

**THE NEGOTIATION OF MASCULINITY BY YOUNG,
MALE PEER COUNSELORS**

By
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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work, and that it has not been submitted for any degree at another university

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ABSTRACT

This study was directed at exploring the personal constructions of young males who had self selected as peer counselors, of what it means to be a man in South Africa at this time in history. One of the goals identified was to highlight and examine both hegemonic and alternative versions of masculinity and, in particular, to examine how young men position themselves in relation to these constructions. In order to investigate the research question, ten adolescents/young men participated in focus group discussions on the topic of masculinity. The participants included 8 school boys, 5 white and 3 black, attending a private, all boys school, as well as 2 black university students. All participants had self selected as peer counselors. The study is located in the qualitative research tradition which allows for depth of description and interpretation. The three focus group discussions held (two at the boys school with 4 participants in each, and one at the university) were recorded and transcribed verbatim. These transcripts were then subject to a critical thematic content analysis. The main themes were identified and the four themes which emerged as dominant in the conversation and occurred most regularly across all three groups are analyzed and discussed. These themes are emotional stoicism, normative heterosexuality, gendered division of labour and displayed toughness. Under each theme material supporting hegemonic constructions of masculinity and material supporting alternative constructions of masculinity is discussed as a separate sub-theme. The impact of the role as peer counselor on participants' constructions of masculinity is also discussed. A brief meta-theoretical discourse analytic commentary is also provided, addressing for example, strategies employed by participants to maintain their sense of masculinity in the discussions. This study highlights the fluidity and plurality of masculinity as well as the struggle of adolescent boys and young men as they engage with where and how to position themselves as masculine. A main finding or observation is that some degree of alternative masculinity will be countenanced provided there is evidence of an acceptable baseline of hegemonic or traditional masculinity in a boy or man.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades a plethora of publications in the areas of femininity, masculinity and gender relations has built up (see for example, Connell, 2002; Karniol, Grosz & Schorr, 2003; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Significant attention has been given to what is now considered the “violent, dysfunctional and oppressive” behaviour of men (Whitehead, 2002, p.8) but which was, until relatively recently, viewed as a fixed and integral aspect of masculinity. Feminist literature has gone a long way to questioning and critiquing this understanding of men’s behaviour and encouraging a school of thought that suggests that to be a man does not necessarily mean, for example, strict adherence to Brannon’s (1976) four tenet’s of masculinity, namely ‘no sissy stuff’, ‘the big wheel’, ‘the sturdy oak’ and ‘give ‘em hell’ (respectively, no femininity, be successful and powerful, be rational tough and self reliant, be daring and don’t stand back).

Masculinity has long been an ‘all or nothing’ construct in the sense that an individual was either man (and hence masculine) or ‘not-man’ (gay or feminine). It has become increasingly apparent, however, that few men live up to the machismo of the masculine icons paraded by society (Connell, 1995). Consideration for what might be termed the ‘grey man’, the man who is neither iconically masculine nor ‘a girl’ has emerged over recent decades. Attention has increasingly been given to what is termed the fluidity and plurality of masculinity. The former refers to the situational and temporal enactment and definition of masculinity while the latter term refers to the non-universality or non-monolithicity of masculinity.

This research study is motivated by an interest in understanding how the fluidity and plurality of masculinities manifest in the South African context. More specifically, this study seeks to further expand the understanding of the constructions of masculinity of young men and the impact of these constructions in the context of some of the social issues with which South

Africa is currently grappling. The seeming intransigence of many of the social problems which beset South Africa at present could be attributed not so much to the individual behaviour of men, but rather to the construction of masculinity which in turn influences the behaviour of men. The male 'accident hump' in the late teens-early twenties, (Connell, 2002), the culture of high alcohol consumption among males and the predominance of male antagonists in family suicide/murders are three examples of the negative impact and influence of how men may understand 'what it means to be a man in South Africa at this time'. In South Africa, and indeed across the African continent, one of the strongest examples of the deleterious impact of the hegemonic construction of masculinity is the rampant HIV/AIDS pandemic which is fuelled to a large extent by men's entitled behaviour in the realm of sexual relationships.

The hegemonic standards of masculinity via which boys are socialised into manhood involve a number of distinctive components which put men and their partners at increased risk of HIV infection. These components include demonstrations of sexual prowess, risk taking and control over women (Harrison, 2002). Issues of gender inequality, violence and sexuality are recognised as important factors in addressing the spread of HIV/AIDS. If men and boys are to change the behaviour which puts them and their partners at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, there needs to be a significant change in the construction and enactment of masculinities.

In order to achieve this change, one dimension of masculinity that needs to be understood is how boys respond to and construct hegemonic tropes and standards of masculinity and how they position themselves relative to these standards. Furthermore, if negative aspects of conventional masculinity construction are to be contested, a study of those young men who have managed to construct and sustain some form of alternative masculinity seems appropriate. Evidence has shown that some adolescent boys are able to find, create and maintain alternative constructions of masculine identity which defy or disidentify with the prevailing hegemonic constructs (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002). Despite non-conformity, some adolescents seem to still be able to maintain a strong sense of their masculinity and continue to be accepted by others as masculine. In order to understand how changes in gender relations may be promoted, it is necessary to appreciate these alternative positions and versions of masculine identification come about, are negotiated and are sustained.

The target group of adolescent boys and young male adults was selected for study in this research because it is during this period of adolescence, and possibly extending into early adolescence, that both social and sexual identity are explored, and solidify (Erikson, 1968). The criterion that participants were self selected peer counsellors was included under the hypothesis that the role of peer counsellor was a non- hegemonic, or alternative masculine position and such individuals may have some experience of living an alternative masculinity.

1.2 KEY AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study is part of an ongoing research project, funded by SANPAD (the South African Netherlands Research Partnership for Alternate Development), which is broadly concerned with understanding the psychology of masculinity, especially some of the critical issues such as masculinity and HIV. An important focus of this project is the examination of the narratives of masculinity of late adolescent boys/young men with the aim of understanding implications of constructions of masculinity for the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The main point of interest of the study upon which this research is based is how young males take on the social identity of ‘being a man’ in the world. The researcher was interested in the manner in which a particular subgroup of young men, living in the democratic South Africa, and subject to the influence of strong gender equity policies, come to position themselves in relation to dominant gender norms. In particular the study looks at how young males construct some of the dominant norms of masculinity as well as alternatives to these. The study also explores the meaning given to the possibly non-hegemonic position of self selected peer counselor.

Through the use of auto-photography and photo-elicitation focus group interviews the design of this study sought to take heed of recent calls for innovative research design that involves participants taking a more active and participatory role in data collection and analysis (Varga, 2001).

1.3 THE FIELD OF MASCULINITY AND CRITICAL MEN'S STUDIES

Over the last three to four decades researchers across the world, but predominantly in the USA, Europe and the UK have turned their attention to the study of masculinity. This follows a period of feminist oriented research which foregrounded women's issues and which, incidentally, saw men treated in essentialist terms. Although this period of focus on women and their issues filled an important gap in gender knowledge, it also highlighted a corresponding lacuna in the knowledge of men's issues and masculinity.

The role of power in masculinity, power over women and over men who adopt less traditional masculine roles, became a focus of research in what was considered a 'pro-feminist' genre. Questions have been asked about how this power was exercised, by whom and how was it maintained and perpetuated. The idea that men are also victims of gender domination and that all men pay a price for male dominance has also been raised. The identification of different forms of masculinities, rather than a single form has led to the examination of the power inequalities among constructions of masculinity and the policing of men by other men. The notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' – that dominant standard of 'acceptable' masculinity sustaining patriarchy (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007) - relates to the understanding that some forms of masculinity enjoy greater legitimacy than others. It represents a public model of masculinity which, although unattainable by most men, still serves as a model consented to and idealized by society.

In acknowledging the influence of socialization on the construction of masculinity, the role of discourse and the effect of language has become a recent focus of research. Masculinity has been conceptualized as a collection of theories handed down from generation to generation or as something 'told' to the next generation (Morrell, 2001b) At the same time men have been attributed with the power to create their own narrative around masculinity and to decide for themselves what the meaning of masculinity is (Edley & Wetherell, 1995). Part of this research study has been to examine the discourses around masculinity, in particular, how masculinities are used, interpreted and reinterpreted, added to and rejected at different times. Recent research has tended to encourage exploration of the manner in which masculinity is

‘performed’, and how this performance is, at times, both adaptive and undermining of, or resistant to, sociohistorical forms of masculinity. How boys question and negotiate hegemonic masculinity and alternative versions is not only of interest for the purpose of this study, but is also critical for future gender relations.

1.4 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Critical men’s studies and research into masculinity is a fairly new area of research in South Africa. An increasing awareness of the role played by dominant masculine constructions in driving the HIV/AIDS pandemic has spurred on much of the research in the overlapping areas of sexual behaviour and gender relations.

In South Africa, normative masculine behaviour includes limited help seeking, gendered violence, misogyny and the degradation of women, sexual preference stigma, uninvolved or absent fathering and multiple social risk factors for HIV (see, for example, Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007).

Regarding the HIV/AIDS pandemic specifically, research has shown dominant masculine imperatives are leading men into believing that sexual power over women is a right. Themes of violent coercion of partners, unprotected sex, control over sex partners, multiple partners and women as dependent on men have been found to be prevalent in South African adolescents. It has been suggested that one of the solutions to this high risk behaviour lies in the ‘peer re-negotiation’ of dominant norms of masculinity (MacPhail, 2003).

It is in this potential ‘space’ that this research is conducted. The study endeavours to gain an understanding of boys’ constructions of masculinities and to develop useful insights for future interventions aimed at influencing the construction of masculinities which embrace and promote egalitarian and respectful relationships.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Following the introductory chapter, a review of theory pertinent to the study is given in chapter two. The following chapter of the research report provides a discussion of the method the study employed. The fourth chapter, detailing the findings of the study, provides a structured summary of the key themes that emerged in both the photographs the participants presented in the focus groups as well as those that arose in group discussion material. Finally a comprehensive discussion of the data which emerged as of primary interest is provided. This takes the form of an analysis and discussion of four particular themes pertaining to hegemonic masculinity. The main body of the discussion serves to elucidate instances of assertion and contestation of hegemonic masculine behaviour. This is followed by a section which discusses, in particular, how the participants' role as self selected peer counselors seemed to influence assertion and contestation of traditional masculine behaviour. The chapter concludes with a brief commentary of a more meta-analytic nature, addressing discursive dimensions of the data.

The thesis is completed with chapter six, the conclusion, which offers a critical evaluation of this research, highlighting the most central implications to emerge as well as identifying limitations and possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Whitehead (2002) suggests that no study of men and masculinities is possible without bearing in mind two factors, the first being that the relationship between men and women is not, and never has been, an equitable one. For centuries men have assumed, and been afforded, a position of superiority over women simply by virtue of their different physical anatomy. It seems little wonder then that there has been a reactionary rise of feminism in recent decades challenging this masculine claim to superiority. How have men dealt with this challenge? Ironically, while many feminists maintain that women's rights remain severely limited and constrained by male dominated cultures and chauvinistic attitudes, it is men who are popularly portrayed as the ones in crisis, rejected and facing existential questions arising from the challenge to their supposed superiority (Whitehead, 2002). This brings us to the second of Whitehead's (2002) points, namely that whatever is spoken by and about men hides other agendas. This then raises the question of whether the 'masculinity in crisis' chorus is an acknowledgement of genuine loss of masculine identity and concomitant distress or, more cynically, whether it is no more than a subtle attempt to regain lost status and privilege. Perhaps it is both.

2.1 CRISIS OF MASCULINITY ?

Since the early 1990's men and masculinity have become the focus of international interest and speculation with the media posing the question whether or not men are in crisis and whether they need assistance in recovering their masculinity (Morrell, 2001b). This notion of some kind of contemporary crisis in masculinity has been posited as an explanation for the relatively recent plethora of research material addressing masculinity (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). According to Levant (1996), the masculinity crisis involves the collapse of the basic behavioural pattern by which men have traditionally fulfilled the 'code of masculinity' - a set of behaviours, roles and attitudes demanded of men. This collapse of men's roles as the exclusive good-provider and safe keeper has been paramount in undermining masculinity

(Levant, 1996). Pleck (1995) suggests that the failure to live up to the expectations of the masculine code results in personal distress as a result of an intensification of internal dissonance: 'This is what I am supposed to be, but this is all I am'.

In the South African context, the democratization of the country, underpinned by a constitution unrivaled in terms of human rights, has fed the crisis in masculinity by undermining both dominant and traditional masculinities (Walker, 2005). Such undermining is evident, for example, in the strong feminist voice apparent in appointments of females to government office, institutions of higher education and even industrial giants. A decade ago women in the South African parliament constituted at least thirty percent of all members with half of all deputy ministers being women and a quarter of all ministers being women (Zulu, 1998, in Morrell, 2002). With the current government's publicly stated commitment to increase the role of women in all spheres of South African society that proportion has certainly risen and the ever increasing proportion of women in the general workplace provides a growing challenge for many men in fulfilling the role of 'family provider'.

Confounding this dynamic of an increasingly powerful female workforce and an increasingly emasculated male workforce is the contention that men have neither the resources nor the incentive to address their 'economic castration' in a collaborative and equitable fashion with women. It has been suggested that the lack of incentive stems from their privileged position in a patriarchal society where power, prerogatives and entitlements accrue to men in quantities far exceeding those accruing to women (Kaufman, 1994). Men's 'lack of resources' refers to the difficulty of men in processing emotionally laden material (Jakupcak, Salters, Gratz, & Roemer, 2003), and hence their difficulty in working through the shame arising from their feelings of emasculation. Any attempt by men, unconscious or otherwise, to counter this undermining of their masculinity or manage their difficult feelings by expressing themselves at home through aggression, is increasingly being exposed and criticized in the media (Edley & Wetherell, 1997).

The above notwithstanding, perusal of historical literature suggests that the current 'crisis', if indeed it is a crisis, is but one in a long line of such episodes (Segal, 1990). Masculinities are constantly being protected and defended, broken down and recreated (Morrell, 2001b). Exactly what defines or characterizes masculinity has been fiercely contested over the ages,

with multiple constructions often prevailing in a given time period with a concomitant struggle to establish certain constructions as hegemonic or dominant (Edley & Wetherell, 1997).

Correlates, and possibly precipitants, of the current crisis of masculinity, assuming such a crisis to be present, and the emergence of the 'new man' as a cultural frame of reference, include social and economic changes such as the feminization of the workforce, and a shift from manufacturing industries to service industries centered around the information technology industry (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). It is also suggested that the influence of feminism has been particularly marked on middle class men while its influence on working class and unemployed men has not been extensively researched (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). There is certainly indirect pressure to change traditional masculine behaviour brought to bear on these latter groups because of an increasing feminist fuelled maligning in the media of certain aspects of male behaviour (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). It might be imagined that in South Africa the influence of feminist oriented, non government organizations operating among the working class, unemployed and traditional populations bring similar pressure to bear. It has been further suggested that the activity of a growing black middle class also creates awareness of feminist influence as its members feed back a more egalitarian model of gender-relating to traditional roots (Walker, 2005)

Although it may well be argued that there exists a universal masculinity crisis characterized by the questioning, by men and others, of previously accepted roles, the masculinity crisis and research around it seems driven by culturally idiosyncratic forces. The changing demographics of the workplace in South Africa as well as high unemployment are certainly features of the 'crisis of masculinity' in this country. In Britain the 'crisis' around masculinity has developed in response to increasing crime figures and boys' deteriorating educational performance when compared to girls. British boys have been criticized for being anti-intellectual, emotionally illiterate, uncommunicative, antisocial and delinquent, with these characteristics setting them apart from girls (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002).

In the contemporary South African context, any crisis that masculinity may have been presenting pre 1996 was acutely focused with the transition to democracy in 1994 and the adoption of the 1996 Constitution and Bill of Rights. This was further reinforced by the

public discourse espousing human rights. Although South Africa reflects many cultures ranging from the traditional African, rural culture to Westernized, modernized culture, with each one reflecting its own version of masculinity, it has been argued that the traditional South African masculinity was one based on 'conservative' patriarchy and aggression (Walker, 2005). Masculinity was thrown into disarray with the new legislation because "[T]he Constitution's implicit understanding of sexuality is premised on a figure of manhood which is as liberal as the Constitution itself" (Walker, 2005, p.226). It is suggested that the liberal and egalitarian constitution of 1996 has both disturbed and destabilized traditional versions and expressions of masculinity (Posel, 2003; Walker, 2005). Such masculinities, "steeped in violence and authoritarianism" are now repugnant in the light of the new constitution and its emphasis on gender equality (Walker, 2005). The 'New South African man' is non violent, is a good father and husband, is employed and is able to provide for his family (Walker, 2005). However, the current relatively low economic growth in South Africa and consequent high levels of unemployment rob millions of men of the role of breadwinner in their families, destabilizing their positions as authority figures, and promoting violence and sexual conquest as they attempt to recapture this lost authority (Posel, 2003). Consequently the 'New South African Man' continues to remain relatively unobtainable and elusive to most.

To answer the question posed in the heading of this section, namely is there a crisis in masculinity?, we might appeal to Whitehead (2002) who cautions against talking up a crisis of masculinity and suggests that the popular discourse of a 'crisis of masculinity' is overblown and needs to be countered. He does concede however that "there are changes afoot around men" (Whitehead, 2002, p.6). Irrespective of whether one chooses to label the changes in gender relations in South Africa a crisis for men or not, Rutherford's (1988) contention, applicable internationally, that the context in which traditional forms of masculine identity made sense are rapidly disappearing, certainly holds true. Since the new Constitution has reduced the 'patriarchal dividends' inherent in the traditional masculinity of the past, (certainly at the legislative level) (Walker, 2005), and a feminist discourse has become more prominent, challenges have been created for young males on the cusp of creating, defining and moulding their own new or alternative masculine identities. It might be arguable globally, but it certainly seems true in the 'New South Africa', that never before has

masculinity been as fluid as it is now, with young boys and men having a much wider palette of colours to choose from as they negotiate their masculine identity.

2.2 IDENTITY FORMATION

Identity can be thought of as the individual's sense of him or herself as an independent, unique person with a specific place in society (Plug, Louw, Gous & Meyer, 1997). Although identity formation begins as early as infancy and continues throughout the life cycle, the greatest degree of identity development occurs during adolescence (Louw, van Ede & Louw, 1998).

Erikson's (1963, 1968) model of psychosocial stages of development suggests that the formation of an identity is a universal requirement of adolescence, but the specific manner or way in which this identity is formed is a function of cultural influences. His psychosocial stage of 'identity versus role confusion' is probably one of the most widely researched and discussed. It involves the negotiation of several sub tasks which, if successfully accomplished, ultimately lead to the individual knowing who he/she is and what he/she wants from life (Louw et al, 1998). Failure to accomplish these subtasks leads to identity confusion which is characterized as the failure to integrate the various roles previously assumed by the adolescent and the consequent clash of contradictory values leaving the individual confused, uncertain and anxious (Louw et al, 1998). Such role confusion often arises as a result of 'identity foreclosure' which is when one's identity is shaped by a series of premature decisions about one's identity, made in the face of pressure and expectations of others and of society, and made so as to appease those making such demands (Louw et al, 1998). It should be clear that in all aspects of identity formation few are immune to the influences of the social environment – family, peer groups and society in general. `

For the adolescent, the task of forming an identity is made no easier by the requirement that it be a gendered identity, that is, be masculine or feminine, and it is during adolescence that the individual's gender-role identity becomes clearly defined (Bem, 1974; Karniol, Grosz and Schorr, 2003). Thus during adolescence individuals define themselves in terms of the

characteristics that are most closely associated with each of the masculine or feminine gender-role.

Gilligan and Wiggins (1988) have argued that beliefs about emotionality and interpersonal relations are at the core of stereotype conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Bem (1974) suggested that the independent dimensions of masculinity and femininity could be 'crossed' to yield four distinct gender role orientations dependent on 'how much' masculinity and femininity an individual possessed. Thus an individual high in both masculine and feminine traits is considered androgynous, an individual low on both is considered undifferentiated while masculine and feminine are self explanatory. Bem (1974) argued that an individual could override their sex by adopting another gender-role orientation and thus impact one's psychological functioning.

The process which determines how this gendered identity comes about can be viewed from several distinct theoretical positions, including the biological, psychodynamic and social learning theory to name but three. The most helpful position, however, may be to consider the development of the individual's gendered identity as a concurrence of influences identified in the different theoretical perspectives. In particular gendered identity may be thought of as influenced by all of biological genitalia, dominant cultural norms (eg., South African masculinity), ethnic imperatives within the culture (eg., black or white masculinity), as well as the environment unique to the individual (eg., early mothering experience, childhood experiences) (Connell, 2002).

Developmental psychologists have characterized adolescence as a time of constantly shifting and ambiguous experiences of sexual and gendered identity (Korobov & Bamberg, 2004). This period in the adolescent's life may be characterized by what is commonly referred to as non-relational sexuality. This refers to a constellation of normative attitudes and behaviours characterized by an experience of sexuality as an obsession with physical attraction, an objectification of sexual partners, as well as tendencies towards trophyism, voyeurism and hypersexuality (Korobov & Bamberg, 2004). Trophyism is reflected in signifiers of accomplishment such as having motor cars, certificates, collections and the like. Non-relational sexuality has been identified as an important peer-group standard in South African based research (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007).

Wetherell and Edley (1999) contend that gender identities are enacted and embodied by practices that occur at the level of social discourse and subjective processes. They suggest that identities are 'psycho-discursive performances'. Frosh et al (2002) have noted how boys adopt different versions of masculinity at different times. They commented on the variety of positions taken up and tactics employed by boys as they participated in group and individual interviews. Depending on the context these positions were often alternative or contradictory to the position taken up in the other context. It is thus possible to consider that an individual may occupy various or even contradictory positions in relation to masculine identity, these positions assumed being a function of social context (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007).

Recent South African research suggests that within the school context, sport, academic activities and the male peer group were important micro-cultural contexts impacting both formation and expression of young masculine identity (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). Due to this country's past apartheid policies with their separate development ideology and the ensuing political upheaval, 'struggle masculinity', violence, and traditional roles depending on masculine superiority characterized the behaviour of 'black' school boys (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). Although 'struggle masculinity' has become 'outdated' in the light of the liberation of South Africa, Bhana's (2005) research into the development of masculine identities among young black boys in South Africa also pointed to the important influence that some schools seemed to have in the formation of violent and misogynistic masculinities despite legislation promoting egalitarian gender and race principles. Her work also clearly implicated the role of poverty, unemployment and economic dislocation in the formation of violent adolescent masculinities (Bhana, 2005). Morrell (2001a) suggests that, in South Africa's black working-class townships there is a strong connection between schooling and violent masculinities. Langa and Eagle's (2008) case study of former self-defence unit members in Kathorus, one of South Africa's most explosive areas in the final years of apartheid prior to the democratic elections in 1994, highlights both the militarized, violent masculinity with which these young men identified at that time of unrest as well as the difficulty experienced by these men in shedding what became, post 1994 elections, an anathematic identity.

Regarding the formation of White masculine identities, for many years, the tradition of white, single sex boarding schools in South Africa produced masculine identities founded on

competitiveness, compulsory heterosexuality, homophobic performance, homosociality and embodied toughness (Epstein, 1998). Such schools were, and still are, strongly organized around hierarchies of exclusion and inclusion based on determinants such as age, academic success and participation in acceptable' team sports such as cricket and rugby (Epstein, 1998). Much research points to sports playing an important role in masculinity. In South Africa, even when sport was racially segregated, men, predominantly from urban areas, were obsessed by it with the predominant winter sports of soccer (generally a 'black' sport) and rugby (predominantly a white, Afrikaner sport) woven into hegemonic masculinities (Morrell, 2001b).

Two points seem to emerge from this discussion. In the first instance the different political influences impacting Black and White youth in the recent past has resulted in relatively disparate gender identity formation outcomes. Moreover, what also seems apparent is the lingering nature of masculine identities, certainly in South Africa, and the seeming intractability of many aspects of masculine identities.

Regarding the role played by peer groups in identity formation, it is understood that they set up standards or norms of acceptability which in turn determine who is accepted into, and who is excluded from, these groups. As such they stand as a powerful force in informing the ways boys position themselves in relation to these standards (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). Interestingly, this same research suggests that these norms are largely met through conversational performance in the peer group context rather than in the actual enactment of a hegemonic standard to prove acceptable masculinity (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007).

Accomplishment and conquest are important factors in heteronormative performance as are appearances of powerfulness and competence (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). It is suggested that in the school environment these factors may manifest as, among other things, displays of contestation, success in sport, being liked by girls, displays of smoking and drinking, and displayed toughness or invulnerability (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). Peer groups may take the form of gangs in which belonging, accomplishment and conquest are achieved through violence. Langa and Eagles' (2007) exposition on members of self-defence units could be understood as a particular example of gang activity with the associated masculine imperatives.

Connell's (1995) suggestion that not all men are equal, and that those men practicing the dominant masculinity of the time and culture are superior to others who don't, with these 'others' becoming marginalized, puts the adolescent male, struggling for an identity as a man, under a great deal of pressure to foreclose on his identity. For the adolescent male this period of identity exploration and formation is further confounded by the current lack of clarity and high degree of contestation around what it means to be 'a man', i.e., what it means to be masculine. In contrast to some thirty or forty years ago where masculinity was viewed as a singular, monolithic entity, it has become common to talk of 'masculinities' in the plural rather than 'masculinity' as a singular, unitary construct (Connell, 2002).

