative, feeding into a generalised sense of anxiety about the role of young men in general and young working class men in particular.
In Ireland, the Department of Education and Sciences’ *Exploring Masculinities* programme (hereafter EM) is an exemplary instance of this generalised anxiety as it is developed into a specific fear and targeted at an identifiable social grouping. The programme is the primary focus for this research and is a direct product of a twin period of heightened media interest in masculinity and the early 1990s men’s studies debates. Historically, EM developed alongside the larger debates and transformations that were taking place within men’s studies throughout Europe and North America, and the work of American men’s studies proponents Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, and their co-edited text, *Theorising Masculinities* (1994) in particular, has been influential in the eventual content and overall ethos of the programme. The perceived need for EM is explained by the programme authors, in their introduction, as coming out of a decision made by the Equality Committee of the Department of Education and Science, who ‘considered that the need for such a programme was firmly established by research conducted on gender equality issues in the ‘80s and ‘90s’ (EM 2000:V). The primary research material behind EM is cited as being the work of Damien Hannan and his team (1983; 1996) at Ireland’s Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). Also central was the study carried out by Irish academic Kathleen Lynch (1989) into equality in Irish schools and an updating of that study, co-authored with Anne Lodge (1999) (ibid: V). Both Hannan and Lynch’s work highlighted the sexist, racist and other discriminatory behaviours seen to be practiced by boys in single-sex schools. By 1995 a writing team had been brought together under the aegis of the Department’s Equality Committee with a Project Director, Maureen Bohan, and a brief to develop and test materials for eventual inclusion in the programme.
EM is a pedagogical ‘intervention’ (EM 2000: V) designed to minimise or prevent among young men the type of behaviour that, if indulged in, may eventually result in an Irish ASBO. The programme is the primary resource for my research in terms of its institutional history, its actual and ideological content, its social and political context, and the multiple roles and functions it fulfils in the classroom. It is instructive in this research framework in that EM, much like the information surrounding ASBOs, reveals more about the context in which it was produced than the target at which it is aimed.

That EM in Ireland and ASBOs in both this country and Britain emerge from shared concerns about the same social grouping is of central importance here. ASBOs are representative of the understanding and fear that groups of young men are beyond control, while EM offers, for classroom discussion, the understanding that the behaviours, attitudes and value systems of young working class men are problematic and incompatible with the norms of broader society. Bringing together these two discourses, one legal, one pedagogical, in this introduction allows for an understanding of the pervasiveness of this overall sense of anxiety. That being said, I do not seek to downplay the existence of often serious and destructive behaviour patterns among this particular social grouping, but rather to question the ways in which these social problems are being addressed. Groups of ‘hoodie’ (hooded sweatshirt) wearing youths loitering on corners or taking over playgrounds and recreation areas are extremely problematic in many neighbourhoods. Local residents often feel threatened and intimidated by them and are nervous about using amenities such as parks and walkways where young people gather. Thus, the introduction of ASBOs and their careful presentation as a ‘weapon’ against a
rising tide of aggressive, out of control 'yobs' means that people are eager to see them used. In Britain local politicians, shopkeepers and residents often favour the use of an ASBO over other, softer, measures that do not bring the immediate cessation of activities and relief associated with the imposition of a behaviour order. This immediate relief is directly due to the fact that once an ASBO has been granted it effectively prevents, on pain of arrest, the recipient from engaging in specific activities or behaviours. Typical of the sanctions imposed are zones of exclusion and curfews. These bar young people from entering certain areas or neighbourhoods, either at particular times or at any time at all. If entry is allowed, often it is permitted only via a particular route or routes, with deviation from this constituting a breach of the order. Young people are also regularly ordered against associating with or being in the same area as named individuals who are often their close friends. The reasoning behind ASBOs is admirable in its relative simplicity, for example, the two most common general sanctions, the closing off of space and of company, could in themselves effectively counter much anti-social behaviour amongst young people as they are cut off from their peers and from their hang-out spots. For instance, a young person who is habitually involved in public drinking in a common area of an estate where he or she is not resident would likely be banned from that estate and from associating with his or her drinking companions. Likewise, a young person who is accused of misbehaviour in a shopping precinct can be banned from the area unless accompanied by a parent or official guardian.

Other young people have been forbidden to congregate in groups of more than three people, resulting in case anomalies such as that of the Manchester teenager served with
an order for persistently inciting and causing vandalism on the deprived urban council estate where he lived. The local authority successfully applied for an ASBO against him, barring him from being in the company of more than three other young people at any time. The conditions of the youth’s ASBO, it could be argued, effectively worked to prevent him continuing his nuisance activities by making it illegal for him to hang around in public with his friends. The conditions worked to temporarily change his behaviour and resulted in him attending the local youth club, rather than loitering threateningly outside it (NAPO 2004: NP). This, like many other cases, appears to be an ASBO success story, whereby a troubled and troublesome young man was directed away from ‘street corner life’ and towards supervised activities in a safe environment thereby giving respite to his neighbours and bringing him into contact with experienced youth workers (Cohen 1955). That is, of course, until the end of the story reveals that as there were always more than three youths in attendance at the youth club the boy was immediately in breach of his ASBO by entering the premises and as such he was arrested, convicted of breaching the order, and consequently imprisoned.

Many of the issues and questions raised by these orders relate directly to my research, particularly in terms of the sustained focus on a distinct social group – in this case young working class people, both male and female. This thesis explores the culture of young, white, Irish, working class boys, through an engagement with selected elements of their material culture, their own experiences and influences as narrated by them in the fieldsite, and popular media and public portrayals of them and their lives. Much media coverage both in Britain and Ireland has shown young working class men in a very negative light.
In particular it has denigrated their cultural influences, habits and interests, highlighting the often violent and distasteful aspects of games, music and films popular among teenaged boys. Some of the most popular games and films are also considered to be the most problematic – for example the violent and misogynistic computer game series *Grand Theft Auto*, the film series *The Fast and the Furious*, about illegal car racing, and the majority of rap and hip hop music by mainstream artists such as Eminem, Fifty Cent or Snoop Dogg which glorify crime and violence while reducing women to the status of sex objects. Working class young men and their behaviour is commonly represented as presenting a threat, not simply to themselves, but also to what is characterised as the rest of, or, ‘respectable’ society. Maurice Devlin, lecturer in social work at the National University of Ireland at Maynooth, engages directly with media representations of young Irish men and women in his 2006 study *Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People*. Carried out by Devlin on behalf of the Equality Authority and the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), this research comprises a case study of newspaper stories about young people and a series of focus groups with teenagers around the country. Devlin’s focus groups illustrate the frustration experienced by young people with regard to the narrow and ‘over-the-top’ representations of their peers that they encounter on a daily basis. Media coverage of ASBOs and of young working class men in particular works to engender fear of the ‘other’, one who is ungovernable, alienated and somehow beyond help or rehabilitation. In response to this type of negative media attention, it has been pointed out by Manchester youth criminal defence solicitor Andrew Keogh, that ASBOs could in fact be an extremely positive and productive measure. That is, if their purpose were to identify those children and young people who, through poverty, parental
neglect, exclusion from education or employment, are most at risk of exposure to potentially dangerous situations or criminal activity. In this case ASBOs could result, in the words of Keogh, in these children and young people being ‘swooped on with services’ rather than being ‘swooped on with punishments in draconian terms they cannot live up to and with no help whatsoever offered’ (Holland 2005c: NP).

Breach of an ASBO, for instance, being seen in the company of a named individual, congregating with more than three other youths, or simply entering a forbidden area can result in a five-year prison sentence, or a fine, or both. That these orders in effect criminalise young people for non-criminal offences is one of the main problems ASBO opponents and children’s rights advocates have highlighted. The other major problem associated with the orders is the nature of their enforcement. These orders do not work unless the individuals concerned are known to all local residents. Residents must also know the terms of the ASBO and what constitutes a breach of each individual order. If members of a community do not report breaches as they occur, ASBOs are effectively rendered useless. This reliance on local, civilian enforcement has led to concerns, voiced by opponents of the orders, over possible vendettas and neighbourhood disputes being fought with ASBOs. The potential for this certainly exists as an order can be granted without concrete proof of behaviour on the grounds of so called ‘hearsay evidence’. As ASBOs are, in Britain, issued by a civil court the burden of proof is much lower than is expected or required in a higher court. Concerns have also arisen about the strong probability that already vulnerable and marginalised young people will be further stigmatised, demonised and alienated by these orders and particularly by the associated
inbuilt levels of publicity and infamy. Conversely, alongside this there is also the possibility of ASBOs becoming a ‘badge of honour’ among young people, something which is already being reported, both anecdotally and in the press (Barkham 2006: NP; Booth, 2006: NP).

Because an ASBO depends on public awareness of its existence for its enforcement publicity is then both the most essential part of the process, as well as one of the most problematic. The technique of ‘Naming and Shaming’ (see Figure 1) is now being applied, seemingly unapologetically or unquestionably, to children who have been issued ASBOs. These children can be, and often are, as young as ten years old. Manchester, Britain’s ‘ASBO capital’ now prints leaflets with photographs of the child or teenager concerned, lists the conditions of the particular ASBO and urges residents to report any transgressions. These leaflets are then put in the letterboxes of homes in the areas concerned or covered by the ASBO. Leading the charge of other local newspapers, the Manchester Evening News has helped the campaign by putting photos and names of ASBO recipients on its front pages. This makes it both possible, and acceptable, for some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Britain (and potentially here in Ireland) to be referred to as ‘ASBO Youths’, and then paraded with a list of their infractions on the front pages of local newspapers, and occasionally, as seen in figure 1, on national news sites in a modern day version of the stocks. Phrases such as ‘ASBO youth’ or ‘yob’ are attempts to disguise humanity and to deflect empathy or understanding for the perpetrator in order to show and emphasise support for his or her victim or victims.
Opponents of ASBOs are not seeking to trivialise the problems caused by young people in disadvantaged communities. Nor do they suggest that young people should escape punishment for their often destructive and disruptive behaviour. Groups such as the ICAA and their British counterparts, ASBOconcern, are committed to promoting long-term solutions centred on investment and intervention in the most seriously deprived communities in both countries. Ignoring these organisations’ repeated calls for restraint and thus further compounding this divisive and problematic course of action, the Manchester local authorities have allowed ‘Not Wanted’ posters of young people to be put up around streets in their city and its suburbs (Aitkenhead 2004: NP). This is clearly at odds with recommendations regarding children’s rights and is in direct contrast to the laws surrounding the ban on publicity or rights to anonymity of children involved in criminal cases. Indeed, it seems that the most likely outcome of these orders is the creation of a whole new class of child, one who is not a child in the same sense as a middle class child, but who is in fact, from the age of ten, a ‘mini-adult’ who requires the full force of adult law and order to punish him or her.

Foregrounding the British situation in this way allows for a projected look at how the Irish ASBO debate may develop since, in a broad sense, the issues giving rise to the perceived need for such orders are the same. Furthermore, the social and personal circumstances of those who are in receipt of orders are also very likely to be similar. The largest concentration of ASBO activity in Britain is in urban areas which are experiencing comparatively high levels of deprivation in relation to the surrounding areas. My research is based in a similar community. Hillside is a Cork city community that has long
experienced consistently high levels of poverty, unemployment and poor housing. Furthermore, as it is surrounded by generally more well-off communities it stands out as an isolated pocket of social and economic disadvantage. The effects of ASBOs on Hillside as a community would, most likely, be markedly similar to the Manchester experience, where young people are quickly banned from particular areas, streets and private estates, are forbidden to behave in particular ways in public, and are then further vilified by the publication of their details in local newspapers and by local authorities. The potential effects of this on young people and on their families, schools and locales are hugely important and potentially damaging, particularly in terms of the effects of the associated publicity and ensuing notoriety. As can be expected, in Britain the vast majority of ASBOs issued against young people are issued against working class boys in deprived areas in urban, suburban and rural communities across England, Scotland and Wales.

The Irish Context

My research contextualises the particular Irish situation in which working class boys have been re-constructed through media and academic debate into a wide-ranging social problem to which there is no clear answer. The curriculum intervention at the heart of this research, the EM programme, was designed to ‘do something’ about these boys. This urgency with which the behaviour of boys is being addressed will be seen throughout the chapters which follow. Each chapter reproduces several examples of materials from the programme building a clear picture of the issues and concerns deemed dominant enough to require space in this ‘intervention project’ (EM 2000:V). The programme was created
for senior cycle classes in single-sex boys’ schools and addresses problems commonly associated with this social grouping including, for instance, violence, sexism, racism and homophobia. 12 I engage with EM, not simply in terms of its relative efficacy in fulfilling its stated aims, but rather as a symptomatic discourse or text reflecting media, academic and public concerns about working class masculinity as they existed at the time of its emergence. My aim throughout is not to dismiss the EM programme as a fundamentally flawed pedagogical initiative. To do so would be to enter into a reductive - if not crude - form of critical reasoning, ignoring the more complex and contradictory energies that the programme renders both audible and visible. While framing the discursive terrain surrounding the EM programme, and specifically highlighting the competing and highly charged debate surrounding it in the press and academic circles, I hope to offer a more detailed, grounded critique of the programme in the space of the classroom - where it is actually translated and performed by students and teachers. I thus work with the ‘grain’ of the EM text in order to critically reflect on its perceived limitations and oversights as well as on its constructive potential as a progressive course of study for young males in contemporary Ireland.

That charged debate, chronicled in detail in chapter one, has since stagnated yet the questions and problems surrounding boys, social class and youth culture remain vital. If and when ASBOs are introduced into Irish law they are likely to provide a new point of convergence for discussion whereby opinions and editorials come together, reigniting the issues of gender, class inequality and delinquency. Within this it remains to be seen whether the Irish media will, unlike the majority of the press coverage of ASBOs and
their associated issues in Britain take steps to engage critically with the growing
demonisation of working class youth, both male and female. The fear and moral outrage
generated by media coverage of out of control youths and crime sprees are in fact part of
a much wider ‘media moral panic’, as data from the Garda youth crime division shows
the number of young offenders to be stable. The ASBO debate in Britain has largely
fallen into a polarised dispute that either totally supports or completely denies the
portrayal of utter social breakdown and disorder among disadvantaged youth. This lack of
balance is already to the forefront of the minds of those working against the introduction
of ASBOs in Ireland. The ICAA have begun their campaign, quoting, in their press
release Geoffrey Shannon, a solicitor specialising in Irish Child Law. He states:

This is a knee-jerk reaction rather than a considered attempt to tackle juvenile
crime ... we need to stop panicking and behave responsibly when discussing
crime and anti-social behaviour.

Reflecting this call for balance and rationality when discussing youth crime and anti-
social behaviour the arguments made against the introduction of ASBOs in Ireland, and
for their repeal in Britain take account of the fact that any effects ASBOs have are likely
to be negligible and short-term in response to behaviour that is rooted in established
cycles of family poverty, disadvantage and neglect.

Although Minister McDowell has stated that ASBOs introduced in an Irish context will
differ significantly from the British model it can be expected that the orders and their
effects will be similarly problematic here in Ireland. While they may not lead to the
huge increases in the numbers of young people in custody as seen for instance in England, Irish ASBOs will have a comparably negative effect on working class communities and will lead to the stigmatisation and criminalisation of young working class people, in particular males. Their effects will be disproportionately felt in poorer and more disadvantaged areas where children and teenagers are already at risk of early school leaving, poor school attendance, exposure to drugs, alcohol, crime, violence and familial breakdown. Yet the minister continues to claim support from working class areas for his version of ASBOs. McDowell states:

At the moment Gardaí are in a hopeless situation, and often have absolutely no prospect of getting a conviction for antisocial behaviour. The opponents of this are not from working-class areas – the opponents are all coming from an ideological distance... middle-class background. I haven’t seen a single deputy from a working-class area say this is a bad idea (O’Brien 2005c: NP).

This has been refuted by both the Garda Representative Association (GRA) and the Chief Executive of the National Youth Federation, Diarmuid Kearney. Both groups speak from experience gained in hundreds of youth-work projects around the country and share the same concerns, stating that legislation already exists under the Public Order Act (1994) and the Children’s Act (2001) (albeit yet to be fully implemented) to combat most anti-social behaviour. Both groups focus on the lack of support for proven measures such as community police work, youth diversion programmes, youth clubs and supervised alcohol-free venues for young people (Kearney 2005: NP).
Of further concern is the fact that all claims for the efficacy of ASBOs are made, necessarily, on a short-term basis. The orders have only been in place in Britain since 1999 and have only been in sustained use for five years. As noted, the number of young people in custody has increased rapidly. This, in and of itself, will present further problems in coming years as young people who have served custodial sentences are far more likely to re-offend than those who are dealt with outside of the prison system. The long-term effects of ASBOs on the very communities for which they are presented as immediate solutions have not been considered. The consequences of channelling an entire generation of young working class people into a criminal underclass feared and vilified by the media and by ‘respectable society’ will be devastating. Instead of a rational approach to youth crime and poverty designed to address the root causes, help restore social cohesion and bring about a reduction in the levels of exclusion and marginalisation from the mainstream of social life as experienced by Ireland’s poor, we will have a shallow, quick-fix proposal. These orders ultimately will further alienate and divide communities while fostering resentment, frustration and mistrust.

The Research Context

My research is not, as noted above, directly concerned with ASBOs, but with the general social climate in which such extreme measures are deemed necessary and desirable. ASBOs spring from the same discourse that gave rise to EM and they will impact directly upon the young men at the centre of this thesis and on their peers. My research is centred on a school-based study conducted in Hillside School’s EM classroom. Throughout I focus specifically on the cultural habits and artefacts, stories, experiences and
constructions of masculinity amongst a group of 24 white Irish working class boys aged between 15 and 16 years. These boys represent precisely the social grouping against which ASBOs will potentially be sought and issued. EM, was, as noted, designed to hone in on and target these boys’ specific, negatively perceived, ‘macho’ masculinity, a form of identity commonly associated with working class men. The programme views this form of masculine identity as aggressive and damaging to the personal and social development of young men and set out to counter it by offering alternative ways of being ‘a man’. In so doing the programme focused on what are commonly seen as problems and associated behaviours more typically experienced by disadvantaged people, addressing the problems of violence, poor nutrition, homelessness, alcohol and drug abuse and criminal behaviour. Reflecting this focus, the programmes’ take up among private, fee-paying schools was extremely low relative to its uptake among community schools and schools in disadvantaged areas.18

This thesis is, therefore, structured around a classroom-based case-study and is small-scale in nature. It is bounded physically by the classroom walls and temporally by the school year. It is bound also in terms of student numbers and focuses specifically on two fourth year groups of students at Hillside school who are obliged, as part of the transition year curriculum, to take part in the EM programme. Both classes number 12 students, are conducted by the same teacher, and follow sequentially over the course of two full school years. The research conducted in the confines of the classroom is wide-ranging in its scope, exploring the maligned culture and feared behaviours of these young men with a thorough understanding of their social class position, their home, community and
The interactions with the programme and its discussion topics provide the impetus for the boys to speak out, denying and refusing the official characterisations of them as portrayed by EM and by the media. The programme material is provocative in the classroom: it challenges the boys, forcing them to narrate their experiences, histories, habits and prejudices in order to justify and defend them. This enabled me, as observer, to build up an image or picture of these boys which is, in part, constructed through their own words. Although this image is not always entirely in contrast to the unflattering portrayal of the young working class male in the media, the boys do add layers of context and meaning to the more extreme representations of working class boys. They flesh out stereotypical portrayals with explanations and illustrations of their motivations and needs, an example of which can be seen in a photography project organised by me. This project, discussed in full in chapter two, allowed the boys to document, on a small scale, the spaces and things that are important to them outside of school thus providing visual instances of these through examples reproduced throughout the thesis. In their photos the boys demonstrate what, from their point of view, are rational responses to the circumstances of their lives. Within this they enunciate a form of masculinity that is continually shaped by their own personal experiences. In *Photographing the Self* (1999) the American psychologist Robert Ziller describes his experiences with similar photographic projects conducted cross culturally, with different age groups, and with both male and female participants. Therein he documents the same high levels of interest and involvement shown by the Hillside boys, giving weight to the importance of this approach (1999: 36).
The voices of the boys are a primary resource, framing and contextualising the photos throughout. Their words inform the reader of their attitudes and experiences while answering back to both their overt critics in the media and the criticism and judgement that they see as implicit in the programme itself. The programme materials are also a key resource for this thesis. They provide a static view of the major concerns both about and for boys at the time of its development. The programme exemplifies a particular moment in our recent history when the question of 'what to do both for and about boys' was top of many agendas. EM encompasses concisely all of the concerns which were being raised, and regularly still are, in relation to boys, their behaviour and a general, creeping fear and uncertainty about 'traditional' macho – i.e. working class - masculinity as a viable gender role or persona. The programme provides concrete evidence of these anxieties, representing an important moment, not just in Irish education but in Irish life as a whole. This, in tandem with the extensive and constantly updated media archive and, a series of interviews conducted with teachers, academics and other interested parties provides a comprehensive view of the Irish 'masculinity in crisis' discourse, as well as its wider effects on educational policy, common perceptions of gender and gender roles and the reluctance of the majority of commentators, programme writers and contributors to engage with the taboo issue of social class.

EM as both a curriculum intervention and a document of social change was a small yet integral element within a much larger debate. It was, as ASBOs are, part of a generalised fear of an ungovernable, disenfranchised youth, who feel no allegiance to the norms of social order and the law. Youth, in this context, is now a derogatory term. It has become a
condition that is incompatible with our society unless one is able to buy the space and time in which to be young. Public spaces are being increasingly policed or privatised at the same time that funding for youth projects and youth clubs is being cut.\textsuperscript{20} Newspapers now openly use phrases like ‘feral youth’ to describe young people and children.\textsuperscript{21} As in Figure 0.01, the BBC, one of the most respected news organisations in the world, considers it appropriate to put a ‘mug-shot’ of a ten and an 11 year old boy on its online news site above a story listing their crimes. This is part of a wider and worrying trend. It is a return to what the cultural studies theorist Beverly Skeggs has described as a Victorianesque discourse marking a distinction between the deserving and ‘unrespectable’ or undeserving poor (2004: 86). Within this, certain types of people, particularly young single mothers and young black and white males from deprived areas are increasingly referred to as being members of an ‘underclass’ and are considered to be dislocated and socially excluded from mainstream society in what is referred to as a ‘culture of dependency’ (ibid: 86-87). Blaming the poor for their own poverty is a ‘reworking of the 1970s ‘culture of poverty discourse’, in which the culture of the working-class, rather than the structures that create inequality, are seen to be problematic’ (ibid). Already, in Ireland this ‘underclass’ – largely classed as young white working class, not in employment or education, and in this specific context, male – receives a disproportionate amount of negative press coverage; occupies a disproportionate number of prison cells and makes up a disproportionately large percentage of early school leavers and the unemployed. Its members are represented in an overwhelmingly disapproving and fearful light and have been reduced to a cartoonish stereotype of violence, drug use and crime all dressed up in the ubiquitous ‘hoodie’. Their culture is denigrated as facile,
violent and misogynistic and little or no effort is made to understand their cultural references or to question why they hold such appeal. As will be seen throughout, although the culture of young working class men is replete with ‘mainstream’ media references and products, it is still somehow understood to present a distinct threat. In response to this overwhelming sense of crisis my research focuses on exploring different representations of masculinity. I choose to begin not with a problem such as joyriding or drug abuse. Instead, in direct contrast to the prevailing images of a destructive and out-of-control youth culture and with a desire to re-examine the life-world of teenage boys, I focus on their unexceptional day-to-day rituals, their attitudes to those around them and their own group and personal cultural interests. This research investigates this youth culture in order to contribute to a restoration of balance in a wider debate about men, boys, masculinity, culture and deviancy.

Before moving on to outline the five chapters that follow it is important to briefly identify and contextualise the major structuring theoretical and methodological threads which converge here and run through this research. My main objective throughout is to explore the way in which young, white, Irish, working class boys have become written into public discourse as the embodiment of a social problem that has no clear solution. EM is addressed as a partial, official response to negative and fearful conceptions about this social grouping. My own questioning of and response to the negative characterisation of working class boys is constructed through an exploration of their culturally mainstream tastes and their locally specific youth culture, their retelling of their experiences in the classroom, and the popular and prevalent media portrayals of them. As noted, and as will
be discussed in full in chapter two, this research is informed primarily by ethnographic data gathered in the classroom field-site through the participation of the boys in the EM programme. The experience of the ethnographic work is of central importance and it is through that experience that the primary object of study emerges. My focus on the reproduction of a particular form of masculinity is thus informed by the understanding, gleaned in the classroom, of the interactions among gender identities, social class, experience and environment. The boys’ dogged adherence to a very traditional form of ‘macho’ masculinity is explored through the structuring influence of their immediate community, their peers, their socio-economic position and their involvement with particular elements of Irish youth culture.

Understanding masculinity with regard to social class and youth culture means that this research is necessarily informed by multiple strands of theoretical interrogation. Men’s studies is important for this research primarily due to the fact that EM emerges directly from debates within this field. I engage with key figures prominent in men’s studies debates as part of both the essential background of the programme and discussions of masculinity and masculinities. Contemporary men’s studies engages with the notion of multiple masculinities, structured by social experience and influenced by variations in age, class, race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality. My understanding of masculinity and masculinities, and indeed the difference between the two terms, is informed by my ethnographic experience whereby the Hillside boys perform different masculinities in response to different sets of circumstances. The distinction made between the two is discussed in chapter one in relation to the hegemonic category of ‘masculinity’ and the
pluralistic ‘masculinities’. Different masculinities or masculine personas are put on and cast off both in and outside the classroom in rapid succession. These personas appear under the broad umbrella form of a traditional working class masculinity that is informed by the boys’ experiences and is characterised by a defensive attitude and mindset.

Chapter one presents the institutional history of EM as a curriculum initiative. For the unfamiliar reader it introduces the full context and background of the programme, its prolonged review process and the media controversy and coverage that surrounded it from the outset. This chapter summarises and explains the problematic ‘masculinity in crisis’ discourse or narrative, the nature and content of the media coverage and the aims, objectives and methodologies of the programme itself. Hillside School, the location of the fieldsite, is introduced here along with the students, their teacher, and other key players connected to the programme. The students, who are the focus of the research through their participation in the case-study, are known throughout, as noted, via personal pseudonyms, or collectively, as ‘the Hillside boys’. They are situated for the reader here and in chapter two in terms of their economic, social, familial and community context through their own words, the words of their teacher, Paul, and through my own knowledge and experience of the Hillside locale and community. Alongside the structuring influence of key cultural studies theorists such as Skeggs in Class, Self and Culture (2004) and Les Back in Gendered Participation: Masculinity and Fieldwork in a South London Adolescent Community (1993), I also draw upon the work of key theorists from the men’s studies debate including that of R.W. Connell, Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and Harry Brod. Issues of class, culture and masculinity in the particular Irish
context are explored in tandem with established case studies including cultural studies theorist Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977), Máirtín Mac an Ghaill’s *The Making of Men* (1994) and sociologists, Mike O'Donnell and Sue Sharpe’s, *Uncertain Masculinities* (2000). Chapter one is an explanatory and exploratory chapter, bringing together essential background information and context, outlining the questions and problems that provide the basis for the thesis as a whole and laying the ground for chapter two, in which questions of method and methodology are addressed.

Chapter two brings the reader directly and immediately into the classroom at Hillside through a critical and reflexive re-reading of my research experience in the school. My ethnographic process is detailed, focusing on the classroom and the experiences therein as well as exploring broader, more abstract questions such as the intersections between active ethnographic research and gender, the larger problems of general and specific access to fieldsites and subjects, and the continuous development and evolution of complex negotiations and conflicts in the field with gate keepers, and occasionally reluctant subjects. This chapter is informed primarily by cultural studies accounts and re-readings of ethnographic research including feminist cultural studies theorists Angela McRobbie’s and Jenny Garber’s (1991) *Girls and Subcultures* which explores the relationship between male researchers and subjects, and Skeggs’ (1992) re-reading of Willis’s *Learning to Labour*. This chapter fully engages with the nature of the classroom as a site for research, detailing both the limitations and possibilities inherent in a space that is simultaneously rigorously controlled and totally anarchic. Exploring this
dichotomy in chapter two I foreground the voices of the Hillside boys, re-presenting, through use of fieldnotes and aural recordings, their interactions with the authority and structures of the school. The nature of their particular brand of macho masculinity is introduced in the final section, in which the first of a series of ‘vignettes’ is reproduced. These scenes feature conversations and debates between the boys and their teacher and among the boys themselves. They are at the very heart of the research and run throughout the work. They build an image of the EM classroom as a space where the boys both challenge and are challenged by the EM materials and allow the reader to experience, through my narration, the words and actions of the boys. This discussion is also framed by a focus on the practical aspects of carrying out ethnographic research in a classroom, informed in part through my own experience and in part through the work of British educational researchers and ethnographers Peter Foster, Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson. Chapter two introduces the reader to the school environment as a space with multiple definitions and manifestations: for instance, it is my research fieldsite, Paul’s (the Hillside EM teacher) workplace, the EM programme’s testing ground and an educational and social hub for the students. It prepares the reader for chapter three in which I move deeper into the classroom, bringing the stories and narrated experiences of the boys to the fore.

Chapter three focuses on encountering and engaging directly with the identity of the Hillside boys, their perceptions of themselves as masculine, their perception of their role(s) in the broader social world and their complex understandings of the ways they are negatively perceived by the adult, classed other or outsider. This chapter essentially
illustrates and explicates the relationship between the hyper-masculine, macho persona preferred by the boys, their social class position and identity and the restrictive, rule-bound environment of the school whereby they are bound to a subservient position that both conflicts with and encourages their constructed identities and classed and gendered senses of self. In this chapter the cultural studies ethnographer and theorist Peter McLaren’s school based ethnography, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Toward a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures* (1999) is a key focus. The same is true of work by Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Connell (2000), both of whom address constructions of masculinity and masculine identities with boys in the school setting. Reflecting the influence of the neighbourhood and community on identity and culture and emerging from a broader cultural studies debate on the importance of the small-scale, locally-situated yet globally relevant case-study are the emphatically ‘local’ ethnographies of social theorist Anoop Nayak (2003), sociologist Hilary Pilkington and cultural studies theorist Richard Johnson (2003). Also representing and interpreting the ‘local’ are Irish educational researchers, Lynch and Lodge. Their 1999 co-authored chapter ‘Essays on School’ in Lynch’s *Equality in Education* addresses issues arising in discussions of single-sex boys’ schools specific to the Irish context. Such schools usually have high proportions of male staff and often an exaggerated emphasis on sport, competitiveness, physical strength and ability. These problems and related questions are addressed here in terms of the way this type of schooling serves to support and shore up boys at the upper end of the social strata while doing a disservice to boys at disadvantaged schools in working class areas. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the way certain attributes of an aggressive and inexpressive masculinity such as strength
and physicality are, ironically, encouraged by the infrastructure and ethos of the boys' school. These forms of masculinity are perhaps only desirable when attached to a middle class masculine identity, as when connected to a working class male persona they are regarded as dangerous and threatening, Skeggs comments:

... [W]hat was projected onto one group (the working-class) as the site of the immoral and dangerous is now re-valued when it becomes attached to another group (the middle-class) as exciting, new and interesting (Skeggs 2004: 105).

Chapter four moves out of the classroom and the school setting and brings the reader directly into contact with the material culture of the boys. I explore the ways in which negative aspects of that physical culture attach themselves to the Hillside boys and their peers in a way that is not similarly evident in relation to middle class boys and their consumption of the same cultural artefacts, brands and moments. Coming largely from a cultural studies perspective, key theorists in this chapter include Skeggs, Nayak and particularly Willis. I engage with his 1970s school-based case-study of working class masculinities through parallel examples and moments from the material culture and stories of the Hillside boys, who I see as modern day versions of Willis' Hammertown subjects. The detailing of the material elements of the Hillside boys' cultural lives is thus threaded through a broader discussion of the importance and influence of social class on the lives and prospects of these young men. The focus is primarily on the processes of identity formation and the ways young male identities are constructed with, supported and maintained by the 'social glue' of shared cultural references. Hence, several texts are explored in full, including two video games, a selection of rap and hip hop music, and a
selection of film and television shows. The hair and clothing styles both particular to, and favoured by, the Hillside boys are also discussed as they are an integral part of the boys' masculine identities, linked to and providing a visual link to their community and their environment. The attraction and appeal of the shows or brands looked at is obvious, however, it is the way in which negative elements of these examples 'stick' to the Hillside boys that makes them interesting. Thus, this chapter uncovers that relationship between an increasingly homogenous youth culture, one that is enjoyed and engaged with on different levels by different social groups but which also then carries different associations for those different groups.

The fifth and final chapter re-enters the classroom, bringing together the material culture of the boys discussed in chapter four and the negotiations between the programme materials, the teacher and the class seen in chapter three. It explores, through a further series of critical vignettes, the problems that arise when the programme materials and youth culture clash. Here I present a possible resolution to this 'clash' by taking an alternative look at the boys' culture and the programme's methodology and focusing on what is an essential contradiction both for this research and for all research concerning boys, youth culture and education. This contradiction arises at the convergence of two key points. The first is the necessary acknowledgment of the deeply rooted public understanding that a large part of mainstream male youth culture is based around a glorification of criminal lifestyles and the ensuing association of violence and misogyny with 'cool' or 'hard' masculinity. The second key point focuses on the understanding that 'boy culture' and its material attachments – films, clothing, music, alcohol – is central
both to the lives and to the group and personal identity structures among young men. The question that remains for chapter five, then, is to find a way for the recognition of the negative impact and influences of boy culture to be brought together in the classroom with the understanding of that culture’s importance to young men. This is necessary in order to engage the interest of boys in a context that does not simply condemn them, their interests and their lifestyles as puerile and threatening, but which offers viable alternatives to ‘negatively traditional’ behaviours and attitudes.

This chapter is primarily informed by theorist James Paul Gee’s (2003) *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*. Gee’s framework of ‘learning principles’ is drawn upon as part of a wider understanding that the relationship between young people and their popular media forms has benefits as well as potential disadvantages. This feeds directly into the main problem, as discussed throughout, which faces EM at the level of both approach and materials. This is the fact that the programme is so keen to avoid legitimising any aspect of macho media culture that it makes no reference to it or to its cultural importance to the boys throughout. It points to a gap between the culture and identities of EM’s primary audience, the working class white male, and the type of masculine identity presented by the programme as a viable and attractive choice. Chapter five lays out a possible solution to bridging that distance through a more inclusive understanding of the relationship between young men and their popular culture. This chapter also draws upon Willis’ later work, including *The Ethnographic Imagination* (2000) as well as on interviews (2001), articles (2002) and commentaries (2004). Throughout these texts, Willis both reflects on the impact and
legacy of *Learning to Labour* while also engaging with newer challenges faced in the construction of cultural ethnographies within an analysis of the defining structural constraints of life for young working class men. I work through these contradictions and conflicts between youth culture and pedagogy in order to advocate a move away from the perhaps, natural, desire to ignore or censor the problematic elements of male youth culture in the classroom. This repositioning of the Hillside boys’ youth culture is essential in order to challenge and expand the narrow representations of young men as seen through the composite image of hoodies, testosterone, delinquency and crime. Thus the relationship between the ‘material ‘structural’ dimensions’ (Nayak 2003: 305) of the Hillside boys’ lives; their engagement with particular forms of masculine youth culture; and the impact these forces have in the classroom space created by EM form the central focus throughout.
Coalition members include the Children’s Rights Alliance, the National Youth Council of Ireland, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Irish Youth Foundation, the ISPCC, the Irish Traveller Movement, the Irish Penal Reform Trust, Barnardos, the Irish Refugee Council, a large number of community projects and youth-reach centres and several legal experts - academics as well as practitioners.

The orders have since been modified (by the Police Reform Act 2002 and the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003. Since 2003 any judge granting an ASBO is required to consider making an Individual Support Order (ISO) or a Parenting Order (PO). These orders are designed to help young people avoid criminal charges and usually involve truancy officers and social workers as well as police liaisons. However, in order to make either of these orders the judge must be in possession of a case report on the young person in question from the youth offending team of the local authority. Due to underfunding and over crowding of the system these are seldom available and so such alternative orders are rarely made.

Separate provisions for ASBOs are made for Scotland and Northern Ireland. For example, in Scotland the recipient must be 16 or over. Otherwise, children under 16 can receive orders but only in exceptional circumstances and when all other avenues have failed (Scottish Executive 2004: NP). In Northern Ireland, ASBOs have been in use since the summer of 2004 and can, as in England and Wales, be issued to children from the age of ten upwards (Northern Ireland Office 2004: NP).

The programme is discussed in full in terms of content, context and institutional history in chapter one.

In a move recognised as a precursor to calls for the total banning of hoodies in shopping centres, Fine Gael TD Michael Noonan has called for shop owners to be given the right to ask people to take their hoods down upon entering a shop or centre. Similar to calls in Britain which have led to several shopping centres banning the wearing of (although not the sale of) hooded tops, Noonan claims it will help reduce shoplifting as people use them to conceal their faces from security cameras (Bracken 2005: NP).

In his classic 1955 study, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, the American criminologist and sociologist Albert K. Cohen discussed the concept of a delinquent subculture among young working class boys and men or ‘corner boys’. He argues that
they disengage from the norms and values of the mainstream society because they find themselves unable to achieve status or advancement in that system. Instead they construct their own yardstick or standard by which to measure social and personal success and thus reject the middle class value system that has both denied them entry and graded them as inferior.

This is just one of many stories focusing on the problems with ASBOs, many of which seem contradictory, unenforceable, and counterproductive within communities. Many of the more outlandish ASBOs are collected on the ASBOconcern website, http://www.asboconcern.org.uk. This example, amongst others, is highlighted in a memorandum from the National Association of Prison Officers UK (NAPO) (2004:NP)

The groups of 90 teenagers were organised through the membership community of the NYCI and were made up of boys and girls in their mid-teens. Participants included members of the Travelling Community, young people with disabilities and lesbian, gay or bi-sexual identified teens. The participants were asked to explain their understandings of young people’s institutional relationships with adults such as teachers, Gardaí, politicians, parents, shop owners, security guards and neighbours. They were also asked about representations of young people in the media.

Details have not yet been made public as to how the Irish ASBO system will operate. Numerous differences have been mentioned (see below – endnotes 17 and 18) although all are yet to be confirmed. It is, however, probable that the courts will be involved in the process.

More ASBOs have been issued in Manchester than in any other part of the country. Over the period 1 January – 30 June 2004, 155 were issued there. During the same period 13 were issued in South Wales and 27 were handed down in Merseyside (NAPO 2004: NP).

‘Hillside’ is a pseudonym as are all of the names of the students and teachers interviewed.

Theme Five, the section headed ‘Violence Against Women, Men and Children’ (241-283) includes eleven sub sections addressing issues around physical and mental violence. Sexism as a theme runs throughout the entire programme but it directly addressed in particular in Theme Two, ‘Men Working’ (41-87) under the topic ‘The Equality Debate’ (51-55) and in Theme Three, ‘Men and Power’ (89-165) as part of the discussion for ‘Men’s Power, Women’s Power’ (92-93). Racism is also discussed in Theme Three, under the title of ‘Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?’ (134-150) and ‘I Have a Dream’ (151-153). The issue of homophobia is covered in the fourth Theme ‘Relationships,
Health and Sexuality’ (167-239) in three separate sections headed ‘Frankie and Chris’ (219-221) ‘Sexual Orientation (222-224) and ‘Understanding Gay People’ (225-228).

For further discussion of the discourse of fear which is constructed around young people in the media, see Devlin (2006).

In Ireland, the numbers of young offenders referred to the Garda’s Juvenile Diversion Programme, a programme focused on rehabilitation that involves first time offenders in diversionary activities while providing support and services to the individuals and their families, remained steady over 2003 and 2004 with approximately 17,000 young people taking part (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2005: NP). This is the most recent period for which data is available and can be found online at: 
www.justice.ie/80256E01003A02CF/vWeb/pcjUCQ6F4LTK-en (Accessed August 2005). These diversionary programmes and other youth schemes are funded by the Department of Justice although funding has been falling in this area. Budget cuts have continued despite youth workers and the Garda Representative Association (GRA) pointing to their relative cheapness and efficacy in keeping young people from becoming (further) involved in crime (Kearney 2005: NP). For example, figures show that each programme has a budget of about €75,000 and benefits between 25 and 30 young people, whereas keeping one young person in Trinity House, a young-offenders unit, costs close to €250,000 per year (O’Brien 2005b:NP). For a full definition of the term ‘moral panic’ see Cohen (1973: 9).

See ICAA Press Release 4 May 2005 for further details and discussion of Shannon’s comments on juvenile crime in Ireland.

Irish ASBOs, as proposed by Minister McDowell, will be applied for a maximum of two years, as opposed to a minimum of two years in Britain. There will be a separate ASBO system for young people and adults, with young people and children who are in breach of their orders facing less severe penalties such as curfews, restrictions on their movements, and parental orders. The definition of what constitutes anti-social behaviour will be narrower and more specific than in the British model and will be designed to encompass more serious behaviour or offences. Shannon describes the changes as ‘a significant improvement on the situation in England and Wales…’ (O’Brien 2005c: NP). However, he goes on to say that, ‘any attempt to introduce ASBOs would fundamentally undermine the principles underpinning the Children’s Act’ (ibid).
The Children's Act (2001) provides for situations in which children whose behaviour is 'difficult to manage or 'out of control' but not criminal in nature' come to the attention of the Gardai. It includes provisions for the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme, Garda Youth Diversion Projects, Conferencing, including Garda Conference as part of the Diversion Project, Family Welfare Conferencing at the behest of the Health Service and Family Conferencing with the Probation and Welfare Services. The Act introduces community sanctions (only two of which have been implemented), including:

1. Community Service Orders (for 16 and 17 year olds)
2. Probation Orders
3. Day Centre Orders
4. Probation (training and activities) Orders
5. Probation (intensive supervision) Orders
6. Probation (residential supervision) Orders
7. Suitable Person (care and supervision) Orders
8. Mentor (family support) Order
9. Restriction on Movement Order
10. Dual Order.

The Act also includes provisions for increased community policing and for the introduction of parental sanctions. The aim of this legislation is to give children the opportunity and the support needed to avoid criminal convictions. It has yet to be fully implemented despite being approved of and supported by all members, political parties and interested groups. It is acknowledged as an excellent piece of legislation which emphasises rehabilitation and community integration while avoiding criminalising children. It, if it were to be fully implemented, demonstrates clearly the unnecessary and counterproductive nature of ASBOs (ICCA 2005: 1-4).

See list of schools that took part in the piloting of the programme (EM 2000: XI-XII).

I make use of the programme and its materials throughout this thesis. It is a key resource and thus an element of review and assessment is unavoidable. However, this research does not set out to provide a comprehensive review of the programme or its materials.

These public spaces are not necessarily being increasingly 'policing' by the Gardai, but by private security firms and through the delimiting of space in gated communities, private car parks and shopping precincts.

The BBC (2005) used the phrase in this headline ‘Feral youths on ‘rampage of fear’ in
May 2005.

See chapter one and chapter two for a full discussion of the main contributors to men’s studies, the ways they understand masculinity and how that understanding informs their works.


Throughout this thesis, I use the term ‘video game’ to refer to all games played either on computers (PCs), in online (Internet) communities, or on gaming consoles such as Playstation, X-Box or Nintendo.

James Paul Gee is Professor of Reading at the University of Wisconsin, he is also part of the university’s Games, Learning, Society (GLS) programme which is run by the School of Education and which was set up to explore the types of learning, literacy and social practices that are encouraged by the playing of video games both on and off line –

http://website.education.wisc.edu/gls/index.htm
Chapter One

Exploring Masculinities: An Institutional History

Figure 1.01: EM Theme One: ‘Starting Out’.

Exploring Masculinities is a programme of personal and social development for Transition Year and Senior Cycle boys. It focuses on the diversity of forms which masculinity can take and it helps young people to explore this diversity. The content of the programme covers a number of areas relevant to the lives of young males in the fast changing world of the beginning of the twenty-first century (EM 2000: V).
The Background

The EM programme was officially launched in September 2000 at an in-service training­day for transition year teachers. As a joint undertaking by the Equality Committee of the Department of Education and Science and the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) and co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), it came as the result of an extensive period of development and pilot testing which began in 1995 with seven schools (EM 2000: XI). A second pilot stage began in 1997 involving 26 schools, and from September 2000 it was made available to all boys’ schools who wished to add it to their curriculum. The programme is described as an ‘intervention’ (EM 2000: V) and is specifically designed for use in single-sex schools at the senior cycle level. The general age of boys who work with the programme is between 15 and 18 and the majority of those who have encountered EM, have done so in transition year. The programme came in response to issues which had been raised through a series of Government committee reports on gender equality and also through the more specific findings of Lynch (1989) and Lynch and Lodge (1999). Their research into the peer group values of boys in Irish secondary schools showed that the type of masculine identity favoured by young Irish men is one in which masculinity is defined by very traditional values focused on strength and power. EM’s introduction highlights the chief findings from this study revealing young Irish masculinities to be narrowly defined and rigidly contained within out­dated and strictly delineated bounds of sexuality, social class and ethnic identity, physicality and power. These findings, as summarised by the EM writing team below, provide the rationale for EM through an exploration of the way in which Irish masculinity is structured by:
...physical strength, height and sporting ability... The dominant attitude to disabled students was one of ignorance... There was a high level of prejudice towards Travellers and high levels of hostility and fear were reported by boys towards gay males in particular. One of the findings of the research was the extent to which, what could clearly be defined as sexist practices and procedures went largely unnoticed or disregarded by students. Gender inequality was not part of the student’s daily vocabulary of analysis (EM 2000: VII).

It is from this understanding that the chief objective of EM developed. At its most basic level the programme’s function is to address and nullify the detrimental effects this dominant form of traditional masculine identity has, not just on young men themselves, but also on the wider community. This rationale reflects the programme’s emergence from a broad set of concerns about rapid social change and the impact, in terms of ‘social, psychological and emotional consequences’ (VII), of this pace of change on young Irish men. Following this explication the programme introduction concludes that ‘it is important that such traditional attitudes and behaviours should change’ (ibid). The programme’s stated aims reflect this desire for change, and the materials, as will be seen, focus on showing young men both how and why they should alter both their attitudes and their behaviours. EM’s aims specify the areas of concern and focus primarily on a lack of acceptance of diversity in sexual and gender identities and roles. They show clearly the particular issues and questions relating to masculinity which had a wide currency in terms of both academic and media discussion at the time of the programme’s launch:

The programme aims to: explore different perceptions and experiences of masculinity; promote understanding and respect for diversity; promote equality among and between the sexes; provide opportunities for males to develop
enhanced interpersonal and social skills; promote healthy lifestyles; raise awareness of: life choices; changing roles in society; work (paid and non-paid); relationships; health and sexuality; violence against adults and children; sport (EM 2000: VI).

These aims were not, as was to be claimed in the media, inevitably prejudicial or 'anti-boy', yet the programme alienated many parents, teachers and boys alike and left them feeling threatened and victimised. The potential for offence was clear to the writing team from the outset and ‘Teacher Notes’ were included throughout highlighting problems which may arise with some sections. For example, one session on bullying is accompanied by a Teacher Note stating that ‘Students may regard this session as “getting at them” or “boy bashing”’ (EM 2000: 105). Session materials for a class on relationships are preceded by a Teacher Note stating, ‘The experience from this session is that many boys feel threatened and are very defensive’ (ibid: 119). As this research shows, the feeling of being ‘got at’ recurred frequently throughout the classes at Hillside, with the boys regularly showing open hostility to the programme materials. This opposition is unsurprising given that EM, as an intervention, is rooted in the understanding that the mental, physical and emotional health of Irish schoolboys is at risk due to their own constructions and perceptions of masculinity.

The programme addresses a situation in which boys face an inability to ‘fit in’ with what is presumed to be the rest of normal society due to their failure to relinquish traditional forms of male identity. The materials are specifically designed to address certain long-established and familiar forms of masculinity and consist of a teachers’ manual or handbook, a video cassette and an audio cassette, the text of which is reproduced in the
The handbook contains an introduction to the course and to the rationale behind it, along with bibliographic sources and background information (2000: I-XVI). This introduction is followed by seven chapters, divided along thematic lines into 'Starting Out'; 'Men Working'; 'Men and Power'; 'Relationships, Health and Sexuality'; 'Violence against Women, Men and Children'; 'Men and Sport'; and 'Wrapping it up'. These themed chapters are further divided into class sessions, each of which comes with a comprehensive lesson plan including teacher guidelines, teacher notes, methodologies, objectives and discussion topics, all focused around a 'Key Question'. The sessions also provide student materials and worksheets, including questionnaires, literary extracts, statistics, quotations and other information relevant to each particular topic. The chapters which follow here refer extensively to the programme materials with examples reproduced throughout. Within EM each session presents a problem such as bullying, sexism, spousal abuse, homelessness or mental illness, the prevalence of which is then linked to the hangover of traditional masculine principles and associated personality traits. This emphasis on what are considered to be typically male 'qualities' such as, for example, the domination of women, can be clearly seen in a session entitled 'Listening to Women’s Voices' (2000: 163-165) wherein the Key Question is 'Do men listen to and hear what women have to say?' (163).

These 'out-dated', traditional forms of masculinity are understood, both by EM and by Lynch and Lodge (1999) in their co-authored 'Essays on School', to prioritise negative macho male values such as aggression, strength or misogyny. Throughout this research I use a descriptive phrase 'negatively traditional masculinity' to refer to old fashioned
elements of male identity as they are manifested in the behaviour and speech of the
Hillside boys. My understanding of what constitutes a negatively traditional masculinity
is primarily structured by the multiple issues raised by Lynch and Lodge in the Irish
context, all of which are supported by my own field work experiences. This
understanding is, however, also comparable to that shared by British researchers, Mike
O’ Donnell and Sue Sharpe (2000), who, in their school based study, describe boys as
suffering from a ‘cultural lag’ that is not experienced by girls (2000: 7). For O’Donnell
and Sharpe this notion of a ‘lag’ refers to a situation whereby the attitudes and
understandings held by boys towards the world around them trail behind broader social
attitudes regarding diversity and change (ibid: 7). My use of negatively traditional
masculinity as a term throughout is informed by these works and signifies a shorthand
version of all that is considered to be wrong with these ‘out-dated’ types of male identity.
Thus, in brief, a negatively traditional masculine identity is understood here to celebrate,
to the point of exclusion of alternatives, attributes such as physical strength, a propensity
towards and an acceptance of violence and violent behaviour, elements of racism, sexism,
xenophobia and a relaxed attitude towards crime and criminal activity.

Aggression, physicality, racism, misogyny, criminality and other negatively traditional
masculine characteristics were at the height of public awareness at the time of EM’s
official launch. As a result the atmosphere in which the general public were introduced to
the programme was already sensitised or alerted to the problems and issues that were
being highlighted about men, boys and masculinity, most particularly the notion of a
‘crisis’ for masculinity. The programme quickly became a focal point for a wide ranging
and long running media discussion which had a disproportionate influence over the
development of EM. The media coverage was, as will be seen in the following section,
divisive and disruptive and rapidly splintered into a series of entrenched views which
were defined and demarcated only by their opposition to one another.

The disputed notion that there is a ‘crisis for masculinity’ was a central and persistent
theme within the media coverage and was an essential part of the general environment in
which EM was developed and launched. The support for the belief that masculinity is
experiencing a crisis drew on a growing body of work within men’s studies and popular
psychology, including the ‘mytho-poetic’ men’s movement, which supported an
understanding that men and masculinity were somehow being displaced by the advance
of women in the workplace, in education and in broader social life. While it is important
that the prevalence of the ‘crisis’ narrative be noted I challenge the existence of any
generalised crisis for masculinity, as it appears both in its underdeveloped media
characterisation and also in the context of men’s studies in which it plays a pivotal role.
Rather than there being a crisis for masculinity, I argue that there is evidence of long-
established social inequalities that impact upon groups and individuals, including both
men and women who are counted as a minority due to their social and economic class
position, racial and ethnic background, religious beliefs, disability and/or sexuality.
Although the programme does not directly address the understanding that masculinity is
in crisis, it was rapidly, and damagingly, drawn into the media free-for-all as a central
player. Within the media, EM was broadly characterised as being, variously, a response
to, a symptom of and a cause of this male identity crisis. In this way both the press
coverage of EM and the EM materials themselves are part of a broader summation of contemporary Irish fears about masculinity and about working class masculinity in particular. The type of representations of young men both presented in the programme and in the media, throughout this critical period of interest and awareness shows the overwhelmingly negative perceptions of young working class masculine identity and culture that abound in Ireland. An exploration and documentation of the broader context surrounding such representations is therefore essential to provide the foundation for the case study that follows. This background helps situate EM relative to the overall research, and, crucially, locates it in response to the storm of media coverage which overtook it, and to the exploration of which we now turn.

**Media Coverage**

I first encountered the EM programme in early 2000, before its official launch, as I researched more general social understandings of, and encounters with, masculinity and the particular cultures of young white working class boys in Ireland. Having become aware of the programme and its significance, especially in terms of its connection to the wider issues surrounding social change and masculinity in Irish society, I began to follow the debate through the media and acquired, with some difficulty, a copy of the EM programme from the Department of Education and Science. It was reluctant to allow copies of the programme for general release, due chiefly to a sharp increase in overwhelmingly negative publicity and press coverage. The Department was almost entirely unprepared for this reaction, as previous media coverage of the EM initiative had been largely positive. The marked reluctance to provide any copies or indeed any
information about EM came both in response to, and because of, the growing media furore. As a result of negative press attention, one month after the official launch a full review of the programme was commissioned by the then Minister for Education and Science, Dr. Michael Woods TD. This review was driven by the unprecedented levels of media and public interest in EM and was undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Prior to the 2000 launch there had only been a small amount of media interest in the pilot programme, and as noted, all early media coverage had been largely positive. Articles at this early, positive, stage were mostly concerned with the novelty of the programme and simply gave basic information about it as in Andy Pollak’s article on the 22 December 1998 which simply tells readers that ‘the programme aims to raise boys’ awareness of their changing roles in society …to promote equality, understanding and mutual respect among all young people’ (Pollak 1998: NP). Likewise, an Irish Times editorial from 2 January 1999 informs readers that:

The introduction of a programme to help teenage boys explore their masculinity in some 30 all-boy secondary schools is a welcome attempt to bring the realities of life into the classroom (1999: NP).

Following the launch, information about EM became available to a far wider audience, whereas previously only narrow groupings had enjoyed access to the materials. This privileged few had primarily included principals and teachers involved with the programme, students taking the course and, to a lesser extent, their parents. A lack of official information about the programme in the public sphere led to suspicion and created an extremely hostile media environment which extended far beyond the boundaries of educational debate.
The main national newspapers - *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Examiner* and *The Sunday Independent* - carried most of the letters, reports, opinion pieces and editorials which emerged after 2000. An online response service provided by the NCCA allowed for more substantive pieces from individuals and groups who were specifically interested in the programme as opposed to the larger discussions about men and women that had grown around the media coverage. Máirtín Mac an Ghaill, Joan Hanafin and Paul Conway, authors of the NCCA Programme Review which was released in June 2002, conducted a comprehensive survey of the major contributions from the public and have identified six distinct phases of the media attention (2002: 100). These six phases accord with my own media archives, which span the period from the beginning of media coverage of the programme itself in December 1998 to early 2002. Having a sense of what each separate phase of media coverage encompassed allows for a fully contextualised understanding of the overall media attention. The authors describe the first stage as an ‘Introductory Phase’ (Winter 1998-1999), followed by a ‘Lull Phase’ in which there was comparatively little interest in the programme or its surrounding issues. This relatively quiet spell ran from January 1999 to September 2000 when the third, or what the authors describe as the ‘Substantive Phase’, began. It was during this time, throughout Autumn 2000, that the major voices who personified the Irish public debate about men and EM emerged. Irish Men’s studies theorist Harry Ferguson and Irish sociologist Tom Inglis both became key players in a prolonged and occasionally personalised and hostile debate with prolific letter writer and former nurse Mary T. Cleary of the men’s support organisation AMEN. This conversation was conducted through the letters pages of the *Irish Times* and continued across several months. The acrimonious nature of these letters
is evidence of the disintegration of the ‘debate’ about EM into a frustrating exchange of opposing opinions and stances. A brief selection of this conversation from the letters page of the *Irish Times* is reproduced below:

Dr Harry Ferguson of UCD ... refers to a little-known programme “Exploring Masculinities” which has been piloted in Irish schools and has now come into full operation. Although he doesn’t say so, Dr Ferguson has had an input into this programme, which is targeted at young men only and looks like an attempt to reconstruct them. Few parents, if any, are aware of its contents, still fewer will have approved of it... I have no wish to be alarmist but the contents [of EM] need to be seen to be believed (Cleary September 28)

In a highly confused and alarmist letter Mary T Cleary of Amen (September 28) attacks the integrity of the new Exploring Masculinities programme... She complains bitterly that she has been refused a copy of the programme, yet feels able to freely criticise its contents. Her entire letter smacks of the paranoia and dangerous simplicity of argument that we have come to expect from Ms Cleary and others who argue that men are now the oppressed gender in Irish society. They have no real understanding of gender relationships... (Ferguson October 5).

This open and enlightened understanding ... contrasts sharply with views expressed by Prof. Harry Ferguson... Obviously Prof. Ferguson holds the view that men carry all the responsibility for violence and women none...In the circumstances I find it hard to understand how Dr Inglis can approve of the Exploring Masculinities programme (Cleary November 2)

With regard to Mary T Cleary’s criticism (November 2) all I am calling for is some critical reflection about the difference between abuse and violence (Inglis November 6)
...despite the role attributed to me ... as one of the “architects of the programme”, I can claim no credit for it. I had no input into the design of the programme. My sole contribution was a one-minute appearance on the video that is part of the teaching materials ... This all happened over two years ago and until the published programme landed on my desk in September I had absolutely no idea what was in it. Mary T Cleary (November 2) seems to have misunderstood the point I was trying to make... (Ferguson November 15)

The disintegration of the debate was noted and addressed by other academics and interest groups. This can be seen clearly in a letter published in December 2001 from five Irish academics whose opening paragraph called for a cessation of hostilities and a return to a balanced debate on the issue. Dr Linda Connolly, UCC, Dr Ronit Lentin, TCD, Dr Sara O’ Sullivan, UCD, Professor Fred Powell, UCC and Hilary Tovey, TCD reminded readers that:

A cool perspective is now needed in a debate which is getting out of hand, misleading the public and misinterpreting the essence of feminist perspectives in social science, in particular (2001: NP).

Public interest peaked during this period, as the amount of coverage and available information on the programme reached new heights. In 2003 I conducted an interview with a contributor to the programme and raised the topic of the media coverage and specifically the contestation, by parents’ groups in particular, that there was a lack of information about the programme in the public sphere. In response to this the contributor commented that:

...[A]t one level there was probably more information in the public arena about EM than any other curricular area. If you look at the revised primary school curriculum, that got less attention in the media than EM. So, on one level there
was a huge amount of information accorded to that. So, if you are a parent and you are trying to find out what’s happening in schools it would be easier to read the media and learn about EM than it would be... if I get on the web [internet] here and put EM into the *Irish Times* archive, I’d come up with I don’t know how many articles... (David 2003).13

Following this most active and engaged phase was a ‘Marginal Phase’. It was described as ‘marginal’ in the sense that interest in men and issues around men’s lives were still on the agenda but the sustained interest in the programme that characterised the preceding period had disappeared. Running alongside this, throughout 2001 and 2002 was a ‘Dedicated and Specialist Press Phase’ wherein references to the programme were made in articles and letters appearing in religious publications such as *The Irish Catholic* and *The Catholic World News* (2002: 100). Several education journals also featured articles and letters about the programme, as did the magazine of the pressure group Parents and Teachers For Real Education (PATRE). The sixth and final phase identified by the authors is the ‘Review Phase’. This mainly focused on covering press releases and other information about the NCCA review as it was carried out. The chronological narrative of the media coverage presented in the review takes the reader up to November 2001. The coverage of the programme and the interest in men and men’s lives has continued since then but has at no time approached the levels of the main phase of interest in Autumn and Winter 2000. The types of articles that appeared in the ‘Marginal Phase’ were significantly different to the articles and letters that emerged in the ‘Dedicated and Specialist Press Phase’. The nature of the coverage changed dramatically from the early or ‘Introductory Phase’ of information about the programme to the huge quantities of features, editorials, letters and articles seen in the ‘Substantive Phase’. The inflamed
rhetoric of the letter writing cohort who sustained most of the public interest in the programme all but disappeared in early 2001. However, the damage to the public image of EM could not be undone and it began to be phased out amid concerns from parents and teachers alike.

Addressing these high levels of concern, the NCCA review is critical of some aspects of the programme and its handling in the media, specifically the reluctance to release information in an open and relaxed manner so as to assuage the fears amongst parents and other interested individuals. It is also sceptical about the real value of what they refer to as ‘sustained media attention’ rather than media debate and points out that although a lot of the coverage mentioned the programme specifically, it was often used as a starting point to draw attention to another issue (Mac an Ghaill et al 2002: 141-2). The review team also emphasise the importance of asking ‘which boys’ when looking at the themes that emerged strongly in the media coverage. These themes primarily included boys and academic underperformance, boys and female empowerment and boys and criminality. The review team suggest that rather than focusing (as the media coverage did) simply on male or female as binary opposites locked in competition, we must consider the myriad factors that influence young people, such as sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability and, crucially, social class (2002: 151).

Boys’ Voices, Alternative Masculinities and the Flow of Information

Questions about the roots of the EM programme were prominent throughout the media coverage with many commentators claiming a ‘feminist plot’ to emasculate boys was
behind the initiative. In fact, the programme cites two main influences, the first being the ‘extensive research’ carried out into gender and education in Ireland led by Hannan (1983; 1996) and, as noted, by Lynch (1989) and by Lynch and Lodge (1999) (EM 2000: V). It is also informed by work carried out within the academic field of men’s studies and particularly influential for EM is Brod and Kaufman’s *Theorising Masculinities* (1994). This, a collection of contemporary thinking within the field throughout the early 1990s sees EM indebted to its analysis of ‘constructions of masculinity’, its theorising on the ‘emerging second wave of critical studies on men and masculinities’ and especially to Brod and Kaufman’s manifesto for that second wave (1994: 4):

The second aspect of a new wave of critical men’s studies is the ever growing recognition that we cannot study masculinity in the singular, as if the stuff of man were a homogenous and unchanging thing. Rather we wish to emphasize the plurality and diversity of men’s experiences, attitudes, beliefs, situations, practices, and institutions, along lines of race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, age, region, physical appearance, able-bodiedness, mental ability, and various other categories ...(ibid: 4-5).

Reflecting the concerns of Broad and Kaufman, EM set out to promote understanding and awareness of diversity and of the different ways in which diverse groups of men experience and live out their masculinities. Yet, as will be seen throughout this case study, the boys at Hillside find it extremely difficult to relate to alternative masculinities and reject outright the more unfamiliar forms. The boys’ own particular brand of defensive masculinity is engendered by an underlying insecurity and is directly related to their precarious position teetering on the edge of post-Celtic Tiger Irish society. The further away from the hegemonic norms of traditional Irish working class masculinity the
programme goes, the more vehemently the boys reject these new forms.\textsuperscript{16} Thus the seemingly innocuous roles of house husband, and male nurse, as portrayed by two men in the programme’s accompanying video produce as strong a reaction as that against the gay man featured in another segment (see figures 1.02a and 1.02b).

