

Negotiating Identities

Being “Boy,” Being “Filipino,” Being “Other”

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Abstract: In this article I explore the nuanced performances of masculinity enacted by a 14-year-old boy named “Tom.” Tom, a boy of Filipino descent, complicated much of what was the case with other (non-Filipino) young male participants in my study when it came to masculinity. Rather than simply (re-)producing hegemonic masculinity, I show in this article how Tom played with his masculinity and countered potential accusations of homosexuality through acts of self-exoticization and self-feminization (removing others’ power to do so). I explore the role that Tom’s Filipino heritage and London background plays in his performance of masculinity, arguing that in the overwhelmingly white context of Norfolk (UK), it serves to anchor his hegemonic masculinity through connotations of “toughness” and “urbanness.” It is therefore in Tom’s emphasis of his diasporic “Otherness” that his gender transgressions can be consolidated.

Keywords: boys, diaspora, Filipino, identity, masculinity, race

In this article I draw on data gathered from focus groups hosted in the summer of 2012 and speak to the diverse literature within the field of masculinity studies. More specifically, I explore the role that race and place plays in the performance and reception of different masculinities during boyhood. Such explorations are crucial because we know that boys of color are routinely stigmatized in ways that have “scarring effects” on their adult life chances (Eslea and Mukhtar

2000; Ferguson 2000: 3; Graham and Robinson 2004; Marsh 2018; Nagarajan 2018).

Furthermore, I argue that in the context of Norfolk, UK (where this study is based), “not being white” plays a significant role in how masculinity is experienced. I also highlight the need for academics to explore the multiplicities of Asian identity and diaspora within the UK context.

Below I provide a nuanced examination of masculinity through a case study of a 14-year-old boy called “Tom”¹ who is part of the Filipino diaspora living in Norfolk (UK). I explore the different strategies that allowed Tom to maintain a hegemonically unproblematic masculine identity despite his articulations being often against the “norm.” In doing so Tom’s presentation of self raises significant questions about the role that race and geography play in both the reception of gender performance, and how his racial difference can be operationalized (by the performer and/or the audience) in the performance of gender identity. This use of difference included emphasis of his diasporic Asian identity, as well as reminding others of his childhood in London (UK). In many ways, these reminders allowed him to buy what Mark McCormack (2012) calls “immunity from stigma.” Furthermore, in this article I draw together some of the disparate literature that examines the Filipino² diaspora and use Tom as a case study to explore what it means to be a Filipino boy in Norfolk. I argue that there is not adequate exploration of the experiences of Southeast Asian young men in the British context and aim in this article to open this debate.

Masculinity During Youth

Masculinity and hierarchy can be usefully understood through the concept of hegemony.

“Hegemony in the gender order is the use of culture for such disciplinary purposes: setting standards, claiming popular assent and discrediting those who fall short” (Connell 2005: 214).

Through the application of hegemony we can start to see how some versions of masculinity are privileged within particular contexts.

In terms of hegemonic masculinity during youth, Stephen Frosh and colleagues have noted the ways in which masculinity within youth culture continues to be rigidly constrained within homophobic rhetoric and the assertion of “‘normal’ masculinity through heterosexuality” (2002: 175; see also Kuhl and Martino 2018). Within this enactment of masculinity, which is heavily (hetero)sexually regulated, they find that “popular masculinity involves ‘hardness,’ sporting prowess, ‘coolness,’ casual treatment of schoolwork and being adept at ‘cussing’” (Frosh et al. 2002: 10). As noted by Ann Ferguson, “when boys want to show contempt for another boy they call him a girl or liken his behavior to female behavior” (2000: 173). These discourses of “traditional” masculinity can also be observed in audience studies, which reveal that boys “actively perform media usage as a means of affirming, and in some cases, policing masculinity” (Ging 2005: 43; see also Cann 2014, 2018). Work in the field of UK boys studies therefore continues to highlight the constraints of hegemonic masculinity experienced by boys.

The Racialization of Masculinity

There is a growing body of work that has explored the role that race plays in the lives of young men (Frosh et al. 2002; Sewell 1997), and a strand of understanding in this work considers how “the ways that individuals or social groups of men learn to ‘do man’ are strongly involved with how they ‘do race’” (Epstein 1998: 53).

