Spatialising health work in schools – exploring the complex interconnection of space, health, physical education and masculinity

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The spaces of schooling are not mere settings or backdrops where students’ learning take place, but are implicated in the production of knowledge and identities/subjectivities – spaces embody specific values, beliefs and traditions. In this paper, we draw on visual ethnographic data from an all-boys school in New Zealand to examine how the spaces of schooling and physical education (PE) perform health work in relation to the all-round development of healthy young masculinities. By drawing on a complexivist philosophy, we draw attention to how school policies, spaces, bodies, students, teachers all intersect to provide the boys with a socio-spatial context in which knowledge and learning about healthy young masculinities is constructed. We demonstrate how stereotypical notions of what boys should be doing and what they like doing is, for instance, materialised by the design and provision of schooling and PE as sporting spaces, based on a form of ‘healthism’, which privileges individualistic notions of health and the assumption that sport = fitness = health. We conclude that although the design and provision of schooling and PE spaces based on healthism is an important source of pleasures for young men, it also reinforces narrowly defined and even problematic forms of healthy young masculinities.

Keywords: space; health work; policy; boys; masculinity; physical education.

Educational practice takes place in space, both actual and virtual. As Wermke, Pettersson and Forsberg (2015) have recently argued in this journal, there is a need to examine how the construction of different schooling spaces emerge from and respond to educational policies and school practices. In acknowledging this need, in this paper we examine how sport and physical education (PE) have been regarded as key spaces for engaging young men in practices that promote the all-round development of positive health outcomes (Hickey, 2008). In fact, as Gard (2006) argues, the emergence of organised competitive sport and the ongoing promotion of PE in schools can be seen as ‘an antidote to what was seen as the corrosive effects of modern life on boys and men’ (p. 785). In particular, when various health crises (e.g. the ‘obesity epidemic’) have been raised as national concerns, participation in physical activity and sport have often been promoted in both popular and scientific media (Gard & Wright, 2005), as well as educational policy statements (UNESCO, 2015), as being linked to notions of ‘healthy’ citizens and the development of gendered identities that contribute to ongoing health outcomes.

While competitive, organised team sports have historically been valued as a means of instilling ‘character’ into boys (Crotty, 2000) and used to foster competition, success, strength and a hard work ethic among young men (Messner, 1992), there has been a growing concern that competitive team sports promote negative qualities such as aggression and violence as well as (re)producing unhealthy notions of masculinity for young males (Kirk, 2010; Mooney & Hickey, 2012; Parker, 1996). The ongoing pervasiveness of competitive team sports in PE can thus be seen to ‘play a central role in elevating certain masculinities and bodies to dominant, hegemonic status, whilst relegating others to subordination’ (McCaughrty & Tischler, 2010, p. 184). Norman (2011) further raised concerns about how singular masculinity and dominant ideas about healthy ‘male’ bodies continue to be perpetuated in school gym spaces. In this sense, PE provides a powerful space for not just the reification and normalisation of particular masculinities,
but also the possibility for problematising masculinity as an important health outcome of educational policy.

In this paper, we explore the interwoven nature of space, masculinity, health and PE practice. We draw insights from complexivist philosophy (Ovens, Hopper, & Butler, 2013) to argue that the conceptual grammar of health education discourse needs to acknowledge that space matters in the social reproduction and constitution of gendered subjectivities. Being sensitive to space provides a vantage point from which to see how subjectivities, social interaction and pedagogical practices are discursively produced and how they may be transformed. In this sense, like other social categories, spaces are no longer assumed to have fixed characteristics. Schools, along with their sport fields and gymnasium, should not be ignored as mere settings or backdrops where students’ learning takes place, but recognised as embodying specific values, beliefs and traditions that become entangled in how identities are performed, the self is understood and particular ways of knowing and knowledge are produced.

The data used in this paper stem from the lead author’s doctoral research which was carried out at a single-sex boys school in New Zealand. Although the data presented and discussed are generated from a New Zealand context, the paper aims to add to our understanding of similar processes in Scandinavian schooling contexts and beyond. Through a spatial analysis, this paper demonstrates how the health work and health promotion of an all-boys secondary school in New Zealand is aligned with constructs related to traditional notions of (sporting) masculinity and therefore needs to be understood as activities by which boys construct their understanding of self and gender. We acknowledge that the concept of an all-boys school may be an unfamiliar practice for many readers of the journal. New Zealand, along with only a few other countries in the world, maintains a range of both single-sex and coeducational schools. The single-sex schools are mainly well established, representing their links back to early colonial times, and located in larger towns and cities where there are several secondary schools. The school in this study is one of the older, more traditional all-boys schools and, in this respect, prides itself on providing a broad education that includes sport and physical activity. In this study, we highlight how the socio-spatial promotion of participation/excellence in sport, especially rugby, at this school is discursively constructed as associated with ‘normal’ masculinities which in turn is conflated with the production of ‘healthy young men’.

