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Working Paper 150: The Emos: The Re-Traditionalisation of White, Working-Class Masculinities Through the 'Alternative Scene'

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Abstract

During the last few decades the South Wales valleys (U.K) have undergone a considerable economic transformation. Alongside industrial change, social, cultural and political traditions have altered youth transitions from school to work. Young working-class men in particular have struggled to adapt to these changes. This paper is drawn from a wider ESRC-funded ethnographic study that explored the diversity of white, working-class masculinities in a socially and economically disadvantaged community. Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, I take the perspective that masculinity is a performance of multiple acts displayed through different regions of self. Concentrating on the 'front' display of masculinity of one group of young men, this paper looks at the experiences of those who embrace a trans-global form of youth culture known as the 'alternative scene' and were labelled by others at *The Emos*. These young men were often alienated, bullied and victimised for their apparent non-normative performances of masculinity. However, through a closer analysis of the historical dynamics of place, class and gender, I suggest that these non-normative front performances of masculinity continue to evidence many traditional discourses that contradict their own 'alternative' displays. In doing so it becomes clear that these performances were in fact a re-traditionalization of older discourses of classed and gender codes.

Keywords: social class, youth culture, masculinities, alternative scene, place

Introduction

This paper draws on scholarship from studies into youth, masculinity, place and space. It seeks to develop the literature on how the social experiences of youth cultures for young men in marginalized communities are lived out within classed and gendered arenas. Within youth studies there has recently been an increasing re-emergence upon the importance that social class plays in the shaping of identities and young people (Dolby et al. 2004; Nayak 2006; Dillabough. et al. 2008; Hollingworth and Williams 2009), suggesting that it is still a major form of difference in deindustrialized places. This focus sits beside other theorists who have emphasised that increased individualisation, reflexivity and lifestyle choice which have been shaped by global and economic restructuring, have indicated that boundaries of class and gender have diminished in importance (see Robertson, 1995; Thornton; 1996; Giddens, 1998; Beck 1999). However, research by Nayak (2003a) and Walkerdine (2010) has highlighted how this diminishing of structural boundaries doesn't appear in the same forms or to be the same for all young people. Weis (2008:292) has furthered this argument by suggesting that as 'other key notes of difference both wrap class and simultaneously serve to produce it', youth identities are continually being played out through gender and racial boundaries which interlink with a community's specific industrial, social, cultural and political history.

In this place based analysis I consider how a particular group of young, white working-class men were dealing with industrial change and negotiating pathways to adulthood. I begin by outlining the socio-economic context of the region and then move on to look at the performance of masculinity and the work of Goffman. I then investigate how a particular music scene was a way for them to perform their masculinities in particular ways that distanced them from their peers. Drawing on ethnographic material, I finish by highlight how these alternative performances were contradictory and illustrate how their displays of masculinity were in fact reformulating older traditions of working-class masculinity, through pain, heroism, physical toughness and homophobia.

Deindustrialization and the South Wales valleys: Young men in changing times

The South Wales valleys were once major contributors to the British coal industry (Williams 1985). Developing at the end of the 19th century to feed the growth in iron manufacturing, coal production in the region soon grew into an industry of its own and by first world war, the valleys were one of the largest industrial centres in the country employing up to a quarter of a million men (Grant 1991, Rees and Stroud 2004). As the industrial regions developed, the South Wales coalfield which as Day (2002:29) puts it encompassed 'only a fifth of the total

Welsh land mass', came to contain over two thirds of the population. Yet despite these periods of extreme growth, the severe depression of the interwar years exposed the regions reliance on heavy industry and a slow decline began. After the Second World War, despite the nationalisation of the industry in 1947, coal mining in the region continued to weaken and large numbers of collieries were closed. Nonetheless even with these closures, up until the 1970's the industry still had a dominant presence in South Wales with large numbers of collieries still operating. However, during the 1980's and onwards into the 1990's due to Thatcherite restructuring policies, the region underwent rapid deindustrialization (Williams 1985; Smith 1999; Day 2002) and struggled to reinvent itself in the 'new modernity' (Beck 1999). This acute collapse coupled with the decline of the manufacturing industry, led to a drastic increase in economic inactivity (see Brewer; 1999; Fevre, 1999). The area is now characterised by what Adamson (2008:21) terms a 'triangle of poverty' with low levels of educational attainment (see also Gorard et al 2004) and high levels of health and housing inequalities across the region.