2.3 THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY(IES)

Part of the young male adolescent's struggle to develop a gendered identity includes developing or solidifying their conscious or unconscious understanding of what it means to be a man, to be masculine. There is an increasing volume of literature arising from international research on the social norms and practices of adolescent masculinity. Writings on this topic originate from a variety of theoretical perspectives including sociology (Connell, 1995), ethnography (Mac an Ghail, 1994) and feminist theory (Segal, 1990). This trend is also reflected in South Africa where a substantial body of research in the area of masculinity has been developing (MacPhail, 2003). These diverse approaches broach a variety of theories as well as different historical periods and cultural contexts. As a whole such research coalesces around the over arching question of what, indeed, is masculinity and is there such a thing as a quintessential masculinity?

While international researchers have noted the link between masculinity and declining academic performance, substance abuse, bullying and gendered violence (Frank, Kehler, Lovell & Davison, 2003; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; McQueen & Henwood, 2002), in South Africa, social norms of masculinity are associated with gendered violence (Morrell, 2001a), misogyny and degradation of women (Pattman, 2005), uninvolved or absent fathers (Morrell, Posel & Devey, 2003) and sexual preference stigma (Reddy & Louw, 2002).

Research into young men and boys has focused on both normative and counter normative constructions of masculinity and some research (eg. MacPhail, 2003) suggests that the ‘peer renegotiation’ of dominant norms of masculinity is essential if the risky behaviour fuelling the HIV epidemic is to be addressed. This latter idea raises the old ‘nature versus nurture’ question which asks whether masculinity is inherent or shaped by societal influences? Is it simply a matter of the unfolding of the individual’s generic blueprint or is a masculine identity actively constructed? Is masculinity an entity to be worn like a jacket or is it embedded, through daily practice, in the very being of males, (and possibly some females)? Such questions cannot be easily answered in the face of the recognition that “masculinity is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced” (Connell, 1995, p.67).

2.3.1 Conceptualizing Masculinity

In the same way that masculinity has evolved over centuries, and even decades (Connell, 1995) so too have approaches to characterizing masculinity. Connell (1995) describes four of the main strategies used over the years to characterize the construct of masculinity

1. **Essentialist:** This approach picks a feature that defines the core of masculinity, for example risk taking, responsibility or an action orientation. Essentialist thinking supposes that masculinity is an innate and inseparable part of men’s psyche. Such thinking holds a monolithic view of men as privileged, women as oppressed and requires gender to be a static, pre-determined system of sex role enactments (Imms, 2000). The weakness in this approach is that the choice of the essence of masculinity is arbitrary. More recent research which allows for flexibility and ‘performance’ in masculinity has conceptualized essentialist versions of masculinity as “specific and pervasive ways of ‘doing gender’” (Frosh et al, 2002, p.73).
2. **Positivist (what men actually are):** This approach makes use of scales to measure and statistically differentiate between male and female. Its weakness lies in the compiling of the scales measuring male and female traits, for which traits are labeled as male and which as female? In the second instance, such an approach rests on the very stereotypes and typifications that are supposedly under investigation, and thirdly, it does not allow for ‘shades of grey’ . In other words a person is either male

or female and the existence of a spectrum of masculinity, somewhere incorporating feminine men, is not countenanced.

3. Normative: This approach posits what masculinity 'is' and what men ought to be. Strict sex role theory treats masculinity precisely as a set of social norms for the behaviour of men. The criticism of this method centers on the question of what is normative about norms that are seldom met? Recent literature has shown that many men do not live up to heteronormative standards and may even at times eschew normative masculinity (Connell, 1995, Frosh et al, 2002). The normative approach thus risks labeling men who fail to meet heteronormative scripts as unmasculine, and ignores men who employ masculine norms, such as toughness and heroism, in the pursuit of 'non-masculine' ideals. Examples of such strength and heroism are illustrated in resisting the norm of toughness or coming out as 'gay' in the face of potential rejection or censure. Additionally, a purely normative definition allows for no exploration of the meaning of the construct at the level of the individual person. Pleck (1995) identified the fallacious assumption inherent in the normative approach, namely the assumption that role and identity correspond.
4. Semiotic: In general, this approach to understanding a phenomenon is premised on the axiom that a 'symbol' can only be understood in relation to another, or other, 'symbol(s)'. Thus, regarding masculinity, this approach moves away from examining masculinity at the level of the personality and concentrates on masculinity as a pattern of human communication arising in contradistinction to that which is feminine. Masculine is defined as not-feminine – "Masculinity does not exist except in contrast to 'femininity'" (Connell, 1995, p.68). Thus masculinity and femininity are understood as being personally and socially constructed or "constituted in discourse" (Connell, 1995, p.5). This approach, which focuses heavily on gender discourse, escapes the arbitrary selection of traits to label as masculine such as is inherent in essentialism, and produces more than the abstract contrasts arising from the positivist approach which precludes feminine men (and masculine women for that matter). However this approach falls short in that it fails to take account of non-discourse oriented influences on masculinity and femininity. These include gender differences in the workplace, in consumer choice, cultural institutions, positions in the military and similar non-discursive elements.

In the thirties a duality between masculinity and femininity was identified and played a dominant role in shaping research. For example, male's aggressiveness, strength and competitiveness was seen as countered by female's compliance, nurturance and cooperativeness (Terman & Miles, 1936). More recently Bem (1974) has investigated the socialization process surrounding the perceptions of what it means to be masculine or feminine. Sex role theory suggests that people are products of society's institutions, learning to behave in ways culturally appropriate to their sex. According to sex role theory, men are aggressive, rational and dominant, while women are passive, intuitive, submissive, and subjective. This popular theoretical position lies behind the plethora of 'Men are from Mars – Women are from Venus' type books (See for example, Gray, 1993). Sex role theory is premised on the understanding of masculinity as a generalized, monolithic, 'one-size-fits-all' construct (Imms, 2000).

Although sex role theory ultimately facilitated the exposure of both the politics of masculinity as well as the complementary disempowering of woman it was also very limiting in understanding men and their behaviour since it attributed very little agency to the individual, implying rather that men led pre-determined lives and played out certain pre-assigned roles based on their sex (Hearn, 1996). Brannon's (1976) four profiles of masculinity, namely 'no sissy stuff', 'the big wheel', 'the sturdy oak' and 'give 'em hell' epitomized the quintessential masculine personality, with no room for deviation at the discretion of the individual. Similarly men's attitudes were catalogued using such labels as 'rational' and 'linear', 'tough minded' and 'analytic' (Collins, 1974, in Imms, 2000). Contemporary research still highlights the existence of a popular 'sex role' discourse detailing definitive, dominant masculine characteristics. Luyt (2003) for example, identified seven currently prevailing 'key hegemonic metaphors' for masculinity, namely control (it's basically a conquest thing); emotional stoicism (having a lion's heart); physicality and toughness (iron man); competitiveness (it's a matter of war); successfulness (flying high); heterosexuality (the steam engine within) and responsibility (child-minding the world). Levant (1996) defined the traditional ideology of masculinity as a multidimensional construct consisting of the male role norms of avoiding all things feminine, restricting one's emotional life, being tough and aggressive, being self reliant, achieving status, having non-relational attitudes towards sexuality, and fearing and hating homosexuals. It is thus clear that these and

other authors have sought to characterize masculinity in some tangible way, either through sex role stereotypes or similar tropes.

Psychoanalysis typically viewed gender and sexuality as consequences of the interplay or conflict between the conscious and unconscious, influenced by both biological and social factors (Imms, 2000; Whitehead, 2002). However the flaw in this approach was to embed masculinity predominantly in the psyche of the individual where “[t]he unconscious and conscious were gendered” (Imms, 2000, p154), and by so doing, largely removing it from the arena of men’s actual practices (Imms, 2000). For example, Freud has been interpreted to have argued that based on the sexual organs, masculinity is essentially active and femininity essentially passive, although he did allow for the possibility that both men and women could have masculine and/or feminine psychic orientations (Frosh, 1994).

Anthropological studies from different cultures have undermined the attempts to define masculinity as a clear set of attributes and behaviours and has demonstrated the folly of seeking cross-cultural positivist theories by highlighting masculinity’s diverse representations and multiple meanings in non-Western cultures (see for example, Herdt, 1981; Meigs, 1990). While anthropological studies undermined the notion of a universal masculinity, historical studies have also undermined the notion of a universal masculinity across time, highlighting the evolving nature of masculinity (Imms, 2000).

2.3.2 Masculinities – The Plurality of Masculinity

More recent research on the identities of boys has challenged common-sense assumptions that gender identities are relatively fixed, self contained set of traits which individuals possess and which cause them to behave in similar and pre-ordained ways. Masculinity is no longer understood as homogeneous set of stable traits or characteristics. Contemporary analysis of gender relations has focused on the larger social structures in which masculinity is ‘located’, and the influence of these social structures on the construction of different masculinities (Connell, 1995), with the range or spectrum of masculinities becoming a significant area of research. Current thinking posits that no longer is gender understood as located within each individual as an essence. Rather it finds constant reproduction through socially informed behavioural interaction, in a manner which allows men and women to

continually affirm their membership of suitable sex categories (Frank, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1991). In other words, the individual is constantly faced with a choice as to which gender to 'perform' in a given situation.

Pro-feminist authors such as Connell and Mac an Ghaill have helped build a model of masculinity as a "varied and varying complex of values and beliefs underlying men's practices, not a set of characteristics shared by all men" (Imms, 2000, p.157). Its meaning for the individual has come to be understood as a function of generation, culture, race, class and other influences. Its vulnerability to ongoing morphosis through constant reinterpretation is clearly articulated by Edley's and Wetherell's contention that "masculinity is a concept which gets transmitted from one generation to the next through talk and text" (1995, p.208).

Masculinity is more recently understood as primarily performative, with boys and men continually taking up 'positions' within a behavioural and attitudinal spectrum, such positions being a function of the social environment and the individual's intra-psychic anxieties (Frosh et al, 2002). Edley & Wetherell (1997) subscribe to this understanding and approach, suggesting that selves, and masculinities in particular, "are accomplished in the course of social interactions; reconstructed from moment to moment" (p.203). Included as part of both the environmental and intra-psychic impact is the knowledge that acquiescence to normative gender demands meets with social reward whilst failure to do so results in negative social sanction (Connell, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1991).

2.3.3 Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell took up a strong anti-essentialist approach suggesting that masculine characters are not 'given' - as in compact units - to individuals but are rather positions taken up within a range of possible styles. Such a range is a function of the gender regimes prevailing in different cultures and historical eras (Connell, 1995). Certain of these positions, or ways of being masculine, become preferred and pressure is put on men to adopt them (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Connell's (1995) coining of the term 'hegemonic masculinity', describing the dominant standards of 'acceptable' masculinity sustaining patriarchy, was one of the first successful theoretical arguments to counter the essentialist discourse of masculinity (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type but

rather the masculinity that occupies the dominant position in a given pattern of gender relations, or in other words, the culturally exalted form of masculinity (Connell, 1995). Bhana (2005) comments that this hegemonic masculinity is “celebrated, presented as ideal and invested with power” (p.207). The patterns of conduct generally associated with hegemonic masculinity include authoritarianism, aggression, heterosexuality, physical bravery, involvement in sport and competitiveness (Connell, 1995; Frosh et al, 2002; Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

Hegemonic masculinity is posited as an ideal set of prescriptive social norms, an inspirational goal strived for by ordinary men but seldom if ever attained. It is highly correlated with what might popularly be termed ‘macho-masculinity’ as reflected in such film roles as Rambo, The Terminator, and the various roles epitomized in the work of actors such as Clint Eastwood (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Despite its unattainability, it remains a crucial regulator of day to day activities and a compelling goal for many men. Most men, Connell (1995) suggests, can never personally embody hegemonic masculinity but they support it, are regulated by it and judge other men’s conduct by it. One might imagine that such an unattainable goal would be abandoned, but men’s complicity with hegemonic masculinity seems to arise from the payoff inherent in occupying an associated dominant position, often termed the patriarchal dividend, and particularly evident in the systematic subordination of women (Connell, 1995).

Hegemonic masculinity tends to subordinate alternative or competing masculinities, promote the subordination of women to ensure the patriarchal dividend for men, and coerce men into adherence through threats of punishment of one sort or another (Connell, 1995). Imms (2000) highlights some forms of this punishment when he refers to marginalisation (the ‘othering’ of some boys’ experiences), oppression (restricting opportunity for self expression) and dominance (restricting some boys’ participation). Consequently complicity with hegemonic norms is high because of the cost of adopting an ‘alternative’ form of masculinity deviating from or rivaling the hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic ideologies preserve, legitimate and naturalize the interests of the powerful, and in so doing marginalize and subordinate the claims of other groups (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Hegemonic masculinity has social authority and it is not easy to challenge openly (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). According to Connell (1995) the task of ‘being a man’ centres on taking on and negotiating

'hegemonic masculinity'. Men's gender identity is largely a function of their complicit or resistant stance vis-à-vis dominant, prescribed masculine styles (Connell, 1995).

2.3.4 Masculinity – All that is not Feminine

Post-structuralist theorists argue semiotically that a concept such as gender is nothing if not relational (Derrida, 1973, in Edley, 2001). In other words, all concepts are defined by contrasting them with other concepts. The same is true for masculinity and indeed it is most easily understood in relation to femininity: masculinity is all that is not feminine. Taking identities as 'relational' and as 'marked by difference' (Woodward, 1997), research on the identities of boys has focused on how these (identities) are produced in relation to particular versions of the feminine 'other' (Frosh et al, 2002). It is important however, to understand that masculinity is not complementary to femininity alone, but that masculinities also develop in relation to and against each other (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). It is the failure to acknowledge this which results in the reinforcement of unitary conceptions of masculinity and femininity as natural binary categories and results in the reification of the construct of masculinity. Connell's (1995, 2002) approach to masculinity which tends to highlight relationships among men through the identification of dominant, alternative and marginalized masculinities has been useful in highlighting the plurality of masculinity.

In the same way that masculinity may be understood as being embodied as opposition to femininity, socially those who are not 'us' also define who 'we' are (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). Such a process may be considered as a systematic 'othering', which is the process of delimiting that or those which is/are not like 'us'. This is clear when masculinity is defined by distinguishing it from the 'other', namely that which is considered feminine. However, hegemonic masculinity goes a step further in so far as it premises 'acceptable masculinity' on the 'othering' of other *men* who fail to embrace the dominant, hegemonic norms, for example, homosexual men. In other words, the 'other' is not female, but male. In attempts to ensure the dominance of macho masculinity, or other hegemonic constructs, alternative forms of masculinity, or the 'other' forms of masculinity come under heavy pressure and censure from those embracing hegemonic standards (Connell, 1995), and are labeled deviant through the attachment of labels such as 'wimp', 'poof', 'sissy' and 'uyulahla', and are marginalized and excluded (Edley & Wetherell, 1997).

The ‘othering’ of alternate forms of masculinities leads to the formation of a hierarchy of masculinities with the hegemonic ideal at its apex and homosexuality at the base, equivalent to femininity (Connell, 1995). Emphasized heterosexuality, be it black or white, seems to still remain at the core of normative male sexuality in South Africa (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). Ranging in between the apex and base of this hierarchy of masculinities lie other non-hegemonic, non-gay masculinities (Frosh et al, 2002). Class and race intersections with gender also contribute to dominant and non dominant positions in this hierarchy (Morrell, 1998). For example Pattman (2005), in researching masculinities in Botswana, uncovers the manner in which xenophobia is woven into the hierarchies of masculinity while Bozzoli (1983) identified a ‘patchwork of patriarchies’ in South Africa, including ‘an English speaking variety’, Afrikaner patriarchy’ and ‘Black culture’ characterized by “sexist assumptions and ideologies” (p.140).

The plurality of masculinities, and their relatedness, is evident from the above discussed research. These different masculinities do not sit side by side as mere alternatives for boys and men to freely position themselves within. There are definite relationships of hierarchy and exclusion between the different expressions and forms or types of masculinity and young boys and men are faced with consequences, positive and negative, regardless of their choice of masculine identity.

2.3.5 Subjective Construction of Masculinity

Connell’s (1993, 1995, 2002) approach to masculinity has been lauded because it allows for diversity in that masculine identities can be studied in the plural rather than in the singular (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). In addition his approach is strongly attentive to the inherent power dynamic in gender relations and politics. Finally, his work also serves to underscore the relevance of both relations between men and women as well as relations between men and other men in the formation of gendered identities (Wetherell and Edley, 1999).

Despite these advantages inherent in Connell’s approach, however, it is suggested that there are shortcomings or limitations in the notion of hegemonic masculinity. In particular Connell’s approach does not address the question of how the forms of masculinity he identifies actually prescribe or regulate the lives of men (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). What is

the content of the prescriptive social norms making up hegemonic masculinity? Although men may or may not conform to hegemonic masculinity, there is little indication of how this compliance or non-compliance may manifest in practice (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Also his emphasis on a hierarchical gender order in which identities can be positioned has been criticized for its structuralist assumptions and for neglecting the ontological status of identities as plural and situated, that is time and place dependent (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). Indeed, it has been argued that some social reductionism in Connell's theory has led to some neglect of the subjective process of identity formation (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). His theory has been accused of the reification of masculine experience through its emphasis on the structuring effects of social categories such as 'race', class and sexuality which serve only to reduce the complexity of individual male experience (Luyt, 2003). Connell's work has also come in for criticism for failing to ground theory and discussion in the actional and discursive practices of everyday male life (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). In other words, there is no examination of the ways in which men become constituted as men with ordinary talk and no examination of how men use debates within their communities as central resources in their self constructions. Other works, such as Rutherford's discussion of the 'retributive man' and the 'new man' have been similarly criticized (Edley & Wetherell, 1997).

What is also unclear from Connell's work is whether hegemonic masculinity is a fixed, pervasive imperative, or whether it can and does vary across social contexts. If the latter, then it is necessary to understand how the conflicts and tensions arising in different contexts and sets of practices are negotiated by men, both in their conscious everyday activities as well as in the unconscious production of their own identity as men (Wetherell & Edley, 1999)

While Connell's theory pertaining to hegemony and patriarchy may help explain the oppressed status of women, and while the ordinary man may acknowledge men's hegemony over women in theory, few men would agree that they actually live it as in as simplistic a way as the literature suggests (Imms, 2000). Consequently these theories are rendered of limited value in research in which they are at odds with the perceptions of research participants (Imms, 2000). Contemporary research focusing on 'men in the making' thus requires "not clinical or psychological abstraction but rather a theoretical orientation that recognizes masculinity as the embodiment of boys' actions and beliefs" (Imms, 2000, p.159). It demands recognition that boys simultaneously inhabit a variety of masculinities rather than a single

one, and that boys actively negotiate individual interpretations of masculinity and do not passively accept their gender as a set of pre-determined roles (Imms, 2000). Research must work from the basis that each boy's masculinity is unique and his own, individual actions are responsible for its structure (Imms, 2000).

Despite what might be seen as Connell's over-simplification of some aspects of masculine identity, his theoretical scaffold nonetheless offers a useful point of entry into an arena which pits societal influences and pressure against individual psyche in the struggle to negotiate a comfortable and acceptable masculine identity (Carpenter, 2000).

From the material presented thus far it is apparent that what defines or characterizes masculinity has been fiercely contested over different ages, with multiple constructions of masculinity often prevailing in a given time period and a concomitant struggle to establish certain constructions as hegemonic and dominant (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). What seems at stake in these debates and critiques is whether in trying to pin down or describe masculinity, even in a critical manner, some reification or rigidity inevitably ensues, leading to descriptions of masculinity which are contrary to lived experience. There also appears to be some debate about the degree of personal agency versus social control that is possible in the occupation of gendered identity. There is clearly some tension in trying to study masculinity as a construct and as a lived identity.

2.3.6 Alternative Masculinities and Resistance to Hegemonic Masculinity

In examining resistance to hegemonic masculinity care needs to be taken not to take up an essentialist 'either/or' position in which the individual is either 'for it' or 'against it'. Shades of grey need to be entertained through the acknowledgement that the subjective positions men may take up in a given social setting and temporal location, are multiple, varied and far more complex than a simple hegemonic dialectic in the sense of being either hegemonic or non hegemonic. The possibility of complicity and non-complicity as bed partners and not as either/or entities needs to be considered. In some situations boys may align themselves strongly with hegemonic masculine ideals, while in other situations, or at other times, or among different people, they may visibly support an alternative masculinity. Furthermore, Wetherell & Edley (1999), in exploring the subjective positions men take up vis-à-vis

hegemonic masculinity note that what may often seem to be resistance to hegemonic masculinity is in fact underpinned by strong hegemonic injunctions, such as celebration of individualism, independence, autonomy, courage, strength and rationality. What is important in this is not so much whether complicity may masquerade as resistance but rather that a simple dichotomy between resistant and complicit practices is insufficiently 'fine-grained' to fully articulate the complex production of gendered selves. An approach similar to that of Segal (1990), which emphasizes a feminist politics based on dealing with shades of grey seems to offer the prospect of acquiring a better comprehension of the subtleties of men's masculine performances (Wetherell and Edley, 1999).

In South Africa research points to several clear instances of both direct and indirect resistance, or questioning at the very least, of hegemonic masculinity. For example several authors (MacPhail, 2003; Posel, 2003; Walker, 2005) have highlighted the distress displayed by a large segment of the South African male population surrounding the deficient role that fathers play in respect of children and their identity formation. Domestic violence, repression and child abuse have left young boys eschewing the role modeled by their fathers' generation, wanting to distance themselves from perpetrators of male violence on women (Walker, 2005). There is some recognition that hegemonic masculinity, despite its patriarchal dividend, comes at a cost, (Walker, 2005). Indeed, withholding emotion and affection may impede the development of a healthy father-son relationships, and there is a desire from some to be a 'modern father' embracing domestic responsibilities (McDowell, 2002).

Evidence of some lived alternative masculinities in South Africa has been noted. In the Nkomazi district of Mpumalanga, the alternative masculine behaviour of a small group of men has been documented (Sideris, 2003). Their non-hegemonic practices include rejection of violence, an engagement with gender and human rights, the decategorization of work by gender, and the relinquishing of control over family income (Sideris, 2003). A masculinity explored by Hunter (2003) was that of '*isoka*', a masculinity attached to men who are successful with women. Apparently this form of masculinity, prevalent and admired in the past, is increasingly being questioned by some young men, with multiple sex partners associated with irresponsibility (Walker, 2005).

Pleck's (1995) strain paradigm is a useful tool in understanding the difficulties inherent in negotiating being 'a man' and responding to hegemonic discourses of masculinity. This approach identifies three areas in which men experience 'strain' as a result of being men. These are 'discrepancy strain', 'dysfunction strain' and 'trauma strain'. The former results when an individual fails to live up to the internalized masculine ideal, which often equates to hegemonic masculinity. An example of discrepancy strain is seen in the distress and feelings of worthlessness experienced by an unemployed man who cannot fill the role of breadwinner and family provider.

Dysfunction strain can result even when one fulfills the requirements of the male ego ideal code, from the possible negative side effects to men and those around them, arising from adherence to this code. An example of this is the suppression of emotion (a requirement of stereotypical masculinity) which can result in an array of physical symptoms (Barlow & Durand, 2002).

Trauma strain, it is suggested, arises from the male role socializing process itself. In particular, the socialization of young boys is now understood to involve the suppression and channeling of their natural emotions to the extent that adult males are normatively less emotionally expressive and empathic than their female counterparts.

Levant and Kopecky (1995) in a vein similar to Pleck's trauma strain note that, alexithymia (literally 'without words for emotions'), an increased tendency to aggressive expression of anger, anger as the default feeling for vulnerable emotions, a reduced capacity for emotional intimacy as well as a preference for non-relational sexuality are all more likely in males than females because of the socialization process. Again it might be debated whether such outcomes are inherently negative, but what the literature is increasingly pointing to are some of the possible detractions in living out or living up to conventional versions of masculine identity, these detractions supporting resistance to hegemonic masculinity.

2.3.7 The New Man

One of the first researchers to highlight the tension between the 'old' and the 'new' masculinities was Rutherford (1988) who conceptualized the current crisis in terms of a

tension between two dominant subject positions, namely the 'retributive man' and the 'new man'. The former represents more traditional masculinity as encapsulated in the breadwinner, authority figure and protector of the family, tough, competitive and emotionally inarticulate. (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). On the other hand the 'new man' represents all that is espoused in feminist literature. In particular, dominant characteristics include sensitivity, caring, eschewing the objectification of women, embracing an egalitarian model of male-female relationships, and taking an interest in personal appearance (Edley & Wetherell, 1997).

Possibly as a result of the increasing feminist flavoured discourse around masculinity and the concomitant overt rejection by many men of chauvinism, the display of non-hegemonic masculinity is increasingly emerging through the persona of the 'new man' or 'metrosexual', a name with origins simply in the fact that such 'new' men live in or near metropolises (Simpson, 2002). This derivation is useful when thinking in terms of the South African situation where the masculinity division is sometimes argued to pivot around the urban/rural or modern/traditional axis. Metrosexuals take pride in good grooming and stylized appearance (Hoh, 2003, as cited in Hill, 2003); they have fewer macho pretensions, more concern with style and prettiness, and a general aversion for macho masculinity (Kirsch, 2003). They also demonstrate more traditionally 'feminine' psychological qualities such as caring and emotionality (Kirsch, 2003). The term 'feminine heterosexual men' best articulates how these men have been characterized in social psychology and gender research (Hill, 2003). Of course the use of the word feminine here risks reifying behaviour or traits exclusively as the province of women and femininity, but this is how these characteristics have been commonly operationalised in this discourse (Hill, 2003).