![Figures 1.02a-b: The EM Video features 'atypical' role models the 'House Husband' and 'Male Nurse'.](image)

The fact that the boys, as will be seen, almost universally reject the alternative representations of masculinity which populate the programme points to another issue, one that is evident throughout and is highlighted via the media coverage. The absence of the voices and experiences of young men was evident not only in the public media reporting, but also in the programme text itself. Throughout the entire period of public and specialised interest, teachers, politicians, parents, pressure groups and journalists were heard from, but there was only one instance in which the voices of any of the boys considered to be EM’s target audience were heard. The lack of media interest in the experiences of boys taking the programme was remarkable and is further evidence of the confused nature of the media coverage and the reactionary and issue-driven commentary which comprised the majority of the so-called ‘public debate’.\textsuperscript{17} It is also reflective of the
fact that the voices of young men are largely absent from the programme materials. This lack of engagement with their voices and experiences seems to me to be a continuation of the understanding that the majority of young men have little to contribute, even when the topic at hand relates directly to them. It is, however, essential that the programme and the questions and concerns which prompted its development be reconnected to the position of the boys who are considered to be in need of this intervention. The NCCA review notes that the only time the voices of any boys were heard in the public arena was in September 2000 on a national radio programme when six boys from four of the schools involved were interviewed along with Maureen Bohan, the director of the project (Mac an Ghaill et al 2002: 135-136). A small-scale case study had also been carried out by Dolores Mullins, a teacher and contributor to the programme’s writing team and the programme facilitator at one of the original pilot schools. Mullins monitored her own teaching practice in relation to the materials and monitored the responses and progress of the twelve students in her own class. Working with an earlier pilot version of the programme, her study is brief but remains one of only two available interrogations of the student experience of EM and its relation and relevance to their lives and experiences (Mullins 1998). The second record appears in the Report of External Evaluation and was carried out by Jim Gleeson, Patricia Conboy and Aileen Walsh of the Department of Education and Professional Studies at the University of Limerick. This evaluation report on the programme, commissioned by the Department in 1997 and completed in 1999, was not publicly released until 2004, a factor which contributed largely to the negativity of the press coverage.
The evaluation report was launched on 2 April 2004 as part of a day’s seminar on masculinity. In addition to the keynote speaker - sociologist and men’s studies theorist Michael Kimmel - several key contributors to Irish and international discussion and debate on masculinity attended the meeting. The steadfast refusal of the Department to publish the findings of the report in full up until this point suggested it was hiding something and, as repeated requests from interest groups for the full report to be published were denied, the moral panic surrounding the programme, its contents and its possible effects grew. John Hammond of the NCCA, in an interview I conducted with him in 2003, comments on the wisdom of allowing such paranoia to grow unchecked:

...[T]here’s no doubt that there was a difficulty in relation to the flow of information from the Department of Education and Science about *Exploring Masculinities*... There is no doubt judging from the kinds of things that were said in the meetings that we would have held as part of the review, that in the view of some of the parents groups there was a level of suspicion about what the agenda associated with EM was and what role the Department saw for it within the education system. It led to suspicions that were unnecessary in my view. I would have found the level of protection, or whatever you would wish to call it, of information about the programme unusual and problematic, particularly in the context of freedom of information. It certainly contributed to a sense out there that somebody somewhere wasn’t sure of the ground or something on which this programme was based or why it had been introduced, or at least people were very worried about it once questions were being asked ... I haven’t experienced it before in relation to a particular educational issue or a particular educational programme, probably not even RSE (Religious and Social Education) which you know would have been a similar type of programme.
In 2002, two years before the publication of the report, the NCCA review authors recommended strongly that the report of the external evaluation be made available in the interests of transparency and accessibility (Mac an Ghaill et al 2002: 217). The importance of the report to parties interested in the programme became clear, as did its potential to stem the tide of public anger and concern related to the contents, on its publication. Part of the external evaluators’ report consists of dedicated case studies that include details of the experiences of teachers, principals and students working with the programme in four carefully selected schools around the country (Gleeson et al 2003: 64-128). Had these case studies, illustrating the reactions of teachers and students, been made available, they would have undermined a large proportion of the more ill-defined and negative coverage of the programme’s alleged pro-feminist/anti-male ethos and aims. This, in turn, could have prevented the situation in which large numbers of schools withdrew the programme to avoid negative publicity and to calm parental anxiety. However, anxiety among parents is not just limited to the different perceptions of masculinity to which boys are exposed in the classroom. As will be discussed in chapter four, the types of media texts aimed at young men are also cause for concern. This is essentially important for EM as it categorically sets out to destabilise and challenge the particularly conservative, macho masculinities that are encouraged or promoted through the material culture of boys. The programme states:

Coping with change is about changing attitudes as well as structures and systems. Traditional attitudes often lag behind the reality in society and nowhere is this more evident than in the media which are so powerful in influencing young people but where the reinforcement of sex-stereotyped images of men’s and women’s roles ... persist despite the erosion of traditional roles (EM 2000: VII).
Had the programme been publicly contextualised in this manner, presented as a means to critically challenge the violent, sexist and criminal models of masculinity that are held up to young men in music, film and video games, it is unlikely that parents and other interested parties would have reacted to it in the way they did. However, as it happened, the way in which information about the programme seeped into the public consciousness seemed designed to cause controversy. The key points of dissent centred around fears, as noted, of a pro-feminist plot, but large numbers of people were outraged by the suggestion that masculinity is a social construct.21

Socially Constructed Masculinity and Social Class

The EM programme was founded on the understanding that masculinity is a social construct and that particular cultures of masculinity in Ireland are damaging to boys and young men and therefore need to (and presumably can) be adapted and changed. Gleeson writes, ‘It is a fundamental premise of the “Exploring Masculinities” initiative, that masculinity is a social construct’ (2000: 1). Further to this controversial understanding, it is negatively traditional manifestations of masculinity that are considered to be the main problem to be addressed by the programme, with representations of violence, substance abuse and antisocial behaviour contributing largely to the increasing social marginalisation of some groups of primarily working class young men. The programme does not differentiate among boys and although it refers to the existence of discrimination and social disadvantage in relation to race, ethnicity, sexuality and disability (see figure 1.03) it makes no reference either to the influence of social class or to the probability that
it is working class boys who will likely experience these negative aspects of male youth culture in greater numbers than their middle or upper class peers.

Skeggs (2004) engages powerfully with this notion of an ‘expectation’ of deviance or excess in relation to working class youth. She argues that such portrayals are so familiar in the news, features and fictional programming – particularly crime dramas - that the association becomes automatic:

The representations unleash a chain of signifiers in which an underclass is not only represented, but also shaped by disparate discourses of familial disorder and dysfunction, dangerous masculinities and dependant, fecund and excessive femininities, of antisocial behaviour, and of moral and ecological decay ... continually cited across a range of sites so that it becomes normative (Skeggs 2004: 87).

Certainly the boys do, as will be seen in the case study documented in this dissertation, indulge in periods and activities that are defined by risk and excess. Yet, the major
influences and outlets for their cultural experiences, both positive and negative, are the
media by which they are surrounded (and in which they are vilified). This further
highlights the programme's omission. Through popular video games such as Grand Theft
Auto or Manhunt and television shows like The Sopranos or Jackass boys consume and
aspire to elements of macho masculinity that are then brought to bear on their lives both
in the classroom and beyond it. As it is currently designed, EM does not have the scope to
eclipse those messages or to effectively challenge that culture of 'machismo'. This
problem is addressed in chapter five where I ask what a newly designed programme
might look like were it to incorporate and engage with the popular culture of the boys.
This requires a re-evaluation of the way in which typical elements of boy culture are
understood. Such an effort is essential if debate about masculinity, boys, class and youth
is to move beyond the somewhat panicked discourse which characterises EM and the
discussion and negative publicity surrounding it.

However, despite this negative publicity, some would argue that EM is a genuinely
groundbreaking pedagogical development, setting a new tone for personal and social
development initiatives in Ireland.22 In terms of what it sets out to do, it is indeed a new
departure, putting major emphasis on the importance of the non-academic side of
education. Prioritising a time and space for boys to simply talk and discuss aspects of
their own lives is a valuable initiative in itself. Perhaps cognisant of the likely (negative)
reception to a proposal in which boys simply sit and talk, the programme was designed
(as will be shown throughout the chapters that follow) to resemble a traditional class
syllabus. Presentation of the material (see appendix)23 in the form of worksheets and right
and wrong answers in an approximation of the ‘learned content’ of other classes is fully
discussed in relation to the problems encountered by the programme and its delivery
within the classroom in chapter five. Despite these programmatic limits, I would argue
that EM, and its attendant publicity has provided a record of the particular anxieties and
concerns as they existed in relation to young men and elements of young masculine
culture throughout the 1990s. Health, both emotional and physical, was top of the agenda,
with particular concerns justifiably arising in relation to the suicide rates amongst young
Irish men. Suicide was, for example, the second biggest killer of young men aged 15 to
24 in 1999 (CSO 2000: NP). A total of 439 suicides were officially recorded as a cause of
death that year with males representing 79% of the victims (ibid: NP) Within the 15 to 24
year old age bracket, 24% of deaths were registered as suicide, with 30% due to road
traffic accidents (ibid: NP). Newspaper cuttings from the 1990s and up to the present
reflect the ongoing concerns relating to young men and depression, drug and/or alcohol
abuse, and crime. Stories with headlines such as ‘New Laddism blamed for big boys
behaving badly’, ‘The killer of men’, ‘Violent sports stars bad role models’, ‘Young
criminals step up the violence’ or ‘Girls continue to do better than boys’ narrated the fear
both of and for young men across Ireland. These stories and others like them focused on
questions which, although they extended far beyond the boundaries of gender identity to
broader issues of social class, education, mainstream popular culture and professional
sports, were labelled simplistically as being entirely related to a persons sex.

EM was a response to these issues and fears. The programme materials are made up of
stories and activities that, it was hoped, would encourage student-led discussion or at the
very least participation. Violence, criminality, mental and physical health are all dealt with in the programme with varying degrees of emphasis. For example, the dedicated section on alcohol and alcohol abuse is not particularly extensive, numbering only three pages out of 420, while drugs and drug abuse appear only in the second to last section on sport (EM 2000: 235-7). Alcohol as a theme does run throughout the programme, primarily as a backdrop, in the sections on violence and health. Here students are encouraged to engage with alcohol abuse as a contributing factor to other problems such as homelessness or parental abuse, rather than as a problem in itself (see: EM 2000: 157-161; 265-273). The more negative and threatening forms and aspects of male youth culture highlighted in the press, such as homophobic violence or street fighting appear in EM but, like the media coverage there is comparatively little attention to the more positive or less sensational aspects of youthful masculinity, a point that was raised by many of the chief opponents to the programme, including Irish Times columnist John Waters, who commented:

…it is not so much that recognised concepts of masculinity are openly attacked and vilified; rather that mainly allegedly negative aspects of male behaviour get highlighted. The section on sport obsesses about competitiveness, locker-room culture, bullying, racism and drug abuse, but has minimal celebration of the tremendous achievement and satisfaction available…’ (October 24 2000).

Waters’s remarks are also reflective of the fact, noted by Connell below, that the issue of a problematic or problematised masculinity is now common currency in the general media. This focused interest on men’s studies’ subject matter in the public sphere can, as will be discussed in the following section, be both productive and obstructionist.
Men's Studies and the Media

Questions about men, boys and gender have [thus] ceased to be a specialist concern of a small group of intellectuals. They have moved into the public arena, and though media attention will wax and wane, there is no reversing that move (Connell 2000: 4).

Since the early 1990s men's studies has been progressing through a particularly important phase in its development as an academic field, evolving from earlier formations into what Australian gender studies theorist R.W. Connell has described as men's studies' 'third approach' (2000: 8). The study of men and of masculinities is now, according to Connell, based on a form of social constructionism and firmly embedded within sociology, with outposts in anthropology, history and media studies. There is also much interest in the field within the public sphere that has contributed much of worth to men's studies. In particular it has raised questions about local masculinities and given insight into the way in which men and young men in particular, are perceived and understood by their own communities. This same public interest has also, however, contributed much confusion and contradiction, tending towards essentialist and divisive understandings of gender and gender differences especially with reference to the field of education. One of the most popular and pervasive threads running through the overall media coverage of men and issues surrounding men focuses on the understanding that boys, rather than setting the standard in literacy, numeracy and overall achievement within the Western education system, have somehow moved to occupy the educationally disadvantaged space on the margins, formerly inhabited by girls. Australian gender studies theorist Lynne Segal engages directly with these issues, discussing this repositioning of girls in education as 'yesterday's victims' through an exploration of the wider blurring of 'the
really significant differences in educational outcome' (Segal 2001: 232-33). Segal identifies these ‘significant’ differences as social class and ethnicity, highlighting the direct link between these categories and educational underachievement (ibid: 237). The absence of debate about class and ethnicity in relation to educational disadvantage is conspicuous and is fuelled by the largely unfounded belief that boys are no longer, as a result of positive discrimination, as effectively served by our education system as girls. In response to this newly antagonistic and competitive relationship that sets girls and boys as opposite but equal populations, yet ignores the disparity in power between and within both sides, the Australian theorist Bob Lingard writes:

The ‘What about the boys?’ refrain in contemporary educational discourse is one element of a broader masculinity politics which attempts to argue that men are the new disadvantaged and that masculinity is under siege and in crisis in the face of the putative success of the feminist reform project (1998:1).

He goes on to say:

...[S]omething needs to be done, for and about boys in school, but this needs to be framed by pro feminism and a recognition that feminism has not achieved its goals for girls in schooling or for women in broader society. Indeed it would appear that at the same time as some detraditionalisation of sex roles and expectations is occurring, there is also a retraditionalisation going on (Lingard 1998: 15).

Lingard’s comments provide an example of what is missing from not only the broader media coverage about masculinity but also from some of the more populist branches of men’s studies. He advocates a re-insertion of categories of class and power from which further power differentials of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability can be divined. Alan
Petersen also discusses the emptying out of theory from some branches of men’s studies. He writes: ‘Evidence of essentialism...is widespread in writings on gender, perhaps most evidently in popular (e.g., mythopoetic) literature on men’ (Petersen 2003: 56). Petersen underlines the need for a renewed emphasis on power and social class, proposing a politically and historically contextualised men’s studies. It is only in the context of class and power that masculinity or masculinities can have meaning or theoretical currency.

Further to this, the absence of the class dynamic in the media is symptomatic of the absence of a genuinely informed public debate about men and men’s issues, as noted above. The lack of a critically engaged analysis exploring men and masculinities in a field of power amounts to a denial of the existence of a class-based society, and is as prevalent in certain forms of men’s studies as it is in the media. This neglect of, or denial of, the continued existence of social class bias and disadvantage is an essential point for this research, especially when considered in relation to the emergence and ethos of the EM programme.

The educational disadvantage discourse has helped foster an aggrieved understanding of masculinity as somehow being threatened by a strong femininity, further expanding and legitimising the false premise that boys are now suffering academically as a result of pro-feminist plots to advance the performance of girls, at the cost of boys (Hayes 1998: 7-9).

This understanding is reflected in a large selection of newspaper headlines including stories by Irish Times educational commentators Sean Flynn and Emmett Oliver (2002) entitled ‘Girls outdo the boys across a range of subjects’ or Flynn (2002) entitled ‘Girls continue to do better than boys’. Debra Hayes, an educational theorist based at the
University of Technology in Sydney, writes of her disbelief at the passing of 'the mantle of disadvantage from girls to boys' without any attempt to explore the actuality of who that educationally-disadvantaged subject may be through a full and critical discussion of social disadvantage (Hayes 1998). The misleading nature of this discourse necessarily ignores, for its own validation, the fact that boys, particularly middle class and upper class boys, make up for any shortfall at second level by dominating top universities and senior management positions after they leave school (O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000: 23).

This confusion and lack of clarity about both academic success and larger issues related to men and masculinities happened as the related 'crisis for masculinity' discourse spiralled out of control. The notion of a crisis was taken up, in the public sphere, with an unprecedented fervour, subsequently losing all potential credibility as a useful and important approach to the study of men and masculinity. Damagingly for men's studies, one of its founding tenets - the existence of 'masculinities', as opposed to a single hegemonic 'masculinity' - is no longer understood in the context of power. The use of the word masculinities marked the beginning of the new men's studies (Brod and Kaufman 1994) and signified an understanding and a deep commitment to engaging with the discrepancies in power and status between different groups of men. 'Masculinities' illustrated the awareness that all men do not benefit from patriarchy, that diverse masculine identities are structured by social, environmental and economic forces such that they are heavily invested with categories of power and hierarchical structures of privilege and disadvantage. However, the notion of masculinities has, now, become popularised and 'has lost its dimension of power and simply come to signify diversity and
plurality’ (Petersen 2003: 57). All too often masculinities signifies little more than an anxiety about inclusiveness rather than any incisive questioning of the relative standing and discrepancies of power that exist between diverse masculine identities. EM is, I will argue, a casualty of this disengagement with the discourse of class-based power and privilege, losing ‘its dimension of power’ through representations of diversity which fail to question the structures within which they exist (Petersen 2003: 57). In the rush to include as many multiple representations of men as possible, (as seen in figures 1.04 a-b, in which the reader is told that ‘...we need to remember that some people suffer from a double disadvantage, e.g. a disabled Traveller, or indeed multiple disadvantage, i.e. a gay disabled traveller [sic], and so on’) the programme fails to engage with the larger institutional structures of disadvantage and class-based bias (EM 2000: 53).

As seen above, groups who regularly experience discrimination and bias, such as women, lesbians and gay men, members of the Travelling Community, members of ethnic and religious minorities, refugees and house husbands are represented and portrayed in a
manner that emphasises their struggle for equal respect and opportunities while outlining the obstacles they face on a daily basis. However, when examined more closely, the portrayal of these groups and individuals and the discrimination they experience is presented in a vacuum of power. Through this removal of larger power relationships, discrimination is reduced to a choice made by an individual, ignoring the ingrained structures of institutional bias that position members of these groups as second-class citizens. It is, as is discussed in the following section, essential that men’s studies in particular reengage with questions of power which can, while prioritising the experience of groups, connect that local experience to the larger global context within which it exists and is maintained.

The role of Ethnography

While the crisis discourse has been damaging for men’s studies, it has also produced major challenges to men’s studies theorists in terms of methodology and recently there has been a backlash of sorts against this discourse, both as it existed before and after the explosion of media and public interest in the subject. Chris Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, prominent British-based social researchers with a shared interest in gender, sexuality, identity and education, have, for example, returned to that notion in their new book *Men and Masculinities* and offer a contemporary re-evaluation of its role in the study of masculinity. They write:

Presently there is much talk across the Western world about a crisis in masculinity. Such discussions provide unclear and unbalanced accounts of men and masculinity with simple and complex explanations being developed that fail to connect with individuals’ experiences (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2003: 4).
Their comments are indicative of a new and more reflexive approach to the study of masculinity and its myriad manifestations. There is now a general awareness of the need to return to the crisis discourse in order to explore the ramifications of it not only for the continued existence of men’s studies, but for the ways in which work in that field is to be carried out in the future. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill point towards an emphasis on ethnography - on an exploration of masculinity as it is experienced by diverse groups and individuals - so as to better understand the relationship not only between masculinity and masculinities, but also between different ways of carrying out research into men and men’s lives. Reflecting on the wider debate within men’s studies on where its future lies offers a direct contrast to Connell’s call for men’s studies to move away from life histories, away from ethnography, beyond the local, and therefore beyond what he refers to as the ‘ethnographic moment’ (2000: 32). As Connell puts it:

Productive as this [the ethnographic moment] has been we now need to move beyond it, to think about gender relations on the scale of world society...we must think about how masculinities are constructed by global forces and how men in all their diversity, are positioned in global society. An international dimension keeps cropping up in local studies, from Walker’s (1998b) study of ‘car culture’ in the Australian working class to Tillner’s (1997) work on masculinities and racism in Austria. We need to consider how particular masculinities were produced by globalizing forces, throughout the history of imperialism and neocolonialism; and we need to study the constitution of masculinities and the gender politics of men under contemporary globalization (ibid: 32-33).

Connell’s comments on the passing, as he sees it, of the ‘ethnographic moment’ are telling, especially in light of his own words, ‘An international dimension keeps cropping up in local studies...’ (ibid: 32). He directs his reader to a number of local ethnographies
conducted with a full awareness of the global. His assertion that the ethnographic moment has passed is also somewhat contradictory when considered in the context of the large numbers of researchers within men’s studies and more particularly within cultural studies and youth studies who are engaging with questions of the impact of the global on the local in terms of youth culture and, specifically here, as is discussed in the following pages, in terms of male youth culture. Such work may be set in the micro world of a garage or a school or an obscure taste community, but it also has a macro dimension.

Cultural studies critic Ann Gray discusses the work of several other cultural studies practitioners, including Willis’s *Learning to Labour* in this context of a ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ distinction (2003: 142-43). She states:

> While Willis’ aim is clear in the title of his study, he was interested in what actually occurred in the classroom and, especially, what schooling and education meant to young men within this socio-economic category. Willis started from a quantifiable fact, i.e. that working-class kids ended up in particular occupations but wanted to know how that reproduction came about. His was a study of a ‘micro’ world, that of a school, but it was set within a ‘macro’ understanding of the broader social context (2003: 42).

Two of the key texts which thus inform this research are located between the micro and macro worlds of two groups of boys. Willis’s research is, as noted by Gray, set within the bounded world of the school, ‘Hammertown Compreheasive’, but with a full cognisance of the broader context in which the subjects of his ethnography exist. Willis engages his respondents in relation to their socialising, their work and their home life, building an understanding of their perceptions of masculinity and of their own social roles. The second key text is McLaren’s (1999) study, set in a disadvantaged Junior High School
that he refers to as ‘St. Ryan’. The school is in inner-city Toronto, caters largely to disadvantaged young people of Portuguese Catholic origin, and is considered a disadvantaged or ‘problem’ school. McLaren studied the interactions between the students, their home culture and the school culture. He also explored the way in which the students are schooled into academic failure by the curriculum and fixed there by their Catholic faith. His work is located within the micro world of the school and his ethnography takes into account and spans all aspects of the subjects’ wider social and environmental contexts.

Both Willis and McLaren’s work reflect the strategies outlined by anthropologist, George E. Marcus in his essay ‘Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System’. Marcus discusses the dual approach inherent in writing ethnography and identifies as a key problematic the need to represent the ways the closely observed world of the case study is rooted in what he describes as ‘larger and more impersonal systems’ (1986: 166). He posits two possible solutions to this, the first being the sequential narrative, and the second, the strategically situated ethnography. In relation to the use of that second technique, Marcus discusses the work of Willis’ Learning to Labour. He writes:

Specifically, Willis strategically locates his subject matter as the oppositional culture that white working class males create in school. His ethnography is replete with references to other locales in which his students live, such as the home, street and dance hall, but he chooses the school environment because this is where class conflict has a day-to-day manifestation, and it is where the critical development of class consciousness occurs... (Marcus 1986: 174)
Willis’s work is, as noted, a key reference throughout and is discussed in more depth in the final section of this chapter. McLaren’s work is returned to in chapter three. Both texts offer insights not only into debates on class but on education, policy, gender, social conditioning and ethnographic research and practice. Other interdisciplinary ethnographies drawn upon throughout include anthropologist Douglas E. Foley’s work on high school masculinity, Pilkington and Johnson’s (2003) work on globo/local British masculinities, and Nayak’s (2003) study of post-industrial working class boys. In *Learning Capitalist Culture* (1996) Foley focuses on the production of class and racial identities in and through school in a small town on the American-Mexican border. His work features chronologically ordered conversations between himself and Willis, as well as an in-depth discussion of Chicano males who adopt ‘ear’ole’ (Willis’ lads’ term referring to academic achievers at Hammertown Comprehensive) behaviour and who, as a result, are perceived to be acting ‘white.’ For their part, Pilkington and Johnson bring together theory and research on the relationship between the global and local in youth cultural practice while Nayak looks at youths facing long-term unemployment. Each one of these ethnographies is located at the intersection of cultural and youth studies, is situated in a school or community context, and emphasises the influence of shifts in global economic structures on the lives and cultures of their spatiotemporally fixed local subjects.

**Beyond the School Gates – Global Masculinities and Local Fieldwork**

Reflecting this reconnection with the ‘experiences of individuals’ my fieldwork research was carried out in the EM classroom at Hillside School which provided the base for my
small-scale case study. This took place over two full school years running from September 2002 to June 2003 and again from September 2003 to June 2004, with subsidiary visits both before and after those periods. Hillside is a single-sex boys' school run by a Catholic Religious Order of Brothers but staffed primarily by lay teachers. The school lies on the outskirts of Cork City in a disadvantaged community which, as is discussed in full in chapter two, is in the process of significant transformation in terms of population composition and economic investment. As noted in the Introduction, two groups of boys took part in the case study with each group containing approximately 12 boys, aged 15 and 16, and in transition year. In the classroom, the Hillside boys practiced a vigorous and defensive masculinity in direct response to the programme materials and the challenges offered by it and they rejected outright the possibility of a critical re-evaluation of their own values and beliefs. Research was carried out primarily through participant observation whereby I attended the EM class on a regular basis. The structured, supervised arena provided by the classroom reassured parents and teachers and the boys who took part in the case study themselves, rendering my presence there generally unproblematic. While present in the classroom, my focus was on the particular youth culture of these boys who responded to the programme's challenges by offering examples and incidences from their own experiences. In this way, the defence put up by the boys in reacting to the questions posed by EM presented me with a unique opportunity to enter and gain insight into their social and cultural world. The moment of confrontation between the culture and values of the boys and the stance adopted by the programme in relation to the constitution of masculine identities provided a vital and charged environment in which to conduct fieldwork. Consequently, even though the field
site is situated within the EM classroom, this research is not solely about EM in terms of a review of its efficacy or performance record in the classroom. The containment of the fieldwork is physical, in that the interactions take place within the four walls of a classroom, however the scope and range of the thesis stretches beyond this. The relationship between the boys and the adult, outside world beyond their peer groupings is often antagonistic and the majority of their social rituals, interests and structures are at odds with it. The boys are continuously aware that they are embedded in what seems to them, and what often is, a hostile environment. This thesis documents, through the boys’ stories as they are recounted in the classroom, their adolescent experiences of the adult world outside of the school.

The impact of the global on the local is a key issue for this research as it has such a disproportionate effect on the particular youth culture of the boys, influencing everything from their language to their clothing to their future employment prospects. I explore the culture of the boys primarily through their classroom interaction with and reaction to EM, relying primarily on the information gathered and the experiences gained throughout my time in the classroom. The research is also indebted to the reservoirs of popular culture artefacts upon which this group of young men rely so heavily. The fieldwork has produced richly detailed information in the form of fieldnotes, audio recordings and photographs, which comprise the primary data in this research. In order to reflect the primacy of this ethnographic data, I turn here to anthropologist Charlotte Aull Davies’ commentary on her use of and understanding of ethnography as both a theoretical term and a research tool. Describing both the process and its written outcome she writes:
I adopt a broad interpretation of ethnography as a research process based on fieldwork using a variety of (mainly qualitative) research techniques but including engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time. The eventual written product – an ethnography – draws its data primarily from this fieldwork experience and usually emphasises descriptive detail as a result (Aull Davies 1999: 4-5).

Focusing on the particular youth culture of a locally specific group of young men or boys aged between 15 and 16 with a view to understanding and exploring their marginalisation and cultural detachment and the ways they have been pathologised, requires sustained engagement with the problematic aspects of their youth culture. These aspects support and sustain the negatively traditional masculinities practised and embodied by the Hillside boys in that the music they listen to, the film and television programmes they watch and the video games they play are at the centre of their lives both in and out of school. These cultural artefacts, encountered through the references made to them in the classroom and in the hallways of Hillside school, are at the centre of my analysis. Behind the detailed exploration of the popular culture artefacts with which the boys engage, the research is further reliant upon a personal knowledge of the community in which the boys live. Descriptive data is grounded for research purposes in the particular historical, social and political context of that local community. An understanding of the history of Hillside is essential for an understanding of the way in which the larger world has impacted upon the neighbourhood, affecting the whole structure of the community in which the boys live and thus shaping and reshaping their culture and providing the basis for their interactions with a larger social formation.
Boys to Men: Popular Culture and the Path to Manhood

The influence of popular culture on the masculinity exhibited by the boys in my case study is significant. The boys are extremely resistant to the adult-sanctioned forms of masculinity presented to them in the programme and prefer to continue to reference their own role models and belief systems. My experiences in the classroom make it clear that any research into the field of youth culture must be supported by in-depth knowledge of popular culture and of the current trends within sport, fashion, music, television, film and video gaming in order to have a fully contextualised and informed understanding of the experience of youth and gendered identities. It becomes essential once it is understood that young people, either male or female, do not leave these important influences at the classroom door. Rather, their taste in music, video games or television shows is brought directly into the classrooms and hallways where it makes up their informal student curriculum. This informal curriculum has the potential to create conflict amongst the formal school codes of appearance, behaviour and values. Interaction between popular culture and the classroom is an important and strategic site for research, given that there is a marked tendency for teachers and curriculum reviewers to ignore it as a teaching resource. Not only are the educational potential and the possibilities offered by technologies such as mobile phones or video games ignored, but popular culture itself is generally disregarded even though it is encountered by, engaged with and integrated into the social structures and relationships among students on a daily basis.  

The consistency of all of the elements that comprise teenage cultures across class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality means that teachers, schools and curriculum designers are neglecting the
Universally applicable interests of young people and are turning the classroom into a ‘profoundly undemocratic space’ (Collins 1994: 60).

EM presents what it considers should be of significance to its audience but does not, I would argue, attempt to do this by accessing and making reference to the boys’ social and cultural networks. Rather the programme tends to present a didactic, top-down model of how young men should be, should feel and should think. Section headings from within the programme include examples of directive and ‘improving’ material such as; ‘Listening to Women’s Voices’ ‘Understanding Gay People’ ‘Disarming the Fist’ and ‘A Challenge for Men’. Mullins (1998), in the conclusion to her brief study based on the early programme materials, acknowledges the difficulty intervention programmes have in making an impact. She attributes this to the multiplicity of influences offered to young people outside of school - most importantly, the many more attractive and exciting models of masculinity and femininity. This is a recurring theme in the majority of school-based ethnographies from Britain and North America as well as in the Irish research directed particularly towards academic achievement and failure. The efforts made by EM to attract and interest the target audience in direct competition with these outside influences are the focus of chapter five.

G’Donnell and Sharpe (2000) also discuss this growing gap between the aims and culture of schools, teachers and their students. Their research, conducted across four London schools, sought to explore how boys of different social classes, races and ethnicities come to think of themselves as men and behave in a manner that they themselves understand to
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be sufficiently masculine. Further to this O'Donnell and Sharpe expand the notion of school as a ‘masculinizing’ institution and add to Willis’s understanding of schools as both producers and reinforcing agents of classed identities by adding the categories of race and ethnicity. Connell refers to the ‘training [of] boys’ bodies’ in relation to the influence of sporting culture and general physicality in the school setting, both in a structured sense, and more importantly, in the unsupervised peer group relationships (2000: 66). In response to this, O'Donnell and Sharpe found that the influence of the school as a masculising force, as seen through the messages passed on by teachers to students and in the broader knowledge-based curriculum and school environment, still operates. There exists an equal balance between the overt influences of the peer group and the more subtle messages passed on by the school and the school environment itself.

An obvious example of the school environment shaping the masculinities of schoolboys occurs through academic streaming and the subsequent classification of some boys as intellectual failures by virtue of their positioning. Connell, re-emphasising the importance of the peer group within the influential sphere of the school environment, elaborates on the process by which some masculinities are shaped by an adherence to the system, such as in the case of academic achievers, while others are shaped by resistance to, and subversion of the school curriculum. The schools visited by these theorists reflect my own findings from Hillside and show that while schools and the school environment do emphatically shape boys and their masculinities, the driving force behind this shaping is in fact the informal curriculum or peer group culture which is generally based on a subversion or appropriation of key tenets of the official school culture and curriculum.
This results in a situation (familiar to all of the teachers spoken to in this study) whereby the school attempts to direct students one way while the peer group pulls them another way, offering far more attractive, ‘cooler’ personas than those which can be offered by the school or the teachers. The boys construct their own masculine identities by measuring themselves against their peers and calculating their own positions in the masculine hierarchy. The peer group thus validates and censures certain forms of masculinity and is a powerful force in their lives. Yet, O’Donnell and Sharpe also note, as do others, that boys – especially in single-sex schools which are generally male-dominated and certainly have male teachers in senior management and teaching roles - are influenced by what they see around them at school. Boys do not receive balanced representations of gender in all-male environments and often the culture of boys’ schools reflects not only hyper-competitive sporting cultures, but an ‘all men together’ attitude within which sexism and other discriminatory ways of thinking can and do flourish. The ratio of male to female staff and the roles they perform are significant factors in the single-sex school environment and were discussed in interviews I conducted with several of the teachers facilitating EM. In response to my question about how many women were on staff Hillside’s Paul had this to say:

We have about nine women but none of them would be permanent which, in itself, is a significant indicator. Most of the staff were recruited when the school was expanding between 1969 and 1977/78. All the staff recruited then would have been male, and that probably wasn’t by accident, there was a strong emphasis on hurling, football, GAA games … the subjects were male orientated in the strongest tradition of a Christian Brothers boy’s secondary school with strong emphasis on the academic side as well ….
The predominantly male environment produces disciplinary problems associated with large numbers of teenage boys contained in small spaces and leads to a necessary over-emphasis on power and control. The importance of sport and physical activity in the curriculum of boys’ schools is a basic response to the need to provide for the release of energy; however this emphasis also leads to the often over-privileged position given to sport and to sporting success. The highly competitive nature of schoolboy sports means the validation of masculinity through physicality and the able muscular body is reinforced daily in boys’ schools as being an ideal state. This is seen clearly in the general attitudes to successful student athletes (Lynch and Lodge 1999: 233-234).

**Hammertown to Hillside: Charting New Paths**

The original aim of *Learning to Labour* was to look at English working class culture in detail in a midlands industrial town. The work then developed into a focus on both how and why working class boys seem to accept, through their own apparent choice, a lifetime of poorly paid manual labour. Using an ethnographic approach, including participant observation, direct observation and group interviews, Willis tracks the production of what he refers to as a ‘counter-school culture’ in a group of young men, whom he refers to as the ‘lads’, in their fifth year at a midlands comprehensive school (1977: 3). His primary interests are in the reproduction of a working class identity through labour power and how it is understood subjectively when it is applied to work. This leads him to a critical examination of the way in which young, non-academic, white, working class males are socialised into a culture of academic failure and social immobility.
Willis’s ethnography, although problematic particularly in relation to questions of
gendered ethnographic practice and the role and responsibilities of the researcher (an
issue I raise in chapter two), is a primary resource. In the same way as the oppositional
culture created by the ‘lads’ in Willis’s ethnography is transferred beyond the classroom,
so too is the defensive masculinity seen in the response of the Hillside boys to EM. The
‘lads’, in what has become a familiar phrasing when referring to the interactions between
school curriculum and student cultures, reject school, preferring instead to engage with
their own counter culture, which as they understand it, better serves their needs both now
and in their immediate future. This counter-school culture is based on a strong negatively
traditional working class identity where masculinity is inseparable from ‘meaningful’
work, physical strength and the role of the male as sole breadwinner and head of
household. Willis’s ‘lads’ hold defiantly sexist and racist views that appear to be as
integral a part of their masculine identity as any of the above. The whole understanding
of negatively traditional masculinities cannot, however, be founded simply on the
disservice it does to the young men who embody such forms. The racism, sexism and
homophobia that characterised Willis’s ‘lads’, 25 years on, still characterises the Hillside
boys. For all of their engagement with racial and sexual diversity through the myriad
forms of popular culture with which they engage, they remain profoundly racist,
homophobic and sexist. The worst insult that can be levelled at another boy in the
classroom or hallway is that he is a ‘gayboy’, a ‘queer’ or a ‘fag’. The boys hold
extremely traditional views on the division of labour in terms of gender and are deeply
opposed to any alternatives such as house husbands or male childminders. Their attitudes
towards race are more complex. They valorise and emulate African American and Afro-
Caribbean musicians but are biased against the larger African communities in the local area such as Cork city’s growing Nigerian population. It would be easy to, much like Willis, refrain from open condemnation of the racist and sexist attitudes of the boys and of others like them and to regard such attitudes as the last gasp of a terminal masculinity, motivated by fear of difference and usurpation. This, however, would negate any call for structural and institutional changes to encourage and foster young masculinities that are receptive to diversity and change and not motivated to forms of discrimination and bias because of social and personal insecurity.

Willis has been criticised by other theorists, most notably and as discussed above, by Skeggs (1992) in relation to his lack of engagement with the sexism and racism of the ‘lads’. He is criticised for his over-identification with them, his romanticising of their culture and for his lack of condemnation of the negative attitudes expressed by them. Skeggs writes:

Willis provides descriptions of how sexuality pervades the power structure of the classroom: the ‘lads’ fake masturbation, they continually recite chat-up lines, accusations of homosexuality are frequently invoked to win points in a competitive conversation, they call a female teacher ‘a cunt’ to undermine her authority, they are admired by teachers for their sexual prowess. The language they use is brutal, violent and misogynist; women are there to be used, they are defined, labelled and categorised in ways that ‘the lads’ fiercely resist. They speak of rape: ‘you know, you’re struggling with her, fighting, to do it, and you’ve got her knickers down’ (p.43) which is theorised by Willis as a complex of emotion. Yet even the fear of women, noted by McRobbie (1980), articulated through their frequent references to menstruation, is seen as a product of their resistance, rather than as a legitimation and articulation of power and domination (1992: 191).
In addition, Angela McRobbie in *Settling Accounts with Subculture: A Feminist Critique* (1991), in a broader attack on the male centricity of youth culture research, takes issue with the failure of male researchers to adequately distance themselves from the groups they study. She sees them as losing objectivity and critical awareness. One of the criticisms that has been levelled against Willis in *Learning to Labour*, is what sociologist Les Back has described as ‘fictitiously dissolving the division between self and other’ (1993: 222). Back, reflecting on his own experiences carrying out ethnographic research in a working class neighbourhood close to where he grew up, imagined links and a connection between himself and his young subjects that he realised can no longer exist. By virtue of his age, his new ‘class identity’ (in the eyes of the local youth he is middle class - a social worker, or a teacher figure) and his position as a researcher, the nature of his relationship to these young people has changed. The experience through which he came to this realisation opened up for him ‘issues which remain unresolved’ but which are grounded in the necessity for the ethnographic researcher to identify and explore the position from which he or she speaks (ibid: 223).

In the appendices to *Learning to Labour*, Willis reproduces conversations he had with the ‘lads’ about the research he conducted and how they feel about it now. He includes this ‘edited transcription of a group discussion’ (194). The following sequential excerpts are extracted from this:

**Bill:** You were staff (at first), you were somebody in between, later on I took you as one of us.

**Joey:** (...) you were someone to pour our hearts out to. You were
obviously as old as most of the staff, and yet none of the staff...they represented...they were so far apart from us...

Spanksy: (...) If any of me mates had told me, ‘Oh come on Spanksy, you’m too much there mate’ l’d’a’ said, ‘Ok it’s gone far enough’. Comin’ from you at that time, it would have seemed as if it was one of them tellin’ me (Willis 1977: 197).

This false ‘dissolving of distance or division’ between Willis and the boys is problematic, as is his lack of engagement with that relationship (Back 1993: 222) Both echo McRobbie’s questioning of the male researcher and his research persona in the field. Taking this critical engagement on board, the influence of Willis’s work is still recognised and appreciated as one of the most far-reaching and important studies of late adolescent boys and their attitudes to work, education, and their own masculinity. Willis’s work foregrounds the importance of the home life of the boys, showing how their families, friends and local communities support and sustain their counter school culture by encouraging the traditional form of hyper-masculine masculinity practised by the ‘lads’. He balances the multiple spheres of activity of the ‘lads’, switching between their performances of masculinity in the home, at work and in school, while either under the eye of teachers or unsupervised. Willis’s study is a notable example of interdisciplinary crossover and integration, as it combines elements of a sociological emphasis on structural and material dimensions of the lives of young men with documentation of their free unstructured time and their own interests and cultural expression. Learning to Labour has certainly provoked responses and Willis’s work has shaped numerous case studies that update his research in the context of contemporary school and social life. In these more recent case studies, elements of a broader racial and ethnic diversity are
acknowledged in addition to a more visible debate on sexuality and sexual orientation. This fosters an awareness of where the descendants of the ‘lads’, today’s working class, non-academic youths, are situated, both socially and culturally, on the margins. There are strong echoes of Willis’s findings throughout my research, as there are in the majority of school-based ethnographies with a focus on class or gender. My work is also located in the classroom, foregrounding the importance of the outside influences and references shared by the Hillside boys. The importance of their broader community, their social and economic class position and their shared understanding of what it is to be male is understood and discussed through the ways in which these structures impact upon their attitudes to work, family, gender, race and difference.

The Hillside boys adhere to an inherited masculinity that is founded on the exclusion of anyone who does not conform to the requirements of a traditional and increasingly socially invalid way of being. Willis found that the boys he interviewed and observed attached massive importance to the ability to do hard, physical labour. They created their own sense of themselves as male through what he described as a primitive confrontation with their individual and collective physicality as they experienced it through their understanding of meaningful work (Willis 1977: 53). For the ‘lads’, work is a direct exhibition of their masculinity with strength and ability serving as powerful signifiers of a physical male hierarchy. In 1970s Britain the ‘lads’ measured their manliness in terms of work, comparing and evaluating themselves and their peers alongside the ‘womanly’ nature of office-based or white-collar work. The Hillside boys and others like them in Ireland and Britain have strong similarities to the ‘lads’. They share similarly negative
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attitudes towards people of different races and ethnic origins, they hold firm to traditional gender roles, expressing distaste for women in what they see as male roles in the workplace and vice-versa. Where it differs, however, is in what happens after they leave school: they do not have the same, albeit limited, opportunities available to the Hammertown ‘lads’ in terms of employment without qualifications and at a relatively young age. O’Donnell and Sharpe have noted that the academic underachievement of boys, despite how it is presented in the media, is not a new phenomenon. It has, as is seen in Willis’s work, been historically ignored as such boys typically entered the workplace at the lowest level of manual labour, requiring no formal qualifications (2000: 22). Yet, as my research reflects, these boys can no longer be ignored due to changes in global and national economies and the nature of work in contemporary society. This means that failing male students who leave school early or without formal qualifications now face little opportunity for successful employment. Boys like the ‘lads’ are no longer absorbed out of public sight and kept off unemployment records by traditional structures of work and home. In the same way as girls no longer disappear into the hidden private role of mother, wife and homemaker, neither do boys disappear into entry level manual labour or industrial roles. Western economies are now primarily knowledge and service based, with skilled, educated workers required for the former, and an unskilled permanently temporary female workplace preferred for the latter.

These modern day incarnations of the ‘lads’ are thus in a very different position. Their home culture and environment as well as their own version of the counter-school culture, or peer group culture arguably, as will be seen in the following chapters, still socialises
them into a traditional working class masculine identity, even if this identity has little or no currency outside of those environments. Willis explores the way in which the home culture and environments of the ‘lads’ prepared them, from an early age, for a future of manual labour. He goes on to track the processes by which the ‘lads’ are socialised into a familial and peer group culture of academic failure. Documenting the reproduction of working class identity and working class masculinity through labour power, he further examines how their destiny as low-paid blue-collar workers is reinforced and strengthened on a daily basis by interaction with their peers through the sharing of their counter-school culture in the classroom setting. The ‘lads’ have rejected school and regard their teachers as class enemies as, by virtue of their position as teacher, they are de facto members of the middle class. This extreme situation, characterised as ‘them or us’ is not replicated in Hillside or in the school ethnographies of Mac an Ghaill (1994), Foley (1996) or O’Donnell and Sharpe (2000). There is, however, still a growing gap between students and teachers, one identified by American theorist Ava Collins (1994) in her writings on critical pedagogy.

Collins looks specifically at the relationship between understandings of popular culture and teaching theory and practice and believes that the explosion in popular culture is the single greatest challenge to the way we understand and dispense knowledge (Collins 1994: 56). Her argument is based on the understanding that when students step into the classroom they do not leave their own particular social, economic and cultural contexts outside. She further argues that the growth of popular and accessible yet advanced technology has fundamentally changed the relationships between student and teacher and
traditional forms of knowledge and popular culture. Collins feels it is the duty of the educator to work with the knowledge that students already have in order to remove the risk of silencing their voices. If the teacher can incorporate elements of the students' lives into the classroom without being patronising, the knowledge held by the students in relation to huge reservoirs of popular texts is then legitimised and validated instead of being labelled as an inferior form of knowledge.

Much like Willis's 'lads', the Hillside boys feel that school, as it exists, has little to offer them. Coming from a community with low levels of participation in further education, they do not see a relationship of causality between further education and financial or personal success and security. Further disadvantages associated with school centre on the fact that while the school does present opportunities for them to perform their hypermasculine roles, they are continuously, and in their view, humiliatingly, under threat from teachers and their authority. The Hillside boys perform different masculinities in different situations. In the corridors or in unsupervised classrooms the most primitive rules apply, with the biggest and the oldest at the top of the food chain. The sports field, as noted, provides opportunities for physical superiority to determine status, as does the playground. The classroom requires a different mode, and the EM classroom requires a heightened form of this resentful and aggrieved masculinity. This resentment stems in part from one of the fundamental elements of the Hillside boys' masculine identities, and that is their feeling, shared by Willis's 'lads', that they are adult males trapped in the childish world of school and lessons, when they could and should be working and earning money and taking full part in the adult male world (Willis 1977: 39). The Hillside boys
are trapped in the 'no man's land' between childhood and adulthood: they have the responsibilities of adults in terms of part-time jobs outside of school, relationships and family duties. In return for this they feel entitled to adult pleasures and so at 15 and 16 the majority of them smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol and are sexually active. Their resentment at being treated like children by the occasionally patronising programme materials is revealed as they expressed it throughout the fieldwork. This irritation is further heightened by uncertainty and insecurity about the next step towards their traditional and inherited identity benchmarks of breadwinner and head of household. They are, like Nayak's Geordie lads, to be denied full masculine status in their own eyes, the eyes of their peers and their community by global changes to industry and services that have cut them out of the job market (Nayak 2003: 309). In this way the Hillside boys both anticipate and lower their expectations of fulfilling the requirements to take their place in the hegemonic order of traditional Irish working class masculinity.

O'Donnell and Sharpe consciously do not use the term hegemonic masculinity in relation to their subjects as they feel they are precluded by age from being part of the hegemonic structure of masculinity. They do acknowledge that the boys in their study are actively anticipating their place within the patriarchal system (O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000: 10). This is at odds with my experience in the classroom. There it is clear that the Hillside boys consider themselves as already adult and resent their lack of autonomy and power. The defensive masculinities they perform are closely related to, in their eyes, an unequal and unfair power relationship and they reject, as did the Hammertown 'lads', the school, its culture and its opportunities for academic and social advancement. Taking this
defensive relationship further, Willis demonstrates how the dominant educational models act to confirm for the ‘lads’ that their main option as a class is manual labour while also dislocating any culpability by referring to their disruptive behaviour and lack of academic ability. This refusal to make relevant the school curriculum to the Hammertown ‘lads’ and the consequent blaming of their academic failure on their own poor behaviour is not something Hillside could stand accused of. The staff and principal at Hillside are fully aware of the needs of the community they serve and make every effort through the curriculum and through the support services they offer to best interest, retain and provide for the futures of the students who attend the school. The battle to keep young working class men engaged and interested enough to stay in the classroom beyond the compulsory cut-off of 16 years of age is larger than any one school and requires institutional and structural efforts and change. Allied to this challenge is the need to transform the association of both male and female working class youth with immorality, lack of self control and a criminality burdensome to the rest of the law-abiding, hard-working social world (Skeggs 2004: 87).

So it would seem that this understanding that school and what lies beyond it has little to offer the ‘lads,’ has not only refused to go away but has become far more urgent. For Willis’s ‘lads’ there were still factories and steel mills that absorbed them and their physical strength after school, thus removing them from public view. Their work, dangerous and poorly paid as it was, also gave the ‘lads’ an identity and a clear role in their community as a ‘real man’ and a potential ‘breadwinner’. Now, however, 25 years on from Willis’s research, boys like the ‘lads’ are arguably in a far more precarious state
(Arnot 2004: 32; Rizvi 2004: 87). They are also more visible as early school leavers, young fathers and holders of traditional understandings of masculinity that no longer have currency in wider social life. Taking into account the global changes which have taken place in that period of 25 years - deindustrialisation and the growth of the service industry – it could be argued that there is now, in a very real sense, an actual crisis, not for a generalised masculinity, but for the globally impacted local lives of young working class boys in Ireland and Western Europe. This crisis is inextricably linked to the social and economic position, rather than the gender, of those who are caught up in it.

This dialogue between the local and the global, between class and gender and between the competing ideals of masculinity across the spheres of education and popular culture continues throughout this thesis, shaping my methodology and my presence in the field. It seems to me, having experienced the culture of the Hillside boys through their stories, recounted experiences, attitudes and beliefs, that there can be no more productive way of engaging with their youthful masculinities and besieged cultures than through a rich knowledge of and an awareness of their social background and environment. It further seems that an engagement with social class provides a crucial code of belonging and of knowledge and is essential to fully understand and explore the negative connotations of their particular local culture which contributes to their increasing social marginalisation within the wider, national community. Bringing these approaches together with an analysis and understanding of the material cultures of the boys is one of the fundamental aims of the research. Chapter two continues this process, exploring the methodological implications of carrying out classroom-based fieldwork while introducing the boys and
their environment in terms of Hillside school itself as well as the boys' immediate local community.
Transition year is typically understood by teachers and the Department of Education and Science to be a year in which students are allowed to mature, to take an interest in social, personal and community affairs and to generally broaden their interests. It is a break between the rigours of the first state examination – the Junior Certificate – and the final examination, the Leaving Certificate. It is generally and traditionally regarded by students as a ‘doss’ year, where they have no exams and therefore can take a break before going on to fifth year and beginning study for their Leaving Cert. Recent publication of research on transition year shows that students who take a fourth year gain more points in the Leaving Certificate and are more likely to go on to higher education than those who do not. Released in January 2005 and entitled \textit{The Transition Year Programme: An Assessment}, the study was carried out by Emer Smyth, Delma Byrne and Carmel Hannan for the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in Dublin. However, they have also shown that transition year is of little benefit to those attending schools in disadvantaged areas where fourth year is often compulsory. They also highlight the cancelling out of the academic advantage gained by some students in the case of those who begin working part-time jobs in transition year and who continue to work up to their Leaving Certificate. A complementary study has just been released by the ESRI, authored by Selina McCoy and Emer Smyth (2005), and entitled \textit{At Work in School: Part-time Employment among Second Level Student}. This study further supports and reinforces concerns about the effect part time work can have on students and on their education.


Much of the media coverage of the programme focused on the belief that EM was a ‘feminist plot’ designed to emasculate boys. Columnist for \textit{The Irish Times}, John Waters described EM as:

\quad...a flabby, intellectually dishonest vehicle for the implanting by stealth of feminist ideologies in the heads of teenage boys. Mostly it reads like ‘doss-class’ fodder, offering a break from serious schoolwork. But the flabbiness, on closer study, reveals itself as a strategy to camouflage the true purpose. The bulk of the programme is an unwieldy woollen glove, inside which lurks the steely fist of Big Mac feminism (Waters 2000 October)
The issue of differentiation within the male sex is an essential one, masculinity and its relationship to categories of social class, sexuality, race, ethnicity and disability influences strongly both the construction of masculine identity and the way in which that identity is perceived by others.

The programme, with its own emergence marking a key moment, is invaluable as documentary evidence of the state of the debate on youth, men and masculinities in the Irish context: Hearn et al, (in a paper extracted from their larger research project) offer a synopsis of the state academic discourse on men from ten countries across the European Union. In relation to Ireland they conclude that:

In Ireland scholarship has been slow to incorporate the study of men and masculinities into gender studies, and men as gendered subjects have remained largely outside of the gaze of critical injury. Traditional Irish hegemonic masculinity was rural, dominated by the Catholic Church and privileged marriage, sexual purity, and the celibate life. In the context of rapid social and economic development, it has been replaced by a metropolitan business masculinity influenced socially and economically by global culture. Beyond this hegemonic form, men live out diverse lives and a plurality of masculinities coexist... Even by the standards of the arguably quite slow development of critical studies of men in North America and the United Kingdom, academic research into men in Ireland has barely begun (Hearn et al 2002: 393-394).

Books such as the Irish psychologist Anthony Clare’s *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* (2000) and American feminist theorist Susan Faludi’s (2000) *Stiffed: The Betrayal of Modern Man* (2000), along with the emergence of men’s ‘liberation’ groups and web communities all contributed to and both sustained and were sustained by the media focus on masculinity and the belief that men had become victims of a new female oriented world. Popular men’s studies books within what was known as the mytho-poetic movement have also had a strong influence here, key texts include Robert Bly’s *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990), Sam Keen’s *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (1991) and Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette’s *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover* (1990) all of which called for a return to the ‘essence of true masculinity’. These books re-directed discussion about masculinity and femininity to essentialist notions of male and female difference and sex roles, they hark back to a mythical, glorious time when men were ‘real men’ and often, as with Moore and Gillette’s work, look as far back as Cro-Magnon man:

When we visit the caves of our distant Cro-Magnon ancestors in France, and descend into the dark of those otherworldly, and inner-worldly, sanctuaries and light our lamps, we jump back in startled awe and wonder at the mysterious
hidden wellsprings of masculine might we see depicted there (Moore and Gillette 1990: 3).


See Devlin (2006) for more on the predominantly negative coverage or media representation of young men.

The NCCA was established in 1987 to advise the Minister for Education about all matters relating to the national curriculum across early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. It has a website, accessible at www.ncca.ie. In July 2001 it was re-established as a statutory body and given a new brief under the Education Act (1998). Its primary objective is to contribute to improving the quality of education in schools through the provision of advice to the Minister as a result of research carried out in reviewing and updating the national curriculum and assessment procedures of pupils in school and in the State examinations In this case their brief was to hold consultative meetings with all interested parties and to accept tenders from individuals and teams of academics who had an interest in carrying out the research phase of the report. The review was commissioned in October 2000 and in July 2001 the NCCA accepted two tenders. One was from Máirtín Mac an Ghaill at the University of Newcastle. The second tender was accepted from Dr Paul Conway and Dr Joan Hanafin, both based in the Department of Education at University College Cork. With both tenders having been accepted, it was decided after discussion between the NCCA representatives and the applicants that both would work together to carry out the research report. The combined research team conducted an extensive review of the programme, the materials, its reception in the classroom, and the media coverage before making several recommendations to the Department with reference to the future of the programme and other programmes of its type. The NCCA held a series of consultative meetings with groups who had availed of the opportunity to make an oral presentation to both NCCA representatives and the members of the research team. These meetings were held on 18, 19 and 31 October 2001 and were attended by Anne Looney, Chief Executive of the NCCA and John Hammond, Deputy Chief Executive as well as the three researchers. A total of 9 meetings took place with members of parent and other interest groups (www.NCCA.ie [Accessed October 2001]. The NCCA also provided its own
commentary on the main points and recommendations made by the research team and this commentary provides an introduction to the main body of the report.

Out of a recorded 42 letters published on the subject, seen across 19 publications including all of the daily national newspapers, three main Sunday newspapers, the Gay Community News and The Catholic World News amongst others, 23 of those letters were written to The Irish Times (Mac an Ghaill et al, 2002: 103-6).


Cleary set up Amen, a support group for victims of male domestic violence in December 1997 (see http://www.Amen.ie. for details of the origins of the group) The group, based in Navan, County Meath runs a help-line which its web-site claims has been contacted by in excess of 20,000 men. The group liaises with unspecified men’s groups around the country about support and legal matters including separations, access to the family home and child custody. Amen also maintains two websites. The first is dedicated to the group’s original project, representing and alerting people to the existence of male victims of domestic violence. The second site maintained by Amen, http://www.exploringmasculinities.com, is dedicated to the posting of negative reviews and press coverage of the EM Programme.

Extract from an interview conducted with ‘David’ a contributor to the programme.

Commentators referring to the existence of a ‘feminist plot’ include Waters in The Irish Times who refers to ‘home-grown man haters’ (October 24 2000) and AMEN whose submission to the NCCA claimed EM is ‘...an attempt to indoctrinate a generation of young Irish men with feminist propaganda’ (www.Amen.ie).

The acceptance of diverse masculinities is extremely threatening to these boys and their peers and is particularly so in the face of the assertion that all forms of masculinity are acceptable and desirable except their own. This is closely related to their social and economic position and is explored in detail in chapter two.

See Henson and Krasas Rogers (2001) for more on men, masculinities and feminized occupations. Kevin Henson and Jackie Krasas Rogers (2001) explore the masculinity of
male temporary clerical workers who, they argue, experience marginalisation both because of their economic and social position and because of their presumed homosexuality. These men experience difficulty in the workplace because, due to their occupation, they are unable to fit into the narrow definitions of conventional masculinity, i.e., the ‘breadwinner role’ (2001: 235) and are regarded as ‘incomplete’ males both within the workplace and the larger social world (2001:235). Henson and Krasas Rogers write:

Male clerical temporaries, as with other men who cross over into women’s work, fall increasingly short of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity on at least two fronts. First, they face gender assessment through their lack of a “real” job (i.e., a full-time career in “men’s work”). Second, their location in a feminized occupation that requires the performance of emphasized femininity, including deference and caretaking behaviours, calls into question their presumed heterosexuality (ibid: 219-220).

For a full and detailed explanation of the ‘public debate’ see Mac an Ghaill et al (2002). The authors conclude that it is incorrect to use the phrase ‘public debate’ in relation to the media contributions and prefer instead to use the phrase ‘sustained media attention’ (2002: 141). Gleeson, Conboy and Walsh (2003), authors of the controversial Limerick review, concur.

Dolores Mullins is a teacher at one of the original pilot schools that took part in the early stages of EM. The report of her small-scale case study is available in the online journal, The Redland Papers in a special edition focused on gender in school.

Michael Kimmel’s work is concerned with pro-feminist men, with men and their responses to feminism, and representations of masculinity as it is linked to power and race. Gleeson, Mac an Ghaill, Paul Conway and Bohan, Project Director for EM, also attended.

An executive summary of the report findings was provided with the programme handbook – this ran to 15 pages and was written by Gleeson.

Elizabeth Byrne, representative for the Parents Association of Community and Comprehensive schools states in a submission to the NCCA:

We would also challenge that masculinity is a ‘social construct’ as stated in this Programme. This is not based on any proper research or evidence. (2001: NP).

Echoing Byrne, two further parent representatives Margaret Garvey and Roger Eldridge, respectively, had this to say in their NCCA submissions:

To attempt to class masculinity, femininity, Fatherhood, Motherhood, heterosexuality as culturally created ‘gender roles’ (which should be
The notion that "masculinity is a social construct" has no basis in any scientific literature. As the 'raison d'être' of this programme it shows the desire for the authors to change our sons according to their feminist ideology (Eldridge 2001: NP).

Although unconnected to the EM’s design, planning and implementation, Lynch of UCD’s Equality Studies Centre and Dympna Devine of UCD’s Education Department asked the *Irish Times* for a chance to respond to the media characterisation of EM. In an article (November 7 2000) they outline why EM should be considered as a ‘timely and welcome resource for teachers and students’ dismissing much of the criticism of the programme in their final comment which states:

> It is regrettable that a pioneering initiative in education such as Exploring Masculinities has been trivialised in such an ill-informed manner... Undoubtedly a programme of such importance deserves to be reviewed and examined. However, this analysis should be undertaken by journalists and commentators who are knowledgeable on the subject matter (NP).

See appendix for additional examples of programme materials. In addition to providing a wide selection of visual and textual material reproduced from the programme throughout the thesis, I have also included this appendix to allow the reader to form his/her own understanding of the course materials without my framing context and commentary.

Men's Studies is currently being challenged as the premier location for work and theory arising from the study of men. Jeff Hearn, a former men’s studies contributor, has, in his 2004 article ‘From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men’ identified a new framework which he refers to as ‘Critical Studies on Men’ (CSM). Here, unlike in men’s studies where it is frequently ignored, the centrality of power issues is recognized (Hearn 2004: 97).

See also Connell (2000:23) for his discussion of the move away from discourses of power, social inequality and masculinity.


Nayak (2003), in particular, writes of the disenfranchisement of a group of young men with an industrial heritage from Newcastle who face a bleak future due to the shift away from heavy industry in Western Europe. These boys are, in a sense, the sons of Willis’s ‘lads’, who left school early for careers on the shop floor of the steel manufacturing plants of the north of England. The impact of global shifts has hit the Newcastle youths in every aspect of their lives. It profoundly shapes their particular identifiable culture, which Nayak calls ‘The Real Geordies’. Their behaviour, interests, manner of dressing and speaking, and the way in which they perceive themselves were all observed by Nayak during his period of ethnographic fieldwork. They are recorded in rich detail allowing him to explore the youths’ relationship to the global through their experiences in the local.

Gray discusses the criticisms that have been levelled at cultural studies from within sociology and anthropology. In particular she states that these criticisms can be simplified down to two bones of contention: scale and breadth, depth and duration. She illustrates the difference between the macro view subscribed to within sociology which draws on large samples or subject groups and aims to produce ‘representative and generalisable results which shed light on the movements, formation, dimensions, [and] changes in that broader population’ (Gray 2003: 16). She follows with the insistence of some within anthropology that cultural studies practitioners do not ‘engage sufficiently with the subjects of their research’ (ibid: 17). Gray introduces this in order to put forward the unique approach of cultural studies to ethnography and to the production of meaning. Her defence of, for example, the small-scale case study hinges on her sense of its ability to respond to such questions as why some people or groups are invested in particular practices or texts and what meaning certain artefacts or behaviours have for different people. For Gray, the small-scale case study can also address the ways such questions relate to the interplay and relationships between class, identity, gender, race and sexuality in everyday life.

For further discussion of the uses of technology – specifically video games – in education, see James Paul Gee (2003) *What Video Games have to Teach Us about*
Learning and Literacy. In chapter five Gee’s research provides the foundation for my discussion of the ways in which the typical youth culture of young men is considered to be problematic by those external to it such as parents, teachers, and the media.

This will be seen throughout the thesis, most notably in chapter two where the boys subvert, or appropriate to their own ends, the messages of EM and the behavioural demands of the school through various stratagems.

Several cases of gender discrimination involving female teachers have come before equality officers in Ireland over the past decade. In one of the first cases of its kind, two female teachers were awarded damages of €7,000 and €12,000 respectively after it was found that the Wicklow school in which they taught had not dealt appropriately with their complaints of sexual harassment by male students. A series of stories have emerged in the press over the years relating to this problem – an example of one such story can be seen in a news story by Flynn (2001: NP) ‘Teachers get damages in victimisation case’ Other examples of these cases include gender discrimination in relation to promotions and post appointment - see Dooley (2004: NP) ‘Teacher says hers was not an isolated case of gender discrimination’ and McGarry (1996: NP) ‘Equality ruling backs teacher’.

See chapter four, which focuses on the boys’ culture as evidenced through the cultural artefacts prized by them, for a full exploration of what these items express about them and their masculine identity.

For further discussion of ‘feminised’ labour see also Henson and Krasas Rogers 2001.
Chapter Two

Into the Classroom

Figure 2.01: Photo taken by Sean in the Hillside locker room. The sign reads ‘Please Leave the Place Clean’.

COMÉAD GLAN
AN ÌT,
LE DE THOIL
Chapter one introduced the main themes running through this research, documenting and contextualising questions and issues relating to social class, ‘boy culture’, masculinity, the media, the EM programme and the problematic and disputed notion of a ‘crisis in masculinity’. These multiple threads are drawn together through their relationship to the overall question of representation which provides the central focus throughout this chapter. The public representation of young working class masculinity means that boys, and working class boys in particular, are typically rendered visible in the public sphere through stories of deviancy and criminality (Devlin 2006: 43-54). Even a programme such as EM, which sets out to ‘help’ boys, furthers this view of young men as both victim and threat. It proposes that they are at risk themselves while simultaneously proposing that they present a risk to others. This risk is contextualised as arising as a result of boys’ own inability to move away from the core values of a negatively traditional masculinity.

Thus, EM ultimately presents an image of boys as simultaneously threatening and threatened by their own masculine identities. Throughout I interrogate this type of narrow representation that restricts young men to a small number of media-assigned public personas, many of which are largely contingent upon their social class position. In the chapter that follows, I hope to challenge this one-sided view by opening up an alternative perspective on both the stereotyped working class boy and his range of cultural references and influences. While the EM programme was overtly designed for all boys attending all single sex boys’ schools in the country, it can be interpreted from the direct and particular focus of the programme that it is aimed at a certain type of young man. Undoubtedly EM does address problems that cross all social barriers such as violence, drug and alcohol
abuse, bullying and misogyny. Yet, I would argue that EM is designed explicitly to neutralise and to normalise what are commonly seen as the deviant excesses of working class ‘youth’ (Skeggs 2004: 80).²

Chapter two is underpinned by my classroom ethnography. As much as this brings the reader into my narration of my experiences in the classroom, it also provides a basis from which I discuss how EM both stems from and re-inscribes an overwhelmingly negative perception of young, white working class Irish men’s culture and behaviour. In Section I, I document the progression of my small-scale ethnographic case study in the field. Here I address questions of access, reactivity, research flexibility and the role of the ethnographer and I take the reader into the school where I introduce the voices of the boys and their teacher, Paul. In Section II I look in detail at Hillside as a locale and attempt to understand my subjects and their classroom culture in the context of the economic and social circumstances which define the area in which they live. In Section III I carry on my engagement with Willis’ ethnography and focus on the ways class and community shape the attitudes of the boys to their own masculinity and education as well as to the world around them and their perceptions of their role in it.

The Ethnographic Experience

My ethnographic experience began in an overheated ground floor classroom at Hillside School at the beginning of October, 2002. I arrived at the school early for the first class session and, as directed by the large signs on the wall by the front doors, somewhat nervously presented myself at the office. There followed a lengthy interrogation by the...
school secretary, conducted through a small glass window, as to why I was there and what exactly I was doing. Once her curiosity was satisfied, she sent a message to Paul, the EM teacher, and I was directed to a chair in the hallway to wait to be collected. I had met Paul previously with the vice-principal to talk about the fieldwork and the research as a whole, and had struck up a good working relationship with him. However, as classes had started in the period in which I was waiting, Paul instead sent a ‘volunteer’ to bring me to the classroom. This was, in essence, my first face-to-face meeting with an informant and programme participant.

As classes were in session, the long, high-ceilinged corridors were empty. Muted noises filtered out from the rooms as my guide, Brendan, and I proceeded towards Room Five. On our way he was a good ten paces ahead of me, determined seemingly to disassociate himself from my presence. Catching up with him at the door of the room, I found Brendan in loud conversation with a fellow student who was leaning dispiritedly against the opposite wall. This boy, I found out once inside, had been selected as a ‘volunteer’ to take the starring role in that day’s lesson. However, at the time, both Brendan and I presumed he had been put out for causing trouble. This, added to the fact that both boys were laughing at me as I arrived, belatedly, at the classroom, did little to help my first-day nerves.