These transformations of the industrial base of the region have led to changes in the relationship between work and masculinity. A strong division of labour once accompanied these communities where distance from anything seen as 'feminine' was essential for a strong masculinity, that which would enable the communities to survive (Walkerline 2010). Men earned respect for working arduously and 'doing a hard job well and being known for it' (Willis 1977:52). Kenway and Kraak (2004) suggest that these roles were often seen as heroic with punishing physical labour that involved different degrees of manual skill and bodily toughness, creating a tough, stoic masculinity. Male camaraderie which was established through physicality and close working conditions underground, also developed through joking around, story-telling, sexist language and banter at the work site. This was further supported through institutions such as miners' institutes, chapels, pubs, working men's clubs and sports. Rugby union (and to a lesser extent boxing and football) in particular still hold powerful positions in the culture of the locale influencing those who play it, those who watch it, those who reject it and those who are deemed unfit for it (Holland and Scourfield 1998; Howe 2001; Harris 2007).

In areas where heavy industry has declined, such as the valleys of South Wales, traditional masculine identities often termed hegemonic (Connell, 1995, Connell and Messerschmitt 2005) may have been challenged, but the attitudes to work and identity are still intrinsically connected to the community young people live in. Hegemonic masculinity, Connell suggests, is the 'most honoured or desired' (2000:10), but not always the most common form of masculinity. It exists at the top of a hierarchy of masculinities and as Kenway and Fitzclarence

(1997): 119-120) put it 'is the standard-bearer of what it means to be a 'real' man or boy and many males draw inspiration from its cultural library of resources'. This leads to the subordination or marginalization of other men (including women) who do not meet its ideals. To be seen as a 'proper' boy or man from the valleys, an archetype of masculinity associated with an older world of industrial work, must still be outwardly performed through 'masculine' affirming practices of playing sports, engaging in physical and aggressive behaviours and certain ideas of male embodiment. The expulsion of the feminine or homosexuality is also an essential aspect in this performance.

Masculinity as dramaturgical performances

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

In Goffman's most renowned work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, ([1956] 1959), Goffman lays out his dramaturgical framework to represent the conduct of individuals interactions. He uses the stage metaphors of front (made up of setting, appearance and manner) and back regions to illustrate how the self is a social product of performances that individuals or 'teams' of individuals (Grazian 2007; Hughey 2011) display in different situations. Goffman argues that the front-stage or front region is the part of the performance that functions 'to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (1959: 32). The front then is the 'expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance' (Goffman 1959: 32). These are the scenic parts of the performance and the stimuli which tell us about the performers' social status and the interaction role that is being performed in a given situation. A large number of different routines can also be presented behind the same front. This means that there is not always a perfect fit between the character of a performance and the socialized guise. Goffman also uses the term 'team' to refer to sets of individuals who 'co-operate in staging a single

routine' (1959: 85). These co-operations then help express meanings within different social relations. The overall team impression can be seen as a performance alongside the individual acts, through forms of impression management. The back region or back-stage, which occurs behind the front and the team performances, is further defined by Goffman as 'a place, related to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course' (1959: 114). Away from the front, things can be adjusted and changed.