Masculinities and health

Early work linking masculinity with men’s health was initially dominated by biological frameworks that assumed masculine traits were ‘hardwired’ and a key determinant of health. For example, an underpinning assumption is that aggression and risk-taking behaviours are naturally occurring expressions of maleness and this increased rather than decreased the tendency for many men to engage in high risk practices (e.g. excessive use of alcohol; high speed driving, etc.), avoid preventative care, delay treatment and ignore health promotion information (Courtney, 2000). The proliferation new gender theories in the 1960s and 1970s resisted biology’s overly deterministic way of interpreting such behaviours and challenged the male–female binary that had permeated earlier sex studies. As a result, research questions about men’s health shifted to better understand the strong negative influence of male socialisation on men’s health and explore how men enacted masculinity through their health and illness practices (Messner, 1997; Sabo, 2000). However, while this research provided innovative insights to processes about how gender is learned and performed, it was also criticised for its reliance on individualistic and psychological examinations of gendered attitudes and personality traits.

Social constructionism emerged to conceptualise gender as intersecting with culture, social class and history, actively constructed and produced. The work of Raewyn Connell (1987, 1995) has been central to this way of conceptualising masculinity particularly in the sense that there is a form of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ that becomes the most honoured way of being a man in any given culture and that requires all other men to position themselves in relation to the ideal. It becomes hegemonic (in the Gramscian sense) because it emerges from social contexts and relations of power that naturalise a particular and favoured way of being male. Hegemonic masculinity becomes an ongoing pattern of practice (as opposed to an identity) that enables not just a hierarchy among men but also a hierarchy between men and women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In respect to young men, researchers found the concept appealing for highlighting how sport and PE are important sites for reproducing an ideology of masculinity (e.g. Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Hickey & Fitzclarence, 1999; McKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000; Messner, 1990 1992). In the context of physical activity, hegemonic masculinities, as normative performances, idealise males as robust, competitive and self-reliant rather than concerned with self-health, illness or injury (Kimmel, 1997).

Social constructionism is allowed for recognising that masculinity is intertwined with various social locations and that the idea of multiple masculinities helped to describe men’s varying alignments to health practices, some of which are synonymous with hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For example, Hickey and Fitzclarence (1999) argue that PE acts as a site where ‘it is expected that young males will learn how to practice and embrace dominant cultural understandings of masculinity’ (p. 53). Coupled with the recognition that not all males get to share equally in the performance of hegemonic masculinity (Messner & Sabo, 1990), studies...
have shown how hierarchies of masculinities contribute to unjustified treatment of not only girls but also boys in schools and PE (Fernandez-Balboa, 1993; Light & Kirk, 2000; Renold, 2004). In addition, it has been argued that school and PE classes can be seen as sites of masculinising practices through which boys learn, embrace and embody, or are damaged by particular codes of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000; Kehler & Martino, 2007).

The complex intertwining of health, space and masculinity

While social constructionist theories were important for interrupting classical ways of linking masculinity and health, they were also critiqued for not providing sufficient nuanced accounts of how men experience masculine roles and gender relations in the context of a variety of social locations and intersecting identities. There was a need to draw attention to the complexity of how of how masculinities, as a social determinant of health, intersects other determinants such as socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, geography, community, education and employment. There was also a need to understand the complexity of how the practices of masculinity vary across the life course of an individual’s life in response to ageing, life events and history. This turn to being sensitive to the complexity of concepts such as masculinity and health draw from a range of disciplines (e.g. post-structuralism and posthumanism) to generate new perspectives on being gendered. Complexity itself is a broad field that is dispersed across a broad array of concepts and disciplinary fields. By nature, it is a fluid concept that is difficult to define and subject to much debate (Alhadeff-Jones, 2008; Ovens et al., 2013). However, it is also a fertile ground for conceptual tools for understanding the dynamic nature of masculinity. In this paper, we draw on two concepts in particular: performativity and spatiality.

Performativity denotes the capacity to perform some action or ability to actually do something. It sits as an alternative to representationalism and draws on an emergentist, temporal epistemology where the emphasis is on process (rather than structure), change (rather than stability), situationally specific (rather than generic) and always emergent (rather than having an essence) (Denzin, 2003). Butler’s (1990, 1997) work on the performativity of gender had an enormous impact in this respect by suggesting that gender is always something that someone ‘does’, but not by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. That is, gender is not programmed into our genes or something that is singularly ‘possessed’ or something that one ‘is’ but something that is continually ‘performed’ through sustained social interaction and a series of repetitive acts (Butler, 1990).