The classroom, like the majority of rooms at Hillside, is longer than it is wide, with five tall windows down the far wall, and 25 or so old-fashioned individual wooden desks with flip-up seats attached and a shelf underneath for books. The desktops are liberally
graffitied, with names, pictures and slogans gouged into the surface with compass points and pens. The underneath of the desk, its legs and the underside of the seat are speckled with old hard pieces of chewing gum. To the left of the blackboard at the front of the classroom there is a shelf for a ‘Holy Statue’, in this case a representation of the Virgin Mary, and to the blackboard’s right there is a cabinet. A teacher’s desk, chair and a further cupboard complete the furnishings. I learn later that nothing is kept in the classroom; teachers store books and teaching materials in their offices or cubby holes in the staffroom. The classrooms are locked between classes, so that students congregate loudly and energetically in the hallways before and after class as they wait for their teachers to arrive and let them in. The walls of the classrooms are bare; the only decoration in Room Five is a large wooden crucifix and a battered map of Europe, which hangs lopsidedly on the wall by the door. In contrast, the ground floor green and white painted corridors are brightly decorated with student artwork and photographs of teams and outings as well as graduating class groups.

I arrived in the middle of the first actively student directed module of EM. The ‘Listening/Not Listening Game’ and the ‘Pairs Listening Exercise’ were my first introduction to the field site and the reality of conducting observational research in a classroom environment. Both of these activities involve the students being out of their seats, directing their own conversations and engaging with each other on an individual basis. They also provide a perfect opportunity for the boys to have private conversations, mock fights and outbursts of hilarity. The majority of the tasks in the programme require students to be either out of their desks or working in groups. This brings a new level of
mobility and freedom to bodies in the EM classroom while at the same time demanding a much higher level of discipline and structure from the teacher present. These two exercises, together with selected others, form part of a series of vignettes extracted from my field notes. They will be discussed in Section II of this chapter and in chapter three. Field notes are reproduced here and throughout the thesis in order to explicate the research process and explore, in narrative form, the pastimes, attitudes and beliefs which comprise the youth culture of the Hillside boys.

From my first meeting with the vice-principal at Hillside, it was made clear that my presence in the school was entirely conditional upon the assigning of pseudonyms to the local area, school, students and teachers involved. The fieldwork was to run over two full school years (September to June) with two fourth-year classes, one commencing in the school year 2002–2003 and the second in 2003–2004. Following this agreement of anonymity, the second part of the entry negotiation process focused on securing the right to return to the classroom on a regular basis over this period in order to conduct ongoing observation. This was agreed upon with the understanding that I would attend only the EM classes and only on the days EM was scheduled. The desire of the vice-principal and the school to protect their students from unnecessary interruptions was made very clear to me and my presence was restricted to this one non-academic/examination class.

As was outlined in chapter one, the difficulties associated with gaining access to the classroom for research purposes require strategy and, occasionally, even subterfuge. Educational theorist Martyn Hammersley and sociologist Paul Atkinson both have a
particular interest in ethnography as research practice. In *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (1993) they advise that, on occasion, the researcher ought not reveal everything on their research agenda to either gatekeepers or informants (Hammersley and Atkinson 1993: 68). This permission to make reasoned decisions about the withholding of, or downplaying of, certain aspects of research is supported by educational theorist and researcher Peter Foster. In *Observing Schools: A Methodological Guide* (1996) Foster goes further than Hammersley and Atkinson and discusses the implications of giving the 'complete picture' of the research plan in situations where such information may significantly change the behaviour of informants or result in the limiting or refusal of access by gatekeepers. Foster outlines the protective measures researchers can offer schools, such as confidentiality agreements and guaranteed anonymity for the students, teachers, the school itself and the locality (1996: 28-29).

It was not necessary for me in this situation to resort to subterfuge, although I did play up my research interest in the running of EM both to the gatekeepers and to the boys themselves. A series of reasons lay behind my decision to locate EM as my central focus as opposed to social class or youth culture. For one, this gave me a clearly contextualised position and role as researcher in the classroom with the programme providing a concrete central object. Further on in this chapter I discuss the research difficulties associated with directly questioning adolescents and young people, especially in relation to sensitive or embarrassing topics. An acute awareness of the potential for discomfort arising from this led me to present myself to my informants primarily as an observer of the programme and of their teacher. This was in order to avoid making the boys uncomfortable and thus
adversely affecting their willingness to engage with their teacher and one another and to speak out in class. Any of these would have denied me access to their stories. The decision to present myself as being mainly interested in the running of EM, with a subsidiary interest in general youth cultures, was designed to maximise my limited time in, and my access to, the classroom.

The minor limitations imposed upon me in the course of the fieldwork were counterbalanced by the relative freedom I experienced in the classroom itself. While I was not free to wander at will in the school corridors or grounds, to approach or converse with students outside of their classes, I was free to locate myself wherever I wanted to within the classroom and to observe and record all that happened there. The limitations of time imposed by the nature of the research and the school-imposed limitations of space and movement have always been an integral part of the thesis, factored in from the outset, and as such have not restricted the work. The freedom to move about the classroom each week, trying out different seats, was enabled by the fact that there are only 12 boys in each group and, thus, at least twelve desks remained free in any one session. In the first year of the fieldwork I experimented with several different desks, finally settling on a desk in the back row, beside the door. This gave me a panoramic view of the classroom, allowing me to see the teacher and all of the students at all times. As students tend to take up the seats next to the window first, filling up from the back of the class, there was sufficient distance between myself and them for the boys not to feel threatened by my 'immediate' presence. At the same time, I was close enough to my informants to overhear any whispers or asides.
The classroom used by the second group was also a long narrow room with five tall windows down one side. Much like the other classroom there were four rows of desks in the room, facing forward towards the empty teacher’s desk, a wall clock and a large crucifix. There is also a large blackboard that Paul very rarely has time to use, and only does when the boys are being particularly uncooperative and silent. It is on the third floor on a corridor referred to by the staff and students as ‘Harbour Terrace,’ an allegedly ‘rough’ area in a nearby estate. The reputation is deserved as this corridor is the furthest away from staff offices and the staff room, thereby rendering it susceptible to a certain amount of chaos when there is no visible staff presence. In fact encounters with highly sexualised conversation and offensive gestures in this hallway and in the classroom without the presence of a recognised authority figure, especially on the third floor, further convinced me that the situation whereby I gathered my information from the boys in the mediated setting of the classroom was preferable to direct conversations with them.

As noted, my entry to the classroom was characterised by a lengthy process of negotiation which, as outlined below, had failed in several other schools. The success of the negotiations with Hillside depended very much upon my willingness to allow the requirements of the school and its gatekeepers to dictate to me the shape the fieldwork would take. As is the case with most other ethnographic research, this opened up multiple possibilities while at the same time giving rise to obvious restrictions. Limitations and possibilities were equally imposed and created from the very outset of this project by my above-discussed decision to frame the research as largely concerned with the EM programme. My interest in the programme brought me into contact with the teachers who
had contributed to the writing of the materials and who were teaching it to students in their own schools. Nevertheless, questions of access were problematic in all the three schools (out of seven at that time) that I was invited to visit. The unresolved issue of access resulted in one school only being visited once as the restrictions placed upon me were so severe that no productive fieldwork could be carried out. The second school, Greenfield, was far more open to the prospect of my carrying out fieldwork but the way in which the course was structured meant that there was a high turnover of students every six to eight weeks or so as it was carried out with several small groups of up to ten at a time. Hillside school was the best option as the class was run with one group at a time over the whole school year, allowing me to become familiar with the boys in each group and giving them sufficient time to become used to me and to my presence in their classroom. Also both the teacher, Paul, and the principal were open to the prospect of my continued presence and were undeterred by my desire to record the classes, first in the form of field notes and a field journal, and later in the form of a digital audio tape recording. The restrictions on my movements in the school and the impossibility of meeting with the boys outside of school limited my interaction with them in the classroom. This shaped and directed the relationship that existed between us, whereupon both the boys and I were fully aware of the gulf of experience which separated us. Thus, over-identifying with and subsequently idealising the boys and their culture was not a possibility for this research. However, as is discussed in the following section, it is still vital for me to explore my position as a young, female, middle class researcher in relation to the position of the boys as ethnographic subjects.
McRobbie and Garber (1991) problematise the relationship between male researchers and male subjects specifically in relation to research into youth subcultures. They postulate a ‘natural rapport’ or what I understand to be a sense that ‘they are all men together’ as being a possible reason for the non-existence of girls in youth-centred research from the 1970s and 1980s. McRobbie and Garber explore whether girls are invisible because they do not participate in popular subcultures, or because male interviewers and researchers render them invisible through a conscious or unconscious adoption of the attitude of their young informants that girls are unimportant except for sexual purposes? They ask:

How do we make sense of this invisibility? Are girls really not present in youth subcultures? Or is it something in the way this kind of research is carried out that renders them invisible? When girls are acknowledged in the literature, it tends to be in terms of their sexual attractiveness. But this too is difficult to interpret... Is this simply a typically dismissive treatment of girls reflecting the natural rapport between a masculine researcher and his male respondents? (1991: 1-2).

This problematic is echoed by Skeggs, (1992) who through a rereading of Willis’s *Learning to Labour*, takes issue with the fact that Willis appears to tacitly align himself with the attitudes of the ‘lads’ by not distinguishing genuine coping strategies from incidences of sexism and racism (1992: 190). The ‘lads’ negative attitudes are not challenged by Willis, but they are challenged by the school system. However, they have chosen to respond to the school’s challenge by rejecting the formal curriculum in its totality thus renouncing any claim to its benefits. The views of the Hillside boys are not challenged by me in the classroom; I document and interpret them in the text alongside
the opposing view as expressed by the programme or by the teacher. The problem of over-identifying with or forming too much of a rapport with my informants, flagged as potentially problematic by, among others, Skeggs, McRobbie and Garber, and Back, does not arise for me. This is the case because the boys and I both perceive an enormous gulf between their experiences, gender, age and situations and my own.

In ‘Gendered Participation: Masculinity and Fieldwork in a South London Adolescent Community,’ (1993) Back approaches the problem of over-identification from a personal perspective. He focuses on work he carried out in a white working class community. During the fieldwork period he was employed as a youth worker for part of the study and lived on the estate where the youth club was based. Ostensibly, he was researching the way in which racist ideas flourish in areas of poverty. However, out of this research came the subsidiary question: what does the researcher do in a situation in which the transmission of sexist or racist ideas is ongoing? And, how does a researcher adequately take into account the gendered positions of and power inequalities between researcher and subject(s) when reading over and writing up ethnographic field research? Back refers to the criticisms made by both McRobbie and Skeggs of research that does not do this, where the ethnographer fails to identify his/herself and his/her position in relation to the research and to the informants. Based upon his own experience, he suggests that the problem arises when the researcher ‘fictitiously dissolve[s] the division between self and other’ (Back 1993: 223). Recounting how it was a shock to him to realise that although he had grown up in that part of London and had had many of the same experiences as his informants, to them he was just another social worker/youth worker. For his informants,
because Back was educated he was assumed to be fully middle class and thus totally alien. Of this experience Back writes:

In a sense, my childhood experience was quite close to those of these young men and women. But I had a degree and a university education, and I no longer spoke the language of their experience... to the people who lived in Riverview I was just another educated – and, by implication, middle-class-social worker, one of the ‘red spectacles and woolly hat brigade’. In this situation the young people were rightly suspicious. The point that I want to make here is that although I had real experiences which informed the research, it was simply farcical to pretend that I had remained what I once was. In a sense I possessed a language and operated intellectual models that were simultaneously my possessions and yet not mine. There were occasions on which I felt this tension (1993: 222-3).

My situation does not produce tensions as pronounced as those described by Back. My personal relationship to Hillside is predicated on a familiarity with the area and a family connection to the school based on the fact that my mother taught in one of the nearby feeder primary schools for 36 years. As a result she had taught a large number of the Hillside boys at some stage of their education and is known to them and to the staff of the school. This made it easier to build a relationship with the teachers and principal as we had a common point outside of the research, but did not help my status with the boys. They have regarded me in much the same way as Back was understood by the South London adolescents; I am, in their opinion totally removed from them and from their experience. Although I would have regarded my self as familiar with the school, the local area and the local slang, it is quite clear that they regard me as just as foreign to them as I realise they are to me. My connection to the teaching profession both through family and
through my position as a researcher serves only to further their opinion of me as thoroughly uninteresting and also on the wrong side of the teacher/student line. This, however, works to my advantage in that, after a while, they have so little interest in me and my presence that they behave, according to Paul, in much the same way, when I am there as when I am not. There are of course exceptions to this general disinterest, several of which are discussed below.

The rapid growth of familiarity with the situation, whereby I am present in their classroom, is best demonstrated by comparing the boys’ reaction to me in the first few classes with their sporadic interest thereafter. Each time Paul turned his back to the class in the first two sessions, the boys, as one, swung around in their desks to look directly at me. During these first weeks of observation I was undoubtedly a source of great distraction. This relatively brief level of interest and Paul’s summation of my novelty value is reflected in notes made after the third class and extracted below:

All the boys are very fidgety today, all turning round and laughing. Throughout class kept hearing whispers and bursts of laughter, muffled in hands, and followed by quick glances in my direction. Paul explains at end of class - ‘they’ll get used to you [being] there in no time’ (4th November 2002).

As the classes wore on and it became apparent to the boys that I was not likely to do or say anything funny or diverting that would have interrupted the class, they rapidly lost interest in me. They never totally forgot that I was there - any mention in the class of women, particularly in the sections on ‘women’s work’ and on relationships - was
enough to remind them of my presence and once again I would be scrutinised for any reaction to their comments. Occasionally the boys attempted to provoke me into a particular response with jokes or comments designed to offend or amuse. However, for the most part, they are occupied with each other, their teacher and the materials or topic at hand. On one occasion, during a discussion of personal freedoms Paul asks the question:

Paul: Have you the freedom to be all that you can? Do you have to change anything about yourself? Why do you wear your hair short like that? Why do you wear a uniform?

Class: Because we’re made to.

Paul: Is that why you are coming to school? Because you’re ‘made to’?

Brendan: [Looking around at me and muttering]. That’s why we’re here. Who’s making her be here?

Apart from such early, humorous, attempts to extract a response from me, there was only one incident where the boys reacted strongly against my presence. This took place at the end of the final term with the second group and came about after a period of negotiation whereby I petitioned for the use, in the classroom, of a digital mini-disc recorder and stereo microphone. I hoped to record in much greater detail the conversation and discussions as they occurred. This would have the additional benefit of leaving me far freer to observe the sights, gestures, signals, and other visuals in the classroom space. I used the recorder for a period of three classes with the second group, but made a reasoned decision to return to field notes having observed the drastic change in the behaviour of
the boys when faced with the reality of being recorded. The first class in which I used the recorder was not considered a perfect example as this extract from my fieldnotes shows:

Seven boys today – half missing? Boys are very quiet, cowed by tape recorder or missing ringleaders? (2nd February 2004).

Further on in the notes for that class I observe that it is moving much more slowly than it normally does. I also note that Paul is using the blackboard, something which he never usually gets a chance to do, as the debates tend to move so quickly. I go on to note the fact that when asked questions the boys put their hands up as opposed to shouting out their answers. Today’s class is dealing with the emotional and difficult subject of mental illness and depression and the role played in that by alcohol and drug abuse. This may be playing a part in their uncomfortable silence as it raises the question of whether the boys are unwilling to admit that they drink alcohol or use drugs in a situation where their voices are being recorded. As a further extract taken at the time shows, I note this as follows:

Paul: How many fellas got drunk ever?
They look embarrassed and all put their hands up instead of shouting like usual. Is tape recorder ruining flow or are they missing louder boys? Will use next class and if still quiet even with full class will let it go and go back to f-notes? (2nd February 2004).

At the beginning of the next class Paul asks me to ask the boys if they mind being recorded. He had noticed the difference in their behaviour in the previous session. Although I am not averse to having the consent of the boys I am, at the same time,
anxious not to draw attention to the recorder and once it has been pointed out to them they again react very badly to it with mutterings about invasions of privacy and so on rising up from the back of the room into a groundswell of dissatisfaction. This silence and reactivity, whereby they assert their power of non-compliance through apparent model behaviour which entails not speaking unless spoken to and answering with the bare minimum of information, continues into the third class and, as the end of term approaches rapidly, I decide to return to the previous method of recording – the in-situ fieldnote.

This experience highlighted for me the importance of being flexible in my approach to the field (Foster 1996: 4). Had I been irrevocably wedded to the idea of using a mini-disc or other sound recorder and arrived at the impasse outlined above I would have been forced into a major restructuring and rethinking. What is more, I might possibly have had further access to the fieldsite denied due to the disruption and discomfort caused by the recording. On the other hand, if I had been equally set against recording the classes I would have missed out on the important reactions and responses to the recorded situation. The refusal of the boys to be recorded and their ensuing disengagement marks an important moment in the power relationship between them and their teacher, but also points to the power relationship between ethnographer and subjects. The boys are willing to talk openly about their lives in my presence, in the classroom, but only in a way that they can control. A mini-disc recording of their voices is a tangible object which I can take away from the classroom and use in a sphere in which they have no influence. It can be played and replayed, listened to by anyone and provides incontrovertible ‘proof’ of what was said and of who said it. A mini-disc recording points to the nature of my
presence in the classroom in a way that field notes do not and draws attention to the underlying and constant question of representation and who has the power of definition.\textsuperscript{13}

It is a prime example of the way in which larger issues which trouble the boys in the outside world are replicated and worked through in the classroom, and it is this mediating function or role performed by the classroom to which I now turn.

**Questions of Method and of Methodology**

The adult power structures the boys encounter and run up against in many aspects of their lives are reflected in the power structure of the classroom. This provides a bounded space for the reproduction of and retelling of their status and experiences in the outside world. The ability of the classroom to provide an accessible, familiar, location that is reflective of the lives of the students in the world outside of the school places it as the ideal site for ethnographic analysis. This classroom power structure can be mapped in relation to social class and economic positioning and re-introduces the key questions of resistance, refusal and conflict, which run throughout the research as a whole. These key issues are embedded in the classroom both in theoretical terms and in the light of the classroom dynamic, wherein the boys, the EM programme and the teachers attempt to negotiate spaces for their competing understandings of masculinity. In addressing this problematic, I use observational ethnographic methodologies to record and narrate the diverse 'voices' of the boys. Stories of their experiences outside the classroom provide primary documentary material, creating a crucial verbal archive of what it is to be young, male and working class in Ireland today. Because it is informed by the preferences demonstrated by the boys themselves, it avoids omitting the most important aspects of the
boys' lives in favour of what is considered by official sources to be suitable material for their schooling.

For example, ignored by some teachers and the programme, yet shared by the boys, are the essential forms of popular culture, e.g., video games, music, clothing and television, which they use to express their masculine subcultures - subcultures that situate and facilitate a performance of their public masculinities. These public masculinities depend heavily on the active performance of an aggressively heterosexual masculinity, marked by a particular defensiveness toward any new figure of authority. This impacted largely on my entry to the classroom whereupon the boys were unsure of my role and my reasons for being there.

At the beginning of each fieldwork period both groups of boys were suspicious of my presence. They were unsure of my interest in them as a group and it was important for me to explain my research and thus my motivations for being in the classroom. As I hoped to cause as little disruption as possible in the EM class, this was done in a very brief three minute interlude on the first meeting between me and each of the two groups at Hillside. I emphasised the role of the programme in my research in order to counter the boys' early impression of me as an evaluator of them and of their classroom behaviour. Placing the programme, rather than them, in the spotlight allowed the boys to feel more relaxed about my presence. Establishing my position as exploring the effectiveness of the programme with reference to their youth culture and their experiences outside of school was a reasoned decision to avoid being characterised by the boys as a moralising figure passing
judgement on their speech and behaviour in the classroom. Directly related to this is the fact that the boys do not respond well to direct questioning either from their teacher or from myself. The best material collected in the field and the occasions when the programme ran most successfully in the classroom both resulted from a different type of questioning on the part of Paul. When questions are couched in story or experience and delivered to the boys in a slightly ‘softer’ format they respond far better and in greater detail, with the best information coming from instances whereby observations made by Paul are left to percolate and be picked up upon by the boys as they wish.

For example, in a class session using materials from the programme section entitled ‘Men Working’, Paul observes that things are very different today in terms of equality and women working. He goes on to wonder, in a tone of mild interest, if there will be further changes in another ten years that would lead to a rise in men staying home and women going out to work. Once he stops speaking the boys clamour to be heard, shouting over each other and trying to get his attention. Their eagerness to respond is due in large part to the style of questioning. As can be seen below, a direct question coming later in that same class gets a very different response:

Paul: What work do you do around the house? Ian? Padraig?
Padraig: Don’t know ... nothing... wash up...
Paul: Anyone else?
Class: [Silence.]
Paul: Stephen?
Stephen: Same... (9th December 2002).
The boys' defensiveness in relation to direct questioning here has less to do with the subject matter than with the importance of remaining 'in charge' in what is ultimately a very uneven power relationship. The boys are not offended to be asked if they do housework. After much probing it turns out that they almost all do something regularly around the house, albeit in very specific circumstances and within a continuum of acceptability – cutting the grass or painting is good, changing babies' nappies or doing laundry is not acceptable. This is discussed in more depth in chapter three, in the section headed Class One: 'Who works where?' The importance of the exchange reproduced above lies in the power play and negotiation of status. A direct demand from a teacher to the boys requires a certain response in order to maintain their dignity and standing in the eyes of the group. This situation becomes doubly difficult when an embarrassing or awkward situation or issue comes up for discussion, such as relationships, sexuality or sex. Invariably, Paul handles necessary questioning on his part with a detached air, usually asking no one student in particular, and thus avoiding placing the focus on any one boy.

In this way, the boys do not feel pressured into answering questions and, as can be seen throughout the research, the programme and the teacher broach the awkward topics and ask the direct questions. This allows me to remain a relatively neutral presence and to act simply as observer and thus, the boys' original hostility towards me eventually dies down. If, however, in my unalterable subject position as a female middle class researcher, I were to ask direct questions about the boys' sexuality, underage drinking, violence, and
intimate relationships with women and men, they would most likely become hostile and feel threatened, embarrassed and awkward.\textsuperscript{14}

The boys react against the official/adult portrayals of them in several negative ways, primarily through their speech and body language and also non-verbally through pointed silences and group disengagement. What they see as unfair or incorrect understandings of them and of their interests are rejected and neutralised through their complexly arranged social groupings and hierarchies and, within these, through their use of particular cultural artefacts as objects of separation or boundary-setting. Their understanding and assertion that adults or official figures of authority simply ‘do not get’ their culture validates their choices, rather than undermining their confidence in the ways in which they choose to express themselves. This allows, for example, for certain types of music or a certain style of clothing to be used both for self-reference and as a unifying force against the remotely authored official perspectives on them and their lives which presently have popular currency and are almost totally outside of their control. As discussed in chapter one the boys did not have a public voice in the debates and discussions which were carried on both about them and all around them. In the EM classroom the questions and representations posed by the programme can be challenged and answered by the boys, so even as the materials reproduce the publicly shared negative view of young working class masculinity, the environment allows for them to challenge it. Allowing boys this opportunity to challenge what is presented is one of the key elements of the EM intervention. Its materials and ethos are flawed; partly rooted in a conviction that boys are at risk due only to their particular gender identity and so reproducing problematic issues
aired in the public discussion of men and masculinity. Yet, the airing of these issues and questions in the classroom means that boys are given the chance to address them head on, albeit in a closed space. My observation in the classroom acknowledges the importance of their views and documents their responses.

Reflecting the significance of the boys’ perspectives and verbal contributions I also collected a different kind of data. In addition to the notes and observations made in the field and to the programme materials, the media controversy and the theoretical literature all of which inform this research, I also worked with visual representations of their culture. These images, which feature throughout the work, are made up a mixture of photographs taken by the boys themselves, and images taken from video games and album covers. The images taken from the various media forms that the boys engage with are used as examples and guides for the reader who may be unfamiliar with these media forms. The photographs taken by the boys are a more integral part of the overall research design and process. I asked the first group of boys, 12 in all, to take part in a project loosely based on the work carried out within photo-elicitation (Hurworth 2003; Prosser 1999; 2003). However, rather than ask the boys to select photos they felt to be representative of them and their lives, I instead provided each student with a single use, disposable camera containing 24 shots and marked with a number corresponding to a list of their first names only. The brief I gave to the group asked them to photograph anything within their home and local community that they felt to be representative of themselves, both personally and in terms of their peer culture and shared influences. This project worked extremely well and the boys responded very positively to it. It is discussed in full
detail in chapter three and the photos are used to illustrate the thesis throughout, including the title page of this chapter. The success of the photo project was twofold. First, the boys were actively engaged in the process of representing themselves. Second, the results illustrate an alternative form of incorporating their perspectives into the text without the need for invasive and personal questioning to which the boys, as noted, respond badly.

The value of using the programme and the photographs as a type of buffer between my position as observer and recorder and the boys' position as informants is clear as it allows the programme materials and the teacher to address questions and issues that would be far more problematic coming directly from me in this particular environment. A further advantage of this buffer is that in the eyes of the boys I remain relatively objective, and importantly, non-judgemental. This is the case because the programme challenges are laid down by the teacher rather than by me. The questions of rights, comfort and the invasion of privacy must be addressed, especially in the context of carrying out research work with informants who are under the age of 18. Access, permission and the protection of the privacy and comfort of my underage informants is obviously of paramount importance. Therefore I explore here the tension between the research imperative and the essential ethical considerations which are inherent in this type of research. Exploring these conditions which are imposed on the fieldwork by the nature of the education system and by the structure of Hillside School, I create a space for a further exploration of the implications - both positive and negative - of these boundaries for this work and for other research in a similar environment or situation.
Environmental Concerns

The classroom as fieldsite offers important environmental conditions that are conducive to working with teenage boys. These include natural boundaries of time and space, required and consistent attendance, and a true distillation of the defensive and conflicted relationship that exists between teenage boys and manifestations of authority. Essential to my understanding of the classroom as fieldsite is its nature as a space that is at once profoundly familiar yet totally new. Once it is looked at in the abstract, that is, once the 'familiar' classroom is made ‘strange’, the intricate nature of its power relations becomes clear. Here I explore and provide insight into the rationale behind the conducting of research into the life-world of white, teenage, working class boys through what appears, at first glance to be a single site, and one in which, by its very nature, the particularity and otherness of that life-world is stifled and regulated. The classroom does not appear to be a space where the various cultural elements which interest the majority of teenage boys can be entertained, or even emerge. The violent and sexualised nature of their media consumption seems to be totally at odds with the school curriculum. However, once in the classroom and observing the programme in action, I saw the extent to which the boys draw on their own personal experiences to interpret the programme material used in class. The series of vignettes reproduced throughout this chapter are exemplary incidences of the boys’ reliance on outside experience and prior knowledge of a situation whether that prior experience comes through their own lives or through media representation is not an clear distinction for them, something which is discussed in chapter five. An important example of this lack of contextualised knowledge centres on the issue of sexism as discussed in relation to the women’s movement for equality in pay and status in the
workplace. Because this is not something that the boys encounter in their own daily lives or through their media consumption, it is not a subject that they can easily contextualise and so they are offended by what they understand to be a baseless and personal attack on them.

On the other hand, they are so familiar with violence of all varieties – real life, televised, video games and comics - that they can debate all aspects of the subject in class and show a clear understanding of motivation and potential situations that give rise to it. Of vital importance is the realisation that the boys do not leave their personal experience, their cultural interests and their media consumption at the door of the classroom (Collins 1994:58). Their experiences and encounters outside of the classroom form the basis for the personas that are brought to bear inside the school walls. Their sense of self as male is constructed around and propped up primarily by their interaction with certain media artefacts that are inscribed with cultural and social meaning for them. A reference made by a boy in the class to the *Sopranos*, an American cable television show about an Italian American Mafia man and his family, places him in relation to the other boys who also watch the show for the same reasons. The *Sopranos* storylines are secondary to its glossy portrayal of hyper-masculinity as seen through graphic violence and a stereotypically male, working class code of honour that is loyal to the ideals of family, tradition and place. Likewise, a reference to the Playstation game *Grand Theft Auto 3 – Vice City*, not only lets everyone know that the speaker has a Playstation console, but that he is also playing the video game equivalent of a show like the *Sopranos*. Cultural artefacts, such as these, function on far more profound levels than the simple provision of enjoyment,
distraction, sociability and media savvy. They provide cohesion for the groups who unite
in their shared interest and appreciation; they provide for the boys clear markers between
‘them’ and ‘us’. Even though these games and television shows, like all of the material
culture engaged with by the boys, are widely available and part of a mainstream
Americanised media culture, they are engaged with on different levels by different
groups. For the boys, as will be discussed in chapter four and chapter five, these games
and shows reaffirm their collective heterosexuality through portrayals of violence and
situations and storylines that are traditionally viewed as representing the total opposite of
female media interests. According to the boys, women like ‘the soaps’ and ‘chick flicks’
while shows with a lot of violence or action are ‘for men’ (9th December 2002).

A major part of the fieldwork and the preparedness for the fieldwork focused on watching
the television programmes and films, reading the magazines and playing the video games
the boys like. This also necessitated reading interviews with, listening to the music of
and watching the videos of musicians in whom the boys are interested. It is essential for
me to understand and to be up-to-date with the current trends in music, gaming, television
and film. It is through listening to the music, watching the programmes and playing the
video games that I have gained a crucial form of access to the raw material of their
culture. I see what occupies and interests them through their own frame of reference as
players, listeners or watchers. This awareness has allowed me to understand the distance
that exists between the EM programme and popular ‘boy culture’. This distance accounts
for the lack of appeal offered by the EM’s ideals of masculinity when it is forced to
compete with the slick vision of masculinity offered by the boys’ media consumption.
Authority, Normalcy and Rules

The first section of this chapter focused on the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of my classroom ethnography, outlining the process of entry to the fieldsite and detailing how I established and consolidated myself as observer in the classroom space. This second section explores the culture of the classroom itself and of its inhabitants. Once in the classroom, there followed a period of adjustment, necessary in order to become accustomed to the surroundings and to begin to build a familiarity with the space and the people who occupy it. The confusion between memories of school days, mental images of fictional school days and the school days encountered first hand in Hillside was surprising to me. Upon leaving Hillside each day I had to, whatever the weather, sit on a wall a few hundred feet away from the school and write down everything that I had not been able to note in the classroom or in the hallways on the way in and on the way out. The barrage of images and noises in the classroom is so continuous and unrelenting that occasionally it is easy to forget what you are there for and simply become caught up in the undercurrent of confusion. The feeling of imminent chaos is always there and is perhaps characteristic of any place in which upward of 500 adolescent boys are confined for a large part of the day. However, standing between the outbreak of mass disorder and anarchy are the strangely powerful ‘school rules’. These rules are posted in the school and are explained to students from their first day. They are, of course, broken regularly in a multitude of different ways, from cycling as opposed to walking with one’s bike up to the bike-shed, to running, shoving and kicking school bags in the corridor rather than walking quietly, to smoking, swearing or not wearing the correct uniform. However, the one rule which seems to hold fast and is accepted by all, is that the teacher is in charge.¹⁸
Many times in the EM classroom, particularly during sessions that involve the students being out of their seats, the breakdown of order has seemed inevitable but for the timely intervention of Paul and the unspoken invocation of that rule. Paul only needs to appear at the side of a particularly boisterous group or a lewd conversation and good behaviour immediately returns. It seems therefore to me that a major characteristic of classroom life is contained within the understanding that the teacher is in charge. All other rules appear to be negotiable and flexible in some way (as will be seen in chapter three where I discuss some of the ways the boys negotiate their way through the EM programme and its challenges). Applying the questioning below to the school rules at Hillside, it seems that however unruly the boys may be on occasion, there is still an acceptance of the legitimacy of the teachers claim to power in the classroom:

What are the rules in schools and classrooms? Which rules are allegedly broken in imputations of deviance? Who makes the rules? Are the rules ever negotiated? How are the rules communicated to members? What justifications are given for the rules, by whom, to whom, and on what occasions? Do teachers and pupils view the rules in the same ways? Are some rules perceived as legitimate by some teachers and some pupils? How do members know that certain rules are relevant to (i.e. are ‘in play’) in a given situation? How do members classify the rules? What differences do members see between different rules? For example do rules vary in importance? (Hargreaves et al 1975: 23-4).

The importance of school rules in relation to the functioning of the classroom from primary school to university is part of an overall accepted understanding and way of behaving in that environment. So accustomed are we to the behaviours and ways of speaking that are accepted practice in the classroom that questions such as those above
are seldom aired, and, when they are, it is only in the context of addressing deviant
behaviour and the importance of controlling that behaviour. Rules, it would seem, are
hidden even when in play, unquestioned, if not unbroken, and accepted as the foundation
for the effective and efficient transfer of knowledge. This accepted relationship among
teachers, students and rules supports and sustains the ultimate goal of the education
system – the successful passage of large numbers of students through a series of formal
academic examinations. The major examinations in the Irish school system are the Junior
Certificate Exams, taken in third year, which provide access to the senior cycle in
secondary school and the Leaving Certificate Exams which lead to further education at
third level or Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) level. Compulsory subjects in these exams
include English, Irish, Mathematics and a foreign language.  

This research, however, looks at a different kind of classroom, one in which exams are
not set and a different pedagogy is introduced, creating a new space in which the
accepted practices of the classroom are subverted and reversed. It is a classroom in which
the EM programme questions what the ‘education product’ or ‘output’ can be – exam
success and financial sustainability for the school, or students who have confidence in
their social, personal and emotional lives that complements their academic knowledge?

My work is located at two distinct moments of challenge to that established system of
regulation. The first moment comes in the subversion of normal classroom standards
whereby the boys, normally confined to their desks in silence, unless asked to speak, are,
in the EM classroom often expected to move about and to speak freely. The second point
occurs at the moment of resistance and direct challenge to both old and new practices of
disciplining and control as seen through the reactions of the boys to the programme and its materials. The pedagogy of EM is vitally important and plays a key role in its relative successes and failures in the classroom as is discussed in chapter three which follows. This classroom confrontation is at the heart of this research; it is that moment wherein the articulation of the particularities — beliefs, relationships, responsibilities — of the culture of white, working class, Irish teenaged boys is at its most clear and unambiguous. Their macho masculinity is infused with seemingly benign levels of sexism and homophobia and a culture (not unique to them) which links consumption of alcohol to enjoyment and 'manliness'. The environmental culture of the boys is such that they feel no real need to hide their underage drinking and smoking and they are proud of their illegal nights out in pubs and nightclubs. They dilute their accounts of nights out in the classroom and in the presence of their teacher through humour, often making jokes about drinking or smoking in connection to otherwise unrelated topics. For example, in a discussion about healthy diets Paul asks what they normally have to eat in a day:

Paul: Give me your daily...someone give me a typical day of eating...
breakfast first...?
Class: [All shouting at once.] Tea and toast
Cornflakes.
A fag [cigarette].
Two Panadol and a cup of tea.
A fry.
Two Es (26th January 2004).

The joking references to a morning meal consisting of a hangover cure, a smoke, or two E (ecstasy) tablets/pills can be taken as just that, a joke, or as a measure of their
familiarity with and ease with the way in which one would use not only the articles themselves but the way in which one talks about them. The growing phenomenon of the hungover student who is either absent from school as a result of alcohol or is too hungover to concentrate or properly participate in classes is now one of the major concerns facing the main teachers’ union, the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI). The ASTI is at present so concerned about underage binge drinking and drug use that the issue has been pushed by the current president, Pat Cahill, to the forefront of all debate both within and beyond that union. He has stated that ‘Irish people are not aware of the extent of binge drinking among teenagers, although the effects are being witnessed on a regular basis by teachers and principals around the country (Downes 2004: NP).’ Even though the problem of alcohol and drug use crosses all social and class boundaries it is, as Skeggs argues, in a very real sense more expected of these students as working class boys. Incompetence, delinquency and the potential for criminality has been publicly ascribed to them by virtue of their social class position (Skeggs 2004: 80). The centrality of the pub and alcohol in the construction and maintenance of the working class, masculine identities of the Hammertown ‘lads’ also runs throughout Willis’s ethnography. ‘Being able to hold your drink is an essential part of the ‘lads’ socialising with and socialisation as part of their local community, class and gender.

Hillside as a Locale

The environment in which the Hillside boys are growing up and its surrounding area both have a long history of, and are currently experiencing comparatively high incidences of intergenerational poverty, educational disadvantage and poor housing along with growing
levels of social marginalisation and exclusion.\textsuperscript{21} The local community has undergone a seismic shift as older areas are redeveloped and additional neighbourhood subdivisions are created in the form of new private housing estates. The ongoing development of the Hillside area is tied directly to those feelings of exclusion and marginalisation experienced by the local community. Progress in the area has been primarily focused on private developments, including gated communities of houses and apartments, private gyms, new bars and new restaurants. This process of ‘gentrification’ and infill building (building on derelict or run-down sites) appears to reinvigorate deprived areas while offering new opportunities to residents, both old and new. However, such redevelopment also effectively removes from young people the possibility of remaining, in the long-term, in their own local area as house prices rise and council property is privatised. The freedom of movement and autonomy of young people in the area is also restricted by the delimiting of previously public spaces. Bars, restaurants, shops and clubs which hope to attract wealthier clients automatically exclude through dress codes, prices and the intimation that such places are not for everyone. A recent study of disadvantage and deprivation in local authority housing areas carried out by Cork Corporation in 1990 – 1991 focused primarily on the well-known northern suburbs of the city, but agreed that the findings were equally applicable to, and were reflected on the south-side of the city.\textsuperscript{22} South of the river Lee the City Corporation has identified two major pockets of deprivation and disadvantage existing in what is a generally more affluent environment. This differs somewhat to the Northside experience with a concentration of local authority housing and wide areas of associated poverty. This incursion of wealth and private enterprise is, however, a growing trend as previously run down areas such as docklands
and older former council estates and terraces in traditionally working class areas are remarked as affordable housing to young middle class professionals. Located on the Southside of the city, Hillside falls within the larger of these two pockets of deprivation and is one of the areas which has been worst hit by high unemployment over the years.

At one point in 1986, 28 percent of the labour force in this area was actively seeking work. Unemployment rates had peaked previous to this in the 1970s with the loss and closure of several of Cork’s major manufacturing plants. These closures decimated communities on both sides of the city, introducing state dependency to those families who had previously been maintained by the income earned by manual labourers employed in these plants (Kiely 1995: 1 Section 3.2.3). Textiles, shipbuilding, auto parts and tyre manufacturing were the major losses with smaller subsidiaries and suppliers of these industries also closing as a result.

The effects of that sudden rise in unemployment in 1986 are, remarkably, still being felt in these communities such that almost 80 percent of Cork Corporation’s tenants in local authority housing are now entirely dependant on state welfare benefits (ibid: Section 3.2.3). Families who, two generations ago, were devastated by the loss of these industries are still trapped in a cycle of poverty and dependency. This continuing dependency demonstrates clearly how the problem of unemployment is experienced and passed on to the next generation, locking people into a self replicating cycle of deprivation. The children whose fathers lost their jobs in the 1970s and 1980s are parents now, and many of their children have never experienced a parent in full-time employment. Both
compounding and emerging from these problems are the dramatic changes in family structure which have led to a predominance of single parent female-headed families in this area. These changes and shifts have grown out of this cyclical process of dependency and inter-generational poverty and have significantly contributed to current social problems in this and other areas.

Continued imposition of divisions and the ensuing creation of new spaces that are now forbidden to the boys clearly accelerates and enhances the perception amongst them of a growing class divide. They are keenly aware of this and their view of themselves as tending towards or being more likely to engage in an accepted and expected deviance is encouraged and further developed by media hype and by the types of topics that are covered and focused upon in EM. The fact that the local area is becoming more inhospitable to the non-middle class residents is part of a wider trend of reinforcing class division and bias. This trend is identified by Skeggs (2004) most powerfully through her discussion of the public denigration of the symbolic figure of the young white working class single mother. She broadens her analysis to the entirety of Britain’s working class communities who she argues are now:

...[B]eing spoken about in many different ways: as underclass, as white blockage to modernity and global prosperity, as irresponsible selves to blame for structural inequality, as passive non-market competitors, as lacking in agency and culture, whilst the middle-classes are represented as the vanguard of the modern, as a national identity and a cultural resource. In this symbolic identification and evaluation we see class divisions being made. The rhetorical positioning of the working-class is a powerful moral formulation, presented as literally use-less, as a
group as inept as they are dysfunctional. This is rhetoric designed not to enhance mobility and opportunity, but to fix firmly in place, metaphorically and physically (2000: 94).

Such modes of 'moral formulation' suggest that the Hillside boys are 'fixed in place' not only by their economic and social position but by a general turn away from discussion of class-based advantage and disadvantage in its wider structural context. Focusing on a personal or group ineptitude or laziness allows for the apportioning of blame or of culpability to members of the working class for their own social and economic status. Masking the problems of social class based disadvantage and bias with spurious gender concerns is one of the main complaints which has been laid against men's studies and against the EM programme specifically. EM does not overtly address this issue; there is no mention of the institutional structures of class-based bias which keep some people fixed in poverty while helping others to reproduce cycles of privilege and opportunity. Instead the programme focuses on the types of discrimination experienced by minorities in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, race and disability. The feeling that EM is only for the poor or working class who do not know how to behave, is reflected in the take up of the programme by particular schools.

The vast majority of fee-paying boys' schools have rejected or ignored the programme on the grounds that it is irrelevant to the lives of their students, who, by that same moral formulation are immune from or 'above' the more negative elements of male youth culture. Many of the more traditionally 'academic' schools, which tend to be fee-paying and thus draw their student body from the middle and upper classes, do not use the
programme for those very reasons. There are obvious exceptions to this, as is the case of Greenfield School, an upper middle class boarding school in a suburban area which was also visited in the early stages of the fieldwork. The programme is taught there as an elective in Transition Year, where in 2002 some 35 boys out of a total of 110 students elected to take EM as a class. The teacher, Evelyn, described in an informal interview with me the reactions of the boys in her class to the materials she chose to use, which included the topics of men working, aggression, domestic violence and bullying:

I am surprised sometimes at the depth of information that's come out of [the group] and the shock and horror at the behaviour of some other men. Like when we did that project last week [on media coverage of men and violence], they were horrified at it 'good lord could you imagine that...' They really couldn't get over it, and I wouldn't say that they were embarrassed but I suppose that they were in a way. They were embarrassed that other men could do such things (2002).

Of key importance here is the use of the word 'other.' Evelyn unconsciously reflects the students' understanding of the programme as being about 'other' men. In a general and uncritical overview the programme appears to deal with situations that are relevant to all boys across class and social boundaries. This includes topics such as bullying, alcohol-related violence, the hyper-competitive masculinities that are encouraged and produced by all-male school environments and questions of equality and building good relationships with those around one regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, disability or class. At a more specific and closely read level, however, the programme deals with problems that have their roots in the social environment of the boys and as such emphasis is given to problems that are far more likely to be encountered by boys from a working
class background. These range from encounters with violence, whether on the street, in the home, in gang-related incidences, to drug and alcohol abuse, or to involvement with petty crime and with the Gardaí. The programme materials highlight the problematic aspects of certain behaviours. It presents solutions and alternatives to these activities or mindsets yet still, through its patronising and remote tone, it simply manages to reinforce the naturalness of the particular negative behaviour in question to the boys. This can be seen in the following example of a classroom debate on personal freedom.

Boys will be Boys...?

Here we have a debate prompted by visual material on gangs (EM 2000: 23) from the first section of the programme, entitled ‘Starting Out’. What emerges of interest from this is not the actual material, or the actual class debate, but rather an undercurrent of whispered talk upon which Paul picks up. He interrupts the class discussion as he becomes aware of the conversation that is taking place at a quieter level among three boys. As I am sitting almost opposite these three at the back of the class, I have been listening primarily to them for the last five minutes or so and taking notes all the while. Two of the boys have turned right around in their seats in order to confer with the third. I am just out of their line of vision and they continue talking quietly among themselves. They are not held back by my presence, which normally acts in a constraining manner when their attention is drawn to it by Paul.25 They are also, for once, not troubled in the slightest when Paul, and therefore the rest of the class (and me), join in their conversation. The following is an extract from my fieldwork journal written up directly from notes taken in the classroom as the conversation developed:
Suddenly hearing the boys next to me utter the word ‘arrested,’ alarm bells visibly go off in Paul’s mind. He stops everything, makes everyone shut up and asks who was arrested? One of the trio – Owen – puts up his hand. Paul waits for him to explain. He is quite happy to talk about what happened, not embarrassed or ashamed, as I would feel or I would have imagined someone would feel. Instead, he seems to feel it is part of a good night out (4th November 2002).

It seems, in his words, that Owen and nine of his friends were picked up by the Gardaí for ‘no reason, we were only standing in the road’ and brought to the local station. They were not, as it turns out, arrested but were cautioned, had their names taken and had their parents called. They were not charged but were kept there for an hour or so as they were drunk and probably, although he does not say so, disorderly. Paul asks what their parents said but receives no answer, only a broad smile and a shrug, indicating to all, that he ‘got away with it’.

Two points of interest and importance arise here. Firstly, the relatively unrestricted reaction and response to the programme materials provide a clarity and urgency to the way in which the boys alter or refute the official perspective on them and on their lives as it is represented to them through EM. The obvious censoriousness of the programme on the subject of hanging out in gangs merely reinforces the rightness of that behaviour for the boys. The willingness to talk about it is the second point of interest. Owen is suddenly the centre of an admiring circle of impressed peers. It is not necessarily the fact that he got caught or the fact that he was drunk. That is something they are all familiar with. Rather it is the fact that there were no repercussions. He ‘got away with it’. In the particular counter-culture of the boys, second only to ‘having a laugh’ is ‘getting away
with it'. This provides an awkward situation for Paul. He is, on the one hand, anxious to condemn the behaviour that led to Garda intervention but at the same time he is keen to remain supportive of the boys who feel that they have been, once again unjustly picked on. 26

Although, as can be seen from the preceding example, the boys are remarkably open and free with their opinions and experiences, they are obviously not totally unrestricted in their reactions and responses, and they regularly, as discussed, dilute things through humorous retellings or through joking. Their relationship with Paul is positive and demonstrates high levels of trust and respect on both sides. Nevertheless, there are some things they will not share in this school setting. This is, in part, due to the very strict system of censorship which operates amongst the boys within the social hierarchy of the group, as it is acknowledged in the classroom. Behavioural cues are taken from the accepted group leaders, who operate an ascending level of censure when an individual goes too far. The importance of this behavioural code lies in the complex and highly structured social hierarchy of the boys which is a major reservoir of inscribed meaning, covering all aspects of ‘learned masculinity’ and the way in which they position themselves in relation to masculine stereotypes. A major role model for the boys is Roy Keane, the former Ireland and Manchester United footballer, who is known, as well as for his sporting prowess, for his intractability and propensity for aggression. A study carried out by Aoife Curtain and Denis Linehan (2002) at University College Cork’s social geography department explored the esteem in which Cork native and Mayfield man Keane is held. 27 They write:
... Roy Keane was praised and admired by many of the participants in the study for his manliness. Keane presents a classic version of hegemonic masculinity: physically fit, successful, powerful and emotionally strong. He was variously praised for being a good family man, for rising above the disadvantages of his working class background and for his physical game on the football pitch (Curtain and Linehan 2002: 67).

The type of masculinity most favoured by the Hillside boys is this 'hard man' persona: someone who resists the feminised processes of compromise or talking out of problems in favour of conflict and taking any problems 'outside'. They regard this type of action as feminised and unmanly and give examples of how they would react in a particular situation described to them by Paul (EM 2000: 119). The situation chosen by Paul involves a boy getting angry and possessive because his girlfriend is talking to another man. He wants them to think of what they would say to this boy to help him deal with the situation and so relates it directly to their own friends:

Paul: Now, have you seen possessiveness amongst your own friends?
Stephen: No, not really.
Brendan: He might just hit the guy instead.
Owen: You might bang something or break something.

The notion of talking it out either with the girl or with the other man involved does not occur to any of the boys. Paul suggests it but it is laughingly dismissed. He is also concerned by the sense of ownership of women that the boys unquestionably go along with and is unwilling to let it go unchallenged. Some minutes later after a slight
digression into a discussion on control and power, Paul reposes the problem of a sense of male ownership over women and the danger of such inequality in a relationship:

Paul: Should fear be part of a relationship?
Class: [Shouting together.] Yes.
Paul: Where does fear come into a good relationship?
Brendan: [In a mocking undertone] Fear that it would end some day.
Stephan: [Pretending to cry.] Stop you’re making me cry.
Alex: She should fear you a bit sir.
Paul: [Talking loudly over the noise that has erupted.] Is control part of a relationship?
Class: [Emphatically.] Yes.
Paul: What about trust, communication, understanding...? Lads ... if it is only fear then you have a problem (3rd March 2003).

At this point the boys lose all interest in the topic and begin to joke about how to ‘punish her’, making exaggeratedly violent gestures and noises. Again while the humour may lessen the impact of the actions and comments, it is at the forefront of my mind and clearly to the front of Paul’s that there is some element of belief in their right to control and extend ownership over a girlfriend.

Examples like this demonstrate the way in which the boys see the programme as a direct challenge to their understanding of themselves and the roles they play in their wider community, as well as a straightforward threat to their coherent group structure. This is one of the key reasons why I chose to carry out fieldwork in the EM classroom environment and why EM is so central to the research. The material periodically
demands a level of engagement from the boys that is not seen in other course materials or classes. It tests the boys, insisting that they reflect upon and justify themselves and their positions across a range of social and moral issues or problems such as racism or sexism.

As is argued throughout and is seen particularly in chapter five, the materials are limited in many aspects. They ignore the cultural and social frames of reference of their audience and gloss over the wider context which impacts so strongly on the masculine attitudes and identities subscribed to by different groups of boys. However, this limited view works productively for me as a researcher, in that it ‘forces’ the boys to explain and narrate their own viewpoint in order to counter what they see as being erroneous or misrepresentative on the part of the programme. In addition, I would have found it extremely difficult to have the above conversation with the boys as they would not have engaged with me in that way. The unrestrained vigour with which they presented their point of view on relationships and on the questions of fear and power is directly related to my strategy of placing myself out of their eye line. Obviously they are generally aware of my presence, but when debate becomes particularly heated they seem to forget that I am behind them. On this occasion Paul reminds them of my presence by moving down the classroom and settling beside my desk. As he does this he repeats his point about fear. This prompts a very different response this time. The boys look directly at me. Furthermore, Brendan, putting his hand up, breaks the feeling of tension that has arisen. This, I am sure, is due to the boys’ sudden conviction that I am sitting in judgement of them and, what is worse, writing everything down. Brendan announces, ‘Sir. I am afraid of Holy Statues (3rd March 2003).
As an occasional reminder to the boys that they are, in a sense ‘on show’ due to my presence, Paul will stand near my desk. As all heads turn and follow him on his classroom perambulations, they will invariably end up looking directly at me. This usually, as shown above, works well in terms of lightening the atmosphere or prodding the boys into a less sexist frame of mind. However, my presence, particularly at the start of each term, also provides much opportunity for attempts at embarrassing me, making me laugh or provoking me through sexist jokes, innuendo, and general clowning. In fact, the only time the boys show embarrassment, either individually or as a group, is when they realise that they have taken something too seriously. In situations where they have engaged with the topic, answered honestly and debated amongst themselves in a genuine manner there arises an urgent need to reassert their subversiveness. Brendan’s intervention above is a classic example of an attempt to recover ground in the face of perceived over-earnestness. The boys constantly police themselves in order to remain and function as a coherent stick-together group. In this instance they had reached a level of engagement and enthusiasm with the programme that is excessive in their eyes and so the code of censure is invoked by the ringleader of this group, Brendan. By making a joke out of it he sets the tone for the rest of the class, where students’ chief fears now include ‘being buried alive’ and ‘being castrated’.

Occasionally the provocative nature of EM does not work, as is seen in situations where the students switch off and reject the challenge through a refusal to engage with the topic or question at hand. This is particularly interesting in terms of EM’s own challenge to traditional pedagogies, whereby it subverts the established rules of the classroom by
putting forward a student-centred and student-led template. Carrying out fieldwork in the
classroom, I see that the boys normally respond well to the non-didactic ‘there is no right
answer’ style of the programme. It also appears that the boys enjoy and, more often than
not, engage with the opportunity to express themselves more freely and to present their
own take on the issues within the conditionally supportive structure of their peer group.
However, there are occasions when the boys reject entirely the challenge laid down by
the programme and instead of disrupting the class in the traditional manner - by creating
noise and disturbances, talking or leaving their seats - they reassert these traditional
values of the classroom by sitting still in straight rows without talking. This means that an
observer passing by the classroom door would see them as perhaps a class of well­
behaved, model students, when in fact they are performing the ultimate act of rejection
and subversion in terms of EM and what it sets out to do.

Negatively Traditional Masculinities

As previously noted, my use of the descriptive phrase negatively traditional masculinities
comes from an understanding of the characteristics of a traditional patriarchal form of
masculinity as it is engaged with by Irish educational theorists Lynch and Lodge from
findings contained in their 1999 study of young males in full-time, second-level
education and their attitudes to the world around them. Most challenging and interesting,
however, are the similarities between the particular form of defensive masculinity that is
put forward by the Hillside boys and the macho masculinity that is an integral part of the
‘counter-school culture’ expressed by the ‘lads’ in Willis’s Learning to Labour. Both
groups draw heavily on their understanding of themselves as ‘real men’ separated by
choice rather than by circumstance from middle class ‘fags’ and ‘ponces’. Their
defensiveness and rejection of alternative masculinities is understandable in this context
through the level of social and personal investment evident in their gender identity. This
negative traditionalism or defensive masculinity as embodied by the ‘lads’ is
rediscovered in the majority of studies dedicated to young men and their masculine
subcultures. It reappears in responses to and updates of Willis’ work, primarily in school-
based research, key examples of which include O’ Donnell and Sharpe’s Uncertain
Masculinities (2000), Mac an Ghaill’s The Making of Men (1994) and Foley’s 1996
ethnography Learning Capitalist Culture. It also appears in studies of young people in
other settings such as youth clubs and sports clubs, and is often reinforced by girls in a
similar class position as they relate to the macho masculinity as a familiar male identity
and one that further reinforces their own femininity (McRobbie 1991: 45-51).

A primary motivation of much school-based research within sociology and cultural
studies, including those above, has been to uncover and examine the way in which social
and educational inequalities are reproduced within the institutional structure of the school
(Foster 1996: 2). Students are often in this case reduced to examples and test cases
representative only of their respective disadvantage, whether it be gender, social class,
race, ethnicity or disability. However, in certain incidences, such as is seen in Learning to
Labour, students, considered to be close to the bottom of the educational and social
hierarchy are, despite criticisms of Willis’s ethnographic practice, engaged with by him
in a constructive manner. While their voices are mediated through Willis’s
documentation and obviously altered by the particularities of the situation in which the
conversations are occurring, there remains a strong sense of the ‘lads’ agency, both of 
their acute awareness of their social position, and of their knowing complicity with a 
system which encourages and maintains their rejection of the chance to ‘better 
themselves’ through working hard, behaving and accepting their subordinate positions as 
students at school. Willis’s ‘lads’ consider their part-time manual jobs to be far more 
important than school. Not only are they earning money which they cannot do in school, 
but they are participating in the male world of hard physical work as painters, labourers, 
milkmen and butchers’ assistants. Willis writes:

From the fourth form onwards, Spike thinks his work at a linen wholesaler’s is 
more important than school. He gladly takes days and weeks off school to work.… 
Joey works with his brother as a painter and decorator during the summer. He 
regards that as real work, and school as some kind of enforced holiday. There is 
no doubt that this ability to ‘make out’ in the ‘real world’….and to deal with 
adults nearly in their own terms strengthens ‘the lads’ self – confidence (1977: 
39).

The majority of the Hillside students have part-time jobs in places such as shops and 
supermarkets, work roles and spaces that were traditionally female and are now reflective 
of the current economising drive towards younger, permanently part-time, casual 
employees who are easy to recruit, lay-off and replace. The boys’ choice of available 
after-school work is determined and limited as much by their immediate environment as it is by their age and gender. The area surrounding the school is primarily residential, on 
the inner outskirts of the city. The typical suburban landscape of video rental stores, small 
privately owned local shops, larger local chain stores including Spar and Centra, several
Hairdressers, a private crèche and a hackney cab base make up the local business community. There are also several small offices located above shops and a small medical centre. A large number of small to medium-sized pubs, a GAA club, several primary schools and churches, one of which is now used as a community centre, are also within immediate reach. These remnants of the older, more established community still flourish but many smaller independent businesses such as butchers, a small bakery and cake shop and several small newsagents are empty and boarded up. Now residents travel to larger suburban outlets such as the Tesco supermarket a mile away, or else into the city for their shopping needs. The boys also travel to the city for after-school work options, with most working in supermarkets a 15 to 20 minute walk from the school. The public faces of these establishments are dominated by women. Trips to Dunnes Stores and SuperValu supermarkets, both large employers of school age workers, revealed all checkout operators to be young to middle aged females, as were bag packers. Background workers such as trolley attendants and shelf stackers were predominantly male, with a split between younger boys clearly working after-school jobs and older male foreign nationals.

In this way the jobs worked by the Hillside boys and their peers reaffirm masculinity only by virtue of the pay check received. There is no inherent value in or satisfaction to be gained from the work itself. That is the crucial difference between Britain and Ireland in the late 1970s and the present day. The pride the 'lads' took from the part time jobs they did and the full-time jobs they moved on to was part of the overall valuing within their community of a certain type of hard, masculine work. They were not treated as schoolboys earning pocket money but as adults, allowed and expected to spend their
wages on grown-up pleasures such as alcohol, cigarettes and nightclubs (1977: 18 - 20).
The Hillside boys are not afforded this status; their work is seen and understood purely
from a financial standpoint. There is no social or cultural value to be gained from the
actual work itself. The value of hard physical labour and the ability to do it successfully is
still an integral part of the male working class psyche. Although the conditions and type
of work are different, it is not to say that the Hillside boys do not spend their money on
the same adult pleasures that the ‘lads’ did. Almost half of the Hillside boys smoke, and
all of them drink alcohol regularly, as is evidenced in conversations with both groups
about the issue of alcohol consumption. Paul does not condone their drinking, but he is
aware of the fact that they do drink and makes it clear that he does not approve but
equally does not condemn it outright in what would be a futile gesture. Instead he
approaches alcohol at their level of experience, linking it carefully to the issue of getting
caught, or the fear of getting into trouble:

Paul: When would you be afraid of getting into trouble... getting
caught? Is it when you are sneaking inside home at two in the
morning and there is a smell of ‘Silvermints’ off you? 28
Owen: It’s ‘Triple X’ mints, Sir.
Paul: Is that the voice of experience there? (3rd March 2003).

Alcohol and cigarettes are major social props employed by the Hillside boys. Going
outside at work or at school lunchtime for a smoke is a mark of maturity as is the ability
to get ‘langers’ (meaning very drunk) and both are highly social activities. The Hillside
boys mirror Willis’s ‘lads’ in this regard, placing emphasis on their sociability and the
cultural props they use to help separate off and maintain groups of friends. So, rather than
educational success it is the importance of the social and the personal networks of friends, family, place, work and tradition that are of central importance to both the Hillside boys and the ‘lads’. Particularly clear from Willis’s research is the fact that the ‘lads’ are unwilling to risk the established security of their embedded position and their innate understanding of that world for the disruptive effects of a move away from family, friends and home to a job or even university further afield. This is one of the substantive differences between the ‘lads’ and the ‘ear’oles29 in Willis’s work. It is not just a difference in scholastic ability as such. Rather, it is a disinclination to separate the self out from the familiar bulk of friends and an insecurity about doing this. The fathers of the ‘lads’ tell stories of interactions with men with whom they were in school, who are now foremen or bosses in the steel works and factories that provide local employment. These stories ridicule and show disdain for and distrust of these men, strongly expressing the reality that once these men separated themselves from the undifferentiated blue collar floor they severed their ties to their local support network and thus may no longer be considered to be part of the community. Willis writes:

A foreman is like, you know what I mean, they’re trying to get up. They’d cut everybody’s throat to get there. You get people like this in the factory. Course these people cop it in the neck off the workers, they do all the tricks under the sun (1977: 54).

Much like the boys at Hillside the ‘lads’ themselves are keenly aware of the division between manual and mental labour. Their fathers reproduce the relationship of mistrust and disdain in the home, an extension of the counter-school culture and a reassertion of ‘them and us’ that the ‘lads’ have been practicing at school in preparation for entry to the
Workplace. In a group discussion Willis asks the ‘lads’ directly why they are not like the ‘ear’oles’, why they do not try harder in school. He receives the following response from a student named Spanksy:

I mean, what will they remember of their school life? What will they have to look back on? Sitting in a classroom, sweating their bollocks off, you know, while we’ve been... I mean look at the things we can look back on, fighting on the Pakis, fighting on the JAs [i.e. Jamaicans]. Some of the things we’ve done on teachers, it’ll be a laff when we look back on it (14).

This behaviour is also actively encouraged by the mothers of the ‘lads’. There is no censure or reprimand for their behaviour, with one boy explaining how his mother keeps all of the letters the principal sends home about his bad behaviour – drinking during school hours, stealing, non-attendance and so on:

Our mum’s kept all the letters, you know, about like the letters Simmondsy’s sent [about the drinking]. I says, “What you keeping them for?” She says, “Well it’ll be nice to look back on to, won’t it, you know, ‘show your kids like you know, what a terror you was” (21).

I introduce these extracts here for two reasons. First, they enable me to explore the conflict highlighted in Willis’s own work. This is Willis’ insistence that the ‘lads’ have agency, that they are not merely passive drones resigned to manual labour and poverty as an accident of birth, and his competing claim which negates the ‘lads’ as well as his own concept of agency. This is his assertion that his subjects would reject this life and the future it entails if they were able to see far enough through the veil of social oppression
which makes them believe that this is the best and only option for them as men. This prevention of the political articulation of oppression occurs for Willis through deep and disorientating divisions between mental and manual labour. These divisions are produced and sustained by social systems that work from the top down, in a didactic model, primarily in this case, through the intervention of that social state apparatus in the form of the school, which is populated by class enemies (teachers) whose role it is to continually reproduce inequality in order to sustain their own class positions (1977: 11-13).

A similar situation emerges at Hillside. The boys are quite keenly aware of their lack of power at an individual level and they submit to their subservience at this time because they are young, living at home with their parents and in full-time education. They are also, however, quite vocal about their lack of power, specifically in relation to media representation and the wider question of who has the power to define youthful working class masculinities:

You’d always see the same pictures of young fellas like, hanging around, with their faces blobbed out ... They use the same kind of pictures always for the same stories... (4th November 2002).

The same kind of stories referred to above describe feature pieces about young men and gangs, young men terrorizing housing estates, joyriding, taking drugs, stealing and seemingly most threateningly, just ‘hanging around’. The Hillside boys do not consider themselves to be intimidating, and claim not to set out to intimidate other people unless they are specifically squaring up to a similar group of young men. They regard themselves as being individually safer when in gangs, but as open to intimidation
themselves, as a group, both from rival groups and from the Gardai. In a class discussing the different perceptions of teenage gangs, the following conversation ensued:

Paul: Now why would the Guards be interested in you at all?
Owen: Only if you’re in a gang of young fellas, sir.
Ian: They’d come up to you because they’d think like… you’d be up to something if you were in a gang of lads…like…all together…
(4th November 2002).30

The disparity between the boys’ perception of themselves and their behaviour and public perceptions of them is growing, although occasional intervention from Juvenile Liaison Officers attempts to address this, often in response to media hysteria on the issue. As one senior Garda points out, ‘There is a hell of a lot of horseplay among young people and if you’re an elderly person it can look worse than it is and can be very frightening indeed. But, in a lot of cases, they’ll be causing no harm to anybody’ (Marsh and Fox-Kibby 1992: NP).31 Instead of seeing themselves as powerful and threatening to others, the Hillside boys see themselves as relatively powerless against an adult world of sanctions and refusals. Interestingly, within this understanding of the power balance, the Hillside boys, unlike Willis’s ‘lads’, understand their powerlessness as having more to do with their relative youth as opposed to a socially institutionalized class bias. There is a growing perception of this in response to the changes in their local area, but it has yet to be fully articulated.

The ‘gentrification’ of the locality has the potential to cause further upheaval for Hillside School, building on the dramatic demographic changes wrought over the past three
decades. Old narrow streets of small terraced cottages have become sought after as an alternative to apartments for investors and first-time buyers. Likewise, former council houses and flat complexes have been sold off and new private developments established on those sites. Areas previously derelict or open to anyone have now become bastions of middle class security, with locked gates for both cars and pedestrians. A number of pubs in the surrounding area have changed hands and now offer high-class ‘gastro-pub’ food service and a brand new clientele. A delicatessen and an organic butcher’s shop have opened on a nearby street notorious for its roughness and for having 28 pubs on a street a half a mile long (Koehane 1999: 3-4).