In the UK context, works have examined the lives of Asian boys, black boys, and white boys, but there has been little discussion of the nuances that race plays within these racial categories. Geoffrey Hunt and colleagues have argued that within the US context “the work on

Asian American youth that has been done too often treats this category as unitary or homogeneous, though Asian Americans comprise a diverse, multifaceted grouping of multiple constituencies” (2011: 275). Meanwhile, within the British context, much of the work that has explored boys from the Asian diaspora have looked at South Asian boys, leading us to much less written about the experiences of boys of other Asian diasporas. Thus, when it is suggested that the experiences of South Asian males have received relatively little academic attention (Connolly 1998: 116; Bhatti 1995), I would argue that in the UK even *less* is known of Asian boys from places other than South Asia (although Becky Francis’s work on Chinese boys provides a welcome exception). As argued below, the legacy of colonial rule in the Philippines produces distinct racial subjectivities for members of the Filipino diaspora across the world.

Filipino Boys

Tom’s (the subject’s) position as a boy from the Filipino diaspora is one that has not been adequately explored within contemporary youth studies in the British context. As a result we know very little of the nuanced ways in which the ideals of Filipino masculinity intersect with Western ideals, and more specifically British ideals of masculinity. In the Canadian context Geraldine Pratt writes of how it is in teenage years that young people come to identify as Filipina/o/x (2010: 344), therefore making this an especially important moment in time to understand the intersectional youth experience for Filipino boys. Existing studies of the Filipino diaspora (*kabayan* in Tagalog) have found that 9.1 million Filipinos are located outside of the Philippines (UN Stats 2017), and so the Filipino diaspora experience is not rare.

Of the existing literature that explores the experiences of young men from the Filipino diaspora, much has focused on the North American context, and the work has overwhelmingly

considered deviancy (Alsaybar 2002; Nadal 2008; Shoemaker 1995). In terms of ethnic and racial identity, Anthony Ocampo (2014) has also considered the ways in which panethnic identities (which follow Spain's and the United States' colonization of the Philippines) are experienced by Filipino boys, suggesting a deeper complexity when it comes to identity construction for Filipino boys.

In terms of masculinity as an intersection of identity, Kale Fajardo has found through ethnographic study that "Filipino peoples in general have been feminized through U.S. and Japanese colonial, imperialist, capitalist, and misogynistic discourses" (2008: 403), which has resulted in the inscription of the Philippines as a "weak nation-state" whose workers are largely exploited (Fajardo 2008: 403). If we consider the problematic role femininity plays in boys' experiences of masculinity (see Cann 2014, 2018; Ferguson 2000; Ging 2005), such discourses are significant. Furthermore, Ritchie Jovero Rubio and Robert-Jay Green have also found that "Filipino men seem to place importance on men being perceived as strong in the public eye and avoiding associations of weakness and effeminacy" (2009: 71). This may be in part due to the feminization of Asian men in Western culture, and of "stereotypically 'feminine' images of the country [Philippines] and its people" (Root 1997: xiii). This therefore becomes problematic through the discursive association between effeminacy and homosexuality. This is significant, as Rubio and Green note in the same study that gay men are seen as bringing "shame" and "disappointment" to their entire extended families within Philippine society (2009), and wider research has found that LGBT+ lifestyles remain largely stigmatized within the Filipino diaspora (Hanna 2017: 697; Ticar 2017: 158). These complexities can help us to better understand why Rubio and Green (2009) have found that, for Filipino men, considerable emphasis is placed on responsibility, integrity, and family orientedness. They also highlight the egalitarian nature of

Filipino families, with men prioritizing both physical *and* emotional strength (Rubio and Green 2009: 62). Sallie Yea has also written of how Filipino masculinities are measured against the ability to tend to a family's welfare, writing that "this standard of masculinity is reflected in the expression *haligi ng tahanan* (lit. pillar of the family)" (2015: 129).

Existing work suggests that the intersection of a Filipino identity and masculinity is highly complex and varied, requiring academic interrogation. It also suggests that boys from the Filipino diaspora are likely to experience masculinity differently from their peers who have different racial identities.