A performative view of gender was particularly challenging for masculinity in the 1990s, because at the time masculinity in language and gender studies was so often the default or residual category that women’s linguistic behaviour was compared to. By taking a performative view, researchers had to begin thinking that even men (and in the US, even white middle-class heterosexual men) must work hard through social practice to be recognised as men. The former type of analysis often led to an understanding of male identities as determined by pre-existing notions of (hegemonic) masculinity ‘possessed’ by individual or groups of males, reinforcing masculinities as ‘fixed’, ‘types’ or ‘possessed’, whereas through a performativa lens, masculinities are (re)performed in multiple, fluid and socio-historic ways, as shaped by the workings of discourse.

Spatiality enables an understanding of how individuals are gendered in ways that are influenced by the social understandings they ‘take from’ and ‘build into’ the places in which they perform their identities (King, 2011). From this perspective, the concept of space is transformed from the geometrical/mathematical idea of denoting an empty area, to seeing space in more complex ways: as a web of interconnected elements, emergent and socially constitutive (Gottzén, 2011). In this sense, the places that provide for human interaction do not pre-exist their performance as some form of static backdrop or neutral setting; rather their construction is ongoing and unstable. Participants in these spaces become sexualised and gendered through performances that imbue material surroundings with meaning, often converting them into places that become very familiar to the participants. It is in such spaces that individuals become gendered subjects rather than being a priori sexualised subjects (King, 2011).

Spaces embody specific values, beliefs and traditions. Stereotypical notions of what boys should be doing and what they like doing is also, for instance, materialised by the design and provision of PE spaces as ‘sporting places’ (Kirk, 2010). The use of space in PE can be seen as the materialisation of dominant discourses of sport, fitness and health. These discourses are based on what Crawford (1980) calls a form of ‘healthism’, which privileges individualistic notions of health and the assumption that sport equals fitness equals health. Indeed, Kehler (2014) argues that ‘In many schools, sport, masculinity, and health are often conflated, over-lapping and often times interchangeable. One term often means the other, though it is not articulated as such’ (p. 63). Spaces therefore constitute – and are constituted by – power/knowledge relations (Blunt & Rose, 1994). The construction and organisation of spaces in PE can be seen as a product of power/knowledge relations inherent in discourses (Foucault, 1980). Discourses have produced knowledge or truths about what spaces are needed in PE.

Although Gieryn (1999) argues that most sociological inquiries have a space dimension to them, even if not overtly recognised or acknowledged, most studies to date...
that have examined boys' performances of gender in schools and PE (e.g. Drummond, 2003; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Hickey, 2008; Kehler, 2004; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Parker, 1996) have not specifically considered how spaces are implicated in these performances. For instance, both Connell (1995, 1996, 2000) and Parker (1996) in their work on schooling, PE and masculinities, use the notion of 'site' in their theorising of masculinities, where this term is mainly used to describe the material context/location where boys perform masculinities. This way of studying boys and masculinities in school and PE fails to recognise that spaces can also be seen to be implicated in the construction and performance of masculinities. Viewing spaces as absolute and passive has in turn contributed to an inattention to the power of particular spaces as implicated in the gendering processes in schools (Jamieson, Fisher, Gilding, Taylor, & Trevitt, 2000). O'Donoghue (2007) and Armstrong (2007) argue that the designation and provision of spaces for particular activities can be seen as responsible for constructing and reproducing stereotypical differences and power relations in the wider society. There is therefore a need to further examine how spaces are implicated in boys' performances of gender in schools and PE, since spaces can be seen as enabling and/or restricting certain forms of masculinities and health practices through social relations of power.

Methodology
The research was undertaken by the lead author in a multicultural single-sex boys secondary school in Auckland, New Zealand over the course of a year. The school was selected, not because it was a boys school, but because it was the only secondary school in the local district that granted permission for the visual ethnography to proceed. Indeed, many of the schools approached were initially interested in the study, but later declined due to the videoing and issues of gender are perceived as 'high risk' (Allen, 2013). Because of the nature of the data collection, ethical permission was sought and granted by the University of Auckland Human Ethics Committee. Consent to use the school as the site for the research was given by the Principal.