The Hillside boys live and are immersed in this sea of change and have grown up in a locale that encompasses several diverse communities. The problematic lies in the understanding that the delicate balance of representation has shifted and the younger members of the older communities are now effectively facing exclusion through rising house prices and a lack of development land for public housing. They are aware of the changes around them in the sense that they encounter them on a daily basis but, as noted above, they regard any restrictions to their movements or to their daily lives as being due primarily to their age. They are, in accordance with their ‘negatively traditional masculinities’, expecting a certain level of traditional male power in the home, in relationships and in the workplace once they leave school and get jobs. However, unlike Willis’s ‘lads’, this type of power is no longer recognised or even available to them anymore. Socially, culturally, and economically the world has changed. Although the Hillside boys are not in as extreme a working class or industrial setting as seen in
Hammertown, and as shown in the examples and extracts introduced previously, their feelings on work are linked to a strong understanding of there being a division between feminised (but not necessarily female) mental and properly masculine manual labour. The Hillside boys, and boys like them, appear on the research radar ‘as a problem’ now that they are no longer absorbed into, and therefore rendered invisible, heavy industry, labouring, or various trades upon leaving school whether after Junior Certificate, at fifteen, or after the Leaving Certificate at eighteen years old (Lingard 1998). They also share a derisive attitude to third-level education which they regard largely as a waste of time. This is an attitude best explained through the use of O’Donnell and Sharpe’s concept of a cultural lag combined with environmental factors that prevent wholly or impede the progression from second-level to third-level education.

Hillside school itself has also undergone much change. Previously the local catchment area would have included long established ‘respectable’ working class neighbourhoods along with a large influx of boys from the then rural, now suburban hinterland. The demographic of the area has changed massively and this is reflected in the school statistics. In the 1970s about seventy percent of each Hillside Leaving Certificate - sixth year - class would have gone on to a university or institute of technology. Now, as related by Paul, that figure is in the low 20s. Paul told me:

At that time more than 70 percent of our Leaving Cert’s would have gone on to third level and today it would be in the low 20s. My definition of third level today would be university, college of technology or apprenticeship and if you take that into account then it would be over 50 percent. But since we introduced
programmes like Leaving Cert Applied we are obviously catering for students who would not have any ambitions to go on to third level... (2002).

It is important to state that the boys are not prepared in school for lives of manual labour in the somewhat insidious way that Hammertown Secondary Modern institutionalised the reproduction of class positions through the ‘lads’. There is rather an acceptance of the social and cultural realities and backgrounds of the Hillside boys that removes for them or makes unattractive to them the possibility of third-level education, which is still, despite its being ‘free’, dominated in Ireland by the middle and upper classes. The staff at Hillside School are unanimous in their positive attitude of encouragement and practical advice to any student considering further education and are proud of those that go on to third level. They do not, however, uphold university education as being the best option for all students, or the option for only the best students. It is simply one option among many that they offer, including apprenticeship schemes, FÁS Schemes and the Leaving Certificate Applied – a vocational skills-led senior cycle programme. There is a common sense acceptance that the majority of the boys in attendance at Hillside do not, or cannot consider third level as an option. This normalisation of social class expectations is problematic, if unsurprising, and is supported by data contained in recent newspaper league tables showing the spread of feeder schools for the first-year degree course intake within each of the major third level institutions in the country. As expected, private fee-paying schools accessible to the middle and upper classes dominate the major universities in the country. Public schools in prosperous suburbs also feature high up in the league tables, with the greatest growth area emergent in the private grind school sector, where
parents again pay above average prices for fifth and sixth year attendance, as well as extra tuition.

Further drawing out the parallel between the ‘lads’ and the boys at Hillside, there is evidence of a milder version of the counter-school culture where the latter too are almost entirely geared towards getting, in the ‘lads’ words, ‘a laff’. Status within the group comes from the ability to disrupt the class without getting oneself or anyone around one into serious trouble. In both groups of boys the acknowledged leader is also the class comedian, always ready with a clever remark or on occasion a rude gesture or noise. The classes are generally characterised by a high level of humour, which is usually accepted by Paul as one of the benefits of EM – it allows the boys to be themselves more so than in any other class. When I asked Paul about this he replied:

A certain level of humour is important, but you know that the jokes people have, often are part of a mindset and they are aware of that... I think with this group we’ve got to the stage where they can say things freely from their own point of view... Very often they are more inhibited by each other than by the teacher, you know, but that kind of inhibitor isn’t there in that group. They all come from the same classes as last year which helps, they have been together for a while (2002).

Two key points here include the recognition by Paul that the humour expressed by the boys is more often than not more reflective of their true beliefs than anything else they say. The second point of importance concerns the way in which the boys inhibit or do not inhibit each other. From my experiences in the classroom, I can discern a distinct and highly structured level of peer censure. Anyone ‘sucking up’ to the teacher is sniggered
derisively at. Likewise anyone showing too much enthusiasm or willingness to engage with a topic is laughed at and mocked. A major tool of censure is imitation and repetition of the last words said by the victim, normally accessorised by what is known colloquially as the ‘gay hand’, a limp-wristed gesture accompanied by a simper or a giggle which always produces hysteria in the rest of the group.

The boys, like Willis’s ‘lads’, the boys in Mac an Ghaill’s, O’Donnell and Sharpe’s, and Foley’s studies, are generally homophobic. The worst insult they can dole out is that someone is gay, or a job is gay. An idea, a shop, a drink, anything that they disapprove of or don’t understand or just don’t like is instantly labelled ‘gay’ and is relegated immediately through mockery to isolation and disinterest. For example, during a class focusing on healthy eating habits, Paul asks a seemingly innocuous question about fruit, unleashing a wave of innuendo and mocking:

Paul: What fruit do you like?
Class: [Pointing at one boy.] Bananas, Sir. He loves bananas.
Paul: So you’re not too big on the fruit, then?
Darren: Sir. [Pause.] Fruit is gay. [Muttered comment.] (26th January 2004).

Regular examples of a seemingly benign homophobia occur in the classroom with some more overtly aggressive incidences being provoked by the portrayal of a softer masculinity on the programme video.\textsuperscript{34} The segment in question features a house husband
(see Figure 2.02a and Figure 2.02b, who stays home to mind his two little girls while his wife goes out to work. Paul asks the class to think about the memories the two children will have of their father when they are old:

He’s a pussy.
He’s a housewife.
He’s a gay-beard.

The man featured has clearly been chosen with a level of care by the producers. He is not ‘just’ a house husband; he also works from home as a carpenter. His job is assumed to be sufficiently masculine to override the fact that he appears happy to stay home and mind his children while his wife works outside the home. However, the Hillside boys are still unable to accept the fact that he is happy to be a part-time house husband and a part-time carpenter and still consider himself to be a ‘real man’. The problems facing teachers, gay and lesbian adults and young people in addressing the issue of homosexuality can be seen graphically through the type of media, and particularly music, preferred by the boys. In terms of music categories, while all except generic pop music is represented, their favoured type of music is rap. The American white rapper Eminem, alter ego of real life, working class Detroit boy Marshall Mathers, features high on their list of chosen musicians and role models. Eminem is important as he is representative of their attitudes and of their aspirations. The rapper gave an interview in 2001 to NYRock, a New York-based web magazine, which focused on the anger he rouses amongst gay and lesbian groups both in the United States and across the rest of the world. He is quoted as saying that he uses the term ‘faggot’ as an insult not necessarily because he thinks the recipient
is homosexual or is attracted to men but to underline that this man is representative of everything a man should not be. Mathers said:

I'm not gay bashing. People just don't understand where I come from. 'Faggot' to me doesn't necessarily mean gay people. 'Faggot' to me just means... taking away your manhood. You're a sissy. You're a coward. Just like you might sit around in your living room and say, 'Dude, stop, you're being a fag, dude [...] it does not necessarily mean you're being a gay person. It just means you're being a fag. You're being an asshole or whatever. That's the way that the word was always taught to me. That's how I learned the word (Gabriella 2001: NP).

The fact that the boys at Hillside agree with Eminem on this point and may use the word 'faggot' in the same way does not lessen their homophobia any. just as it does not dilute Mathers' clear dislike of gay people. Using 'gay' or 'faggot' or any other variation on the theme as an insult does not mean that the insulter believes the victim to be attracted to or sexually active with men but rather aims to take away his claim to manhood or masculinity by the implication that he is somehow an incomplete or unworthy male.
What an awareness of the boys' evident complicity as regards the 'unmanliness' of gay men does, is give us insight into the importance of the researcher's awareness of the cultural and social influences that impact upon the social attitudes of the boys. It is particularly important in this case in order to fully comprehend the effectiveness or worth of the efforts made by EM in attempting to shift or somehow alter the negatively traditional masculinity that demands an abhorrence of the homosexual male. It also highlights the still pervasive understanding that to be a gay man is to be in some sense a fake or false man. Sexual activity and sexual orientation is of paramount importance in the construction of youthful masculinity. It is linked indelibly to the centrality of the body in youth culture and is explored in full in the following chapter.

On another occasion the group had been watching a further segment from the video, this time featuring members of the South East Men's Network, a men's collective that meets for discussion groups. One individual featured announces that 'men think that they own women' and goes on from there to discuss sexism in society and to denounce it. Following up on that specific comment, Paul asks the class in general if they agree with the statement made:

Paul: Do you think that? [e.g., do you believe that men feel that they own women?]

David: No.

Darren: [Interrupting.] I do [think that].

Paul: Do you really, though? Do you Darren?

Darren: No....

Class: [Laughing and pointing.] He does, sir. He does. You do.
Once the class settles down, Paul reposes the question. In response to muttering from the back of the class that ‘that fella is gay’ and that he ‘has a problem with sex’, he asks the boys to explain further. But, no one seems to have an answer beyond that this man is, although married to a woman, gay. Paul waits. Standing at the back of the class leaning one shoulder against the wall, he is unwilling to let this go unchallenged. He asks again:

Paul:  So, if a man has a problem with sex, he is gay? Or do you just call other men gay ...?
Owen:  If men think another man is better than them, they all call him gay.
Darren: Like the singers, sir. All the women love them and so all the men call them gay (1st March 2004).

Owen and Darren’s comments provoke the interest of the rest of the class, who had previously been ignoring Paul and talking amongst themselves. Now they are suddenly willing, with no apparent sense of irony or embarrassment whatsoever, to dissect their most serious and commonly used insult. They admit to the fact that calling another man ‘gay’ often has little to do with individual sexual orientation. Using ‘gay’ as a pejorative term then signifies both a degree of genuine homophobia and the widely shared social understanding that being gay makes you ‘less of a man’.

**Women, Work and Macho Men**

Including extracts from Willis’s work functions as a prelude to the more essential discussion, introduced briefly above, of the way in which aspects of this counter-culture, homophobia and sexism are related to the persistence of this very traditional form of masculinity. This macho working class masculinity may have seemed to be on its way out
in 1970s Britain with Willis’s ‘lads’, but it nevertheless remains one of the strongest and most coherent male identities expressed by boys at Hillside school today, almost 30 years after *Learning to Labour* was published. Importantly, this time lag is experienced to some extent, both in the Irish findings of Lynch and Lodge and in the British equivalent by O’Donnell and Sharpe by all boys (but more so by working class and non-academic boys who are the present day equivalent of the Hammertown ‘lads’). The educational performance of middle and upper class boys is still good. They continue to dominate male participation at the top universities while working class boys are now understood as receiving little or no benefit from the education system (O’Donnell and Sharpe 2000: 23). So much is this so that they are now considered its main failures, with working class boys of ethnic or racial minorities making up the majority of young men who have opted out of the school system (ibid 2000: 17). This replication of the macho masculinity amongst groups of non-academic, working class young men is found in Mac an Ghaill’s study. He links it to an insecurity about their role as young working class men in a society which seemingly has no function for them (1994:59). The macho persona is a major part of the performance of the aggressive heterosexual masculinities which are so strongly evident at Hillside. It is seen through the high levels of sexism that are exemplified by the seemingly unshakable conviction that men’s work and women’s work are, and should be, inherently different. The boys are not comfortable with men who perform what they understand to be a woman’s role. Returning to the theme of the house husband, they further criticise him in terms of the actual work he does in the home.

Paul: Is he the breadwinner or the child minder?
Class: He’s both.

Paul: Is there anything that the father is doing that’s unusual?

Liam: He cleans up.

Darren: He’s a wimp.

There is a general consensus among the boys that men should work outside the home. They realise that most women work outside of the home too, but feel strongly that if there is a situation in which one parent must stay home that it should be the woman, even if she earns more than the man. In addition to this, they strongly believe that, if, as a man you are working outside of the home, you should not have to do any housework. One of the boys states, ‘If you’re bringing in the money like... You shouldn’t have to do housework if you’ve been out all day workin’ (8th March 2004).

The traditional views held by the boys are sustained across both groups with each boy admitting to a certain amount of housework as well as to looking after younger brothers and sisters or nephews and nieces. However, they are all equally adamant that they submit to the indignity of ‘women’s work’ only because they are young and are living at home. When asked by Paul if they would do the same when they are married, or have children, the question is rejected outright. Collectively they feel that to work outside of the home and to provide for a family is one of the fundamental elements of being a ‘real man’. They genuinely, as is underlined by all of the ‘joking’, do not identify with the house husband featured and consider his situation to be both ‘depressing’ and ‘abnormal’. Their identity in being masculine is totally bound up with the idea of work and within that, with the categorisation of work that is suitable for ‘men’.
With specific reference to both the pervasiveness and perseverance of this particular form of negatively traditional masculinity, it is essential to understand why it is continuously so attractive to young men, and especially to disenfranchised groups of young men. Of particular interest at the moment is the situation whereby, paradoxically, these boys and young men are being pushed further and further to the margins of affluent western societies even as they appear more and more frequently in the media and on academic agendas, where they are characterised in an increasingly narrow and one-sided manner as being inherently deviant and as therefore posing a specific threat to those affluent societies. This understanding of young people, and especially of young working class boys, as constituting a threatening population has been explored by educational theorist Henry Giroux. In ‘Hollywood, Race and the Demonization of Youth: The “Kids” are not “Alright”’ (1996) he looks at the long American history of the complicated relationship that exists among adult, white, middle class society and young, black and Hispanic working class people. Giroux discusses the assertion that this has moved beyond the traditional white fear of the other and that a more democratic and inclusive fear now extends to all but the most privileged groups of young people. He writes:

...[S]ociety at present exudes both a deep rooted hostility and chilling indifference toward youth, reinforcing the dismal conditions under which young people are increasingly living...Fuelled by a degrading visual depiction of youth as criminal, sexually decadent, drug crazed and illiterate. In short, youth are viewed as a growing threat to the public order (Giroux 1996: 31).

While this is familiar ground for Giroux and his American readers, there is clearly a different tradition and a different context as far as the Irish situation is concerned. The
teenager, as an individual who is someplace between child and young adult, still with characteristics of one yet with some responsibilities of the other, has had a more tenuous grip on the imaginations of teachers, parents and policymakers in this country. Added to this is the relatively recent commodification of young people, helped by retail industry realisation of their spending power across social classes. The upsurge in young people working after school and improved legislation to protect and ensure fair pay has led to a generation of relatively wealthy teenagers spending their money primarily on themselves and on their own interests. Changes in family and community structure, including local physical changes with the loss of green spaces due to housing and private developments, coupled with longer working hours and commuting time for working parents, means that not only do young people spend more time on their own, but that their time is relatively unstructured and undisciplined. The tendency to gather in groups and to simply hang around is one of the biggest problems associated with young men and young women. It is generally regarded as a precursor to, or cover for, high risk behaviour, criminal activity and intimidation of other community members. Undoubtedly, this is true in many cases. But, in general, it is due to boredom, lack of facilities and lack of direction along with a natural inclination to hang out with friends that leads to the nightly gatherings of anything from three to 20 youths in the Hillside area. Local and national media reports on the problem across the country are generally one-sided and tend to exaggerate the situation, inflating fears on the side of older people and neighbours and sowing resentment on the part of the young people (Devlin 2006).
This hostile media portrayal, which is understood by many to be legitimised through policy decisions such as EM, further invests a sense of crisis, urgency and moral panic in both official and public understandings of a delinquent, out-of-control youth. Such coverage manages to be simultaneously extensive and alarmist while steadfastly ignoring the actual roots of social problems. This coverage diverts all attention towards debates on gender-based academic achievement tables or the criminality of a minority while one of the more vulnerable sectors of society is being further marginalised through a collective public identification of working class boys in particular as being criminally maladjusted (Lingard 1998). Accompanying this characterisation of boys is the general understanding that the only adult figures to whom blame or responsibility could be apportioned are the parents of these socially and morally irredeemable youths, with occasional swipes at the teaching profession for not providing an adequate moral framework. 38

In response to and as a counter-measure to such mindsets and media coverage, it becomes even more essential to understand the many different contexts and applications of the descriptive phrase ‘negatively traditional masculinity’. I see this cultural identity as a viable persona that can be adopted by the boys; the boys see it as necessary for acceptance and survival. It is a defensive stratagem and also an attractive persona for young working class men. It is also understood here as academic shorthand for a reductive and over-simplified way of looking at aspects of masculine culture, and as an agent of moral panic when used in the media context. Therefore my use and understanding of the descriptive phrase ‘negatively traditional masculinity’ is cognisant of all of the above and places emphasis on the importance of addressing the underlying
factors which contribute to the ongoing attractiveness of a macho masculinity amongst groups of young Irish men.

Without condemning or championing this type of hyper-masculine/negatively traditional identity, it is important to recognise it in order to see it as performed by the boys. Understanding the attraction goes towards addressing that which is missing from the EM programme. It is the lack of a sustained engagement with, or questioning of, the social conditions behind the continued attraction to this type of behaviour both together with, and on behalf of, young Irish men that is problematic. My response to this is to directly personalise my fieldwork practices and methodologies, adapting to the moods of the students and the atmosphere in the classroom. Attention to details such as smells, silent interactions between boys, noises and sounds such as rumbling stomachs, forbidden mobile phones, the rustle and scratch of surreptitious note writing, enables me to make the most of my presence in the classroom. Awareness of the prevailing mood and how quickly it changes is an essential part of understanding and interacting productively with a situation in which the boys participating in EM are constantly explaining and justifying their masculine identities and subcultures in response to the challenges laid down by that programme.

Conclusion

This desire to re-examine both the literature and the actuality of the life world of teenage boys came from a personal dissatisfaction with official, media, academic and other popular portrayals and (mis)understandings of these teenagers as universally deviant and
with no interest in or commitment to the wider society that must uncomplainingly support
them and their excesses. Popularised understandings of teenage working class boys as
members of a deviant subsection of society who pose a threat to the stability and safety of
all around them is common, reiterated and reinforced primarily through the media.
Paradoxically, then, this particular social grouping is both one of the most marginalised
yet most visible in Irish society. As a result, a situation arises in which these boys are not
only presented as a universal ‘one-man’ but also as un-personalised non-entities who
exist only in connection to anti-social behaviour or criminal activity, and who are
consistently characterised through their silence. Denial of the voice of these young men is
part of a complex relationship of separation and alienation. This prevents, through
structural and ideological barriers, the right of access to the type of language, the power
to define oneself and have that definition accepted and the means which allow you to
make your voice heard in the public media (Foley 1996: 159; 192).39

Part of my emphasis in situating my fieldwork in the EM classroom is to reflect a
radicalised space in which the boys are offered the opportunity to express themselves
more freely on a wider range of topics than is generally experienced in the classroom
setting. The EM programme itself is a central text, but this new space that it creates in the
traditional classroom is of greater interest, purely for the resulting exchanges and
revelations enabled by the extra freedom. The programme encourages students to speak
their minds, to contradict and to interrupt and to leave their seats for role-play and for
experiments in language and debate. These changes are huge - both for the teacher and
the students - in the context of the typical Irish boys’ school which does not have a

168
tradition in social education but tends instead towards a 'clear instrumental bias' which values examination performance and other tangibles (Hannan et al 1996: 21). The transformation can be observed chronologically in the fieldnotes as the boys first take advantage of this new freedom and seeming absence of an authoritarian voice instructing and ‘telling’, and soon move on to a far more self-directed and naturalised environment. In this environment the boys police each other as they do in their peer groups. Anyone who is too enthusiastic or too sarcastic is censured. Anyone who is too disruptive or who causes trouble for, or as is more common, embarrasses those sitting near him is momentarily frozen out of the group. They respond to material they find offensive or challenging by disengaging and refusing to participate, deploying a rigidly observed group silence as a lethal weapon. Often, on occasions of such silence and disengagement, the resentment and refusal on the part of the boys can be far more telling than their enthusiastic participation. Embedded in any discussion of silencing and articulation is the question of how to glean meaning from what is left unsaid, what is merely referred to and what the boys refuse to engage with as a reservoir of cultural data expressed through an eloquent silence. My sustained emphasis on the stories told by the boys and their experiences as they are retold in the classroom is a reflection of the main aim of this research – to document the boys through their encounters with a new classroom environment, one that encourages them to speak their experiences within those newly expanded boundaries of what is acceptable in the classroom. This expansion of boundaries allows me space within which to document their mediated voices, thus contributing to the construction of a verbal and experiential archive focused on the experience of being young, white, urban, working class and male in post-boom Ireland.
Chapter three continues this process of documentation with a sustained look at the details of life in the EM classroom, building up a picture of the complexities inherent in and the importance of everyday school life and culture to the boys and to the structure of their peer group.
This image is a photograph taken by one of the Hillside boys in response to my request for images of daily life both in and out of school. The picture shows a sign, handwritten in Irish, in one of the boys' locker rooms at Hillside. The photographic project carried out with the boys is discussed in full in chapter three and their photographs are featured throughout the dissertation.

'Youth' as a descriptive label is widely used by the media when referring to young men. In this context it is particularly pejorative as it comes with a series of negative associations relating to the fact that this young man is not named as a 'boy' or a 'teenager' but as some 'other' category which need special terminology. Devlin (2006) engages with the way in which young men, and young working class men, in particular, are named or classified in this manner.

In the school setting the understanding of a 'volunteer' differs to its general conception in the outside world. In the classroom 'volunteers' are selected at random, without ever volunteering, to fetch televisions, take part in role plays, deliver messages, read things to the class and so on. The lack of enthusiasm displayed when asked to perform any task is essential to the social fabric of the peer structure. Any one showing disproportionate or unseemly eagerness to do anything leaves himself open to mockery and denigration. The only barely acceptable task is one which gets you and, crucially someone else (to have a laugh with) out of the classroom for any period of time, no matter how brief.

See educational ethnographic researcher Mary Kehily (2001) for further discussion of the body in the classroom. On the issue of school discipline, she writes:

In contemporary schooling, pupils become the objects of disciplinary regimes that aim to control and regulate the (sexed) body as well as the mind. Rules govern the physical use of spaces where pupils move – in classrooms, playgrounds and corridors. The spaces, in their architectural design and layout, also prescribe, to some extent, the type of movement that is possible and desirable. For example, the subject of 'classroom management' taught at teacher training colleges suggests to student teachers that the learning environment can be shaped in particular ways by the strategic placing of tables, chairs and classroom equipment. Bodies in school can be seen in two ways: collectively as a student body, to be controlled and moved about with ease, and as individual bodies to be, simultaneously, trained and protected. (Kehily 2001: 177-178).
See Laberge and Albert, ‘Conceptions of Masculinity and of Gender Transgressions in Sport among Adolescent Boys. Hegemony, Contestation and Social Class Dynamic.’ (1999: 246). Suzanne Laberge is Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Montreal and has research interests in the sociology of sport, gender, class and health. Mathieu Albert is a post doctoral fellow at the Interuniversity Center for Research on Science and Technology in Montreal. His research interests include the sociology of sport, performance arts and the nature of research in the social sciences.

The boys’ tactic of deploying a rigid silence is extremely important to them and is used with pointed accuracy. It is discussed in greater depth further on in this chapter and again in chapter three.

The restrictions involved my agreeing to simply observe classes with no recording of any type including a ban on fieldnotes, and undertaking to make no mention of the school even with a pseudonym in place of the actual name as it was considered by the staff involved that the school could be identified by the process of elimination as only seven schools were working with the programme at that time (during the Autumn term in 2003). The second school, Greenfield, as a private, fee paying suburban day and boarding school, is at the opposite end of the educational spectrum from Hillside, and as such offered a substantively different environment in which to observe both the progression of the EM programme and the interactions between social class, gender, youth culture and representation. Greenfield was visited on four occasions and the EM teacher, Evelyn, interviewed. Greenfield School provided an interesting contrast to Hillside as the main field site, however logistically it became impossible to maintain my presence in Hillside and establish a presence in Greenfield as the classes were run on the same day. For that reason it was decided to focus on the Hillside classroom.

For further discussion of over-identifying with subjects see Skeggs (1992); McRobbie and Garber (1991) and Back (1993).

This refers equally to both groups of boys.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1993: 17-19) and Foster (1996: 12-15) both offer useful commentary on the question of reactivity and observation in the specific context of ethnographic research.

The boys often answer as a whole. One student shouts out something and the others echo him, or they all simultaneously give the same answer.

Consent was sought from all the boys in the class prior to beginning observation at the
start of each school year. The boys were given a verbal outline of the project and encouraged to ask questions throughout. My offer to request written permission from parents was regarded as unnecessary by both Hillside’s principal and the class teacher, who were appraised of the non-invasiveness and total anonymity of the research.

This refers to the way in which the boys understand the broader relationship which exists between them and those who have the power to represent and define them through the media and through the programme.

For further discussion of the responses of young people to the presence and questioning of a researcher see Back (1993)

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The boys’ media usage in terms of the actual choices they make when watching television programmes, buying or renting videos, DVD’s, video or computer games form the core of chapter four. Their interests in music or film or gaming is introduced here in order to provide context for their prior knowledge and advanced understanding of some aspects of social life as they encounter them in their own patterns of cultural consumption.

This issue is an important one and is at the core of the discussion of the relationship between class, gender and culture which is worked through in chapter four. The issue of authenticity of ‘fanship’ (Ging 2005: 45) is important here as are the problems identified by Skeggs (2004) in relation to the transference of cultural associations from the media (i.e. popular media tropes such as criminality among young working class men, or radical Islam among young Muslim men) to ‘real life’ groups.

This obviously depends to a point on the particular teacher, and on his or her level of experience and personal authority. See also Kehily (2003) for more on rules

There is also the option for students to sit the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) which is distinctly different from the Leaving Certificate. The LCA allows students to take half year vocational modules in areas such as childcare, horticulture, office administration and
customer care and graphics and construction studies as opposed to the academic focus of the Leaving Certificate. The LCA is described on its website as being:

... [A] distinct, self-contained two-year programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. The programme puts an emphasis on forms of achievement and excellence, which the established Leaving Certificate has not recognised in the past (http://lca.slss.ie)

ASTI President Pat Cahill. Quoted in Downes (2004: NP).

Social exclusion in this context is understood to mean the unavailability of particular opportunities and life chances due to social class positioning. The Hillside boys experience social exclusion on several levels, ranging from exclusion from particular shops, bars, restaurants or communities to exclusion from third-level education and highly paid employment. Social exclusion in this context also means that they are outside of what are now considered mainstream youth experiences as defined by the middle classes. This further suggests that their own activities and experiences, particularly hanging around ‘doing nothing’ are deemed problematic and even criminalised. This becomes even more of a pressing issue in the wake of the possibility of the introduction of ASBOs in this country.

See Kiely (1995) for further detail and breakdown of the social and economic divisions seen in Cork city and county.

Major industries included textiles production and processing, such as the defunct Sunbeam Mills on the city’s northside as well as auto-part manufacturing in the Ford Plant and the Dunlop Tyre Plant. Both of these closed in the 1980s along with the city’s shipbuilding industry which also ground to a halt at that time. Brewing and distilling survived and new industries arrived in the form of the massive multi-national chemical and pharmaceutical companies which now occupy industrial parks in Little Island on the Lee Estuary. These industries however have limited opportunities for unskilled manual labourers and as such have had little impact on the future or current employment prospects of such workers. For more on the economic history of Cork see Kiely (1995).

This belief, however, was dramatically shaken in August 2000 when a young man, an ex-pupil of one of Dublin’s high status private schools was killed in a brawl outside Anabel’s nightclub, a venue popular with upper and middle class teenagers. The ‘Anabel’s case’ as it became known saw four boys, all ex-pupils of the prestigious Blackrock College in Dublin, stand accused of the manslaughter of and violent assault on
18 year old Brian Murphy. The media coverage of the case was characterised by a
disbelief and discomfort that this could happen among what were described by one
commentator as ‘gilded youths’ (Sheridan 2004:NP). ‘Nightclub killing that convulsed
and divided the middle classes’. *The Irish Times*. 16 March). Sheridan also reposes the
question, one of many asked on radio television call in shows, ‘If the accused had been a
bunch of skangers from Darndale, would you be feeling so sorry for them? and ‘is it that
we believe boys from such backgrounds were reared to know better?’ Other headlines on
stories and coverage of this incidence and the court case which followed included
examples such as Cusack (2000b) ‘Culture of thuggery centred in the rugby schools’
(September 9th); Flynn (2004) ‘Case has not enhanced image of prestigious school’. *The
Irish Times* (28th February).

Paul generally draws the boys’ attention to me when he wants them to calm down or to
think more deeply about what they are saying. As they all turn and follow his progress as
he walks around the classroom, he reminds them that I am there by simply settling near
my desk and thus placing me right in their line of vision.

Paul’s ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’ approach is finely balanced. He manages his
responsibility to deplore the act without giving the perpetrator(s) an opportunity to play a
‘hard man’ persona in response to outright criticism of their behaviour.

Mayfield is a deprived community on Cork’s northside.

The boys use mints to mask the smell of alcohol and cigarettes.

‘Ear’oles (ear-holes) in the ‘lads’ vernacular denotes ‘swots’ or those boys who reject the
counter-school culture and work hard at their lessons, behave in the classroom and, rather
than regarding the teachers as class enemies, see them as the only people who can help to
get them out a future of poorly paid manual labour by giving them access to the language
and knowledge that will get them through exams and so on to a white collar future or
even university. See also Foley for his discussion of Chicano males who adapt to ear’ole
behaviour and are perceived to be acting ‘white’ as a result.

See Devlin (2006) for his analysis both of media coverage of young people and also the
responses of young people to the ways in which they are portrayed.

Unnamed ‘Senior Garda’ quoted in Marsh and Fox-Kibby (1992) in response to
questioning about Irish teenagers and media reporting of alcohol abuse ‘cider parties’ and
public drinking in urban areas. It should however be noted that this report was published
by the Portman Group – a drinks industry member – although the ‘Senior Garda’s’ words
are backed up by Devlin’s focus group research with young people whereby they discuss
the assumptions of adults that they are always ‘up to something’ (2006-20-26).

Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) is Ireland’s Training and Employment Authority. A large
part of their services include the provision of courses in for the unemployed, early school
leavers, people with disabilities and those on long-term social welfare support. The
courses are designed to facilitate the acquisition of skills on an ascending level and cover
all areas of work from forestry to construction to administration or mechanics. Participation in courses can qualify the student for various levels of financial bonus and assistance.

This refers to the three largest and oldest Universities in Ireland, including Trinity
College Dublin, University College Dublin and University College Cork. The National
University of Ireland at Galway and Maynooth, the University of Limerick, Dublin City
University, Dublin Institute of Technology and the smaller Institutes of Technology
around the country are also included. This data is taken from The Irish Times Publication
of Third Level Feeder Schools Listings published throughout May 2004.

The programme video has many problematic elements associated with it, in terms of
ideology and representation. It was not received well in the classroom either by teachers
or students and was condemned by both the review and the report. The video and the
problems with it are discussed in detail and fully contextualised in chapter three which
follows.

Faggot or fag is generally understood to be a derogatory term describing a homosexual
man. It can also be used to mean a cigarette.

O’Donnell and Sharpe refer here to the situation in the UK where the relationship of, in
particular, Afro-Caribbean boys to education is acknowledged as being in difficulty. As
yet there is no data available in the Irish context however, this is particularly important in
the light of Ireland’s increasingly racially diverse school intake and population.

For more information on issues around teenagers and part time employment see the Irish
Government Web page:

www.oasis.gov.ie/employment/employment_rights/protection_of_young_people_in_emp
loyment.html

In a speech delivered at University College Cork as part of the Last Lecture Series, being
run through the City’s European Capital of Culture programme, Professor Emeritus and
founding president of the University of Limerick, Dr Edward Walsh, lent legitimacy to
claims that overly generous social welfare payments to the poor and particularly to working class single mothers have created social problems in Ireland:

Clearly in ways we do much better in 2005 in looking after young lone females who become pregnant and have children than we did previously. Yet the support the State provides may have moved further than it should: very real financial incentives are now in place that may actively encourage the formation of lone parent families ... many of the social ills we face in Ireland can be traced to the growth of lone-parent families, and especially to families where the father is absent.

This extract was taken from a transcript of Dr Walsh’s speech which had been released in draft form and seen by the paper. The extract was published in an editorial in *The Irish Times* on January 27th 2005. The speech was to be delivered on the 2nd of February as part of the Faculty of Science Public Lecture Series. The title of the speech was 'Science, Technology and the Future of Ireland'. The response to the publication of his speech was overwhelmingly negative with individuals and a group condemning Walsh’s over-simplification of what is a complex social issue. A further response to his speech was written by columnist Kevin Myers of *The Irish Times* on February 8th 2005 in his daily column ‘An Irish Man’s Diary’. In it he referred consistently to single mothers as MOBs or Mothers of Bastards and referred to young mothers as ‘the unmotivated, the confused, the backward and the lazy’ who ‘consciously embark upon a career of mothering bastards because it seems a good way of getting money and accommodation from the State’. He goes onto refer to single motherhood as a career in ‘cash crop whelping’ (ibid).

See also Willis’s discussion of ‘partial cultural penetrations’ and the barriers to a full understanding of the conditions of the existence of the individual and the group as part of the social whole (1977: 185-93)
Chapter Three
Policing Themselves? Boys, School and Youth Culture

KEY QUESTION
How do we build good relationships?

We are all influenced by our relationships, and they form the kind of person we are. Through our relationships with others, we learn how to think and behave. Through our relationships we learn how to feel in different circumstances. Good relationships make us feel secure, accepted and loved. We feel confident about trying out new experiences, knowing we will still be accepted even if we fail. We are encouraged and supported in our efforts.

I was struck by a number of things that afternoon:
that the women seemed a lot more relaxed in each other’s company and seemed to be enjoying each other’s company a lot more than the men were enjoying theirs;
that the children did not seem to notice their fathers all afternoon;
that the conversation of the men was predictable and confined to very safe and predictable subjects.

EXPLORATIONS
1. What is it to be a man?
2. What is a “hard man?”

Figure 3.01: EM asks ‘What is it to be a man?’

The role of the school as an institution in the production of masculinity is, according to Connell (2000: 29-30), to regulate and to structure hierarchies of maleness based around the typical markers of negatively traditional masculinity. Throughout this chapter I explore the way in which these particular forms of masculine identity in the classroom
are considered to be superior to others as is seen through the Hillside boys’ prioritising of the strong, athletic or ‘tough’ masculinity. Subsequent to this prioritising there is a subordination of non-athletic, ‘softer’, or more academic boys, who are, as Connell notes in relation to his suburban working-class Australian subjects, then ‘symbolically assimilated to femininity’ (2000: 31). These ‘unmanly’ boys are, as will be seen here in the case of Hillside’s Kevin, subject to ridicule and censure by their ‘more masculine’ peers. This hierarchical structure of masculinity is clearly seen at Hillside, and is explored here through the classroom vignettes which feature throughout this chapter. Within these vignettes the boys can be seen to vigorously police themselves, their speech and their attitudes, relegating those who, however briefly, step outside of the boundaries of acceptable masculinity to a lesser status.

Mac an Ghaill (1994) engages with this hierarchically structured relationship through his discussion of schooling and the development of heterosexual male identity. He traces this process through an analysis of student interaction with both the formal and informal school curricula, or what he refers to as the ‘social scaffolding’ of the school and the pupil culture alike (1994: 4-5). Mac an Ghaill uncovers the way in which schools normalise and reify sex and gender categories like heterosexuality and machismo and thus ensure, at least in part, through a sports-centred curriculum and gendered subject selection (such as wood-work or mechanical drawing) that a homogenous and hyper-masculine identity is at the base of life in boys’ single-sex schools (1994: 9-12). This formal or official school culture is echoed in the informal student culture of the Hillside boys which shows high levels of intolerance and hostility directed at those who fall
outside the narrow definition of what is, as considered by them, acceptably or appropriately 'masculine enough'.

In explaining how schoolboy masculinity is both produced by and in the school system, Connell highlights the necessity of taking broader influences into account. The significance and value mass youth culture holds for young people from an increasingly early age is such that it simply cannot be ignored. The Hillside boys are so invested in their material culture that they are almost impervious or oblivious to other outside influences. Their culture is one of 'cool'; it is aggressively peer-sanctioned and powerfully reinforced by adult disapproval. It is also, in a seeming contradiction and as noted previously, a distinctively old-fashioned or traditional form of masculinity in that the boys still adhere to outmoded views on gender roles in the home and in the workplace and are extremely resistant to difference and to change. They, backed up by their powerful popular culture based life-world, reference themselves and each other through television, film and video game versions of manhood. This influential and reciprocal media relationship is explored in full in the following chapter, where my focus moves out of the classroom and into the community and the material cultures of the boys at Hillside school. The boys are powerfully attached to their cultural forms and to the images of hyper-masculinity portrayed by them. The centrality of film, music and television in their lives points to the reality that the school, while still a key player in the construction of youthful masculinities, cannot produce and reproduce class and gender identities in a vacuum of influence. That function has been eroded somewhat due to the importance of elements of popular culture in the lives of boys, but schools are still widely considered to
exert a significant influence. Examples of this are clearly seen in the media coverage of EM, particularly in the feature writing and letter writing elements of the coverage, whereby there is evidence of an underlying conviction that the school and, more specifically, the official school curriculum is the major influence in the construction of gendered identities amongst young people - and in this case amongst young men. While it is clear that the school, in both its official exam-based curriculum, as well as in its more informal socialising and holistic aspects, is a central and essential player in the formation and reproduction of classed and gendered identities, it is equally clear that there are other forces that must be considered in full.

However, before beginning in chapter four to explore the cultural artefacts the boys interact with on a daily basis, it is necessary first to understand the essential relationship that exists between the school environment and the defensive and hyper-masculine identities practised and performed by the boys. This defensive masculinity is seen to operate on two levels, each of which is explored here. Therefore, in this chapter I first document the boys’ own cultural agency at work in the school setting as they unsettle and disrupt the new versions of masculinity the programme presents to them. I then move on to present a series of performative ‘vignettes’ wherein the boys perform their defensive masculinity in response to material that threatens it. For example, their rejection of the legitimacy of the manhood of a house-husband, as seen in the chapter two (and as discussed here in the first extract from the classroom) is the first manifestation of that defensive attitude. This is the case because they understand and perform their own masculinity through both an awareness and a demonstrable refusal of what they are not.
Defensive masculinity is also practised by the boys on another level and is seen through the processes of interference, subversion and resistance, highlighted in chapter two, whereby the boys use a variety of means to unsettle the new plurality of masculinities presented to them in the EM classroom. This disruption of the classroom space is readdressed through a reproduction, from fieldnotes, of classroom dialogue and details of interference tactics. In *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Toward a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures* (1999), the North American ethnographer and pedagogue Peter McLaren explores student tactics of disruption in a Canadian junior high school. He examines the way boys resist the authoritarian culture of the classroom and reject the ‘structure of conformity’ for what he terms the ‘antistructure of resistance’ (ibid: 145). He describes it thus:

> Whatever sense of identity was stripped from the student during class time was returned through the torn seams, fissures and eruptions of the resistant and liminal self. In both subtle and overt ways, recusant students exhibited actions which undermined the consensually validated norms and authorized codes of the school (ibid: 147).

This disruption is an essential part of the boys' defensive masculinity and part of the elaborate system of rule-bending, testing and breaking which confers higher status on the perpetrator among his peers. Within the group this 'messing' or 'having a laugh' is supported and required by the clearly defined boundaries laid down in accordance with the dominant elements of machismo and bravado which hold sway within their particular youth culture. This machismo is primarily played out through the attachment to and engagement with elements of the boys' material culture. However, when in the classroom
and in the absence of their artefacts, the boys are forced to rely on their immediate surroundings and on their classroom personas which are constructed and designed to amuse and entertain their peers.

Because popular culture is not typically discussed in the classroom there is a broadening gap between the boys' understanding of what constitutes desirable masculinities and what fulfils the criteria of the programme and of its teachers. The boys continually reference themselves through television and film characters and interact socially with each other on the basis of shared experiences that are increasingly virtual as well as actual. Yet, the only occasions in which popular culture was mentioned to me by teachers or discussed in the class were overwhelmingly in a negative context. Television, music videos and video games were discussed with me only in terms of their negative aspects, such as the denigration of women and the promotion of a violent lifestyle in which alcohol and drugs feature prominently. As these aspects increasingly make up a large proportion of the cultural forms targeted at young males, some concern is warranted. However, my interest in youth-orientated popular culture goes further than the familiar discussion of either the presentation of women as being permanently sexually available or the casual violence and aggression which go with a 'cool' male media persona. I also move beyond the circular logic based on the relationship between media violence and male youth culture. This circular approach implies that violent computer games and music videos inevitably create a violent and desensitised youth, irrespective of circumstance and environment. The constant production of aggressive imagery featuring posturing, gun-toting males is worthy of attention. Yet, there is a stronger case for a wider exploration of
the way this material affects particular types of boys within that general target audience of young men. Following this, what provides the impetus behind this research and represents my interest here, is the way the boys use these global cultural forms to both prop up and represent their ideals of a specific form of manhood as defined by class and locality. I unpick this relationship here and in chapter four.

When Doing is Being: Men and ‘Women’s work’

The Hillside boys are, as discussed, extremely resistant to the notion that there are different forms of lived masculinity. Their overall response to various examples of men who by virtue of their race, livelihood, physical attributes or sexual preference fall outside their model of traditional or hegemonic masculinity, is overwhelmingly negative. For example, they respond particularly badly, as noted briefly in chapter two, to the video which accompanies the programme and showcases, among a variety of other people, a series of men who could be understood to be living ‘alternative’ masculinities. These alternatives include a gay man, a full-time carer and a househusband. The section featuring the househusband is especially difficult for the boys to come to terms with as will be seen in the section which follows entitled Class One: ‘Who Works Where?’. The boys’ attitude and response is explored in detail and in the wider context of their understandings of what constitutes masculinity. Before moving on to this, and by way of introducing the video itself, I would like to comment briefly on another section that raised issues and problems both in and outside of the classroom. It should also be noted at this point that although the boys reacted particularly defensively or aggressively to several sections of the video (another problematic section is discussed in chapter five), they did
in general respond badly to the video as a whole, reflecting the wider experiences of teachers and students who took part in the EM review. Their general response, while predominantly negative is not in itself exceptional or unusual with regard to the type of overtly ‘improving’ or instructional material contained by the EM video. They laugh at, mimic and mock the contributors, making crude gestures and often simply talking in loud whispers over them. Yet, occasionally, as will be seen below, the boys move beyond this relatively benign interference and ‘messing’ into a far more defensive mode.

The video material, which runs for approximately an hour and a half in total, follows roughly the same seven theme structure as the programme with each theme containing a series of short segments - generally ‘talking heads’ or ‘vox pop’ style clips. A number of adult commentators are featured throughout with individuals drawn from the academic disciplines of women’s studies, men’s studies, social work, education and history. The remaining adult figures provide ‘real life’ examples of alternative masculinities or are engaged in grass-roots men’s movement activities. There are only a minimal number of teenaged participants in the video, six in all, interviewed in two sets of three boys and three girls. While the majority of the segments featuring adults were subject to much ridicule and mockery, it was the sections featuring the teenagers that presented the biggest difficulty in the Hillside classroom. The overall problems with the video are associated primarily with what was seen as the excessively critical tone of the material as it relates to boys and to youthful masculinity, as well as, more prosaically, to poor production values and visual content which dated extremely quickly (Mac an Ghaill et al 2002: 224). As well as discussing the video in interviews with teachers and programme
contributors, I attended three classes in which the video was used. My field notes from one of these classes document the negative responses of the boys to the material:

Boys seem to find it [the video] alternatively hilarious/stupid – they are laughing and appear to have no intention of taking it seriously. One boy at back left corner is imitating the gestures of the women talking on screen and miming breasts with his hands – those around him are convulsed with laughter. No one is watching or listening to video tape (9th December 2002).

To adopt a phrase from the boys’ vernacular the high level of ‘piss-taking’ evident in relation to the video is not something I had encountered as frequently with regard to the print materials. This is perhaps due to the changed nature of the classroom environment which shifts with the expectation of watching a ‘film’ - however short it may be. Watching a video involves a teacher or ‘volunteer’ fetching the wheeled cabinet in which the television and video player are kept, desks have to be moved out of the way so it can be pushed up the aisle, leads and plugs must be untangled, the remote controls located, the correct channel selected and the video tape cued up. There is a feeling of normal classroom service being suspended, however briefly, which has an effect on the atmosphere in the room. The boys feel that they are able to be, if not completely open, then less covert about their dislike of the material being presented to them. Watching the video they laugh out loud, turn their backs on the screen, made insulting comments, mimic the participants, make offensive gestures, and are quick to ridicule and deride both the individuals portrayed and the message being presented.
This type of response, although elevated to a higher level in this instance than is usual, is arguably a fairly natural and familiar response in any classroom. Yet, at times, moving beyond this joking and ridicule (as will be seen in reference to the particular example discussed below) the boys respond in a more serious manner. As they viewed the video extract featuring the three teenage girls they became extremely defensive and, unusually, were suddenly unable to find any cause or stimulus for humour in the clip. This defensive attitude is seen and brought to bear on the classroom environment through a mix of interference and subversion: during the clip the boys direct a steady stream of sotto voce commentary at the screen and one other when they should be quietly listening and a stony silence prevails after the screening and during a time when the boys should be making observations and answering questions.

This reaction is provoked by two main problems with this extract, both of which are discussed below. The first problem is immediately obvious to the boys, and the second, while not as immediately evident, is one that the boys are aware of and which they articulate in different ways. The transcripts reproduced here come from the section entitled ‘Listening to Women’s Voices’ which features three teenage girls (see figure 3.02) discussing their experience of, and thoughts about, sexism, violence, gender discrimination and the ‘ideal man’. The immediately evident problem or issue stems from their very dismissive attitudes to boys their own age, coupled with their relatively ‘adult’ way of speaking. Again this is not unique amongst teenagers. However, the boys take it as a personalised attack on themselves. They interpret the girls’ comments, reproduced
included in the video: three girls and a separate set of three boys. The segments featuring young people make up approximately 12 minutes of footage out of an overall 90 minutes. Within this, the girls speak for around 10 minutes while the boys are allowed two. The girls are all extremely articulate, confident, well-dressed, evidently middle class and from urban backgrounds. They speak clearly and directly to the camera, making eye contact with the viewer. Comparatively, the adolescent boys are scruffy and inarticulate. They seem intimidated by the camera and are obviously rural and from working class backgrounds. They do not speak directly to the camera, looking up or off to one side as they speak. They are, like the girls, being asked questions, some audible, some not, by an off-screen interviewer. However, their conversation is framed very differently. Unlike the more wide-ranging conversation with takes place among the girls, there is a direct focus on the boys. The conversation takes place as follows:

Figure 3.03: EM video still featuring from left - Michael, Kenny and John.

Kenny: I’d love to be a D.J. [continues speaking but is inaudible].
John: I’d like to be a vet.
Interviewer: Why’s that?
below, as insulting and as coming from, as one boy remarks, ‘three ugly stuck-up bitches’.

Figure 3.02: EM video still featuring from left - Amy, Clare and Rhea.

Clare: Well, in terms of expecting behaviour from young men, you don’t want men to whistle after you, you don’t want crude male chauvinist comments etc. etc. You don’t mind being complimented - everybody wants to be complimented and told you’re attractive and so on. But, the stereotypical view of women as sex objects to men, it just doesn’t work anymore you know? I don’t think [pauses] I certainly wouldn’t put up with it and I don’t think any young woman would put up with it today, you know? You can take compliments but you’re not going to take patronising attitudes.

Rhea: I think a lot of the time it’s just to impress their friends, that kind of behaviour. It’s peer pressure really (EM Video 2000).

As Clare remarks that she would not ‘put up with’ sexist behaviour, one of the boys’, in a stage whisper, announces that ‘we wouldn’t put up with you either bitch’. The girls’ confidence, their apparently dismissive attitude and language is combined with the larger problem of what can be seen as a skewed gender representation and means that once again the boys feel unfairly picked upon. As noted, only two sets of young people are
John: I love animals.
Michael: I’d love to be [pauses] a model [laughter in background].
Interviewer: What kind of a model?
Michael: Oh modelling clothes, love it.
Interviewer: Why exactly... Why would you like to be a model?
Michael: Ahh... there’s a lot of money involved [pauses] and building. I love building as well. Hard working man’s job. You get muscles, the whole lot from it, well-paid as well so there’s nothing wrong there. [pauses] The likes of us wouldn’t get jobs like that. No one would take us on.
Interviewer: Why’s that? Why do you think nobody would take you on?
Michael: All full of tattoos and the way we talk? You’d know by us we’re proper scamps.
Interviewer: [Question unheard]
John: A real man... [interrupted by K]
Kenny: Suppose having a job, a wife and children [interrupted by J]
John: Like Kenny said – having a wife [interrupted by K]
Kenny: Boys have more power than women because they get better jobs like. They’ve more control over women than girls have over boys like d’you know what I mean? [Section ends]

While the clips are played the boys whisper, comment and complain about what is on screen. There are a series of hushed conversations going on in which the mood of dissatisfaction is distinct although the exact words which express that mood are more difficult to distinguish. This hubbub is in marked contrast to the pointed silence that falls at the end of the clip featuring the girls and is broken by a question wherein Gavin asks, ‘Why are all men always the bad ones, even the ones who haven’t even done anything?’ (9th December 2000). Answering Gavin’s question is difficult both for Paul in the
classroom and for me to address here. The boys very definitely see the programme as being ‘unfair’, echoing, unconsciously or not, the voices from the media and public sphere who enquire ‘why there is no ‘Exploring Femininities’ programme’. ‘Because girls are perfect I suppose’ is one sarcastically muttered response from the front of the class. The video, which was presumably designed to engage its viewers and to challenge their perception of what is the norm, actually succeeds in presenting girls as both intimidating and threateningly dismissive of boys of the same age, while showing boys as slow, under-confident and insecure. This is an unfair representation by the programme. It ignores the question of social class, presenting two groups of girls and boys but making no comment about them or attempt to redress the clear social and economic inequalities between them.

Both the asking of ‘why is there no ‘Exploring Femininities’ programme?’ and the anonymous response to it, have echoes of the wider discussions, most particularly those framed within the ‘competition discourse’, that continued on outside the classroom. Positions within this discourse suggest that girls are pitted against boys (and vice versa) in a competitive relationship where there is little regard for any difference beyond that of gender and where neither gender can win unless it is at the expense of the other ‘side’. Social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religious affiliation or disability are all discounted, thus making the issue of sexism as talked about here very difficult for the boys to address. In response to this the boys show their genuine displeasure and lack of comprehension as to why they are being seemingly singled out as ‘personally’ violent, sexist or responsible for inequality that they themselves may well experience, by simply
refusing to engage with the video and running out the clock for the rest of the class period in relative silence.⁹

This section of the video reinforces for the boys the fact that they are ‘in the wrong’ with regard to their views on women and work. It also lends credence to the public endorsement, as they understand it through the video, that all men are sexist, set against feminism and potentially violent. This does not provoke a rethinking of position or attitudes amongst the boys or an understanding of the problem at a structural level, but merely strengthens their feeling of being hard done by and unfairly maligned. The boys understand the following extract to be ‘proof’ of a publicly endorsed anti-male stance:

Amy: ... and one thing definitely, like, that’s not on is violence in the home and, like, just violence towards women, just aggression, you know? Well, like guys hitting their girlfriends or whatever. That’s just not right you know?

Clare: In terms of violence, I mean, men are always going to be physically stronger than women. They are always going to be able to beat a woman up and a woman cannot beat a man. But to gain any equality within the home, ...men have to realise that you cannot hit a woman.

Rhea: In terms of, just intimidation, in terms of their [men’s] general conversation, even just their physical ... if they are talking to a woman, sometimes just the way they [men] stand, it can just be intimidating (EM Video 2000)
The fact that the boys react as badly to what they perceive to be a dismissal of themselves by a confident, articulate teenage girl as to a househusband is perhaps related to the threat that both are seen as offering to traditional 'macho' masculinity. Primacy and dominance by men in the workplace and the identity construct of the breadwinner are of fundamental importance to sustaining a 'negatively traditional' masculine identity. The Hillside boys are defensive and threatened by both above-discussed video excerpts due to broader feelings of a generalised insecurity that relates to their increasingly marginalised position in Irish social life. Because the Hillside boys are potentially excluded from the traditional middle class markers of a successful masculinity, such as a third-level education, a relatively high-paying job, home ownership and a dependent family, they must all the more vigorously defend and protect the aspects of masculinity which are under their control. Thus they are quick to pick up on an attitude or stance that is out of step with the macho personas that they project and perform both in the classroom and outside it. They are disinclined to be seen by the group as accepting difference or variance in behaviour or attitude. A good example of the boys' reluctance to tolerate any deviation from their preferred understanding of masculinity, as defined by what a man does, is seen in the material reproduced below from fieldnotes. These extracts were taken (as was the video material) from a class using templates from the programme's second theme - 'Men Working' (EM 2000: 51). Working and the notion of 'man's work' is of key importance to the Hillside boys as a site, or an embodiment of a bastion of traditional male power.
The discussion topic today is nominally the role of men and women both in the home and in the workplace but actually introduces the boys to the possibility of reversing and dramatically changing the traditional roles to which they adhere so strongly. The idea of men who, for various reasons, work at home as carers, househusbands or child-minders was broached in several of the video segments watched in the previous class. Now, the boys are asked to move on and to discuss the issues raised by the lifestyles of the individuals featured. The class thus begins with Paul asking the boys to think about themselves in ten years’ time, to imagine themselves married, or with a partner, and with a family. Appreciating the potential for enjoyment in this case the boys at first make no attempt to do this in any serious manner, beginning instead to speculate loudly on the relative unattractiveness of each others’ future wives and children. However, once Paul stops them by asking loudly, over the hubbub ‘Would you be at home and she at work?’ they become a lot more interested in this topic and begin to engage almost seriously with the question of men working in the home (9th December 2002).

Following Paul’s provocative question, there is a chorus of unambiguous ‘No’. The boys are affronted by Paul’s query. They view the suggestion that they would be at home while their wife worked outside of it as a direct challenge to their masculinity. The boys are very definite about the importance of ‘real’ work to a man and, having seen in the previous class the video clip of the husband and wife who share housework and childcare, it is very clear that they consider that man and other men like him to be legitimate figures of fun. Interestingly, they are quite unclear as to what exactly they mean by ‘real
work' for a man and choose to negotiate the topic by loudly outlining what they consider to be inappropriate jobs or careers for men. Predictably, unsuitable jobs include the feminised positions of nursing, primary school teaching, childminding, and overwhelmingly, the role of 'housewife'. The class continues after some confused moments when everyone is talking at once and it emerges that the majority of the 11 boys present in the classroom that day has a mother who works either part or full-time. The boys are not generally opposed, once the job is 'suitable', to the idea of women working and they agree that it would probably be necessary today for both partners to work in order to support a family. Paul then rephrases the question and asks, 'Imagine financially that both of you don’t have to have jobs. Who should go out to work?' Again, the class answers as a whole with a resounding 'the men'. Paul continues to push the boys, asking 'why' and trying to force explanations out of them. They respond defensively with a selection of reasons as to why they feel this should be so. Their responses include:

- It’s abnormal for men to be home.
- It’s depressing.
- You’d have to clean the house.
- Because I want to work.
- Women shouldn’t be working...well not hard jobs anyway.
- I wouldn’t be a househusband. I wasn’t raised in a situation like that.
- If I had to I suppose...I wouldn’t mind... but if it was a choice then no.

(9th December 2002).

In general the boys are taking Paul's questions quite seriously as they regard them to be an assault on the type of masculinity and gender role they aim to embody. The resident class comedian, Brendan, always has a response with which to delight his peers, and
more importantly, with which to dilute or deflate any situation that is in danger of becoming too serious or in which the class is becoming too earnestly engaged. Thus, shouting over the rest of the class, Brendan announces:

Brendan: I would [stay home] and I would sit down and watch telly all day.

Paul: [Laughing]. And who would do the washing and the cleaning and the dinner and change the baby?

Brendan: [Laughing]. She could when she got home, sir (9\textsuperscript{th} December 2002).

This type of give and take generally amuses Paul as well and he points out to me in an aside during another incidence of Brendan’s humour that he allows it, to a point, in a class like this where he wants the boys to feel like they can relax and talk naturally. The main point of Brendan’s joking seems to me to be about policing, rather than relaxing, and is designed to rein in the other boys when they begin to take it all too seriously. His role as joker or class comedian is primarily about reminding the class of the appropriate behaviour but also serves to cut the sudden tensions that can arise out of seemingly thin air in the middle of apparently innocuous debates or conversations.\textsuperscript{12} As a leader of the group in the class sessions, Brendan often sets the tone for the level of discussion and is very quick to instigate dissension and to bring about a shift in attitude amongst the other boys. Following his intervention, as often happens, the discussion continues in a different atmosphere and in a very different tone, with an unidentified voice from the back reiterating his comments:
Student: Women should work, sir.
Paul: Why?
Class: So we can watch telly all day (9th December 2002).

This humour, or ‘banter’ as it is colloquially known in Cork, is central not only to the litany of methods of class disruption but also to the type of masculinity performed by the Hillside boys. Their ability to turn things to their own amusement is reminiscent of the Hammertown ‘lads’ ‘having a laff’ and is part of their battle against their relegation, by virtue of age and social position, both in the classroom and the larger community, to the position of junior or inferior males with little or no authority or power (Willis 1977). The Hillside boys continually assert their claims to agency and independence within the school through humour, messing and ‘banter’. This ‘jokey’ type of communication allows the boys to engage with the teachers on a more informal level within certain parameters. As an accepted form it also means the boys can score points and gain status within the group by getting in a good joke, saying something rude or funny or outwitting the teacher momentarily without having to worry about getting into trouble.

After the boys settle down, which takes several minutes, Paul asks them to make a list of all of the work that is done in the home by men, women and children. Here he is adapting several of the sections contained in the programme materials ‘Men Working’ and using them together to address the main point of interest. This is the very traditional attitude the boys have towards work and it encompasses their views of women in the workplace and the types of jobs that are suitable for men or for women, but not for both. At this point in the class, the discussion is, as usual, accompanied by low level talking and messing.
around which continues until the boys suddenly breakout into gales of laughter. Aware that he has missed something, as have I, Paul zeroes in on the most likely culprit and asks him what was so funny. After a minute of being stared at by the teacher and his classmates, with a soundtrack of muffled giggling, Brendan is finally provoked into repeating himself and, grinning broadly, addresses the top of his desk. He says:

Q: What do you do if your wife is nagging you in the front room?
A: Shorten the leash to keep her in the kitchen (9th December 2002).

All 11 boys swing around partly to check out the effect of this joke on their teacher who is standing beside me and partly to see how I am taking it. As this is one of the first times that they have seemed particularly interested in my reaction to anything that has been said in the class, I take my cue from the teacher. He adopts an ambiguous expression, neither approval nor disapproval and does not laugh. The boys’ sense of humour is an expression of their deeper beliefs: men work outside the home and while women occasionally have to do so, there should not be a situation where a man intentionally stays at home while his partner intentionally goes out to work. This, for the boys, is the absolute feminisation of the masculine. They believe that if a man does too much housework, he will become, in the muttered words of one unidentifiable student, ‘her bitch’.  

By this point it is clear that it will be quite difficult to get the boys back into a frame of mind where they will address the issues in a serious manner. In an effort to get them back on track Paul asks the boys to, ‘Think about it yourself... what is your role in the family? What part do you play in keeping the home, as opposed to the house, ticking over?’ There
is a long pause, punctuated only by feet kicking desk legs, ostentatious faux coughing and a pen clicking contest in the back row. He asks again, ‘What work do you do?’ Again there is a protracted verbal silence full of non-speech noise and movement as the boys shuffle in their desks, kick their feet about and make faces. The boys are invoking their most effective weapon: non-compliance through verbal silence. It is clear they are bored with the topic now and as the acknowledged group leader seems too uninterested in the question to make jokes, they take their cue from him and stay quiet. They are also a little angered by being forced to engage with what they see as promotional material for women working which forces men to stay home and thereby inhabit a position of emasculation which is represented by having no money and ‘no balls’.

To counter the boy’s sudden aggrieved silence, Paul asks the question again in a much firmer voice and uses far more formal language. This is clearly a voice that has familiar repercussions if it is ignored as the boys straighten up in their seats and assume looks of deep thought as he demands, ‘What would be expected of a young man of your age at home?’ There is a flurry of answers as jobs are called out. In general the boys tidy their rooms, empty and fill the dishwasher and do odd jobs like painting or lifting furniture. They do not cook meals, vacuum, clean or do grocery shopping apart from running to the local shop for milk or butter. Many of them have younger siblings or nieces or nephews who live with them or who are looked after in their homes and they all, very reluctantly, admit to being forced to, (‘you’d be made to’) baby-sit, change nappies, dress and take children out for walks and to play. All of the boys agree though that they try to avoid
being seen pushing a buggy or a pram and, admit that they laugh at those men or boys they see doing so.

As the time period is nearly up, Paul recaps the main point covered: the conviction amongst the students that in a situation whereby only one partner in a marriage or relationship needs to work, it should be the man. He asks them to think about what happens if the woman earns significantly more than the man in the relationship. How would the boys react to that? The firm consensus is that any ‘normal man’ would react badly as it means a complete lack of power, with the main problem, as the boys see it, characterised in the words of one horrified student as ‘you’d have to ask her for money so you could go out and stuff …’. The reduction of every question and topic to a power-based relationship runs throughout these boys’ interpretations of the EM material. It will be examined in further examples that focus on the defensiveness of the students and their contextualisation of almost every situation or encounter as potentially posing a threat to their status or power.

Single-Sex Schooling and Traditional Masculinities

The boys’ collective and mutually supportive reaction to this material on women in the workplace reinforces the prejudices and ‘jokes’ with laughter and visible approval, showing how the actual, physical school remains one of the essential and key sites in the life-world of young people. The amount of time spent in the school and the highly social aspects of school life for most students means it is the place where most peer group interaction takes place and also, therefore, where their essential cultural and social mores
and codes of conduct are both disseminated and policed. The strength and tenacity with which the boys cling to their ‘negatively traditional’ form of social masculinity, as seen clearly in the account related above, is illustrative of the intertwining of their outside material culture with the social elements of their lives. Also well integrated here is the formal school culture which is not as incompatible with the boys’ own value system as it may seem. At first glance it may appear that the boys indiscriminately resist and fight against everything connected with the school and indicative of its apparent values. Nevertheless, it quickly becomes clear, upon spending time in the school and in the classroom, that the official or formal school culture and the informal culture of the students are very much related. The qualities valued by the boys’ own culture, such as strength, physicality, ‘respect’, loyalty, emotional reticence and conformity, are the very same qualities promoted by the school culture. They may have slightly different interpretations and applications but at root they are distinctly similar. Compounding this, the almost all-male atmosphere of Hillside has a massive influence on the gender identity of the boys, paving the way for how they relate to each other as well as to other boys and girls and women outside of school time.14

Single-sex boys’ schools, it is argued, place too much emphasis on sports and are understood to give rise to environments in which the more exaggerated forms of hierarchies existent within masculinity can thrive.15 Boys who are not athletic or who are uninterested in popular sports such as rugby or hurling, as well as boys who are very academic or who seem to be effeminate in voice, interests or appearance, are generally ascribed a subordinate position by their peers. Such ‘unmanly’ boys are examples of
those who suffer under that hyper-masculine structure of acceptability, popularity and power (Lynch and Lodge 2002: 107-109) This exaggerated hierarchy whereby the student athlete or team member is ascribed a preferential position by other students and often by staff is, if not liked, largely accepted and understood to be simply an expression of the ‘natural order’ by most boys. It also appears to be part of the vernacular of the Hillside boys, who attribute high status to those students who are more physically able and pick on those who deviate from the physical norm by being very short, very skinny or very overweight.

It is clear that boys’ schools offer two curricula, the formal core syllabus of academic subjects and exams, complemented by a second curriculum centred on informal school culture and its pervasive masculine ethos. This ethos is spread though all aspects of boys’ school life, from sports to the subject choices offered. The regular academic curriculum is thus embedded in the perpetration of a hyper-masculine form of gender identity that reinforces negative behaviours and stereotyping. The majority of boys’ schools do not offer subjects such as cooking, home economics, music, or social, personal and health education (SPHE) (Mac an Ghaill et al 2002: 8). Rather, subjects offered tend towards the traditionally ‘male’ interests of maths, engineering and more vocational activities such as woodwork or metalwork. This skewed curriculum is further compounded by an emphasis on participation and success in very competitive schoolboy sport as opposed to exercise for health, fitness and enjoyment. Boys are thus schooled to be men in terms of gendered interests, gender specific behaviours – for example boys are required to be unemotional, ‘tough’ and independent – and gendered abilities and ambitions. School is then,
ultimately, a positive affirmation of this dual or hidden curriculum approach and is
directly linked to the continuance of the negatively traditional masculinities identified and
condemned in educational research, men's studies and cultural studies.

So, while at a first glance the boys appear to resist and struggle against official school
policies and rules, it is important to understand that they do so only on a surface level.
The boys, both openly and covertly, challenge the external rules and manifestations of
authority within the school culture while simultaneously and continuously reproducing its
deeper content and ethos in their own interactions. The external challenge to break certain
rules, particularly ones which relate to the actual physical agency of the boy, such as
clothing or hairstyle or habits such as smoking, is central to that public display of
masculinity which maintains status in the peer group. However, that public display of
autonomy and recklessness is also a large part of the schools' formal culture. Boys'
schools have always, as noted, set out to 'make boys into men' and toughness,
conformity, strength of will and a desire for independence are seen as essential
characteristics for adolescent males, and ones that will, it is felt, serve them well in
adulthood (Connell 2000; Mac an Ghaill 1994).