Although some well known individuals such as the English footballer, David Beckham, have been held up as examples of the 'new man' or 'metrosexual' paradigm, it is unclear to what extent such examples are truly 'new men' and non-hegemonic. Certainly public utterances and displays suggest an acceptance and comfortableness with some aspects of non-hegemonic behaviour, such as attention to personal grooming and fashion, but where do such icons intrinsically stand with regard to some of the other key characteristics of masculinity such as the role of breadwinner, display of emotion, heterosexuality versus homosexuality and displayed toughness?

2.4 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF MASCULINITY

2.4.1 Breadwinner

Winchester & Smith, (1998) contend that a pivotal point of men's identity is negotiated at the boundary between the 'male' domain of work and the 'female' domain of home. Although masculinity, like all identities, is formed in a diversity of contexts, in twentieth century industrialized society men's identity has been predominantly grounded in the workplace (Connell, 1995). The workplace is a major arena in which the polarities between male and female attributes and traits have been constructed and consolidated, with the reason and rationality of men's work aligned with the high status accorded science and technology (Winchester & Smith, 1998). It has been noted how, historically, the workplace/home front duality has been a strong spatial component of masculinity with the workplace representing a power site while the home front is constructed as less important and 'women's space' (Silverstein, 1996). For many men the reward for working is inherent in its status, as well as in other compensations such as the satisfaction of physical (or even mental) effort, comradeship and identification with the wage which allows them to provide for wife and children (Willis, 1979). In South Africa where a large portion of the workforce is involved in male dominated and labour intensive activities such as construction, factory work and mining, the importance of physical strength to effective employment, and hence masculinity, is underlined (Cockburn, 1984).

In this country there is evidence suggesting that many young men still hold the hegemonic opinion that it is incumbent on the husband or male partner to fill the role of family (and community) breadwinner (Walker, 2005) . Consequently part of young men's fulfillment of masculinity is associated with being able to secure work and earn money, not only to provide for themselves but also for potential partners. In South Africa where unemployment is so high, the unavailability of work, an essential component of working class masculinities across the globe, leaves many men unemployed with the sense of being stripped of their masculinity. They resort to reclaiming their masculinity through one of the few means possible, violence and heterosexual activity, and these in turn confirm gender power inequalities and fuel gender violence (Wood & Jewkes, 2001).

2.4.2 Restricted Emotional Display

The stereotypical belief that men and women differ in their expression and experience of emotion seems to be supported by a significant amount of research exploring gender and emotions (Jakupcak et al, 2003). However, the diversity of masculinity, or the existence of a masculinity continuum, both supports and is supported by recent findings that suggest that men's emotional experience and expression is inversely related to the individual's position on the masculinity continuum. In other words, the more manly, the less emotional and vice versa (see, for example, Levant & Richmond, 2007).

The most 'up-close' view one can have of men enacting masculinity is through the sociolinguistic study of speech (Nye, 2005). According to Coates (2003), women tell stories about relationships, stories peppered by people, men and women, and involving expressions of how they feel. By contrast, men seldom disclose intimate feelings about anything. When they do talk about women, it is to indulge in talk about non relational sex through objectification, and their conversation is often flavoured with strong homophobic remarks and expressions of disgust at effeminacy, timid behaviour or personal eccentricity (Coates, 2003). A familiar theme in patriarchal ideology is that men are rational and unemotional while women are the opposite, namely irrational and emotional (Connell, 1995) and it is one of the leading ideas in sex role theory, typified in the form of the instrumental/expressive dichotomy.

Along with the valuing of rationality and reason as masculine features, a large body of literature testifies to the fact that masculinity is conventionally understood as encompassing emotional detachment (Buchbinder, 1994; Pleck, 1995; Seidler, 1994, 1997). For Example Buchbinder (1994) asserts that normative prescriptions demand that men exude toughness whilst always remaining rational, logical and emotionally self-controlled: "In fact hegemonic masculinity establishes its hegemony by its claim to embody the power of reason, and thus represent the interests of the whole society" (Connell, 1995, p.164). Some research (for example, Luyt, 2003) highlights the masculine discourse within which the expression of emotion is strongly shunned due to it being seen as 'feminine' and the encouragement of male emotional detachment and independence as a sign of 'true' masculinity is promoted. Other research asserts that men are simply afraid of emotion and reports that men show

significantly more fear of anger, positive emotions and sadness than women, and report less intensity in affect particularly in response to negative stimuli (Jakupcak, Salters, Gratz, Roemer, 2003). This fear by men of their emotions may be due to negative social feedback in response to men's emotionality. Jakupcak et al (2003) also found that traditionally masculine men reported lower levels of affect intensity than did less traditional men which supports the notion that masculine ideology may be important in understanding individual differences in men's emotionality.

Seidler (1988) argues that in traditional masculinity terms we can only strive for independence through releasing ourselves from all forms of dependence. However, masculinity is created as alien to dependency (Frosh et al, 2002). This makes it difficult for men to acknowledge their emotions and needs without feeling that their masculinity is somehow brought into question because emotion and needs are purely relational and suggest a form of dependency. Men are constantly engaging in activities that overtly demonstrate their emotional and physical strength together with their toughness (Seidler, 1988).

Men's denial of their emotions is believed to facilitate an outward focus on the body in an attempt to divert attention from inward subjectivity. As such the male body is a particularly powerful material tool through which hegemonic masculinity may be displayed, as well as offering a clear object for normative correction and control (Connell, 1990)

In terms of developmental trajectories, emotional support is primarily the domain of the mother while joking seems to be the way of establishing intimacy between men in general, and between father and son in particular, and also serves to exclude women (Frosh et al, 2002). Joking as a way of relating can be seen as something boys learn from their fathers en route to becoming masculinised. It seems that masculine connectivity is via jokes and not via congruent emotional relating (Frosh et al, 2002). Father-son relationships frequently pivot so strongly on the axis of teasing and fun, that when the boy needs help, comfort or emotional release, he cannot trust his father to be able to manage such needs (Frosh et al, 2002). When a situation has some level of emotional valence, the mother, generally speaking, has to respond to or bear it. Complaints about fathers' general emotional unavailability were common in a study conducted by Frosh et al (2002) on 11 – 14 year old, London school boys. They commented that one area that stood out strikingly in their research was young boys' difficulty in speaking intimately to others. The explanation for this were twofold. In the first instance,

boys do not learn to relate emotionally to other males: “There really does seem to be an embargo on close, dependent contact between young men and between them and their fathers” (Frosh et al, 2002, p.264). Secondly policing of masculinities rendered those boys who did attempt open emotionality with other boys vulnerable to ridicule and marginalization (Frosh et al, 2002).

Emerging from Mac an Ghail’s (1994) study on male school boys is that, despite the apparent camaraderie which male peer groups offer, they are actually experienced by many boys as unsupportive. Young men experienced the single sex peer group as a competitive space in which they were expected to prove themselves. Boys report feeling pressured in these groups to assert masculinities by avoiding all talk about feelings.

Frosh et al (2002) refer to a dichotomy between boys’ constructions of themselves as ‘loyal’ and the male peer group culture which tends to militate against displays of intimacy or concern for others. Walker & Kushner (1999) suggest that many boys find it extremely difficult to manage the dichotomy between asserting or proving masculinities on the one hand, and expressing feelings, especially among their peers, on the other. They find themselves torn between a ‘public’ and a private, ‘authentic’ self. While it is important to take into account the significance of the public/private dichotomy when considering the ways in which boys construct and experience their identities, it is equally important not to reify the public self and private self by associating the latter with authenticity and stability and the former with artificiality, peer pressure and external manipulation: “Boys are neither more nor less authentic in different situations]. Rather they enact gender differently” (Frosh et al, 2002, p.121).

Recent literature indicates that the ‘authentic’ individual is itself an attractive masculine identity (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). It is often taken up in quite elitist ways by boys who fail in terms of hegemonic versions of masculinity. Edley & Wetherell (1997) talk about non rugby playing boys characterizing those who do play the sport as “unthinking conformists, incapable, even scared perhaps of doing their own thing” (p.211). The implication was that they (the non players) were, in contrast, ‘mentally strong’, individualistic and authentic. Edley & Wetherell (1999) found that ‘demonstrating one’s distance from macho stereotypes’ was also a common discursive strategy, and they argue that this may be “one of the most

effective ways ... of being a man” (p.351). Connell (1995) suggested that the types of macho stereotypes from which men and boys distance themselves are precisely hegemonic masculinities. Edley & Wetherell (1999) suggest that more recently “perhaps what is most hegemonic is to be non-hegemonic – an independent man who knows his own mind and who can ‘see through’ social expectations” (p.351).

2.4.3 Heteronormativity and Homophobia

Research has indicated that homophobia is one of the organizing principles of heterosexual masculinity. As such it underlies a significant proportion of men’s behaviour including their relationships with both women and other men, as well as violence (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

The formation of normative heterosexual scripts has generated much discussion. In feminists circles heterosexual sex is understood as being strongly based on difference, and the exertion of power of ‘the other’ (Jackson, 1996). Hill (2003) suggests that there is broad consensus that heteronormative scripts are underpinned by two complementary scripts, namely one in which the male is the active, dominant participant, together with the script in which the female is the passive, submissive participant. The emphasis on the power differential in these characterizations of heteronormative sex serves to highlight its possible collusion with hegemonic masculinity which is based on male power over females. It goes without saying though, that there are a myriad of heterosexual scripts which are at odds with heteronormative dictates, homosexuality being one such example (Perper & Weis, 1987; Segal, 1990).

MacPhail (2003) notes that there is a high degree of complicity with the hegemonic imperative that “part of being a ‘normal’ man is the exercise of power over women, irrespective of the degree to which this complicity is recognized, acknowledged or desired by an individual man” (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe & Thomson, 1994, p.123). Among South African male youth power over women is achieved through anything from persuasion to emotional and physical abuse (MacPhail, 2003). However MacPhail (2003) reports the presence of males who challenge this norm of masculine power over women and who view such behaviour as obsolete and relevant only in a bygone era.

Research indicates that discrimination against gays is still widespread across the world (Wilkinson, 2003) and in South Africa homophobic violence appears to be on the increase over the last several years (Reid & Dirsuweit, 2002). It is argued that this is partly as a result of the increased visibility of homosexuality in response to the country's new constitution and some consequent contestation of the heterosexual landscape (Walker, 2005). Gay men reportedly rise the ire of heteronormative heterosexual men because the former represent a violation of the way men are supposed to be and represent a threat to the latter's sense of masculinity (Kilianski, 2003; Kite & Whitley, 1998). It can be argued that this threat arises as a result of the post-structuralist paradigm where that which is seen or considered to be feminine is simultaneously and automatically considered to be non-masculine (Connell, 1995). Thus women's attraction for a sex partner of the opposite sex immediately renders any attraction by men to other men as sexual partners as unmasculine and hence threatening.

It is increasingly common to draw attention to the extent to which anti-lesbian and anti-gay talk and behaviour saturates pupils' cultures, especially school based cultures of masculinity (Redman, 2000). The inevitable question is why boys are so homophobic and how this impacts their formation of identity. Nayak and Kehily (1996) suggest that boy's homophobia is "a performance designed to give substance to their masculinity as well as constructing themselves as masculine" (p.175). In other words, homophobia is seen as a set of behaviours and activities through which boys publicly and repetitively assert their 'normal' masculinity through heterosexuality. At the same time, because homosexuality has a status of 'not masculine' it is associated with femininity and the construction of masculinity is partially underpinned by projecting this femininity onto particular boys who are singled out as gay or insufficiently masculine (Nayak and Kehily, 1996). Both Butler (1997) and Nayak and Kehily (1996) note the precariousness and fragility of these masculine identities and Frosh et al (2002) suggests that boys homophobic performances may thus be seen as ways of shoring up their masculinities by constructing the feminine other as an ever present threat. Supporting this contention, Eder, Evans & Parker (1995) suggest that boys' homophobic practices demonstrate that there is no essential masculinity and hence that boys have actively to shore up their masculine identities "since these labels are viewed so negatively by adolescent boys, their extensive use suggests that strong pressure is needed to reinforce traditional masculine behaviour" (p.64).

Many of the boys in Frosh et al's (2002) study of British public school boys introduced homophobia into their discussion with the researchers themselves without prompting. Boys who were called gay were seen as possessing the same characteristics that were denigrated in girls demonstrating how homophobia becomes intertwined with misogyny. Boys had to be careful about what they said or did for fear of being called gay or effeminate. In this sense their identities were policed. It seems that homophobia is about the terror that others will see one as gay, as a failed man, rather than about the irrational fear of gay people, or the fear that one might actually be gay or have gay tendencies (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). This policing of masculine identities was not restricted to employing homophobia only but also included more subtle strategies for constructing any non-hegemonic masculinities as feminine. This policing has the dual effect of alienating those who transgress the hegemonic norm too obviously, as well as confirming the acceptable boundaries of masculinity for those who do not.

Many boys suggested that homophobia, although extremely common, was insignificant, claiming for example that calling a boy gay was 'just' a cuss (or a method of 'dissing' in South African parlance) or 'just' a joke (Frosh et al, 2002). However such cussing seems to be far more loaded than often acknowledged in that homosexuality is strongly associated with gender non-conformity; to call another boy a 'faggot' or sissy is to strip them of their manhood (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

Such 'dissing' aimed at boys who had close friendships with other boys also helps remind other boys of the unacceptability of close relations between boys and men: "the association of affection with femininity could lead boys to not expect or want similar shows of affection from boys". (Frosh et al, 2002, p190). The construction of rigid boundaries between boys and girls is clearly exemplified in Frosh et al's study with boys saying that they preferred to speak to girls about their problems rather than to boys or other men for fear of being mocked and labeled as 'wimpish' by the latter (Frosh et al, 2002). Interestingly although some dissatisfaction may be expressed at boys and men for their tendency to tease, be unsympathetic, unempathic and unsupportive, the possibility of having 'soft', 'serious' and 'tender' relations with men and boys was precluded by constructing such relationships as gay and such relationships being seen as restricted to girls (Frosh et al, 2002). Duncan (1999) also indicates that boy's homophobia in schools also operates to shut down "signs of incipient

emotional sharing between boys, confining boys to a thin and impoverished range of expression of their feelings” (p.124).

Psychodynamically, Redman (2000), suggests that, in general, the unconscious plays a strong role in the positions that boys take up within a repertoire of masculinities. This is true, in particular, for positions pertaining to homosexuality. He suggests that psychic and social dynamics work hand in hand and that the anti-gay, ‘homophobic’ positions taken up by young boys represent, in part, the manifestation of unconscious Oedipal and pre-Oedipal anxieties, a manifestation aided by the conducive sociological anti-gay discourse.

Much of the research discussed in this section alludes to the social milieu in which homophobic labels have emotional valence, as well as the performative nature of boys’ masculinity. Kimmel & Mahler (2003) note an important but often unstated requirement, namely that of the necessity that one’s masculine performance be witnessed. Indeed, “[i]f masculinity is largely a homosocial performance, then at least one male peer, who is himself successful, must approve of the performance” (p.1452).

2.5 RESEARCH INTO ADOLESCENT MASCULINITY

A substantial body of research in masculinity studies consists of research on young masculinities, i.e., research conducted with young, school going adolescents (eg, Frosh et al, 2002; Korobov and Bamberg, 2004; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). The contribution of the school environment in producing identities is well documented (Bhana, 2005; Frosh et al, 2002; Moletsane, Morrell, Unterhalter & Epstein, 2002). It has been noted that schools are more than just formal places of learning for they represent a microcosm of wider society and culture and are thus imbued with social and cultural meanings that influence gender subjectivities and shape identities (Bhana, 2005; Frosh et al, 2002; Korobov and Bamberg, 2004; Moletsane et al, 2002).

Mac an Ghaill (1994) put a lot of emphasis on the role played by processes inherent in the school environment and in peer group relationships in the development of adolescent identities. Peer groups may renegotiate identities and can act as a powerful resource for

adolescent boys to create and maintain distances from dominant standards of masculinity, or may reinforce dominant ideological positions.

Literature on young masculinities generally finds that there is a dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity that influences boys and men's understanding of how they have to act in order to be 'acceptably' male, and that this dominant mode is associated with heterosexuality, toughness, power and authority, competitiveness and the subordination of gay men (Frosh et al, 2002). Most boys, however, cannot hope to fit into the masculine 'ideal' and, indeed, in Frosh et al's study of boys in the United Kingdom, they did not necessarily claim to aspire to hegemonic masculinity, even though they tended to take it as a standard against which to evaluate themselves and other boys (Frosh et al, 2002). They therefore positioned themselves in relation to popular masculinities in various ways, showing considerable evidence of what Wetherell (1998) terms 'troubled' subject positions: "points in conversation when subject positions become difficult and have to be repaired" (p.83). This often manifests in the ways boys strove to explain that although they did not fit the bill for a hegemonically 'ideal' male, they were nevertheless acceptably masculine. Their accounts tended to indicate that they had, at some point, 'proved' their toughness and no longer needed to do so. This was very apparent in discussions around academic performance.

Four general ways in which boys were found to establish their authenticity as masculine whilst diverging from the masculine ideal (Edley & Wetherell, 1997) are as elaborated as follows:

1. Disparagement of those who 'pretended' to be overly masculine, and arguing that although they might not necessarily be the most popular boys, at least they were authentic. It is suggested that hegemonic masculinity may indeed be viewed as a 'performance' rather than assumed to be 'real', and that this allows some who do not regard themselves as 'hegemonic' to maintain untroubled subject positions as authentically masculine.
2. Using their own hardness (or possibly some other single attribute of masculinity) and positioning themselves high up the hardness hierarchy.
3. Rejecting of hegemonic masculinity as an inferior concept.
4. Juggling popularity (friendly and good at sport) and academia (by not letting others see their enjoyment of academic pursuits).

A number of researchers have noted the significance attached by boys to body shape and, in relation to this, ability at sport, as an indicator of masculinity (for example, Eder et al, 1995). International and local research indicates that sport is undeniably central in defining masculine norms among adolescent boys (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007; Frosh et al, 2002; Mac an Ghail, 1998). 'Hardness' was often used as an anchor against which to relate masculinities and was associated with fighting ability (Frosh et al, 2002). Connell (1987) suggests that to be masculine means to embody force, to embody competence. Some research suggests that physical toughness and self confidence are both linked and counter posed to intellectual or academic commitment, the latter signifying weakness and effeminacy (Frosh et al, 2002). Gilbert & Gilbert (1998) suggest that academic activities are strongly associated with girls – their intelligence is not admired but rather seen as a by-product of their inactivity - and that boys, in reaction to this construction of girls engage in sport and by so doing eschew academic performance. Further, boys also assert themselves by denigrating and ostracizing those boys who are constructed as academic. Swain (2000), in research with young boys aged around 10, found this split to be absent among committed sports players, most of whom were also high academic achievers. In addition, unpopular boys were neither sports players nor high academic achievers. Thus again there is some indication that the stereotypes concerning practices and popularity are not necessarily borne out in lived experience and are contestable. Frosh et al (2002) suggest that masculinity and femininity become increasingly polarized around sport and academics in secondary school and are more fluid constructs earlier on in development. This may account for some of the differences in theirs and Swain's research.

Much of the research conducted overseas, particularly in the United Kingdom (eg, Frosh et al, 2002; Mac an Ghail, 1994) found a strong positive correlation between boys perception of a link between masculine popularity on the one hand and resistance to academic and educational development on the other: "Again and again boys explained to us that popular boys have to mess about in class and not do their schoolwork" (Frosh et al, 2002, p.204). A lot of energy appeared to go into negotiating popularity and high academic performance. In Frosh et al's study it was found that it was easier for private school boys to successfully negotiate this divide because, as private school scholars they were expected to attain an education and good grades. This thus allowed them to avoid the troubling position of

constructing themselves as working too hard to be properly masculine, but still allowed them to criticize the most hard working boys in their classes (Frosh et al, 2002).

Maintaining a sense of one's masculinity in the face of non compliance with hegemonic norms, or the non-performance of hegemonic activities, rests on the ability of the individual boy to adopt various strategies which either mask his non compliance, or compensate for it. Such masking or compensation often requires the approval of, and validation by, the male peer-group (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). Strategies for avoiding hegemonic compliance include 'positioning' and 'distancing' tactics, the latter usually involving attributing certain behaviour to 'others', while the former often involved presenting behaviour as a rational and 'acceptable' alternative to other forms (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007).

In public (and private) schools, boys could get away with being academic achievers and yet still remain popular if they found some other way to mitigate against their 'nerdish' academic performance. Frosh et al (2002) suggest that being able to laugh at themselves and not mind being teased was one such strategy. Generally, popularity has to be worked at and, in particular, being good at school work was only tolerated by other boys if there were mitigating factors such as being good at sport .

Rudberg (1999) and Mac an Ghaill (1994) highlight another interesting way boys may maintain constructions of themselves as popular while simultaneously doing well academically, namely the development of a masculine, intellectual elite or 'clan' which dominates their peer group through intellectualism. However Redman (2000) and Mac an Ghaill (1994) comment on the similarity between competitive, physical sport and 'intellectual muscularity' and observe that the latter may be complicit with hegemonic masculinity in so far as it is about power, both involving pushing other men around be it physically or intellectually. Intellectual prowess in these scenarios is not an 'alternate masculinity' but simply de-feminized. Most boys however, found a way of positioning themselves 'in the middle' in terms of popularity and negotiated ways in which they could get on with school work and not be constructed as unpopular.

In understanding these different multiple positions taken up by boys it is necessary to note that it is unusual for people to produce accounts of themselves that construct identities in

ways that make them look bad since the maintenance of self esteem requires that the self be presented in a positive way (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; van Dijk, 1992). It is thus difficult to ask boys, and receive honest answers to questions that imply their unpopularity, or force them to take up unpopular positions, since this immediately places them in a troubled subject position (Frosh et al, 2002). The vulnerability of masculine identities implies a constant need for such identities to be proved or asserted, thus reinforcing and obscuring the anxieties and tensions which underlie them (Frosh et al, 2002).

The above findings suggest that masculine identities are not only positioned within a gender order, as Connell suggested, but that masculinities are dynamic and performative self narratives, 'positioned' in subjective time and space (Frosh et al, 2002; Redman, 2000; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). It should also not be assumed that meanings of masculinity in adolescence are generic, consistent or stable; rather meanings occur dynamically in socially varying contexts (Varga, 2001).

Drawing on the above material, Blackbeard & Lindegger (2007) suggest a conceptualization of masculinity as that of a performative social identity and subjectivity in which masculinities are self narratives which are simultaneously instantiated through social discourse and subjective processes, including fantasy and the unconscious. Hermans and Kempen's (1993) theory of the 'dialogical self', which proposes that the self is a fluid multiplicity of relatively independent self-narratives, located within the subjectivity of time and space, is clearly complementary with the above positions (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007).

2.6 GENDER AND THE ROLE OF COUNSELOR

It seems appropriate to assume that mental health care providers such as counselors and therapists need to demonstrate personal attributes or traits which include a willingness for introspection and self exploration, as well as a certain level of emotional maturity including empathy and a capacity for intimacy (Brems, 2001). Given that masculinity is traditionally associated with difficulty in expressing and processing emotion (Jakupcak et al, 2003) it then becomes intriguing to understand how men perform and function as therapists and counselors.

Gilligan (1982) suggests that men and women differ in their adoption of an 'ethic of care' and responsibility for others. She posited that men tend to adopt an approach aimed at righting the wrongs of the system while women adopted a more caretaking role and were concerned with the amelioration of the welfare of those suffering under the system (Gilligan, 1982). In a research project using Bem's Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) to distinguish masculinity and femininity, Karniol et al (2003) found that girls and individuals high in femininity had a higher ethic of care than did boys and those who highly endorsed masculinity. They also found that individuals with a feminine gender orientation received higher care scores than did individuals who displayed an androgynous orientation (Karniol et al, 2003). Soetching, Skoe and Marcia (1994) found that gender-role orientation was a better predictor of what they termed care-oriented moral reasoning than gender itself. It has also been argued that femininity in adolescents is directly related to the capacity for empathy and concern (Karniol, Gabay, Ochion and Harari, 1998).

What seems to be suggested from this research is that adopting a feminine gender role tends to be related to a higher capacity for empathy and tendency towards caring than does adopting a masculine gender role, and that it is more the gender-role than the sex of the individual that determines the ability to empathize and care for others. In other words research seems to suggest that empathy and caring are be positively correlated with femininity and negatively correlated with masculinity, where femininity and masculinity are understood in terms of Bem's (1974) characterization.

Harvey and Hansen's (1999) study of gender roles in male psychologists found that the majority of male psychologists endorsed androgynous gender role profiles (high in both masculine and feminine traits) rather than the other classifications of masculine, feminine and undifferentiated (low on both masculine and feminine scales). In other words, if this finding were to be generalized, male therapists would exhibit more nurturing and empathic qualities than their masculine gender-role counterparts, but also more cognitive and instrumental traits than their feminine gender role counterparts. This research also reflected the tendency of male psychologists to adopt a more androgynous style in their personal lives (Harvey and Hansen, 1999). However, whether this was a learned style as a result of their psychological training or whether they came to study psychology partly because of their androgynous orientation, was unclear.