Participants were Year 10 (age 14–15) students (n = 60) from two different PE classes. All of the boys from these two PE classes took part in the study. Since all the participants were younger than 16, both the boys and at least one parent/legal guardian signed consent forms. An important ethical consideration of the study was the fact that no harm should come to those who decided to participate in the study. The boys were assured that the identities of individuals and sources of information would not be made known to the reader. Any details of the students' individual responses were not made available to any of the school staff and pseudonyms were used for the boys'/teacher's citations and the name of the school, to minimise risk of identification (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In an effort to provide a more intimate representation of the participants' contextually embedded everyday experiences and capture the everyday materiality of gendered practices in PE, data were generated using a 'participatory visual research approach' (Pink, 2007). In this approach, both the researcher and the participating boys used video cameras to record the experiences of participating in PE. In practice, this meant that each student got to use the video camera once for about 20–30 minutes resulting in a mixture of longer and shorter video clips. In total, over 50 hours of video recordings were made and blurred where necessary to ensure the participants could not be identified (Schuck & Kearney, 2006).

After all the recordings had been completed, the participants were invited to focus group and individuals interviews where they were asked to select video clips to discuss. The focus groups consisted of 4–6 boys who had been doing an activity together at some point in one of the lessons, such as playing on the same volleyball team. The group stayed the same for the second interview. All the boys also took part in individual interviews. Everyone was invited to take part in the individual interviews in order to eliminate the risk of individual students being questioned by their peers as to why they were chosen, which could potentially lead to these students being harassed or ridiculed. The decision to exclusively let the boys themselves decide what video clips to look at was based on Azzarito's (2010) concern that visual material selected by the researcher might lead to a 'displacement from the personal to the social' (p. 156) where the boys might disavow strong feelings, or issues of personal relevance, on the topic researched. The clips were then played on the researcher’s computer and the boy(s) were encouraged to talk about what was happening in the selected clip.

Open-ended questions/prompts were used in order to get them thinking and talking about issues relating to performances of gender in these video clips. These questions/prompts were developed in relation to the review of literature and themes/issues that had been identified during the observations and video recordings. However, these open-ended questions/prompts were not introduced until after the video clips had been played and then only provided when needed, so as not to overly influence responses and to encourage the boys to elaborate on topics raised during the conversations taking place while watching the video clips. All the conversations were taped and later transcribed.

According to Pink (2007), such an approach creates a 'context where ethnographers/authors can create or represent continuities between [these] diverse worlds, voices
or experiences, and describe or imply points in the research at which they meet or collide’ (144). However, giving the boys a voice through participatory visual methods is not unproblematic. Finding the line between the participants’ own stories and that of the researcher is a particularly important consideration (Luttrell, 2010). Arnot and Reay (2007) in particular caution against treating the account that is produced as an end itself, thus conflating voice and message, and instead understanding common-sense understandings as themselves produced. For this reason, more traditional ethnographic techniques, such as interviews/discussions and observations, were also used to complement the data from the participatory visual methods. Observations were for instance initially used in order to get to know the students and gain some of their ‘trust’, which was seen as important prior to conducting the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

The data from the initial focus groups and individual interviews were then thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and used in a second round of interviews in order to seek further clarification and elaboration on the themes identified. This often involved going back to particular video clips that they had selected and asking them to look at them again and either reaffirming or amending their interpretations. The boys’ responses in these follow-up interviews added another layer of data which were also analysed in relation to the identified themes.

All the data generated were coded according to emerging themes, or ‘analytical categories’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994), in relation to the boys, masculinities, spaces and health. Ultimately, the different codes, such as ‘male/female space’, ‘sporting space’ and ‘masculinising space’, became incorporated into the two key themes presented in this paper; ‘school spaces as gendered places’ and ‘performing masculinities in the spaces of PE’. The analysis of the themes then involved going from an analysis at a ‘semantic level’ to a ‘latent level’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006), where we attempted to understand how these themes, in relation to the performances of gender, ended up with their particular form and meaning. In order to do so, we drew in part from Foucauldian and Butlerian notions of performativity, discourse and materialisation by exploring how through their performances of gender – actions, interactions, language use – boys (re)produced the spaces of schooling and PE as shaped by the dominant notions of masculinity, sport, fitness and health circulating in this research setting.

The boys’ visual representations (the framing and choice of content to video) together with their descriptions and interpretations of these in the focus groups and individual interviews provided thick and rich accounts of boys’ performances of gender in PE and generated an array of meanings as associated with space, masculinities and health. The findings reported on in this paper focus on those themes where the boys’ meaning-making demonstrates the discursive links between schooling, space, masculinities, sport and health.

Findings

School spaces as gendered places

New Zealand schools are typically located on large allocations of land. The school buildings themselves, mainly single or double-storied, tend to be surrounded by grassed and hard-surfaced spaces. These extra spaces are not natural or neutral free spaces, but differentiated into areas dedicated to particular sports. Around the school buildings there may be some recreational and garden areas allowing for students to sit and eat their lunch during a break in the school day. In primary schools, there may also be climbing and adventure playground equipment, but the provision of additional space in schools is mainly for sport.