Methodology

This article takes a case study approach, and as such offers an in-depth exploration of how masculinity and race intersect for a boy³ from the Filipino diaspora. It is therefore limited in its generalizability and not intended as such. Using an intersectionally focused discourse analysis to interrogate the production of subjects, this article is intended instead to offer new insight into the (re-)production of racialized gender identity during boyhood.

To reflect on Trinh Minh-Ha's point of "who writes? and in what context?" (2009: 1), I first outline my own identities in the production of this knowledge. As a white, cisgender woman who grew up in a working-class family south of Norwich, my experiences are not commensurate with those of Tom. In this article I am aware that I am speaking to youth experiences vastly different from my own. Subjective distance can provide a useful analytical tool, but I am aware that cross-cultural research is one that must be attentive to the power dynamics in play, particularly when adult white women are working with boys of color. Full ethical clearance for

this project was granted from the University of East Anglia, and informed consent was gained from both participants in the study and their parents/guardians.

Data for this article came from a series of focus groups that took place in the Spring/Summer term of 2012 at a school that I will call “Outskirts High,” which was part of a much larger study on youth gender identities in Norfolk.⁴ Participants were recruited through the school, where an open call was made to all students in year nine (13- and 14-year-olds). This allowed me to explore experiences of gender holistically, and to consider the ways in which gender identities are relationally (re-)produced. In total there were six participants who attended three sessions in total. Most participants were familiar with each other and some (in the case of Anna and Eliza) were good friends.

Outskirts High is a large coed comprehensive with over one thousand students located in the outskirts of a Norfolk city. The suburban town in which it is located is popular with families and is inhabited largely by blue- and white-collar workers. It attracts pupils from a varied socioeconomic catchment area, although the overwhelming majority of its students are from a predominantly working-class household and the majority of pupils have a racial background that is white British. It has a reputation in the area as being neither a particularly “good” nor particularly “bad” school, but is significantly more popular with parents and guardians than the other school in the catchment area (which has a greater proportion of students from socioeconomically poor backgrounds and students for whom English is a second language, and has poorer average GSCE results⁵). Both schools in the catchment area have become academies in the time that has passed since the data was collected, and the GSCE results remain in line with the UK average.⁶

Focus groups are particularly useful for interrogating contemporary social identities, as they foreground group collaboration, that is, “how they achieve consensus (or fail to), and how they construct shared meanings” (Stewart et al. 2007: 112). Further to this, focus groups’ ability to give space to a range of young people’s perspectives helps us to acknowledge that there is not “one youth experience” but many (McRobbie 1994). Through these diversities we are nevertheless able to access “collective experience and collective understandings” (Gauntlett 2007: 15). This is particularly important in studies that explore contemporary identities, as it allows for some of the complexities of intersecting identities to be captured, addressing some of the limitations of single-axis approaches (Cho et al. 2013).

Prompts were used in the focus groups to elicit conversations about gender-appropriate taste. These prompts were based on data collected on young people’s tastes; participants (from the region and of a similar age) wrote down a series of cultural texts that they like and dislike. In the focus groups I asked participants to tell me what gender they thought the person was based on their tastes. This allowed me to develop an understanding of gender-appropriate taste through their focused discussions on this topic.

After the completion of the focus groups, the video and audio recordings were transcribed (by myself) and analyzed using thematic analysis to bring out the main patterns of social analysis. Intersectional discourse analysis was then used to interrogate the formation of identity and the moments of regulation. Through discourse analysis of the conversations with respect to this article (and not the larger study from which the data derives), attention was paid to the discursive production of race and place and the meaning that they have for the participants. This follows the theoretical basis of this article, which contends that both race and gender are things that are “done” (Epstein 1998) and that these subjectivities are discursively achieved.

About the Locale

Norfolk offers a unique geographical position for the study of young people's lives. Norfolk's geographic remoteness leads its towns and cities to be characterized within popular English discourse as being more "backward" than more cosmopolitan spaces such as Birmingham, Manchester, or London. Investigating youth in Norfolk therefore offers an important contribution to contemporary youth studies, as it provides an understanding of how contemporary youth cultures operate within rural/semirural locations and, in particular, a locale that is overwhelmingly white.