What seems consistent in all these findings is that those males who tend to be high in empathy and capacity for caring tend to endorse more feminine attributes and align themselves more closely with the feminine gender role on scales such as Bem's, than do other males.

2.7 SUMMARY

Conceptualizing masculinity as single and unitary construct seems to be an unsuitable path to follow in understanding the formation of gendered identities in boys and young men, as well as in men's behaviour generally. Considering the many and varied positions that men take up in the world in relation to other men and in relation to women leads to the more useful understanding of masculinity as being a function, to a large extent, of both time and space. Masculinity is understood as being both performative and variable leading to the conceptualizing of multiple forms of masculinity rather than a single, quintessential form of masculinity.

Different masculinities are either more or less accepted in differing cultures, social milieus and historical periods, often with a single masculinity becoming the dominant trope or form. Adherence to this hegemonic masculinity holds certain benefits, but also comes at a certain cost to the individual. Individuals may be required to negotiate the tensions inherent in adhering to hegemonic masculine ideals at the cost of personal ideals or competing masculine ideals. Social sanctions may be expected for those who deviate from the dominant masculinity and boys and young men walk a fine line between acceptance and rejection as they negotiate the degree to which they adhere to dominant masculine imperatives. Increasingly the dialectical opposition between masculinity and femininity is being undermined with growing interest in, and intrigue with, the idea of the 'new man' who embraces characteristics and traits that were once considered anathema to masculinity.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

The aim of qualitative research, which is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they engage and live through situations (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999), makes it eminently suitable for this particular study which had as its goal an increased understanding of the lived experiences of certain group of young men as they engaged with masculinity.

3.1 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

This study is interested in young male masculinity as portrayed through the words of boys and young men who elected to become peer counselors in a high school or university setting. It focused particularly on the ways in which their commentary about what it means to be a young man in South Africa at this time reflected an appreciation of a range of aspects of masculinity, including both dominant forms, and alternatives to these.

In particular, the research aimed to explore the construction and maintenance of both dominant and alternative masculine identities in a specific group of young males who have identified themselves with what would generally be viewed as a non-hegemonic masculine activity, namely self selecting to become peer counselors. The research assessed the manner in which these adolescent boys and young men have negotiated for themselves a masculinity somewhat alternative to the hegemonic standard, but one which still allows their construction of themselves as masculine.

The major objectives of this research were thus:

1. To identify young males' constructions of dominant norms of masculine practice.
2. To highlight areas in which constructions of traditional masculinity appear to be open to contestation and interrogation.

3. To examine the processes through which these boys position themselves in an alternative relation to hegemonic constructs and how they sustain this positioning.
4. To examine the possible multivoiced performance of masculinity in participants.

These aims then lead to the following research question:

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

This study seeks to explore the constructions that young males, who have self selected as peer counselors, have of hegemonic masculine practices, and how they have possibly negotiated and sustained alternative aspects of masculinity for themselves in their own positioning and in their discursive construction of the idea of masculinity.

3.3 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Because the research was interested in examining and understanding the performance of masculinity in the current South African context and in understanding how the interpretation of the environment by participants informed their masculinity, an interpretative/hermeneutic framework was appropriate (Patton, 2002). Since the research aimed to explore how participants have come to have their perceptions of reality, particularly what it means to be masculine, how their realities are represented in their conversation and the consequences of their constructions of reality (regarding their inter personal relationships and way of being in the world), it also appropriately appealed to social constructionist/constructivist elements, including some elements of discourse analysis (Patton, 2002).

Under the umbrella of what might be termed ‘critical thematic analysis’, the research entertains both interpretive and constructionist perspectives. This straddling of dual perspectives reflects a simultaneous interest in describing and interpreting a certain aspect of human behaviour (namely positioning vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity) as well as a commitment to more fully understanding the implications of social discourse and practice as it influences behaviour. The present research utilized the interpretive method of thematic content analysis in conjunction with some aspects of critical discourse analysis. Eagle (1998) suggests that these two approaches can prove complementary: “the discussion of the thematic

material is informed by a social constructionist perspective which enriches appreciation of the data” (p.192) .

In blending these two approaches, the research stance varies between emic and etic, or first person and third person perspectives, as the researcher takes up an empathic stance to hear and understand the human experience of being a young man at this point in time in South Africa, and then takes up a stance of distancing as interpretations of understandings are made and critical attention to discursive elements is given.

One of the mainstays of hermeneutic enquiry is what has been termed the hermeneutic spiral or circle. Essentially it refers to the basic premise that ‘the part’ cannot be understood without reference to ‘the whole’ and the whole cannot be understood without reference to the part (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). A hermeneutic enquiry must thus, by default, take into consideration the whole context in which the researched is located and always remain alert to the interaction between parts and whole. Thus, in terms of this current research, an understanding of young and alternate masculinities is augmented by some appreciation of the cultural and social contexts in which these masculinities are embedded.

In summary, the study is ontologically relativist, epistemologically subjectivist and methodologically hermeneutic and dialectic.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

3.4.1 Participants

3.4.1.1 Recruitment and Selection

In accordance with the method of analysis, namely content analysis, the data set in this study consisted of a collection of texts, rather than individuals, or collections of individuals. The texts were derived from the discussions that were facilitated in three focus groups. The fundamental data that focus groups produce are transcripts of the group discussions (Morgan, 1997).

In order to render sufficiently rich, sophisticated material, and because the study focused on a particular context, namely male peer counselors, purposive selection was employed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At different levels the context of the research can be thought of as either singular or multiple. The context may be thought of as singular in the light of all participants being male peer counselors. However an attempt was made to derive texts representative of at least two different group/spatial contexts, thus allowing for possible generalization of findings or the highlighting of pertinent distinctions. The two contexts explored involved interviewing school going, adolescent, male peer counselors at a secondary school and, secondly, male peer counselors at a local university. Three focus groups were conducted in total, as outlined later.

Currently many secondary schools and universities operate peer counseling programs and males from any such counseling programs were eligible for selection as participants. Ease of access to participants was the major reason for the choice of school and university from which the scholar participants were drawn. As a result of the researcher's previous relationship with the school from which the school going participants were drawn, as a member of the teaching staff a decade earlier, minimal gate-keeping issues arose and after a proposal was submitted to the school's psychologist, access to learners on the peer counseling program was given. The researcher's registration at the university from which the university participants were drawn made access to these students, via the head of the peer counseling program non-problematic.

The school from which participants were drawn is a private, all boys, day school with a strong Christian ethos, located in an affluent northern suburb of Johannesburg. The open university from which the remaining participants were drawn is centrally located in Johannesburg. The main selection criteria of the participants were that they were firstly male, and secondly had self selected to become peer counselors. This latter criterion was imposed because such self selection suggested that these participants had identified with a masculinity which was perhaps an alternative to prevailing hegemonic masculinity. The school participants were all grade eleven pupils aged between sixteen and seventeen. Three were black and five were white. Although the participants had not yet begun their training as peer counselors, the fact that they had voluntarily come forward publicly within the school and

indicated their willingness to train as peer counselors was deemed sufficient to invite them to take part in the research study.

Permission to recruit participants from the school was obtained from the school psychologist. Selection of the boys was based on an invitation to all peer counselors to attend a general information meeting at which the purpose of the research was explained to them as well as the demands that would be placed upon them should they agree to participate. Those who indicated their intention to participate were required to produce evidence of parental consent via a standardised letter handed to them at the initial interview as well as signing their own agreement to participate and have their participation verbally and visually recorded. (See Appendix for documents concerning ethical considerations and informed consent.) At the same meeting dates for focus groups were decided upon and the boys arranged themselves into two groups depending on which focus group date suited them best. Eight boys volunteered for participation and four boys took part in each focus group. One boy declined the invitation to participate.

Selection of participants from the university campus followed a similar protocol with the head of the peer counseling unit granting permission for access to the program's peer counselors. Although four participants initially indicated their intention to participate only two arrived for the focus group. They were aged twenty one and twenty seven years old respectively. All participants had completed their training as peer counselors and had been practising as such for some period.

Individuals who had indicated their willingness to participate were issued with a disposal camera along with a letter providing a summary of the pertinent details of the project, including the theme guiding the composition of their photographs. In particular, the participants were asked to take photographs which represented for them 'what it means to be a young man in South Africa today'.

All told, three focus groups were held, two at the school and one at the university. The focus groups involving the school boys each had four participants, two white boys and two black boys in the one and three white scholars and one black scholar in the other. The focus group with the university students had two participants, both of them black.

The focus groups for the school learners were held seven and ten days after cameras were issued, while the focus group for the university counselors was held some four weeks after cameras were distributed.

3.4.1.2 Size of Participant Group

Merton, Fiske and Kendall, (1990) suggest that in conducting focus groups "the size of the group should manifestly be governed by two considerations...it should not be so large as to be unwieldy or to preclude adequate participation by most members nor should it be so small that it fails to provide substantially greater coverage than that of an interview with one individual" (p.137). Although between six and eight members is often considered optimal, Kreuger (1988) suggests that smaller groups of between four and six may be preferable when the participants are 'experts' in the area under research or have had long and intense experience in the researched area. Taking the research topic into account it was deemed that focus groups of four boys or young men would be adequate. Although it was disappointing that only two participants arrived for the university focus group it was decided to go ahead with the process with the two participants who had made time to attend.

3.4.2 Data Collection

3.4.2.1 Focus Groups

Focus groups were chosen as the method of data collection for several reasons. One of the main advantages of focus groups is that they allow the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a given topic in a limited time period (Morgan, 1997). This was particularly relevant to this study because of the performative nature of masculinity and the important role of other men in policing hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Focus groups allow an emphasis on the participants' interaction among themselves rather than their interaction with the interviewer (Morgan, 1997), and this was important for the research questions. Focus groups allowed the participants the opportunity to interact and express views and opinions while also allowing the facilitator to observe interaction on the topic and identify the performative nature of masculinity as the participants variously positioned themselves vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity throughout the discussion. Levy (1979) suggests that hearing how

participants respond to one another gives insight not only into their natural vocabulary on the topic but also highlights when they are willing to challenge one another, and how they respond to such challenges.

Morgan (1997) has also commented on the suitability of focus groups for the investigation of attitudes and cognitions, both of which are germane to understanding boys' views of masculinities and their related behaviours.

3.4.2.2 Auto-photography

Varga (2001) suggested that ways be found to increase the level of active participation in data collection (and analysis), especially when working with youth. Regarding research into identity formation, Noland (2006) notes that traditional research has not allowed participants the freedom to articulate their self concepts and backs the recent trend in social research towards increasing the authenticity of the research process. By increasing the authenticity it is hoped that researchers will be better able to represent participants' experiences.

As a result of the above ideas, and following the example of recent works (see for example, Karlson, 2001; Lindegger & Blackbeard, 2007), a form of research practice called auto-photography was used. This approach involves issuing the participants with a camera and asking them to take photographs of aspects of their social, cultural and physical environments that are important to them (Noland, 2006). It can generate more authentic data because it enables researchers to look at the participants' world through the participants' eyes as the participants themselves select and record the images which they feel best represent them (Noland, 2006).

Once the photographs are developed they are invariably returned to the photographer and discussion in either individual or group interview settings is then prompted by inviting participants to collaborate with the researcher as 'expert guides', describing their photographs and what the photographs mean to them, a method of interview termed photo-elicitation (Noland, 2006). In the focus group situation this method of interviewing has a twofold dividend. It relieves the stress of being the subject that many informants feel (Collier & Collier, 1986) as well as seeming to free the discussion space up for informal comment,

discussion and contribution. This seems to arise from the detachment that this style of interviewing offers which both encourages and allows free association by participants (Collier & Collier, 1986) as well as rendering critiques and contestation less penetrative to the photographer.

3.4.2.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection took place through the three focus groups consisting of four, four and two participants respectively. Participants had returned their cameras for processing some days prior to the focus group meeting and the developed photographs were returned to participants at the respective focus group. As previously discussed, the photographs were used as 'triggers' for conversation around masculinity. Participants were invited to select four or five of their photographs which best represented what it meant, for them, to be a young man in South Africa at this time, and they were then asked to tell the group why they had chosen each image as representative and to associate freely to the photographs. Participants tended to explain all their photographs before conversation and free association around them developed. Two participants in one of the school focus groups did not return their cameras and consequently did not have their own photographs to share. Nevertheless sufficient conversation and discussion was elicited using the photographs of the other two members.

The researcher's role was primarily one of facilitating discussion, for example prompting participants to move to the next photograph or the next participant's photographs when the conversation around one particular photograph became repetitive. In particular several interventions were made by the researcher with the express aim of moving the discussion in a particular direction. For example, the researcher was interested in the participants' views or perceptions of the existence of a hierarchy of masculinities and, at what seemed an appropriate point in the discussion, explicitly introduced the concept and term to the participants. At other times a participant may have touched on a theme which has been extensively discussed in the masculinity literature, but which the other participants failed to engage with. At such points the researcher would make interventions which would facilitate further discussion and engagement with such themes. Finally, since alternative masculinities is an important part of this study, any mention by the participants of positions which could be

interpreted, however loosely, as alternative masculinities, was picked up by the researcher and further discussion facilitated.

All focus groups were audio and video recorded to allow for transcription and later observation if necessary.

3.5 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

According to Kreuger (1988), content analysis is an appropriate method for analyzing texts transcribed from focus group discussions. As stated previously, the study made use of a kind of critical thematic content analysis, allowing for identification of descriptive, interpretive and discursive elements. The essence of the method of content analysis is that it primarily draws inferences from a given text, utilizing systematic procedures (Eagle, 1998). Since the aim of this research was to draw inferences and make interpretations regarding ‘masculinity-related’ behaviour and ideas of adolescent boys and young adult men, content analysis seemed an appropriate approach.

Thematic content analysis is the term used to describe a more interpretative application of the content analysis method and involves the identification of various themes which are in turn categorized and finally elaborated upon on the basis of systematic scrutiny (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994).

3.5.1 Steps in the Analysis

As Eagle (1998) notes, the essential purpose of content analysis is the reduction of data into “coherent, manageable categories to allow for the identification and elucidation of central issues” (p.215). To this end, the approach used in this study largely follows commonly accepted procedure such as those articulated in Weber, (1985) and Wimmer and Dominick, (1987)

The transcripts were analysed by use of the following steps.

1) Specification of recording units: The focus of this research was upon themes and consequently thematic units were defined. Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggest that a ‘theme’ is an assertion about some subject. This assertion may be explicit or implicit. With this conceptualisation in mind, thematic units were defined in terms of their logical coherence around a specific topic germane to masculinity.

2) Definition of categories of analysis: This defining process was both inductive and deductive (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Regarding the former, themes from the literature relating to hegemonic masculinity, alternative masculinities and masculinities in general were used. Deductively, the texts were analysed openly (Neuman, 1997), in the context of the literature covered in the review, to allow for the possible emergence of previously unidentified themes. Both researcher and supervisor identified a range of such themes and those most commonly agreed upon were highlighted.

3) Each focus group transcript was then analyzed and the presence of material relating to each of the themes, for example aggression, was identified, and every occurrence noted on an excel spreadsheet, alongside the theme title, and referenced to the transcript and line number(s) where it occurred. For each theme the various occurrences were analysed for commonalities and diversity. Although some content analysis practitioners insist that categories are mutually exclusive, it seemed expedient to allow for sections of text to be classified in more than one thematic unit. Thus a reference to a school yard fight might be classified under headings of ‘aggression’, ‘inhibited expression of emotions’ and ‘physical toughness’. Eagle (1998) defends this multiple classification by noting that “units cannot always be separated out into discrete and independent themes since this is not how people naturally speak” (p.216).

4) Those themes which occurred most regularly across the three focus groups and which included examples of both identification with, and contestation of, the hegemonic masculine theme or behaviour were selected for discussion and interpretation. Since the discourse of hegemonic masculinity came into focus at this point, the analysis of the categories or themes selected included a secondary constructionist and discursive analysis, more critical than the initial and primary interpretative analysis.

5) In the discourse analysis, a loose adherence to the methodology of Bannister et al, (1994) was followed. The researcher aimed to describe how pertinent discourses operate to naturalise the things they refer to, in other words, how they attempt to construct the things they refer to in such a way as to make any questioning of them appear perverse and non-sensical. This is particularly relevant to the discourse surrounding hegemonic masculinity. Those who benefit from the discourse as well as those who are disadvantaged by it were borne in mind and the degree to which participants take up positions as a function of space and time to maximize their benefit and minimize any disadvantage were explored. This includes attention to who supports the discourse and under what circumstances, as well as those who discredit the discourse, and under what circumstances this discrediting or contestation occurs.

3.6 REFLEXIVITY CONSIDERATIONS

Hermeneutists must bear in mind the fact that “they are constructing the ‘reality’ on the basis of their interpretations of data with the help of the participants who provided the data” (Eichelberger, 1989, p.9). It is thus important for both researcher and reader to have knowledge of the perspective, situational context or praxis from which the researcher describes and interprets (Patton, 2002). Researchers are required to recognise that they are not entirely indifferent to the outcomes of the research and that some form of pre-understanding is brought to the research process (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Indeed, it is critical for the hermeneutic researcher to look back on the progress made, and critically evaluate the path walked in making that progress to assess the impact, as researcher, on the outcome.

In the context of this research, several particular dimensions of the research process may have had a bearing on the manner in which the participants interacted in the focus groups and what information they shared, and how they shared it. Mac an Ghaill (1994) notes the influence of both gender and ethnicity when conducting research with school going adolescents and the demographics of the interviewer as a substantially older, white, male feasibly influenced the contributions of participants. As an older male unconscious associations with father figures and/or school teachers may have elicited a particular response type while both black and

white participants may have been differentially influenced by the interviewer's ethnicity, in terms of identification and disidentification. Since all participants had self selected as peer-counselors some affinity with counseling and/or psychology on their part may have lead to some idealisation of the interviewer because of his intended professional qualification as a psychologist which they were aware of from the informed consent sheet and verbal invitation to participate. Contributions may then have been biased in favour of gaining the positive esteem of the researcher. This may have been particularly so in the discussion of the role of peer counselor.

Given the researcher's interest in alternative masculinity and the particular questions or interventions thus made, participants, consciously or unconsciously, may have responded in a particular way, influenced by the researcher's stance and the flavour of his interventions.

3.7 COMMENT ON METHODOLOGY

The data for this research was collected from focus group discussions. The work of Frosh et al (2002) suggests that if individual interviews had also been conducted with the same participants, the performative nature of masculinity may have been further highlighted by bringing to light values, thoughts, opinions and behaviours which the participants suppressed in the focus groups. Also, the additional information that may have been shared in individual interviews may have provided further insight into the degree to which some aspects of hegemonic masculinity are indeed contested. Assuming the participants were subject to both unconscious and conscious peer policing of their actions and expression in the focus groups, information elicited in an environment where unconscious and actual peer policing was reduced may have been richer. However, for the purpose of a research report of limited scope and for the main aims of this project the focus group data appeared to be sufficient. Further evaluative comments on the research study will be offered in the conclusion

That only two participants arrived for the university peer counselor focus group leads to the question of whether they did in fact constitute a focus group. If one understands a focus group as defined by its goal, namely to "conduct a group discussion that resembles a lively conversation" (Morgan, 1997, p.22) then the former question can be answered by looking at

the quality of conversation, debate and interaction between the two individuals in the group. Certainly the role of the facilitator in this group discussion was more noticeable, but the discussion and interaction between the two participants was sufficient, in the opinion of the researcher, to adjudge it having met the goal of being a group discussion resembling a lively conversation.

Participants were given between seven days and a month to take their photographs. The first focus group, school boys, had a week. The second focus group, school boys, had ten days while the third focus groups, university peer counselors, had around a month. The photographs taken were mostly quite mundane and ordinary and this may have been due to the relatively short period allocated the school boys, and the fact that the university counselors were involved in exams over the period given for photograph taking. The possibility of eliciting a wider variety of photographs and ones which were more visually arresting may have been increased if cameras were given to participants for a longer period and perhaps over a vacation period. Having said this however, it is interesting to note that Harper (1986) suggests that mundane images are more authentic representations of daily life and identity than dramatic ones.

Finally, the location of at least the two focus groups involving school boys, namely the school itself, may have had some bearing on material elicited and shared as any restrictive introjections associated with the school environment may have affected the level of free association in the focus groups.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participants made themselves available voluntarily and they were not offered any compensation for their participation. Confidentiality was assured to the extent that no identifying features would be incorporated in any publication arising from the research although they were made aware that direct quotations may be reproduced as well as the essence of their contributions reported. Assent for participation was obtained from all participants and parental consent was also obtained in the case of the school boys. In addition the fact that all focus group discussions would be audio and video recorded was made known

to the participants. Confidentiality of all material shared in the focus groups was emphasized and participants encouraged not to discuss this material with third parties.

Consideration was also given to any subtle pressure boys may have been under as a consequence of, among other things, the research having the backing and interest of the school psychologist, as well as any feeling of obligation arising for any other reason. It was explicitly communicated to the boys that there was no obligation of any nature for them to participate and that there would be neither reward nor punishment of any kind for either participation or non-participation. Indeed at least one individual explicitly declined the invitation to participate.

(See Appendix for documentation pertaining to ethics material, informed consent, etc.)

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter aims to present the reader with some of the findings of the research, including the main themes present in the focus group discussions as well as the themes present in the photographs that the participants took. Deeper analysis, interpretation and discussion of the focus group transcripts will be developed in chapter five.

Regarding themes elicited in focus groups, there were themes that emerged across all three groups, themes that were idiosyncratic to a particular group and some themes finding voice in only two of the groups. The table below lists the themes and indicates which groups the themes emerged in. The table also includes a rough indication of the number of relatively independent references to a given theme across all three groups. In order to categorize sentences, statements and exchanges, a decision was made as to the type of content that would be considered under each theme. The table also illustrates what content type was considered appropriate for inclusion in each theme category where the theme label is not self explanatory.

Not all things spoken about in the groups aligned unambiguously with a single theme. Sometimes a sentence or an exchange in the group seemed applicable to more than one theme and was grouped under both. Also, when boys expressed views which were both apparently hegemonic and counter to the hegemonic masculine view inherent in the theme category, both types of material were included under that theme. The total number of references to a theme thus gives a rough guide to the degree of preoccupation with a particular issue in the focus group conversations about young masculinities in South Africa. It must also be taken into account that, towards the end of each group, the discussion was directed to looking at taking on the role of peer counselor which gave some directionality to the content that emerged.

TABLE 4.1 PREDOMINANT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION THEMES

THEME	SUB THEMES	GROUPS IN WHICH THEME WAS MENTIONED	TOTAL NUMBER OF REFERENCES
Toughness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical strength <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sport ○ Fighting ○ Physical power ○ Aggression • Bodily appearance • Protector • Mental strength <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Countering physical aggression with words ○ Emotional stoicism ○ Ability to be emotionally depended on • Other undifferentiated reference to ‘strength’ 	All	40
Emotionality	Any reference to emotions, in particular, expression and non expression of emotions	All	37
Male camaraderie / unity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camaraderie • Conforming to group imperatives • Associated reference to boys/men who are different 	All	23
Breadwinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary income provider • Head of household • Protector of household 	All	18

THEME	SUB THEMES	GROUPS IN WHICH THEME WAS MENTIONED	TOTAL NUMBER OF REFERENCES
Sexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heterosexuality • Homosexuality 	All	17
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competence • Control • Authority • Respect 	All	17
Alcohol	Use of alcohol	All	13
Men as superior to women		All	7
Physical Intimacy (boy – boy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys hugging • Physical space between boys 	One school group and university group	6
Materialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wealth • Possessions 	All	6
Work differential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical for men • Office for women 	University group	3
Non help seeking behaviour		Both school groups	2
Men as competitive		One school group	1

It is apparent from the table that much of the conventional content of ideas relating to masculinity emerged in the discussions. Strongly foregrounded were themes to do with toughness, non-emotionality and male camaraderies. Also emphasized were issues to do with sex-role occupation, sexual orientation, interest in sport and the exercise of power. Other related secondary themes also emerged. There was little that was highly unusual or unexpected that emerged in terms of the literature on masculinity. However, the kinds of

debates that emerged within or in relation to content categories were of considerable interest and form the basis for much of the discussion in chapter five. Only the most dominant themes that emerged will be discussed with particular reference to assertions and contestations of dominant forms of masculinity. Some of the less commonly mentioned themes may be touched on in the discussion as a whole, however. The second part of this findings chapter provides a summary of the main content of the photographic material.

Much of the discussion arising in the focus groups was triggered by the photographs that the participants chose to share with the group and which were used as a springboard to discussion. A full content analysis of the photographs presented by the participants was not done since the photographs were not discussed systematically in every boy's case. The table below gives a guide to the kind of material that the boys included in their photographs.