Leaving aside for the moment the material elements of their popular culture, the question
then arises as to which is the more problematic aspect of the boys' interests. Are the
cultural habits, value systems and personas of boys themselves more troubling, or should
the underlying culture which surrounds both the academic and non-academic aspects of
boys' schooling give more cause for concern? It appears that both are locked in a self-
sustaining system of mutual support whereby the negative aspects of youthful masculinity, as they are played out or performed outside the school, are reinforced in school through the continuation of the informal peer-based code of conduct as well as the school’s official culture. For example, the aggression considered so dangerous and problematic in the school hallways, playground or outside a nightclub is frowned upon in these spaces, yet actively encouraged and positively reinforced on a daily basis on the rugby, hurling and football field. The same aggressive and fierce policing of the boundaries of support that is associated with and encouraged among school and team followers under the guise of ‘school spirit’ is similar to the divisive and sectarian behaviour seen outside of the school in relation to neighbourhood ‘territory’. This type of double standard is part of the overall problem of the mixed messages about masculinity that are regularly received by boys wherein behaviour that is condemned in one setting is actively praised in another. Relating to this, a major concern highlighted in both the review (Mac an Ghaill et al 2002: 50-60) and the report of EM (Gleeson et al 2000: 135-8) focused on these mixed messages as well as on the notion of a ‘solo run’. The term ‘solo run’ refers to the fact that teachers of EM and of SPHE courses in general usually operate alone, with little or no support or interest from colleagues. The main problems with this, according to Gleeson, Conboy and Walsh (2000), relate to the danger of mixed messages being given to boys whereby other teachers may contradict or undermine the messages presented in EM. One teacher from a Portlaoise school remarked in the report that:

You wouldn’t get much support within the school – the best we got was tolerance of it [EM] … it also limits it by the fact that the rest of the staff probably don’t know what is going on (Gleeson et al 2000: 136).
The same teacher went on to say, ‘It wouldn’t be impossible to find yourself teaching this programme and find that the complete opposite was being taught in another subject’. In the Executive Summary (2000) of the report Gleeson points out the problems associated with the ‘School Cultural Factors’. These include the fact that boys’ schools are often resistant to change, as well as being particularly opposed to the beliefs which underlie the programme. He states:

The culture of some boys’ schools is resistant to change in general and to the values underpinning ‘Exploring Masculinities’ in particular... There is a real danger that students in participating schools will hear conflicting messages in relation to masculinity (Gleeson 2000: 10).

The constant social pressure on the boys ‘to be men’ or to behave in an adequately ‘masculine fashion’ in terms of the deeply embedded social expectations of gendered behaviour is fundamentally at odds with the materials presented in EM. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that beyond the ‘solo run’ problem, not all teachers in boys’ schools supported the initiative or wanted to incorporate its ethos of tolerance and plurality into their classes and sports teams. One student’s comments, reproduced in the report, perfectly illustrated the coming together of the negative attitudes of the boys with those of many of their teachers. This student asked:

Why should we learn about women’s rights when we’re not women or never will be [?] As another teacher said to us today ‘Why did the woman want a window at the kitchen sink?’ ... Because she wanted to have a point of view’ (Gleeson et al 2000: 122).
Another teacher commented on the problem of this lack of support for the programme in schools, remarking that once boys leave the EM classroom they are more often than not going straight ‘into a class where the very attitudes we have been talking about are reinforced because of the way that particular individuals in the school deal with them’ (2000: 136). These experiences of such mixed messages are confusing for students and undermine the teachings of the programme. Again, what is not taken into account here is how the popular culture of the boys performs exactly this same function, promoting gender stereotypes and aggressive hyper-masculine personas as being the epitome of cool. This leaves boys to wrestle with the alternative and multiple masculinities presented in an EM session before being reminded in their next class, or when they turn on their television, that there is only one socially acceptable and valid form of masculinity to which to aspire.

Fixing Class and Making Gender

As noted, Connell (2000) discusses the role institutions play in forming and maintaining specific gender roles, particularly the socially dominant heterosexual form of masculinity. He explores the influence of the education system and the way it reinforces class and gender boundaries through constant reaffirmation of the status quo. His study of Australian schoolboys and masculinity summarised in his essay ‘Cool guys, swots and wimps’ relies upon life history interviews in which adult males recall their schooldays. Their comments help him build up an image of the school as a system that is active in the process of ‘making’ and sustaining a particularly restrictive male gender identity (Connell 2000: 131-133). Although these men are looking back over a period of several years and
recounting tales from an adult and therefore less immediate standpoint, their stories and experiences are disarmingly familiar. The voices of Mal and Eel, two of the participants in Connell’s study, discuss their school days, illustrating the similarity of experience across culture, time and place. They recall:

In high school [my friends] were real hoods [toughs] ... like we used to hang down the back... We’d sit down there and smoke cigarettes and talk about women, get dirty books out... Just the things you do at high school in the first year (ibid: 133).

I was in a bit of trouble in the last four years of school. I got busted for ...selling porno books. Third form it was getting drunk at the school fete... Fourth form, wasn’t much happening in fourth form really, busted in the dunnies [toilets] having a smoke! (ibid:134)

Another man, Danny, recollects the physicality of school and the competitive nature of the peer group status system of masculinity:

When the first form joins and all comes together from all different [primary] schools there’s this thing like sorting out who was the best fighter, who is the most toughest and aggressive boy in the form... It was like this pecking order stuff (ibid: 136).

The voices of Willis’s ‘lads’ are evoked as are instances narrated by the Hillside boys through these older men’s stories of getting into trouble, getting away with things, and ‘knowing where you stand’ in relation to older, younger, stronger or weaker males, with the ‘ear’oles”18 being replaced by the effeminate or academically inclined ‘Cyrils’19. The reflexivity the older men bring to their accounts is illuminating in that it makes clear to
them the very institutionalised processes which produced their youthful masculinities when they in fact, at the time, felt them to be products of their own free will or choice.

One working class young man recounts the way in which he changed from being a quiet boy in primary school to being a ‘tough’ in high school, reflecting now on the way in which the boys in his class were encouraged, by the school, to toughen up:

Once I started getting used to the place [high school] and not so afraid of my own shadow, I felt here was a chance to develop a new identity. Now I can be a coolie, I can be tough. So I started to be a bit more belligerent. I started to get in with the gangs a bit, slag off teachers behind their backs, and tell dirty jokes and stuff like that (2000: 138).

The Hillside version of this ‘processing’ is clearly evident. The stories the boys tell in class and the responses they give to the EM material bears all of the hallmarks of a continuous and ongoing process of ‘masculinizing’ both in school and outside. Such is the influence of this dual aspect – the peer group and the informal school culture - that EM is almost powerless against it.

One of the EM programme’s major obstacles is directly related to the production and maintenance of masculinity in both the informal and formal school curricula. The nature of classroom interaction, whereby every word spoken is subject to the scrutiny of the peer group means every word is carefully chosen to fall precisely within the boundaries of acceptability and any failure to understand or adhere to this leaves the speaker in a vulnerable position, open to mockery, ridicule and censure. The boys actively police themselves in terms of speech and engagement in the classroom. Excessive enthusiasm or
The eagerness is tempered by the awareness of the favourite form of punishment practiced by
the boys among themselves. The tactic or technique of cutting off an offender by turning
away from him, ignoring him and then focusing on his embarrassment in jokes and
conversation is employed often by the boys, sometimes for a whole class or longer,
sometimes just for a matter of minutes. An example of both the narrowness of these
boundaries and of what happens when a boy steps outside of them is discussed in the next
segment which occurred in a class about fear, in the module on 'Violence'.

Class Two: 'Breaking the Rules'

At the beginning of this class (24th March 2003), just after the bell has rung and the boys
have settled down slightly, Paul jumps right into today's topic, asking the class as a
whole where they think different kinds of people may feel or experience fear? He gives
the example of a small child who can't find his or her mother in a busy supermarket or
street. He then asks the boys can they think of any other situations where a specific type
of person may feel particularly afraid. Clearly Paul is hoping that they will engage with
the material and take this more seriously than some of the other topics. The session starts
off well as one boy, Kevin, suggests honestly that 'you might be a bit scared sometimes
at night walking home on your own from the pub or somewhere'. This, even with the
addition of the pub as a legitimate and 'manly' location, immediately produces a variety
of derisive responses ranging from an instant physical shifting away from Kevin by the
boys sitting closest to him, to the whispers - 'he wouldn't get into a pub' - to outright
laughter, exaggerated mincing and sneering. At this point over the general racket Paul is
forced to remind the boys of the ground rules of EM by which they, in much the same
sense as they ‘volunteer’ for things, had agreed to abide at the beginning of the year.  

These ground rules, known as the ‘code of practice’, form the basis of the first two class sessions in the programme materials. In these opening sessions the students are asked to conduct a code of behaviour that will help to ‘facilitate open discussion, to establish the right to be heard, and to allow us to reflect on our development as people’ (EM 2000: 3). The teachers’ notes suggest that teachers may prompt students in the development of the good behaviour charter by using the list which follows:

- No laughing at other students’ ideas or feelings.
- Good humour is acceptable.
- Confidentiality.
- Importance of listening.
- Everyone gets a chance to participate.
- No put downs.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Honesty.
- Respect.
- No ‘slagging’ (EM 2000: 2).

One of these rules involves an undertaking not to laugh at anyone else in the class when they are speaking; however, the boys are bound by a far more powerful set of ground rules than those of EM. Letting Kevin’s words go un-remarked is tantamount to the admission that they too are such incomplete and inadequate men that they are afraid to walk home alone at night. Of course, the reality is that there exists, for all of the boys, most likely a healthy and sensible level of wariness, if not outright fear, associated with walking around the city at night. However, the group code of conduct requires this to remain unsaid. The masculinity of the boys is founded on defence, machismo and a
pervasive sense of bravado. They regard themselves as the equal of both the ‘toughs’ they watch on television shows such as Buffy, The Sopranos or the O.C., where adult, 20 to 30 year old men and women improbably play teenagers, and the exaggeratedly pumped up parodies of men whose music videos they consume on MTV. This type of laid back, effortless cool that comes from a scripted character’s feeling of control has filtered into their personae from American-produced popular culture and is now linked to their understanding of their own power and personal autonomy. Therefore, to admit to feeling powerless in an actual and realistic situation such as the one Kevin has outlined is to admit to the actuality of being powerless in the broader social context.

The quiet, studious and un-athletic looking Kevin is clearly the class patsy or easy target. His attentiveness and willingness to engage with the teacher and the material, his neatness and generally well-behaved and tidy demeanour marks him out as different. A good example of his ‘different-ness’ is seen in the photographs, reproduced here in figure 3.04, he submitted as part of the camera project I conducted with 12 of the boys. This project, as noted in chapter two was loosely based on the broader technique of photo-interviewing or photo-elicitation (Hurworth 2003; Prosser 1999; 2003) whereby each of the boys was given a disposable camera to take pictures with over a week-long period. The participants were asked to photograph what they considered to be the central or essential elements of their lives outside of school. These were to include places where they hung out with friends, places where they went to spend time on their own and the material things that represent their interests, pastimes and hobbies. Protecting the privacy of the boys and that of the school was paramount and I had no desire to make the former
or any members of their family feel uncomfortable by initiating invasive research practices in the family home or community. Reflecting the importance of maintaining and balancing the boys' interest and comfort, the brief for the photo project focused only on the picturing of places and things as opposed to that of family, houses or friends. This inanimate/impersonal focus worked well, allowing the boys enhanced scope to narrate themselves and their culture through a different medium without concerns or embarrassment about intrusion into their private family lives. Following this, as the Hillside boys conducted their photographic work on their own and because each camera was tagged only with their first name, they did not feel constrained by possibly being identified by anyone outside of their classroom. Nor did they feel obliged to take full rolls of film (each camera contained 24 shots). Some boys used the entire roll of film; others took no more than two or three shots. Because of the anonymity of the process and the broadness of the brief, the boys felt free to photograph anything they wanted rather than being limited to a selection chosen by me, a cultural outsider who could therefore only make suggestions and presumptions as to their interests.

The films returned to and developed by me yielded an unsurprisingly narrow range of places and of things. Bedrooms featured prominently with most of the boys photographing their bedroom first as a place they hang out in, before going on to document the things they keep in there. Items such as stereos and associated equipment, headphones and extra speakers, personal computers, video game consoles, as well as music CDs, DVDs, video games and mobile phones were photographed by the majority. Outside spaces featured were all public in nature and were all characterised as places to
hang out, to drink alcohol (a practice known as ‘bushing’), to smoke cigarettes or to just meet up and ‘do nothing’. As I could not follow the boys to these spaces, in order to spend and record time in their company outside of the classroom this photo project represented an important opportunity and source of data. It created a space for the Hillside boys to represent themselves to me through the subjects and places they chose to photograph. This helped to rebalance the uneven power relationship that existed between the class and myself and it gave the boys a sense of agency and control over the physical photographic representations of them that I would take away with me from the classroom.

Returning to Kevin, his difference to the other boys is, as noted, marked out by his appearance, his speech and his behaviour. It is also represented through the photographs he chose to take. As shown in figures 3.04a and 3.04b, they are all internal shots of his bedroom and include his library of science fiction and fantasy novels and, more remarkably, in this context, his school books (see figures 3.04 a-b).

These photos are in contrast to the photos of the other boys (see figure 3.05) which feature, as discussed above, outside public spaces, various accessories to ‘manly’ activities such as weights and motorbikes and the accessories of a media-based culture.
such as *Playstation* and televisions. To the rest of the class (and probably to some of the teachers) Kevin is an 'ear'ole', a ‘Cyril’, or to use the vernacular of the boys, a ‘suck’.

Figure 3.05: T.V., weights and bikes – a selection of photos taken by the Hillside boys.
Kevin has chosen to remain outside of his peers and as such has marked himself off as a class and a gender traitor in much the same way as the academic boys in Willis’s, Connell’s and O’Donnell and Sharpe’s ethnographies were set apart from the bulk of their compatriots through appearance, attitude and behaviour. There are other quiet boys in each class who do not directly engage with the teacher or make jokes but they, unlike Kevin, remain within the main body of the group, laughing at the right times and sharing, to my mind, the same appearance – a type of general dishevelment and an air of unconcerned nonchalance – as the ring leaders.

Following on from Kevin’s comment on fear and walking home at night the boys are on the defensive and are eager to make up for his perceived moment of weakness as they fear it may tarnish them all. As such, the remainder of this class is spent trying to expunge his over-earnestness by being as scatological and offensive as is possible. Thus, as indicated below, when Paul asks the question again he receives a very different type of response:

Paul: C’mon now… where would… say… a young man feel fear?
Sean: In a gay club.
Mark: In prison. [Mimes washing his arms with a bar of soap].
Student: [Muttered in the back of the class.] Especially in the showers!
Paul: [Ignoring the raucous laughter.] Where else would someone be afraid? What would some fellas be afraid of…?
Brendan: Fat fellas would be afraid of the gym, sir. [He mimes a fat person by puffing out his cheeks and jiggling imaginary rolls of fat around.]
Paul: [Treating it seriously.] Well, some people would fear exposure or that people would be laughing at them or commenting at them...

Len: Fat fellas would be afraid to go on a swing.

Tadgh: Black fellas would be afraid of the KKK.

Sean: Gay lads would be scared in a straight bar coz they’re afraid of women, sir. (24th March 2003).

By this point all of the boys are laughing and shouting out things, acting out pantomimes of surprise and fear with elaborate hand gestures and exaggerated facial expressions. As the class is nearly over, Paul gives up, rolling his eyes at them and at me, he shrugs good-naturedly and lets them talk until the bell goes a minute or so later. Paul recognises the centrality of humour to the boys and also their need to reassert themselves after Kevin’s seemingly minor, but important transgression of their norm. However, he also recognises the deeper reality and the strength of conviction and belief that lies behind their comedy. Laughter is central to the policing of the group as well as being one of the more public ways of displaying scorn and of reinforcing the exclusion of the transgressor. The jokes the boys make are reflections, as much of their uncertainties, as they are of their prejudices. The often dubious humour used reflects their fear and dislike of difference which is generally perceived as threatening. I understand their jokes and mockery - most particularly those ‘joking’ comments made in relation to women and to gay men - as being representative of a deeper truth: (McLaren 1999: 160-164).

Class Three: ‘Breaking the Rules (Again)’

An acceptance of diversity is promoted throughout the programme and is founded on an attempt to illustrate to the boys the importance of being open to differences in gender,
race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability and disability. However, my experiences tally with those of Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Lynch and Lodge. The former depicts boys' schools as places of homophobia and misogyny while the latter find within single-sex boys' schools a particularly old-fashioned masculinity that embraces the opposite of what EM presents. My time in the classroom as an observer showed me beyond doubt that one of the greatest fears entertained by the boys is the fear of being different, of standing out from the crowd and being singled out as 'other'. Broadmindedness is not an option within the structures of the defensive masculinity practiced by these boys. Difference is perceived primarily as a threat and tolerance of certain variations within sexual orientation or ethnicity is not acceptable to the group as a whole. This is also evidenced in the case studies which influence this work. Willis (1977), Foley (1996), O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) and Mac an Ghaill (1994) all show the doggedness with which boys in a school setting will cling to their identity as a group, isolating and harassing those who do not conform to the dominant ideal. The self-policing carried out by the boys in terms of their own masculinities is intense and thorough. Any deviation from the approved script of manliness is pounced on and ridiculed with the perpetrator mocked and chastened.

In one incidence in a class session on ‘Power’, the discussion developed into an evaluation of the type of power that adults have over young people.

Paul: Does a teacher have control over a class?
Class: No! [Shouted.]
Cathal: It depends on the teacher, sir.
Paul: Does a teacher have power? [His emphasis.]
Class: Yes! [Resounding.]
Paul: What gives them that power? What quality?
Brendan: Fear, sir. [Sarcastically.]
Paul: What are you afraid of?
John: You’d get into trouble.
Brendan: They’d tell your parents and you’d be in trouble.
Alex: Some teachers have no power because they don’t know how to use it, sir.
Paul: How’d you mean?
Alex: You’ve to project an image of power ...to show that you can’t be messed with.
Paul: So.... [pauses]. What are you afraid of then? Punishment? What type of punishment?
Class: [All talking together.] Detention, suspension.
Paul: But none of you have ever been suspended have you?
Class: [Meditatively.] No.
Paul: So it is about control? About a threat if you don’t behave? Is there anyway a teacher can have positive control?
Stephen: If a teacher takes it easy on you...if he respects you, you respect him.
Paul: So mutual respect? How does that come about?
Stephen: Fair play, like.
Brendan: Leaving you off once or twice.
Kevin: Depends what you do in class, what kind of relationship you have with the teacher. (24th March 2003).

At this point the class dissolves into disorder; the serious discussion which had been continuing apace is abandoned instantly in a storm of mockery and laughter. Their derision is all focused on the fact that Kevin, once again, has stepped outside the boundaries, this time by using the words relationship and teacher in the same sentence. The boys instantly pounce upon the possible although barely perceptible homosexual
connotations and immediately invoke their own code of censure. Kevin is clearly very embarrassed and Paul is once again forced to remind the class of the EM ground rules to which they were unenthusiastic subscribers. It takes several minutes for the boys to settle down again and when they do their interest in the topic has once again evolved into the far more diverting pastime of mocking Kevin. Moments such as this where Paul is forced by the boys' behaviour to rebuke them or to show disapproval has a totally contradictory effect upon them. The fact that Paul is perceived as coming to Kevin's aid simply reinforces his position as a traitor and an 'ear'ole' and in turn reinforces the rightness of the behaviour of the rest of the class. Because Kevin is, in their view, bringing it upon himself by being a 'suck' the boys feel that they are merely rebalancing the scales by mocking and teasing him. The adult intervention in their 'justice system' merely reinforces the perception of 'rightness' among the group, whereby Kevin's weakness, if not commented upon and therefore erased, will otherwise be understood to be applicable to all of them.

**Personal Freedom, Power and Youthful Masculinity**

This adult position of disapproval qua moral superiority produces in the students a desire to subvert that logic and there are countless such acts of subversion by the boys throughout the school day. Most of these are small and may appear to be petty and meaningless and often seem to be irritating purely for the sake of it. Yet, acts such as sitting sideways in a seat until told to sit properly, wearing the uniform incorrectly, adding banned articles of clothing or riding bicycles up to the door of the bike shed are necessary if the boys are to maintain the integrity of their own masculinity. The
Constant stream of remonstration from teachers is part of the maintenance of their positions of authority, as opposed to signifying a classroom which is out of control, as I had first assumed. Even a teacher such as Paul, who clearly has both the authority over and the respect of the students in his class, keeps up a running commentary of admonition.

As he moves around the class directing discussions, he seamlessly integrates warnings and cautionary observations. These are an important part of the student-teacher relationship and are essential for the smooth running of EM in a classroom setting. Far from being a student-led initiative as claimed, the programme is fundamentally about conflict, negotiation and the remote possibility of compromise between several different and opposed value systems. The culture of the school and the culture of the boys come together in an effort to subvert the messages contained within EM. The emphasis on difference, diversity, and change is at odds with the type of masculine identity preferred by boys’ schools and by the boys themselves. The gulf between what the programme advocates and what exists is almost unbridgeable. At times the boys do, as seen, engage seriously with the material and topics but for the most part they are confused or otherwise at a loss to understand what they see as a baseless attack on them in particular and on their totally ‘normal’ way of life. An excellent example of this in relation to the affirmation of the values and belief systems of the boys is seen in discussions centred on the topic of personal freedom. The dominant attitude of the boys is generally, as noted, one of defence. Everything is reduced to a question of power and their unarticulated powerlessness as young male subjects. This is demonstrated most clearly through their
constant return to the use of and understanding of the word ‘trouble’. Everything comes back to trouble for them: getting into trouble, getting out of trouble, causing trouble, avoiding trouble, looking for trouble and being punished, rightly or wrongly for it. The toughness and bravado that emerges in their recounting of experiences is an essential and fundamental part of their cultural coherence. The defensive attitude is seen at its strongest and most overt when they are offended by or feel threatened by certain extracts from the EM video. In particular they are angered by the presentation of young men as scruffy and inarticulate, juxtaposed with polished, confident and well-dressed girls. This defensiveness does, however, emerge in more subtle and interesting ways in the general class discussions. The symbolic importance of traditional masculinity cannot be underestimated and it is by not acknowledging, appealing to or addressing that side of their identity that EM (as will be addressed in full in chapter five) loses its audience at key moments. While there are obvious problems with an overly or hyper-masculine identity such as excessive violence, criminal activity, sexism and a certain lack of fear or good sense, it is an important part of identity formation for the young Irish male. Clearly EM does not wish to encourage or legitimise this type of masculine identity by allowing the focus to shift away from a concentration on the negative aspects of this form of masculinity. It is also important to note at this point that these boys are not the testosterone fuelled delinquents which constitute the default characterisation of working class Irish youth in the media (Devlin 2006). Their culture, as will be seen in chapter four, is part of the mainstream. Their idols include men such as the former Irish footballer Roy Keane (see Figure 3.06), who was previously discussed in chapter two. Keane was fêted for his willingness to throw himself into fights on the pitch and off and for his
refusal to be told what to do in any situation, yet he is still predominantly regarded as a national hero.  

Keane is celebrated by the boys for, to use the particularly Irish phrase which can be both laudatory and derogatory, his eagerness to 'play the hard man'. However, he is equally admired for his perceived qualities (especially during the 2002 World Cup) of intransigence, fierce loyalty and pride, all characteristics highly valued by the boys. Other role models (some of which I have noted above) include motorbike racers, action heroes, television anti-heroes or villains such as the ruthless mafia characters in the American cable TV series 'The Sopranos', American rap musicians such as Eminem and 50 Cent and characters from video games such as Grand Theft Auto.

All of these characters, both actual and fictional, as will be seen in chapter four, represent total freedom. They all exist in almost exclusively male worlds (such as Mafias, football teams, motor racing teams, bands, rap groups and prisons), free from female disapproval and criticism. These are both, it is interesting to note, characterised by the boys as
feminine traits, regardless of the gender of the disapproving party. In sharp contrast to themselves, the characters the boys admire have agency and power. Any women who feature in these texts are generally there to provide sexual services or domestic comforts. This contentious form of masculinity is, however, simply a fiction or an aspiration. It is temporary and unreal, but these facts in no way diminish its attraction. The boys are aware of the consequences which occur in response to unrealistic behaviour such as excessive violence or complete refusal to abide by rules. The situation in which they find themselves, whereby they are subject to the rules of home and school, bound to appear every day at the appointed hour in the correct attire, nominally forbidden to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or drive is a frustrating one. They are old enough to work, and the majority of them have after school jobs and many of them have familial responsibilities to parents and siblings that other young men of their age may not have. The boys are trapped in a no-man’s land between childhood and adulthood. Highlighting this limbo is the tone taken by EM. It attempts to appeal to the ‘adult’ within the boys by stressing responsibility for the sake of good citizenship and other (in the boys’ opinion) heartfelt irrelevancies and thereby censures the behaviour that develops out of a frustration with the boys’ lack of status or power in everyday life. This frustration can be channelled into alternative constructs of citizenship or community spirit, wherein the boys create their own standards of behaviour and acceptability as well as their own system of advancement, conferring status and power within the group. This process is particularly attractive to and important for the Hillside boys as they are not only restricted by youth but also by their social and economic class positioning. For example Cohen (1955) in Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang discusses the concept of a ‘delinquent’
subculture in which young working class boys and men or 'corner boys', disengage from the norms and values of mainstream society because they find that they cannot achieve status or advancement in that system, stacked as it is against them. Instead they construct their own yardstick or standard by which to measure social and personal success and thus reject the middle class value system that has both denied them entry and graded them as inferior (1955: 121).

In her co-edited collection *Young People, Leisure and Place* (2004), Australian social theorist, Margaret Robertson explores the issues facing young people in urban life in terms of personal geographies and the use of space. As part of her discussion of the local community, she uncovers the frustration experienced by young people in the West who cannot afford to buy or to experience all of the commodities which are advertised to them as signifying social success. (2004: 41). That is part of the frustration experienced by the Hillside boys but it goes far beyond simply that desire for material goods. As will be seen in chapter four, the Hillside boys already have a huge investment, both emotionally and financially, in entertainment media such as games consoles and audio visual equipment. Their dissatisfaction comes primarily, I would argue, from an ongoing feeling of powerlessness linked to an uncertainty about the world after school. Because the traditional path of getting good work in the locality and settling down in an established community that existed for previous generations is gone, the boys are facing an uncertain future. Once they leave school, in order to establish their claim to a socially valid adult masculinity they will have to negotiate a new way of doing so. They find themselves in much the same predicament as Nayak’s (2003) subjects. In the vacuum left by the
destruction of the traditional way of life in a Northern England town, formally a centre for shipbuilding and other heavy industries, these young men 'the Real Geordies' find themselves clinging to tactics and values that are almost identical to those of the Hillside boys (2003: 310-12).

**Class Four: 'The Freedom to Be the Same' 25**

The desire of the boys to have a sense of power over their own lives becomes more and more evident as the classes move on. Their frustration at being permanently confined by the rules of home, school and work contributes largely to their defensive attitude and the ensuing reduction of situations and conversations to a context within which they have either won or lost. It also relates to what is perceived and presented by the media as the active/potential delinquency of young working class men.26 This generally takes the form of inspection of the behaviour of young men outside of school, home and work wherein due to a lack of facilities and a lack of engagement they simply hang around their housing estates actively 'doing nothing' or hang around in town 'just messing'.27 There is a feeling among the boys that everyday life is a battleground on which they must constantly prove themselves to their peers by fulfilling the group requirements for acceptance and membership while keeping within the boundaries set by the adults in charge. The young people interviewed in Devlin’s study echo the Hillside boys in both attitude and recounted experience; they feel their lives to be more complicated than those of young people in the past and feel adults have little understanding of them and of their needs. Responding to the questions the participants commented that:
You need a lot of money these days like. Like if you see someone wearing good clothes you’re gonna want the same. So you don’t feel left out... (Devlin 2006: 22).

...All of us get tarred with the same brush. You’re a teenager, you hang around in a group, you must be a vandal (ibid).

Negotiating the space between what is defined as acceptable behaviour by the peer group and what is seen as appropriate by the teacher highlights a range of subject positions with the class ‘swot’ at one extreme and the class clown at the other. For example, at Hillside, the class ‘swots’ Kevin, in one group, and Tim in the other, are this school’s versions of Willis’s ‘lad’s’ ‘ear’ole’. Neither boy participates in general class disruption. Both respond only to direct questions and neither laughs at the clowning of the boys around him. Both answer seriously when addressed by Paul and pay attention more or less the whole time. Neither tests the limits of speech or behaviour and so each one stays firmly in the good books as far as the teacher is concerned but is viewed as a traitor and a ‘suck’ by his classmates. Brendan, as the class comedian, is at the opposite end of the scale. He is appreciated by the boys as a source of amusement and is the acknowledged leader in most discussions. Yet, occasionally, when he takes it too far, he risks getting them all in trouble and so is temporarily disassociated from the group. This is generally done by the rest of the class turning their gaze from him and not engaging with him until the danger has passed.

The setting of boundaries through rules and shows of authority are a major part of the school day and underlying this is the continuous testing of and shifting of those bounds of
acceptable behaviour in the context of different classes and teachers. Behaviour that is acceptable in the EM classroom would not be tolerated in science or history class. Talking back to one teacher would not be tolerated by another and forgetting your homework in one class can be taken a lot more seriously than in another. Aggression that translates into enthusiasm and dedication on the playing pitches is seen as dangerous and understood in the corridors as bullying. The students are highly sensitive to minute changes in tone and body language amongst both their peers and their teachers and are continually aware of what they can get away with at any one time. The boys’ sensitivity to the people around them is based on those peoples’ perception of their status and behaviour at that time. This responsiveness is based on a constant awareness of the status of the self and the need to maintain that status in the eyes of the group. EM had set out to promote a more altruistic sensitivity based on the needs and feelings of other people but such is the high potential for embarrassment and the subsequent belittling at the hands of the class that the majority of boys focus only on remaining ‘cool’ in front of their friends. Standing up for those who are different or supporting an unpopular viewpoint is therefore not an option.

The importance of acceptance by the group is seen clearly in a lesson entitled ‘The Freedom to Be’ (4th November 2002). As stated in the objects, the aim of this session is ‘that students may explore the Key Question: what personal freedoms do we, as individuals, need in order to develop emotionally?’ (EM 2000: 23). The student materials for this session include a cartoon and a list of freedoms (see figures 3.07 a-b). The teachers’ notes suggest that the class be divided into small groups in order to discuss the
cartoon amongst themselves and then report back to the rest of the class. Paul adapts the methodology here and gives each boy a copy of the cartoon and tells the class to look at it individually and quietly themselves. After a few minutes, he asks them to ‘read’ the cartoon or, in other words, to tell him what is happening in it. Having waited for an unprompted answer, Paul points at Brendan and demands that he ‘Tell us’. Once Brendan starts to speak the other boys all start to speak at once and the general consensus is that one pigeon is a ‘loser’. It is obvious that the boys are not all that interested in the cartoon and only perk up again when Paul goes into the meaning of the words used and the puns involved. Asking what ‘flocking’ means to birds and what the human equivalent is provokes much laughter. Paul ignores this and goes onto ask what the birds are doing in human terms.

The boys have decided to read ‘don’t nobody flock with us’ as ‘don’t nobody fuck with us’ and sensing an opportunity for diversion, some of the boys claim not to understand the cartoon, and try to get Paul to say ‘fuck with us’. After a stand-off of a few minutes, when Paul asks them again what the pigeons mean by saying ‘don’t nobody flock with us,’ Alex announces in an extremely bored voice, ‘They are telling him not to fuck with them sir.’ Brendan immediately assumes a pious expression and putting his hand up, (the first time I saw any student do so), he says in a faux-shocked voice, ‘Sir he said ‘fuck’’. He is ignored by Paul but congratulated by the rest of the class through an outburst of near hysterical laughter. Having spoken with the boys in the hallways and having listened to them talk amongst themselves in conversations littered with a selection of swearwords including ‘fuck’, ‘shit’, ‘cunt’ and a wide array of others, this becomes a
further example of the naivety of some sections of the EM material. The childish nature of the cartoon is irritating enough, judging from the expressions of the boys and the fact that the two boys in my eye-line have already scribbled all over their copies. The coyness and poor word play is patronising and lends itself easily to the thorough going over with which it is greeted.

Figure 3.07a-b: Student Material from EM
Over a hum of boredom-induced muttering and shuffling, Paul pushes ahead with the cartoon and its relation to ‘real life’. He suggests that the lone pigeon is being invited to join the group but that in so doing he must behave in a certain way. This is obviously to suggest to students that the personal freedoms of the pigeon will be limited if he conforms to the rules of the gang and it is intended that the students will sympathise with this individual. The boys have decided to read the cartoon in quite a different way. Rather than seeing it as an invitation to join the gang, the boys see it as the playing out of a threat or as a warning to the lone bird. This ever-present defensive mindset emerges strongly on occasions and does so particularly here, when, as suggested unsubtly in the Teacher notes, Paul asks ‘Does this scene remind you of any scene you may have seen or experienced in the school yard’ (EM 2000: 24) This is greeted with laughter by the class and so he asks, ‘Well, would you see it anywhere else?’ If none of the boys has seen this kind of behaviour in school it is well-represented outside in ‘the street’, ‘the park’, ‘estates’, ‘outside the shop’ and ‘all over town’. The next question for the class, leading on from their responses, concerns what is going to happen next, or what the gang is going to do to this pigeon. This provokes a briefly considered and serious discussion among the boys, with the most likely outcomes being that the gang will:

Alex: Hit him.
Stephen: Take his money and stuff... or his phone...
Ian: Beat him up, sir.
Paul: But how do you know that they won’t just let him go on his way? Alex? Stephen?
Alex: Because he looks scared.
John: They have him surrounded.
Edward: One is pointing at him and they’re all looking at him.
Paul: Ok, imagine they are human and inside in town. Whereabouts is this happening? Is it day or night? What time? (4th November 2002).

The boys, who have only had a passing interest in this up to now, have switched off completely. It is obvious to them what will happen to the pigeon and where and when this will occur. Because Paul is looking at them a few boys call out some street names and the name of a park as possible locations. Paul moves on and asks if they think any of the pigeons will get into trouble for this. One of the boys points out that if there is a fight, more people would join in, maybe friends of the lone pigeon, with the most likely result of this being the arrival of the Gardaí. In light of one of the boys’ experience with being arrested, Paul decides to explore further their feelings about the police. He asks, ‘Why or when would the Gardaí be interested in you at all?’ The boys are very interested in this and they all have the same answer, ‘Because you’d be hanging around in gangs… and people are afraid of them [gangs]’ They feel victimised by the Gardaí and the defensive element of their masculinity once again comes out here as the boys compete to be heard over a stream of stories involving their friends, cousins or brothers being treated, as they perceive it, unfairly by the police. The boys vigorously deny any wrongdoing on their part and claim they are picked on because of where they come from and how they look and dress.

This relates directly to a pervasive feeling of grievance amongst the boys. They are angered by the negatively comparative presentation of young men in the programme video (see figures 3.02 and 3.03) and are able to link this to the way young men are
talked about in the newspapers and on the television and the radio. In stories of their experiences it seems they are regarded with suspicion and mistrust outside of school and home. Because the spaces in which they congregate are public (see figure 3.08 a-d), the activities in which they engage, however innocent, are regarded as threatening and anti-social and the boys themselves are regarded as delinquents.

The photographs featured both here and throughout the research, offer clues to the problems facing the boys in their local communities. These same problems are also reflected in the comment below from one of the participants in Devlin’s focus groups:

Everybody stares at you, there’s no where to go like. As adults, they can go to the pub, they’ve more things to do with their time. We haven’t. That’s why, there’s nothing really for us to do, nothing else to do but drink. We’re just knocking about and you can see us more, we’re just kids. We don’t have no where to go. Adults can hide but we can’t. Whatever we want to do we have to do it outside (2006: 22).

The lack of money means that they will often congregate to just hang around or to drink alcohol outside, in parks, playing fields, playgrounds and street corners rather than go to the pub. Their unwillingness to take part in adult organised activities means they prefer to ‘do nothing’ rather than be supervised in an activity, or will simply retreat alone to the sanctuary of their bedrooms and their media-based popular culture. Outside of the home, their hangouts are public spaces where all activities, however harmless, come under the scrutiny of other ‘more legitimate’ users of these spaces.
Class Five: Crime and Punishment

The boys’ attitude to crime is complex. They are eager to deny any active involvement in activities such as fights or vandalism but they do not condemn it. They are proud of their underage drinking and smoking and the fact that they can get into over-18 pubs at weekends. They work after school for their money like adults and they expect to be able to spend it on adult pastimes. The reaction of Paul to the behaviour of the students outside of his classroom is crucial. It is clear from his comments that he disapproves of whatever behaviour may bring them to the attention of the Gardaí. He does not condemn them but does not condone their behaviour either. In this class Paul spots an opportunity to raise
some questions about vandalism and petty crimes and their impact on the community.

The conversation which follows below was sparked by a conversation among several boys about throwing water balloons and stones at buses on Hallowe’en night.

Paul attempts to have the boys think about the impact of actions like this on the rest of the community by asking the boys what should be done about the problem. One boy suggests that the buses shouldn’t run on Hallowe’en night. Several agree with him saying, it is stupid as they will ‘only definitely have stuff aimed at them’. Paul asks the boys to think about the people who will be inconvenienced by the cancellation of bus services because of behaviour like this and is gratified to have at least half the class agree with him that it is ‘stupid’ and ‘done by young fellas who don’t know [any better]’. However, this conversation is derailed by Brendan and an accomplice, Alex, who announce loudly that it is fun and that they do it every year. Brendan mimes throwing something at Paul’s back (he has turned around and is walking towards the front of the class) with a look of comical false concentration on his face. This provokes much laughter and diverts attention away from the fact that Hallowe’en is becoming increasingly problematic for local communities, both urban and rural. It is now a holiday typically associated with large bonfires which draw large congregations of youths and involves excessive alcohol consumption and varying degrees of violence. Paul rejoins the conversation, attempting to direct it away from Brendan’s mimed throwing by walking down the room and settling by the back desks, before asking the class in general, ‘what other fun could you have on Hallowe’en night?’
As time is running out for this class, Paul brings it back to the cartoon by picking up a copy, unfortunately one that is scribbled upon all over, from a desk as he walks past it. He asks what freedom the pigeon has, answering himself and saying ‘he can fly away’. He then asks what freedoms do they all have in their lives? He suggests that they have some freedom in that they have the freedom to choose in certain situations. Paul points out the limitations to the boys’ freedom that are a direct result of their age but stops short of discussing, in the classroom, limitations that are a direct result of their social and economic positioning and that of their parents. In the class he sticks to restrictions on them because of their youth. For example, the boys have to live at home, they have to wear a school uniform and their hair short, so they do not have the freedom to choose the way in which they live, dress or look. He then asks them to think about freedom for the next day, to think about the ways in which they are restricted in their choice of friends, clothes, places they go and things they do.
Class Six: Limitations and Restrictions

The next class begins with a return to the topic of personal freedom. This is a difficult concept for the boys, as for them freedom is broadly understood and articulated through any challenge to their behaviour or self. This defensive attitude or stance is seen clearly in their reactions to the questions posed in this session. They understand the notion of ‘being free to be your own person’ very differently to the way in which the programme and the teacher would like them to. For example, in response to Paul’s questioning about the issue, they are unable to get beyond the idea that personal freedom means absolute freedom to please the self at all times. Paul asks:

Which freedom is the most important? Is it the freedom to be your own person? Why?

To which the boys respond:

If you don’t stand up for yourself, nobody will.
If you aren’t looking out for yourself no one else will be doing it for you.
So people aren’t always telling you what to do all the time like...
(11th November 2002).

While this programme section is clearly designed to make students think about the way they behave with their friends and to create an awareness of peer pressure, the boys cling to the characterisation of any challenge to their freedom as coming always from an adult source. They are obviously aware of and familiar with the concept of peer pressure. It seems that to admit to be affected by it, or fall victim to it, is taboo. Further contributing to the problem is the confrontational nature of their interactions with adults. These
generally seem to consist of adult direction and censure and adolescent compliance or disobedience. The boys do not understand the limiting of personal freedoms as emanating from their friends, but characterise any limitations imposed on them as an adult challenge to their independence and agency.

Throughout this class Paul tries hard to get the boys away from the ideas that freedom means always being able to do what you want and that any limitations to - or manipulations of - your freedom or independence come from adults, as opposed to the peer group. He also works hard to challenge the notion that freedom amounts to the total control of the self, and by implication, others. Rejecting this, the boys keep coming back to the conclusion that the most important freedom is the freedom to be your own person because it means being able to do what you want. Sensing that the boys are intractable on this point and as the mood begins to sour in accordance with their stubbornness, Paul tries another tack. He challenges their basic belief that once they are ‘grown up’ they will have absolute freedom, announcing ‘You will never have the freedom to do what you like all of the time. Why?’ Shouted from the back of the class comes the only answer ‘Because you’ll get arrested, sir’. This provokes much laughter and lightens the atmosphere, allowing Paul to wrap up the session by asking the boys to think beyond the choices they make or have made for them and to focus on the consequences and other choices that follow. He explains his point, finishing the class here:

You have the ultimate choice not to wear the [school] uniform on any one day, but the freedom to make that choice is restricted by consequences, so the freedom to be yourself is restricted (11th November 2002).
Who is Man Enough?

The Hillside boys are very aware that there are other ways of thinking and other ways of being a man. They are, however, unconvinced that any of those other ways are socially valid or acceptable in their contextualising of what constitutes ‘man enough’. The work a man does or the job he has, his appearance and physicality, his family status and his status within the peer group and the wider community are all, for the boys, essential elements of a masculine identity. This is well understood by the production companies and editors who cater to boys’ popular culture interests and who provide them with characters who check the correct boxes at different stages of their lives and who inspire envy and respect, and thus consumer or viewer loyalty. Chapter four moves out of the classroom into the wider communities inhabited by the Hillside boys in order to explore and to address this relationship. Communities explored outside of the school include Hillside’s local community and the local environment in which the boys have grown up as well as the more ephemeral taste communities that they inhabit over different lengths of time and levels of intensity. The effect of the local on the global forms of popular culture consumed by the boys results in a geo-specific youth subculture complete with dress codes, slang and other linguistic codes which are broadly similar to those of other youth subcultures but are tied directly to local place and time. Chapter four then directs the discussion contained here away from the correlations between the official or formal culture of the school and the masculinity of the students and into the material cultures of the boys as practised in their leisure time.
Notes

See also Hannan, et al. (1996); Smyth (1999). Mac an Ghaill (1994). Hannan et al and Smyth both explore questions which arise about gender and curriculum and class and curriculum, focusing primarily on the difficulties associated with girls in co-educational school environments and traditional ‘boy’ subjects such as higher maths, physics or vocational subjects like metal-work or wood-work or mechanical drawing. They also discuss the problems of the narrow curricula of typical boys’ single-sex schools. Mac an Ghaill looks at the way in which boys’ schools use gendered subjects as a way of sustaining their gender regimes.

See also Collins (1994) for her discussion of the place of popular culture in the classroom.

In actuality the television watched by the boys is in general quite low in drug references. However, because they, as will be discussed in chapter four, mostly play video games and watch films which have an ‘18 Certificate’, and are thus designed for adults they are encountering themes and content intended for a different audience. Storylines and plots often include drugs – both sale and supply of, as well as the use of various substances - extreme violence and strong sexual references.

This is the focus of chapter five where a different approach to the maligned youth culture of boys is explored.

See Nayak (2003) and Pilkington and Johnson (2003). Both articles discuss the study of a global youth culture in the localised context of geographical and class based adaptations made by young people.

See Mac an Ghaill, Hanafin, Conway et al who state:

We recommend that the video be updated. Its production values could be enhanced and certain sections elaborated in light of the ongoing revision of the programme (2002: 224).

See also (Mac an Ghaill et al: 2002: 58; 65; 116; 223) for further comments on the programme video and its reception and use in the classroom.

The seven themes are: Starting Out; Men Working; Men and Power; Relationships, Health and Sexuality; Violence against Women, Men and Children; Men and Sport and Wrapping it Up (EM 2000: IX).
This discussion of sexism is particularly relevant to the lives of these boys and it is vital to understand their particular ‘sexism’ in its social and personal context. Understanding the way in which these boys express a very traditional sexist ideology is best achieved in terms of Connell’s discussion of men and sexism. Connell highlights the position of men and boys who do not now, and possibly never will, experience the patriarchal privilege as it exists for men at the upper end of society, but who, as he strongly asserts, still have an interest in the maintaining or attempt at maintaining the gender imbalance or status quo (2000: 21-22). The Hillside boys are, in terms of the local economy and environment, currently at more of a disadvantage than their female counterparts in relation to employment. Young women are preferred and are more likely to work in the ever-expanding service industry and are more likely to find work in light industry. The traditional destinations of these boys of heavy industry, labouring, or trades are by no means as available as they once were. They are aware, as recounted in class, that at this age their girlfriends are more employable and are more likely to get jobs that pay slightly better, as Owen states, ‘my girlfriend makes more money than I do, and I have two jobs’ (9th December 2002).

Chapter five looks in more detail at a series of classes with the boys in which they react and respond to the programme materials in a variety of different ways. Their reactions are documented and placed in the context of their broader culture and the reasoning behind the methodologies employed by the EM materials.

There are many problems and issues beyond this with the video; however, the boys are able to use it effectively to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the portrayal of young men throughout the programme materials.

This is perhaps to do with the fact that the boys are unsure as to what exactly they want to, or will be able to do once they leave school. It is in the face of such insecurity, which springs from broader international and national economic and industrial changes impacting upon the local it is easier to negotiate uncertainty and find confidence in knowing what you won’t do. Thus the boys are very vocal and assured of their blacklist of jobs or careers in the absence of a selection of viable roles.

See McLaren (1999: 160-164) for his discussion of the importance of the class clown. Often a dissenting or rude voice will emanate from a section of the classroom, but it is difficult to identify who has spoken due to the fact that, as in the case above, the student feels he may be pushing the tolerance of the teacher a little too far and does not want to
get into trouble, but at the same time wants the approval of the boys around him. Often the students will speak out as a group, or several of them will make the same point together, when this happens they are referred to collectively in field notes as ‘Class’. However if an individual speaks out but cannot be identified he is referred to as ‘Student’.

See chapter one for a full discussion of the gender breakdown at Hillside.

See Connell (2000); Lynch and Lodge (2002); and Mac an Ghaill (1994) for their discussion of the particular and problematic cultures of many boys schools.

Of course, there are exceptions to this lack of interest and support from colleagues and principals and these are discussed in both the report and the review. Teachers spoken to by me had a variety of experiences with colleagues and principals. In particular the two main teachers, at Hillside and Greenfield, had very positive responses from their principals and from other staff members, particularly those who taught religion, English and civic studies. However, fitting the profile of the typical EM teacher, both these individuals are senior staff members, are highly experienced and operate at an autonomous level. Therefore their isolation in regard to the programme would not perhaps be as noticeable. They did also experience problems with certain members of staff with the female teacher at Greenfield in particular recounting, in an interview, how some male staff or ‘machos’ as she called them had mocked and laughed at the name and the programme values:

The name of it – Exploring Masculinities – got an awful lot of ... it got me an awful lot of slagging ... I had men going ‘I’m male’ ‘I’m masculine’ ... I got an awful time from machos...

This Executive Summary was originally published with the programme in 2000. The main report although commissioned in 1997, completed and in the possession of the Department in 2000, was not published until April 2004. See chapter one for a fuller discussion of the problems this delay led to as well as an exploration of the possible reasoning behind it.

This refers to the terminology used by the young men in Willis’s study. They refer to the boys in their classes who conform to the school rules and study hard as ‘ear’ oles’. They regard these individuals as traitors due to their alignment with the teachers and their desire to study and achieve white-collar positions when they leave school. The love of
studying and the implied aversion to physical labour makes them different in the eyes of
the dominant social group that is the ‘lads’ and marks them out as ‘sissy’ or effeminate.
Academic ability and enthusiasm is regarded as and equated with a negative femininity
amongst the boys at Hillside in much the same way as the Australian working class
informants in Connell’s research. The ‘ear’oies’, ‘swots’, ‘Cyrils’ or Hillside ‘sucks’ are
at the very bottom of the schoolboy masculinity hierarchy, regarded by their peers as
overly feminine and as not reaching the physical or social standard of the peer judged
‘real man’. This primacy of toughness and physicality is not the same at all boys schools,
although there is an interesting dichotomy at work/play in Irelands’ middle and upper
middle class fee-paying schools between the drive for university acceptance and the
massive importance attached to schoolboy rugby, wherein training and matchplay is
prioritised over all else.
For more on the understanding of the school as a ‘masculinizing’ institution see chapter
one here, and also Connell (1995: 28-30; 66); Mac an Ghaill (1994: 40-51); O’Donnell
See chapter two for a fuller discussion about ‘volunteering’ and ‘volunteers’ in the
classroom.
See Prosser and Schwartz (1998) and Ziller (1990) for further discussion on the various
uses of photography within the research process.
See McLaren (1999) for his discussion of student methods of resistance and his listing of
the most common incidences observed. He writes:
The most common instances of resistance were: leaning back on chairs so that
students nearly fell over (and often did); knocking each other on the backs of the
knees and other forms of ‘masculine’ jostling; leaning over the desk and talking
to other students; lollingly sitting at your desk and looking around the room with
a bored expression; insurrectionary posing such as thrusting out the chin and
scowling at the teacher; being in a restricted space without permission (such as a
hallway or a washroom) during a classroom lesson or activity; obeying a
teacher’s command but performing the required task in slow motion (symbolic
stalling); ‘horsing around’ or fighting in class and wearing ‘intimidating’ clothing
(McLaren 1999: 149-150).
See chapter two for a fuller discussion of Roy Keane and the importance the boys attach
to him in particular and chapter four for a further discussion of the importance attached to
footballers in general. Also here - the problem of generalised and sweepingly negative portrayals of working class boys has been discussed in the preceding chapters and is something which will be returned to both in chapter five with specific reference to the panicked discourse which surrounds ‘boy culture’ and the associated artefacts.

Although referred to as two separate sessions, class four and class five actually took place in the same session. There is however a distinct shift between the two parts of that session and as such they have been labelled as separate entities.

This, and the point which follows below, is extremely interesting and important in terms of the possible introduction, to Ireland, of ASBO’s which originated in the UK under the current Labour government and whose value and use has been widely questioned. Opponents argue that ASBO’s, which can be applied to young people as young as ten simply criminalise already marginalised youth for their engagement in non criminal ‘nuisance’ behaviour. Hearsay evidence is admissible in court and the breach of an ASBO allows for criminal proceedings to proceed in the absence of any actual criminal activity (other than the breaching of the order) having taken place. Supporters of the orders argue that ASBO’s are effective in forcing young people to think about their actions and that they have had a positive effect on petty crimes such as vandalism, graffiti, nuisance drinking and large congregations of youths in public places. See also Devlin:

In short, Irish news stories tend in the vast majority of cases to portray young people either as being a problem or as having problems, which is obviously a stereotypical representation (and one...of which young people themselves are acutely aware). A comparison of the news reports with a sample of feature items, and of tabloid with broadsheet newspapers, found that the overall pattern of representation was consistent. (Devlin 2006: 65). [Italics in original].

This particular problem (and its wider context) of large groups of youths hanging out in public places is discussed in more depth in chapter four. See also Devlin (2006: 22-7).

This is one of the problems identified by the report of EM (Gleeson et al 2000:135-138) as being endemic to boy’s schools. The potential for mixed messages about masculinity and appropriate male behaviour is there in all schools and is heightened by a controversial programme such as this where extensive debate has not resolved many of the differences of opinion and understandings of masculinity allowing for a certain
amount of confusion among teachers and students, some of whom would be unwilling to take on board the message of EM.

Arguably, the pigeons mean that the lone pigeon cannot *flock* with them in the sense that he cannot hang out with them as much as they mean he cannot *fuck* with them. However, the boys have so little interest in the, to their eyes, childish cartoon that the only thing holding their attention at this point is trying to make their teacher say ‘fuck’. Interestingly, Mac an Ghaill et al (2000) question why some students regard the programme as patronising and as more suitable for primary school classes: ‘It is unclear why some students may have viewed some of the teaching methodologies and activities in EM as childish’ (165). The neglect of boys’ culture, interests, class and belief systems by the programme and subsequently by its review and report means that there is little understanding of what is required to engage with adolescent boys especially on topics such as those contained in the programme which are totally ‘uncool’.

See chapter two for the boys’ retelling of an encounter with the Gardaí.
Reservoirs of Meaning and Illustrations of the Unsaid

There are two predominant approaches to the study of youth and youth culture: the first explores a conceptual version of 'youth' and the youth experience at a macro/global level while the second takes smaller, more localised groups of young people at face value and
I argue, one of the primary motivators behind their cultural attempts to understand their experiences through their own specific references and their own constructed communities of meaning (Nayak 2003: 306). In this chapter my focus is mainly directed towards the latter approach. I situate the Hillside boys in relation to their immediate local community and background while making reference to their broader context, especially with relation to the more generalised classifications of youth and nationality, race and social class. I explore their lives and culture both in terms of the micro/local level of the visible communities of their school, their neighbourhood, their special interests and wider peer groups as well as the more broadly applicable and generic communities of gender, age, ethnicity and social class which serve to distinguish and classify the boys at a macro/global level. The small scale and intensive nature of the case-study work allows me a familiarity with the boys’ lives and their local community, enabling a better understanding of the ways they have chosen to express their identities through their media use, culture and consumption patterns. It also allows me to question these choices with an awareness of the local environment and the structural class-based limitations that impose themselves on the lives of these boys, directing their choices and manipulating their futures even at this relatively early stage.

Shifting attention away from what happens in the classroom to what occupies the boys in their free time; the main focus in this chapter is, therefore, centred on the processes of identity formation via popular culture consumption amongst the Hillside boys. The central importance of the peer group and its acceptance or validation of individual lifestyles and personas is, I argue, one of the primary motivators behind their cultural interests and pastimes. Hence an in-depth textual description and analysis of a
representative selection of the cultural artefacts that are desired, purchased and used by
the boys as a primary part of that process is integrated into a wider discussion of the
actual conditions of their regular, daily existence. Their lifestyle is explored in terms of
the social props and commodities that act as markers of identity, separating them from
other groups while, simultaneously, visibly underpinning their loyalties to place, class
and peer group. The boys describe and explain their lifestyle anecdotally, referring to and
referencing themselves through the television shows they watch and the music they listen
to. They also display their interests and allegiances through graffiti on their school bags
and books. Their consumption practices are alluded to in terms of the clothing labels they
like and the magazines, CDs, DVDs and computer games they buy. My main interest in
exploring the purchases the boys make and the media with which they engage is centred
on the question of what is interesting and appealing to them. Why are they interested in
certain media and not in others, what speaks to them and reflects their interests in ways
that they find significant or enjoyable? Looking beyond notions of significance or
pleasure, I also address the essential question of what it is that has shaped those tastes or
interests through a focus on social class.

Skeggs (2004) explores how class as a social category has disappeared as a consideration
in today’s supposedly meritocratic society. She argues that we have ‘entered a time when
speaking of class is not acceptable (even distasteful)’ and, as a result, social
classifications have re-emerged in terms of cultural criticisms (ibid: 46). We no longer
overtly talk about people in terms of their being ‘working class’ or ‘middle class’ and
there is a commonplace refutation of the existence of ingrained structural inequities.
Definitions and decisions about social classifications of people are still made but they are couched in cultural terms and hidden or glossed over by references to a supposed meritocracy in which everyone can equally take their chances. Under this rubric the majority of poor people are understood to be poor because they embody a culture of laziness, failure, or a lack of marketable talent. This is in direct contrast to the perceived ‘hard working’ minority of publicly visible people who have pulled themselves out of poverty, usually to fabulous riches and fame. Particularly insidious according to Skeggs, and as previously discussed, is the return of this ‘culture of poverty’ discourse which focuses attention on the cultural failings of working class (although they are no longer defined in these terms) people, rather than deep-seated structural inequalities which prevent subjects from accessing the same opportunities across the board (2004: 87-88).

Reflecting this awareness, my research incorporates a socio-economic analysis of the choices the boys make in the marketplace, focusing on the ways they pass their time outside of school. The limitations on and restrictions inherent in these choices are explored with a strong emphasis on the question of social class and the realities it imposes upon the boys. The significant purchases and commodity/media consumption patterns displayed by the Hillside boys are thus analysed in a contemporary re-evaluation of the cultural and social aspects of their lifestyles. Their particular local youth culture is expressed in the classroom and beyond through their relationship with the various commodities and mass media products that are introduced across the following sections.
Exploring this particular youth culture requires an understanding of both the structural inequalities to which Skeggs refers and the particular manifestations of disadvantage as they are experienced in this community. As the boys' culture and interests have generally developed from their environment and immediate experiences, it is essential to reflect as wholly as possible the interwoven and interdependent nature of the socio/economic and the cultural spheres. The decisions made by the boys in terms of what media to engage with, what subjects to study in school, what music to listen to and what kind of life to aspire to are not simply their own unhindered personal choices. They are influenced and directed by their understanding and experience of the world, as it exists both for them and around them. In 'Ivory Lives' Nayak (2003) addresses this divide by identifying two main strands in youth culture and subculture research.

The first strand is identified as a traditionally sociological emphasis on the material and structural dimensions of the lives of young people, with a focus on social class and transitions to adulthood through experiences of education, training and labour. The second strand Nayak identifies as slightly divergent; it moves away from what is often a rather 'bleak' perspective to encompass altogether 'more colourful "cultural" accounts of young lives' (2003: 306). This strand takes in the more fragmented aspect of youth culture or subculture, exploring how young people use their free time, documenting and examining their cultural expression and tracking the consumption and enjoyment patterns of this particular demographic. Nayak, while drawing attention to notable examples of crossover and integration such as that in the work of Willis and the sociologist Robert Hollands (1995), identifies as problematic the lack of dialogue between structural
theorists who focus on transitions and cultural theorists who focus on lifestyles and identity.¹ His ethnography is based on a desire to integrate these two approaches in order to reflect a clearer understanding of the way young people react at a local level to changes at a national or global level by constructing new subject positions and re-evaluating residual or inherited understandings of the self in response to periods of (global/local) transition that have impacted upon their lives (Nayak 2003: 305-6).

My research reflects this critical interdependency and is founded on an understanding of its centrality to the development of greater knowledge of both the lifestyles aspired to by the boys and their particular appeal. As I described in the previous chapter, the Hillside boys live in an area that has undergone seismic shifts in population both in terms of expansion and demographic make-up.² This is a direct result of changes in both the local economy and social/family structures. As a result of these changes, the boys are forced to construct new subject positions on the bones of the older, inherited, roles they might have expected to inhabit. This reordering is essential if they are to make sense of the altered expectations that are applied to them. Changes are required in the ways they must see and understand themselves and their role as young working class white men in a social structure that undervalues their contribution, both current and potential. The assumed inability to handle responsibility results in an actual removal of accountability in terms of expected welfare dependency, single parenthood and unemployment. Young, white, working class men are expected, therefore, to be socially and economically unproductive. They are surrounded by media characterisations and public expectations of deviancy, poverty and unemployment.
The fact that poverty and educational disadvantage are, to an extent, relative terms in that they are experienced to differing degrees by different sectors of the community does not lessen their impact on the community as a whole. While a growing proportion of young people in the area, and in the feeder primary schools in particular, could be considered to be experiencing abject poverty, this particular group of boys, in contrast, could be considered 'privileged'. This relative level of privilege is based on the fact that by virtue of their presence in the classroom they have been able to remain in full-time secondary education. Figures from 1999 show 10,600 pupils left school before taking their Leaving Certificate exams (Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) 2003: NP). Within this a significant 25 percent are registered as coming from families located within the 'Unskilled Manual' socio-economic bracket (ibid: NP). Figures from the same year show a further 2,400 students - or just over three percent of the Junior Cycle cohort - left school with no formal qualifications i.e., before taking the Junior Certificate exams (ibid: NP).

Educational disadvantage is part of a wider cycle of social marginalisation and is a main contributor to intergenerational poverty as young people who leave school early or without formal qualifications are effectively cut out of much employment or restricted to casual and/or low paying work. This type of casual labour offers little or no chance to build a career, acquire transferable skills or build long-term employment prospects. Such work is also increasingly structured around short-term contracts with no benefits, sick days, health or pension plans. However, the benefits of staying on at school are often not readily apparent to young people in areas experiencing high long-term unemployment (Smith 1999:269). It costs them and their families' money in the short-term through the
associated costs and they do not see evidence of its benefits around them. Consequently, choices made by the boys in all aspects of their lives are delineated by the actuality of their surroundings and the material conditions of their existence. Their culture, commodity choices and lifestyles, which are representative of their identities, are tied directly to their economic and social status and, as a result, any exploration or analysis of their consumption habits and leisure pursuits must take these elements into account. An exploration of youth culture that fails to acknowledge the full details of the social class and environment in which the study is embedded can only contribute to or reflect one part of a much broader picture. The Hillside boys are, then, relatively advantaged in terms of access to education. But, to reiterate, this advantage is not unbounded, as the boys, in the words of their teacher Paul in chapter two, do not consider third-level education to be an available option for them. In the 1980s Hillside set out to provide for those students who ‘would not have any ambition to go onto third-level’ (Paul 2002) by shifting curricular priorities to allow for the study of vocational subjects. Paul explains:

During that time [1980s] ... we introduced subjects like woodwork, mechanical drawing, which up to then would have been regarded as subjects for vocational schools ... because we felt that students needed a wider range of subjects... we should have probably had a full time music teacher in the early 80s but we opted for a third woodwork teacher so that gives you an idea of the direction that we were headed (2002).

However, with youth unemployment amongst early school leavers aged between 18 and 24 standing at 17 percent in 2002, their prospects for finding a ‘worthwhile’ job or trade do not look promising (CSO 2002: NP). The outlook is even bleaker without the option of some further Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) training or a place on a coveted
an apprenticeship scheme. Hillside School, as discussed in chapter one, prepares its students for their options after school, having taken into account their abilities, interests, family position and responsibilities. Within the school curriculum, vocational, social and personal education have taken on a more prioritised role in response to the needs of the students the school serves. This reaction on the part of the school board and staff towards servicing the local community follows the Combat Poverty Agency’s (CPA) main recommendations for the reduction of the effects of educational disadvantage. A CPA paper identifies one of the main factors contributing to this problem as being ‘the failure of the school to reflect and validate the cultural backgrounds and learning styles of all learners’ (CPA 2003: 3).

Unsurprisingly, the non-consideration of third-level education as an option for the Hillside boys is reflected in similar schools across the city, county and country. The publication this year of tables showing ‘Third Level: Feeder Schools’ for each University and Institute of Technology in the Republic of Ireland shows the depth of the division between the fee-paying and the public education sector. It exposes what Labour Party education spokesperson, Jan O’Sullivan identifies as a ‘growing educational apartheid in second level schools …specifically in relation to facilitating progress to universities’. Most problematic is not merely the financial inability in poorer schools to reduce class size, retain top teachers, maintain discipline and provide the range of facilities and support to encourage and enable disadvantaged students to achieve college places. What is far worse is that this inability is compounded by long established notions of class norms and traditions which act as ideological constructs and constraints and lead to a
shared conviction amongst the students themselves that college is not ‘for them’.\textsuperscript{12} Discounting the option of third level education is not in itself problematic; there are many other options with vocational training, ‘on the job’ training and apprenticeship schemes being especially important and relevant for young people who are not attracted to the prospect of three or four more years of study. What is problematic is the fact that these boys reject the possibility of college outright, fulfilling the social expectations of them as young working class men who are uninterested in academics and are destined for a life of manual or unskilled labour.

Willis asked ‘…how and why it is that working class lads come to accept working class jobs through their own apparent choice’ (1977: 185). He suggests this phenomenon is a form of cultural reproduction by members of the working class that is perpetuated by the dominant ideologies of class and labour and the real ways these contribute to the financial security and advancement of those in the upper and middle classes. For example, through the outright rejection of third level education in favour of immediate and generally low paid work or unemployment, the Hillside boys are reproducing and reinforcing their own class position.

This process of cultural reproduction is often solely understood through the macro structures of employment, location, educational attainment and financial situation. However, it is not sufficient to assume that these variables alone will determine the choices that young people make (1977: 172). As Willis points out, we must understand the way in which these macro structures become meaningful in the culture of young
people; we must allow them to have influence on attitudes and ways of thinking and thus understand them as shaping behaviours. Birth place, social class, parental education and income are not in themselves the only determining factors in the lives of the Hillside boys and their peers. Their life expectations are a reflection of the influence of these larger structures on their own localised youth cultures. Their cultural association of third level education with 'ponces' and 'rich people' thus has two dimensions. The first includes the macro determinants of finance, opportunity and social disadvantage. The second dimension is the manner in which these determinants are worked through into the collective culture of these young men. Equating college with effeminate wealthy young men or 'ponces' echoes strongly the relationship constructed by Willis's 'lads' between white-collar or non-manual work and effeminate or less masculine men. This is part of the engrained set of class-based 'expectations' which reinforce and bolster class divisions and disadvantage. The children of the middle classes are expected to go to university, just as they are expected to have careers. The children of the working classes are, on the other hand, subject to a different and far more negative set of expectations and hence of future prospects.