The area, including the city, is marked by its isolation; few major roads service the area, and transport connections to other major cities and counties are poor. This means that while having a relatively large population and range of amenities, the city remains somewhat isolated in relation to the rest of the country. This research is therefore unique, as it places young people in a location that straddles both the rural and the urban, complicating binary conceptions of young people as either urban *or* rural (see Hopkins 2010: 239). Participants discussed these tensions:

Eliza: But I think they'd only do it [call people "gay"], just because where we live, in say London for instance there's a lot more, they're a lot further ahead of us . . .

Chloe: They're more open about it.

Tom: I'm from London.

Eliza: . . . They're more accepting I don't think it would be as bad as what it is here, because we're so like, secluded.

Troy: Thanks for that!

Eliza: Well I'm just saying it is a lot different!

Tom: Inbred.

Eliza: No it's a lot different coming from a place where everything is so multicultural coming here . . .

This demonstrates not only how young people that live in the region understand their location, but also what this means in terms of identity. For them, London is seen as an accepting place compared to the “seclusion” of Norfolk. In terms of Tom, this passage shows the ways in which he aligns himself with London and distances himself from Norfolk. Given the whiteness of Norfolk, I argue that this positioning is significant.

About Tom

Tom was one of two boys who volunteered to take part in the study⁷ and was 14 at the time of data collection. Tom was relatively tall for his age, able-bodied, sporty (he played basketball), slim, and of Filipino heritage. He was talkative, at times argumentative, and approached conversation with good humor (he was a joker) and routinely placed himself at the center of attention. Tom counted among his interests a number of popular cultural texts and being the captain of the basketball team. Discussions within the focus group revealed that while Tom and the participants were not *unpopular*, they saw themselves as distinct from the “cool kids,” whom they derided. As I will discuss in greater depth below, Tom did not grow up in Norfolk, but in London, which, along with his nonwhite identity, marked him as “Other” within the group.

Findings and Analysis

“I’m the Asian Ambassador Here”: Filipino Diaspora and Young Masculinity

Tom’s Asian identity is clearly important to him, and this mirrors the findings of Frosh and colleagues, who contend that “black and Asian boys . . . were often very aware of their ethnicity, visually proudly” (2002: 162). More specifically to Tom’s racial subjectivity, it has been found that Filipino youth often identify as Filipino in their teenage years not out of free choice, but because they were read as “perpetual outsiders” (Pratt 2010: 344). In the white-dominated space of Outskirts High, we see Tom repeatedly calling himself out as an outsider, and I suggest this has an impact on how his masculinity is understood, forcing a wider re-evaluation of intersectional boyhoods within the academic field.

One of the first things that Tom said as he entered the focus group context was that he was the group’s “Asian ambassador.” Moments across the focus groups were punctuated with reminders of his Asian identity, with him making comments such as “*I’m Asian*” and “*I’m the only Asian in the school*”⁸ numerous times. This is in contrast to his white peers, who did not comment upon their whiteness at any point. The only instance where whiteness *was* rendered visible was in a conversation when Katherine was teased by her peers for being ginger⁹—in this instance placing Katherine *outside* of the normative white experience. In this moment Tom distracted the group from this conversation, simply saying, “I’m Asian.” Tom achieves two things in his discursive diversion from the “Othering” of Katherine; first, he “saves her” from the “Othering” he likely experiences on a daily basis, and second, he further marks himself out as “Other.”

This demonstrates how whiteness is taken as the “norm,” while difference is marked as “Other” within this context. This follows the work of Pratt, who found that some Filipino youth in the Canadian context are “being pressed into Filipino identification as a defense against norms of whiteness” (2010: 345). Tom provides a preemptive strike of control here, marking *himself* out in a way that prevents his peers from doing so. Tom deploys language that is both self-exoticizing (“the only Asian in the school”) and self-feminizing (“I’m camp”) as a form of self-deprecating protectionism. By this I mean that Tom calls himself out as “feminine” and racially “Other,” which takes some ownership over the discourse, minimizing potential harm that derogatory name-calling may cause from his peers, and operationalizing his difference to one that carries status.