Since the millennium, qualitative studies have begun to focus on what young people themselves think about their lives and how they are experienced in lived realities in different spatial contexts (see Ball et al 2000; Frosh, et al 2002; McDowell 2003; Nayak 2006; Kenway, et al 2006; Hall et al 2009; McCormack 2010). In relation to working-class boys in particular, there seems to be limited studies which focuses on the impact of place on the way young people experience education and the influence a localities history has on the way young men view education, schooling and their performances of hegemonic forms of masculinity (see Nayak 2003a; Kenway et al 2006). Renold (2004) suggests that researchers not only need to explore boys' relationship to hegemonic masculinities, but also look to how other ways of 'doing boy' (including those who are socially and culturally subordinated) come to be performed and the extent to which boys can disrupt hegemonic masculine discourses. While I acknowledge that for every front performance, there is another region behind it, due to the limitations of space in this paper, I will only concentrate here on the front displays of masculinity by one group of young men, who I term *The Emos*, who at first seemed to perform their masculinities in a very different ways to their peers. However as I will go on to show, I suggest that *The Emos* who embraced the trans-global form of youth culture known as the 'alternative scene', continue to evidence many traditional discourses that contradict their own 'alternative' displays.

The study and methods

This paper draws on findings from an ESRC-funded doctoral study. A long term ethnography study was conducted over a two and a half year period, which looked at the diversity of a group of white, working class, young men within the former industrial town of Cwm Dyffryn¹ situated in the Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority area of South Wales. This fieldwork ran from the spring of 2008 (when the participants were in their final months of compulsory schooling) to the autumn of 2010 after many of the participants had collected their A level results and were preparing for university. The overall aim was to investigate

¹ The name has been changed to maintain the anonymity of participants, but chosen to reflect its history and geography.

how masculinities were formed, articulated and negotiated by one school year group at the end of their compulsory schooling and then to subsequently follow them through their different post-16 educational pathways. This was conducted in the same school sixth form and within other educational institutions that some of the young men opted for after their GCSE's. Anoop Nayak (2003b:148) has argued that 'young people's gender identities cannot be adequately comprehended within the microcosm of the school institution alone'. This research therefore, was undertaken across multiple other arenas in order to gain what Geertz (1973:6) called a rich 'thick description' of their lives, which led to a more meaningful and intricate understanding of how they understood and represented their world. This also enabled the multiple ways that these young men performed their masculinities to different audience and in different contexts to come through.

The fieldwork included participant observation supported by extensive fieldnotes, focus group interviews, ethnographic conversations, and more formally recorded one on one interviews with a number of young men (approximately 60 with around 15-20 as key figures) over the research period. These interviews were fully transcribed and along with the detailed fieldnotes, coded using a CAQDAS package for key themes. At school and (as the research period progressed) college fieldwork included observing and actively participating in different lessons (even on one occasion helping to change a tyre and also groom a horse); 'hanging around' in the sixth form common room and various canteens during break and dinner times; playing football and scrabble; and attending school events such as prize nights, parents' evenings, school trips and sporting occasions. Outside their different educational institutions (once the young men invited me into these other areas of their lives) I was also able to spend time in a variety of other settings. These ranged from sitting in cars in car parks and driving around the town; attending nights out in pubs and night clubs in the town centre and in the larger cities of South Wales; going to live music gigs and trips with them to the cinema, 18th birthday parties, takeaways, cafes and shops; playing computer games, and attending university open days and places of work (such as sports centres, supermarkets). I also used the social networking site Facebook as a means of keeping in touch and becoming involved in organised events. Different groups or teams (Goffman 1959) of working-class young men were identified and alongside *The Emos*, others including *The Geeks* (those young men who worked hard to achieve academically), the *Valley Boiz* (young men who came from families that would not have traditionally continued into post-compulsory education and occupied the hegemonic position in the school) and other young men who crossed friendship groups and adopted multiple presentations of self.

The data analysed here draws primarily on one friendship group of young men, who were referred to by others as *The Emos* and whose front performance of masculinity made them stand out from their peers. They were similar to Nayak's (2003c) 'White Wannabes' in terms of a multifaceted youth identity and close to Brown's (1987) 'ordinary kids' in their attitudes to education. However, they differed in the ways they constructed their identities against the school, and the locality compared to the other boys in their year group. In keeping with other research with youth subcultural groups (McCulloch et al 2006, Hollingworth and Williams 2009) they did not refer or label themselves in any particular way and many of the labels they were given came from others in their year group. I now turn to focus on *The Emos* friendship group and outline the alternative scene through which they displayed their front performance of masculinity through.