TABLE 4.2 PREDOMINANT THEMES IN PRESENTED PHOTOGRAPHS

THEME IN PHOTOGRAPH	CONTENT	GROUPS IN WHICH THEME OCCURRED	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES
Campus environment	Photos of campus (buildings, grounds)	University group	9
Boys interacting / bonding	Groups of school boys interacting in one way or another.	School groups	7
Aggression	Fights, fists	School groups	4
School environment	Photos of school environment (buildings, boys milling around)	School groups	4
'Gadgets'	Any depiction of techno-gadgets such as i-pods, MP3 players, television/DVD/Video and remotes.	University group	4

THEME IN PHOTOGRAPH	CONTENT	GROUPS IN WHICH THEME OCCURRED	NUMBER OF OCCURENCES
Intimate relationships	Girl friend, two person photos; domestic pets	School & University	4
Issues of power	HIV poster exhorting men not to have sex with women; poster of growling tiger; poster of wrestler, and Batman type figure; security guard	School & University	4
Alcohol	Bottles, cans	School & University	3
'Gents' sign		School & University	3
Sport	Swimming pool, football match	School & University	2
Racial togetherness	Handshake; hands alongside one another	School groups	2
Girlie Girls	Magazine Covers; poster	University group	2
Cars		School & University	2
Metrosexual	Grooming; fashion	School groups	2
Physical strength	Dumbbells; bicep	School groups	2
Leadership	Poster of elephant matriarch leading baby; Candle in the dark lighting the way	School groups	2
Religion	Church, crucifix	University group	2
Knowledge	Books, tech magazines	School & University	2
Self portrait		University group	1

At the end of each of the three focus groups the participants were invited to select approximately five photographs from all those that were displayed which they, as a group, felt best reflected what it means to be a young man in South Africa today.

The first school focus group selected photographs conveying themes of

1. Aggression (Fist fight)
2. Physical strength (Bicep)
3. Leadership (Elephant leading young)
4. Male bonding (School boys talking together and boys in a huddle)
5. Need for 'safe' male environment
(‘Gents’ sign.)

The second school group’s final four photographs depicted themes of

1. Male bonding (School milieu and two school friends)
2. Sport (Swimming pool)
3. Socializing and providing for others
(Two bottles of alcohol and four beer six packs)
4. Group uniformity but also an individual
(Bowl of fruit, seven green apples and one orange)

The university peer counselor group selected six photos representing the following themes:

1. Responsibility (Bank sign)
2. Education (Library books)
3. Sport (Sporting magazine)
4. Religion/values (Crucifix)
5. ‘Gadgets’ (TV, remote and fast car)

It is interesting that although hetero- and homosexuality were such important topics of discussion in all the focus groups (see the next chapter), only three of the participants included photographs directly depicting material relating to this theme (girlie posters and magazines, girlfriend). One of the school boys included a photograph of a poster featuring a scantily clad dancer while one of the university participants included a photograph of a girlie magazine and a photo of a girlie poster. The other student included a photograph of his

girlfriend. The only other photographic reference to this theme of homo/heterosexuality came when one of the school boys, explaining his photo showing boys huddled together with arms around one another's shoulders before a sports match, commented on men's reluctance to stand too close together, but this point was secondary to the photograph's primary theme of male bonding. Neither of the two participants chose these photographs to comment on in the focus group. Conversely, although most of the schoolboys had photographs related to masculine bonding and camaraderie, they either chose not to display them to the group, or if they did, such photographs did not generate much lively discussion in terms of contestation of hegemonic imperatives. This might be attributed to masculine bonding and camaraderie not needing to be negotiated or argued against as a hegemonic behaviour in the same manner or to the same degree that normative heterosexuality, and sex-role occupations might be, for example.

Also of immediate interest is the fact that only one photograph featured a living female – a girlfriend of one of the university participants. One would have expected young males in the age groups of the participants to have had more of an interest in the opposite sex than was displayed. Regarding the adolescent school participants, perhaps at this stage of their development, and in line with Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stages of development, peer relationships are more important than opposite sex relationships. In addition, their access to girls may be limited by their attendance at an all boys school.

The process of settling on the final five or so 'core' photographs proved relatively uncontentious. Only in one of their school groups was there some debate and difference of opinion about including a photograph depicting masculine aggression. One opinion was that it shouldn't be included because it is such a 'negative' aspect of masculinity and proponents of excluding it wanted to ensure that positive aspects of masculinity were included. The counter argument was that it should be included because so many men display aggression. The outcome was the inclusion of a photograph depicting aggression. All three groups included photographs depicting masculine bonding, while two of the groups included a photograph representing sport. The next chapter will more fully explore themes which emerged as the boys shared and discussed one another's photographs.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

There is much research suggesting that young males actively negotiate individual interpretations of masculinity, refusing to passively accept their gender as a set of predetermined roles (for example, Imms, 2000). Recent studies point to masculine identities not only being positioned within a gender order ala Connell's (1995) sociological approach, but also being seen as dynamic and performative self narratives, positioned in subjective time and space (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007; Frosh et al, 2002). In other words, the masculine identities adopted by young males can and do change under different circumstances and environment, and across time. Furthermore, changes in masculine identity invoked and performed by an individual are dependent on the individual's perception and understanding of his environment. Within this discussion chapter the negotiation of masculinity and masculine identity as illustrated in the focus group discussions will be elaborated against this background. In the previous chapter an outline of the key themes identified in the group conversations was presented. Only the most dominant themes will be discussed at length in this chapter. In addition some commentary on rhetorical or conversational and other strategies employed in the participants' positioning of themselves as masculine will also be briefly discussed.

In this chapter four themes pertaining to hegemonic masculinity come under the spotlight. Based on the discussion and debate that emerged in the focus groups it was evident that there were certain traditional ideas around masculinity which were not accorded automatic acceptance by participants and which repeatedly came up for interrogation by them. Most noticeable in this regard were the topics of emotional display (emotionality), sex object choice (heterosexuality versus homosexuality), gender related occupational roles (male partner as breadwinner), and the display of toughness. Although there was a high number of references to male camaraderie and unity in the discussions (see table 4.1), there was very little contestation of this as a hegemonic imperative and so it was not considered for discussion. Regarding the four themes analyzed, hegemonic masculine norms are definitive

with regard to each of these topics. In particular stereotypical men do not display emotion (other than anger), are heterosexual, perform the family role of breadwinner and provider, and are seen to be tough and ‘hard’. The analysis and discussion in this chapter will focus on these themes and will look at how the participants positioned themselves vis-à-vis the hegemonic masculine imperatives attaching to each. Included under each identified theme will be the aspects – subscription to hegemonic norms, contestation or debate re hegemonic versions, illustrative material and some reference to the pre-existing literature. It was felt that this approach would bring some structure to the discussion. Additionally, because the participants are all peer counselors or have put themselves forward for training as peer counselors, some discussion of how this choice of a non-hegemonic activity impacts their everyday negotiation of masculinity among their male colleagues will follow. Finally, a short ‘meta-analysis’ of the material, focusing on dominant strategies or repeated methods of expression employed by the participants, will conclude the chapter.

Regarding the referencing of illustrative quotations taken from focus group discussions, the following convention is used. Each quotation is followed by a letter, which bears reference to a certain individual, and a number which alludes to the group in which the participant was a member. The first school group held is referenced with the number ‘1’, the second school group with the number ‘2’ and the university focus group is referenced with the number ‘3’. Thus the following quotation was originally shared by person K in the second school focus group:

I think leadership’s a big part of it.[K2]

A number on its own, such as [3], will follow the quotation of a conversation between two or more participants and will indicate in which group that conversation arose.

The letters A, B, C and D were randomly allocated as identifiers to the participants in the first school focus group, while the letters K, L, M and N were randomly allocated as identifiers to the second school focus group participants. The participants in the university focus group were randomly allocated the letters X and Y as identifiers. The facilitator/researcher is identified by the letters FR.

5.1 THEME 1: EMOTIONALITY - NO SISSY STUFF

The discussion of masculinity and emotionality seemed more germane for the school going boys as the older group did not broach this topic nearly as robustly and enthusiastically as the school boys did. This may have been a result of the adolescents being more immersed in identity formation, questioning issues such as the expression of emotionality, whereas the older participants seemed to take masculine emotionality (or the lack of it) as a given. It is also perhaps worth noting that while both schoolboy groups were mixed in racial composition the university group consisted only of two young black men so that it is also possible that some cultural differences were at play. However, with the kind of numbers involved in the study, this would be difficult to argue and material concerning the experience and expression of emotion came up in all three groups.

5.1.1 Support for Hegemonic Versions

Participants in the two school boy focus groups spontaneously raised the issue of emotional expression early in their discussion. Inhibition of emotional expression was quickly identified as a traditional characteristic of masculinity. On this subject, with the help of metaphor, they equated the suppression of emotion with the characteristics of a tiger. Although what this linking was meant to convey was not explicit, it seems reasonable to assume that stereotypical masculine traits such as strength and power were intended. Other stereotypical traits of men, such as control, were blended into the discussion around emotionality, invariably in a way which positioned emotional stoicism as positive and desirable. Indeed, the stoic management of emotional expression was also equated with control which, in turn, appeared to be seen as affording one a position superior to those less in control of emotions.

Congruent with their linking of emotional control with power and strength, the boys were emphatic in contending that the display of emotion was feminine behaviour. Several negative consequences of emotional expression were posited. It was suggested that one of the consequences of embracing one's emotional world would be to run the risk of being seen by one's peers as gay. One participant expressed the thought that being brought up in an

environment where non hegemonic behaviour, that is, emotional expression, was encouraged, may result in a boy becoming gay.

Boys also made the point that to express emotion was to make oneself vulnerable which in turn appeared to be associated with displaying weakness and was hence shameful. As might have been expected, participants endorsed the display of anger as appropriate for men. This seems to arise as a consequence of anger being associated with the expression of power or dominance unlike emotions related to vulnerability and pain.

5.1.2 Debate & Contestation of Hegemonic Versions

Although the school boys demonstrated some resistance to adopting a less restrictive emotional stance and indicated their agreement with the idea that emotions should be controlled, there was some contestation of this style of managing one's feelings and emotions. One of the boys suggested that a degree of inauthenticity was inherent in such splitting off of feelings. Contrary to popular masculine ideology the suggestion was also made that to hide one's emotions was weak.

In one group men were criticized as being emotionally challenged. The need for increased emotional expression by men was emphasized although a new generation of men who are more aware of their emotions was defended. Most participants were ultimately outspoken in their opinions that men should express their emotions more, not only because lack of emotional expression comes at a psychological cost, but also because such expression facilitates social interaction.

It seemed understandable that as boys struggle with their gender identity formation they struggle with the question of whether to allow emotional display or not. Their ambivalence around these issues seemed to manifest in a tendency of some boys to try and walk a fine 'compromise' line by commenting neutrally (that is without judgment) on the existence of displayed emotionality in some men, while at the same time maintaining their dominant masculine position in one way or another. Thus while voicing concerns about the repression of the full range of emotions they were cautious about endorsing emotional displays and the laughter and ridiculing of the latter in some of the conversation suggested considerable

ambivalence. As will be elaborated later, in respect of most topics discussed various strategies were employed to deal with such ambivalence. For example, conservative opinions were attributed to ‘others’ outside the group but could still then be given voice.

5.1.3 Illustrative Material

There was uniformity across both school groups that on the matter of emotional expression boys and girls relate and behave in distinctly different ways - girls are emotionally expressive; boys are not. The following exchange articulates this thinking clearly:

M: Ja, because friendships with girls... they talk about different things than guys. With guys

...

L: (Interrupting) You make friends by talking about sports, going out together...and stuff like that. Girls like...

M: (Interrupting) Girls are emotional.

L: Ya, they're more emotional ... they like go home, "Oh my God he did this, he did that" ...we go home and like dos – I'm tired. [2]

There was an abundance of material illustrating participants' value judgements associated with these different emotional behaviours. Support for the dominant masculine practice of emotional stoicism and the denigration of emotional expression was widely expressed. Examples of such expression included:

A participant commenting on a man crying:

Weakness. It would be like he's such a girl.[General laughter]. It would mean a lot of weakness. [C1]

I mean, I think it's quite a female aspect that you will put seemingly stupid things on someone else .[A] (Commenting on sharing your emotions after breaking up with a girlfriend).

Men are just not supposed to be emotional.[L2]

There was also an appeal to the metaphor of ‘tigerish strength’ to underline the positive dimension of emotional restraint

So many people say men don't cry, tigers don't cry, and stuff. [C1]

The last quote is an example of how a speaker fails to 'own' his statement, attributing it to 'other people'. This strategy seems to allow C to hold back from foreclosing on a position and creates the possibility of taking up an alternative position at a later stage if he so wishes.

Evidence of the later softening of positions on emotionality and consideration of the cost of following hegemonic masculine dictates, included

Men don't really express their emotions properly and it still affects lots of people's marriages and everything and men still don't talk, they don't. They always talk about soccer for three hours Everything else but what really bothers them. They won't talk. [C1]

And so I guess men just don't like to talk and as I say, they like to be alone, so being alone is almost a way to deal with their anger and deal with their feelings internally, and that's why they implode and get those psychological problems and everything. [D1]

N suggesting that men are

...emotionally challenged. [N2]

However, there was also a suggestion that embracing one's emotions came at a cost, namely the possibility of being labeled gay and being seen as feminine:

People are turning that way because .. like in the past people would turn out straight instead of gay just because of the way society brought them up and now [agreement] because of maybe like, guys are turning homosexual or something... because of emotional stuff or somethingI don't know...maybe I just grew up differently. [A1]

The ending of this participant's contribution is interesting –“*maybe I just grew up differently*”. Is he pondering the possibility that he may have been gay had his upbringing been different or is he drawing on the discourse of socialization to justify some degree of prejudice or othering?

Being labeled 'gay' was not the only concern boys had when considering their own emotional expression. Another sinister outcome of emotional interaction was suggested:

But you know girls are always fighting and stuff. Is that because they're too open with each other?[L2]

This seems to reflect an uncertainty and curiosity on the part of the speaker of the implications of emotional engagement and in particular, an indirect curiosity of whether emotionality might 'work' in boy-boy friendships. The way in which the question is phrased, loaded with negative attribution to emotional engagement, is interesting for it seems to protect the speaker from being seen to take up a position supporting an alternative version of masculinity, which in fact is what he is indirectly doing.

Despite the concern around being labeled gay, the emergence of a new generation of emotional men, aware of the importance of emotional expression, was acknowledged:

With the new generation out there I think everybody is starting to get in touch with their feelings right now, from a guy in grade 8 to a guy in matric. [M2]

I think you have to be able to express your feelings to be able to understand how the other person is expressing their feelings to you.[M2]

Expressions of recognition that men have a significant emotional life, and that there is a need to ventilate emotions came in several forms, ranging from the owning of one's own emotionality, to the 'discovery' of such a component in another man:

I don't really show my emotions as much as I'm quite emotional but I don't show my emotions that much. I guess I'm also kind of shy. [A1]

D: It's weird the degree, it's actually scary the degree to which we hide them and stuff,...

FR: As men?

D: Ya, as men. Like there was a guy I knew. I'd see him everyday and wouldn't think anything of him, and then I saw one of his books... I saw his books and he had all writings in it and

stuff about how he felt and stuff, and showed sort of that dimension that we really are hiding everything. I think every man .. [talking over] [1]

The question of how to manage the confluence of these factors and the resulting ‘catch 22’ position in which men’s emotional lives are acknowledged, the importance of expressing one’s emotions is acknowledged, but the Damaclesian label of ‘gay’ remains forever threatening, was perhaps unwittingly alluded to in the following

:

M: I think okes find it really hard to talk to their friends.

?: Ya, open up ...

M: They think you like men!

?: There are only some people who can open up so much to another person.

?: To another guy, especially.

M: Like to another girl you can open up a lot more, but to another guy

FR: You’re worried about what he’s going to think, how’s he going to react...?.

M: He’s going to think I’m a little gay or, you know what I mean.

FR:: Say again M (Interviewer seeks clarity)

M: [Some laughter] Like he’s, he’s...is he like a little dodgy? [2]

In addition to the clear message that emotional intercourse between males is taboo and peer policing of normative masculine behaviour might result in emotional expression garnering the label of ‘dodgy’, the implicit suggestion seems to be ‘if males won’t/can’t oblige, females will/can’. This interaction does seem to convey a softening of the traditional masculine position of no emotionality where, now, emotional intercourse with females seems to be condoned. What is also interesting to note at this juncture is the contradictory positions assumed by boys at different times. At the start of this section quotations and exchanges in which girls’ and women’s emotionality was sneered at by boys are included. In the above exchange the capacity for girls to engage emotionally seems to be welcomed.

What is interesting in this exchange is the manner in which an unnamed participant seems to appeal to some ‘law of large numbers’ to confirm his ‘normality’ (and that of his peers) when he notes that there are only *some* people who can be emotional (open up) with others, the remaining majority being unable to do so.

At times participants noted cultural and generational differences in the way emotions are displayed:

It's very evident. You hardly ever see a black man showing emotion. Even with my father he doesn't express if he's very upset, it's even hard to tell whether he's upset or not.. It's very blank and very stern and hidden. Emotions get hidden a lot. I don't know if it's the same for whites...? [General laughter] [D1]

I learned a lot in my culture that guys don't really cry. I've never really seen a black guy cry, but I see white fully grown men cry. I've never seen a black man cry. [C2]

As well as making a generational comparison, A, in the extract below, also indirectly points to anger being seen as an 'acceptable' male emotion to display. The laughter and agreement by the other participants perhaps marks their awareness of the Fordian injunction: You can have any emotion you like, as long as it's anger.

I've never seen my dad, like, cry.... I mean I think that's also still a [inaudible], .. but , I don't know, because my emotions don't really show either. He's very like emotional – angry you can see [lots of agreement and laughter]. [A1]

The following brief exchange arising after a participant displayed a photograph showing two school peers grabbing at each other's blazers also underlines the acceptance of anger as being typically masculine:

A: And that's also showing, like, anger, like... [comments from other participants]

FR: Just talk a little more about this and relate it to being a man.

A: Well, um, just a kind of, aah, show of strength whatever, again the fighting and the ... I don't know how to put it.. [1]

In a different focus group it was suggested that men have little control over their anger:

But usually the whole testosterone thing, men get angrier faster ... [L2]

Following on from the acceptance of anger and aggression as permissible emotions for men to express, participants shared the following thoughts on what other emotional expression was or was not appropriate.

I mean, I think it's quite a female aspect that you will put seemingly stupid things on someone else. You'll go talk to a friend like "Oh, I was dumped". I mean "Oh! She didn't go out with me". I mean, you can deal with that yourself! Honestly! It's not that terrible [general laughter]. I mean, if it's like a death in the family then you can speak to someone else about that because that's pretty tragic. [B1]

But even then you'll share some stuff. I mean you'll just keep other stuff to yourself just because I don't know, I guess guys don't really like showing everything. They feel vulnerable. I mean Guys don't want to feel, like, ... vulnerable to like, ... you don't want to tell too much of yourself, I mean ... I don't know...[M1]

There's still a view that you can show too much emotion. [D1]

Once again we note how the participant in the last quote positions himself in a way that avoids taking ownership of the statement, a strategy which precludes him having to reveal his personal position and feelings on the matter to his peers.

The use of a narrative of superiority to justify the 'new man's' increased levels of emotional expression was evident in some instances:

N: Like, in the new stereotype, not the new stereotype of a male but the new perception of a male, almost puts you at a greater level, if I can say this without sounding arrogant, at a greater level than the others in that you've accepted that you do have emotion, that you almost have to acknowledge or live with your emotion – you can't just put them aside and try not live with them. I think that it just means that we've accepted the new man who has a feminine side a lot quicker than the other people.

M: I wouldn't call it greater than them, I'd say we're more mature than them.

N: It's just another word.

M: I think that some okes are not mature enough to accept that it's not all about drinking, it's not all about fighting, it's not all about that. You also have a bit of a feminine side. [2]

5.1.4 Theoretical Contextualization

There is a large body of literature confirming the conventional understanding of masculinity as encompassing emotional detachment (Buchbinder, 1994; Pleck, 1995; Seidler, 1994, 1997). Brannon (1976) was among those to highlight this conceptualization of masculine identity with his ‘No sissy stuff’, and Luyt (2003) refers to a similar injunction to men embodied in the metaphor to have the ‘heart of a lion’.

Luyt (2003), commenting on his research experience with young men and their comments about emotional expression, noted that “in underlining the active suppression of emotion, this disclosure comes promisingly close to championing masculinities performative, rather than innate nature” (p.57). The current study reflected similar imperatives towards emotional expression and the performative nature of masculinity was evident in the ways boys contributed to the discussion, notably strategically locating themselves as they took up positions which they felt might undermine their sense of masculinity and alienate them from the group. This is also congruent with Mac an Ghail’s (1994) observation that the single sex peer group is a competitive space in which boys are expected to prove themselves.

The suggestion that it is easier to talk to girls than it is to talk to boys for fear of being ridiculed by the latter, echoed the sentiments expressed by boys in Frosh et al’s (2002) study. Participants in that study said that they preferred to speak to girls about their problems than to boys or other men for fear of being mocked and labeled as ‘wimpish’.

Although the reference to the link between homosexuality and emotional expression made by one of the participants in this study was not directly supported and was phrased as arising out of curiosity, it could be interpreted along lines similar to that suggested by Duncan (1999) who posited that homophobia is employed as a way of shutting down “incipient emotional sharing between boys” (p. 124)

Homophobia and references to sexual orientation were ubiquitous in all three groups and in the next section consideration is given to participants’ engagement with heteronormative and homophobic discourses as related to the development of sexual identity as a boy or man.

5.2 THEME 2: MALE SEXUAL ORIENTATION – THE STRAIGHT OAK

It was clear in the interviews that in thinking about masculinity the issues of hetero- and homosexuality were prominent in the minds of the participants and was a topic of interest in their worlds. As was the case in the discussion of emotionality, the concept of gayness came up early in all three groups without any prompting from the facilitator, and unlike the issue of emotionality which seemed to have currency largely with the younger school going participants, all three groups' discussions were peppered with references to the topic of homosexuality and heterosexuality. There was a clear sense that the older group of varsity students voiced opinions and ideas that were less accepting of homosexuality than did the scholars. That is not to suggest that the scholar groups were entirely accepting. Indeed they showed a considerable degree of ambivalence. Such ambivalence ranged from the cynical suggestion that to be gay at this time was no more than part of a fashion fad, (which seemed to suggest that gayness was perhaps no more than part of the performative repertoire available at this point in time) to what seemed genuine attempts to understand the existence of different sexual preferences. It might be argued that both ends of this spectrum mask an anxiety around what might be understood as a threat to the 'safe' world of heterosexuality.

Participants' assumptions about heterosexuality were never overtly stated but were conveyed through the manner in which the 'opposite', namely homosexuality, was discussed and referred to. Thus while there were few references to girlfriends, courting or sexual contact with girls, there was a clear assumption that a heterosexual orientation was normative – so normative in fact that it did not need to be spelled out. Most references to homosexuality, however, were either joking, derogatory or puzzled and intrigued.

There was no voice which championed homosexuality as an acceptable, alternative way of being a man, but in most cases groups eventually expressed some degree of resigned acceptance or tolerance of gayness. It seemed that the two school groups were more accepting of homosexuality than the older participants, perhaps because of differences in theoretical, as opposed to more active, sexual engagement themselves. It seemed that homosexuality appeared as some what of an enigma to the younger participants with both

school groups attempting to find an explanation for it or to make sense of this sexual orientation in some way. It seemed that the possibility of an individual having a sexual orientation different to their own, by choice, was difficult to entertain and so other rational explanations were sought. The statement that came closest to supporting the contention that an individual could choose his sexual orientation was a reference to that person having 'walked a different road'.

The performative nature of masculinity was clearly evident in the debate around homosexuality. The fear of being thought of as gay seemed to infiltrate at least one of the groups. For one individual, being perceived to have some familiarity with homosexuality and homosexual practices seemed to hold the threat of being seen as 'one of them' and so, while offering an opinion on the topic, he also worked hard to position himself as a non-expert. In another instance, the degree to which one accepted or rejected a gay individual was linked to whether the group one was 'hanging out with' accepted or rejected gays. Finally, providing a reason why they 'had to' accept gays, for example because of their status as counselors, allowed boys to simultaneously take up a position supporting alternative masculinity and adopt a more conventional hegemonic view, when for example, the hat of counselor was off.

5.2.1 Support for Hegemonic Versions

The major support for normative heterosexuality manifested indirectly in the derogation of homosexuality rather than in the direct elevation of heterosexuality.

There was consensus across all three groups in the equation of homosexuality and femininity. This equation was taken further in the school focus groups where femininity was equated with the lowest form of identity that a man could assume. At its worst, to be called 'gay' was to lose one's masculinity completely, to be considered female, and to have betrayed other men.

The school going participants' contributions tended to support the contention that, in their all male school environment, support for hegemonic positions on sexual orientation were most strongly expressed through the pejorative use of the label 'gay'. The 'gay' label was not always used to suggest that someone was 'a girl', - for example, if displaying vulnerability -

but also tended to equated with ‘all that is bad’, and was often used simply to convey distaste for any non-hegemonic masculine behaviour. Thus it seems that in everyday usage, the label ‘gay’ is used to denigrate, almost as a kind of slang. However, when ‘gayness’ was engaged with as a homosexual identity position clear views of tolerance and acceptance were often voiced and it seemed that there was a more respectful and thoughtful engagement with the concept. This may partly reflect a moving in and out of political correctness where the former usage is employed in times of reduced self consciousness. However, it may also reflect the mindlessness of some forms of association and insult.

The imputation was also made that to be gay meant to be subservient and lacking in authority. There was some stereotypical thinking about the appearance of straight men and the appearance of gay men where the former would, for example, sport “*strong beards*” and the latter would, by contrast, be weak in manner. Either/or thinking was exhibited in the older group where it was suggested that you are either ‘for us’ or ‘against us’, you either read ‘straight’ magazines or you read gay magazines. No contemplation of shades of grey on a straight-gay continuum was countenanced.

Physical intimacy among men, for example standing close to one another, also became part of the discussion around homosexuality with boys, at times, emphasizing the need to keep some distance between men, lest one risk the label of being ‘gay’.