Tom often marked himself out as racially different. An instance where this is demonstrated is in a moment when Anna discusses the different cliques at the high school in terms of the popular American film *Mean Girls*:

Anna: Going back to the clique thing, using for an example *Mean Girls* when she writes out the cafeteria thing and you have like the cool Asians the nerd Asians the jocks, the best people you’ll ever meet, they’re like actually and you do actually get all those people.

As soon as Anna mentions the different Asian factions Tom starts talking over her, saying and whispering, “I’m Asian” (three times in total). Here, Tom repeated that he was Asian in order to ensure that all members of the group heard him, signaling that he belongs to a group that is

separated from the mainstream, both within the world of the film, as well as their world at Outskirts High. In these instances he displayed pride in his Filipino identity.

A further way in which we see Tom display this pride for his Filipino heritage is in his use of Spanish. Ocampo has found that “the cultural residuals of historical colonialism in the Philippines, by both Spain and the USA, shape how Filipinos negotiate panethnic boundaries with Asians and Latinos, albeit in different ways” (2014: 425). Tom’s display of Spanish knowledge is one that draws upon his Filipino identity. For instance, in a conversation about the game Monopets, Tom explains that “*mono means monkey in Spanish*” to his peers. Also, at the end of the first session, Tom asks Anna for his pen back:

Tom: Can I have my pen back please?

Anna: It’s so cool, it’s all in Filipin, Filipino, Filipino.

Tom: *Philippinian.*

Here, Tom mocks Anna’s lack of “insider” knowledge, positioning himself in a world she does not understand.

However, despite embracing his “Otherness,” Tom does not associate himself with the other students at his school from diaspora backgrounds. When one of the sessions was interrupted by a member of the staff who runs the international club at the school, Tom jokes, “I think that’s for the international club which nobody from international clubs actually go to,” his friends then mark him out, saying, “You should go.”

Aside from his Asian identity, Tom is also proud of his past as a Londoner. On a number of occasions he reminds the group that he is from London. This happened when discussing

Norfolk as inbred (see above), discussions of the British TV show *Made in Chelsea*, to which Tom exclaimed, “*I’m from Chelsea!*” as well as discussing London gangsta language (associated with people of color), of which Tom either pretended or believed he was an expert, saying, “*Coz I’m from London innit ze.*” In this verbal performance we also witness Tom drawing on a particular Afro-Caribbean Londoner repertoire, something that Ann Ferguson notes boys do to “establish reputation” and “achieve status” (2000: 178–179).

This is significant because in the context of Norfolk, London is highly connected with urbanness (and this is emphasized when Tom draws on the area being “gangsta”). In positioning himself as a Londoner, Tom is therefore associated with tough urbanness, something that Frosh and colleagues (2002) argue supports traditional versions of masculinity. This allows us to see how Tom is able to trouble masculinity in some of the potentially transgressive instances I describe below, while ultimately maintaining his hegemonic masculine identity. In highlighting these differences, which bring with them discourses of “street authenticity” and “coolness,” Tom demonstrates that he holds a masculinity that is associated with what Richard Mora describes as “high status boys” (2013: 350). Mora suggests that in these instances the boys with high status are placed under less scrutiny than their male peers. As I demonstrate below, Tom’s background that marks him as an “outsider” is also one that Tom actively deploys as a means of anchoring his masculinity within the heterosexual matrix—allowing him to push the boundaries of what is permissible gendered behavior.

Traditional Masculinity?

The relationship between race and gender is a complicated one, particularly when understanding and accounting for the multiple experiences of Asianness and masculinity. However, in the

predominantly white context of Norfolk, Tom's nonwhiteness and position as an ex-resident of the most "urban" of UK cities, London, combines to create an assumed "toughness" that (re-)produces an esteemed version of hegemonic masculinity. As such, there are a number of ways in which Tom's performance of masculinity fits with dominant/hegemonic models that are emphasized when his geographical and raced background intersect.