The key word here is 'expectation'. Working class boys do not have to actually 'achieve criminality or immorality; they have been positioned and fixed by these values' (Skeggs 2004: 4). By virtue of being working class boys from a particular area, the belief is that they will fulfil the stereotypes and continue the cycle of poverty. They are, in short, almost totally disenfranchised. They are expected to be underemployed if not long-term unemployed. As such they are relegated to a position of being a burden on the State, a
position which effectively disallows them the possibility of any social contribution. They are, to refer to Nayak’s graphic characterisation of a similar group of young white working class men in post-industrial Newcastle, like ‘flies in amber’ (2003: 309). They are trapped in State-sponsored delayed adolescence and as such they are ‘...outsiders-within whose transition into the masculine world of work would remain, in many cases, as if in a perpetual state of deferral’ (ibid: 309). The unavailability of traditional markers of manhood – providing for a family, working full time, etc. mean that other attributes that can be problematic in excess and that are traditionally understood to signify masculinity must instead be emphasised. Thus the process of forming or constructing negatively traditional gender identities or masculinities is related to this widespread uncertainty and social disadvantage.

Each young man who performs his designated class role as expected, who leaves school for unemployment or low paid work, who engages in criminal activity or who fathers children he cannot support, reinforces the fixedness of the category for those boys behind him. It is the reproduction of a cycle of poverty that is maintained by structural conditions and that leaves those who try to escape it through, for example, further education, as ‘other’ in their own communities. The lack of mobility and of opportunity in their lives is reflected most graphically in terms of the lifestyles that they aspire to. The ever-widening fissures between the lives these boys live, the futures that are available to them and the aspirational and fantastical qualities which make up the bulk of their culture is indicative of the demoralising effects of living a life on the margins. None of the Hillside boys falls into the category of the desperately or abjectly poor. However, the fact remains that all
the boys are currently unable to take full part in a society and social life that, dangled
before them, remains tantalisingly just out of reach.

Choose Life...

The choices the boys make and the preferences they express in terms of music, in
particular, but also film, television, computer games and other media are, in general,
choices that are reproduced across class and age boundaries amongst different groups of
young men (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004:10). However, it is the reasons and the
justifications for these choices and the Hillside boys’ applications of specific
commodities as lifestyle accoutrements where differences amongst different groups of
young men emerge. Though young people engage with global culture across class and
social boundaries through television, the Internet and magazines in both online and print
versions, their consumption of it, and the extent of their engagement with it can be
limited by cost and by availability.

The Hillside boys have strict parameters of taste and of acceptability related to the
strength of their connection to a local identity. This in itself conveys strong resonances of
strictly delineated class and gender roles played out in the selection and rejection of
particular forms or artists who are acceptable or undesirable. The local and classed
identity comes into play in battles over the legitimacy of users, whereby, for example in
the United States, traditionally black forms of music such as hip hop, soul or rap have
been ‘hijacked’ or assimilated into the references and bank accounts of white musicians,
artists and record labels. In Ireland these types of music are identified primarily in terms
of class rather than racial associations. Rap in particular, due to its subject matter and predominantly black performers, is regarded both here and in the United States, as being both produced by and for those in lower socio-economic brackets. Therefore while middle class teenage boys may like and listen to this type of music, their legitimacy as an audience is contested by those who make what they feel to be a more rightful claim as fans. Being a legitimate music fan is extremely important and, in this youth culture, it is almost obligatory to listen to the music of young black American rappers who parade their working class credentials as much as their hyper-masculinity and gangster-style moral code of support for their community and in constant opposition to the law. It seems that although the gulf between the experiences of the black urban working classes in the United and those of white urban working classes in Ireland is wide, it is easier to bridge than that between the Hillside boys and their middle class contemporaries. The working class credentials held by rappers and hip hop performers are played up by record companies to enhance the sense of danger and the sense of ‘gritty reality’ which is perceived as lacking in so called ‘college bands’ or ‘art school’ bands like Coldplay or The Thrills.

Although music, film, television and video gaming cross boundaries of class and age, this does not in any way imply a similarity or familiarity of experience among separate groups. In fact, this crossing of class and age boundaries often serves to further the divide between groups as each group regards the other as incapable of fully understanding the material and thereby usurping it. ‘Ownership’ of particular cultural forms is important to the boys. They feel that they can relate to the lyrics of Eminem or Beenie Man in a more
authentic manner than their middle or upper class counterparts. Shared class credentials combine with attitudes developed out of years of oppression and marginalisation to strike a chord with young white working class boys such that they feel the music is uniquely theirs to understand (Ging 2005: 45).\(^\text{14}\) The alignment of experience and knowledge with these media forms is further evidence of both their centrality to the lives of young people and to the different ways original media are read or interpreted. The choices young people make in terms of cultural relevance and expression are then indelibly marked with their experiences of the world in the local context. Throughout the course of the fieldwork these choices and the explanations for them have become far more telling and more informative than I had ever thought possible. The rich reserves of meaning which are layered throughout the things the boys buy are unspoken utterances or articulations of both their local allegiances and their wider aspirations.

My research focus thus extends to a full exploration of the formation of such specifically gendered and classed identities. The local environments of the home, family, school, peer group and community provide the basis for the construction of masculine identities that will be successful and viable within class norms. However, these identities are, at this stage, constructed primarily in relation to and for the benefit of their immediate peer group. The importance placed on breaking the rules and asserting one's power and strength at this age means that a male identity deemed successful within a peer group is considered by wider society to be fundamentally pathological, dangerous, destructive, and basically anti-social.\(^\text{15}\) A successful young male working class identity in the eyes of the peer group is not always viable in the eyes of teachers, parents, academics, or media
commentators. The significance attached by the boys to the crossing of adult-defined boundaries and of ‘getting away with’ any transgressive act has been discussed in the previous chapters, primarily chapter two and chapter three. It has been explored in terms of the bad behaviour displayed and flaunted for laughs in the classroom and in relation to more covert delinquent activity both inside and outside the confines of the school. Drinking alcohol, for example, is an integral part of the lives of the Hillside boys, as apparently it is for most young people across the country. An Irish Times/MRBI Poll in September 2003 showed that 60 percent of all teenagers aged between 15 and 17 years, drink alcohol, with a quarter of that number allowed to drink at home.16 It also showed that four in ten young people between the ages of 15 and 25 regularly smoke cigarettes, with an average starting age of just 14 years.17 There is amongst young people a ‘continuum of acceptability’ (McShane 2003: NP) with alcohol, cigarettes and smoking cannabis or hash being regarded as normal and acceptable behaviour while the use of cocaine or heroin is on the outer limits of tolerance (McShane 2003: NP). Somewhere between these limits are the other ‘youth’ drugs. These include chiefly ecstasy, or E, a stimulant powder known as MDMA that is closely linked to the dance music scene, and speed, the street name for amphetamine. Speed is commonly sold in powder form in wraps (small pieces of paper) unlike ecstasy which is generally taken in tablet form. Ecstasy and speed are still quite closely linked to specific music and clubbing scenes, while hash smoking is far less regulated in a spatiotemporal sense. Most ‘dope’ smokers smoke at home, in their rooms, in friends’ houses or outdoors around quiet areas. This outdoor smoking is also closely linked to ‘bushing’, a local term used to describe outdoor drinking parties held in parks, sports-grounds, fields, alleyways or on streets, and
attended by young people who either cannot get into pubs or who wish to save money and buy their alcohol cheaper in the off-licence or supermarket. The Hillside boys are familiar with the parlance of the youth drugs listed above and while they stop short of actually admitting outright in the classroom to any drug use, there is a culture of awareness and familiarity among them. As discussed in chapter two and chapter three, they are more than happy to admit to drinking alcohol, usually to excess. The ‘hard man’ culture of an ability to ‘hold your drink,’ where drinking is undertaken with the sole aim of getting drunk as quickly as possible, is widespread amongst young people of all social and economic backgrounds.

Drinking alcohol is by far the most common form of illegal activity among young people, with over half of all MRBI Poll respondents agreeing with the statement ‘I love the buzz of drinking’ (McShane 2003: NP). As discussed in chapter two, hungover students, incapable of concentrating or taking full part in their classes, are now common enough to have become one of the top issues addressed by the secondary teachers union, the ASTI. Yet, because drinking alcohol is often combined successfully with playing sport and is indeed openly encouraged and indulged as a part of Ireland’s ‘sporting culture’, it is often regarded as less dangerous or destructive than other drugs. This is most effectively demonstrated through the continuing sponsorship of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) by drinks giant Diageo. A pattern has developed over the years in which a sporting organisation which is active in almost every school in Ireland, and which forms the ethos of many boys’ schools, is allowed to advertise alcohol at matches and lends its name to the advertising of alcoholic beverages. A GAA task force commissioned to
address the issue unveiled a plan to combat alcohol abuse following a year of consultation with health boards and clubs. This task force has called for a total end to sponsorship by companies with a connection to the alcohol industry. This idea has so far been rejected by the former president of the association, Sean Kelly. He states:

The easiest thing for me and the GAA to have done last year was to say we won’t renew the Guinness sponsorship, full stop. Everyone, from the highest political people on down, would have said well done to the GAA. But what difference would it have made in reality? We were the first organisation to ban smoking sponsorship and did it make one bit of difference in the overall context? Smoking increases and we banned it 30 years ago. The exact same would have happened if we’d just ended drinks sponsorship and done nothing else (O’Brien 2004: NP).

This ongoing debate about sponsorship is particularly relevant in reference to Hillside School, which has a long tradition of involvement with, and excellence in, Gaelic games. With such adult encouragement or at least acceptance as displayed through a lack of outrage about underage drinking, smoking cigarettes and taking 'softer' drugs becomes almost required in order to sufficiently demarcate and draw attention to the transgression of adult norms. Such physical acts of transgression like drinking or smoking are a large part of teenage life, and are seen to be replicated across class and gender boundaries. They are part of a highly visible and extremely common rejection of adult sanctioned activities. A group of drunken teenagers is comparable to a group of teenage Goths or punks. They are easy to spot, classify and identify as 'they wear their difference in the form of 'semiotic guerrilla warfare' (Stahl 2004: 52-3). Their rebellion is obvious and
forthright. It is, however, the less visible, less dramatic forms of youth culture that are of interest to me here.

Figure 4.02: Owen's whiskey and brand of cigarettes as pictured by him.

Determining Local Lifestyles

The lifestyles of the Hillside boys are identifiable in relation to their local area. Outside of that they are relegated to a mass unindivuated classed identity, a singular many headed body of ‘knackers’ in tracksuits and jewellery. The strong Southside identity of the boys is ignored. North or south, ‘norrie’ or ‘whacker’ they all look the same and are to be avoided. ‘Keeping the head down’, is the most successful strategy for most young working class men in a society that has constructed an aura of fear and mistrust around them. This is characterised by media hype and moral panic and often the best path is simply to keep to yourself and to your local area. Even though working class boys like these are currently at the centre of social debate and media coverage they are, in actuality, extremely socially excluded in a very real and tangible sense. In their article on peripheral youth and localised experience, Pilkington and Johnson state that ‘Although some groups may be culturally central they may continue to suffer social marginalization’ (2003: 261).
Many places are simply off limits to the Hillside boys and others like them. The appearance of a group of track-suited youths in a middle class housing estate in any affluent Cork suburb is likely to result in the prompt arrival of a Garda patrol car. The boys relate occurrences exactly like this in the classroom. They tell of being investigated and removed if and when they gather together in a public place outside of their immediate ‘legitimate’ environment. An extreme example of the pathologizing of working class youth culture and its expression can be seen in the pub and nightclub ban on particular brands, as opposed to types of clothing, that is spreading across Britain. Parts of the country, including Aberdeen and Dundee in Scotland and Leicester in the English Midlands, have banned certain brands of footwear as well as Burberry and Henri Lloyd clothing and accessories. The recent association of these supposedly exclusive labels with working class youths classified as trouble-makers seems enough of a reason for them to be barred without question. The unimportance attached to the ban by Burberry in particular is part of the wider disdain associated with this type of ‘customer’. A spokesperson for the company spoke to the BBC in response to the ban and stated that as far as the company is concerned ‘it’s actually quite insignificant’ (BBC 2004: NP).

‘Tribal Hijacking’

Designer labels such as these are traditionally the preserve of the wealthy and the famous, with Lloyd in particular being designed for yachting and country sports such as shooting and hunting. However these brands are now perhaps the most recent examples of incidences of ‘tribal hijacking’, a term used by the clothing industry to describe the moment that a brand becomes a badge of belonging for a section of society that is not part
of the intended target market. The famous Burberry check is now identified primarily as the uniform of the white football hooligan across Britain, with Henri Lloyd becoming increasingly popular with black inner city youths. The wearing of these labels does not, however, reflect a desire to ‘dress up’ in the sense of aspiration towards upward social mobility. Rather the taking of and the subversion of the meaning and context of a piece of clothing reflects several very important moments for these young men. Firstly it shows the people around you that you have the wherewithal to purchase expensive designer goods (even if they are fakes); secondly it allows a moment of subversive power that alters the perception amongst the typical wearers of a brand. The power this gives otherwise uninfluential young people, is in direct correlation to the adoption of the trend by their role models, particularly rappers and other musicians. The adoption and endorsement of a particular brand by a certain star has the power to convert an entirely new type of customer, whether desired by the company or not, to that brand.

This phenomenon of working class boys dipping in and out of upper middle class culture reflects a nice turnaround or backlash against designers and fashion editors who continuously and reverently court the newest and brightest stars in the world of music and film. This is part of the commonly observed middle class practice of dipping in and out of working class culture - a world is perceived as hard edged and as representative of true working class grit and as such is plundered for its coolness and credibility of experience. White working class culture, and black inner city culture in particular, have been ransacked for music, fashion and underground style all of which has been sanitised and
repackaged for a white middle class audience who are ‘living on the edge.’ Skeggs explains:

...[W]hat was projected onto one group (the working-class) as the site of the immoral and dangerous is now re-valued when it becomes attached to another group (the middle-class) as exciting, new and interesting... Different combinations are put together to create the greatest value: the blackness that is figured as ‘cool’ is a particular ‘(safe) version of working-class blackness (‘of the street’). The hardness of white working-class men, the anti-authoritarian mafia ‘Italianness’ (e.g. the whole of Martin Scorsese’s output and The Sopranos), and the authentic grit of Irishness too, are marketable, offered as an experience, an affect, a partial practice, a commodified resource, offered for others to consume (2004: 105).

It is in fact the mark of a well rounded ‘culturally aware’ middle class individual to know about the culture of others and to display ease in referring to it. The ex-crack dealing rapper, 50 Cent, who has, reportedly, been shot nine times, lends bland upper middle class labels a sanitised edge of danger by appearing in a sweater or a jacket by Henri Lloyd or Tommy Hilfiger. This makes marketing managers happy. Dissatisfaction emerges, however, when full tribal hijacking occurs and legions of the less affluent and less famous fans of the particular star begin to wear the label (or a counterfeit version of it) on their council estates. It is generally at this point that the public estimation of that brand begins to change. The power this gives otherwise disempowered young men is paradoxical. They remain in a position of what is perceived to be tasteless and culturally inferior yet have taken a previously enduring symbol of the middle and upper classes with them. They have, in this example at least, reversed the middle class process of
cultural adoption and adaptation, emptying out a recognisable symbol of its associated values and totally subverting its meanings. This resembles the way in which the Hillside boys, irritated with constant media portrayals of themselves and their peers as stereotypical loutish youths in hoodies and tracksuits, have subverted the meaning and message of EM, through group disengagement, in order to effectively refuse and undermine what they see as its condemnation of both themselves and their lifestyles.\textsuperscript{24}

In the Irish context specifically, these labels or more commonly counterfeit versions of them, are beginning to have a cultural presence amongst young people. Nevertheless, in this localised context of Hillside, designer sportswear is far more prevalent and indeed is ubiquitous enough to be referred to as the uniform of Cork city working class youth. Clothing is obviously extremely important in terms of identity and the displaying of visible signs of belonging. When they are not in school the Hillside boys wear tracksuits and running shoes, or ‘runners’, as they are known locally. Their hair is shaven to a blade one or a blade two, usually with a small gelled fringe of longer hair arranged over their foreheads at the front.\textsuperscript{25} Earrings are common, usually just in one ear, and are generally taken out during school hours. Large gold signet rings and chunky gold-plated or silver necklaces are also worn by almost all the boys. This distinctive style is not unique to them; it is replicated across the country and identified specifically with a working class identity. It is a style that comes laden with negative connotations for those outside of that shared identity and is commonly perceived as having an aggressive edge. It is in itself, with a full awareness of those negative connotations, a declaration of loyalties and of community belonging. This style of dressing is, in the true sense of the phrase, a fashion
statement, proclaiming all of the above in a matter of seconds to the onlooker. Non-verbal communication means that ‘dress is one of the most basic and reliable methods of placing ourselves and others in the social world’ (Braham 1997: 127). Clothing and appearance are two of the quickest ways members of a community have of recognising those who are outsiders or those who belong. The tracksuits, haircuts and jewellery worn by the Hillside boys effectively identify them all as being members of a particular cultural and social grouping. What is perceived as the uniform of youthful criminality by some members of the community is simply the uniform of youth for others. The way in which the Hillside boys dress contributes to the reproduction of stereotypical representations of themselves and of their behaviour and is also a major factor in the delimiting of public/accessible and private/forbidden space for them.

‘Busy Doing Nothing’

Devlin’s study of young people and media stereotyping shows that 32.7% of news stories about young people focus on crime or violence while good behaviour as a theme accounts for only 8.9% (2006: 46). Themes of news stories about young men, specifically, feature crime and violence at 44.1% and good behaviour at 6.6% compared to stories about girls which showed 15.2% and 12% respectively in these categories (ibid:48). Young men were also overwhelmingly referred to in stories as ‘youths’ (47% of the time), as opposed to less pejorative or less implicitly negative terms like ‘teenager’, ‘teen’, ‘boy’ or ‘young person’ (ibid: 48-50).26 Typically the same stories and types of stories about young people, and especially about young working class men, are seen in the media meaning that this particular group are uniquely and continuously associated with a particular form
of negative commentary. This becomes more prevalent as communities change, as two participants in Devlin’s study commented:

If they see us hanging around... but like there’s nowhere else to go... they feel intimidated... they write into the local newspaper, but it’s not our fault, we have [the youth club] once a week, there’s six other nights, like, with nothing else to do but hang around (ibid: 23)

I think things have gotten worse as new estates have been built... because there’s more teenagers now and there’s still nothing to do, there’d be bigger gangs... (ibid: 25)

In chapter two I looked at the reordering of space in the immediate neighbourhood of Hillside and the way in which this reflected the new delimiting of access for local residents. Even in their own neighbourhood, the boys do not have the freedom to move about as they want. Their appearance, which marks them out as fashionable and part of the group in one part of the neighbourhood, works against them and debars them from another. They are, as related in their own classroom narrations of their experiences, generally moved on by the Gardaí if they congregate in a visible public place, such as on a street corner or in a playground. New housing estates and apartment complexes are closed off to them, as are bars and private sporting/leisure facilities. Much work has been done in the area in order to counter the specific problem of young men hanging around with nothing to do and as such there are now several options available to the boys. Due to these efforts there currently is, in theory, no great shortage of things to do or places to hang out. The immediate local area offers clubs and organisations such as the Scouts, an Ógra Chorcaí Youth Club and the YMCA which runs a variety of programmes ranging
from homework clubs to hip hop dancing. There is also a GAA club, several community centres, and several other sports clubs including Judo and soccer.

Yet, young people in any area, no matter how similar their social and economic circumstances may be, cannot be considered as a homogenous group. There are, within the confines of the school alone, several different groups of students based on different interests and pastimes. These different groups of young men can be seen to congregate together and to react to the presence of other groups during break periods and in the hallways between classes. Among the groups, the athletes and sports team members stand out as using their time differently, both outside of and during school hours. Much of their free time is organised in the sense of going to training sessions and playing matches or attending games and other functions. Other students who are involved in extra curricular activities such as chess club or playing music also have structured free time, which is supervised, if not by adults, then by their own sense of a need to achieve certain goals.

The majority of the Hillside students, however, have no obligations outside of school beyond part-time jobs and family duties. Therefore, their free time is generally their own and the overwhelming majority of them prefer to spend that time away from and unsupervised by adults. The general perception of the clubs in the area, with the exception of the sports club, is that they are for younger boys or for girls. Not all boys want to be involved in sport at club level, and quite a few of the boys in the subject group follow English Premier League or Championship football religiously while having little or no interest in the sport at a local level. There is in general a derisive attitude to ‘youth
groups' and a reluctance to participate in adult organised and supervised activities such as youth discos or homework clubs (Kiely 1995: 9; Devlin 2006: 25).

The reality is that none of these organised groups or clubs are attractive in comparison to the possibilities offered by the playing-out of the rich fantasy lives provided by the plethora of video games, television shows, and music videos with which the boys engage and which are enhanced, rehashed and appropriated during unstructured, unsupervised 'doing nothing' time. The allure of 'doing nothing' as seen and understood from the adult perspective of equating and qualifying this with doing nothing productive can be difficult to understand. Further to this, the very elements of doing nothing – playing video games, hanging out in groups in public places, drinking with friends, listening to music and watching hours of television, are all the elements of youth culture that cause concern from several points of view. Growing rates of obesity, partially attributable to an overall decrease in physical activity in the West, and a steady stream of violent and sexually exploitative images piped directly into the bedroom of a teenager are likely to genuinely worry parents, teachers and other involved parties. Beyond the actual pastimes of the 'doing nothing' youth culture, the accessories themselves cause further concern, with the most offensive of these fetishised by young men purely for what seems to be their offence value. The video game, Manhunt, (see figure 4.05 and figure 4.06) having been vaguely implicated in the murder of a one British teenager by another, was recently withdrawn from stores in Ireland and Britain, and is as a consequence of this action wildly popular. Music with sexist and/or homophobic lyrics such as that produced by Jamaican musician Beenie Man, or American rappers Eminem and Ludacris are also all high on the list of
preferred choices amongst the Hillside boys. While these media texts may cause concern and appear contrary to accepted social norms they do not, in fact, offer any challenge to the long established, traditional masculinities embodied by these norms (Ging 2005: 39-40).

Is What You Have Who You Are?

Most adolescents are at a stage of their lives where the most important decisions about how one presents oneself to the world in terms of appearance, residence and interests are made, or at least ratified, by parents or guardians. Therefore, other strategies which may take second place in an adult identity become, for the Hillside boys, the composite facets of who they are. Thus, class and community belonging is displayed overtly in appearance while musical taste is outwardly displayed in personal graffiti on school bags, books and clothing. Subcultural membership is displayed through appearances, hair style, jewellery, clothing and attitude, as well as through established peer group associations. Role models are referenced through imitation, quotations and devotion as well as through visual representation and graffiti, such as names, logos, band symbols and so on. Teenage male identity is built up and sustained through these associations, allowing boys to classify and understand the others around them through their stated allegiances.

For example, the Hillside boys, although they attend what is, nominally at least, a Catholic denominational school, do not appear to be especially devout Catholics. Nor do they appear to be virulently nationalistic. Yet, they display an extreme attachment to the Scottish Premier League football club Glasgow Celtic. Founded in 1888, by an Irish
monk, in order to give poor Irish immigrants in Scotland something to be a part of, Celtic has become a primary symbol of sectarian and religious divide. The club has a bitter and violent history of clashes between Celtic fans and their Protestant rivals Glasgow Rangers, with outbreaks of rioting common in Northern Ireland, Scotland and parts of Britain after matches between the two. Players on both sides have been threatened with sectarian violence, including one extreme incident in which a Celtic player was forced to retire from international football for Northern Ireland after he received death threats and his extended family was targeted by loyalist paramilitaries. For the Hillside boys, the nationalist associations which come with being a fan of Celtic may be equal - if not more important than the actual football game itself.

![Figure 4.03: Celtic Posters in Stephen's bedroom](image)

As can be seen above, Celtic is extremely popular among the boys. However, other football teams (here it is Liverpool) are also represented in the boys' photographs and are followed obsessively in the 'real football'. English premiership football teams are the major sporting interests of the boys, with the Celtic connection being more of a cultural
reference to a working class heritage of emigration and disempowerment. The devotion to Celtic provides just one example of the often complex reasoning behind the choices the boys make. Not all of their choices are random attractions to soulless commercial enterprises, or simply latched on to in order to follow the herd. The context in which the boys make choices about their interests and media engagement is as important as the things with which they choose to identify themselves. This is important when considering EM and its influence in the classroom. Few of the boys would be likely to fully articulate the complex relationship between the history of colonialism in this country, the plight of Irish immigrants in Britain, and their own feelings of social disempowerment. Giving them this confidence and this ability to challenge their own assumptions and interests is part of what EM set out to do, and interestingly, in my experience, it has managed to achieve this primarily in situations where the boys themselves have chosen who and what they would like to talk about and why. They are, for example, able to, through their support for Celtic as a symbolic institution rather than simply a football club, address some of those complex issues pertaining to a history of colonial occupation and emigrant poverty. My understanding of their support of the club relates to its long association in this country with Northern Irish republicans and with the broadly working class support that exists across Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This means that fanship is, in this case, about much more than just football. This football club plays an important role for its fans in general and the boys in particular in Ireland’s postcolonial relationship with Britain. What is more, the anxiety displayed by the boys about new forms of citizenship in Ireland (as observed in the classroom) is expressed through a peer enforced obligation to be ‘au fait’ with Celtic. The primarily working class support the
club enjoys in this country is not solely because of their football prowess but also because of what they represent on a cultural level.

Enabling an articulation of these competing dialogues of culture and consumption, of structural conditions and of practice means understanding the multifaceted relationships that exist between the processes of and the artefacts employed in identity formation at both a group and individual level. It requires an exploration of the environmental and social limitations imposed upon the construction of a viable masculinity and a parallel examination of the possibilities which exist for the building of a successful male identity within class norms and boundaries. This double-sided aim can be achieved through an analysis of the cultural artefacts that are relied upon by the boys in the public expression of their group allegiances and a conversation structured around that description and analysis of the actual raw material make-up of the boys’ culture. This conversation has been and is informed by a textual analysis of and a practised familiarity with those artefacts and a full exploration of the process of identity building that is constructed around them. For the purposes of that representation here, I have chosen several brief examples of the type of media product and its associated practices and social uses which are relied upon and enjoyed in a very full sense. The boys’ interaction with the media goes beyond simply just watching or playing, and is seen to come out in all aspects of their lives and personas. These artefacts are crucially important for the Hillside boys as part of their construction of the self as a ‘real man’.
Having spent a large part of this research, and in particular, two long months, listening to the music, watching the films and television shows and playing the computer games highlighted by the boys as the ones that are most likely to fill their time outside of school, I now want to focus directly on the content and composition of these artefacts. As noted above, cultural commodities are purchased and utilised by the boys not only for enjoyment but as markers of identity and difference both within and without their various peer groups. These commodities have the power to illustrate choices and aspirations and to fill in the spaces in our conversations and the conversations in class in which the boys leave things unsaid. This ability of consumer goods and media products to express the unsaid is particularly relevant in terms of the discussion of social class and the material and structural conditions within which the Hillside boys live. The choices made by them about which media to engage with, which pastimes to enjoy after school, which clothes labels to buy or to desire all speak volumes, albeit wordlessly, about what it is that they have decided is relevant to them and to their lives.

Items chosen by me for close reading include *Playstation Two* games *Grand Theft Auto 2: Vice City* and *Manhunt.* The *Playstation Two* games console was selected as most of the boys have, as part of their extensive audio visual collections, either their own console or regular access to a shared one. The film chosen is 2001’s *The Fast and the Furious,* starring action hero Vin Diesel. The professed musical interests of the boys are quite broad with many citing an interest across reggae, rap, rock, heavy metal, dance and garage music. Such a broad crossover is indicative of the fluidity and choice that is allowed in peer regulated judgements of musical taste. The only music that is truly
frowned upon is generic, manufactured pop such as Westlife, Justin Timberlake or Britany Spears. The attractiveness of the fantasy world of hip hop and rap is obvious and elements of that world cross over into, and are linked very much to the types of video games that appeal to the Hillside boys. Playing *Playstation* is one of the greatest time-fillers (outside of school and work) for the boys. However, it is important to recognise that hours spent using the *Playstation* are not just 'down time' or 'doing nothing'. These games are, as will be discussed more fully in the chapter five, complex, mentally challenging and can be both a solitary and a communal experience. Games can be played alone or with two players and because most of the boys have the same games they can and do converse about them in terms of high scores, stunts managed, and cheats or shortcuts discovered. Playing video games is extremely involving in terms of the time it takes to master the controls and to master the various skills which obviously differ across fighting, driving or sports-based games. Because they have the consoles and equipment in their bedrooms, for the most part the boys are able to practise and to play for as long as they like, often for as long as six or seven hours in a row. *Manhunt* and *Grand Theft Auto*, the two games selected for analysis here, are both 'first person' or 'role player' games, games in which the player takes on the persona of an on-screen character and works through obstacles and fights enemies to complete tasks and move up levels. *Grand Theft Auto*, to which I now turn, takes place in an American cityscape and centres on Tommy Vercetti, a young male free-lance hitman working for an unnamed criminal organisation, presumably the Sicilian Mafia.
Tommy’s - and therefore the player’s role - is to steal cars and use them to complete tasks like contract killing and the collection and delivery of packages and prostitutes to specific addresses for a crime boss while being sure to keep the police off of one’s trail. As each task is completed, money is earned and visits can then be paid to gun superstores to purchase new weaponry and ammunition, to clothes shops to buy new outfits and to illegal auto spray shops to have cars re-sprayed and disguised in order to help to avoid the police. Within the game, methods of car stealing are based on the car jack, where Tommy/the player stands in the middle of the road or at a stop light and drags people out of the car before hopping in and speeding off. A small feature indicative of the detailed nature of the graphics means that if at any point a pedestrian or car owner is punched or kicked enough s/he will bleed profusely onto the sidewalk and onto Tommy’s/the player’s shoes. This of course means that when Tommy/the player runs away, bright red bloody footprints are left behind.

Figure 4.04: Tommy Vercetti

Reckless driving is essential to complete the tasks and pedestrians scream realistically if knocked down. The high speed nature of the game means a lot of swerving and crashing
about, as each mission is timed and must be completed in so many minutes or seconds.

As Tommy/the player earns more money and moves up levels, it is possible to go to clubs or certain areas of the city to pick up prostitutes. If Tommy/the player pulls up beside a prostitute, she will get into the car and the money meter at the top of the screen will start to tick downwards, continuing to do so until Tommy/the player gets out of the car.

Scattered throughout the game, at transition points to new levels and new missions there are interludes with dialogue which sounds as though it is from a typical mafia or crime film. The boys are familiar with this type of dialogue and with the setup from shows like the Sopranos and films like The Godfather. Within the context of the game, it is but a matter of practice before the boys become virtual street racers and hit men, aware of both the best place to hide to get their victim and all the shortcuts and hiding places that can help them evade the police and get from point A to point B before the clock runs out. It is a difficult game, and one that takes persistence and practice before a player is able to manoeuvre around the congested streets of the city with any confidence or speed. As the player moves up levels, s/he also gains access to helicopters and speed boats which enable him/her to carry out more complex missions. The amount of weaponry and the cold-blooded manner in which the tasks must be carried out make it an exceptionally violent and therefore very popular and very 'cool' game. The soundtrack is a large part of that, arranged as it is to represent different radio stations playing different kinds of music, depending on what type of car Tommy/the player steals. For example, the radio in a pickup truck plays Christian rock or country music, while that in a low rider sports-car plays Hispanic dance music.
The high level graphics and attention to detail make the game's cityscape the ideal fantasy landscape. The streets and buildings are detailed, as are the cars and people. The sounds, separate from the music soundtrack, are excellent and realistic, with the whole experience resembling an interactive film in which the player is the hero who must make decisions in split seconds and according to skill and ability. It is not hard to see why young men like it; it is like the video world of American hip hop and rap – glossy, high production values and full of scantily dressed women who are prostitutes, gangsters' molls or disposable pedestrians/car owners. The chance to escape into a sun drenched virtual world of safe danger, wherein one is in control of the world around one and able to solve problems by driving over or away from them is a very attractive prospect. Playing on their feelings of powerlessness and defensiveness, it is especially attractive to boys who do not have that freedom. I found it a difficult game to play and to enjoy. The dedication needed to become competent at 'driving' and shooting and beating up townspeople was out of my reach, but then I am clearly not the target market for this game, or any like it.

Generally more unpleasant is the second game, Manhunt. This game is also made by Rockstar, the same company that makes Grand Theft Auto. It also has high production values but is very low on glossiness. The main reason for this visual grittiness is that the game takes the shape of a snuff movie, so a low grade video camera is simulated. The footage is poorly lit and grainy, replicating the type of footage expected from a wobbly, hand-held camera. The screen shot below strikingly illustrates this:
The aim of this game is far more sinister than that of *Grand Theft Auto*. The central character, James Earl Cash, seen above wielding the blood stained baseball bat over the head of his victim, is the persona the player takes on for the duration of the game. He has, for some reason, been rescued from state execution by lethal injection. His saviour is an unseen and sinister ‘filmmaker’, who replaced the poison with a strong sedative. At the start of the game Cash awakens in a locked room to hear a voice-over telling him he has been given this chance to live and that to take it he must kill as many people as he can in one night. Furthermore, he must do this while avoiding the gangs who are trying to kill him at the behest of the person behind the disembodied voice. The rationale behind this task is to allow the ‘filmmaker’ to video the murders, thus providing real footage for his snuff movie business. This game differs from *Grand Theft Auto* in several ways. There is none of the filmic feeling and because it is all the same shades of black and grey with dark dingy backgrounds, there is almost no break from the depressing colour scheme. However, one splash of colour is added each time Cash attacks a gang member and bright red blood sprays out of his/her body and spatters on the ground. The soundtrack is also
unsettling as it consists primarily of heavy breathing, a rhythmic heartbeat, the menacing voice-over and the screams of victims as they plead with Cash/the player not to kill them. In *Grand Theft Auto* many of the missions, especially at the earlier and easier levels, simply involve ferrying people and things to different places. There is also the option to take a break from missions and just cruise around the cityscape, choosing different cars and motorbikes whilst practising driving. In *Manhunt* there is no opportunity to do or experience anything other than kill or be killed. Points are gained for the number of killings and for the methods which are used to kill, with higher scores for more brutal murders.

![Manhunt](image)

**Figure 4.06: The central character – James Earl Cash**

This game is also incredibly popular. Much of this popularity, I would argue stems more from its infamy and through word of mouth rather than any advertising in the public arena. The more appalled journalists, parents and teachers are about a game like this, the more teenage boys are going to want to play it and have it. Of course, both these games are rated ‘18’ – i.e. they are not to be sold to any one under that age. That clearly does not
stop these 15 and 16 year old boys purchasing them or getting them from their parents, who may or may not be aware of the contents, at Christmas or at birthdays. A further factor in this, as noted, (and as can be seen in figure 4.07 a-b) is that most of the boys have their own entertainment systems in their bedrooms. Therefore, they are not being overlooked or overheard as they play and so the more horrific and savage scenes from games like *Manhunt* are not being experienced by parents or other family members. Keeping the game and its box in the bedroom away from casual onlookers also means most parents probably do not read the instruction manual or see the opening sequence of the game’s introduction which advises the player that ‘To best experience Manhunt you should...Turn off the lights...Close the drapes...Lock the door...Then get ready to kill’ (Rockstar 2003: NP).

This instruction relates directly to the way the television set is used in a variety of different ways in the family home and the way in which the boys’ relationship to it changes according to its location and use. Games like *Manhunt* which could perhaps not be played in full sight or earshot of parents or family members can be played in the bedroom with the door closed, and in that context of the private, teenage bedroom the television set provides an important physical focal point. It commands attention in a less tangible manner in terms of the absorption of the huge amounts of time, energy and emotion that are invested in it by the boys in this environment, with game playing often extending late into the night.
However, the boys’ relationship to the television set changes when it is used for watching scheduled television programming in the sitting room or kitchen. In contrast to often solitary game playing, watching television is, for the boys, generally a social activity, involving family members and friends. Unsurprisingly it also accounts for a large amount of time with up to and beyond three hours a day spent watching (McShane 2003: NP). As noted, most of the boys have televisions in their bedrooms that are used primarily to play computer games. As this is their primary use, often they are not hooked up to a television.
point and so can be used only to watch videos or DVDs. This means that the boys are forced to mix with the rest of the family in communal areas of the home if they want to watch regular scheduled television programmes.

The mobile phone, like the video games console, is another form of technology that is available for private use by young people although it does not have the long history of association such as that between teenage boys and television or teenage boys and video games. This is due only to the mobile phone’s relative newness, something that is not reflected in its (now) omni-presence but is reflected in the absence of literature assessing the mobile phone and its cultural implications for teenagers and young people.\(^{32}\) The mobile is a central player in the lives of the vast majority of young people and the Hillside boys are no exception. (It is interesting to note that several boys returned photos of their mobile phones as part of the photo project. Two examples are reproduced below):

![Figure 4.08: ‘Mobiles’ as photographed by the Hillside boys.](image)

They all have one and it seems that their social lives and sociability are almost completely constructed around their mobiles. The ubiquity of the mobile phone is certainly a cultural phenomenon, since over 90 percent of young people own one and the
market (beyond the original outlay for the actual handset/contract) for covers, ring tones, screensavers and tags is almost totally directed at teenagers, both boys and girls alike.\textsuperscript{33} The mobile is contradictory in that it presents both a new level of ease of communication along with a new series of issues and problems. As mobiles become more and more advanced - ‘camera phones’ can now capture streaming image and sound as well as still photographs - concern about their potential improper use in schools, playgrounds and changing rooms is increasing. Meanwhile, older or more constant concerns related to bullying are resituated or repositioned via the mobile phone as young people are bullied anonymously or from a distance via text messages. These issues present important questions for further address. However, in this particular context the mobile phone is considered as primarily a tool of connectivity and mass cultural belonging, allowing the boys to keep in touch on their own terms through text messages or phone calls.\textsuperscript{34} With a mobile phone, like the video game console in the private space of the bedroom, boys can make their communications invisible or unobservable from the shared family space, a place they are largely required to inhabit in order to watch television. It is to this practice that I now turn.

\textbf{Television: Scheduled Culture}

The boys' interest in the regular television schedule is not limited to televised sport although it is, according to their preferences, one of the main draws. American cable shows such as \textit{The Sopranos} and \textit{Buffy the Vampire Slayer} and MTV’s \textit{Jackass} are also extremely popular. Several of the boys also mentioned the major British soap operas, \textit{Coronation Street}, \textit{East Enders}, and the Irish soap, \textit{Fair City}, which is set in Dublin. But
Soap opera is very much seen by them as a woman’s genre and all are quick to qualify their watching of such shows with a comment like:

Alex: Me Nan watches Coronation [St] and has it on all the time so you’d always see it in her house like... (9th December 2002)

Buffy is extremely popular with the boys with several of them display posters of the actress, Sarah Michelle Geller on their bedroom walls (see figure 4.09 a-c below).

![Buffy posters](image)

*Figure 4.09 a-c: Posters of Buffy actress Sarah Michelle Geller on bedroom walls*

While undoubtedly a large part of the programmes’ draw is due to Geller’s attractiveness, there is also the element of the fantasy world in which the main character Buffy and her friends exist. The series updates ancient folklore and biblical mythology and splices it
with elements of horror, action and romantic comedy/teen drama genres. The basic story
centres on the fact that the town in which Buffy now lives – ‘Sunnydale’ – was built on
one of the seven mouths of hell. Furthermore, it is known to have a portal through which
come the vampires and demons that Buffy is destined to slay until she herself is killed
and the next slayer found.\\n
The formulaic progress of each show moves through the appearance of a new or
continuing threat facing Buffy and her loyal friends, on to crises of confidence, and the
seeking of advice from the non-judgmental, wise, adult figure of the librarian. Finally, at
the close of each episode, there is the overcoming of the evil force. These are familiar
fantasy tropes and in the same way that the boys claim to have enjoyed and related to the
themes of Lord of the Rings, in both book and film format, so they enjoy and relate to the
fantastical trials and tribulations faced by Buffy and the town, which are always,
ultimately solved by Buffy ‘kicking ass’. The unreal evils that threaten in the show can be
seen as abstract representations of the obstacles that threaten to overwhelm the boys in
adolescence but can be overcome with advice, assistance and the tackling of them head
on. Of course, ultimately the morals and upbeat messages are deeply buried in the glossy
package of a sexy blonde girl beating up demons while backed up by her uniformly
attractive friends. It is interesting, however, to compare the package that is Buffy the
Vampire Slayer with EM in order to explore the positive messages each contains and to
better understand the interest which greets one and the derision which greets the other.
Of course *Buffy* has the advantage of featuring a cast of young, beautiful, fast talking, action-women whereas EM is a relatively dry text. The boys’ main tactic, in the classroom, is the undermining, through humour, of anything that is presented to them that takes itself too seriously. They can disarm EM by laughing at it and poking fun at the formal language it uses, especially when the programme attempts to be ‘young’, for instance with the cartoon featuring the pigeons. *Buffy*, however, is remarkably clever in that while encouraging laughter with slapstick and wit, at its core it is composed of a series of old fashioned morality tales, in which good triumphs over evil with the help of good advice, citizenship and teamwork. The show thus spins the same messages as EM. These are of course well hidden under aforementioned layers of slapstick comedy, moments of misplaced humour (often apparent at moments of seeming peril), and rampant teenage sexuality. *Buffy* is careful never to come across as actually having a message, nor does it seem to be something that is likely to create a lasting effect in the minds of young people. Nevertheless, it gets that same moral message across to viewers in their thousands by addressing issues which impact upon teenagers in an upfront, non-serious and active manner on screen.

As a result of what the boys see as its somewhat ‘priggish’ tone, EM is constantly undermined and mocked, occasionally with good reason. No teacher I spoke to had been able to fully use or even approach the material on ‘Understanding Gay People.’ This was the case not only because it proved so controversial with parents groups but also because of the type of language used. For example, in one section students are asked to ‘explore the Key Question: What is life actually like for our gay brothers?’ (EM 2000: 225). There
are many examples of the boys subverting and transforming the material in the
programme for their own amusement. One such occasion is illustrated through an
exchange which came at the end of a discussion on father-son relationships. This
correspondence was based particularly around the memories children may have of their
parents when they are older and the particular focus was on a story from an unnamed man
about how the father he barely knew tried to teach him how to swim. Paul reads the
story in which the man recounts standing shivering nervously on an Irish beach while this
unknown father stood in the water beckoning him in. The boys find this story hilarious
and as whispers of 'pervert' and 'paedo' are circulating around the back of the room, Paul
raises his voice in an attempt to get their attention and asks:

Paul: What is the father trying to get him to do?

The power that the boys have to disrupt the narrative of the programme as it is played out
both in the accompanying video and the actual textual material is the equivalent of the
power they have to switch Buffy off (which tellingly they choose not to do). They cannot,
however, turn off EM, no matter how much they would like to. Their only option then is
to attempt to gain control over the material and to use it against itself in order to amuse
themselves and each other. They can exert their power or agency over the programme in
the classroom by subverting the materials presented and topics covered by it. Sticking
with television and its obvious importance to the boys, there is, at the other end
of the entertainment spectrum, Sopranos. This show seems to function on a completely
different level to *Buffy*. It is billed as an adult drama and focuses on the life and extended family of a mafia don named Tony Soprano who is in therapy (he suffers from ‘work’ related anxiety attacks). This is again a glossy American cable show. It is set in New Jersey and focuses on the hyper-masculine world of stereotypically portrayed Italian-American men. Its target audience is older than that of *Buffy* but it still contains many elements which are extremely attractive to teenage boys, not least its status as an adult show. The world portrayed in it is one of ‘hard men’ who smoke, drink, drive big cars, play poker, and kill people who insult or threaten them or their livelihoods. They are violent, unreasonable and bound together by loyalty and fealty. It is attractive to the boys because of the undeniable cool factor enhanced by the excellent soundtrack and well chosen guest stars. These men do everything that is not allowed and not only do they (almost) always get away with it, they irritate and evade the parent figure of the FBI and look good doing it. Once again the peppering of the show with attractive women in roles as girlfriends, wives, and the inevitable hookers and corpses helps retain the attention of the young male audience. It is of course not just that which draws them in. The bleeding of references across the world of television, video gaming and film means that the elements of escapism, unreality, danger and fantasy discussed in relation to *Grand Theft Auto* and *Manhunt*, also re-emerge in *Buffy* and *Sopranos*, of whom Tommy Vercetti is clearly a distant cousin.

MTV’s *Jackass* is a completely different type of show and is mentioned here because of its iconic status among the Hillside boys. The basic premise of the show involves a group of male friends challenging each other to complete dares and tasks ranging from the
ridiculous to the insanely dangerous. Each show begins with a warning to not attempt any
thing seen on the show – one episode featured the leader of the gang, Johnny Knoxville,
‘bobbing for jellyfish’. Other stunts include snowboarding naked, ‘testing’ mace and
pepper spray, freewheeling down (closed to traffic) stretches of hillside roadway on
children’s bikes or in shopping trolleys. Skateboarding, nakedness, disgusting food
challenges such as drinking three gallons of milk in one sitting and jokes about erections
make up the bulk of the show. It has struck such a cord with teenage males across the
United States and Europe that the first warning, which is clearly ignored by the bulk of
Jackass’ viewers’ is now followed by a second one which advises people not to send in
their own tapes of themselves and their friends performing Jackass-style stunts. The
success of the series was capitalised on by the release of a Jackass film. This was
basically 87 minutes of the crew wreaking havoc on golf courses, eating urine soaked
sno-cones and being assaulted by various other members of the gang. The masculinity
portrayed here is irredeemably adolescent, in contrast to the adult stars of the Sopranos
and the maturity of Buffy and her cohorts. The sheer idiocy of each of the stunts involved
seems calculated to appeal to teenage boys on the most visceral level and much hilarity
and disgust has been witnessed as stunts shown on television the night before are
recounted in the classroom the following day. The familiar elements of safe danger and
the breaking of rules are again encountered here, along with the bleeding of references
from music played over the stunts to the famous guest stars featured. Escapism and
virtual realities wherein no one is ever seriously hurt are mixed in with the gross out
stunts making Jackass just another video game, feature film, or teenage fantasy. It is a
hybrid - intensely popular amongst its target audience and loathed by almost every one
else. The hyper-masculinity of the hard man is reinterpreted in *Jackass* and given a lighter and more humorous touch. The crew do not take themselves too seriously -- which is in itself perhaps the only positive element which can be taken from the entire show.

This intensity of purpose in portraying a ‘real man’ re-emerges in the types of film discussed by the boys. They particularly enjoy high-octane action and describe in class sequences from *The Fast and the Furious* that feature muscle man Vin Diesel who is, in himself, an icon of hyper-masculinity. He plays Dominic Torretto, a man wrongly accused of stealing millions of dollars worth of electrical equipment who also happens to be head of an illegal street racing gang. The story line is however submerged within seconds in a blur of fast cars, fast talking and beautiful, available women, and is clearly superfluous. The similarities to *Grand Theft Auto* are obvious, but themes familiar from *The Sopranos* also emerge, particularly in terms of the degree to which the audience is expected to accept the inherent criminality of both men as the defining nature of their masculinity. Both the show and the film feature men who are criminally active and who are defined as men primarily through their criminal activity. The coolness and the hardness of their masculinity are built on their uncompromising natures and willingness to take risks and defy the law. Although, in *The Fast and the Furious*, Torretto is innocent of the theft charges, his real role in life is as the leader of a gang of illegal street racers. Tony Soprano may be in therapy seeking assistance for his ‘job’ related panic attacks but he too is the head of a family of mafia hit-men. The personification of criminals as cool has a long tradition in cinema and television and is increasingly the norm in music videos and song lyrics where musicians trade on the historical associations
of outlaws and renegades to give them an instant edge. The glorification of what is ultimately criminal behaviour and its re-inscription as cool in a filmic sense is damaging in the extreme. Behaviour such as joyriding which is regarded as (and is) extremely dangerous, is condemned and criticised in the strongest possible terms when it is performed in reality by young working class men. It becomes exciting and new, however, when performed on screen by wealthy actors and stuntmen. The fact that the hard men of traditionally working class masculinities and associated criminality are marketable in the worlds of films and computer games is entirely due to the thirst for a sanitised experience of a world removed from their own, thus allowing momentary escape from overly feminised versions of masculinity (Skeggs 2004: 105-110). The mobility that the upper and middle classes have allows them to dip in and out of working class culture, adopting certain aspects and ignoring others. The Hillside boys do not have this mobility. They are stuck with this perception for as long as they live where they live, dress the way they do and speak the way they speak. Their potential or possible associations with criminality are regarded fearfully, and as a threat, not as a sign of manliness.

Is Who You Are What You Have?

In the introduction to their edited volume, After Subculture (2004), sociologists Bennett and Kahn Harris consider the nature of the theorised relationship between young people and the mass media. They identify as problematic a tendency for researchers within the field of youth culture to ignore the importance of the two way relationship that exists between young people and the media. They draw attention to the common understanding that for teenagers the media’s role is seen to be a mere reflection of a youth subcultural
movement, thus confirming its existence, rather than a creator or an instigator. In response to this widespread oversight they highlight the media and subculture critic Sarah Thornton's (1995) concern that researchers do not focus on the fact that often it is a television show or a film or a type of music that introduces the trends or provides the visual prompts for particular teenage subcultures. They prefer instead to claim a type of grassroots purity for these subcultures or youth cultures, portraying them as always one step ahead of the media producers and scriptwriters. A more accurate reflection of the complex relationship between young people and the media takes into account the existence of a two way flow of influence and reflects the mutual sustainability of that relationship. As much as young people can be said to exert their influence over what is shown, by switching off or not purchasing, they also pick up on trends or new movements through media exposure (Thornton 1995: 117). This is not to say that the scriptwriters, music producers and programme makers do not draw inspiration from young people and their lives, which they then repackage as new and exciting shows. There is, however, an uneven reciprocity or a relationship of diminishing returns whereby the advertising directors, marketing managers or scriptwriters take inspiration from a particular element of youth culture, package it, link it with their own product in some immutable way and then sell it back as something unique to other young people.

Representations of young Irish working class boys in the mass media are, as has been discussed in the preceding chapters, generally quite negative, particularly in the context of current affairs, news reporting and features focusing on young people. Home grown Irish programming for this age group is almost non-existent, with most boys instead
opting to watch sport, MTV or cable channels. The Irish-made, Dublin set soap opera Fair City and the Irish language soap Ros na Rún do include several young male characters in their casts. But, these young men are frequently involved in unrealistic storylines and shown in an overwhelmingly negative light. A selection of the young male characters from these soaps depict young working class males in storylines that are representative of disastrous and unlikely situations, featuring violence, death, imprisonment, rape, unplanned pregnancies, multiple abortions, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, kidnap, cult membership and unemployment.40

While these are in general wholly unrealistic storylines, elements of them are not entirely unrepresentative. Yet while the extremes of experience listed above are dealt with by the soaps, the far more prevalent problems faced by young men who do not pop up on that extreme radar remain unquestioned. The over-hyping of criminal and degenerate behaviour as it is practised by a minority of young working class men is forever in the spotlight, drawing attention from the everyday existences of other boys. Such hyperbole is just one further example of the way these young men see themselves represented and portrayed in the popular media. The value of the social experiences, both positive and negative, of working class communities for these scriptwriters is completely unreflective of the product they turn out, which unfailingly offers a bleak view of chaotic family lives and destructive environments punctuated by encounters with the law. The lack of professed interest in these genres and types of programming is therefore not surprising. The unrelenting nature of these shows in which poorly dressed, relatively unattractive (in comparison to the fixation with male and female youth and beauty in American materials)
characters lurch from crisis to crisis are less than appealing to this particular demographic. Far more attractive to them is glossier American, and to some extend British programming, where the production values are higher, the budgets are bigger and the sense of distance between the character and the viewer is widened and reinforced by visible cultural differences such as local variations of accent, appearance and surroundings. This rejection of, or lack of interest in, familiar accents and situations may seem odd or irrational, but the fact remains that Irish teenagers appear to find more of relevance and import in television shows wherein the ‘reality’ and experiences of characters seem far removed from their own. The lack of strong and well-produced Irish programming for young people means that they will, by necessity and preference, either turn to non-terrestrial channels or watch solely the ever increasing quantity of imported programmes on the four national channels.

The unsurprising situation in which many young men watch almost exclusively American and British programming means that the boys are subject to the appropriation of localised and geographically specific youth cultures. The televisual linking of particular local youth cultures to certain types of clothing, behaviours, speech and music such as skateboarding, hip hop or British garage cultures, means that young white working class men in Hillside wear almost the same type of clothes as young black working class men in Los Angeles’ South Compton or young white and Asian boys in poverty blighted London boroughs. The Hillside boys are, as a result, highly unlikely to see their own unique culture and localised speech, slang and style reflected in programming drawn from these markets, even if that speech, slang and style is a mishmash or collage of
elements of old Cork, Hackney and Detroit. Their way of speaking, dressing and even walking all show elements of outside, global influence, including the infamous ‘pimp roll’ as it is known in hip hop parlance, or ‘knacker gatch’ as it has become known in Cork. This refers to a loose limbed, low-slung, slouching strut which appears both aggressive and laid-back at the same time. It is an assertion of masculine authority and strength coupled with a familiar defensiveness. This slouch along with the wearing of a particular style of clothes in the social world marks one out as a member of a particular group while at the same time telling adult or outside observers, or other young people, what music one probably listens to, what television one watches as a communal activity and what one does with one’s friends.

How one appears to others provides them with a visual shorthand that allows them to place one in relation to themselves and their experience of the world. As previously noted, the tracksuit, with hoodie and runners are the three elements which make up the staple of the Hillside boys out-of-school uniform. They wear their school uniform of grey trousers, white shirt and grey jumper during the day in a slapdash manner, adding banned items such as earrings or non-regulation shoes and leaving out required items such as ties or crested school jumpers. Far more attention is given to the clothes they wear outside of school. This uniform has little to do with the utilitarian aspects of school clothes and is far more than a fashion statement for them. The way they look outside of their school clothes identifies them immediately in relation to the established social strata in Cork city. It places them socially, economically and geographically and is a powerful statement both of belonging and personal loyalty. The look not only identifies them with an area
and a social position; it also identifies them with other working class youths. The primary association (in their view) is with the status and standing of gangs as they are understood in the American context, with their deserved reputation for toughness and territorialism. The blade one haircut and uniform appearance sends out a ‘don’t mess with us warning’ to other youths and has become a media shorthand for criminality.⁴⁵

The uniform appearance of the Hillside boys is part of a larger package of associations and behaviours and is an integral part of their identities at both a group and individual level. The popularity of expensive designer sportswear is undoubtedly linked to the growing visibility of footballers as fashion, as well as sports, role models. It is also attributable to the massive rise in popularity of music traditionally popular amongst Black teenagers, such as rap and hip hop, and in the new status afforded to personalities associated with these genres. The continuing diversification of Black music stars such as Diddy (SeanJohn Clothing), Snoop Dogg (SnoopDogg Clothing) or Jay Z and Damon Dash (Rocawear) into clothing and accessories further influences taste amongst young people. These brands are not yet widely available in Ireland, and are still prohibitively expensive in the United States where they sell, both on-line, and in upmarket department stores. However, their influence is felt and is taken on board by the major sportswear producers leading to a distinctly new and bewildering choice of clothing within the classifications of the tracksuit and running shoe. Prices are high here also, rivalling so-called prestige brands such as Ralph Lauren for cost. So this look is not a less expensive option allowing younger people and those with little disposable income to avail of it. It is not about a cheap option but is rather about an option that allows one to express one’s
allegiances through one’s clothing. The working class ‘ghetto chic’ of Black urban music appeals to the Hillside boys in terms of the credibility enjoyed as the voice of the disenfranchised youth of America. Interestingly the strong connection the boys feel with this type of music is at odds with the casual racism they express in daily life. The fact that their style icons and heroes are Black does not make any odds with the Hillside boys. Presenting the possibility of a change, either for better or worse, in this mindset is the fact that Hillside and its surrounding area are rapidly becoming more ethnically diverse, with a sizeable number of immigrant families settling in the area. The primary schools in the locality are thus seeing a wider variety of racial and ethnic groups in reception classes, and upwards throughout the school, offering the potential for the development of positive attitudes towards difference among younger pupils.46

The attractiveness of the hip hop scene lies in the fact that it seems entirely devised for and by young men. Lyrics revolve around women, sex, crime, drugs, money, alcohol, cars and codes of belonging and personal loyalties to locality, friends and honour. It brings to life the fantasy world of the teenage boy, somehow managing to combine industry power and wealth with adult disapproval and misunderstanding. The falsity of the façade is not questioned by the boys, submerged as it is in glossy videos, interviews and articles that are edited carefully to remove all references to corporate ownership and ‘sell out’, while actively hyping up any illegal activity such as gun or drug possession. The money filled world of naked women dancing on low rider cars in sun-drenched neighbourhoods remains as unreal to the Hillside boys as any PlayStation game or any
episode of MTV’s *Cribs*. This however makes no difference and in fact simply increases the popularity and coolness of the music and the artists themselves.

Realistically the Hillside boys cannot fully relate to this type of lifestyle, but this in no way diminishes its worth for them. Throughout this chapter emphasis is placed on the way in which the boys use certain consumer items and media products as a way of proclaiming their selves to the world around them. Because their references are emphatically youth/peer orientated and their role models more diverse and fragmented than ever before, it is difficult to understand their interests and influences from an adult perspective. The ridiculous and cartoonish nature of exaggeration and extravagance seen in the gangsta’ culture of hip hop is clear from the album covers as can be seen overleaf. 50 Cent’s *Guess Who’s Back* and Ludacris’s *Chicken and Beer* album show that while perhaps they, and certainly their marketers, do not expect to be taken literally, all of the elements of teenage male fantasy are contained within.

![Figure 4.10 a-b: Album covers from 50 Cent and Ludacris.](image-url)
Lyrics from both these artists as well as from Eminem and his D12 band reflect a major focus on sex, money, drugs, guns, crime, and revenge, but there are also many references to poverty, violence, deprivation and the drive it takes to escape from this life. There is also a very clear code of conduct that centres on loyalty, not forgetting where you come from and looking out for your friends. While such a balance promises to construct the potential for positive role models amongst rap and hip hop artists, at present the scales are tipped heavily in favour of what is exciting and what is perceived as cool by young men and so what is seen as dangerous and sexist by others. I discuss this problematic in full in the following chapter, by addressing the different understandings of boy culture by the Hillside boys, the EM programme and parents, teachers and other interested parties.

The value that the Hillside boys ascribe to their media interaction and engagement means that it is something which exerts far more influence on them than an invocation to explore masculinities in the classroom. So, as seen above, their primary public response to the material in the programme is to laugh at and ridicule the examples of ‘diverse’ or ‘alternative’ masculinities shown in the programme video. On the subject of women the boys prefer the beautiful, sexually available, pliable and biddable women who drape themselves adoringly over their heroes in music videos rather than the educated, opinionated, fully clothed women who appear on the programme videos to tell them where they are going wrong and why, in the case of the three young girls featured, they wouldn’t go out with them.
Media Engagement, the EM Programme, Identity and ‘Boy Culture’

The relationship between young men and the media provides some of the most important resources for the lives and cultural development of these boys. Their wholesale and dedicated engagement with the media is essential in terms of the foundation it gives to their friendships and to their identity construction. The massive importance attached by teenagers to first hand knowledge and experience of particular television shows, certain musicians or films cannot be underestimated. Groups grow up around television shows, video games, or bands and base inclusion and membership on this knowledge, as well as on the ability to converse about and engage with the material concerned. Appearances, likes, dislikes, activities, conversations are all framed by the communal experiences of the mass media, shared between and rehashed by the boys on a daily basis. The attraction of these virtual and unrealistic landscapes may be difficult for some to fathom. They represent an escape into a fantasy world of freedom and power, the two things that are most commonly denied to young people. The dedication to and investment in media forms can be quite staggering, with boys admitting to spending up to six hours at a time playing one game, repeating levels until they are completed. This commitment is, in itself, a reflection of the difficulties and the contradictions that are inherent in the construction of a successful and viable male identity.
Realising the problems and obstacles that are part of this identity construction process is essential. The sometimes uncomfortable realities of being a white working class male are difficult to reconcile within the parameters of the double disadvantage of youth and social exclusion. A successful male working class identity requires elements which are often not readily accessible to young men. Addressing this, this chapter explored the fantasy world of the video game, drawing attention to the access it gives to some of the primary markers of that successful male working class identity. These markers are still, for the boys, focused around the very traditional aspects of male power and agency. The cars, the ability to use force, the mastery of weapons, the control of malleable women and the continuous bloody defeat of enemies is a response to a world in which young working class men feel that they are powerless. Many aspects of male youth culture, and male working class youth culture in particular, are troubling and harbour potentially harmful elements which can be very damaging when encountered by vulnerable individuals. Much of the engagement of teenage boys with the media is with violent and coarse imagery which degrades both women and men, or is so far removed from their own reality that it is nearly impossible to see how they can relate to it. However, relate to this material they do and to communicate this is the purpose of this chapter. My aim was, not to simply critically evaluate the content of youth media. Rather, it was to look beyond what it contains and to question both the relevance of these particular forms to young white working class men and the relationship the boys have with these media. In addition I wanted to trace what consumption patterns, media products and cultural practices say about the social, cultural and environmental background and development of these boys both now and in the future.
This chapter looked specifically at the type and content of media forms that are engaged with by a small, geographically, economically and socially localised group of boys. While the fieldwork focus is relatively narrow, the questioning is situated within the broader context of general concerns about male youth culture. Chapter five is also motivated by these wide-ranging concerns about young men. It brings together the classroom culture as discussed in chapter three with the popular media culture explored here. Chapter five returns the focus to the EM classroom, exploring the interaction between the programme materials and the boys’ own cultural references. This interaction is shown through a series of critical vignettes that illustrate the conflicted relationship which exists between the boys’ media based culture and the ethos of the EM programme. The video game is given particular emphasis again in Chapter five as it is widely used and understood to be a material representation of male youth culture. It is also one of the most demonised aspects of ‘boy culture’ and discussion of it in the public sphere is regularly accompanied by high levels of concern in relation to portrayals of violence and gender stereotyping. However, in chapter five, the general understanding of the video game as a harmful or destructive influence is inverted and the video game is re-contextualised as the basis for a possible ‘rethinking’ of the type of materials that are selected for use in the EM programme.

Rethinking EM is the primary focus of chapter five and this is grounded in an awareness of the centrality of popular culture to the lives of young men. Recognising the incursion of popular media forms into all aspects of boys’ lives highlights the need for the emergence of alternative pedagogies and methods which can better reach and engage
with the young men in the EM classroom. Reflecting this importance, the video game is used as a model which has the potential to inform a different approach to the collection, presentation and, ultimately, the reception of EM materials in the classroom. My reading of the video game proposes that the relationship between young people and their preferred media forms needs to be discussed in light of the potential benefits popular culture offers them in terms of sociability, literacy and learning. It is not about hijacking or remaking young men’s culture, but rather about understanding where boys ‘are’ and starting from that point in order to address the problematic or offensive elements contained therein. In chapter five I explore the ways in which ‘boy culture’ could be incorporated into a reworked EM programme in order to bridge the existent gap in understanding between the boys’ own experiences and the version of masculinity as presented by the programme. Reworking EM to include and incorporate material that is both attractive and familiar to young men is simply the first step; however, this step is not in itself unproblematic as incorporating ‘boy culture’ into the official curriculum raises a series of questions and an apparent contradiction. This contradiction is based on the understanding that if elements of male youth culture are inherently problematic, propagating and encouraging violence, misogyny and stereotyping by gender, race and sexuality, then the question arises of whether a valid argument or case can still be made for the incorporation of that culture into the pedagogy, materials and approach of EM. This is a central question framing and guiding the argument throughout chapter five.
Of specific interest here is Hollands' 1995 study, *Friday Night, Saturday Night: Youth Cultural Identification in the Post-Industrial City*. The cultural significance attached to 'going out' amongst Newcastle's 16-24-year-olds is the central focus, explored through the different rituals and behaviours that are built up around the city nightlife for these young people.

See chapter two for a fuller account of these shifts.

See the Combat Poverty Agency (2003) report on *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*.

In conversation with a teacher with 36 years of experience in one of the main feeder schools for Hillside. She refers to the huge growth in uptake of financial support services for families in need including the school book rental scheme, the school uniform recycling scheme, free school milk and free healthy snacks for all children in need.

These reflect the most recent figures derived from the Combat Poverty Agency's Summer 2003 report on *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*. Details of the report are available online at: [http://www.cpa.ie/downloads/publications/PovertyBriefings/Educational Disadvantage.pdf](http://www.cpa.ie/downloads/publications/PovertyBriefings/Educational Disadvantage.pdf)

Examples include working in supermarkets, petrol stations, video shops, other shops, assembly line work, casual labour on building sites and other unskilled, impermanent forms of employment.

Associated costs include books, lunch money, uniform, footwear, sports equipment and clothing, school trips and other sundry expenses.

Statistics from www.cso.ie. For a more in depth analysis and discussion of the issues around youth unemployment, see Gorby, McCoy and Watson (2005).

Paul talks about the introduction of subjects such as wood work, mechanical drawing, construction studies and other vocational options in response to the changing needs of the community the school serves (November 25th 2002).