The 'alternative scene' and being an emo

The 'alternative scene' revolves around a combination of guitar based bands stemming out of broad genres of non-mainstream music which transcends the globe (Moore 2005). 'Alternative,' I suggest can be used as an umbrella term for a music scene with fluid, flexible boundaries, which can incorporate many sub-divisions of punk, different forms of heavy metal, nu metal, (Harris 2000), hard-core, glam, thrash, grunge, riot grrrl (Moore 2010), emo (House of Emo 2010) and the goth scene (Hodkinson 2002). Multiple forms of dance and violent body movements, such as moshing, slam dancing and crowd surfing accompany the live arena with many of these activities being carried out in spaces known as 'pits' (Tsitsos 1999). The broad scene is also marked with different clothing fashions but these are frequently combined together to make a complex appearance. These incorporate tight or over sized jeans, t-shirts with slogans or band logos on them, canvas or chunky trainers, heavy boots, dark or colourful belts with big buckles, hooded jumpers and jackets. Hair is often straight and long (sometimes pulled down over one eye) and dyed in various shades. Tattoos, facial and other body piercings are also popular. Leisure pursuits or 'extreme' sports that are loosely associated with the music, such as skateboarding, BMX riding, surfing and snowboarding, also accompanied the scene. Slobin (1993) developed the term 'affinity intercultural', which connects with the scene to describe certain forms of musical taste which link an audience, that might be in a minority in the locale, across the globe. Holly Kruse (1993) argues that the loose term of alternative music also means that 'local identities and traditions interact with relatively coherent translocal frames of reference' (Kruse 1993, in Hodkinson 2002:27). The shared task of networks, communications and commerce can connect people with each other.

When I first met Bruce, Clump, Jelly Belly, Jack and Tommy² (the key members of *The Emos* friendship group) in the spring of 2008 they were in Year 11, aged between 15 and 16. They didn't have a collective name for their friendship group, but did refer to each other as 'different' (Jack), and stated that 'other people... like us' (Bruce) weren't listened to and that some teachers at school referred to them as 'scumbags' (Bruce) and felt that they were 'looked down on' (Jack). Over the time I was acquainted with them and as their educational pathways changed, other young men and women were introduced to the group. Jenkins, Dai and Billy-Joe became friends with Clump and Jelly Belly at a local Further Education (F.E.) college and they performed together in different guitar based bands playing gigs in pubs and clubs across the region. Brittany and Rosie also became part of the wider group when they became romantically involved with Clump and Bruce and would always attend gigs with them and stand in the crowd at the very front of the stage when the different bands played.

In keeping with the scene that I outlined above, one of the ways these young men's personal front performance of masculinity was displayed was through their distinctive style of clothing. They tended to dress in baggy trousers or very tight skinny jeans, with dark T-shirts which has their favourite band logos on them and big baggy hooded jumpers. They tended to have long hair which was dyed a variety of bright colours and sometimes, but not always, pulled down over their eyes. Their bodies were also adorned with piercings in their eyebrows, ears, tongues, noses and even though the base of the neck (!). As they grew older, ever more elaborate tattoos were also added on their arms, legs and bodies to further enabling them to showcase their allegiance to the alternative scene. However, embracing this scene caused alienation within their schools and colleges from both teacher and their peers. They were often bullied in the wider community because of the way they dressed, their hair styles and the variety of body piercings and colourful tattoos that made them stand out within the locale as they transgressed accepted patterns of behaviour.

Alienation, bullying and intimidation

At school, teachers and their peers referred to the group as 'emos', something the popular press and other forms of media have sought to vilify (Daily Mail 2006) and mock (Guardian online 2006) when writing about the 'dangers' of non-mainstream youth. The boys themselves were uneasy about this label and when I asked them about it Bruce commented that he didn't like the 'stereotyping us as being emo' which also 'pissed' off Jack. They said

² Participants chose their own pseudonyms, many of which reflect their musical tastes. Bruce chose his because it was the lead singer's name of one of his favourite bands Iron Maiden and Jack chose his after the musician Jack White.

that it wasn't just about that '*cos we like listen to heavy metal and stuff like that*' (Jelly Belly); '*it's not just to do with emos*' (Clump).