This trend is evident in the utilisation of space at Kea College. Figure 1 is a photo from the ‘back’ of the college and shows how the school buildings, including ‘blocks’ for art, science, technology, language, are grouped to orient the ‘front’ of the school close to the road entrance and leave significant space at the rear to be divided into different playing fields. Figure 1 also shows the brand new sports complex at the end of the rugby and soccer
fields. Next to this there is a multipurpose ‘astro-court’ (artificial grass) with lines for tennis and hockey including a smaller fenced off area for basketball. Behind the new sports complex and the multipurpose astro-court there is an older gym which is a two-storey building with changing rooms, gym and PE staff room downstairs and an indoor multipurpose gym with lines for indoor soccer and hockey, basketball etc. upstairs. Nearby there is another sports field with stands that is used for the school’s top rugby, cricket and soccer teams. The differentiation of these spaces, along with the careful grooming of these spaces to be flat and well drained, reflects the prominent role that the school gives to sport in the education of its students.

The value of sport is embedded in the deeper discourses Kea College uses to ground its educational practices. Sport is represented as an important part of the life of the school. An example of this is provided on the school’s official web page where the ‘upcoming events’ section on the front page advertises various sporting events such as basketball, swimming and rugby and a slideshow scrolls through a number of images, many showing school members playing sport. Sport is also represented as a form of excellence. In the school’s prospectus for future students, ‘sporting excellence’ is one of the main headings stating that ‘Sport has always had a high profile at [Kea] College and many of our Old Boys, as well as some current pupils, are in National Representative teams’. However, in the school prospectus it is further stated that at Kea College:

We stress the importance of sport in the all-round development of healthy young men, believing it to be as important for their social development as classroom activities are for their academic progress. All boys are encouraged to participate and develop skills in some form of sporting activity as well as taking part in Physical Education lessons at all year levels … Although the importance of competition is acknowledged, we are more concerned in encouraging enjoyment of sport for its own sake. While success is always gratifying, [Kea] College is proudest of its tradition of sportsmanship and fair play [emphasis added].

In this sense, sport is also represented as a part of a broad education. Further evidence of this was provided by Mr Whyte, the Head of PE, who stated that his desire was for students, once they leave Kea College, to have ‘found’ at least one sport that they will continue doing later in life. This is also reflected in the fact that in contrast to many other schools across New Zealand PE at Kea College is compulsory throughout the entire schooling (Year 7–13) whereas in most other schools, and indeed as stipulated by the curriculum, PE is only compulsory until Year 10.

This discourse was also represented in the comments shared by some of the participants during the interviews. When the boys are asked about the best things about going to Kea College, involvement in sport was a recurring theme. When asked what they learn from such involvement, they linked it to the development of positive character traits. For example,

- Mitchell: Sports build character … respect [for] others and stuff.
- Logan: You learn how to work hard … discipline.
- Dominic: Cooperating with others.
- Matthew: Competing and measuring yourself against others.
- James: Learning certain skills … you know like running and stuff.
- Logan: Teamwork and that sort of stuff.

In this respect, the boys’ comments link their participation in sport with development of masculine qualities (such as ‘working hard’, ‘discipline’, ‘respecting others’, ‘cooperating’ and ‘teamwork’) that have been shown to influence young men’s health behaviours (Courtenay, 2000). The focus placed in the school prospectus for Kea College above on the ‘all-round development of healthy young men’ can be seen as materialised through the ‘social development’ and the socialisation processes the boys refer to as inherent in their engagement with sport at this school.

These discourses also manifest and shape the material practices within the school in several ways. Firstly, many of the boys and teachers at this school seem to conflate school sports, such as rugby, with PE. This view is not an interpretation of the official Health and PE curriculum in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2007) that other schools and curriculum experts would promote, but it is a recurring feature of the boys/teachers’ commentary in this study. Secondly, sport and PE at this school can be seen as closely associated with developing, constructing and maintaining a (certain) masculine identity, seen as important in the all-round development of healthy young men. Indeed, the above statements from the school prospectus also highlight Butler’s (1997) proposal regarding the potentially productive power of discourse and representation in the process of materialisation. Drawing on Butler, it could be argued that a statement such as ‘sport for its own sake’ is all that is needed to (re)produce sport as a desirable or even expected masculine endeavour. That is, ‘any’ form of involvement in sport is juxtaposed with ‘no’ involvement, since it helps boys reaffirm/conform to the discursively constructed ‘normal’ masculinities within this school setting which importantly is also conflated with ‘healthy’ young masculine identities. This demonstrates how becoming ‘healthy young men’, as emphasised in the Kea College’s school prospectus above, for these boys relies on adhering and living...
up to the discursively constructed norm of a ‘sporting masculinity’.