Feeder Schools in this context denote the school at which the university entrant first sat their Leaving Certificate Exam. The data is taken from lists provided by Universities of first year students and which were published in the National Press. The data here is taken from *The Irish Times* newspaper across a period extending from the May 20th 2004 to the May 26th 2004.

Jan O' Sullivan as quoted in (2004) 'Elite Schools top the league tables' *The Irish Independent* (21 May) p. 12.
Universities and Institutes of Technology are working to address this social imbalance, and programmes designed to assist and encourage students from disadvantaged backgrounds both to apply to third level courses and to manage their subsequent learning are now in place in all institutions. However international research has demonstrated that even with greater numbers of disadvantaged students finishing second level education and participating at third level, social class inequalities in educational attainment still continue (Smyth 1999: 282)

See Skeggs (2004) for further discussion of cultural hijacking and assimilation by, in this case, the middle classes.

This sense of ownership is expressed very strongly among the Hillside boys. It is also reflected in Debbie Ging’s 2005 research in which one boy comments on Eminem:

When Eminem was younger his father left... He was also brought up in a poor family so was I. Nobody understands what he says in his music about his childhood and family because they don’t know what he went through but I can relate to him a lot.’ (Ging 2005: 45)

Ging carried out her research into the media consumption of teenage Irish boys across nine secondary schools and through focus groups and questionnaires with boys in Transition Year. The paper: ‘A ‘Manual on Masculinity? The consumption and use of mediated images of masculinity among teenage boys in Ireland’ which is referred to here is an extract from a larger study.

The simultaneous and paradoxical affirmation and condemnation of this type of negative masculinity through the accepted culture or gender regime at many boys’ schools is discussed in depth in chapter three. Here I refer to the broader social or public conceptions of what constitutes anti-social behaviour or threatening masculinities.

MRBI is the largest research company in Ireland with a full time staff of over 40 employees. They carry out market research as well as non commercial research for social and political opinion polls such as the poll referred to here which focuses on young people and their experiences of alcohol, drugs, sexual relationships and their levels of engagement with the mass media.

Ian McShane, Managing Director of TNS MRBI, is author (listed) of the survey which provided details for The Irish Times Poll published in a series of three reports on the 18th, 19th and 20th of September 2003. The survey was carried out over the period of the 20th of August to the 6th of September 2003. It covers several aspects of the life of a typical
Irish young person aged between fifteen and twenty-five, including Alcohol and Drugs, Relationships and Sex, and Media Consumption and Social Issues.

Diageo, the international branded drinks company are sponsors of the Guinness Hurling Championships and involved in expensive, high profile advertising campaigns featuring Gaelic sports stars and match footage.


‘Knacker’ is now a generally derogatory term related to the Travelling community.

Cork slang for a north-sider or a ‘knacker’. While ‘norrie’ usually denotes a person from the northside of the city it is often interchangeable with knacker which includes people from both sides of the river.

Pilkington and Johnson (2003) present a dialogue between a range of theory and research on global/local identities and relationships. They put forward the case for situating global/local studies in the peripheries of the social, prioritising the sub cultures and foregrounding questions of race, ethnicity, class, generation, gender and sexuality.


See chapter two for a full discussion of disengagement by the boys.

‘Blade one’ or ‘blade two’ refers to the setting or position of the blade on the clippers used to cut or shave the hair. A ‘blade one’ gives the closest/shortest cut.

Devlin discusses the ‘naming’ of young men:

Stories about young men [in newspapers] tend to focus more on criminality/deviance … for instance, the word ‘youth’ tends to be used in a very formulaic way in the context of stories about crime and deviance involving young men, while the other words (like ‘teenager’, ‘youngster’ and so on) often have more benign connotations… [this] is a distinctive feature of their social position in our society, and is clearly related to the ease and frequency with which they can be stereotyped (2006: 65)

This translates roughly as the Young People of Cork’s Youth Club.

The information given by the boys on what they do outside of school and work commitments makes it clear that they prefer to hang around with their friends without any adult intervention or supervision.

In terms of reading, books and comics in the fantasy and science fiction genres are popular with several of the boys. Newspapers are read primarily for sports news and the titles read are generally whatever is in the house, or bought by their parents. Most popular are the national tabloids – the Irish Sun and Star as well as the Cork local paper The Echo, which has a narrow focus on Cork city and county, and is primarily comprised of local news and sports results. Magazines aimed at older men such as Maxim and specialist music and computer magazines, such as Loaded or P2 are most popular with the boys. However because of the relatively peripheral role these media play in the lives of the Hillside boys, they are sidelined here as well.

One important analysis of this area is contained in Sonia Livingstone’s Young People and New Media, a new publication of the report of the research project ‘Children, Young People and the Changing Media Environment’ originally reported in Young People, New Media by Livingstone and Maureen Bovill in 1999. Livingstone, Professor of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics notes in her introduction that ‘Curiously there is a notable discrepancy between the high levels of public concern over children and young people’s use of new media and the paucity of empirical research conducted thus far’ (2003: 3).

In a sample of advertisement breaks lasting approximately four minutes between 16:30 and 17:30, and 21:30 to 22:30 on MTV, one the most popular channels with the boys, there was a staggering number of ring tone, mobile tags and phone screen saver adverts, numbering seven adverts in each break out of an approximate 14 adverts in all shown (These services provide, at a relatively high cost, chart hits as ring tones, the ability to ‘tag’ your mobile whereby your name appears on its screen, or a picture or screen saver of a semi-naked girl or a fluffy kitten depending on your tastes). This was conducted over a period of two weeks. The time slots were chosen as they are representative of the prime programming slots on MTV when their audience has returned from school or has finished homework/part-time work. Other adverts seen in these breaks include spots for clothing, snack and junk food, pain killers and banking services.

Mobile phones are no longer expensive and basic models can be bought extremely cheaply. ‘Pay as you go’ phones require no bills or contract with providers, which means young people can, once they have purchased a handset spend as little or as much as they
can afford on their phones, ‘topping up’ their ‘credit’ in increments of €5, €10, €20 and upwards.

See Lodge (2004: 164-181) for her discussion of the show as part of her wider exploration of children and young people as active and critical users of media.

This story is an extract from Irish novelist Colm Tóibin’s The Heather Blazing. It is clear that the boys consider it to be particularly embarrassing and over-sentimental and much sniggering and muttering breaks out in response to it. The extract focuses on a young boy named Eamon and his father as they go swimming in the sea on a hot day. Eamon is afraid of the water and does not want to go in, while his father stands in the water and tries to encourage him. After a show of reluctance, Eamon eventually does decide to trust his father and allows him to help him swim. However, by the time this point is reached in the class the boys are laughing derisively and mincing about in their desks making exaggerated faces of fear. They find the language used to be especially hilarious, particularly the extract reproduced below:

He changed into his togs. He felt sweaty in the heat and noticed when he lay out on the sand again that the sand was sticking to his skin. He stood up and walked down towards the sea. He knew it would be cold, but with the warm sun on his back it was not as bad as he expected. His father was waving to him and swimming in a dog paddle towards the shore. Eamon moved out until he, too, had to jump to avoid the waves. He wondered how you would get the courage to dive in: what would those first moments be like? His father was beckoning him to come out further (EM: 196-7).

The overwrought nature, to the boys’ sensibility, of the memoir requires neutralisation. The wimpishness of Eamon is much mocked as is the ‘creepiness’ of the father and until Darren breaks the embarrassed silence which has resulted from Paul’s question, there is a feeling of imminent mutiny in the air.

The nature of the boys’ responses, negative and positive, to EM and its materials is discussed in chapter five with regard to the wider context of debates and concerns about youth culture and ‘boy culture’ in particular.

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Such as Keelin Shanley’s report for *Prime Time* (14th January 2003), RTE’s current affairs show, in which she discusses youth crime with teenage joy riders (the show is available to view in part or in full at http://www.rte.ie/news/2003/0114/primetime.html.

This information is gathered from the official web sites for Fair City and Ros na Rún. Character biographies give brief synopses of age, family, occupation and high and low points of the characters’ lives and loves. The characters selected as representative here include from Fair City – Stephen McCoy, Lorcan Foley and Mondo O’ Connell. Characters from Ros na Run include Conall, Jason O’ Connor and Mack Ó Riain. This information can be accessed at http://www.rte.ie/tv/faircity and at http://www.rosnarun.com. The Character Section on each web site provides back story for each character, demonstrating the extraordinary circumstances of their fictional lives.

See Ging (2006: 33) for her discussion of Irish boys and media engagement.

RTE One and Two, TG4 and TV3.

Excluding sports.

‘Gatch’ is an old Cork name for gait, meaning style of walking. ‘Knacker gatch’ here refers to the way in which groups of young men carry themselves in public.

Shops in some British towns have banned baseball caps and hooded sweatshirts in an effort to beat shoplifting, claiming both articles of clothing are used by teenage boys to conceal their faces during thefts. The shop keepers now reserve the right to refuse entry to individuals wearing these items. The question of whether or not this reduces shoplifting or simply pathologises young working class men further is not raised. Paterson (2003). ‘Hoods and Hats Banned to Beat the Shoplifters’ (26 May). See link at http://www.telegraph.co.uk. (The online version of *The Daily Telegraph*).

These immigrant families are, however, mostly young and there are still relatively few non-white students at second level in the area.

MTV’s Cribs is a concept show whereby MTV cameras are ‘invited’ into the homes of celebrities, film stars and musicians. The show follows the individual around their home, into the contents of their fridge, their garden, pool, basket ball courts and garage allowing them to show off their wealth and possessions and allowing viewers to see where and how they live.
Acknowledging that problems arise with the content of the majority of the media aimed at young men does not immediately cancel out the possibility, or indeed necessity, of using that same material as a resource in the EM classroom. Rather, it reflects the complex nature of the difficulties that exist in both public and academic debates about youthful masculinities and their relation to education, culture, anti-social behaviour and social life. As a result of what they see as an attack on their culture the Hillside boys feel threatened by elements of EM and their responses in the classroom often indicate a
hardening of their outlook on certain issues, most particularly those relating to non-traditional gender roles and homosexuality. This standoff between the boys and the EM materials is easy to see throughout, however, an obvious solution to that impasse is less evident. Here, in chapter five, I acknowledge this problematic and address what lies behind these confrontations through a series of classroom vignettes extracted from my fieldwork. This chapter also draws upon broader questions about the relationship between popular youth culture and the education system and foregrounds the necessity of a re-evaluation of ‘boy culture’ as it is understood and represented, both in the classroom, and in the wider public sphere.

A central question for this chapter asks how EM (and by extension any other programmes and interventions which will follow it) can locate and address important and relevant questions about male youth culture without alienating its audience and invoking in them an unreceptive, hostile state. I attempt to answer this question in the first instance by offering a reinterpretation of a negatively perceived element of that ‘boy culture’ through a specific example of the ‘rehabilitation’ of the popular video game. The centrality of popular culture seen in chapter four is re-examined here in terms of its conflicted relationship with education and established pedagogical structures and hierarchies of knowledge. As advocates for the integration of popular culture in the classroom and the curriculum, Collins (1994) and the American educational theorist Nadine Dolby (2003) both contend that accepting and engaging with student culture is essentially important. Such an engagement will, they argue, not only enhance the democracy of the classroom (Collins 1994: 60) but could also impact positively on the wider processes of a
democratic society (Dolby 2003: 7). Chapter five thus begins with a repositioning of boys’ popular culture, starting from ‘where the boys are’ and accepting their dominant interest in certain, often problematic forms. Following this, the second part of this chapter moves back into the classroom for a final visit in order to illustrate the way in which a more open and less proscriptive view of those negatively perceived elements of ‘boy culture’, such as the video game, could offer EM a new relevance with regard both to its original principles and the interests, belief structures and attitudes of its target audience.¹

To do this, chapter five draws on the work of James Paul Gee, who, in What Video Games have to Teach us about Learning and Literacy (2003), sidelines video game content and rereads it, as a form, in terms of its structure and narrative. He resituates the video game (one of the more demonised elements of ‘boy culture’) in terms of its potential as a tool for enhancing traditional literacy, with obvious implications for it as an educational resource.² In light of his reading I imagine the impact a programme like EM might have in the classroom were it to take some tips from the way in which a popular video game is designed. Both the form and the ethos of the video game are the antithesis of EM. Designed to ‘hook in’ players and to engage them from the outset, the video game more often than not relies on the old fashioned masculine attractions of sex, violence and rebellion. Yet, a discussion and reconsideration of the pedagogical value of video game structure and form constitutes the first part of the chapter. As noted, the second part of chapter five returns to the classroom and opens up a series of critical vignettes or scenes for the reader. Reproduced throughout, with these vignettes, are the student and teacher materials that accompany the classes discussed. Their presence in the text allows the
reader to understand more fully the root causes of the often tense and conflicted context in which conversations and whispered exchanges take place in the classroom. This tension comes, in part, as a result of the gap between youth culture and traditional pedagogy, whereby both resist an acknowledgement of the other (Dolby 2003). Each scene highlights the frequently difficult relationship which exists between young peoples' understanding and experience of youth culture; ‘adult’ or public characterisation of working class masculine identities, and the educational initiatives, like EM, which are charged with bridging that gap in awareness.

Of course, in order to re-evaluate ‘boy culture’ - moving it away from the familiar and established negative associations with violent, sexist and homophobic content - it is essential that this gap in understanding and experience between many young people and adults be recognised. The previous chapters have sought to ensure that the particular local culture of the Hillside boys is understood and is fully contextualised in terms of its social positioning. This understanding is vital in order to successfully challenge and/or dislodge the more damaging aspects of this young male media culture, something which is the overall aim of EM. In chapter four I looked at what attracts boys to this form of cultural identity, exploring what exactly is offered to them by the media, and experiencing, through engagement with their material culture and from my own subject position, the heady world of the gangster, the rapper and the (sometimes literally meant) ‘lady-killer’. This cultural analysis of attraction was conducted within a necessary awareness of the real concerns held over the content of much of this media culture and the way in which it encourages and strengthens traditionally rigid masculine attitudes, such as those held in
relation to women and to gay men. This aggressive form of male identity is also fundamentally in opposition to the ‘softer’ and more tolerant form of masculinity espoused by EM. Nevertheless, I argue in this chapter that this poorly perceived, influential, attractive and potentially damaging culture must be allowed to inform the ways in which EM, and any programmes which follow it, present this type of material in the classroom. Here, following Gee (2003), I call for an emphasis on understanding and engaging fully with the negatively traditional elements of boy culture, so they can be dislodged or challenged by discussion or debate between the boys themselves and their teacher. This emphasis is prompted by the need to find alternative pedagogies and methods which can better reach and engage with the young men following the EM curriculum. Within this, if the main difficulty the programme has in the classroom is rooted in the already defensive mindset of the Hillside boys, then the first solution or step must be to find a way of addressing the sense that the boys have of being ‘picked on’ while still offering a robust challenge to the traditional and outmoded belief systems which surface in debate.

Engaging with the boys’ defensiveness brings together an awareness of the importance they attach to their material culture (and the masculine identities it supports and maintains), with the programme’s equal conviction that it is detrimental to their emotional, social and intellectual development. In fact, neither view is fully complete. ‘Boy culture’ and EM each have positive and negative attributes and recognition of this would be beneficial for all involved. Instead, these opposing views come together in the class vignettes showing the intensity of the entrenched positions of both sides, each
wedded to their oppositional beliefs about the value of the materiality of male youth culture. Representing this complexity, the vignettes presented here are contextualised and used differently to those presented in the previous chapters. In the earlier chapters the scenes from the classroom are linear, explanatory or illustrative instances allowing the reader to share my access to the voices of the Hillside boys as they narrate their experiences. This still remains the case here, although the scenes reproduced in this chapter go further and are distinct in that they are indicative of both the structural problem with EM while simultaneously offering suggestions as to how EM may be re-imagined.

Rethinking EM

In the two sections which follow, I bring together my own cultural analysis of this group of young white working class men and allow that analysis to inform and suggest ways in which they might be better engaged, enabled and accommodated by a programme initiative like EM. It is, however, important to note that this chapter is not about making a case for the removal of EM or for the programme to be rewritten as a ‘rules of engagement’ for dealing with problems associated with working class boys. Rather I am offering suggestions, informed by my classroom experiences about how EM might be re-imagined. A renewal of the programme is necessary in order for EM to fulfil its potential - enabling young men to see and understand the ways in which their traditional perceptions of masculinity and ‘manliness’, can, in a society which has shifted away from that gender identity or norm, be detrimental to their lives, health and prospects. The necessity of knowing why the Hillside boys are so attached to their traditional attitudes
and to traditional perceptions of gender roles and characteristics, often in the face of reproach, is underlined here as it is the first step to understanding how to shift and challenge those positions. The challenging of these belief structures is essential, I am not suggesting at any point in the research that these views are unproblematic, but I am suggesting that they be viewed as problematic in different and multiple ways. Racism, homophobia, sexism and aggression are by no means attributes unique to young white working class men. However, the Hillside boys and their peers are likely to be publicly associated with these stances in a manner that is not comparable to representations of middle class men and boys. Traditional masculine identities operate differently when attached to different class positions, wherein forms of cultural associations are ‘inscribed onto bodies, fixing and associating cultural characteristics on certain groups’ (Skeggs 2004: 2).

Currently there is a gap between the Hillside boys’ version of a viable and successful form of masculinity and the programme’s contradictory version of this. Closing down this distance will enhance the impact the EM programme can have on its target audience and finding an effective way of doing this is the primary aim of this chapter. Broadening perceptions of video games beyond common concerns about content and influence is the first step in the narrowing of this break. However, any move towards this new view, must be cognisant that engaging with popular culture in the classroom does not, as Willis (2003) explains:
... mean a lazy throwing open of the school doors to the latest fad, but rather committing to a principled understanding of the complexity of contemporary cultural experience (2003: 13).

Thus, focusing on the possibility of drawing on video game structure and design in order to re-conceptualise EM is not unproblematic. The call to incorporate popular youth culture materials in the classroom disrupts shared cultural assumptions that the language, knowledge and intellectual authority of the teacher is paramount. And, moving away from the broad presupposition that the teacher is always 'correct' is fundamentally in opposition to traditional understandings of school and schooling. Bringing youth culture into the classroom shifts the balance of power between teacher and student, blurring the lines between those who hold and dispense valued knowledge and those who receive it. The American cultural studies theorist Lawrence Grossberg proposes that when there is an institutional acknowledgment that students' culture is a positive force in their lives, students will be encouraged to 'gain some understanding of their own involvement in the world and in the making of their own future' (1994: 18). Reflecting this, in a small way, are the Hillside boys' responses to a more democratic classroom space. When, (as will be seen through the vignettes), the culturally and socially acquired competencies and literacies of the boys are appealed to and engaged with, their enthusiasm, attitudes and general demeanour become strikingly different and shift away from the heavy pall of sarcasm, defensiveness, and offensiveness, which normally hangs over the classroom.

Taking this shift into account, I re-imagine EM here, not through the provision and design of a brand new programme, but in the light of a cultural analysis which takes into
account the differences between groups of boys in terms of experience, environment and social class positioning and uses that understanding to best reach and engage with them in the classroom. It is essential that young men’s social and personal development be addressed in school. The EM programme provides a vital space for this in an extremely overcrowded school day. It is important therefore, that this space in the curriculum be used in the best possible way. Doing this requires a rethinking of the logic of delivery of EM with a re-examination of the programme’s ‘reformist ethos’ which seeks to reshape the negative attitudes of boys, along with a reconsideration of the selection, construction and presentation of the class themes, topics, worksheets and methodologies. It is to this rethinking that I now turn, and following Gee (2003), the first section of this chapter explores the types of structures and techniques that are employed by mainstream, popular video games and which encourage learning and active participation among players. The particular example chosen here is *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (*GTA*) and is used to illustrate the application of what Gee identifies as the ‘principles of learning’ (2003: 67). While *GTA* is one of the most popular video games with the Hillside boys, on a more general level, this and other games like it can be understood as being the ideological opposite of the EM programme. That is, they glamorise and encourage the very ‘negative’ and ‘traditional’ forms of masculinity that are propagated through popular ‘boy culture’ and which EM is trying to stamp out.

The Learning Principles of ‘Good Video Games’

Taking an important step towards addressing this relationship between popular culture and the official curriculum, Gee outlines 36 learning principles that he sees as both
actively encouraged and at work in the narrative structure and design of good video games. At the root of his interest in the subject is a series of questions and understandings. This includes the belief that to learn to play a video game, something that involves moving through different levels, learning shortcuts and cheats, controlling and directing a character through a virtual world, is neither a waste of time nor a distraction from the ‘real world’. Rather, for Gee it is part of a process of learning a new and essential literacy. This form of literacy is based on visual skill and on being able to read images independently of text, although traditional forms of literacy – such as reading text (both on and off screen) - are still required (Gee 2003: 13-14).

**Taking Over a Territory**

Note that each gang has their own color that they wear. This same color is used to designate a particular gang’s location on the map. Note that Grove Street, as you should know by now, are green. When the turf war portion of the game begins, refer to the map and take a look at the territories and their corresponding colors.

First, recruit some fellow gang members to bring along. It’s always best to bring along three (in a four-door car), then pick-up more as you get close to your intended destination. Before you start a riot, get out of the car and look for other gang members to recruit to maximize your firepower. Note that Cj’s level of Running Respect determines how many you can recruit. It’s definitely much easier to go into battle with as many ‘friends’ as possible. Note, however, that the recruits aren’t always the smartest; it’s nice, though, to have more bullets flying at the rival gang.

When you’ve finished recruiting, head to one of the locations highlighted on the map. Drive or walk around until your crew spots one of its rivals; you’ll know they’ve spotted them when your guys start shooting. Then while on foot, take out at least three or four rival gang members. This should start the first phase of the fight. (Note that you cannot start a turf war while inside a vehicle.)

The fight consists of essentially three waves of rival gang members. The first part of the fight is (obviously) the easiest, as these guys usually pack the least powerful weapons and they always are the smallest in number. Take care during this phase to avoid as much damage as possible, as you’ll need plenty of health to make it through the next two phases.

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**Helpful Tactics**

As mentioned previously, it’s always best to bring only plenty of support. It’s never advised to start a turf war with only Cj bringing along as many recruits as possible and use them to draw fire away from Cj while he unloads on the rivals. It’s highly unlikely that the recruits will last all three phases, so use other methods to protect Cj.

Look for walls or other objects to hide behind and avoid standing directly in the open where the rival gang members have a clear shot at Cj. If not, his health will definitely suffer. Also, don’t wait too long to find and use the Health and Body Armor power-ups that appear in-between phases. It’s too easy to take a lucky shot in the back while running toward the power-up. Try to get onto ledges or rooftops and unload on any unsuspecting thugs, too.

Some of the most effective weapons to use in the second and third stages are Grenades and Molotovs. When a new phase of the battle begins, quickly refer to the on-screen map and look for the red icons representing the other gang members. Avoid getting trapped by two sets of attacks and instead look for a way to bring them all toward Cj at once. Then as they approach, hit them from a distance with a Grenade or Molotov to finish off multiple thugs at a time.

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Figure 5.02: ‘Helpful Tactics’ from GTA.

Gee refers in particular to the prevalence of what are often complicated and detailed instructions, written in complex language and requiring a high level of concentration and comprehension (2003: 100-108). This type of instruction is comparable - although clearly not in terms of content - to the more typically valued school textbook which is more
broadly understood as being ‘educational’ (see figure 5.02). Video game literacy also relies on the use of memory, manual dexterity, rapid mental and physical reactions and the ability to construct and maintain maps of meaning and of relationships as they apply to the character and his or her virtual world. This ability to ‘recover meaning’ from events and incidences in that virtual world and to then process images as information is, Gee argues, a far more important skill now than previously in our history. He further states that the type of learning involved in video games is far more suited to both the needs and the competencies of young people who have grown up and live surrounded by advanced communicative technology (2003: 7).

Gee’s primary interest is not in the technology of video games. Rather, he focuses on what makes some games successful when others, even though they offer a similar – if not identical – mix of violence, excitement and sex, fail. For Gee the answer lies in how some video games, even when difficult and challenging, draw players in and keep them interested. This function, he argues, is the first reflection of the principles of intensive teaching and learning seen in this media form. Gee is not suggesting an altruistic motivation behind this; he clearly recognises that video games need to sell in order to be commercially successful. Rather, it is in the interest of the games’ success to make people want to play them. He asks, ‘how are good video games designed to enhance getting themselves learned – learned well and quickly so people can play and enjoy them even when they are long and hard?’ (Gee 2003: 6). This question shapes his desire to uncover and to apply the ‘learning principles’ used by those games which keep players interested and make them want to keep playing even when the game requires levels of commitment
beyond, as seen in figure 5.02, regular entertainment practices which demand less
physical and mental effort. Gee answers his own question by presenting his 36 learning
principles, and here I focus on the first four: ‘enticement’, ‘practice’, ‘reward’ and
‘identity’ (2003: 61-68). He also identifies a ‘cycle of thought’ which, he argues, is
couraged by video gaming (ibid: 90). Both these four principles and the cycle of
thought are discussed in full in the following sections in relation to GTA as well as in the
class session extracts.

Before moving on to these examples, however, it is essential to first understand, in the
context of Gee’s re-evaluation, what it is that popular culture and video games, in
particular, can offer boys both in and beyond the classroom. At this point the original
contradiction highlighted in chapter four and at the beginning of this chapter re-emerges.
Focusing solely on the problems with content in relation to ‘boy culture’ excludes any
other perspective and specifically precludes the depth of understanding that can be gained
from personally engaging with the media artefacts and media forms which comprise that
culture. This is not to say that the machismo, sexism or violence inherent in so many
forms should be acceptable or should pass un-remarked. However, the continued
attraction to these forms is firmly linked to the pervasiveness of a ‘negatively traditional
masculinity’ (and is part of a cyclical relationship wherein each sustains the other). A
programme like EM cannot expect to simply dislodge these preferences along with the
accompanying and engrained attitudes of boys and young men without a full
understanding and awareness of that which it is trying to shift or neutralise. Once it is
clear, beyond the obvious levels of titillation and entertainment, what keeps young men
interested in particular media forms, those forms or structures can in many cases, as Gee points out, be used in or applied to different settings and with different materials. In the specific case of video games it cannot just be sex or violence that attracts players. This is the case, Gee argues, because many games offering a similar or identical mix of the two as GTA does, fail to sell (2003: 5-6). Looking beyond the attractive/problematic content of these and other media forms in this way allows for an exploration of structure and of the way in which the material addresses its audience. Hence a reinterpretation of how material is selected, structured and presented in EM is framed, in the following section, through a critically informed revisiting of the GTA game series.

Reinterpreting and Representing

I chose the new version of GTA: San Andreas for illustration purposes here for several reasons. Firstly, it is extremely popular with boys in this age group. Secondly, the game is considered to be one of the most violent and misogynistic (and therefore ‘worst’) examples of the genre. This is a complaint that has been enhanced by the game’s visual ‘realism’. Examples of this can be found in figure 5.03a and figure 5.03b. Thirdly, it is a new installment in the GTA series and so has changed to reflect the current music and filmic references of its players while also showcasing advanced graphics. The game also has a complete and fully contextualised narrative structure together with high levels of complexity in terms of plot lines, characterisation and motivated action. San Andreas focuses on the geographically and culturally distant, yet familiar, world of urban gang warfare. The action has moved from the Mafia-run Miami of the 1980s, as seen in the earlier versions discussed in chapter four, to the violent battles for territory between and
among rival Latino and African-American gang members which allegedly mirror ‘real-life’ battles which rocked Los Angeles in the 1990s. The game is set in the fictional cities of Las Venturas, a gambling hotspot based on Las Vegas, San Fierro, modelled on San Francisco and Los Santos, a fictionalised Los Angeles.

Figure 5.03 a-b: The ‘Realism’ of GTA – Screenshots of CJ and the Grove St Family Gang.

The violent and crime-riven urban sprawl of Los Santos is home to a young black man named Carl Johnson (CJ). He is the game’s hero/anti-hero and a member of the formerly influential, although now in decline, Grove St Families Gang. He is also the persona taken on by the player in the game. CJ’s masculinity is problematic and typical of that which is offered to boys across action films, rap music and other video games. He operates outside the law, is physically strong, violent, sexually promiscuous and aggressive. Yet, although clearly a violent criminal, CJ is presented to players in a context that suggests that he is a ‘good’ character and his actions are explained in terms of motivation and necessity. He is portrayed as a guardian for his family, neighbourhood and gang. Nevertheless, he appears throughout the game dripping with guns, jewellery and women (see figure 5.03b). He therefore embodies the feared stereotype of the inner
city black male and bears a strong and non-accidental resemblance to the ‘real-life’ rapper and ex crack-dealer Fifty Cent (see figure 4.10a). This popular form of hyper-masculinity is a fantasy masculinity and is recognised as such by the Hillside boys. Yet, it raises the same problems as many other similar ‘role player’ games. These include, but are not restricted to, examples of misogyny, racial and cultural stereotyping, a glorification of the ‘machismo’ of crime, and extremely high levels of casual violence inflicted on rival gang members, the police and on the regular ‘citizens’ of the three cities portrayed.

Obviously a programme such as EM is never going to be as attractive to young men as playing GTA or other video games. Fundamentally the programme does not ‘start where the boys are’, rather it seeks to alter behaviour and to intercede or intervene in the playing out and performance of aggressive or troublesome working class masculinities. Thus, EM, like the ASBO, condemns male youth culture without room for a full consideration of the sets of circumstances, often outside of the control of these young men, which have led to a point whereby such dramatic interventions are felt to be necessary. In Willis’ recent work, The Ethnographic Imagination (2000: 93), he updates and reflects on the contemporary position of working class boys and men discussing the way in which they react to the current social and economic conditions in which they find themselves. The result of this being, he argues, that many young working class men construct their own alternative value system, with their own tests and standards for ‘being a man’ because they are unable or unwilling to reach the standards set by a middle class society of accepted social norms. Thus when EM does not speak to them in a language - either
verbal or visual - that makes them want to move away from their macho masculine identity and towards the alternative ‘softer’ masculine identity offered to them by the programme, they are more likely to retain their own alternative means of conferring masculinity. The identity proffered by the programme is undoubtedly a tolerant and open-minded masculinity that is accepting of difference, diversity and change, whereas the masculinity offered by *GTA: San Andreas* is violent, sexist and criminal. Both forms of masculinity are unrealistic extremes, a point understood by the boys. But, at the same time, one form is able to far more effectively draw them in and keep them interested than the other.\(^{14}\) Understanding that EM could never seriously compete with a slick, glossy video game does not mean that it cannot draw upon or learn from it. Comparisons between content and enjoyment levels are not especially informative or sustainable as these are two wholly different media produced in two completely different contexts, with what are, arguably, totally opposing aims. Yet, the positive elements of the video game format as discussed in relation to Gee’s work as well as in relation to the complex narrative structure, the motivated actions, rewards, sociability and mental agility offered by the game have much to offer to any redevelopment of EM.

EM can learn from the way video games are put together and from the way games and their designers ask players and participants to engage with different materials. Video games allow the player to practice – to try out different moves, avenues and decisions and then, on finding the ‘right’ one, to become better at it by doing it over and over again, as many times as it takes.\(^ {15}\) EM does not allow boys to ‘practice’ different attitudes. A typical lesson plan (see appendix) will basically outline the ‘wrongness’ of one position
and then present a series of alternative, ‘positive’ stances which function to close the
topic or subject. Although the programme set out to be a ‘student led’ initiative, the
materials do not provide a starting point for that to occur. It relies instead on rigidly
structured worksheets and step-by-step instructions for both teachers and students
(examples of both are reproduced in the second half of this chapter). This means it is
overtly ‘improving’ or didactic. The issue of reward is also central here. The boys are
well aware that their views and positions may not be desirable or agreed with outside of
their immediate peer group or local setting. This is immediately evident in the classroom,
when a ‘joke’ or supposedly ‘throwaway’ comment which has a clear basis in real feeling
or belief is made. As discussed in relation to the programme’s attempt to raise issues of
homosexuality or the role of women, the boys, expecting their views to be challenged, go
on the defensive at once. EM does not offer them a credible alternative to their current
understanding of what it is that ‘makes a man’ and neither do they see any advantage in
allowing themselves to be seriously challenged by the programme material.

As discussed in chapters two and three, the boys’ sense of insecurity is related to their
social and economic positioning as well as to their youth and relatively low standing in
the general hierarchy of Irish masculinity. They do not see an inherent reward for their
efforts or any real incentive, apart from teacher approval, to commit to the programme
and take on board its ideology. Rather they regard the type of masculinity advocated by
EM as a feminised version – a form of ‘light masculinity’ –that will result in even lower
standing in their hierarchy of maleness which runs from ‘hard-man’ to ‘gay-boy’. Even if
they do decide to subvert their more traditional or controversial (as seen from a liberal
middle class perspective) views on immigration, homosexuality, or the role of women, their own personal position in the world will not have changed.

In addition to this, the fact that the boys will not be tested in an official exam capacity on EM removes both the fear of the possibility of ‘failing’ and the motivational promise of doing well. Because EM is not considered to be a ‘real’ class, there is no ‘quantifiable’ learned content on which the boys can be tested and so effort and engagement are not implicitly accepted as a part of the programme. Furthermore, as noted, conforming to the norms of EM is unlikely to garner praise or admiration from classmates. Conversely, GTA offers rewards for effort and practice in both the virtual and social ‘real’ world. Gaining new skills and using them to complete missions successfully allows new parts of the game to be unlocked. For example, once a player hone her/his skills and completes the training missions for flying aircraft, a whole world above the ground opens up and passenger airliners, military aircraft, helicopters and parachutes can all be added to CJ’s/the player’s transport repertoire. Although these are ‘virtual’ skills it is, nonetheless, important to understand that this ‘achievement’ is something recognised by classmates. The boys share a frame of reference, appreciating the effort involved and understanding what completing a particular mission means within the broader context of the video game. This achievement principle could be incorporated on a far larger scale into the programme. This could, by offering the boys the possibility of achieving a definable result or outcome, encourage participation and active engagement with the programme. This potentiality will be discussed more fully in the second half of this chapter in the context of the EM game entitled ‘The Murder Hunt’.
A ‘Cycle of Thought’

Gee also discusses what he refers to as the ‘cycle of thought’, describing this cycle as to ‘probe – hypothesise – re-probe – rethink’ (2003: 90). A game like San Andreas actively encourages this model; the player must first enter a virtual world and find out how things work, what things are, and how the rules apply. Having investigated this virtual world, the player must reflect on what s/he has learned and form guesses as to what particular items may mean in the context of the game. According to this model, the game player then re-enters the virtual world armed with her/his hypotheses which will be put to the test. The feedback gained from testing ideas and trying out actions allows the player to see whether or not s/he should reject or rethink her/his original ideas. This reflective practice is essential to learning in the classroom as well as outside of it. That such a fundamental process is at the basis of what is considered to be one of the ‘worst’ (in terms of negative content and influence) mainstream video games is an almost total inversion of their more negative associations. In contrast, EM does not allow students to ‘practice’ different attitudes and opinions. Neither does it, primarily due to time constraints, allow students to reflect on the issues presented. The issue of time is crucial here as most schools were only able to allocate one or two class periods of 40 minutes apiece to the programme.

The time consuming nature of EM’s introductory sessions, the need to prepare classrooms and to arrange materials means that it can be a while before students and teachers can get ‘stuck into’ the programme proper. This, as compared with the time spent in other classes and school activities means that EM is at a disadvantage and that it
often has little chance of making an impression on the attitudes it wishes to shift. Time in the class is generally at a premium. Typically, stories or poems are presented and worksheets are handed out, they are filled in and discussion takes place. Within this framework students are not able to take the time to ‘dip’ into different or diverse experiences, to think about how issues of restriction and choice effect people in particular situations. For example, as will be seen in the class extract, *No Place to Go*, a discussion about homelessness is structured through a list of causes, definitions and a series of worksheets offering ‘answers’. To be sure, Gee’s ‘cycle of thought’ is difficult to facilitate in a 40 minute class session. It would even be difficult to facilitate it across several class sessions compared to the amount of time dedicated to playing a game like *San Andreas*. The time allocated and the volume of material is one of the main problems with EM as it currently exists. The methodologies presented for teachers are practical and tangible examples of the broader problems which exist with the ‘mindset’ or ethos of the intervention programme. Currently teachers are forced to choose between covering many topics superficially, covering relatively few in depth, or allowing discussion and debate to progress in a more ‘organic’ manner depending upon the interest students show and investments they make in particular questions or problems.

This disparity between the time allocated and the volume of material offered should, if EM were to be returned to the drawing board, form the basis for its re-making. Evinced by the variety of materials, the vastness of the programme effectively cancels out what it aimed to be – student-led, discussion-based and founded upon a loose pedagogy, in and out of which teachers could dip according to the particular and locally specific needs of
their students. As such the possibilities offered by the programme are outweighed by the problems with it and these problems can be directly traced to its general ethos and the methodological issues which stem from that. The student worksheets provided for each section, in particular, proved to be problematic. The Hillside boys found the worksheets to be overly childish and didactic. Frequent complaints in class were based on the feeling that they did not agree with any of the available answers or categories provided to them on their worksheets. Occasionally this was due to a desire on behalf of the class to be disruptive. However, the sheets handed out to them in class were, often, either left blank or scribbled and doodled on. The 'right' answers, as asked for by these sheets, were rarely given. Incidences in which Paul asked students to explain why they had not filled in their sheets resulted in such explanations as 'the one I want isn’t on it' and 'the answer I have won’t fit/isn’t asked for'. The programme review team expressed surprise at this displeasure. They stated, 'It is unclear why some students may have viewed some of the teaching methodologies and activities in EM as childish' (Mac an Ghaill et al 2003: 165).

In response to this, informed by my fieldwork, I would suggest students' views stem from the fact that the visual sophistication and literacy of adolescent boys was either underestimated or not considered in the programme design.

Reflecting on this problem, the following section looks in more detail at the programme materials; going back into the classroom to look at how they are received by the Hillside boys. A series of key questions run throughout the critical vignettes. These focus on the issue of approach and on the omission of popular culture as a resource. The framing question here focuses on whether or not EM could be remade to take into account the
competencies, familiarities, media-based knowledge and skills of the boys. This remaking would help overcome the 'defensive-offensive responses' (Willis 2000: 43) of the boys and engage them more actively and productively.

**Back to the Classroom - New Perspectives**

Questions addressed in this section are not posed in order to provide clear-cut answers but to explore a possible alternative, drawing on classroom observation and a prolonged engagement with the cultural mores and artefacts of this group of boys. I will not, as noted, provide a detailed pedagogic methodology nor advocate a dismissal of the EM programme or any others like it which may follow. The alternative model outlined is dedicated to the preservation of the type of classroom environment that EM can and does, occasionally, provide. This programme, when it ran well, offered a vibrant space in which the boys wanted to participate, to disagree, discuss and debate with their teacher and with each other, both the ways in which they perceive the world around them and their role in it. The programme, when it did not run well, provoked upset, prolonged silences, subversion and disengagement. By adopting and adapting the question posed by Gee, I hope to explore the way in which EM sometimes 'facilitates getting itself learned' (2003: 6) whereas at other times, it seems to actively discourage engagement and participation (ibid).

Understanding how the programme works (or doesn’t work) in the class is essential to any attempt to suggest a new direction for EM. A greater understanding also provides an important insight into the regular clashes between teacher, materials, students and culture.
In order to structure these insights, I have divided the vignettes under the illustrative headings of ‘successful’, ‘failed’ and ‘moderate’ sessions. Descriptively speaking, a ‘successful’ class denotes one in which the boys are engaged, enjoy themselves and are receptive to the challenge being laid down by the programme. These classes were relatively rare and accounted for a small percentage of the total classes attended. A ‘failed’ class does not denote one in which the boys are loud and messing around. Rather, a loud class full of chat and debate actually indicated a ‘successful’ or ‘moderate’ session with the boys visibly relaxed and comfortable in the environment. Instead, a ‘failed’ class is marked by an awkward silence and a complete withdrawal and disengagement on the part of the boys. ‘Moderate’ classes typically are neither hated nor loved by the boys. The atmosphere does not run as high as in a ‘successful’ class in terms of engagement and enjoyment but equally, the boys do not feel alienated or irritated by the materials as they do in a markedly bad session.

The very fact that the boys are alienated and genuinely feel threatened by some of the programme materials is representative of a problem at the level of overall programme approach rather than a problem at the level of delivery. As noted throughout, all of the teachers interviewed in the course of this research, and particularly Hillside’s Paul, are highly sensitive to the needs of their students. Despite this, with a difficult and disputed programme, such as EM, added resolve is needed to capture and hold boys’ attention and participation. Because Paul was, more often than not, open to the boys’ interests and experiences, classes sometimes began with a statement or expression of interest made by one or more students. In marked distinction to this, classes that took their lead completely
from the programme worksheets and materials generally floundered because they failed to reflect ‘reality’ or relevance to the boys. On occasion this seemed like a self-fulfilling prophecy as often on ‘off days,’ when the boys were grumpy or Paul himself was ‘not in the humour for it,’ the programme materials were given more of a central role to play. On several particularly bad days, when it seemed that no one felt like doing anything, the programme video was used, with, as will be seen, a predictably negative response.

‘Getting (Or Not Getting) Learned’

Throughout the programme there are moments of genuine enjoyment, connection and productivity, although these are experienced against a fairly constant backdrop of disagreement with the programme’s aims and ethos. While the disagreement is fairly continuous it is not, in itself, a certain indicator of total opposition. Nor should this disagreement or defensiveness necessarily be regarded as wholly negative, as in fact this can open up a useful and productive space in which the boys may find themselves obliged to examine closely their own prejudices and positions. Nevertheless, unmistakeable signs of an irritated and insulted group of boys are frequently visible, most plainly illustrated through that powerful action in the student lexicon of resistance - switching off mentally and withdrawing all interest and willingness to engage. This is generally resorted to only when there is no possibility of extracting any more fun out of the situation or topic and is generally led, as discussed in chapter three, by the class ‘joker’ or ‘clown’.

Darren, and his counterpart in the second class, Brendan, as ‘jokers’ effectively set the mood and the tone for many of the EM classes. When they cease to make jokes, the rest
of the class usually follow their lead. Because they can generally be relied upon to
provide a laugh or to lighten the tone both are often singled out to offer an answer in an
otherwise silent class. McLaren (1999: 160-164) notes the importance of the ‘class
clown’ and both boys, though occasionally disruptive, are not unappreciated by Paul.
With their humour they provide a release valve for the simmering frustrations of the
classroom and yet all the while remain astute judges of the classroom mood, pulling back
and leading the silence whenever it is felt to be necessary. Efforts to provoke laughter
often come at crisis moments in a class and are a clear attempt by boys to ‘take charge’ of
the material or to control material by re-situating it in a context they can understand and
relate to on their own terms. When the programme fails to address the boys ‘where they
are’ and gives them neither a credible alternative position, nor incentive to come to the
programme, humour is used to bring it back to their level. This is seen in the following
short extracts that outline the difference in atmosphere and mood between a ‘failed’ class
and a regular or ‘moderate’ class. In a ‘failed’ class the mood is a constant, whereas in a
‘moderate’ class the atmosphere can switch from happy to furious to silly and back to
serious over the course of one session.

A ‘Failed’ Class

As noted the majority of EM classes that go well or are enjoyable, are focused on
relatively neutral topics, or, as will be seen in ‘The Murder Hunt’, appeal to boys through
their cultural competencies and strengths. In the case of a ‘failed’ class, however, there is
a breakdown in communication and understanding. This breakdown occurs between the
programme materials and methodology, the teacher, the students and the perception of
the motivations behind the behaviours or attitudes being 'corrected' or challenged in the
particular session. The programme video provides an excellent example of this gap in
understanding.

Throughout, the majority of classes I observed had moments that went badly yet it was
rare that an entire 40 minute class would pass in a disagreeable silence. When a class
does start to go badly, usually a subject change, a cathartic joke or a silly comment is
enough to jolt the boys back into a ‘good mood’. Jolting them back into a ‘good mood’
does not necessarily suggest that they return to serious discussion but simply back into
some form of engagement and participation, even if it is just back to messing around. For
example, in classes where difficult topics such as homosexuality or domestic violence
came up, the boys become extremely defensive. This was particularly the case in relation
to their negative views about ‘gays’ and they were reluctant to talk about such issues.

Immediately on the defensive, they waited, as noted, to be challenged on their views.

In two class discussions about men and violence, and men and household responsibilities
the boys aggressively defended their traditional attitudes towards work, women and
power. Yet, in both these classes, as seen in the extracts reproduced from fieldnotes
below, a joke or ridiculous comment was enough to disarm the mounting tension and
allow the class to either move on to a new point of interest or to simply finish up in a
positive and relaxed atmosphere:
Paul: What does domestic mean? In the house or home. So domestic violence is violence in the home... What kind of men might we be talking about here?

Eoin: Mental cases.

David: Junkies, not right in the head like...

Graham: He might just be, like, have a bit of a temper just.

Paul: So naturally hot headed?

Graham: It depends on the situation like, someone might have grown up with it, seen it in their own house.

Paul: Does it happen often do you think?

Graham: I dunno...

Eoin: Yeah, all the time I’d say.

Paul: Is it [domestic violence] just within the family? Could it be somewhere else? Between boyfriend and girlfriend?

Class: [Silence.]

Paul: Would it happen in a relationship with young people at all do you think?

Class: [Silence.]

Bernard: [In a falsetto.] Boyfriend and boyfriend sir! He’d be hitting his bitch! [Laughter erupts.] (3rd March 2003)

Towards the end of a session with the second class and in an increasingly edgy debate about the role of men and women in the home, the following exchange occurred:

Paul: What would your idea be so when you get married or take a partner? Would you want to be at home with the children? Would she?

Class: [Silence.]

Paul: Would you send them to crèche? To a childminder? How many fellas went to a childminder ever?
Darren: Sir, I still go. [The class erupts in loud and relieved laughter and Paul cannot resist joining in.] (8th March 2004)

In a ‘failed’ class the atmosphere is unpleasant and uncomfortable. The boys disengage completely. There is no ‘banter’, no messing. The boys sit in their desks silently, giving the outward appearance of the perfect students while refusing to participate except when strongly prompted or otherwise ‘forced’ to take part. The classroom space in a ‘failed’ class is characterised by a total lack of interaction on all sides. The boys do not chat or squabble with each other or with Paul. There is no teasing or enjoyment. The boys sit rigidly as opposed to other classes where they are relaxed and feel free to sprawl around in their desks. Every second of the 40 minute period is felt: time moves slowly and is punctuated with long silences wherein questions from Paul hang in the air until he has to name, or point to a student in order to get an answer. More often than not, Paul will not get a complete answer and is usually forced to answer the question himself.

Fieldnotes reflect the lack of conversation or movement in a ‘failed’ class. In ‘successful’ or ‘moderate’ classes so much is usually going on that I rarely stop writing and am often still making notes at the school gates on my way out. In a ‘failed’ class fieldnotes are confined to the physical appearance of the room, how the boys are sitting, what they look like and where Paul is. There is little conversation, nor is there much focus on the topic up for discussion. Little happens in these classes. A ‘failed’ class does not contain any ‘drama’ and it is not the site for a heated argument or a debate as either would presume a level of engagement and commitment on behalf of those involved. The room is permeated by a sullen resentment and is unrelieved by any humour or levity. Paul, in one
of the examples that follows in the next section, turns to Darren, 15 or so minutes into a session, in the hope of provoking a joke or a 'smart-alec' response from him which may lift the mood. He is however, rebuffed and this effectively sets the tone for the rest of the group who proceed to sit out the clock in a stony silence.

Mentally Healthy

The class session discussed here comes from the Relationships, Health and Sexuality (EM 2000: 167) theme in the programme and is one of three classes focused on health. The first class in this section of the programme looks at physical health. In this case, it went relatively well, with the boys enjoying themselves and actively participating. An extract from this class is reproduced here:

Paul: What about organic foods? What does organic mean? What kind of stuff can you get that is organic?
Darren: [Shouting.] Vegetables! Chickens, sir!
Martin: Eggs and chickens who are always outside ...
Paul: They can be. Organic means something grown or reared with no chemicals, so any organic animals would have no antibiotics given to them and if it were vegetables they would have no pesticides on them or no chemical fertiliser, and...
Ian: [Interrupting and provoking much laughter.] Just shit so, sir...
Paul: [Smiling but ignoring the interruption] For instance so lads, can you get organic chips? Would you be able to do that?
Sean: No. Chips are bad for you.
Paul: Wait, I’ll ask again. Can you get organic chips?
Class: No!
Paul: Where do chips come from?
Ian: [Encouraged by the laughter.] From the chipper!
Paul: Where do chips come from?
Martin: From spuds.
Paul: So organic chips would come from ... [He pauses here for an answer but gets only more laughing in response.] From organic potatoes. Well I won’t be asking any of you to do the shopping, I’d be afraid what you’d come back to me with...
Darren: Coffee. [Making a disgusted face.]
Paul: How many lads like coffee? Hands up. [He puts up his own.]
Ian: It’s disgusting the smell of it.
Darren: There’s an awful smell down around there [laughing and gesturing in the direction of Paul’s office.] (Paul brews fresh coffee each morning.) 19 (26th January 2004)

This extract shows how this type of class is enjoyable and informative for the boys, even if it appears that nothing of substantial value is covered. There were several classes where it seemed as though Paul and the boys were simply having a chat, teasing each other and making jokes. This type of atmosphere is only possible in classes where difficult topics or the challenging of engrained beliefs are not on the agenda. This is obviously not something which could account for the entirety of a programme like this. The relaxed exchange of ‘banter’ above is in stark contrast to tension evident in the following session, entitled ‘Focusing on Mental Health’ which took place a week later, on 2 February 2004. This class is clearly addressing a far more difficult topic - mental illness and depression - and the boys, as could be expected, react very differently to it. The class begins with the information that one in nine people will be affected by mental illness at some point in their lives and with an extract from 1966, by the Irish poet Paul Durcan. The poem 1966 is part of a series that deals with Durcan’s experience of being an in-patient in a
psychiatric institution in England in the 1960s (see figure 5.04a below). Paul hands out
the first sheet and the boys are asked to read the poem quietly to themselves.

1966 (An Extract)

Cliff and Cheryl are chirpy
With pay movie tickets,
The current hit
Of the charts, 'The Eve of Destruction'
By Barry McGuire.
All afternoon we listen
To it again and again.
'The Eve of Destruction'
By Barry McGuire.

Bark in the mammatory yard,
Lying on my back in my trolley bed
Wearing tights out,
In my striped pyjamas,
Listening to Terry
Counting bubble gum
(Aud by David Brown on piano)
The word in black flippers;
He roughs two miles a day
Pacing the word in black flippers.
He never speaks, there is a space of a

Girls somewhere between his ears
And his mouth, his eyes
From a spring, dark eyes.

He has two big dimples,
One on each side of his forehead,
Two volubilious emotions
I grip tight the headrail
Behind my head
In stop myself screaming,
So tight; I can feel
My knuckles whitening,
I dream of my father.
What is my father?
Will I ever see him again?

(from Daddy, Daddy, p. 128 – 127)

EXPLORATIONS

1. Did you like the poem?

2. The ordinariness of the world of Cliff and Cheryl is contrasted with the world of Terry and David Brown. In what way are their worlds different? Are their worlds similar in any respect? You might like to read the whole poem to see if there is any similarity.

3. He has two big dimples.
   One on each side of his forehead.
   What do you think caused these?

4. Why do you think Paul Durcan
   (Grips) tight the headrail
   Behind my head
   To stop myself screaming?

5. How would you describe the tone of the poem?

Figure 5.04a-b: Student Material - Focusing on Mental Health

Although things deteriorate rapidly, the class does not start off badly. The boys are lively to begin with, chatting and messing around. They take their worksheets with the usual level of interest. Paul explains as he hands out the sheets that they will be talking about
mental health and the possible reasons why some people might suffer from or experience
different mental illnesses. As he explains this, the boys begin to make ‘cross’ faces and to
sigh loudly. As he goes on and they look at their worksheets, the atmosphere subtly
undergoes a shift. While they read the poem Paul writes a heading on the board, ‘reasons
for poor mental health’. As he is doing this, the noise level rises, and complaints emerge
from the hubbub such as ‘it’s like fucking English.’ In other words, because they have to
read a poem and talk about it, it seems to the boys as if they are in English class, as
opposed to taking it easy in EM.

Cutting through the sudden groundswell of discontentment, Paul raises a question about
the poem. He asks, ‘What is he gripping and why is he gripping it?’ Instead of the usual
raft of jokes that might have been expected here, Paul gets blank stares. He asks again,
‘Why do people grip things tightly? Afraid? That they might be falling off something?’
He directs the last comment to Darren, hoping he will pick up the joke, but is ignored. As
no one answers his question, Paul points to one boy, Gavin, and says ‘Tell us.’ He then
asks his question again. Gavin shrugs and says ‘yeah’ all the while staring at a point over
Paul’s left shoulder. The class is now completely silent, with all the boys facing forward
towards Paul who is standing at the top of the class. There is no messing and no talking.
As a result, because I do not have to keep up with the myriad conversations that normally
flow around the room, I have much more time to look around me. In contrast to today’s
slowness, Paul is usually pushed for time. He often comments after class that there is
never enough time allocated to programmes and issues like EM, nor is there enough time
to get good discussions going:
Very often you'd have something good going along, talking, and the bell would go and you’d lose it and take the whole next session trying to get it back (24th March 2003).

Paul moves back to the blackboard where, picking up a piece of chalk, he asks for any reasons as to why some people might suffer from mental illness. Again his question is met by a blank stare and he is forced to supply possible reasons himself. He writes - 'Bad childhood,' 'Violence', 'Abuse', 'Bereavement' and 'Stress' - on the blackboard, calling them out as he goes and pausing, hopefully, for any comments from the boys. Pointing at a boy in the front row he asks ‘anything else?’ and, even though it is already on the board, he receives an unenthusiastic ‘Violence’ as a reply. Paul continues, ‘Now I am throwing this in because it is so obvious that most people would not even think of it...’ he writes ‘Drugs/Alcohol’ on the board and turns back to the boys, inviting any comments or thoughts. At this point, 20 minutes into the class, the atmosphere is leaden and all of the faces that I can see are fixed firmly in scowls. Attempting to move the class on, Paul distributes the next worksheets, skipping over the rest of the ‘Explorations’ that follow the poem and continuing on to further discussion of the factors contributing to mental illness (see figure 5.04c). Paul keeps up a continual flow of talk while handing out the sheets. He goes through all of the possible factors, asking the boys to think about these and to fill out their sheets accordingly. None of the boys makes any serious effort to do this and the majority of pages are either left blank or scribbled on.
Poor Mental Health is caused by a number of factors. These could also include:

- Physical causes, e.g. being injured or deprived of food
- Social causes, e.g. being deprived of contact with others
- Psychological causes, e.g. feeling uncared for
- Structural causes, e.g. poverty

Examples of each include:

- Feeling uncared for,
- Growing up scared of a parent,
- Not being able to express feelings,
- Inability to cope with problems,
- Bullying,
- Exam Pressure,
- Poverty,
- Own Expectations,
- Genetic inheritance,
- Unemployment,
- Insecurity,
- Racial harassment,
- Sexual abuse,
- A sense of failure,
- Absence of friends,
- Parental expectations.

Figure 5.04c: Student Material - Focusing on Mental Health.

Moving on to another angle, Paul asks the boys to raise their hands if they would ‘have a drink ever’. They all, after a pause, grudgingly raise their hands, some half way, others barely off their desks. There is still no chat and none of the normal comments and finger pointing - ‘he’s always drunk sir’ – one would normally expect to see and hear. The class limps on with Paul dragging answers out of the boys. He asks ‘Why is it that, statistics tell us, men are more likely to commit suicide?’ Addressing the entire class yields no response and so he is forced to cast around for an answer. He picks out Kevin, the ‘good boy’ or ‘suck’ of the class. Even Kevin does not want to get involved, but as he does not want to disobey the teacher either, he mutters something about ‘how men don’t talk…’ before trailing off. Enthused, Paul tries to encourage him, ‘you’re getting close there, go on…’ but Kevin has nothing further he wants to add. Kevin’s comment is the last and this class ends with a room of resentful boys, an irate teacher and almost five minutes of pointed silence (during which the boys were nominally ‘doing the worksheet’) as everyone waited for the bell to go.
A number of factors contributed to this class going badly. The difficult nature of the piece, the methodology and materials (working from a poem is too reminiscent of homework), and the range of topics expected to be covered in one session all added to the unpleasant atmosphere which settled over the room within five minutes. It is difficult to think how a topic like this might be approached differently but perhaps starting from a point with which the students are comfortable and by using language with which they are familiar with may offer a more positive start. The reluctance to draw upon the cultural references of young men is evident throughout, but the programme video provides the most readily accessible example of the failure to do this and of its consequences. The video missed its mark dramatically and gave rise to the only real incidences of classroom indiscipline seen throughout the entirety of the fieldwork. It was also the only time Paul was forced to actually get ‘cross’. This next extract shows how the video produced a different, perhaps more familiar form of a ‘failed’ class, one that was certainly counterproductive with regards to the stated aims of EM.

**Video Nasties?**

The programme video is a perfect example of the reluctance to draw upon the cultural mores and references of young men, and young working class men in particular. The adolescent and adult men and women who appear in the video irritate the Hillside boys so much that they simply reinforce their convictions as to what is, in fact, a desirable masculinity. The people featured in the video, as discussed in detail in chapter three, are so far removed from the lives and experiences of the Hillside boys that they have no reason to relate to them. Expecting teenaged boys to relate to and empathise with a
selection of middle class house husbands and female academics is futile. Leaving the reliance on adult figures aside and looking at the few young people featured, the gap in relevancy continues, as does the problematic and skewed representation in terms of gender. By skewed I am referring to the way in which the teenaged girls featured in the video are evidently middle class and from urban backgrounds. They are unfairly compared to three, working class, rural, adolescent boys who mumble, avoid looking at the camera, snigger and are clearly uncomfortable. The problem does not lie in the inclusion of young working class rural men in the video but in the fact that the video actually succeeds in presenting girls as both intimidating and threateningly dismissive of boys of the same age. It pairs this with a representation of boys as slow-witted, under-confident and insecure. This is an unequal representation by the programme. For example, the segment featuring teenaged girls who speak about sexism is not counterbalanced by a group of young men from a comparable background and level of articulacy speaking on the same subject. It is instead ‘countered’ by a group of much older men in a totally different group context, offering no incentive for boys to revise the negative opinions they hold of both groups. This does nothing to encourage the cooperation and interest the video and wider programme requires from its intended audience in order to be successful.

In fact, so dedicated was the programme to the presentation of the fullest possible diversity of the range of masculine identities that it was unable to fully explore the immense attraction to traditional forms of macho masculinity adhered to by the majority of boys. Had the programme taken as its starting point that sole form of hard-man
masculinity, exploring its unreality, its mental, physical and emotional limits, along with its inherently self-destructive nature when it occurs anywhere outside of the fantasy and fantastic worlds of film, music and games, it might conversely have had more success. Couching the student materials in language that pupils can readily understand and allowing boys to populate it with familiar figures and characters that they can relate to might not present such a ‘politically correct’ and diverse a video/programme, but it might have more of an impact upon its intended audience. I am not suggesting here that CJ from GTA: San Andreas, is a suitable role model. I am, however, stating that as a character he is attractive to boys and young men. Therefore before CJ, or the type of masculinity he represents, can be dislodged, he must first be fully understood. Ignoring the attraction of the physically strong, aggressive, unemotional, and above all ‘cool’ male persona that is so much a part of the Hillside boys’ (and those of their peers) sense of identity leaves the video in a position of almost complete irrelevance. The boys are so attached to this fantasy form of macho masculinity that they are not willing to entertain the notion of diverging from it, especially when they are not being offered a viable alternative. As these boys seem to personify every ‘bad element’ of youthful masculinity as imagined by the programme (and by the media) it is unsurprising that they, as well as being opposed to the material, are also several steps removed from it. This video, then, presents a perfect example of how both a misunderstanding of and a failure to see the larger processes behind the negative characteristics of youthful working class masculinities ultimately combine and reinforce the conviction of ‘rightness’ and ‘coolness’ among the perpetrators of ‘wrongness’. It also further emphasises, by failing to acknowledge or to make reference to the interests and motivations of boys at this age, both the disdain with
which their culture is viewed and conversely the potentially positive influence and power
that this maligned culture has to offer in the classroom.

'They're Not Men'

This further example of the reluctance to reference ‘boy culture’ comes in one of the
video segments focusing on a men’s collective known as the ‘South East Men’s
Network’. This clip features a collection of men who speak (in the disgusted words of
one of the Hillside boys) in ‘a born again’ type of vernacular about their experiences both
of masculinity and of forming relationships before, and after, joining this men’s group.
The effect of the overly sanctimonious and thoroughly ‘unmanly’ tone of the piece has an
immediate effect on the class. In the first few minutes the boys respond to the clip
through mockery and laughter. (One of the men featured is called Jimmy Long and his
name inspires a burst of hysteria with exaggerated miming of large genitalia) As the film
continues, however, the boys simply switch off. Their lack of interest is understandable in
response to the type of comments made in the film by the leader/guru of the men’s group,
Alan O’Neill, see figure 5.05 below:

Figure 5.05: The South East Men’s Network Meeting, led by Alan O’Neill, left.
O’Neill sets the tone for the piece, and for much of the video, in an extremely patronising speech to the camera:

I think sexism is a key issue for men. I see sexism as basically affecting women, and a key step for men to take is to realise that the information we’ve got growing up has made us sexist. It’s not true of us, we are conditioned to be sexist and we need to admit that and say ‘I am sexist’ (EM Video 2000).

He then, in the same overly calm voice, goes on to discuss the way in which men talk to women:

What you have to listen for is tone. It’s the tone in a man’s voice that is disparaging, is dismissive, ok? The words might be fine, ok, but it’s the tone, that when I’m talking to a woman that my tone is dismissive, disparaging [pauses] rejecting, ok? That’s when I know and I can go ‘oh, there, I did it again’… Now it’s not my fault that I do it because that’s the way I’ve heard men talking to women over the years and once we have that awareness then to say ‘I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have talked to you like that’. So it is to take the responsibility then as well… so we have the awareness of the sexism and we are admitting that we are sexist and that’s how we can take steps against it and work towards equality (EM Video 2000).

The boys are, as we have seen throughout, undoubtedly sexist, but this is not the way to challenge that sexism, or to present O’Neill’s position as being an acceptable and workable perspective on masculinity. The boys responded to this particular segment, beyond the first burst of incredulous laughter, by totally opting out. By the first two minutes into the segment one boy is surreptitiously eating a bag of crisps under his desk lid, another is painstakingly peeling narrow strips of paper off the side of his worksheet, while the rest of the class either stare vacantly at the window (even though the bottom
half of the glass is frosted and they cannot see out) or thrash around in their desks every time Paul turns his head away. They are sprawled in their desks, yawning, talking, laughing and fighting noisily with occasional bursts of competitive pen clicking. When the segment finally ends, Paul attempts to bring them into a conversation about what was expressed in the video. The boys are slow to respond and, on principle because once again they feel righteously insulted, they disagree vociferously with everything Paul says. The consensus amongst the boys is that these men are not men, they are creeping female apologists or in their words ‘sad wankers’ who ‘wish they were women’. In these instances they are immediately on the defensive and this brings about the particularly combative exchanges that punctuate the otherwise pointed silence. In contrast to this, offering a different and perhaps overall more familiar view, the class session which follows shows an example of a ‘moderate’ class and illustrates another type of classroom atmosphere. In this session the boys are not insulted or annoyed by the materials, yet they remain largely unengaged by them, drifting between brief shows of interest and periodic bouts of ‘messing’.

A ‘Moderate’ Class

This class, entitled ‘No Place to Go’ (12th January 2004) was typical of the vast majority of EM classes. It was not a ‘failed’ class or a waste of time. However, the boys present enjoyed the class time as opposed to engaging with the class material. They spent most of the 40 minute period entertaining themselves by clicking their pens and staring into space for prolonged periods of time. Generally, throughout the class the boys answered Paul only when prompted. Occasionally they joined in with more enthusiasm, but only when
the material afforded them a chance to be funny or to turn the class around onto their terms. The student materials include, on the first page, an extract from a poem and some statistical information, a worksheet (figure: 5.06a) with a drawing of a house on it (which the boys disparagingly assert is ‘too young’ for them) and a list and set of questions or ‘Explorations’ (see figure: 5.06b). The materials are somewhat confused, and are therefore confusing, as they seek to address ‘homelessness’ in its broadest sense and in all its possible guises. The ‘Key Question’ asked is: ‘In what ways, if any, does the experience of homelessness differ between men and women?’ (EM 2000: 158). It begins from the position of the homeless exile, presenting the specific example of the Irish exile in London. The materials then skip quickly to descriptions of homelessness, to the question ‘Who are the homeless?’ to a list of ‘who the homeless are’ and finally moving on to mark the distinction between men and women’s experiences of homelessness. These are important and interesting differences but making them apparent all at once does not facilitate a proper discussion or understanding of the issue.

The boys are not able to engage fully with any of the issues that arise in this session. The teacher methodology suggests four steps for this class and each one of these could constitute a 40 minute discussion on its own, without worksheets or examples. For instance, the historical situation of Irish immigrants in London and New York is extremely relevant and could be used to address the negative perceptions in relation to contemporary migrants who come to Ireland. Had the conversation moved away from the materials the question could have been used to make connections and draw parallels with the way in which people from other countries seeking work now come to Ireland, and
face the same or similar situations. There is a distinct lack of context to the materials, and as a result of this the class moves slowly and distractedly with much hopping back and forth as Paul tries to remind them of the key points and keep them on topic.