He is sporty, saying that he tends to be the captain in basketball (session one). While sport has long been argued to play a significant role in boys' articulation of masculinity (Anderson 2009; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Messner 1992; Renold 1997; Swain 2000), it is notable to find a case within the British context that is of basketball. This is because basketball occupies a distinct position in terms of its discursive meaning, particularly as a sport associated with urban boys of color (see Atencio and Wright 2008). In the overwhelmingly white context of this school, Tom would have been one of the only boys of color on the team. Therefore, Tom's association with basketball has much greater meaning than simply "he plays basketball"; rather, Tom's alignment with basketball means that he is associated with a particular racialized form of masculinity. Existing studies into the racialization of masculinity have found that boys of African Caribbean descent are often seen as "super-masculine," with Frosh and colleagues noting a particular "toughness and authentically male style in talk and dress" (2002: 150). The authors observe that African Caribbean boys were associated with a "pervasive narrative" (Frosh et al. 2002: 153). This narrative emphasized assumptions about African Caribbean boys' sporting ability, drawing on problematic essentialist discourses, as well as the characteristics of "coolness" and "toughness" in the construction of these boys as, in many ways, more hegemonically masculine (Frosh et al. 2002: 151). So, while for white boys' alignment with sport (football in particular) provides them with an "acceptable" form of hegemonic masculinity

(see Cann 2018), we can see that in an overwhelmingly white space, nonwhiteness coupled with an interest in sport can further anchor masculinity within what is hegemonically acceptable.

Another way in which Tom's masculinity can be considered traditionally hegemonic is in his role as the "class clown," drawing on humor. Many studies have shown the central role that humor plays within boys' lives in the UK context (Ferguson 2000; Kehily and Nayak 1997; Willis 1978), and thus I do not wish to dwell on this too much here. What I do want to emphasize, however, is that humor was a central part of Tom's performances. Tom regularly made jokes (often with sarcasm), showed knowledge of a range of school-related "inside jokes," and also poked fun at people (including me). He was also very physical in his modes of communication, mirroring the ways in which collective masculine narratives were performed by the Latino boys of Mora's (2013) study. Tom's constant "entertaining" also included singing and humming and speaking in accents—usually American. Oftentimes I found Tom's energy level exhausting. Tom's constant joke making served not only to cement his hegemonic masculinity in relation to humor, but also served to undermine his academic achievements, allowing himself to be seen as masculine in terms of his rejection of school. This can be understood in relation to Tom's racialized position as "Other," as by seizing the spotlight Tom reframes his position as "troublemaker" to one that highlights his strengths (Ferguson 2000: 176). By not being seen to take school seriously Tom also taps into discourses of academic achievers as being in some way "effeminate" (see Frosh et al. 2002; Mac an Ghail 1994) and thus distances himself from this form of effeminacy.

Tom also signals his traditional masculinity through his heterosexuality, something deemed a necessary part of identity performance for boys at school (Cann 2014; Mora 2013: 343). Although I will show below that Tom embraces elements of what he calls his "camp"

identity, we also learn in the focus groups that he does have a girlfriend (“Beth”). Tom rarely speaks of her during the sessions, which may be because he is embarrassed, not keen to show his “authentic” emotionality, or perhaps because he wants to keep this part of his life private. Whatever Tom’s reasons may be, Beth’s existence is important as she acts as “proof” of his heterosexuality, which further quells accusations of homosexuality deemed problematic within the context of their school.¹⁰ As I will now explore in the context of my wider study, Tom’s openness to alternative masculinities and femininities in his performance of identity was somewhat unique. Tom appeared unafraid of not only *aligning* himself with feminine texts and taste positions (collectively defined as such by his peer group; see Cann 2018), but sometimes even emphasizing them. I argue that this is only possible in the heterosexual matrix because of the work that he has done in securing his masculinity.

Transgressions of Gender-Appropriateness?