Thirdly, these discourses have the material effect of defining social groups and who the boys spend time with during breaks:

Latham: You hang out with the people who play same sports as you.
Alex: In the breaks people get into groups sporty and not sporty.
James: … rugby people hang out with rugby people … people hang out in different spaces depending on the group.
Ben: … rugby players group … not sporty people who hang out at the library.

James and Ben indicate that the sports students belong to, such as rugby, not only determine what people they mostly spend time with, but also what spaces they occupy in the school. In this sense, the gendered identities of the boys are also filled with spatial metaphors (Gilroy, 1993). Foucault (1995) alerts us to the ways in which even physical spaces are power processes which produce effects in people. In relation to education, Allen (2013) more specifically argues that this is how ‘temporal and spatial configurations of power that are often inconspicuous, unacknowledged and/or mundane affect students’ experiences of education’ (pp. 59–60).

However, as we have stated early on, gender is a complex concept and many of the boys in this study also reveal how their schooling activities do not (only) involve sport, thus blurring the possibility of a simple or linear link between sport and masculinity. For instance, the boys talk about playing various ‘instruments’, being involved in ‘graphics/arts’ and ‘computer games’. One of the boys, Jack, says that the main reason he goes to Kea College is because of its ‘awesome music department and teachers’ so he can pursue his passion for playing the piano. Indeed, Mr Whyte runs computer games programming courses both during the school terms and in the school holidays. While in the final stages of the fieldwork, he had just taken over the IT department which can be seen as a sign of disrupting the link between sport, PE teachers and masculinity. Reporting on the lived experiences of PE teachers such as Mr Whyte can be important in order to provide further disruptions to the enduring discourses of masculine hegemony that pervade all-boy’s schooling and PE (Mooney & Hickey, 2012).

Oliver cites this socio-spatial grouping dependent on sports as being one of the negatives or ‘downsides’ of attending Kea College:

Oliver: Well you know the downside is that there is a few people I don’t like … some people show off too much … groups of really sporty people always hang out together … they think they are good at everything … telling everyone what to do and stuff.

Similarly, Timothy relates how this grouping of people is also related to issues of bullying:

Timothy: Yeah bullying is definitely one of the negatives of Kea College … people who are not very social and not into sport.

Oliver and Timothy illustrate how sport not only acts as an important space for the development of masculine identities, but also in the production and maintaining of unequal power relations between and among boys. For instance, on a couple of occasions it was observed how groups of ‘sporty’ boys before/during/after PE bullied/intimidated other less ‘sporty’ or ‘non-sporty’ boys by tackling them against the wall/fence/to the ground or passing the ball to someone who clearly is not ready to receive it. Just as the boy James in O’Donoghue’s (2007) study used a particular school yard place to bully other students, the materially and discursively constructed sporting space is used by some boys to intimidate other boys. However, it is important to note that it is not the sporting spaces per se that determines these actions; it is the boys’ repeated use of these spaces, as shaped by discourses of sport and masculinity and relations of power that perform these spaces as ‘bullying’ spaces. Being and performing ‘sporty’ boy, importantly has the double function of giving access to particular spaces associated with privileged social peer group status and (re)produces the position of the ‘non-sporty’ boys as the ‘other’ (Hunter, 2004). In this sense, the spaces of schooling and PE as constitutive of discourses of sport and masculinity simultaneously produce certain pleasures and displeasures (Gerdin, 2015; Gerdin & Pringle, 2015).

The language available to these boys to describe their understandings and experiences of schooling and PE is shaped by the socio-spatial context of sport. One of Foucault’s (1972) primary assertions about discourse is that language not only describes a thing but simultaneously produces it: ‘Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention’ (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). The particular way these boys describe how sports define social groups and who they spend time with during school, such as ‘sporty’ and ‘non-sporty’ boys, might reify discursive links between discourses of sport and masculinity. However, their description, as in Oliver’s case, might also provide evidence of some sort of resistance to dominant ideas associated with these particular kinds of experiences. The important thing here is that these boys are never outside of discourse; they make sense of their experiences through the discourses available to them.
Performing masculinities in the spaces of PE

As stated above, PE at Kea College was conflated with sport to the extent that its content and instruction were oriented around the teaching of sporting techniques and playing games. This meant that the spaces of PE were also the spaces where the boys were participating in school sport. In the following discussion, we now turn our attention to examining how these spaces enabled and constrained the boys’ performances of masculine identity. The first extract comes while watching a video clip representing a game of rugby (represented by the still images in Fig. 2):