The Emos did enough to 'get on' in school and achieved a mid-range of GCSE grades. However, they all said that they hated the way they were treated in school and the majority of them left after their GCSE's to undertake a variety of music and arts based courses at an F.E. college. Bruce and Tommy did opt to return to school after their GCSEs to undertake A levels (in similar arts based subjects to those who had left), but they continued to feel out of place. This feeling of alienation resulted in Tommy dropping out after his AS exams to join the others at college, so only Bruce remained to complete his final year. Brittany, his girlfriend and later fiancé (he proposed over a picnic on the mountain side above the town during the summer of 2009), was a year younger than he was and he therefore spent the majority of time with her during his final year in the sixth form. Bruce even took on an additional chemistry AS level course so that he could spend more time with her. When Brittany wasn't around, he stayed in the rooms of the art department working on his art projects or playing his guitar and practising songs to music that influenced his own bands such as *Lamb of God*, *Kill Switch Engage*, *Bullet for my Valentine* and *Funeral for a Friend*. He said that he '*preferred being on his own*' to mixing with the others in his year group.

Alongside the alienation which many of the boys felt within the school (which some subsequently left) they also indicated that they felt they did not fit in with the town of Cwm Duffryn. Their involvement with the different aspects of the 'alternative scene' (as noted above) attracted unwanted attention within the locality. In casual conversations, tales of bullying emerged from both inside and outside the school.

Jack: Yeah it used to be bad and used to be annoying, because everyone hated each other but it's alright now cos everyone's grown up a little bit now

Clump: Yeah used to get heaps of shit everyday in like year 7...

MW: Who did?

Bruce: Us, cos we're different to everyone else so we just got shouted at... called names but now in year 11 we get hardly any of it

Jack, Clump and Bruce here try to play down or minimalizing any bullying that occurred to them. They frame it as occurring in the past and therefore make it safe by indicating that is '*used to be bad*' and that now, as they and others are older they '*get hardly any of it*'. In this way the young men are also able to distance themselves from any negative feelings associated with this bullying or how it may have affected their self-esteem and attitudes to

school in general. Outside school the bullying took a more violent turn. They explained that on certain occasions when they were out at night, they felt threatened and intimidated when they came across other young men drinking alcohol in parks or in the street.

Jack: Like yeah wherever we go out, cos we don't wanna go out drinking round the street, say we wanna go up the country park sitting on the swings like that and a load of piss heads (drunks) will walk up like

Bruce: Yeah I can guarantee that you'll go out on a Friday night and you're guaranteed to see loads of um

Jelly Belly: It's like they can't enjoy themselves

Clump: Like drink after drink just to get smashed and...

Bruce: (cuts in) the bad thing then is that you're walking through them you are a bit weary of things

Tommy: You walk past some of um and they'll go (change of tone) *can I harrvee a fag en butt* (can I have a cigarette then) and if you don't have a fag you're fucked

Bruce: Yeah that's it like, no fag or lighter they start on you!

Jelly Belly: Me, him (Points at Clump) and Jenkins (not present) right got jumped on down the skate park because we didn't have a fag or nothing, they kept shouting at us about 15 of um coming on to us

MW: Did you manage to get away?

Jelly Belly: Well all them lot, Jenkins and Clump run off!

Clump: Yeah I had to! I got head butted!

MW: Really? Hang on, start again!

Jelly Belly: Well as Jenkins and Clump run off they all chased um, I stayed there for a little bit and they all went, then when I jumped down (off the skate ramp) they were all round the corner, about 14 of them and then I got jumped again!