Figure 5.06a: Student Material focusing on gender and homelessness
Now compare your list with the following:

1. People who move from one friend’s or relative’s house to another on a regular basis.
2. Ex-prisoners, usually men, with no homes to return to when they are released.
3. Young people who have lived in care and have no safe or suitable place to go to when they leave care.
4. People who live in private rented accommodation who earn a low income or who receive social welfare, and who are at risk of being evicted because they are unable to pay the increasing rental costs.
5. Long-term psychiatric patients (i.e. people with mental health problems) who leave psychiatric care and have nowhere suitable to go.
6. People who are living in squats, in dangerous and insecure buildings.
7. People who live in night shelters, hostels and refuges.
8. Refugees and asylum seekers.
9. Families who are placed in bed-and-breakfasts and hostels because they have no place else to go to.
10. Returned emigrants, usually single, separated or divorced men, who have lost contact with their families and have nowhere to live.
11. People who sleep rough, in doorways, under bridges, underground in subways, in cardboard boxes.
12. People who move because of harassment from neighbours.
13. People who move because of domestic violence.
14. Low income, gay and lesbian people who are forced to leave their homes when their sexual orientation has become known.
15. People with alcohol and family breakdown problems.

Figure 5.06b: Student Material focusing on gender and homelessness

‘No Place to Go’

This class begins with the students in a lively mood. It is the first EM class after the Christmas break and the boys have not yet settled back in. Paul starts the class off by handing out the first worksheet, which includes an extract from a poem entitled *On Exiles and Defeats*. Rather than handing the sheets to one boy and having him pass the bundle back, Paul walks up and down the aisles handing them out individually. As he does so he makes eye contact with each boy, welcoming him back and engaging in a little ‘banter’. Pausing at one desk where Gary is slumped over the table Paul has to hold out the sheet for several seconds before he is noticed. Gary, rubbing his eyes, takes the sheet as Paul remarks ‘you had a good break I’d say, you’re very rested looking altogether.’
This good humoured reminder to ‘wake up’ provokes a loud response from the rest of the class. Students exclaim, ‘It’s the first Monday back, sir!’ Some add, ‘It’s way too early for this,’ while others simply state, ‘we’re knackered’. Once everyone has a worksheet Paul asks them to read it through quickly to themselves. There is a steady flow of chat and messing going on during this reading time. The boys are restless and continuously shifting and shuffling around in their desks. Paul, who is pacing slowly around the back of the class, cuts through the chat and rustling by asking loudly, ‘What kind of homelessness is mentioned here’. He gets no response, except for a muffled ‘the kind with no house’ from the currently un-policed front desks. Paul asks again ‘What, in this case, lads, is the creator of the homelessness? Anyone at all?’ Shaking his head he adds, ostensibly to himself, ‘you’re all very sluggish this morning … very lazy this morning…’

Moving back up to the front of the class, Paul rephrases the question and asks it in a more deliberate tone of voice. This is one with which the boys are familiar and which obviously requires a quick response. Paul asks, ‘So. What kind of homelessness?’ One of the boys at the front of the class, Ian, answers him, ‘When people live on the streets sir’.

Although Ian was being serious, his response produces much laughter and further scuffling. Paul refocuses the class again, this time by clearing his throat in a pointed manner while holding up the sheet, with his finger pointing to the poem. The boys take note of the shift in Paul’s demeanour and although the chatting and messing is still continuing, they at least pretend to read their sheets, ducking their heads down and laughing into their hands. Although slightly off topic, some of the ongoing conversation,
as overhead from two boys sitting close to my desk at the back of the room, is also about homelessness.

Gary: [...] they were all getting [drinking] down by the Fáis [an office building in the city centre] and a mad [homeless] fella tried to take a can [of beer] off of him!

Eoin: Did he get it [the can]. What age was he?

Gary: He gave it. Your man was mental, he said. All dirty like and he didn’t want it back after him.

The conversation is interrupted by Paul moving towards the back of the room, talking as he goes. Paul is trying to get the class to focus on the immigration factor as it is presented by the poet and once more he asks, ‘What kind of homelessness is talked about here?’ Answering himself he starts to say ‘immigrants’ and is cut-off as the boys realise that this is the answer he is looking for. A chorus of ‘immigrants’ ‘immigration’ and ‘England’ begins. Nodding, Paul starts to read through the poem, putting careful emphasis on particular words and phrases such as ‘friends far away,’ ‘alien rain’ and ‘stranger’.

Stopping by Darren’s desk he asks him ‘if she [the poet] had used crying instead of sobbing would there be a difference?’ Darren, in his primary role as class joker responds with a broad grin, solicitously informing Paul that ‘sobbing would be when you are depressed sir, not just normally sad like’. Smiling, Paul agrees with him and moves on to the next desk. No one laughs at Darren when he makes this comment as it is clear that while he is being ‘serious’ he is not taking it seriously, unlike in previous instances in which other boys have been perceived as engaging too much with the material and thus going against the prevailing mood in the class.
Stopping at the next desk, which is one up from mine, Paul asks for another word for 'immigrant'. He gets ‘illegal aliens’, ‘asylum seeker’, and from Darren, ‘a drifter’. As this is clearly a joke, Darren gets a huge laugh and sits smiling and very pleased with himself. Paul shakes his head and says:

Are ye familiar with the word ‘displaced’ lads? They would be displaced people. These are men and women who not by choice are away from their homes and families and friends. Is that by choice do you think? (12th January 2004).

He gets no response to this last question and rather than pursue it with a clearly uninterested bunch he begins to pass out the second work sheet. (The sheets are given out only as they are immediately ready to be used to prevent the boys looking on ahead and also to keep them focused on the task at hand.) Paul has, following the worksheet logic, and encouraged by the lack of interest in the plight of immigrants, moved on to work through the listing of the different descriptions of homelessness:

Paul: Now, inadequate shelter. A building that was falling down, or that was in poor repair, maybe a squat. The next one, inadequate privacy or space? How about that one? A three bedroom house with twelve people living in it. Is that adequate?

Class: No!

Eoin: I’ve to share a room sir, you’ve no privacy!

Darren: For what? [Laughter].

Paul: [Ignoring them] When you go to turn on the tap you expect the water to be...?

Ian: Wet!

Paul: [Through the laughter] Wet, yes, what else though?
Eoin: Hot water, sir.
Paul: And clean. You expect there to be water that is hot or cold and clean. Tell me this now, how many fellas live in a house with no bathroom?
Darren: I do sir, we go in the back garden! [Laughter].
Paul: Of course ye are laughing at me. Ye all have toilets but some don’t.
Class: [Laughter].
Paul: How about living in a caravan or a tent or a mobile home all year? Now will ye fill in the house (12th January 2004).

As Paul asks them to begin the exercise, there is a mass dive for bags. As per usual, students have begun the class with nothing on their desks. No textbooks, copy books or pencil cases are visible. The noise mounts rapidly and Paul is forced to ask for quiet, a quiet that he maintains by patrolling the aisles as the boys fill in the worksheet. It appears on the surface that the boys are diligently ‘filling in their houses’, Darren in particular is scribbling frantically, calling out his answers as he writes them down. One boy opposite me, however, is busy doodling on his house. At the same time, the boy in front of me and the boy in front of him, who has turned around in his seat, are continuing their earlier conversation and ignoring their sheets. The rest of the class are now talking and noting this, Paul begins to move around the room and to look over peoples’ shoulders so that they begin to write as he approaches them. Listing slurs such as ‘junkies, alcos [alcoholics], suicidal people, dirt bags,’ Darren provides a window onto the general perception of homeless people. While he does so, Paul settles on the side of an empty desk next to him in an effort to rein in his enthusiasm. This is causing the boys around him, who now seem to be writing down what he says on their own sheets, much hilarity. Paul hands out the third sheet which has a list numbering 15 examples for the boys to
compare to what they wrote in their ‘house’. Paul begins to work through this list, adding comments and asking questions as he goes. The boys listen for the first minute or first few examples and then go back to their conversations and messing around.

As they took their pencil cases out to fill in their worksheets the boys all have pens and rulers on their desks and several are now fighting with those pens and poking each other with rulers. Paul perseveres and occasionally one or two students will join in and answer a question or make a comment. Towards the end of the list Paul asks the class if they are listening. Ian informs him that the list ‘is all the same as what we said already’ and he goes on to declare that ‘that house is stupid.’ He continues by saying that, ‘it don’t even look like a house’ and several other boys adds, ‘It’s a kid’s house.’ The class is bored by the repetitiveness of the exercise and as the end of the class approaches, Paul finishes off the list. He does not hand out the last sheet which addresses the ‘Key Question’ of whether men and women experience homelessness differently although he has, in his working through of the list, emphasised this issue. (see figure 5.06b for this list). The bell is about to go to signal the end of class and Paul causes a mild panic as well as a frantic scribbling out of certain words and drawings as he asks for the sheets back. He walks the aisles collecting the sheets and occasionally raises an eyebrow or comments on the more liberally decorated papers. The bell rings and the room empties out in a flurry of shouting and banging of bags, leaving Paul and me to follow.

As usual, we discuss the class briefly on our way out with Paul pointing out what he feels to have gone well or not. Today we chat on the way down the corridor about the
difficulty of getting the boys back in the proper mindset for any class -not just EM- after the long Christmas break. Paul felt they were unsettled and a little more distracted than usual. However, as per the understanding of a ‘moderate’ class, this session did not go badly. The use of the poem to start discussion worked better here than in the previous class although a large amount of humour, presumably not intended by either the poet or the programme designer, was extracted from the poem. The boys enjoy this class, they join in occasionally and are willing to go along with things in a particularly non-committal manner. In contrast to this ‘take it or leave it’ attitude, the difference that appealing to their interests and cultural references makes is seen clearly in the final example in which I present a ‘successful’ class.

‘It’s like we’re in Law and Order Sir!’

This particular section of the programme produced one of the most successful sessions I have seen in this class context. The students were, as a group, interested and actively engaged, taking their task very seriously while still giving every indication of enjoying themselves. As it came about very early in the fieldwork (it was only the second class I had observed) it seemed to me, at that point, that the programme, if it continued like this, was destined to be extremely successful. Reflecting on this early prediction, it is obvious that several factors contributed to the ‘textbook’ running of this session. The fact that this section did not deal with sensitive or ‘embarrassing’ topics was certainly a contributory factor. Also important is the fact that ‘The Murder Hunt’ (14th October 2002) set out not to challenge views or opinions, as does the later material, but rather to look at how people operate and relate to one another in groups (EM 2000: 17-19). In relation to this class,
what really stood out and what was not seen again at any other point throughout the observation period, was the way in which the game-like structure of this exercise appealed to the boys. As shown in figure 5.07, they were given a challenge, a set of clues to work with, specific rules that applied to the world of the game and a set time limit in which to finish. The programme materials directly encouraged and allowed the boys to take charge, working independently without the need for the constant direction and policing from Paul, something which came to characterise the later classes. Paul, typical of his approach to the programme overall, did not stick entirely to the instructions but adapted them to suit this particular class.  

This class began with a hallway encounter as the boys approached loudly from the direction of the gym hall and the back classrooms while Paul and I came from the corridor leading to the office and main entrance hall. As usual, the boys' approach was accompanied by shoving, shouting and a general level of messing. As we neared the boys, Paul commented upon this latter saying, 'They are in fine voice today'. As we reached the classroom door he repeated his comment good naturedly to the boys:

Paul: You're all in fine voice today. I'm only sorry it's not a singing class.
Steven: We could just sing, Sir.
Neil: Yeah, Sir! Singing [breaks into song]

Paul laughs with the rest of the class and unlocking the door tells them all to wait outside for a minute. I enter the room with him and take a seat at the back of the class while Paul begins to move desks. Paul is arranging the desks to facilitate the running of 'The Murder
Hunt’ and has pushed ten desks together to form two lines so that the boys will be sitting facing each other, as though at a single long table with five on each side. There is a lone desk positioned at the top of the ‘table’. The boys are clamouring in the doorway, trying to see what he is doing, and some are still singing snatches of pop songs and football chants. Once Paul has arranged the desks to his satisfaction he allows the boys in to sit down. Once the fight for seats has been settled - none of the boys, sensing rightly that the lone desk at the top might mean extra work/attention in some capacity, want to sit there – Paul recaps quickly on what was covered last week. With this over, he addresses Liam, sitting in the lone seat and informs him that he has just ‘volunteered’ to be the class observer and reporter. This provokes much laughing and mocking from the rest of the class and Liam, as could perhaps be expected, is none too pleased.

The stated objectives of this class, as contained in the teacher guidelines, are to explore the ‘Key Question’ of how groups operate and work together. The subsidiary aims include developing an awareness of the way in which each individual contributes to the group and an understanding of how some ways of behaving can make group tasks difficult to complete. Paul does not mention any of these objectives and instead announces that they will be taking part, as detectives, in a ‘murder hunt’. He tells them that he will be handing out clues to them all except the ‘volunteer’ observer, Liam, who protests this strongly, proclaiming it to be unfair and declaring that he doesn’t want to do it. Paul ignores him and starts explaining the task. The students are to find out from the 30 clues he will distribute, the identity of the killer, the motive, the weapon, the time and the place of the killing.
The boys are clearly very interested and are all listening very closely. This includes Liam who, although still cross, seems to be coming round to the idea. Paul continues with the instructions saying that he can only take an answer from the group as a whole. In other words, they all have to agree on the five points listed above. Once the clues are handed out, the boys are not to move from their seats. They are not to pass clues to anyone else. They are not to show clues to anyone else and they are not to write anything down. They can only share their clues with each other by talking about them. Paul tells them that they have 15 minutes to fully solve the murder case through verbal communication only. He hands out the clues and moves towards the blackboard at the top of the classroom, stopping briefly by Liam to tell him ‘to keep a good eye on them [the rest of the class] now’.

The night porter in the hotel said he saw Mr Kelleher on the hotel stairs at around 12.15 a.m.

A golf club was found hidden in the laundry basket near Mr Scanlon’s room.

The night porter in the hotel said that when he saw Mr Kelleher he appeared to be staggering and he thought he was drunk.

A gun was found in the laundry basket outside Ms Murphy’s hotel room door.

The golf club which was found had traces of Mr Kelleher’s blood on it.

The gun found in the laundry basket had Mr Kelleher’s fingerprints on it and also Mr Scanlon’s.

The gun found in the laundry basket was owned by Mr Kelleher.

Mr Kelleher and Mr Johnston had a violent quarrel in the bar of the hotel during the day and Mr Kelleher threatened to have Mr Johnston sacked.

The night porter in the hotel said he saw Mr Kelleher’s wife go to Mr Scanlon’s room around 11.00 p.m.

Figure 5.07: The Murder Hunt – some of the 30 clues provided in the student material.
The atmosphere in the class is now one of urgent absorption. The boys are all hurriedly reading their clues and discussing who has what. Paul is at the top of the classroom, with his back turned to the boys, writing the five points which need solving on the board. He has no need to turn around and keep an eye on them, which, as I come to realise, rapidly becomes the norm in all the classes that follow. The boys have quickly worked out a strategy to get the answers and one boy in particular, Stephen, has assumed the leader position. Stephen takes charge and asks for the clues to be read with relation to the main points. In other words, he asks for anyone with a weapon clue to read it and then asks the same of anyone with a motive clue and so on. The boys all cooperate with this, sorting out their clues, reading them in turn and listening attentively to each other. Visually the class is a study in concentration. Each time someone speaks or reads out a clue all the boys lean forward to listen and then lean back in their desks to think before the next clue is read out. While this is going on Paul has finished writing on the board and is sitting on an empty desk in the corner, totally unnoticed.

After about ten or so minutes he stands up and reminds the class that they only have five minutes left and that there must be consensus on all five questions. The boys have, in this brief period, worked out the motive, the weapon, the time and the place of the killing. They have done this quietly with no ‘messing’ and only the occasional loud voice or excited announcement as someone thinks he has the answer. They are divided, however, on who the actual murderer might be, with an almost equal split between two of the characters provided. Paul, happy with what he has seen, acknowledges and accepts the boys’ lack of consensus on this point and he reads out the real answer to cheers and hand-
shakes. Paul is very pleased with how well the class has gone and the boys have thoroughly enjoyed themselves, as evidenced from the complete attention given, with no teacher intervention or direction, to their task. The task finishes up with Liam being asked to give his observer’s report on how the group worked. He gives a full and detailed account of who took charge and of the way in which the group organised the information they had and put it together ‘like it was a jigsaw’. Paul agrees with him and, saying, ‘even though you weren’t too happy about it at first,’ he praises him for doing a good job. He also praises the rest of the group for working well together and then moves on to lead a lively discussion until the bell rings for the end of class about some of the issues which can arise in group work.

This class was an example of the EM programme working at the level for which it was intended – that of the boys’ interests and abilities. This section reflected their enjoyment of the fiction and television/filmic genre of the crime thriller/detective drama and meant that the boys were willing and able to engage fully with the materials, an occurrence that did not appear exceptional to me so early in the fieldwork period. However, looking back on the time spent in the classroom, this stands out as the one of the relatively few sessions which genuinely and positively appealed to the Hillside boys. Other sessions had moments of absorption and real interest but nothing like the sustained attention and eagerness which characterised this in-class detective work with one boy commenting ‘it’s like we’re in Law and Order sir’. Returning, then, to Gee’s question of ‘how video games get themselves learned,’ we can apply this to the programme and in this case to how these materials (about group work, about the importance of listening and about the
importance of cooperation in a group task) get actively learned or actively engaged with as the case may be. Gee lists the elements of enticement, practice, reward and identity as being essential foundations of video games that involve players in the cycle of thought, which, he suggests, comes into effect when playing games like GTA, or in this case when taking part in a Murder Hunt.

Enticement

The boys are enticed by this approach. The game-like structure is familiar to them. They are used to the structure of rules (time and movement restrictions) which apply to the virtual world of any game. In addition to this, they practice unravelling and mentally collating clues every time they read a thriller or watch a crime show. Even the fact that they are unable to write in this game - a prohibition that might make the process of solving the murder more difficult - adds to the authenticity of the experience. Few boys are likely to settle down with a pen and paper to watch Law and Order or Crime Scene Investigation. The reward which comes with this methodology is, aside from the teacher’s praise, well within the context of the rewards gained in the virtual gaming world. The clear sense of satisfaction among the class is evidenced through the cheers, faked ‘serious hand-shaking’ and faux deep voiced ‘well done’s which break out as Paul reads the answer. The fact that the boys’ existing knowledge and hitherto unused/ignored television-watching skills have been acknowledged and shown to be effective in a classroom task contributes to the students’ productive discussion of working in a group.
The Murder Hunt also produced the ‘cycle of thought’ presented by Gee. The boys, on receipt of the 30 clues – each boy received three clues – used them to ‘probe’ and find out about the virtual world populated by the characters and the situation. As the clues were read out and began to be gathered into groups under motive, killer, weapon and so on, hypotheses were formed as to what had happened in this murder case. These were then ‘re-probed’ according to the full information available once the clues were all heard. This led to the final stage in the cycle wherein the boys tested, through discussion, the various possibilities and suspects and their relation to the evidence. This active engagement was in part due to the impersonal nature of the material being discussed. However, the most important aspect of this class was the way in which the boys responded with alacrity and genuine enthusiasm. This methodology turned what could have been, had it been handled less well, an extremely dull lesson into an interesting, productive and positive experience.

Pedagogy, Youth Culture and Resistance

As noted throughout this chapter, and throughout the research as a whole, EM as an initiative has much to offer. However, as it is currently constructed as a reformist or interventionary programme which seeks actively to remake or reshape the behaviours and attitudes of young working class men, its potential cannot be fulfilled. At present EM focuses exclusively on efforts to dislodge, uproot and replace what it sees as problematic macho identities. While it is correct that the sexist and aggressive overtones of a negatively traditional masculinity be challenged in the classroom, issues remain over how best to do this. In this chapter I have raised a series of questions and sought to offer, thorough examples from the field, both the impetus for change and a possible path
towards that change in ethos, methodology and approach. Chapter five began by highlighting the traditionally opposing positions occupied by pedagogy on the one hand and by youth culture on the other. This binary outlook is not unique to EM, but is rather symptomatic of the long and difficult relationship which exists between the ‘serious’ cultural space of the classroom and the ‘frivolous’ and distracting forces of youth culture which operate outside of it. In order to situate my discussion of EM in relation to this conflicted relationship between education and youth culture, I will conclude here with a return to the work of Willis, whose commitment to the issues of youth, social class, culture and resistance has seen him revisit this territory many times since *Learning to Labour*, each time adding new insight to the meanings behind the cultural practices of young working class men. My discussion of Willis’ work is further framed by an awareness of the other questions raised throughout this chapter, primarily the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of incorporating popular youth culture into the classroom, alongside an understanding of the importance of the particular social context and the structural imperatives which impact on the lives of young people. This is essential as the negatively traditional and defensive masculinity of the Hillside boys is, like the resistant ‘Counter School Culture’ of the Hammertown ‘lads’, (although very different in the details), only fully understandable in light of their broader existence as is defined by their social and economic class positioning. The root of this understanding is contained within the relationship between class, youth culture and defensiveness, and, fundamentally, in the lack of engagement by formal school curricula with the media and commodity forms engaged with by young people.
The locking out of popular culture by schools, as though 'the four walls of the classroom, sanctuary-making as they can be, contain all that is necessary to understand and direct what goes on within them' (Willis 2003: 14-15), meant, in 1970s Hammertown, that the resistance of 'the lads' to academic work and to the authority of the teachers and the school was understood on only one level – that of disruption and indiscipline on the part of a small group of disaffected young men. However, Willis unpacks this resistance in terms of its roots in an exploitative class culture. Only part of this class culture is visible to the Hammertown 'lads', whereby their rejection of school is legitimised by their understanding of class heritage and opposition to middle class structures of white collar work and formal education. The Hillside boys' opposition or resistance to EM is significantly different to the Counter School Culture of 'the lads'. They are resisting what they understand to be efforts to 'blame everything on them' from anti social behaviour, to the proliferation of drugs, crime, sexism, alcohol abuse and racist attitudes in contemporary Ireland. Yet, while the details differ, the overall problem Willis is highlighting remains the same. This is the lack of an inclusive pedagogy which works with, rather than against the interests and cultural positioning of young working class men.

As noted, Willis's commitment to the centrality of both social class and culture in the lives of young people is a consistent theme in his work, he regularly returns to the territory of class, culture and resistance, each time further questioning the relationship between the structural elements of compulsory schooling and unemployment and the cultural practices through which young people negotiate these structures. (2003: 14-15).
Returning to 1977 and to the latter half of *Learning to Labour* (1977), Willis presents an analysis of his fieldwork findings in light of the social climate existent at that time. Connected directly to the traditional and purposeful neglect of popular culture in the classroom, Willis found a broader gap in the provision of any ‘form of pedagogy for disaffected working class kids’ (1977: 189). This neglect was compounded by a mass misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the problems presented, through their resistance, by these ‘disaffected kids’ in the school system. Willis’s Hammertown lads are considered problematic only in terms of their likely impact on the education and comfort of others around them, something Willis categorises as a key element in a then ongoing (and arguably still current) ‘moral panic’ about working class youth (1977: 189-190). This is not dissimilar to the contemporary situation which has given rise to EM in Ireland and the ASBO in the UK. Both initiatives are the result of, as discussed in the introduction and in chapter one, being scared into that ‘moral panic’ not just ‘about violence and disruption in the classroom’ (ibid: 190) but about working class male youth culture and how it is manifested in the social world writ large.

In response to his findings Willis set out to address this lack of an inclusive pedagogy, calling for a form that not only works with young men but that acknowledges the risks their attitudes and behaviour can pose to their education and to their lives beyond school. He is not expert in the field of curriculum design, and thus does not set out to create a new curriculum that will do this. He does, however, seek to see teachers and academics:

utilize the cultural experiences and embedded bodily knowledge of their students as a starting point, not for bemoaning the failures and inadequacies of their
charges, but to render more conscious for them … their own place and formation within flows of cultural modernization (2003: 14-15).

Willis’ cultural analysis of the lads and their lives in Hammertown provides the foundational material from which to draw up a set of general principles which suggest the direction any shift in curricula and pedagogy could take. Willis describes his relationship to curriculum design and pedagogical change, stating:

These are complex [pedagogical] issues and rather than stray too far and too naively into specialist areas I am simply trying here to make available, and suggest the relevance of, an analysis of the cultural level... Most basically I suggest that the cultural level can be recognised for itself, its particular logics traced out, and material outcomes understood. (1977: 190).

The transformation of his analysis into an actual policy is not Willis’s role. He has identified the complex relationship between social class, masculinity, culture, education, the workplace and youth showing how certain groups of vulnerable young men are systematically shaped into enacting and performing a rejection of formal education. The Hillside boys and their peers are not at risk in the same way as the Hammertown ‘lads’ were of rejecting all forms of education. They are, however, likely to remain holding fast to their ‘out-dated’ and defensive forms of masculinity in the absence of an acknowledgement and open discussion of what makes these forms simultaneously attractive and inherently limiting.

My cultural analysis throughout this research has provided an understanding of what sustains these traditional forms of macho masculinity among a group of young white
working class men. It demonstrates here, through the resistant and defensive reactions to EM’s attempts to ‘reform’, the central importance of recognising context – social, economic, local, and cultural. It further illustrates the impact which is experienced in the classroom when familiar and popular media forms and content are allowed to filter into pedagogy. The boys’ embrace of a class which drew on the well-known structure of the crime drama or detective story shows the value of harnessing their enthusiasm and interest. Further steps towards discussions of the type of masculinity portrayed in popular film and video games; of the stereotyping of race and gender in rap music; or even of the difference between adult and teenage perceptions of the ‘hoodie’ as an article of clothing with important and very different cultural overtones could be taken within this framework. The acceptance of the importance of youth culture, and its acknowledgement in the classroom, as both a positive and negative influence has the potential to increase awareness of what particular youth cultures can mean, both for those who partake in them and, crucially, for those who do not. Encouraging boys to think about how their behaviours and attitudes affect those who are excluded from their peer group culture by age; by gender; by race; religion; sexuality; or disability, is an essential function of EM, but one which is currently underperformed. Giving boys a sense of agency and ownership over a programme like this by appealing to their cultural competencies, experiences, and familiarity with particular media and commodity forms is the best way to encourage them to reflect and to engage in discussion and debate. This reflection was clearly seen in a class documented in chapter three. Here, in a discussion of anti-social behaviour on Hallowe’en night, whereby much of Hillside and similar areas become a no-go region for buses and pedestrians, the boys, in between jokes and messing, engaged seriously with
the consequences of 'egging' cars and buses and throwing fireworks. Paul encouraged them to think about the effects this behaviour, while fun for them, has on others through allowing the boys to populate this debate with people they know; experiences they have had; and incidences that they are familiar with. The high levels of interest and engagement seen at this point were not replicated elsewhere in this class, which otherwise focused on EM materials and worksheets.

Legitimising the different forms of 'knowledge' and competencies held by students in the classroom is a difficult step. Historically the characterising of youth culture within education practice and theorising has been overwhelmingly focused on their incompatibility. In her essay 'Popular Culture and Democratic Practice' Dolby (2003) offers a historical overview of that characterising. She highlights, in particular, what is known as the 'anxiety or celebration approach to the study of popular culture' (5) whereby 'popular culture is either wholly rejected as a dangerous influence on youth ... or uncritically embraced' (ibid). This former approach is dominant in the case of EM, both in terms of the associated media coverage and the programme's depictions of the negative influences which operate on boys through their engagement with macho male youth culture. The binary structure of the 'anxiety or celebration approach' to popular culture in education is an important issue, as it implies a focus on one perspective or position to the exclusion of alternatives. 'Boy culture' undoubtedly has a dark side, indeed there are multiple examples and incidences from this small scale study alone of expressions which, in themselves, offer strong justification for the introduction and preservation of EM. However, equally so, 'boy culture' remains a centrally important
influence in the lives of young Irish men. It is both hard to avoid and unlikely to go away (Dolby 2003: 5). Rather it is, as noted by Willis in Common Culture (1990) becoming evermore important in the lives of young people:

The field of education is likely to come under even more intense pressure. It will be further marginalized in most people’s experience by common [read “popular” or “everyday”] culture. In so far as educational practices are still predicated on traditional liberal humanist lines and on the assumed superiority of high art, they will become almost totally irrelevant to the real energies and interests of most young people and have no part in their identity formation. Common culture will, increasingly, undertake, in its own ways, the roles that education has vacated (1990: 147).

In agreement with Willis’ analysis it is, therefore, imperative that youth culture in all its forms be readdressed in relation to its place in the Irish classroom. Ignoring it or emphasising its worst elements while attempting to reform it, will not, as I have shown, have effect beyond strengthening the resonance such forms have for many young working class men. Further to this, uncritically accepting or dismissing these common cultural forms as either wholly emancipatory or inherently limiting simplifies the complexity of the relationship between young people and their cultural practices and commodity forms. This simplification also draws attention to a related division in the broader study of young people, culture and social life. Nayak, (2003: 305-306) as noted in chapter four, identifies a divide between the ‘structural’ and ‘cultural’ traditions of youth research, highlighting the lack of crossover or dialogue between the two approaches. He comments thusly:
However, with some notable exceptions (Willis, 1977; Hollands, 1995; MacDonald et al, 2001), there has been relatively little dialogue between structural writers of youth transitions and cultural studies scholars concerned with youth identity and popular culture. In a bid to further this debate and develop more integrative approaches, this article seeks to knit together historical, ‘structural’ and ‘cultural’ approaches to reveal their interwoven patterning upon contemporary youth lifestyles (306).

Nayak notes that Learning to Labour is both an example of the structural tradition of youth research and an example of an interdisciplinary crossover between structural and cultural concerns. This crossover is a fundamental and central element of Willis’ work. In an interview conducted in 2001, he describes his research as ‘... trying to grasp in an ethnographic way what it means to live and act out structurally given conditions of existence’ (Mills and Gibb 2004: 215). Willis re-emphasises this in his 2004 commentary on the 25th anniversary of Learning to Labour by calling for more research which brings together the creativities and possibilities offered by a cultural studies analysis with the sociological focus on the ‘broken transitions’ of working class youth who can no longer move from education to apprenticeships or manual work and instead face a future of unemployment, training and retraining schemes or casual employment in the service industry (2004: 186).

My research takes on the challenges offered by Willis and Nayak and attempts to build a bridge between the structural realities of environment, economics and school which shape the lives of the Hillside boys in order to better understand the cultural practices and associated constructions of masculinity which allow them to negotiate these structures.
This allows for an understanding of their negatively traditional masculine attitudes and behaviours that is grounded in their experiences. Understanding the boys’ attitudes and behaviours is not a ploy to excuse them away or to suggest an ‘uncritical embrace’ of machismo but rather suggests the possibility of finding a new way to challenge this hyper-masculine identity in the classroom. Thus, within this chapter, and throughout, I am guided by the dual objective of moving beyond the ‘defensive – offensive responses’ (Willis 2000: 43) of the Hillside boys in order to challenge their very real prejudices while, at the same time, understanding and being aware of the full social and cultural context in which these prejudices develop and thrive. Encouraging the Hillside boys to engage with the world immediately around them through the language, forms and experiences of what is commonly perceived to be a threateningly violent, sexist, homophobic and rigidly gendered youth culture seems inherently conflicted. Yet, engagement with this culture has, in practice, in the classroom produced both genuine interest and new understandings on behalf of all concerned.

A final and crucial point in relation to the Hillside boys’ youth culture must be made here. I have argued throughout this research that their attitudes are part of a complex set of responses to the particular forms of social and economic circumstances that they find themselves in. They express attitudes that are profoundly homophobic, wedded to traditional gender roles and fearful of new immigrant communities, issues that can be traced directly, as discussed in chapter two, to their broader sense of social dispossession as a class and as a gender. Yet, what has been seen and experienced, both from my observation in the classroom and from my engagement with the physical artefacts of this
‘boy culture’ is the utter ‘ordinariness’ of school life in Hillside. The media culture the boys are immersed in is, in actuality, a universally available culture, engaged with by a broad range of men, both young and old and from varying social and economic backgrounds. It is a mass culture peppered with the Hillside boys’ own local specificities, interpretations, slang and preferences and yet this world is not unique or specific to them.\(^\text{29}\) The classroom culture seen at Hillside – the jokes, references, rebellions and disruptions – are similarly both performed and experienced across the varying social and economic contexts of the majority of Irish boys’ schools, on a daily basis. Contrary to what could be expected from both the programme and from the general tone of the media coverage of young Irish working class men, the Hillside boys do not stand out as the personification or embodiment of deviance.\(^\text{30}\) However, because of their positioning as young, working class men, their behaviour and attitudes come under a more sustained and critical scrutiny than that which is applied to their middle aged or middle class equivalents (Skeggs 2004). What stands out in the classroom is their humour, not the sense that they are out-of-control or engaged in a subversive subculture that is inaccessible and incomprehensible to those outside of their classed and gendered peer group. Most remarkable in the classroom, and most surprising from an observational point of view, is the wit and ease with which they subvert the programme when it challenges their more established attitudes, and the enthusiasm with which they respond to it when it resonates for them. The centrality of their voices throughout not only provides insight, but offers, from a different perspective, a totally new assessment of EM. This assessment is intrinsically bound up in the performative cultural practices and
associated masculine identities through which this group of boys negotiate and traverse the structural inequalities which profoundly shape their lives.
Gee (2003) discusses what he calls ‘good’ video games, examples of which he considers to be ‘good’ in terms of narrative structure, design, player engagement and the ultimate test – popularity. For a video game to be popular i.e. to sell well, it must be enjoyed. This understanding of ‘good’ as it is applied to video games by Gee means that he is focused on games which contain his identified learning principles or those which encourage players to become actively engaged and invested in the virtual world of the game. He does not focus on content in defining good or bad. He lists his own preference as leaning towards historical type games like the World War II role player game *Medal of Honour*, or towards ‘civilisation building games’ like *Sim City*. However the games he discusses are those that are most popular with young people and include fantasy type games and the *Tomb Raider* series.

Meaning, for example, that the association of white male working class ‘cool’ with criminality, such as in the films of British director Guy Ritchie, is largely beneficial for the actors and the film maker, but these associations and characterisations of violence and crime ‘stick’ to the bodies of actual working class men, heightening fear and marginalisation of them in the wider community (Skeggs 2004: 22).

Gee points out that many teachers and parents are uncomfortable with the notion that children and young adults may have expert and specialist knowledge that they, as adults, have no access to. He uses the examples of skateboarding, music genres and of course video games. However, particularly important is the issue of children, young people and their relationship to technology, which is often far more advanced than that of their parents and teachers (Gee 2003: 38). See also Collins (1994) and Dolby (2003) for further discussion of the incorporation of student knowledge and culture in the classroom.

Gee (2003) outlines the possibilities offered by games in terms of the development of different forms of literacy and different social, technological and cultural competencies. Gee’s analysis of the educational values of gaming culture stems from his own experience playing children’s video games with his six year old son. On the basis of this experience he was interested in trying out some games designed for an older audience. Once he found out how long, difficult and involving the average ‘role player’ game is, experiencing his own desire to ‘learn’ the game in order to progress to different levels, he

Notes

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1. See chapter one for the fully listed aims of the EM programme.
2. Gee (2003) discusses what he calls ‘good’ video games, examples of which he considers to be ‘good’ in terms of narrative structure, design, player engagement and the ultimate test – popularity. For a video game to be popular i.e. to sell well, it must be enjoyed. This understanding of ‘good’ as it is applied to video games by Gee means that he is focused on games which contain his identified learning principles or those which encourage players to become actively engaged and invested in the virtual world of the game. He does not focus on content in defining good or bad. He lists his own preference as leaning towards historical type games like the World War II role player game *Medal of Honour*, or towards ‘civilisation building games’ like *Sim City*. However the games he discusses are those that are most popular with young people and include fantasy type games and the *Tomb Raider* series.

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realised the inherent educational values that games contain. Gee’s video game ‘revelation’ is part of a wider understanding he brings to the question of learning and literacy and is founded on a conviction that to reach young people one must engage with what interests them, or in his words, ‘build bridges to their relevancies’ (2003: 59). He does not advocate the use of specifically designed ‘educational software’ in the classroom, but rather suggests that educators and academics must instead learn why popular video games both attract and hold onto the interest of players, even when they are difficult or challenging.

In relation to these ‘learning principles’, only the very basic and foundational principles are discussed here. A full list of the 36 principles identified by Gee is available as an index in his 2003 text.

These images are taken from Bogenn and Barga’s (2005) *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Official Strategy Guide* and show the high levels of involvement required. They also show the need for traditional literacy skills as the instructions are text based and are remarkably complex and intricate. The player needs to be able to follow a long series of specific steps and specific orders to succeed, it is not simply ‘point and shoot’ as is often assumed by those who have no experience of playing a game like this. Having spent time playing these games – particularly the *GTA* series - I can attest to the high levels of investment required on the part of the player, instructions are complicated and acting upon them difficult, however, with the key element of practice particular skills can be honed and the player can advance.

Tessa Jowell, in her role as UK Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport spoke at the 2003 Media Guardian Edinburgh Television Festival and stated that ‘in the modern world media literacy will become as important a skill as maths or science’. This statement is quoted by and engaged with by Cary Bazalgette in a paper for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, in which she agrees with and outlines the importance of understanding the role the media plays in the lives of children and young adults. This paper entitled, ‘Literacy and the Media’ is available online at:


An earlier version of this series (*GTA: Vice City*, starring Italian American criminal-for-hire Tommy Vercetti, as opposed to African American urban gang member Carl Johnson) was addressed in a different context in chapter four.

The previous version was based on the Mafia films of the 1980s and had the visual feel of TV shows from the period like Miami Vice. San Andreas draws on a very different tradition and has moved from organised crime to gang warfare and is reflective of the mainstreaming of black urban music and culture.

CJ, as he is known in the narrative, has been in hiding on the East Coast for some years but has been forced to return by the murder of his mother. On his return to Los Santos, he is immediately framed for another murder by two corrupt cops, forcing him to go on a series of missions across the city in order to regain respect and retake control of the streets with his gang. While he is undoubtedly a criminal, taking part in and profiting both financially and in terms of status from pimping, robbery, assault, homicide and car theft he is understood to be the force of ‘good’ in the game. He is on a mission to re-establish his gang as a legitimate social force by wresting control from the warring Latino and Vietnamese drug-dealing/gun running gangs who are tearing the established city territories apart. The Grove St Families Gang, under the control of CJ’s brother ‘Sweet’ are considered and presented within the narrative and therefore within their virtual social context as being a positive influence within the community in the face of endemic corruption in the city’s police force and the flourishing cocaine and gun trade. See the game site – www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas/ for a detailed description of the game itself, the three cities, the characters and their motivations.

Cohen (1955) also makes this same claim in his discussion of working class boys who opt out of mainstream social life in favour of a ‘delinquent subculture’ (121). Willis (2000:93) Rivzi (2004: 87) and Nayak (2003:309-310) all cite the loss of youth employment opportunities as one of the fundamental breaks in the socialization of young
working class men. A lack of work cuts young men off from the traditional and socially acknowledged markers of a wage, a home of their own, marriage and a family.

The level of acceptance and tolerance aimed at by the type of masculinity favoured by EM is considered by the boys to be ‘gay’, while at the same time they realise that CJ’s masculinity is not a serious option for them,

In GTA: San Andreas a large number of missions beyond the introductory stages of the game require certain levels of skill to be built up. Likewise many of the missions are impossible (as I have found) without adequate driving skills, weapon and fighting skills. All of these can be worked on and practised throughout the game.

This happened frequently in the Hillside classroom no matter how hard Paul worked to manage the class and the general atmosphere. Other teachers spoken to as part of the early field research also anecdotally reported poor reception. The programme review and programme report also include large numbers of comments throughout from teachers and students, which reflect poor experiences with the materials in the classroom.

As noted in chapter one, in all the school was visited approximately twice monthly across two full school years. Approximately 14 full classes were attended, as on occasion I simply met with the teacher if classes were cancelled on the day, or if a large proportion of the class were elsewhere in the school/out of school meaning the EM class did not run as normal/or to a full class.

In a class on violence on the 24th of March 2003, in which the boys were unusually disruptive and noisy, Paul explained that they had missed the last two classes due to other scheduled activities and were all ‘out of the mindset’ required by the class, while he himself was also ‘not in the humour for it’.

Transcribed from field notes taken in class on January 26th 2004.

The lack of any consultation, at the writing and designing stages, with young men as to what they would like to see in a programme like this is made clear by the recommendations in the programme Report which recommends urgently that the ‘voices and perceptions of young people be included more’ (Gleeson et al 2003: 168)

See chapter two and chapter three for further discussion of the video.

See McLaren and Scatamburlo-D’Annibale (2004:43) for their discussion of the current academic concentration on ‘differences’ as opposed to class.

‘Wank’ is a slang term for masturbation – here the implied meaning of ‘wankers’ is
extended to an understanding that these are men who are unable to attract women due to their perceived ‘unmanliness’.

24 The fact that Paul often did not stick exactly to the materials characterises a tension which emerged in the review in particular between the over dependency of some teachers on the materials and the presumed autonomy of others who dipped in and out, favouring a lengthier focus on select topics rather than a quicker look at a wider range of topics. The writers had envisioned that the materials be used as a ‘resource’ rather than as a required syllabus however concern is raised about teachers who will miss important sections of the programme if they simply dip in and out at will (Mac an Ghaill, 2002: 209; Gleeson et al, 2003: 131)

25 This continues the trend noted throughout of informing the reluctant participant that he has just ‘volunteered’ for something.

26 Law and Order is a popular American made detective drama, based around a New York City Police precinct and a courtroom. It is shown widely on both terrestrial and cable channels in Ireland and has several spin off shows including, Law and Order: Criminal Intent and Law and Order: Special Victims Unit.

27 See chapter three – Class Five: Crime and Punishment for further details on this class.

28 This interview was carried out by David Mills of the University of Birmingham and Robert Gibb of the University of Edinburgh in 2001 and originally published in the journal Cultural Anthropology 16 (3). It was reprinted for Dolby and Dimitriadis’ (2004) edited collection Learning to Labour in New Times which marked the 25th anniversary of Learning to Labour. References made here refer to the 2004 reprint of the interview transcript.

29 In chapter four I argue, following Skeggs (2004) that what is exceptional about the Hillside boys’ own version of mass youth culture is the way in which these particular cultural choices and associations can potentially have a far more negative impact on their lives than on those of their middle or upper class peers (see Skeggs 2004: 105).

30 See chapter one for a discussion of masculinity and the media. See also Devlin (2006:65) for further discussion of the way in which young men are portrayed in the media.
Conclusion

Figure 6.01: Fine Gael's www.safestreets.ie

Of course, the point of engaging in field work, what impels you to face its difficulties, dilemmas and jeoparadies, is to give yourself a chance of being surprised, to have experiences that generate new knowledge not wholly prefigured in your starting out position... you cannot be surprised unless you thought that you knew, or assumed, something already, which is then overturned, or perhaps strengthened, or positively diverted, or fulfilled in unexpectedly elegant ways (Willis 2000: 113).
In *The Ethnographic Imagination* Willis discusses what are, for him, two of the key moments in conducting and writing ethnography. The first is that notion of surprise whereby the researcher sees his or her pre-fieldwork preconceptions, understandings or assumptions turned upside down upon entry to the field site. The second is contained in the production of what he terms an ‘Ah-Ha’ moment for the reader (2000:117). Both of these key moments are, in this context, about the realisation on the part of, first the researcher, and subsequently the reader, that even the most public and familiar of lives and experiences can be, upon closer examination, made strange. Making the familiar strange in this way is one of my primary aims throughout this research. Working class boys lead uniquely public-private lives - their supposed deviant culture and pastimes and their relative educational failings are regularly and minutely discussed and detailed, both within the media and in the academic sphere. Because of this, it is difficult to come to them as subjects without both consciously and unconsciously fixed ideas and assumptions about them and about their lives. That moment of surprise then, for me as researcher, comes in the lack of correlation between those public depictions and public understandings of working class male ‘youths’ and the actuality of their beliefs, attitudes, cultural practices and engagements. It also comes in hearing the boys embody and voice those beliefs and attitudes. Their voices are central throughout, providing a new perspective and illustrating the broader picture behind issues and questions which are oversimplified and emptied out of meaning and power relationships in the press and public sphere. Again this is not to say that some of their attitudes and cultural forms are not problematic, but rather to highlight the inconsistency with which they are perceived.
The Hillside boys, rather than being part of a subversive and inaccessible subculture, are, in fact, engaged in a mainstream, socially conservative, consumption driven popular culture which has been adapted by them to fit their own local needs and circumstances. The Hillside boys have the same cultural interests, preoccupations and popular role models as their middle class peers, yet they are spoken and written about as though they are entirely ‘other’. This characterisation of working class boys has far reaching consequences. Their defensiveness in the classroom is directly related to it – racism, sexism or homophobic attitudes are not unique to them, yet are located there as if they were. Undoubtedly the Hillside boys feel threatened by difference and regard the advance of women or new migrants as coming at a cost to them and their own prospects. This insecurity and lack of knowledge about migration or women’s battle for equality is behind their expression of attitudes which, while understandable in this context, are difficult to condone. Thus their negatively traditional masculinity, which is supported maintained and referenced through their boy culture, makes sense to them and for them. It is a simple reaction to the circumstances in which they find themselves, as it is through this out dated form of identity and the associated practices and attitudes that the Hillside boys can recover aspects of traditional forms of masculinity and the elements of male superiority which they feel to be their right.

This problematic reconstruction of masculine ‘privilege’ through male youth culture and the creativity which is inherent in terms of adapting global texts to suit local contexts are the two major and conflicting rationales which I use to argue for the incorporation of youth culture into the classroom. Both show why youth culture can no longer be
dismissed as destructive, irrelevant or frivolous - it is, as evidenced throughout, simply too important and too influential in the lives of young people to continue to deny it space in the curriculum. My experiences at Hillside have shown how and why the boys reject EM’s direct questioning of the legitimacy of their masculinity, yet respond enthusiastically when they are offered familiar cultural territory within which to examine and question their own attitudes and responses. Currently the boys struggle for ownership of the EM material in the classroom, not in the way the programme writers had hoped, but through subverting and investing EM with the qualities that they admire and respect in their own peer group relationships and conversations. As it is the boys are not challenged by the materials, they easily counter the programme messages with humour and mockery, actively policing the group and preventing a serious engagement with the majority of topics raised. They are defensive and occasionally offensive, defending their masculinity against what they perceive as another attack on them, and unable, at present, to see how their favoured form of ‘hard man’ masculinity may limit them, both now, and in the future. It is at this point that a re-imagined EM could productively step in, unpacking and discussing the type of man who is portrayed on film or television, in video games, or through rap and hip hop music, showing how on screen cool does not transfer to off screen life. Beginning where boys are, on their familiar territory allows for a sense of ownership among them, extending and creating greater understandings of where popular culture, class and gender identities meet, and what this can mean for different groups of young men. For the Hillside boys, their attachment to ‘hard man’ masculinity means further marginalisation, as they are visually and culturally associated with the public characterisation of deviant, criminal, working class youths.
Suggesting an entry point to the classroom for an intervention programme produces the ‘new knowledge’ highlighted by Willis. A re-imagining of EM and a call to acknowledge and incorporate into the national curriculum the violent, sexist, and stereotypical youth culture of young men was not, to paraphrase, ‘prefigured in my starting out position’. Yet, once the fieldwork began, it became increasingly clear that a new relationship between classroom pedagogy and popular culture is needed. This reconsideration of the traditionally opposite forms of knowledge – the ordered ‘high culture’ of literature and drama explored in the classroom and the chaotic ‘low culture’ of comics, pop music and Hollywood action films - is now essential in order to counter the social and educational disadvantages which are brought about by the boys’ adherence to their negatively traditional forms of masculinity. Thus, my argument throughout attempts to build a vital bridge between the classroom and the public private space of working class boy culture, showing the importance of accepting and acknowledging the value of each rather than feeling compelled to offer an uncritical embrace of the one alongside a total dismissal of the other.
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Appendix of Images
THEME 2: Fir ag Obair (Men Working)

9. Teacher Guidelines: The World of Work (W TG 9)

OBJECTIVES:
that students may:

• explore the Key Question: What is work and how has the world of work changed?

• reflect on the different types of work, i.e. indoor work, outdoor work, women's work/men's work, primary/secondary/tertiary types of industry or any category they wish to come up with.

• investigate how work has changed from the time of their father's/grandfather's generation.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 23 Everyone has the right to work and join a Trade Union.

TEACHER NOTE:

Students need to be given some guidance on surveying before going out into the street. It is probably better if students actually do survey work on the street or in a shopping centre or in a very public place. It is not advisable for students to call to people's homes, as people in the home may feel threatened by students calling to their door.

It is better to have students work in pairs. It is also advisable to notify the management of a shopping centre if the class is going to carry out a survey there. This avoids any difficulty later on.

Some time should be spent in advance on preparing a questionnaire. It is preferable to have a series of closed questions rather than open questions, apart from "What is your present or last job?" The questionnaire should include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>15 - 20</td>
<td>21 - 35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

METHODOLOGY

1. Each student brainstorm: What is Work?

2. Students identify different types of work.

3. Conduct a survey on the changes that have taken place in the world of work.

Divide the class into groups and ask them to draw up a list of questions, suitable for a questionnaire, on the world of work in the past.

The groups report back to the whole class and agree on a set of questions. Each student conducts an interview with an older person and writes a report on his experience.
9. **Student Material: The World of Work (W SM 9)**

**KEY QUESTION:**
What is work and how has the world of work changed?

Write the word WORK in the middle of the circle and write as many words as you can, which you associate with the world of work.

Having completed the above task, go on to the next table and give examples of each of the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work outside the home</th>
<th>Work in the home</th>
<th>Voluntary/Community/Caring Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXPLORATIONS**

1. Which of the above would you consider the most rewarding? Why?
2. Which of the above would you consider the most difficult? Why?
3. Which of the above makes the biggest contribution to society? Why?
4. Which of the above has the most status? Why?
5. Which of the above makes the most demands on the worker? Why?
27. Teacher Guidelines: I Know Tim’s Number by Heart (P TG 27)

KEY QUESTIONS
Can bullying take place within an intimate relationship?

HUMAN RIGHTS
Article 20: Everyone has the right to meet with others.

AUDIO
I Know Tim’s Number By Heart

VIDEO: EXPLORING MASCULINITIES
There are two minutes towards the end of The Violence Against Women section of the video during which Colm O’Connor (in close up and with the beard and the red shirt and tie) talks about boy-girl relationships. Amongst the assertions he makes, he states that boys automatically expect their girlfriends to enter their world and hang around with their friends, that very seldom would you see a boy with his girlfriend and her girlfriends. This video clip could be shown after having read and discussed the poem and the students could be asked to discuss Colm’s assertion.

TEACHER NOTE
The experience from this session is that many boys feel threatened and are very defensive. One of the defences put forward is that some girls are equally capable of getting involved in any of the behaviours outlined below. This needs to be acknowledged. The reason the focus is on some boys’ negative behaviour is that this programme is directed at boys and aims to allow them to reflect on potentially oppressive aspects of their behaviour. It also needs to be pointed out that the majority of girl-boy relationships are open, healthy, good relationships but it is equally true to say that some are not. This exercise is to ensure that relationships are based primarily on fairness.

This session could be accompanied with a visit to the classroom from any of the relationship counselling organisations. Some of the Youth Services offer relationship-counselling services and may be willing to come to the classroom for a visit.
METHODOLOGY

1. Students read I Know Tim's Number by Heart.

2. Divide the class into a number of groups and ask each group to take two or three of the explorations and discuss them.

3. In groups or individually, students are given three of the headings from Now let's look at each of these forms of bullying individually (in PSM 27) and they are asked to identify ways in which this form of bullying would take place. The "answers" are as follows:

3.1. Isolation and exclusion: What specific ways might a boyfriend try to isolate his girlfriend?
He might tell her he doesn't like the friends she hangs around with and insist that she spend all of her free time with him.

3.2. Emotional abuse/anger: How might a boyfriend try to make his girlfriend feel bad about herself?
He might make negative reference to her physical appearance, her dress sense, her friends, her views, etc.

3.3. Using male privilege: How might a boyfriend use his "privileged" status as a male to try to make his girlfriend feel inferior?
He might try to make all the decisions as to where she goes, what she does, etc.

3.4. Sexual abuse: How might a boyfriend sexually abuse his girlfriend?
He might put pressure on her to engage in a particular activity that she is uncomfortable with or he may manipulate her in some way to suit his needs.

3.5. Peer pressure: In what way might a boy put pressure on his girlfriend?
He might say that all of her friends are behaving in a certain way, thereby putting unwelcome pressure on her.

3.6. Physical abuse: How might a boy engage in physical abuse?
He may engage in pushing, slapping, punching or other forms of abuse.

3.7. Threats: In what ways might a boy threaten his girlfriend?
He might keep a girlfriend from breaking up with him by threatening what he will do to himself or to her or by threatening to reveal things told in confidence.

3.8. Intimidation: How might a boy force a girl to be in the background when he is around his friends?
He could give her dirty looks, raise his voice at her etc.

4. Students come up with a Code of Conduct for good relationships between girls and boys and men and women.

5. Bring the whole group back together to enable a general discussion on the Code to take place.
27. Student Materials: I Know Tim’s Number by Heart (P SM 27)

KEY QUESTION
Can bullying take place within an intimate relationship?

It is often presumed that bullying only takes place between young people in the school-yard, or on the street. However, bullying can also take place in the context of an intimate relationship. A girl or boy may wish to dominate the other’s life, may wish to determine with whom she/he keeps company, may expect the life of the other to revolve around her/him. Within an intimate relationship, bullying is not a once-off occurrence, but rather a process that builds up over time. The following is an example of bullying in an intimate relationship. The story is based on an actual account.

I Know Tim’s Number By Heart

I know Tim’s number by heart,
I always call when I get home.
Because I know that he’ll be waiting.
And he’ll ask me where I’ve been.
And he’ll ask me who I’ve seen.
I know Tim’s number by heart.
Sometimes I call too late.
And he screams at me through the phone.
And he wants to know where I’ve been.
And he wants to know who I’ve seen.
I know Tim’s number by heart.
But tonight I didn’t get to call.
And now I feel sick in my stomach.
Because he’s wondering where I am.
And he’s imagining who I’ve seen.
And I’m afraid of what he’ll do.
I know Tim’s number by heart.

EXPLORATIONS

1. Is this a good relationship for Tim? On a scale of 1 – 10 where 1 is a very bad relationship and 10 is a very good relationship, how would you rate it?

2. Is this a good relationship for the girl in the poem? On a scale of 1 – 10 where 1 is a very bad relationship and 10 is a very good relationship, how would you rate it?

3. What, if anything, is the girl giving up for the relationship?

4. What, if anything, is the boy giving up for the relationship?

5. List specific behaviours that would be unacceptable to you in a relationship.

6. Do you think the girl is being bullied in this relationship? In what ways?
**WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE?**

Listed below are a number of behaviours and the form of bullying being employed. Match the form of behaviour with the form of bullying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Behaviour</th>
<th>The Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A boyfriend tries to isolate his girlfriend?</td>
<td>A. Emotional Abuse/Anger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A boy might actively pressurise his girlfriend from talking to other people when they are out.</td>
<td>C. Sexual Coercion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A boy uses his &quot;privileged&quot; status as a male to try to make his girlfriend feel inferior?</td>
<td>D. Threats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A boy forces a girl to engage in a particular kind of sexual activity that she did not want to do.</td>
<td>E. Intimidation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If a boy hits his girlfriend, how might he blame her for his actions?</td>
<td>F. Peer Pressure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A boy makes his girlfriend feel bad about herself?</td>
<td>G. Isolation and Exclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A boy forces his girlfriend to drink alcohol?</td>
<td>H. Social Status.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOW LET'S LOOK AT EACH OF THESE FORMS OF BULLYING INDIVIDUALLY

1. Isolation and exclusion: What specific ways might a boyfriend try to isolate his girlfriend?

2. Emotional abuse/anger: How might a boyfriend try to make his girlfriend feel bad about herself?

3. Using male privilege: How might a boyfriend use his “privileged” status as a male to try to make his girlfriend feel inferior?

4. Sexual Abuse: How might a boyfriend sexually abuse his girlfriend?

5. Peer Pressure: In what ways might a boy put pressure on his girlfriend?

6. Physical Abuse: How might a boy engage in physical abuse?

7. Threats: In what ways might a boy threaten his girlfriend?

8. Intimidation: In what ways might a boy intimidate his girlfriend?

REMEMBER

Abusers use a combination of different forms of abuse which sometimes, but not always, include physical and sexual violence. The most common form of abuse to which women are subjected within an intimate relationship is emotional abuse.
59. Teacher Guidelines: Disarming the Fist (P TG 59)

OBJECTIVES

that students may:

- examine the Key Question: What changes have taken place in the law to protect victims of violence?
- examine legal practices from the past and compare them to those of the present.
- examine three organisations involved in issues of domestic violence.

AUDIO

Disarming the Fist

TEACHER NOTE

There was some discussion among the writing team whether this material should be included as student material or as an Appendix. While reading through family law may seem very “dry”, it is still important that people are aware of legal protections. It may improve the interaction if a local solicitor were given the student material and came to talk to the students about the background of each of the pieces of legislation. She could provide some case histories. A lot of legislation went through the Oireachtas on these issues recently so a T.D. or Senator may have a special interest in this issue and may be willing to talk to students. The students would also have a copy of the material.

You might consider reading Safety and Sanctions by Patricia Kelleher and Monica O’Connor before beginning this session. The book examines the way domestic violence cases are processed in the Irish civil and criminal justice systems.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 3: You have the right to life and to freedom and safety.
Article 5: No one has the right to torture you or threaten you or to treat you cruelly.
Article 8: You can ask for legal protection when the law of your country is not respected.
Article 12: You have the right to ask to be protected if someone wants to force you to change the way you are.
Article 13: You have the right to come and go as you wish in your own country.
Article 17: You have the right to own something yourself.
Article 18: You have the right to make up your own mind.
Article 19: You have the right to express your own thoughts.
Article 24: You have the right to rest and leisure.
Article 27: You have the right to join in cultural activity.

METHODOLOGY

1. Students read resource material “Disarming the Fist” V SM 59 and complete the worksheet.
2. A visit from a solicitor
KEY QUESTION
What changes have taken place in the law to protect victims of violence?

There was a time when violence was not only tolerated but also legal.

In the past within English Common Law a husband was allowed to beat his wife to keep her under control...without fear of interference from the state. Of course, there were restrictions on how harsh a man was allowed to be: The popular expression "Rule of Thumb" is derived from the section of the original British law that holds that a man can beat his wife with a stick no thicker than his thumb.

(from Domestic Violence for Beginners, p. 40-42)

In the 1840s, according to the above book, a judge affirmed the husband's right to kidnap his wife, beat her and imprison her in the matrimonial home. As Ireland was a colony of Britain, these laws applied to Ireland. However, major changes have taken place since then. In 1993, a Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights took place at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. In the same year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. It identified being female as the primary risk factor for violence. In 1994, the UN appointed a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. In this country a series of legislative changes have been put in place to protect all men, women and children from violence or violent situations. These include:

**Family Law (Protection of Spouses and Children) Act 1981**
Under this law the Gardaí have the powers of arrest for breach of a Protection or a Barring Order (see below).

**The 1990 Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act defined rape as**

unlawful intercourse with a woman who at the time of intercourse does not consent to it, where the man knows that she does not consent to it ... or that he is reckless as to whether she does or does not consent to it.

Since 1990, rape or sexual assault by a husband is defined as a crime and carries the same penalty of a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

**The Child Care Act 1991**

The Child Care Act 1991 was implemented in full on 31 December 1996. The purpose of the legislation was to update the law in relation to the care of children, particularly those who have been assaulted, ill-treated, neglected, or sexually abused or who are at risk.
Criminal Damage Act 1991

This act gives Gardai the power of arrest if they believe a person is about to damage property or they suspect a person has been guilty of such an offence.

The Domestic Violence Act, 1996

This act introduced major changes in the legal remedies for domestic violence. There are two main remedies available:

- safety order - this order prohibits a person from further violence or threats of violence. It does not oblige that person to leave the family home. If the parties live apart, the order prohibits the violent person from watching or being in the vicinity of the house.
- barring order - this order requires the violent person to leave the family home.

- protection order - while a person is waiting for the court to decide on an application for a safety or barring order, the court can grant an immediate order called a protection order. This has the same effect as a safety order and is intended to last until the court decides the case. In exceptional cases, the court can grant an interim barring order which is an immediate order requiring the violent person to leave the family home, pending the hearing of an application for a barring order.

The Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Bill, 1997

This provides a new offence of harassment aimed at "stalking" which incurs a maximum penalty of five years. Any person who by any means including the use of the telephone harasses another person by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting, or communicating commits this crime.

EXPLORATIONS

1. When might a safety order be imposed?
2. What restrictions does a safety order impose on an abusive partner?
3. What is meant by a barring order?
4. When might a barring order be imposed?
5. What is a protection order?
6. In your opinion are these safeguards sufficient?

For men who are violent, there are a number of agencies that offer counselling and help. Likewise, there are agencies to support women and men who are the victims of violence.
67. Teacher Guidelines: The Winner Takes it All (S TG 67)

OBJECTIVES
that students may:
• explore the Key Question: is there a win at all costs mentality? If so, what impact does this have not only on the players themselves but also on the rest of us?

AUDIO
The Winner Takes it All

TEACHER NOTE
As we have seen, sport gets massive coverage not only from the newspapers but also from television. There is a huge build up to any of the major sporting events, and afterwards the spotlight shines brightly on the winners. It has now become a regular feature in this country for sports stars to be given civic receptions, for open top buses to be used to carry the players through the streets of towns and cities. The exploits of these sports people are spoken of, written about and they are given a status and recognition that is not given to people who achieve in other areas of life. Given the level of hype surrounding sport is there now a pressure to win at whatever cost?

FILM
Twentyfourseven
The Power of One
67. Student Material. The Winner Takes it All
(S SM 67)

KEY QUESTION

Is there a win-at-all-costs mentality? If so, what impact does this have not only on the players themselves but also on the rest of us?

- Have we gone overboard in the status we give to our sports people?
- What effect does it have on the sport stars themselves?
- Does this emphasis on winning put unfair pressure on the players?
- Are they subject to abuse when they don't deliver - as inevitably will happen at some stage?
- Do sports people get preferential treatment over others in areas outside of sport, and, if so, is that fair?
- Are men/women who play sport more likely to get promotion than those who don't, and are men/women who play sport more likely to get a job over men and women who don't?

Many of these issues are discussed by the players themselves in The Players in S SM 70. People who do not wish to be named related the following accounts. They are, however, accurate accounts of their experiences. Both of these accounts relate to young people's experiences of GAA sports, but as we have seen from the experiences of mini-rugby, these experiences are not confined to the GAA. Some minor details have been changed to protect anonymity.

Case Study 1

John is a 16 year-old keen footballer. He has been on the margins of the team since he joined the under 12s. Occasionally he gets a game, but for the most part he is on the substitutes' bench. He desperately wants to become a more permanent player on the team. The coach has been slagging him of late. Comments like "at least we have John to carry the jerseys" have become an "in-joke".

Outwardly, John laughs along with the others, but secretly he is not amused. However, what gets to John more than anything is that he is used as a put-down for the others. Invariably, the coach will say during the training session, "Look at how hard John is trying and he hasn't a feckin' hope of gettin' on the team." Again John is not amused but he joins in the general laughter. He feels that if he were to object, it would make matters worse, and he feels that if he said so to the coach, he would never get on the team. He is tempted to give up, but he really wants to get on the team.

On one occasion, the coach referred to John's weight. He is small for his age and skinny. The coach said to a player beaten by John for a fifty-fifty ball "and you let that wisp beat you?" John really resented that comment.
Case Study 2

Competition was very keen for places on the minor hurling team and to be on the team meant you had made it. It was also felt that getting on the team would increase the chances of getting a good part-time job. The managers of the team saw part-time work as a way of ensuring that players didn't get into trouble. Because competition was so strong, nobody ever missed training. The joke was that you had to be dead; it was no good if your mother was dead.

The training was really tough. Yet you could not complain. To complain meant you were out of the team. We were pushed and pushed. Some of the exercises were way out of line. And the language - just a constant barrage. I remembering puking my guts up after training, and yet I did not want to complain. Some of the parents of the lads heard what was going on but I didn't want to tell mine. They'd go ape and ruin my chances. So we kept our heads down and put up with it. At the end of the day we didn't win anything. So we put up with all of that for nothing. At the time I didn't really think of what was going on. Later I realised that the coach was on a big power trip and so were all the hangers-on, the so-called backroom boys. They wanted to be associated with the winning team. I know all coaches are not like that but that is the way it was with us.

EXPLORATIONS

1. Does this emphasis on winning put unfair pressure on the players?
2. Are they subject to abuse when they don't deliver - as inevitably will happen at some stage?
3. Have we gone overboard in the status we give to our sports people?
4. What effect does it have on the sport stars themselves?
5. Do sports people get preferential treatment over others in areas outside of sport and if so is that fair?
6. Are men/women who play sport more likely to get promotion than those who don't, and are men/women who play sport more likely to get a job over men and women who don't?
7. Are the above two case studies typical or untypical, in your experience?