Finally, that gay men were frequently seen as different from heterosexual men was confirmed by the acknowledgement that when it became known that there was a gay person in the group, different conversation would take place and different treatment would be afforded the gay individual.

5.2.2 Debate & Contestation of Hegemonic Versions

As stated previously, there was no explicit support for homosexuality and any relaxing of hegemonic views on the topic tended to be verbalized as an ‘acceptance of’ rather than a ‘support for’. Participants’ ambivalence often manifested as a juxtaposition of an expression of acceptance or tolerance alongside an articulation of how such ‘behaviour’ would not have been tolerated in the past, or in their parents’ era. At other times the group’s ambivalence was

noticeable where, if one member expressed 'acceptance' of non-heterosexuality another member would attempt to dilute the expression of acceptance in some way, often by replacing the notion of 'acceptance' with the notion of homosexuality only being 'allowed' or 'tolerated'. Although tolerance was articulated, such tolerance was often tempered with strict boundaries or conditions of acceptance.

Evidence of strong policing of physical contact between males was present in all the discussion groups. While the handshake seems to be comfortable and acceptable for most men, anything more begins to raise questions around sexual orientation. Whereas there were times when participants spoke about needing to display an appropriate physical separateness from other men, there were also times when this imperative was relaxed. One of the photos displayed by a group member showed a group of his peers 'horsing' around, arms around one another, some with feet kicking in the air, some pulling faces for the camera. The photographer expressed the opinion that this type of intimate behaviour was tolerable when in the presence of friends. A member of another discussion group suggested that to hug another man was acceptable, provided it is known that both men are straight. Both these instances seemed to echo a general theme that physical intimacy or any behaviour which might be interpreted as 'gay' could be gotten away with, provided those who observed it knew of the heterosexuality of those participating. There seemed to be some tension between a wish for male bonding and the need not to appear to desire men for fear of being perceived as 'gay'.

Participants seemed better able to contemplate the acceptance or tolerance of gays as long as they, the gays, were 'out'. It seemed that the 'unknown gay' held some fear for participants, while the 'out there' gay who was observable and possibly monitorable, posed less of a threat and was more tolerated.

5.2.3 Illustrative Material

All focus groups had a 'red thread' of gay versus straight conversation permeating them. It seems that the microcosm of the focus groups may have reflected the reality of the boys' lived experience in their larger worlds and their increasing exposure to both homosexual individuals, conversations about and images of heterosexuality.

The extract below appears at first glance to demonstrate a cynical attitude towards the existence of gays but at a second glance it may also convey more:

Like they say, .. nowadays they say it's fashionable to be homosexual, because ... at my friend's school, it's just fashionable. Everyone's just lesbian or anyone's just gay. Everyone! Everyone! [C1]

A certain sense of frustration seems evident at what this participant may experience as the ubiquity of homosexuals – almost like a ‘Queer Chicken Man’: “He’s everywhere. He’s everywhere!”. The question could be asked as to whether the general ‘outing’ of gayness poses a threat to the straight young male. Could his frustration/cynicism be partly a consequence of a threat to the comfort of his straight world? This hypothesis seems strengthened when one notices how the participant locates the ‘gay fashion’ in a friend’s school, and not in his own, immediate world. However, this reference to gay behaviour as ‘fashionable’ also suggests an increasing acceptance of same sex desire even if this is at the level of experimentation and it is certainly a novel idea to view homosexual behaviour as ‘trend-setting’. The reference may well be to a behavioural change rather than the assumption of a full gay identity but certainly indicated exposure to shifting ideas and practices in regard to homosexuality.

The conviction with which boys at times equated male homosexuality with femininity makes understandable the vehemence with which they may oppose a growing homosexual flavour to their society, long dominated by a hegemonic masculine ethos which viewed women as weaker. When all men are straight, the world is safe. When other men are gay, it removes the certainty that ‘I am not gay, that I cannot become gay’, and increases anxiety. The following quote is unambiguous in the equation of male homosexuality with femininity, as well as the consequences that follow, namely marginalization and isolation.

'Because then other men wont, they won't see him as a man. They'll say he's not a man because he's gay. That's what they'll say. They'll be excluding him because they'll know he has to go with women, this one'. [Y3]

From a different group came the following quote which, in addition to equating male homosexuality with femininity, also makes clear the derision with which femininity is viewed in the world of hegemonic masculinity.

I mean most men still view a gay man as being the lowest level a man can be. Like he's so close to that feminine aspect that it's... [some laughter]... I can't explain. [D1]

To be labelled as gay was seen as one of the ultimate insults for a boy:

I mean if you call a girl fat, that's terrible. Call a guy a gay and that's like equally ...[talking over] [B1]

This line of thought was contested however, with one participant suggesting the view that being gay was the worst that a man could be, was a view held only among 'conservative men', while another participant suggested that:

I don't think he [the gay boy or man] would be at the bottom of the ... 'cause at least he like, he has, he knows who he is, I guess. There is something worse than being gay, I would think. [A1]

It seems however that the sting in the 'gay label' was at its most potent when applied to straight boys:

It's also.. you don't, if someone is gay and you know, like they say "I'm gay", you don't, like you don't be mean to them about it. It's fine, You accept it. It's like "ok". It's, more like when someone you don't know and you just ... it's like the worst thing you can do. But when someone is gay, it like kind of has no effect. [B1]

This suggests that homophobia is more about fearing being labelled gay and then ostracized, and less about a real fear of homosexual men.

The following extract is rich with several different examples of thinking congruent with hegemonic masculine principles and will be discussed further in subsequent sections. At this

juncture it is the final line which succinctly sums up one of the basic premise of hegemonic masculinity, namely the split between masculinity and femininity:

FR: So what would you think if you walked into a company and the person at reception [i.e. the secretary] was a guy, was a man? I mean what would your feeling be about him.

X: I mean like, ... uh... I mean it would probably depend, and not to be offensive, like if the man was like gay or not, I think that plays a part too. But if it was a straight man it would be embarrassing, you know. If the guy was like gay, it would be sort of understandable.

FR: Why would it be understandable if he was gay?

X: I mean, that feminine thing... [3]

In the minds of many of the participants, gayness was seen as a flaw, and homosexual men as faulty in some way. This sense of faultiness was inherent in many of the assumptions that the participants made around gay men, such as the idea that they are emotionally weak and are followers rather than leaders. The following quotation seemed to speak on behalf of all participants when directly referring to the ‘fault’ in the gay man.

Ya, I think, some things that aren't seen as being manly, I sort of accept it now, maybe like a gay guy ... with all his faults I can still understand him in a way... Perhaps in a way I'm still sensitive and caring. [X3]

The closing sentence here is again of interest. Is it just a continuation of what he might call his empathic understanding of the ‘faults’ of the gay man, or is he perhaps unconsciously identifying with the gay man (defined by feminine characteristics including sensitivity and caring) by virtue of his own sense of being sensitive and caring?

Although emanating in another group, there was contestation around whether homosexuality was inherent or whether becoming homosexual was the result of social forces, for example, home environment. While heterosexuality was assumed there was clearly a need to explain the aberrant, i.e., homosexuality. While the discussion represented an attempt to convey more understanding of this sexual identity it also conveyed that it was abnormal.

I think maybe society is accepting it [homosexuality] more. People are turning that way because... like in the past people would turn out straight instead of gay just because of the way society brought them up and now, because of maybe, like, ... guys are turning homosexual or something ... because of emotional stuff or something Maybe I just grew up differently. [A1]

The language and thinking in this contribution warrants closer reflection. The use of the phrase “*homosexual or something*” may serve to distance the speaker from the concept of homosexuality. It might be viewed as being akin to saying something along the lines of ‘I’m not sure I know what this homosexual thing really is’. This kind of language use may be employed to guard against other group members, as well as perhaps himself, thinking he knows too much about homosexuality and may in some way be implicated in its practice himself, thus incurring the penalty of being labeled ‘a little dodgy’ (as suggested by a participant) despite his assertion of “*society accepting it more*”.

That people “*turn out that way*” (i.e. homosexual) was attributed to social forces. The possibility that a person may *choose* to be gay, seemed difficult to entertain. By appealing to the discourse of ‘socialization’ it seems that participants are saying that individuals are neither born with it, nor choose it, but that they may be brought up in such a way as to become gay. The last sentence in the previous quote – “*Maybe I just grew up differently*” seems to confirm this thought pattern. This appeal to socialization for the ‘cause’, rather than to choice or biology, is perhaps a way of voicing qualified acceptance of homosexuality.

The above two quotes refer to ‘acceptance’ of homosexuality in men. Other evidence of acceptance and tolerance was present but was conditional or included a caveat. For example, one participant seemed to suggest that tolerance or acceptance of male homosexuality would be countenanced but only if there was no overt flaunting of sexual orientation, if gay men remained sufficiently masculine, if they were not too different:

X: I think, you sort of have to look at different gay people. I mean you have the gay guy who will sort of still look like, you know, talk like you and stuff like that, but on the other side you have the gay guy with the voice, he dresses gay, he walks gay, I mean everything he does is totally opposite from you,

FR: So again it's like there's a continuum so the gay guy who presents as quite manly is still acceptable.

X: (interrupting) Acceptable! [3]

This contribution appears to suggest that 'masculine gays' are acceptable while 'feminine gays' are not. In other words, if gay men are 'straight acting' then their masculinity may not be in question even if their sexual object choice is other. Interestingly, the phrase "*totally opposite from you*" seems to allude to the masculine/feminine parallel connotation so often inherent in the association with heterosexual/homosexual.

Participants pointed out the influence of historical time on attitudes towards homosexuality. Several occasions of comparison between parents or past generations and today's young arose, as illustrated in the following extracts:

I think, in a way you have to look at the generation gap. I think among the older generation it's still unacceptable for a man to be gay but for our age group it's sort of, it's becoming acceptable, it's ok now. Maybe like you can take your gay friend to a party and stuff, like today it's becoming socially acceptable. But with like the older generation, it will never change. It will still be wrong. [X3]

It seems that this comparison allows participants to take up a dual position to some extent. Expressing an understanding of how it might have been difficult for past generations to accept and tolerate homosexuality perhaps gives voice to that part of them which does not accept and tolerate homosexuality. This allows a reduction in internal dissonance as the internal split between acceptance and rejection of non hegemonic masculine sexual-object choice is denied.

At times the ambivalence was clearer, with 'acceptance' of homosexuality being ruled out, and a clear implication that, although not 'that bad', it was still associated with badness.

It's not necessarily frowned upon. It's not accepted, let's say, but it's not frowned upon as it used to be. A lot of people are saying 'well, it's not that bad'. [B1]

Another participant made this association of homosexuality/gay with badness more overt, although suggesting some perversion of meaning of the term 'gay':

It's very weird. Nowadays, anything that's associated with homosexuality is bad. Like even if someone disagrees with something or thinks that something is unpleasant they will say that thing is gay.[Agreement]. [D1]

In the statement there seems to be the beginning of some awareness that this is a peculiar and pejorative association.

A lot of the concerns expressed seemed to lie in participants' perceptions of whether something was being concealed from them. A sense of possible betrayal seemed to underlie some of the participant's thoughts about men who conceal their homosexuality.

...if they know you are gay there is a way men will treat you. If we don't know you are gay we will treat you like a man. And when you surprise us that you are a gay we will react! [Y3]

It's also.. you don't, if someone is gay and you know, like they say "I'm gay", you don't, like you don't be mean to them about it. It's fine, You accept it. It's like "ok". [A1]

In the following quote, the participant expresses thoughts about being 'used', about something being taken from him surreptitiously by a closet gay:

You go through your thoughts like if I go with X, I know X is fine. We don't mind hugging each other, we just go, I mean we are guys. Now if you discover he is gay, I mean you go Man, I've been hugging him" [laughter] He was enjoying it when I was touching him when I was talking with him. You'll be going all over that and you'll be "No man, it can't be!". Sometimes you go to a changing room to take a shower, and it begins to go through the thoughts "this guy was gay and was like looking at us , Waah!! [Y3]

From the above example it seems that there is some tendency towards unconscious imputation of malignancy to homosexuality. This is in line with the comments earlier about homosexuality being associated with the 'bad'. This last quote, in addition to underlining the distress of betrayal, also comments on several other aspects of gayness as they relate to

masculinity. The reference to the ‘fault’ in gayness once again, this time via the use of the word ‘fine’ is clear although perhaps unintended. The participant unconsciously exposes his beliefs around homosexuality when he refers to his straight friend as being ‘fine’, the implication being homosexuals are not ‘fine’. It is also suggested in the same quote that physical intimacy between men, in this instance hugging, is acceptable provided both men are ‘guys’, (“*I mean we are guys*”) that is, are straight, and are known to be straight. This latter point is important, for if there is no knowledge by others that the individual is straight, then manliness (or hegemonic style masculinity) must be overtly conveyed:

You wouldn't hold hands with another guy, while girls would do that, so I mean there's still a distinction between, ... you still have to keep your manliness [agreement; laughter]. [M1]

This theme of being able to push the boundaries when in the presence of friends who know you are straight was again echoed when one of the participants, in explaining the group photograph described earlier commented:

I don't know whether I should put this one – it's friendship... but then there's also a sort of flamboyance [he laughs] and I don't know whether this is a strictly male thing. It sort of conflicts with that picture of uniformity, but still, I think among friends there's more willingness to show your weird streak, your differences, you can, .. if you're with your friends you can show your flamboyance or your whacky side, or your strange view of the world [D1]

It is interesting that the speaker feels the need to qualify this particular contribution by suggesting that this more disinhibited group display may not be “*a strictly male thing*”. Is he excusing the behaviour or is he acknowledging the presence of a ‘feminine side’? His choice of the word flamboyance is also an interesting one. In colloquial language it is often used to as an adjective describing gay men’s behaviour (Baker, 2005). What may be being said here is that the more weird, ‘gay’ or ‘non masculine’ behaviour, so long eschewed by the hegemonic masculine order, may be tolerable under certain circumstances such as when you are with friends. This seems to talk to the performative nature of masculinity and in particular a possible splitting of environments into those which are safe and those which are not. By safe environment is meant an environment in which one has more freedom to just ‘be’, less chance of being judged and less chance of being labeled as gay. What distinguishes a safe

environment from a less safe one? In this instance the reference to being with friends, and the implied knowledge one has of the other, seems relevant. It seems that knowledge of the other refers to knowledge of the sexual orientation of the friends.

Nevertheless, this knowledge of the other notwithstanding, the need to perform or demonstrate masculinity was never far away. Social belonging takes precedence over one's own tolerance of difference and there was an implication that to accept homosexuality might put one at some risk of being ostracized:

Sometimes you find this group of people who are like "we don't go with gays". This group of people you know you cannot, .. even if you don't mind, but because of this group of people they will always tell you "I don't like gay guys because of this and this and this" and if you spend time with them you will end up not liking gay guys. Whenever you look at them you will be seeing whatever your friends are seeing this is the problem about them. But if your friends are the ones who don't mind about gay guys then they will tell you no, they are people like us and you will look at them, view them like some other guy, but just that he is taking some other path, different from yours. [Y3]

The following exchange provides the final illustration for this section and is interesting in that it includes several aspects of the gay/straight discourse. In particular, reference is made to male to male intimacy, the latitude given to boys when their sexual orientation is known to be straight as well as the performative nature of masculinity:

M: I think okes find it really hard to like, talk to their friends,...

?: Ya, open up.

M: They think you like men

?: There are only some people who can open up so much to another person.

?: To another guy, especially.

M: Like to another girl you can open up a lot more, but to another guy

FR: You're worried about what he's going to think, how's he going to react.?

M: He's going to think I'm a little gay or, you know what I mean.

FR: Say again T (Interviewer didn't hear clearly)

[Some laughter]

M: Like he's, he's...is he like a little dodgy?

FR: So somewhere if you, if you, ..I suppose are somewhat intimate or make yourself somewhat vulnerable with a guy, [ya], that's generally not ...(interrupted)
N: (Interrupting)...acceptable. [Ya]
FR: Not acceptable. Is that right?
K: Stereotypically yes
L: We're fine because we've been with each other for how long? [ya], so basically know who each other is [2]

5.2.4 Theoretical Contextualization

The emotional valence and the high interest which homosexuality seems to have in the world of young adolescents is a well documented phenomenon (Butler, 1990; Nayak & Kehily, 1996). Nayak and Kehily (1996), in their study in secondary schools found that homophobia “had a high profile in male heterosexual cultures” (in Frosh et al, 2002, p. 63). The early emergence of this topic in all three groups in this study, as well as the tendency of the groups to weave the issue of homosexuality into all the discussion exemplifies these assertions. It is suggested that young men and adolescent boys are constantly engaged in ‘performing’ masculinity and that homophobia is one such performance (Nayak & Kehily, 1996). Butler (1990) alluded to gender as performative and Nayak & Kehily (1996) took this further with regard to homophobia when they commented that “the performance [of homophobia] provides a fantasy of masculinity which can only be sustained through repetition, yet always resonates with the echo of uncertainty” (p. 227). Eder et al (1995) refer to the lack of an essential masculinity resulting in boys having to constantly shore up their masculine identities, with the pejorative ‘gay label’ being employed to apply pressure aimed at reinforcing traditional masculine behaviour. In this study participants regularly appealed to the pejorative use of the label ‘gay’ to reinforce what they viewed as inappropriate masculine behaviour. Regarding the use of homophobia to ‘shore up their masculinity’ there were instances in the discussions when participants seemed unable to rationally or logically defend why a certain behaviour was not masculine and would then resort to a default position of labeling that particular behaviour as ‘gay’.

The generally pejorative potency of discourses concerning homosexuality seems to lie in the fact that, “[p]atriarchal culture has a simple interpretation of gay men: they lack masculinity”

(Connell, 1995, p.143). This belief was repeated many times in the focus group discussions. In line with hegemonic practices, gay men have been alienated, marginalized and punished for their expression of 'non-masculinity' and 'defection to femininity'. This sense of defection on the part of gay men may account for some of the feelings of betrayal evident in the discussions. Connell (1995) notes how hegemonic masculinity has shaped the perception of gayness in so far that if someone is attracted to the masculine, as in the case of the gay relationship, "then that person must be feminine – if not in body, then somehow in mind" (p.143). While Connell is referring to attraction to the male physical body, the focus group discussions tended to widen the 'gay net' to include any attraction to, or incorporation of, what are considered feminine traits, such as caring and emotionality.

In several instances participants in this study clearly echoed findings from other studies. Duncan (1999) found in his study of sexual bullying in secondary schools that the "most prevalent and hurtful accusation leveled at boys by both sexes was to be called gay" (p.106). This was echoed by the participant who suggested calling a boy gay was as hurtful as calling a girl fat. The second instance relates to the anger that would be displayed towards a friend who came out as gay – "*And when you surprise us that you are a gay we will react!*". Duncan's (1999) study notes boys responding in a similar way, reporting that, when asked about a peer coming out as gay, they "responded with frightening alacrity that they would attack them, even if they had been close friends up to that point" (p.108). Frosh et al (2002) also discuss some findings which suggest that adolescent boys may work hard to place homosexuality outside the bounds of their immediate environment. This seemed to be the case with the participant in this study who shared his perception that "*at a friend's school*" there were so many gays.

In the discussion around gay men, several participants alluded to different roles filled by straight men and by gay men. In particular, a man who filled a work position normally filled by a woman, for example, a receptionist, was labeled as weak and effeminate, and ultimately gay, while men who didn't work, either through choice (house husband) or circumstance, were seen as failing to live up to traditional masculine roles. The role of the workplace in constructions of masculinity is evidently important and is now examined.

5.3 THEME 3: MASCULINIZING DOMESTICITY

After emotional stoicism, the man as breadwinner and provider seemed to be the characteristic most associated with the stereotypical man. The school boy group seemed to concentrate on possible feelings of inferiority arising from a female partner (wife) commanding a higher salary while the university group were invested in debating how the workplace should be structured regarding which sex should be doing what work.

5.3.1 Support for Hegemonic Versions

The importance of the role of breadwinner in masculine identity construction was evident as it was soon introduced into the discussion. All groups referred to the changing demographics of the workplace and the effect of affirmative action which was putting more women in the workplace and consequently reducing the number of men able to fill the traditional masculine roles prescribed by society. The politics of power inherent in being employed or not was referred to, with concern expressed over men's loss of 'guaranteed' power as women got jobs and men became unemployed or secondary earners in the family. Women were viewed as having taken positions that were supposed to belong exclusively to men. Participants noted that having to adjust to the role of house husband or secondary earner would entail accommodating men's views on what constitutes 'achievement' and 'failure', and by association, masculinity. Indeed to have a woman as the primary financial provider left participants pondering the feelings of underachievement and failure that a male partner might experience.

The university group, in addition to sharing sentiments similar to those mentioned thus far, also emphasized the importance of an income for a man, "*no matter how small*", since for the man to be without money was to be rejected. Issues of dependency also arose in this discussion with a lack of income entailing the reliance on the charity of others, which was viewed as inherently unmasculine. The comparison between men and women in this regard was directly made with the same implications not holding for a woman who had no income.

Support for the traditional gender related division of labour structure came from the university group where the participants rigidly supported the view that there should be a clear distinction in the type of work suitable for the two sexes. Generally, office bound jobs were believed suitable for women while it was deemed more appropriate for men to be engaged in work that required physical strength. Indeed, this group alluded to the presence of a hierarchy of male jobs with men who filled positions such as receptionists or secretaries being labeled gay and condemned to the lowest position on the work hierarchy. Interestingly, there was little reference to the interface between class and gender relations.

5.3.2 Debate & Contestation of Hegemonic Versions

Discussion around stay-at-home husbands was raised predominantly in the school rather than the university focus groups. In the university group the topic was only obliquely alluded to in the reference to the need for fathers to take up a more nurturing role vis-à-vis their children. Although the school going participants voiced their feeling that essentially they had no problem with men staying at home while wives worked, they nevertheless did express a reservation that society would look down upon them as men if such a situation came to pass. The boys, however, expressed no distress with a situation in which a woman earned a higher salary than her partner.

Despite the expressed acceptance of the possibility that a woman might become the primary financial provider for a family, participants worked hard to try and recapture for the househusband the powerful position associated with being a primary breadwinner, a power now usurped by wives. Stay at home fathers, or house-husbands, were described as filling more important roles than their female, working counterparts. The participants appeared oblivious to the irony that women, who have been filling this vital role for generations past, were never accorded the same status or recognition. Participants also insisted that, although not always the breadwinner, the man was still viewed as the ‘leader’ in the home. In what also seemed to be attempts to prevent men losing power through altered occupational roles, some participants commented that both the role of breadwinner and the role of home maker / nurturer were equally important while others sought to drain the element of power from the equation completely by classing both the role of breadwinner and the role of home maker as “*just jobs*”.

There was some contestation between groups around accepting that men and women are equal in the workplace. Some members expressed a belief that there was a new generation of young people willing to concede to a more egalitarian understanding of the genders, but in another group the photograph of a 'GENTS' sign outside a male ablution facility was imbued with meaning in relation to the 'castration' men were experiencing at the hands of women, particularly in the workplace. The importance of being able to work as a man, and the role of work in male identity was emphasized when participants, in identifying with future occupational status, admitted to feeling lost, and not knowing who they are, as men, because of their jobs being taken by women.

The group comprised of university students was quite vociferous in expressing the opinion that regardless of whether men adopted the role of househusband or breadwinner, there was an urgent need for them to take up a more active role in the nurturance and development of their children. Men were exhorted to relinquish the power-invested role of family law maker and punisher, and embrace their feminine side to become involved in the 'softer' aspects of parenting. However, this argument seemed to suggest that fathers, exclusively, should take up this role, that they rather than mothers 'should' be the ones to educate their children around such things as HIV and relationships. This suggested that participants were in fact leaning towards a belief that fathers were perhaps 'better' in some way than mothers, even in respect of nurturing, and particularly educating. It might thus be inferred that some participants, although talking about a change of some sort in gender roles, see the power differential between men and women as not up for negotiation.

5.3.3 Illustrative Material

The importance to masculine identity of being employed, having a job and being able to provide for one's dependents is clearly articulated in the following contribution:

And when they [men] are not working it's almost like a whole taboo. "He's not working. He's a guy. He should be working, bringing money to the home!" If he's not working something's gone wrong. [C1]

Most participants expressed support for the idea that the role of breadwinner was invested with more power than that of the non-income earning partner, and that recent changes in the South African workplace were eroding the power of men as breadwinners and providers. The following extracts give examples of their thoughts in this regard:

I think it comes from society – the way we’ve been raised, you know like the man always provides for the woman. I’m from that background, you know, ya. [X3]

..., and also like a provider ... like the idealised man who has to come home with the money but nowadays you have woman working and you get your wife earning more than you do and all of a sudden the guy’s role has changed into like, a stay at home and he kind of loses power ... [C1]

But it’s also because women have been given the more powerful role now, like to be, ... have men’s positions and jobs. [L2]

The emasculation and confusion arising from women’s encroachment into what was traditionally an all male domain, was conveyed by an exchange around a participant’s explanation of why he had included a photograph of a ‘GENTS’ sign amongst his photographs.

D: I think we as men, we’re looking for an identity which makes us men because now days, with female rights and women taking jobs and becoming bread winners, there’s a sort of intermingling of roles so we maybe feel a bit lost so we don’t know what makes us a man and if we have demarcated bathrooms[laughter], for obvious reasons=

A: (Interrupting) Like trying to get away from women, hey? [laughter]

B: [inaudible] ...saying “this is ours” [loud agreement] – you can’t touch this![More agreement] [1]

Another participant also commented on the blurring of gender roles and the resulting identity diffusion.