It was not indicated in these highly charged discussions with the young men, but due to the small size of the area in which they lived, it is possible that those who would have once bullied them in school would continue doing so outside of it. Regardless if this was the case, what is clear here is that they were subordinated by others for not sticking to the normative masculine practices of the region and in the spaces where these practices were played out such as the skate park. The boys used the focus groups and interviews over the period to voice their concerns and had angry discussions of the bullying and harassment they received. Nonetheless, as can be seen in the defence of their actions when they were 'started on' (a verbal or physical altercation) for not having cigarette in the skate park, instead of seeing

themselves as victims, the young men try to frame their experiences as forms of heroic narratives. As Jelly Belly states '*15 of um coming on to us*', it is clear he sets himself up as trying to battle back against the odds in the face of intimidation and to hold onto his pride. He also doesn't talk about any of the pain that these beatings may have caused him physically or emotionally, again adding to his heroic narrative and proving he has the ability to suffer and take a beating. What is also interesting here is how Tommy is able to change his tone of voice to mimic how he perceives those who have the potential to attack him speak. By drawing out the words '*can I harrvee a fag en butt*', (can I have a fag then butt) in a broad South Wales accent, he is further distancing himself from those in the locale and placing himself at a different level by looking down on those who speak with such a strong, regional accent.

The Emos strategies for performing non-normative ways of being against the dominant notions of masculinity in Cwm Dyffryn produced a troubled and risky subject position. However, in this final section I focus now on how these positions were quite often contradictory. These young men who were seen as 'other' by their peers, often tried to maintain their position or justify it by exaggerating their expulsion. As Renold succinctly puts it, they 'ironically reinforced the very forms of heteronormative masculinity that marginalized their own alternative ways of doing and being' (2004:260). These contradictory ways that Bruce, Clump, Jelly Belly and the others adopted were in many ways re-traditionalizing (Adkins 1999) the older discourses of class and gender.

A Real Alternative?

Masculinities are always located in a specific time and place (Beynon 2002; Kenway et al 2006) but they also exist and are played out through social performances. The front performance of self is not as Connell (1995:64) points out, the internal processes that these young men draw on, but a combination of

Social relations and symbolism; they may well involve large scale social institutions. Particular versions of masculinity are constituted in their circuits as meaningful bodies and embodied meanings. Through body-reflexive practices, more than individual lives are formed: a social world is formed.

The Emos front performance of self then rather than offering a real difference, actually provided the customs, symbols and displays of machismo, familiar to an older world of industrial labour. The following extracts illustrate how strongly these boys felt about some issues which defined their difference, but also how, by engaging in practices such as skateboarding (which are not allowed by the school) and surprisingly American Football

(although through observations this never amounted to more than a casual throwing around of a rugby ball), the traditional masculine values of the locale were reborn or 'retraditionalized' (Adkins 1999) through performances of pain, heroism and physical and verbal toughness:

- Tommy: ... the only games played are like football and rugby...
- Hendrix: Like the normal games
- MW: So that controls what you can do and that's what annoys you?
- Hendrix: They don't like listen to opinions of other people... like us we hate football
- MW: Yeah, yeah...
- Hendrix: Like we'll have a kick around, but stupidly not so seriously like we like American football that's fun but they won't let us do it
- Jelly Belly: (talked over by Hendrix) Kids take it too serious football like
- Jack: We even asked once if we could bring our skateboards in once
- MW: Why did you say American Football though?
- Hendrix: Cos it's fun, you like get to munch people like
- Tommy: It's different init more running...
- Jack: We even asked if we could bring our skateboards in at one point for games lesson but they wouldn't let us
- Tommy: (talks over Jack)...it's an extreme sport that is...
- Jack: But they wouldn't let us
- MW: Have you guys ever tried and I know it's hard because it's uphill to the school, but skated to school?
- Various: Not allowed...we're not allowed, they take the boards off us. We're not allowed to do it!