Steven: Wow what a pass, Mike! [Top left image]
Mike: Yeah that was a mint pass ay! But look at me getting tackled later! [Top right image]
Steven: And wow mean tackle, Bruce! Oh that’s gotta hurt Mike![Laughter]
Mike: Yeah but look at me getting up and getting my payback there! [Bottom left image]
Bruce: Yeah you got me good there!
Steven: Awesome![Laughter]
Steven: And look there’s Duncan getting tackled too! [Bottom right image]
Mike: Yeah but he is so weak, look he is not even getting up again!
Steven: What a loser!
Mike: Yeah come on, don’t be a poofier, be a man Duncan! [Laughter]

In this extract, the boys’ conversation reflects how performing in this space is linked to qualities of male toughness, aggressiveness and competitiveness. What is evident in their comments are how they value an indifference to their own and other boys’ physical pain (‘Oh that’s gotta hurt... Yeah but look at me getting up and getting my payback’) and label those who are less physically able in a derogatory way as homosexual (‘don’t be a poofier, be a man Duncan’). In this space, it is possible to see that particular performances become valued as masculine and the boys become hierarchically arranged based on how they live up to these masculine norms and ideals. In this sense, sports such as rugby can act as a ‘dividing practice’ (Foucault, 1983, p. 208) by comparing, differentiating and hierarchising boys, subsequently producing particular relations of power that regulate and monitor the actions and behaviours of these boys. Hence, boys such as Duncan who are not able or are unwilling to live up to these masculine norms and ideals are judged as inferior or the ‘other’. This ‘other’ is then (re)produced by the dominant sporting discourse as representing undesirable/unhealthy masculinities.

The second extract comes from one of the focus group discussions when two of the boys explained the privileged status enjoyed by the school’s ‘First XV’ rugby team:

Adam: Well you know if you want to become a real man and stuff you need to be good at sports. I mean look at the First XV boys they are all awesome at sports and
by far the most popular at our school. Many of them have girlfriends and have probably already had sex and stuff.

Thomas: Yeah man being on that rugby team people automatically think you are super masculine and stuff, you know a real man. Then they can score any girl they want!

Adam: Yeah like all the girls from other schools love them. They all come and watch their games and dress up for it and stuff. You know look all feminine and stuff.

In this extract, the comments from Adam and Thomas' regarding the high social status of the First XV rugby boys gives an indication of how gender and (hetero) sexuality are deeply intertwined (Connell, 1987) in this school setting. The boys’ comments demonstrate how notions of masculinity are loaded with particular heterosexual meanings. Thus, in this space, sport powerfully interacts with discourses of sexuality where ideals of athleticism and strength are coupled with attractiveness in front of the other sex (Wellard, 2009). Or as Jackson (2009) puts it, ‘What confirms masculinity is being (hetero) sexually active [to ‘score’ in Thomas’s parlance]; what confirms femininity is being sexually attractive to men [‘look all feminine’]’ (p. 152). That is, healthy (sporting/rugby) masculinities are closely linked with heterosexuality.

Given this we suggest that this school’s use of rugby in PE can be seen to contribute to the constitution of the subject as a ‘technology of domination’ (Foucault, 1972), which (re)produces spaces where students experience unequal power relations and certain dis/pleasures. In other words, as a curriculum space, the pedagogical practices being employed are not necessarily democratising, inclusive or ‘healthy’ in the sense that ideas around masculinity are challenged (e.g. Burrows, 2005; Curry, 1993; Markula & Pringle, 2006).

Discussion and conclusions

Drawing on an extended ethnography of one boy’s school, this paper has considered how certain performances of gender are shaped, played out and performed within the spaces of schooling and PE. For Kea College, space is not a neutral concept, but rather an area to be territorialised and differentiated in ways that reflect not only the prominence of sport in the school, but also which sports are valued and privileged. Creating sport territories in this way not only invokes social norms of who participates in such spaces and how such spaces are used, but they also become the materialisation of the key discourses central to what education means for the school. What is evident from the observations is that sport, in particular rugby, are central to the way the spaces of the school are constructed and embedded into the school philosophy of what it means to educate healthy young men. For those boys who are able to physically perform in ways congruent with dominant masculine values reified through sport, these spaces are seen as important sites for bonding between males and as a rite of passage for boys becoming healthy young men. Conversely, those boys who fail to live up to these privileged masculine ideals experience these spaces as uncomfortable and confrontational which leads to fears and anxieties about their own gendered and sexual identities.