It’s weird. It’s like we’re losing identity despite the fact that the anatomy’s different. [D1]

Regarding women holding better paid or superior positions to men, one participant suggested that a new generation of younger men is taking a less rigid standpoint:

... there's a new generation coming in that's starting to accept the fact that everyone is equal and it's ok being below where women are... [N2]

This particular contribution to the debate does, however, seem to expose some preoccupation with power dynamic inherent in who is the primary breadwinner. Despite talking about equality, this participant immediately creates a hierarchical ordering with men being assigned a position 'below' women. An egalitarian way of conceptualizing the dynamics of occupational roles seemed to elude the participants, possibly because of fear of the negative repercussions of acting counter to societal mores. A participant seemed to suggest this when in response to what would be hard for him about being a househusband, he said:

I think that ...it's just the way society sees it. Like I don't think society's at that stage yet where they fully accept that I'd like to stay at home more. [M2]

That feelings of emasculation and other troubled feelings around success and failure would be evoked in a situation in which a man had to stay at home is apparent from the following interchange:

K: Do you, like, feel inferior if ... you're called a house husband?

M: I don't know hey. Obviously it will challenge your masculinity. You'll feel like you've underachieved, but I mean [2]

The extract below, which followed on immediately after the above exchange illustrates an attempt by both participants to reclaim some of the power they perceive as having been lost in the role reversal, by equating the two roles.

K: The thing about what you're doing for your kids as well, you know, that's what I think about a lot.

M: It's not like you're not doing anything, as well.

K: Exactly. I find actually one of the most important jobs is raising your family; keeping them safe et cetera. So, personally I don't really think there's a difference between a housewife and

a househusband, as such. It's both an important role being a breadwinner and raising a family. [2]

As shown in this extract, it seemed that although the school participants expressed their guarded support for stay-at-home husbands, they were conflicted about this. Different approaches were used to justify why they would take up the position of house husband, including casting themselves as making a logical, rational decision, as well as being generous in spirit. The following quote illustrates this:

I personally, I probably, I obviously have mixed feelings about it. But then I would do it because if my wife was earning more than me, it's fine. I can't ... change it . I can't .. I mean if I was in her position, if I put myself in her position and I was working [inaudible] and someone said to me "No, you can't earn more than me" I'd be like, "Why aren't you happy for me?" [M2]

Another strategy used to recoup this hypothetically lost power was by casting the house-husband as the leader in the family. The quotation below ironically also alludes to the manipulation of the situation in some sense in that the participant acknowledges that his thinking is at odds with general understanding:

I think there's less of a view as well nowadays, as the man as a breadwinner but rather the leader of the family. I know it sounds kind of confusing ' cause usually we associate the bread winner with the leader because he brings home the money and makes sure everyone is fine. But even in homes where the woman is earning more, the man is still seen as the..., like, the leader, the person who's exerting control. [D1]

Another debate formed around the hegemonic tenet that men are superior to women and should be afforded privilege in the workplace. When asked a general question about women's struggle for equality with men, the exchange immediately centered on the workplace:

*FR: And what do you feel about that, women wanting to do the same or be the same as men?
X: I think it's ok. I don't have a problem with it but maybe in certain work places there should be a separation, you know like, this job's for women and this job's for men.*

FR: And how would that separation .. where would that line be, ..how would you decide what's for who..., you know like, this job's for women and this job's for men?

Y: Geez, that's difficult to know.

X: Maybe like, a job like being a secretary. That can be like a woman's job. And like something for mining, where strength is needed, I say that for men.

FR: Y, does that sound on target? Do you agree with that?

Y: Ya, I think so. Another thing, when it comes to women, I think, on my side I think there are certain things that women should not be doing, that should be done by men. Mostly I think men, when it comes to the work place, men are supposed, I think, to be given the first preference over women. [3]

The hierarchy of job type alluded to above is made overt in the following quotation volunteered in response to the question of how a man who works as a receptionist or secretary will be viewed by society. Not surprisingly, it is 'women's work' which lies at the bottom of the hierarchy.

You know what, being a man secretary, you are not in charge, like, other men will look at you like you are being controlled by who ever is on top. Most probably you'll be finding the people on top are women and then if you go among guys they will say that you are being controlled because you are a secretary. So I think someone who happens to be a chauffeur will be more respected than you if you are a secretary. We will be seeing this one at least as doing a man's job which is to chauffeur, take people from one place to another. But you as a secretary they'll be saying you're doing the woman's work. [Y3]

The same participant did qualify his statement somewhat when he said that if a man filled the position of secretary for a trade union, that would be acceptable because such positions require the incumbent to travel overnight and over weekends, and if a women were to fill this position, such responsibilities would prevent her from carrying out her duties at home. Although oblique, this is a very clear rejection of a more liberal, non-hegemonic position on labour division and indicates that hegemonic thinking is still operational, although individuals may overtly identify with less hegemonic practices.

Two of the groups commented on the roles of fathers, emphasizing how men have not been adequate fathers in the past, neglecting to support mothers in raising children. It is likely that

this follows directly from the workplace/home, masculine/feminine, soft/firm split which is reflected in men's eschewing of child rearing responsibilities – certainly those of the nurturing variety:

I look at it like as a man you also need to have that feminine side like women so that your children can come to you and find comfort from you as a man, as a father. They can easily come to you, and be able to come and talk to you and be easy to come and associate with you, should not be like harsh ... [Y3]

Men out there are not leading families that's why you get so many criminals and so many messed up children, 'cause fathers aren't there to lead anymore they're just figures, just make babies and disappear –[laughter] – it's true. [C1]

What I'm saying is that men, mostly children, everything they learn, they usually learn it from their mother. So the father is just the one who comes and puts the law and say this is what should be done and then leaves. But children, they don't get to learn, like ... um, like now when we talk about lifestyles, issues of sex, issues of HIV and AIDS, like I believe fathers are the ones who should pass that knowledge to their children, instead of leaving it to be done by their mothers. [Y3]

Although all three quotes above suggests a disidentification with the previous generation's understanding of masculinity and fatherhood, one wonders whether the last portion of this contribution which clearly assigns the role of educator to the father subtly suggests that men are better positioned to carry out this task than women. However, there does seem to be some sense of the need for men to engage more actively in parenting and for the gender dichotomy in this area to become less absolute.

5.3.4 Theoretical Contextualization

The breadwinner as a male role, associated with the ideal of masculinity, and the home maker as female has long been society's standard (bar the possible odd cultural exception) (Smith & Winchester, 1998). Certainly in African culture the role of the man as breadwinner and woman as home maker, nurturer and child rearer has been well entrenched and remains active

in more rural populations (Connell, 2002). The comments from all participants in the current study confirm such ideas about the stereotypic gender divisions of labour.

It has been argued (Wetherell & Edley, 1999) that, despite buying into the norms of hegemonic masculinity, few men actually live up to the hegemonic ideal. It may be argued that the workplace has, in the past, been one of the arenas where men, at least those employed, could attain the ideal of breadwinner and reinforce their sense of power as provider for the family. Discussion in the focus groups suggest that this may be changing in South Africa and the possibility of achieving hegemonic masculine ideals might be diminished or diminishing, contributing to possible psychic distress.

Although not necessarily flowing directly from the discussion of the role of breadwinner versus househusband, but certainly intersecting with it, was the discussion of the role of the 'New Father'. In most times and places, society has regarded the biological fathering of children as a necessary and sufficient condition for masculinity. Child rearing, on the other hand, has always been a separate and seemingly unrelated matter (Nye, 2005). However, some awareness of the inequality in the split between actively raising children and siring them and providing materially for them appears to be coming to the fore. There is, according to Nye (2005), an effort afoot, certainly in Western cultures, to 'masculinize' child rearing and make it an important aspect of masculine identity. This idea was supported particularly by the university participants who exhorted men to be less harsh, more feminine and more approachable to their offspring rather than primarily adopting the role of authoritarian law maker, law enforcer and dispenser of punishment.

One of the themes that came out strongly in discussions around the workplace and the type of work appropriate for each of the sexes was that physical work requiring physical strength should be reserved for men. This line of argument is not unusual in traditionally masculine circles where displayed toughness and strength is a cornerstone of masculinity. The next section takes a closer look at the traditional masculine imperative for men to show their strength.

5.4 THEME 4: TOUGHNESS AND HARDNESS -THE STURDY OAK

As discussed in a previous section, emotional stoicism was considered by most participants to be a demonstration of strength, but many other forms of strength, toughness and hardness were directly and indirectly referred to in all three focus groups. In particular, reference to physical strength, fighting and aggression were amply evident as examples of male 'hardness' and toughness. Although a theme of physical strength as quintessentially masculine, and as the preserve of men was evident, there was also evidence that most participants wanted to distance themselves to some degree from this traditional representation of ideal masculinity.

Younger participants from the school found more content to engage with on this topic than did the university varsity students. Several factors may account for this. Firstly, the younger boys, in attempts to assert themselves in difficult situations may resort to stereotypical behaviour since they have, by virtue of their age, had limited access to other masculine ways of asserting themselves, for example in sexual conquests. Also it might be contended that an all boys school may encourage traditional ways of being masculine rather than providing alternative models. The university students, with considerable more life experience, as well as exposure to a university environment in which thought over brawn is generally encouraged, may have less need to resort to physical displays of masculine toughness and hardness in asserting a masculine identity.

While the school participants at times tended to glorify overt displays of strength and aggression, the older participants focused more on covert or subtle displays of strength.

5.4.1 Support for Hegemonic Versions

Discussion of masculinity in all three focus groups was peppered by the use of the word 'strong' and words similar to it. Participants went to great lengths to portray themselves as strong, tough and hard. Such efforts included, for example, conceptualizing the need for male counselors to be 'softer' as one which ultimately suggests the individual to be 'stronger'. Men who display emotion (softness) were constructed as being stronger than those who are

scared to display emotion. Men were also referred to as 'rocks' upon whom people can depend.

Beyond strength, masculinity was also associated with aggression in all three groups. The consensus seemed to be that men are biologically programmed to be aggressive and to fight. In one instance, when talking about physical fights that took place among themselves, participants appeared to celebrate the aggression of masculinity.

In the discussion around 'strength' in the university group the core argument centered on how men's inherent physical strength and women's inherent lack of the same (as perceived by participants) should dictate the types of employment opportunities available to each sex. Women should be protected from 'dangerous' work as well as work that required physical strength, such as mining. The discussion provided for no entertainment of any 'grey' area allowing for the possibility of physically stronger women or physically weaker men. It also seemed important to participants that men are *seen* to be strong, with the workplace providing such an opportunity. This was in line with opinions expressed in the discussions that 'masculinity must be seen to be done' before an individual is seen as masculine.

Regarding the importance of men being able to demonstrate their strength, a photograph of a male bicep was displayed and in another group reference was made to being able to differentiate homosexuals from heterosexuals through the appearance of either 'strong' or 'soft' facial features. Sport was a theme in all discussion groups. A direct link between men's toughness and sport was not directly made but the linking of sport with aggression, as well as the pointed reference to contact sports and the respect afforded those who play first team rugby made the connection clear.

Anger and aggression were classified as 'not soft' emotions and consequently acceptable for men to display. The implication seems to be that a display of these 'harder' emotions demonstrates toughness and masculinity.

5.4.2 Debate & Contestation of Hegemonic Versions

Although participants (predominantly the school going boys) at times seemed to revel in the stories being told about aggression and fights when the photos depicting these instances were shown, more considered and thoughtful views emerged as the conversation developed. Participants used several different approaches in attempts to distance themselves from the culture of macho fisticuffs and aggression.

As noted in the section on normative sexuality, adolescents tend to try and position that which they are uncomfortable with in environments distinct from their own. A similar tendency was observed in the discussion around fighting and aggression as displays of masculine strength where participants would suggest that *their* school environment was largely free from this type of masculine performance.

It was also suggested that ‘times are changing’ and that nowadays people are less willing to fight physically. Those who continue to resort to fisticuffs were derided as ‘stereotypical’ and lacking intellect. Fighting was also equated with getting drunk which in turn was viewed with disdain.

Although there was some acknowledgement of the sublimation of aggression and other ‘hard’ emotions through sport, there was the view that the need for men to have to behave in this way was worrying. Another stereotypical view that was contested was the idea of the biological origins of men’s aggression. The possibility that men are aggressive only because of their refusal to express their emotions was offered as a counter theory.

5.3.3 Illustrative Material

The pressure for a man to be tough was simply put by a participant:

[A]s a man you in a way you are expected in some way to be strong. [Y3]

In displaying a photograph of several boys conversing, one participant commented that men like to:

Always be the rock other people can lean on when they're in trouble. [N2]

The choice of the word 'rock' is important here for it underlies an unconscious identification with society's demand that men be 'hard'.

Physical strength and aggression were important points around which discussion developed. In explaining his choice to photograph a male bicep, a participant said that it

[s]ort of makes you a man, or defines masculinity – the whole strength and testosterone image thing. [B1]

The reference to testosterone reflects an essentialist thinking which locates masculinity, certainly aggression, in the biology of the individual. This thinking was echoed by another participant with his use of the word 'animalistic':

I mean there's always been like a need for men to have conflict. That's why there's always been wars. I think there always will be. Men, man, man needs to show his, like, animalistic side. [A1]

As with the bicep, the body as stereotypical signifier of masculinity was again vaunted when another participant, commenting on the presence of a man at a reception desk said:

But if you find a guy who's smooth, no beard, working there, then probably as X put it, maybe he's gay or whatever, and you may be able to interact with that person easily, unlike if you find a man with strong beard there, you'll be afraid to ask questions. [Y3]

This quote also alludes to the power inherent in being a 'he man' – he is scary, intimidating and 'hard', difficult to approach, while the gay man can be easily engaged with. Interestingly a double message of sorts is conveyed by this contribution. Whereas the gay man was generally despised in the focus group discussions and the 'he man' extolled here is an example of where the gay man's effeminacy triumphs over the 'he man's' masculinity in rendering him more approachable. Perhaps there is an unconscious communication here about the, at times, unhelpful nature of hegemonic masculine displays in encouraging social interaction.

The role of physical toughness in circumscribing areas of employment was broached by the older group:

But I also think they [women] shouldn't do the more physical stuff, like it's fine if women are CEO's in high positions, you know like, mainly in the office but I won't say that, that the strength work, like personally, I don't think women should do that. [X3]

It is interesting that the contributor here pays scant attention to the strength (albeit not physical) required to lead a company as CEO. Possibly this is due to that notion of masculinity which suggests that it needs to be physically displayed, needs to be observable. This is clear in the following quote:

I think it's like a mindset, you know. Like a man, he isn't supposed to do that. Like being a secretary, like being such a low position, from a man's perspective, it's sort of ... there's no physical stuff involved ... it's petty work. It's petty work. It's not manly. It's so like [laughter drowns out the end]. [X3]

It is also intriguing that this argument was raised by individuals who have a tertiary qualification and who are unlikely to be earning a living through hard manual work. This suggests that participants' masculine performance and positioning was often at the verbal and conversational level rather than at an action or behavioral level.

On occasion the expression of anger tended to be seen as a display of masculine strength. A photograph of two school boys fighting was shown and explained as “*showing, like, anger*”. When asked to relate that to masculinity and being a man it was linked via the explanation of such behaviour being

just a kind of, ah, show of strength whatever, again the fighting. [A1]

Another member also produced a photograph showing two boys fighting and he related this to masculinity as follows:

...a fight showing the aggression of masculinity. [D1]

Aggression was also constructed as a ‘harder’ emotion and was thus seemingly more acceptable:

[It] doesn't look like the softer side of the emotions... [A1]

Despite having attributed men’s aggression to biological factors such as testosterone, participants were generally loathe to identify with the display of aggression and physical fighting and they employed various mechanisms to locate themselves in opposition to this construction of masculinity. One participant distanced his school collectively with the simple suggestion:

We have the least fights [L2]

This was echoed by members of another group.

B: Even in our school we don't have fights in our school generally, physical fights. Very rare.. I mean [over talk] I know, it's our school. You'd expect [interrupted]

A: [Interrupting] Fights are broken up quickly. I mean, there's a lot more .. I know this is our school, especially our school ... I think ...

FR: So fighting is pretty much frowned upon, hey? [General agreement]

A: It's more like the camaraderie-ship kind of thing at our school, I think. Like no fighting..

[1]

The clear and over emphasized reference to “our school” seemed to suggest a preoccupation with locating this type of masculine behavior outside their immediate environment.

One participant seemed to suggest a wave of change when he noted that

people are becoming scared. They're actually less willing to fight someone nowadays [D1]

For those who continued to rely on their brawn it was suggested that they were trapped in a stereotypical role:

But then they would probably do that because that's what they've been portrayed to do. You'll get them like they're stereotyped, like "Oh, look you're big, you're going to fight". So then they'll try and keep with that image. [B1]

Another participant, although acknowledging some change, was less optimistic about the extent of such courage:

I think the majority still hold onto the stereotype but there is a movement nowadays towards letting go of it. [D1]

A more overt acknowledgement of a softer side to men, and a covert denigration of fighting and drinking machismo was communicated in another group:

I think that some okes are not mature enough to accept that it's not all about drinking, it's not all about fighting, it's not all about that. You also have a bit of a feminine side. [M2]

In contrast, however, there did appear to be an unconscious celebration of aggressive masculinity that emerged in one of the groups around a photograph of two boys in a physical fight. This signaled a clear break with what had been emphatic disparagement of aggression up until this point. Exclamations such as "*It was a real fight!*" and "*I was there*" were interspersed with lots of laughter and energy.

The tendency to distance oneself was again evident when the boy who had initially aligned himself with this masculine display of aggression attempted to distance himself by blaming his friends:

My friends, they were taunting them, trying to get them to fight. [A1]

Later in the interview he made it clear that although physical aggression may have placed an individual at the top of the masculine hierarchy in the past, personally he looks down on someone who fights:

It also changes with like, as time goes on. Like maybe fighting back then was at the top but I look down on someone who fights. I think it's like stupid. I think they would be less of a man in my books. Back then they'd be more of one. [M1]

Fighting was also placed along side 'getting sloshed' as something that did not deserve respect. This comment, however, was prefaced by another member ([K2]) with the contention that "you respect someone who plays first team rugby". This seems to suggest that the disparaging of overt physical fighting is made permissible only because there exists a display of masculine prowess alternative to physical fighting and overt aggression, namely in playing first team rugby. It can be reasonably questioned whether this individual is really distancing himself from hegemonic masculine beliefs around manly aggression and toughness, or whether, in fact, it is a case of support for hegemonic masculine ideals masquerading as resistance. The same question can be asked of the participant who posited that intellectual aggression is superior to physical aggression:

I think it's more accepted now to not fight, that like intellectually you can be so much better than someone else.[A1]

As has been noted, while physical fighting and displays of aggression were generally viewed with disdain, the presence of anger and aggression in the sports arena was deemed appropriate:

I mean when you watch sports, especially like soccer, you can release your frustration toward, you know, .. let your anger out about ... or the passion for the game and stuff like that. [X3]

It was agreed that aggression needed to be released as a matter of course and the sports field was as good a place as any for the sublimation of aggression and anger:

That's why there's also sport and stuff as well. Like contact sport. You need to like get aggressive sometimes to like let that part of your humanity go. To downplay it – so there is less conflict with sport. [A1]

However, there was also some contestation around the display of aggression on the sports field:

It's weird – tragic creatures. I think the need to show that aggression, the need to run around and kick the ball, the need to fight and punch someone is because we've been brought up to hide our feelings. [B1]

In the above excerpt the belief that aggression is biologically driven is directly challenged. The link between the non-expression of feelings and a consequent aggressive 'acting out', whether on the sports field or in the class room was suggested:

I think the new perception of what a man's supposed to be now is that you don't keep things locked in you – you talk to other people, you know what I mean. You talk to someone you trust. And there's nothing wrong with that, which I think is the correct way because if okes keep things inside them then that's where the violence comes out. [M2]

Obviously I agree, there is that aspect of it [biological component] but I think some of it also spawns from the fact that we hide all our feelings and this fighting is sort of a way of letting all of that go. I think, there was research done. Men have more psychological problems than women and they are more [agreement, comments, talking] I mean we hide everything. I mean with women they perhaps speak to their friends ... [D1]

If both alexithymia and aggression are masculine traits – inherent or otherwise, and if, as suggested by participants, the more one withholds expression of feelings, the more one becomes aggressive, then there appears some awareness of destructive cycle of masculinity in which the more masculine one is (alexithymia), the more masculine (aggressive) one becomes. This in turn may require further effort to suppress emotions until such time that mental and psychological ill health manifests. Thus emotional suppression is conveyed as both possibly maladaptive and as a source of male violence and aggression. One sees some awareness of a psychological discourse of repression and displacement reflected in this kind of discussion.

A slightly different angle on strength and aggression as intrinsic components of masculinity emerged in the group with the older participants. Y introduced an evolutionary perspective on aggression with themes of 'survival of the strongest' and the rejection of the runt of the litter:

Also like when you go out with your friends, it's always about showing off that you are strong, that you can do it. You know you get that respect when you are head of the group. Even the ladies when they see you coming and they know that group is led by you they tend to respect you because of that. They see the guy is like strong, and everything, so they give you that respect. But if you are.. you know that group, you are the last .. you usually call the person the 'last born of the group', you know that one [there's nothing he can do?] Even the ladies, they will despise you. [They won't even talk to you?] They will refuse. But if they know that guy is the leader of that group, they will give that respect. [Y3]

In the discussion on hetero- and homosexuality the demonstration of heterosexuality was implicit in the overall negativity of the conversation around homosexuality. In a similar way, participants make known their support for 'hardness' via their equation of 'softness' with femininity. Thus hardness and toughness were clearly associated with masculinity and a masculine/ feminine dichotomy of hard/soft was set up and maintained.

5.3.4 Theoretical Contextualization

At the turn of the century, Henry Stimson, a Secretary of War under Taft and Franklin Roosevelt and a Secretary of State under Hoover, wrote that war would be a wonderfully good thing for the USA, because "this is the way you get to express your manhood" (Shalom, 1998). It is unclear which stereotypical aspect or aspects of masculinity Stimson had in mind when he made this statement, but it seems that aggression and physical toughness may well have been two of them.

Connell (2002) notes that boys are taught the importance of appearing hard and dominant – whether they like it or not. At school and through media exposure boys are steered towards competitive sports and put under pressure to show their toughness (Connell, 2002). Inter school first team rugby, to which participants referred, is notoriously competitive and prestige and admiration of physical prowess accompanies winning. The respect which participants indicated was afforded first team players underlines the idealization of both competitive sport and the toughness of rugby, confirming Connell's assertions.

The works of both Frosh et al (2002) and Mac an Ghaill (1994) confirm the importance of hardness as a pivot around which boys negotiate their masculinity. The former group of authors suggested 'hardness' to be associated with fighting ability. In a similar vein Connell (1987), referring to the emphasis on the physical body, notes that to be masculine means "to embody force, to embody competence" (p.27). Discussions in two of the three groups supported these author's contentions with significant debate and discussion around physical fighting.

Some discussion around sport took place in all three groups. A number of researchers have noted the significance attached by boys to body shape and, in relation to this, ability at sport, as an indicator of masculinity (for example, Eder et al, 1995). International and local research indicates that sport is undeniably central in defining masculine norms among adolescent boys (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007; Frosh et al, 2002; Mac an Ghaill, 1998). In this study participants put considerable of emphasis on sport as being a way in which men could demonstrate their physical power and release their aggression.

Some research suggests that physical toughness and self confidence are both linked and counter-posed to intellectual or academic commitment, the latter in contrast signifying weakness and effeminacy (Frosh et al, 2002). Gilbert & Gilbert (1998) suggest that academic activities are strongly associated with girls – their intelligence is not admired but rather seen as a by-product of their inactivity - and that boys, in reaction to this construction of girls engage in sport and by so doing eschew academic performance. Further, boys also assert themselves by denigrating and ostracizing those boys who are constructed as academic. Interestingly there was no evidence of this sport (physical toughness)/academic (intellectual toughness) dichotomy in this research. Although some mention was made of girls, no criticism of them as academics or intellectuals was voiced, and similarly, no denigrating comments were passed with reference to boys who succeeded academically. In fact the converse was seen to be true. This situation may be different to overseas findings due to the different nature of the respective schools at which the research was conducted. In contrast to an inner city, co-educational public school, a private, all boys school which prides itself on both academic performance and sporting prowess may be more conducive to creating an environment in which the possibility of devaluation of academic performance in favour of sporting capability, is reduced. In addition, being situated in an upper class environment, the

families whose sons attend the school probably have at least one tertiary educated parent with the possible consequences that the importance of intellectual performance is instilled in their sons.

The material discussed under the four areas or imperatives of hegemonic masculinity focused on in this analysis is all characterized by a certain level of fluidity in that, despite the status of these thematic tropes as hegemonic imperatives, they were not accepted without question by group participants. Indeed, it would appear that, in line with the hypothesis that the performance of masculinity is a function of both temporal and spatial factors, (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007), the participants appeared to selectively endorse and distance themselves from these imperatives as expedient. The extent to which their selection or functioning as peer counselors influenced when and how they took up various masculine positions, both hegemonic and alternative, was explored in the focus groups and the participants thoughts on this are discussed in the following section.