The findings discussed above show some of the ways in which Tom conforms to traditional, hegemonic, masculinity. The examples given above are not exhaustive but do demonstrate elements of Tom’s hegemonic/“traditional” masculinity. In this final section I work through instances where Tom either transgresses and/or problematizes traditional masculinity. These instances include some of the cultural texts that he says he likes (such as *Glee*), his constant singing (an activity commonly associated with teenage girls; see Willett 2011), and his description of himself as “camp” (a term used, usually pejoratively, to describe effeminate gay men). Ultimately, I will argue that Tom’s transgressions are only permissible because of his racial (nonwhite) and geographical (“urban”/London) identity, which do work to recuperate his actions within the heterosexual matrix.

At Outskirts High, participants discussed how peers that articulated preference for cultural texts deemed “gender inappropriate” were “shunned.” My work (Cann 2018) has shown how boys in particular were wary of saying they like things associated with girls’ tastes because this may make them appear gay—something still considered problematic in the context of British high schools (Cann 2018) and boys’ cultures more broadly (Bragg et al. 2018; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Frosh et al. 2002; Kehily and Nayak 1997; Nayak and Kehily 1996; Rasmussen 2004).

Tom, however, did not express such anxieties. For example, when discussing feminine tastes, Tom emphasizes that these are also *his* tastes, saying, “This could be me.”

Troy: Oh this is a girl!

[laughter]

Tom: It could be me actually!

Anna: Celebrities I like Johnny Depp.

Eliza: [in high-pitched “girly” voice] Celebrities I dislike Anna, oh it should be—

Tom: You know this could be me?

Troy: This could be you.

Eliza: *Mean Girls, Harry Potter, Pirates of the Caribbean*, oh my gosh.

Interviewer: Hang on a second, why could it be you?

Tom: I like *Glee*, I like *Britain’s Got Talent*, I like . . . [Tom continues to list his similarities to this person’s tastes]

(session one)

I ask the group to say a little more about what happens if a boy says he likes Johnny Depp (something they considered girls liked) at school, to which Eliza responded, saying that “*they’d say they’re slightly* [gestures limp hand¹¹],” and Anna said they’d be called “*the, erm, word that sounds like maggot.*” Troy explains why this would be, saying, “*Coz Johnny Depp is kind of, like a bit of an icon for women and if you’re a bloke and are like, ah I really like Johnny Depp, you’d be like no you don’t get out.*” Further exemplifying Tom’s resistance to these discourses, he responds by saying, “*I do like him though.*” Given the possible ramifications of being seen as gay, this is a potentially bold move by Tom. This suggests one of two things (which need not be either/or, but are being presented as such here): either that Tom feels he lives in a time of inclusive masculinity, as posited by theorists such as Eric Anderson (2009) and Mark McCormack (2012), or that he feels he has found ways to offset this and secure his masculinity through other means (the position I take in this article).

Tom’s potentially transgressive acts can also be witnessed in his fandom of the American television program *Glee*. I have discussed previously that *Glee* is a potentially problematic text for boys to align themselves with, as it raises questions of their heterosexuality (Cann 2014: 25–26). However, despite this, Tom emphasized that he liked the program throughout the focus groups. In the second focus group session Tom explained that he said he liked *Glee* and found himself shunned (to the girls’ table) as a result.

Tom: I said I like *Glee*.

[laughter]

Katherine: Now you sit with us at lunchtime!

The idea that Tom had to (temporarily) sit with the girls at lunchtime demonstrates some of the regulatory functions that Mora's observation of gender splits in the canteen perform: "At lunch, the students separated themselves by gender, with the boys sitting at one table and the girls at another" (2013: 345). Being "relegated" to the girls' table, then, shows some of the punishments for deviating from gender-appropriate tastes. However, such is Tom's lack of concern for this form of regulation that he remains unashamed and perhaps even pushes it by raising it again in conversation (although this is a potentially safer space given how dominated by girls this particular focus group was).

Singing at school is something that has been associated with girls (Willett 2011), so it is significant that Tom sang in every focus group held. Tom's singing can be understood as a wider part of his role as "entertainer" (as discussed above), and thus while it could be considered "camp" and/or feminine in its association to girls' culture, it is also connected to an anti-education "class clown" persona—something not all that divergent from hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, such actions follow research on black boys' masculinities and suggestions that the ways in which "bold flamboyance" was considered essential, as indirectness (or slyness) would be less successful in the performance of masculinity (Ferguson 2000: 179).