In the narratives these young men told of their lives, a collective identity emerged which saw them positioning themselves away from their peers by not participating in certain sports. Jelly Belly thought these were taken too seriously by others who he saw as '*kids*' indicating that he felt more mature than others for not doing so. One afternoon in the music practice room at the school, whilst trying to learn a variety of guitar riffs from their favourite bands, Bruce and Tommy discussed how they liked to spend their Educational Maintenance Allowance (students in full time education from lower income households can receive between £10 and £30 per week from the Welsh Assembly Government) on going to see gigs or spending it on musical equipment. Instead of tales of drunken antics (which they saw as a waste of money) or watching sport, these young men talked about going to see the music they liked and

participate in, jumping around in the 'mosh pit' at live gigs that they went to watch. Tsitsos (1999) describes these as practices and forms of dance and body movements which are violent and aggressive. This particular space was one where they could connect with other young people with similar interests to them, but also perform older discourses of masculinity displayed through acts of physical toughness in the mosh pit.

Hetero-normative and homophobia

The position that the young men took on some aspects of sexuality also seemed tied-up with the traditions of the locale and they still emitted older dominant notions within their language and speech patterns. When they talked about sexual difference when discussing another young man from their school (Nibbles) who was openly gay, the contradictions were made clear.

- Bruce: He deserves a right fucking slap...
- MW: Why does he deserve it?
- Bruce: Cos he's GAY... I got... no...I haven't got a particular thing against gays but why? I mean why?
- Clump: They walk past and you know they are looking at your ass and stuff you know it's wrong like
- MW: Why do you think that then?
- Clump: No it's just the possibility that they could like...
- Bruce: And if there was a so called god do you think that they'd want males together!
- Tommy: Stopping the race init!
- Bruce: I know it's up to them but keep it to themselves like, behind doors like
- Jack: It's like in Glyn Neath [a nearby town] before I went fishing with my dad and my Nan we went down like that and there was cars everywhere and just two blokes or blokes going in and out of the bushes like we pelted it away...

In other recent studies with middle class young men, some recent authors have proclaimed that homophobia is on the decline (McCormack 2010). It would seem evident here that for these working-class emos, this was not the case. As I have already noted, the attributes of the 'alternative scene' made them stand out and in some cases become victims of abuse. But by projecting a strong heterosexual/homophobic stance here, they could distance themselves from the harassment that was regularly aimed at them for being 'emo' and also expresses attitudes of the white, heterosexual, heritage of the region in relation to masculinity and sexuality (Mac an Ghail, 1994; Epstein, 1997; Nayak and Kehily 1997). This display also allows them to validate their own heterosexuality by positioning themselves against another

form of 'other' which they proclaim to be unnatural as it was '*stopping the race*'. By using this homophobic discourse they were also able to distance themselves further from being seen as a source of desire by other men.

Conclusion

The reordering of work has resulted in jobs that were once the cornerstones of communities disappearing and the notion of what it means to be a man has altered (Kenway et al. 2006). In light of these economic and neo-liberal changes, class and gender boundaries for some have diminished (Beck 1999), but in a global economy in the former industrial places young people inhabit, they remain a major form of social inequality. In this article I have discussed the ways in which one group of white working class young men from a deprived community, who I have termed *The Emos*, tried to perform an alternative version of masculinity. I have argued here how the experiences of those who embrace a trans-global form of youth culture known as the 'alternative scene', are often alienated, bullied and victimised both within the school arena and outside of it, for their apparent non-normative masculinities. However, as the locality's traditional culture is linked to a specific form of classed work, the masculinities that are played out within this youth scene are, as Adkins (1999) terms it, undergoing a 'retraditionalization' process reconnecting to these older forms of identity, and are not as 'alternative' as they may be first proclaimed by the young men themselves and others. These young men are trapped between two strong gender cultures, one of the traditional historical physically hard working-class masculinity, and the more ambiguous masculinity of the scene they embrace. This is particularly evident through their personal front displays which are performed through certain fashion tastes and other aspects of the scene that have been highlighted in this paper. As the young men in this study experience life, they are not the total free agents that neo-liberalism proclaims and holds others to be. Their 'alternative' subjectivities are still bound to the classed and gendered codes of the former industrial heritage of place. Nonetheless, on a more optimistic note, the youth scene they embrace does offer these young men a refuge and a source of solidarity from the marginalized position they continually find themselves in.

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