The spaces of PE which can be seen to construct and reproduce certain (stereotypical) ways of being or performing boy (O’Donoghue, 2007), produce both pleasures and displeasures for boys (Gerdin, 2015; Gerdin & Pringle, 2015). For instance, the findings reported on in this paper highlighted how the dominance of rugby at this school and during PE acts as a dividing practice which contributes to the development of both privileged and subjugated masculinities since the national sport of rugby can be seen as the ‘glue’ of masculine identities in New Zealand. However, we agree with Pringle (2007), that the sport of rugby should not be considered as ‘the social problem’, but concern be directed toward the discursive articulations that help constitute rugby’s current state of dominance. The sometimes problematic construction of masculinities and pleasures associated with rugby stem from the dominating discourses that position rugby as the national sport of New Zealand and as a ‘rite of passage’ for boys becoming men (Drummond, 2003). Performing heath work by actively encouraging participation and excellence in sport within a school setting seems such a simple and effective solution to getting more young men healthy but the boys’ responses, for instance, highlighted how the sport of rugby constructs/produces undesirable and ‘unhealthy’ masculine behaviours such as an indifference to their own and other boys' physical pain and heterosexism/homophobia. The problematic nature of the discursively constructed healthy young masculinities associated with sports such as rugby at this school can, thus, be summarised in the question, ‘Healthy for (and at the expense of) who?’.

Sport has a significant place in many boys’ and men’s lives, through playing or watching or even ignoring, to the extent that many boys’ and men’s whole sense of themselves as a male is tied up with their experiences of sport (Messer & Sabo, 1990). Of course, many boys and men benefit greatly from having sport as a part of their lives. Taking part in sport gives an outlet to boys ‘physicality’ where they need to expend energy and enjoy the experience of being active, developing and honing new skills along with the pride in performing in front of others (Bailey, 2006). Participation in contact team sports is an expected part of a boy’s life, and has been seen to be a central component of the preparation for ‘manhood’ in many culture (Light & Kirk, 2000; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Ironically, it may also be the case that some of
the supposed problems of boys' and men's attitudes to (ill-)health – ignoring pain, fighting on, acting tough – may be a result of their sport participation socialisation process (Robertson, 2003).

Consequently, schools and (PE) teachers need to be aware that they are not only encouraging and promoting health through engagement/excellence in sports such as rugby, but they are also influential in (re)producing what constitutes healthy young masculinities. The spatial (discursive) practices of schooling and PE related to health, sport and masculinity in this way produce boys' performances of gender. In this sense, the social norms or the discourses of schooling and PE in this setting produce a range of options and constraints for the boys. Within this paper, we have shown how the discursive articulations between masculinities, sport and PE are influential in shaping the boys' experiences of schooling and PE and the production of healthy young masculinities. This can be seen as further evidence of how schools and PE through both the official and hidden curriculum reproduce dominant discourses of gender, making only certain gender identities available to the students, as associated with sport, fitness, health and masculinity. The health work or health promoting done by this school are aligned with constructs related to traditional (sporting) masculinity, and the boys' actions and behaviours may, thus, be understood as practices by which they construct their own understanding of self and gender – healthy young Kea College men.

However, the findings in this paper have also shown how those boys who are unable or unwilling to live up to these ideals related to sport and masculinity, experience school and PE more negatively. The results, in particular, warrant a continued concern for the discursive links between, for instance, dominant discourses of masculinity, toughness/aggression, competition and (hetero) sexuality. In particular, by raising awareness of those aspects of PE that contribute to the alienation of some boys, we hope to have further contributed to an alternative discourse of PE which might create space and opportunities for alternative ways of performing healthy young masculinities.

Any real attempt to challenge the normalisation of masculinities in schooling and PE therefore needs to include an attempt to challenge dominant notions of sport, fitness and health as well. In particular, there is a need to challenge the prevalence of dominant discourses of sport, fitness, health and masculinity by ‘detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 133). By addressing normalising technologies of power, there is a further need to scrutinise the spatiality of healthy young masculinities of schooling and PE. In particular, we need to acknowledge that space – both material and discursive – matters in the social production and constitution of both health and gender. The challenge for PE teachers therefore in particular lies in continuing to promote and support healthy lifestyle practices while simultaneously dislodging deep-seated attitudes and beliefs of heteronormative masculinity still pervasive in school and PE spaces (Kehler, 2014). PE teachers need to ask themselves, how are non-conforming young masculinities, for example, supported and encouraged to be accepted and valued in school and PE spaces?

Future research which focuses on boys’ experiences and understandings of schooling and PE spaces might help highlight and challenge how these spaces shape narrow conceptions, and restrict the diversity, of healthy young masculinities. The use of such insights might also have the potential to improve both educational and health outcomes in PE by enabling more boys to critically learn about themselves, others and their bodies and experience the excitement of participating in a range of health- and movement-related contexts (of which sport is also a part).

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