Tom's ownership over his "deviant" tastes shows his comfort with his identity and his masculinity. It seems that Tom is not fearful (or at least not outwardly fearful) of being called gay and/or for his masculinity to be questioned. Tom's ownership of the elements of his identity that are discursively "Othered" within the context of Outskirts High are ones that he openly embraces. I contend that this is largely due to his racially "different" identity within the overwhelmingly white context of Norfolk.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Tom's nonwhite urbanness does much to anchor his identity as largely hegemonically masculine. Tom's normative masculinity is anchored by his "Otherness"—his nonwhiteness and Londonness—and thus he is able to push the boundaries of what is considered gender-appropriate or acceptable by his peers. As Mora notes in reference to the participants in his study, the laughter that emerges from Tom's (potential) transgressions "reify the group's heteronormative gender order" (2013: 350) and does little to trouble gender norms. So, while he transgresses much more than his white male peers do, this is arguably only made possible because of his "Otherness" and his self-emphasized difference. One notable tactic that Tom used in "being Other" was to mark himself out in a way that prevented his peers from doing so. This technique involved emphasizing his Asian identity as well as reminding his peers of his London background. These identities intersect with Tom's masculinity, allowing us to see the usefulness of considering the nuances of Asian masculinities. Rather than being seen as "weak and effeminate" (see, e.g., Cohen 1997; Frosh et al. 2002; Mac an Ghail 1994), Tom's association with basketball, London, and as a "not-white" member of an overwhelmingly white population anchors his masculinity in the hegemonic. This is, I argue, because the potential to be seen as weak and effeminate is balanced out by his urbanness, which carries with it connotations of toughness. This may not have been the case in more urban contexts such as London, Birmingham, or Manchester, highlighting the complexity of contemporary youth masculinities, particularly when we consider the ways in which they intersect with place, race, and diaspora.

What I have been able to achieve in this article is somewhat limited. This is because I have been looking in-depth at the performances of just one young male. I am therefore keen to see more work undertaken that explores the complexity and plurality of Asian masculinities

within the UK context. Through my research I found little work from the UK that explores Asian masculinities outside of South Asian boys and men. My findings related to Tom, who is of Filipino heritage, have illuminated the dearth of research into both the Filipino diaspora in the UK as well as the experiences of Asian boys and men from across the multiple areas that Asia covers, illuminating the scope for further research in this area. While we can learn much from Tom, I encourage future scholars to meet with the “Toms” of their own communities, developing a rich and nuanced understanding of gender identities during youth.

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Notes

1. "Tom" is a pseudonym selected by the research participant.
2. I use the term "Filipino" rather than "Filipina," "Filipin@," or "Filipinx," as this case study focuses on a young person that presents as cisgender male and thus "Filipino" best describes his presented subjectivity. However, I note the usefulness of "Filipino/a/x" for its experimental and political purpose (Hanna 2017: 697) as well as highlighting the discursive construction of gender beyond the binary.
3. Tom presented as cisgender; however, he did not openly identify as cis or trans in the focus groups.
4. Norfolk is a predominantly rural area in the east of England (UK).
5. GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education. They are subject-based qualifications that pupils take in their final year of compulsory education (at age 16).
6. Schools generally become "academies" when found to be "failing" and are part of the neoliberalization of the UK primary and secondary education provision (see, e.g., Kulz 2014; Morrin 2018).
7. This reflects some of the difficulties many of us researchers of youth face when it comes to engaging with young male participants in our studies.
8. All in-text quotes are italicized. This is to clearly distinguish the participants' voices from both my own and from the academic quotes I use. In the case of emphasis in talk or actions performed by the participant, these are presented without italics.

9. Some members of the group teased her for denying that she was ginger (her hair was blonde at the time, which they said was dyed).

10. This is not to say that Tom is therefore de facto “straight,” but rather this is how he presents himself and is read by his peers.

11. This use of the “limp wrist” mirrors that of Mora’s study, where one of the male participants performed the role of *maricón* (faggot—Mora’s translation) as pouting, limp-wristed, and swaying hips (2013: 349).