5.5 MASCULINITY AND THE ROLE OF COUNSELOR

Research has consistently shown that those males who tend to be high in empathy and the capacity for caring tend to endorse more feminine attributes and align themselves more closely with the feminine gender role than do other males. In this study the assumption was made that, because counseling requires engagement with feelings and emotions, (an activity generally understood as anathema to conventional versions of masculinity), making oneself available to be a peer counselor, *de facto* implicates one in an alternative masculinity. What is of interest is how participants in this study managed to negotiate this alternative masculine position both in terms of their own feelings around traits such as empathy and caring, as well as the perceptions that their peers may hold of them.

Having to locate themselves somewhere in the masculine discourse they drew upon proved somewhat challenging for these self selected counselors when it came to talking about the role of counselor. B's response to the question of where they position themselves, as peer counselors, given the discussion on masculinity so far, was immediately met with the exclamation "*Ah! A spanner in the works*". His response seemed to suggest that it was easier

to talk at a distance about the more difficult aspects of masculinity, such as men as emotional beings, but having to own up to one's own position seemed to risk vulnerability, peer censure and possible labeling. He went on to say that answering the question posed by the interviewer required a "*deeply meaningful conversation*", this despite participants having adopted a very introspective and involved stance in the focus group up until this point. B's reference to a 'deep meaningful conversation' perhaps communicated the requirement that to answer such a question these young men needed to take time to think about this issue since this might evoke some contradictions. In particular, it might entail recognizing that in engaging in counseling they may need to assume a non-hegemonic position and be open to the expression of emotion.

Strong views that came to the fore included suggesting that being a counselor did not detract from masculinity, that counseling and caring for others was not necessarily a feminine activity, and that, indeed, their being counselors made them more manly, could enable them to know themselves better, and gave them a step up from their non-counseling peers. Participants were at pains to articulate that counseling, and thus caring, did not equate to being soft. It seemed that they were willing to be caring, and carry out caring behaviour, but eschewed any reference to 'softness' which they understood to mean "*being a push over*" [A1], "*sentimental*" [D1], "*not taken seriously*" [B1], "*touchy-feely*" [D1] and "*feminine*" [C1]. However, their need to separate softness out from caring suggested that they were aware of some link between the two and they expended considerable energy in almost masculinizing counseling as an activity.

The following extract of the discussion around caring and counseling elucidates the importance the participants attach to maintaining their 'hardness' in the face of possibly being seen as 'soft':

C: Why do people link counseling with caring and helping?

B: That's a very good question. [general laughter]

C: Why do we always link it up? [laughter and talking over]

FR: Are you saying that maybe it doesn't link for you, caring and counseling.

C: Ah, ..no, not that it doesn't link up. But, sometimes you get people who don't care outside but who care when they come to counseling; like you get counselors who, like outside of counseling are rough people, [agreement] and then they come to counseling they're soft.

B: Maybe they're not showing that ...

D: I don't know if caring and softness link ... sort of, you can still be caring and still be sort of stern and hard faced. You don't really have to be soft to care.[ya, ya]

B: I think that's probably the biggest stereotype there is, that if you care you're soft. [ya]

FR: And you're saying that's not true.

B: Not necessarily, no.

A: You can be a stern person and still worry about your colleagues and friends

[1]

This aversion to 'softness' in this context confirms the discussion in an earlier section which looked at how important it is for boys to demonstrate some degree of hardness. Being labeled as 'soft' would undermine their view of themselves as normalized boys. In this exchange participants seem to create a split between the role of counselor and the role of boy or man. Although the counselor needs to be 'soft', the man should not be. In fact, if necessary one can be a 'stern' and 'hard-faced' counselor – almost needing to exaggerate one's hardness to escape the possible negative connotations of being a counselor. The level at which the boys worked to retain a sense of masculinity for counselors was almost ludicrous and one wonders what their experience will be in practice.

Another split emerged in the discussion concerning being a counselor and going to see a counselor. This ironic thinking seems to have at its source the stereotypical thinking that the masculine man is essentially non-help seeking (Thorpe, 2002). According to participants going to visit a counselor was a patent display of weakness, which they would tolerate in their peers but not publicly in themselves,

...going to a counselor would not be the typical man thing; Being a counselor is fine to be I think. I mean going is like showing a weakness... [A1]

Justification for the masculinized version of the role of counselor came in a stretching of the oft stated view that men are providers and protectors. So to be a counselor was just to fill the traditional masculine role of being a provider, was to be someone who could be depended on,

was to be a rock to which people could cling in times of trouble. The following extracts are illustrative of the thinking around this point:

...Well, I mean it's just ... knowing who you are. I mean helping someone is also seen as reaching out, and that's being a man; you're taking that step, that like, thing to help them, and that's nothing that should be looked on as not being a man. [A1]

...always being the rock other people can lean on when they're in trouble. [N2]

...you have to have time to support other people's interests. But you still have to have time to keep the world around you in tact. I think it's a man thing to help people around him, or want to help people around him.[N2]

This last reference to keeping the world 'intact' suggests some exaggeration of male potency and may reflect the degree to which participants may have felt threatened by the possibility that they might be seen as feminine, and thus weak and impotent in taking on the role of counselor. They seemed both intrigued by the cudos attached to the role and afraid that becoming associated with counseling activity might in some way bring their masculinity into question.

As the discussion progressed it seemed that the boys in one particular focus group found it increasingly difficult to integrate their ideas about emotions with their view of masculinity. One participant suggested that being a counselor did not require anything more than that demanded by hegemonic norms in this regard – emotions could still remain split off:

To be a counselor, I mean you don't really have to show that much emotion at all. [A1]

Some softening in their argument and views did however, emerge over the course of the discussion and some willingness to admit a softer side, a softer version of masculinity was conceded despite earlier remarks about there being no connection between caring and 'softness':

I think you just need empathy, an ability to sort of identify with someone else, although that may be associated to a degree, with softness. [D1]

Participants seemed to need to offset this acknowledgement of a softer side, a side which demanded entertaining and engaging with one's own and other's feelings and emotions, with a hegemonic or normative masculine 'spin'. Several strategies were employed by participants in this regard. These included portraying oneself as having extraordinary or superior skills and abilities, and the claiming of a genetic predisposition towards empathic skills. For example, one participant contended that counseling associated one with understanding and required

control of your own feelings to such a degree that you can help other people with theirs.
[D1]

His use of the expression "to such a degree" seems to carry the implication that this level of control puts counselors apart from others. In the same vein, N's rhetorical question illustrated in the quotation below, as well as pressuring fellow participants to agree with him, both eschews the label of 'soft' and notes that to be a counselor, requires intellectual superiority.

N: ...you meet a guy who's a counselor, who works professionally as a counselor or psychiatrist, are you going to see him as soft or as someone who is able to deal with other people's problems, someone who might have a higher mental intellect?

L: Oh Yea! Like us having a stronger, what you call it, emotional intelligence. [2]

The enthusiasm behind L's response raises the question of whether it was the seduction of being seen as intellectually superior or the discomfort of holding out against the pressure brought to bear by N's statement, or possibly both, that was behind the response. This framing of the counseling role seemed to enjoy considerable support.

In rationalizing and renouncing any agency in their choice to care for their peers through counseling, two participants explained that perhaps they were just born to help other people, to care.

Well surely you know that you've got like ability in an area and you know that you're not, like, disregarding that you're compassionate, disregarding that you could help people, and that you're actually doing something with the talents you have. [B1]

.. like you're born to help people, like you care. [A1]

That they could be counselors, with the possible non-hegemonic implications of this position, and still retain the respect of their peers was explained as being due to their current popular status in the school as well as the fact that they played sport. These points both suggest that adopting a somewhat alternate masculinity is risky

...because counselors are attached with, like, feminine. They may really think that you're not necessarily straight [X3]

However, being a peer counselor and retaining one's masculine identity might be possible, provided that some hegemonic normative behaviours are still displayed (for example, the playing of sport), or at least that peers know that you are clearly heterosexual:

I mean our friends know us really well so they know that us doing this isn't going to change us, it's not going to change the way we feel about ourselves, about the opposite sex, even [X3].

In the grade above us there might be a few guys who are like, who are going to be like "ya, look at those guys – they're the softer guys". But I think everyone here plays sport. [N2]

In underlining the retention of their manliness, M goes on to explicitly articulate the type of macho language that he, certainly, will use when talking to a troubled peer:

You can see an oke's not looking ... he's kind of looking down. I think he'll be quite happy that one of his friends has come to them and say "What's up Bru? What's happening?" Know what I mean? [M2]

In the group consisting of the older university peer counselors, the performance of different masculinities as plural and situational (Edley & Wetherell, 1997, Frosh et al, 2002, Redman, 2000), in other words a function of time and space was emphasized. Both participants admitted to keeping their role as peer counselors away from family, and making this role known only on campus.

Y, who had made his counseling role more widely known than X had lamented his decision to do so and also highlighted the spatial performance of his alternative masculine roles:

Ya, like when they see you they say “Man, I’m stressed. Can you counsel me?” And sometimes they don’t come to you alone; they say it sitting in a group - “Hey man, I’m stressed” and you go like “No! I can’t do it in public. I have to do it somewhere”. [Y3]

Although the “*somewhere*” referred to may superficially be linked with protecting the confidentiality of the counselee, it seems, in the context of the discussion, that it may also allude to a need for the counselor to protect his own masculinity and to keep different parts of his identity enactment separate.

X mentioned that he harboured fantasies of telling other people about his interest in counseling and that he had thoughts on how it might be to tell a group of friends. Indeed he articulated how masculine group performance might lead to group mocking and teasing, whereas in the company of a single friend, the chances of that friend “*respecting and listening*” to what you had to say increased significantly. Again it was apparent that taking on the role of counselor might be seen as somewhat transgressive in relation to masculinity and the open adoption of this identity practice required careful consideration.

In summary, it seemed that while these young men were in some respects affirming their status as peer counselors, they were also at pains to distance themselves from any suggestion that this might require adoption of more feminine attributes. In discussing counseling roles in the context of masculinity it was apparent that this engendered some disquiet or anxiety and that conversational work and counter-balancing enactment of masculinity were required to allow one to take on such a role. It seems that transgressive aspects of being a counselor were implicitly recognized, but that the tendency was to attempt to masculinize the activity of counseling in response to this awareness, rather than, for example, to embrace the possibility of a more androgynous identity. Having discussed the most significant themes that arose in the groups, the last part of the chapter offers some commentary on the kind of strategic patterns of engagement observed across themes.

5.6 META COMMENTARY ON STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING WITH MASCULINITY

In recent times the performative nature of masculinity has been widely acknowledged (Butler, 1990, 1997; Frosh et al, 2002; Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007; Whitehead, 2002) and has been alluded to and commented on throughout this chapter. It is not surprising that when attention is paid to the manner in which participants put their views forward, aspects of performance are again evident. This final section of the chapter will look more closely at aspects of this performance.

It is worthwhile to note that most of the rigid, unquestioning support for hegemonic masculine behaviours was verbalized towards the start of a discussion of a particular topic. As the discussion progressed and boys felt they had adequately demonstrated their masculinity to their peers and possibly the male facilitator, their views became less emphatic and the discussion more curious.

It is understandable that boys may initially have been fearful of taking up alternative or less hegemonic positions in front of their peers. It might thus be conjectured that the group's tendency to initially align themselves with dominant masculine norms might have been a strategy to ensure a safe environment from which to conduct exploratory forays into the terrain of non-hegemonic attributes. A similar strategy was observed in individual contributions. For example, a boy would comment on cultural differences, aligning himself with the hegemonic masculinity of his own culture initially, but then questioning the possibility of an alternative masculinity, perhaps to be found in another culture. Alignment with the hegemonic practice was first secured, and only then was the possibility of another way of being masculine entertained or explored.

A member of one of the school focus groups, N, set himself apart from his peers by virtue of his propensity to actively question hegemonic masculinity and suggest alternative masculine positions, even going so far as to encourage the acceptance of men as having a feminine side long before his peers in the group were considering that possibility. He, more than any

participant, tended to challenge the hegemonic opinions of the others. N presented physically as a very masculine boy, stocky and well built. He attended the focus group in his school track suit indicating he had either come from, or was due to go to, some sporting activity. He was the dominant 'alpha male' in the group and directed much of the conversation. It seemed he commanded more adulation in the group than did other members. Whether this gave him leeway in his views on gender is unclear, but evidence accumulated throughout the focus groups that generally some degree of 'feminine' character would be tolerated in a boy, provided it was 'balanced' with a healthy dose of public adherence to hegemonic masculinity in another area, such as participation in sport or dating a girl. This may have been the case with N.

Connell (1995) discusses how hegemonic masculinity is policed by men through processes of marginalization and derogation. Some evidence that such processes were present in the focus groups was reflected. This was achieved through group laughter, both direct and indirect challenging of assertions and inferences made about taking up certain positions (as will have been evident in some of the data presented thus far). For example, the implication that failing to embrace the new man suggests such an individual is 'emotionally challenged' or is not 'superior', pressures others to align themselves with the 'modern, emotionally expressive man' or risk being seen as emotionally challenged and inferior. The subtle policing and 'othering' inherent in the discussion of the 'new man' ironically mirrored the same policing tendencies noted in the literature in relation to hegemonic versions of masculinity. This reaffirms a point made by many theorists (for example, Morrell, 2001) that the dominant masculinity at any given point in time is often threatened and attacked by masculinities competing for the dominant position and when dominance is achieved, policing techniques remain largely unchanged.

The use of narratives of either maturity or intellectual or emotional superiority to build up counter normative discourse in aligning with 'new manhood' mirrors the findings of both Edley and Wetherell (1997) and Frosh et al, (2002). The former authors reported that in a group of sixth form, non rugby playing boys, the domination of the school environment by rugby players was challenged by labeling the rugby players "unthinking conformists, incapable or even scared perhaps of doing their own thing" (p.211). The implication that the non-rugby playing boys were intellectually superior is immediate. Frosh et al (2002) found

that one of the ways in which boys attempted to “resist the notion of hegemonic masculinities was to claim to be above it” (p.86). Wetherell and Edley, (1999), in commenting on the commonly employed discursive strategy of distancing oneself from macho stereotypes, suggest that distancing oneself from macho stereotypes may be “one of the most effective ways of being a ‘man’ ” (p.351).

Participants often found themselves trying to straddle splits in allegiance to hegemonic and non-hegemonic views or positions. At such times it seemed that they felt torn between wanting to identify with normative masculine behaviour, for example rejecting homosexuality, and at the same time wanting to demonstrate their membership of the ‘new male order’ which was understood by them as accepting alternative or non-hegemonic behaviour, views and ideologies. It seemed that in order to manage this internal rent one strategy was to employ projection of one type or another. Projection is a defensive mechanism by means of which intolerable feelings, impulses or thoughts are attributed to another and the individual then views the other as representing that projected part of him or herself. In the context of the discussion around hegemonic and non-hegemonic views and behaviour, such projections appeared to take either an historical ‘then-now’ or an ‘us-them’ form with the ‘intolerable’ parts or views being projected into the ‘then’ (past) or the ‘them’ (other). Examples of these projections were evident in most groups and occurred in relation to all of the four topics analyzed. Illustrations of the use of this kind of strategy include:

On male sexuality:

I think among the older generation it's still unacceptable for a man to be gay but for our age group it's sort of, it's becoming acceptable, it's ok now. Maybe like you can take your gay friend to a party and stuff, like today it's becoming socially acceptable. But with like the older generation, it will never change. It will still be wrong. [X3]

On men as the breadwinner:

... there's a new generation coming in that's starting to accept the fact that everyone is equal and it's ok being below where women are, whereas before we were seen as better than them... a couple of hundred years ago... [N2]

On men's toughness/hardness:

Like maybe fighting back then was at the top but I look down on someone who fights. I think it's like stupid. I think they would be less of a man in my books. Back then they'd be more of one. [A1]

On men's lack of emotional display:

I've never really seen a black guy cry but I see white fully grown men cry. I've never seen a black man cry. [C1]

In all these examples the speaker is attributing one set of views of behaviour to another time, place or culture, while attributing the converse to himself or his generation or his environment. In the first three examples, the views projected into the other are generally those associated with more conservative, perhaps traditional, hegemonic masculine attitudes, views, which if expressed openly and publicly in contemporary South Africa, would be likely to be labeled as inappropriate. In the last example, the speaker attributes the more 'shameful' behaviour to the other, even though he may unconsciously or even consciously want to own it as his own. In all cases the material which is unacceptable and hence projected is intolerable only because of a *new* hegemony developing around masculinity, a hegemony which marks conservative views as inappropriate. Failure to express more liberal views, including acceptance of gay men, emotional men, stay-at-home husbands and 'soft' men, holds the threat of incurring the disdain of peers in one's current context.. The internal dissonance stemming from suppression of 'old hegemonic' views in the face of the 'new hegemony' is attenuated through the projection of these views into others.

In chapter four, the findings chapter, brief mention was made of the fact that in one of the groups there was some discussion around whether to include a photograph depicting aggression in the final group selection. It was suggested that this may show men up in a negative light. This was not an isolated thought. When participants were asked at the end of each group how things might have been if females were present, one group suggested that they would have 'protected' men and would have refrained from saying things which portrayed men in a negative light. Another group concurred that they would have felt less free to speak because of their fear of being judged by the girls. These insights suggest that young men may be feeling a general sense of insecurity, vulnerability and neglect, possibly experiencing their worlds as somewhat persecutory and blaming in so far as gender relations

are concerned. A recent study of feminist reform in schools reported that these reforms left many boys feeling resentful and alienated (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore and Rennie, 1998). Furthermore, many boys resorted to a discourse of victimhood in order to try and rebuild male solidarity. The question might be asked whether similar feelings have been evoked in South African men following the radical politically motivated feminist reforms implemented over the last decade, and whether a similar discourse of victimhood will emerge. Indeed, at end of two of the groups (one school group and the university group), and off the record, participants expressed appreciation for the research being conducted into men, adding that so little is being done for men while so much is being done for women. It is interesting that these sentiments did not arise in the group discussions, and no strong discourse of victimhood was present – possibly as a result of some performance requirement participants felt – but their addition to the proceedings as a *post script* is evidence of some male discontent which, as Kenway et al's (1998) study also suggested, only galvanizes the pro-macho spirit in boys rather than encouraging more useful reflection on masculine identity.

Negotiating being a young man in South Africa at this time seems to require young men to negotiate conflicting feelings around societal and personal views on what it means to be a man. This chapter has looked at four themes pertaining to masculinity which appeared to elicit a wide array of ambivalent feelings in participants. The various ways in which participants positioned themselves relative to hegemonic masculine dictates were explored and discussed. The influence of the participants' choice to be peer counselors, and hence potential adoption of what might be considered an alternative masculinity, on their negotiation of masculine identity positions was also explored. Finally, strategies employed by the participants to manage their often ambivalent or contradictory opinions and feelings were identified and discussed.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Recent research in the area of young masculinities has underlined both the possibility of the interrogation of traditional masculine roles by many young males, as well as the multi-voiced performance of masculinity by young males. A lot of attention has been focused on the often contrasting and contradictory positions assumed by young males as they struggle to meet the masculine related demands of society, while at the same time seeking to assuage the inner psychological tensions that arise as they consider the potential positions available to them from a spectrum of gendered behaviours.

This study has sought to gain further understanding of constructions of both hegemonic and alternative aspects of contemporary masculinity. To this end the study explored constructions of, and ideas about, masculinity amongst young male peer counselors.

6.1 CENTRAL FINDINGS

Findings from this study were generally in line with other recent research in the area of masculinity studies, especially research relating to the experiences of adolescents boys.

In the photographs which the participants were tasked with taking to represent ‘what it means to be a man in South Africa today’, and which they brought to the focus groups, the content was generally neither surprising nor unexpected. The photographic images tended to articulate traditional masculine roles and expectations including displays of aggression, male bonding, and demonstrations of strength and power. There was some allusion to ‘new masculinities’, generally in the form of photographs conveying images related to grooming and fashion.

In the discussions which arose in the focus groups, it was again themes strongly connected with hegemonic and traditional versions of masculinity that claimed the most conversation

space. There was evidence of some contestation of several hegemonic masculine imperatives and this study looked in detail at four such themes or issues, namely emotional stoicism, the role of the man as breadwinner, the display of toughness, and normative heterosexuality. During debates around these issues participants in the various focus groups adopted both pro- and anti-hegemonic stances. It is clear from the results that many previously assumed or taken for granted characteristics of masculinity are being questioned by young males and are no longer unequivocally accepted as an essential part of being a man. These include the four areas of masculinity mentioned above.

In summarizing some aspects of the findings the following points are worth noting. Regarding homosexuality, although participants voiced some tolerance of this sexual orientation, acceptance seemed harder to voice and hegemonic masculinity was still largely constructed in contrast to a rejected 'gay' identity. The pejorative use of the label 'gay' seemed ubiquitous in the participants' worlds and served as a strong tool in policing masculinity. In line with other research, the homophobia displayed by participants seemed less about a fear of homosexuals than about being labeled as a homosexual and incurring the opprobrium and rejection of peers. Changes in gender based occupational roles, for example the loss of the position of *primary* breadwinner by men, did not seem unduly problematic to the participants, but the perception of a concomitant loss of power and control in the family did seem to generate some degree of unease. Participants seemed most aware of the cost of living up to the 'masculine code' in the discussion around emotional stoicism with men's paucity of emotional expression being understood as contributing to psychological problems. However, in relation to emotional expression the participants' contributions demonstrated a continued adherence to traditional expectations. In addition to emotional stoicism, participants seemed to focus on men's aggression as a signifier of male toughness. They most generally resorted to an essentialist explanation of the origin of men's aggression, ascribing it to biological factors, although ironically acknowledging that aggressive men are not the heroes they once were and tending to distance themselves from overt displays of aggression.

What was clear across all groups and in relation to most themes was that participants tended to first assert strongly pro-hegemonic views when a topic was introduced. Only after having demonstrated their 'masculinity' through this more conventional positioning of themselves did they venture into more contested areas and express support, even if limited at times, for

non-hegemonic versions of masculinity or more critical positions. Possibly the clearest finding from the research was that it seemed that the young men and boys felt comfortable and 'safe' in contesting certain hegemonic masculine imperatives and taking up alternative positions provided they felt they had demonstrated their adherence to the hegemonic code of masculinity sufficiently clearly in other arenas. The boys suggested that it was their strong performance in traditional areas of masculinity, such as sport and heterosexual interest, that allowed them to then take up the less traditional role of peer counselors.

6.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The choice and size of any research sample has critical implications for the contextualization of the research results in larger society. With eighty percent of the participants being drawn from an upper class, private, Christian, all boys school there is some limitation to the possibility of extending or generalizing findings from this research to wider male populations. Indeed there is evidence to suggest that male adolescents of comparable age, and living in more disadvantaged areas, may align themselves quite differently vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity in comparison to this study's participants (Langa & Eagle, 2007). The entertainment by the school boys of fairly liberal views is conceivably a function of their middle to upper class wealth and social status. The effect of being schooled in a Christian environment should also not be overlooked.

The above notwithstanding, the value of the results from this study may well lie in the understanding that, firstly, such views and opinions are 'out there', part of a wider pool of positions relating to hegemonic masculinity. Secondly, the possibility that boys such as those who participated in this research will become future leaders, politicians and captains of industry, by virtue of their socio-economic status and ultimate education, and may thus be involved in the shaping of future decisions and policy in South Africa, should be borne in mind. In this light then, this study was successful in elucidating the views and opinions of a sample of boys from a larger population of adolescents whose future influence on policy and decisions may not be insignificant. In order to garner a set of views and opinions representative of a wider class of male adolescents, future research should aim to include

participants from several socio-economic strata, across varying religious beliefs and include more cultural variation than did this sample.

In terms of methodology, although a rich diversity of opinion was elicited in the group discussions, several authors have commented on the different presentations of participants in individual interviews as compared to group discussions. In particular, as noted by Mac an Ghail (1994) and Frosh et al (2002) focus groups may elicit competitive performances as well as performances among peers likely to hide the more vulnerable aspects of the individual. Thus this study's reliance on focus groups, although appropriate for a study of limited scope, precludes views and opinions which the participants may have shared in individual interviews but which they may have withheld in the group discussions. Nevertheless it was felt that interesting and rich data emerged in the groups and that aspects of group interaction allowed the researcher to more closely observe some of the strategic dimensions involved in enacting masculinity or 'being a boy/man' in public. Future studies with a broader brief should consider the inclusion of individual interviews.

Although the study highlighted the fact that hegemonic imperatives are being questioned in several important areas, the degree to which boys are willing to 'walk the talk' and actively adopt non-hegemonic positions is uncertain. Future research should aim at not only identifying areas of contestation, but also the degree to which boys are willing to adopt and live out non-hegemonic positions. Allied to this would be an investigation into what steps might be taken to make it easier for young men to adopt alternative masculine positions.

6.3 REFLEXIVE COMMENT

One of the limitations of the use of a qualitative methodology is the subjectivity of the researcher. During the facilitation of the focus groups the researcher had certain ideas as to what areas of interest in studying masculinity might be useful for inclusion in the research. Consequently some of the facilitating interventions on the part of the researcher influenced the content of material that emerged and the level of engagement with particular topics.

The researcher was also careful to reflect on the role of personal, ideological and cultural assumptions in the analysis and interpretation of the transcripts. Discussion with a research supervisor served to limit the influence of personal views and standpoints in the analysis stage of the research. However, the analysis and organization of the results cannot be regarded as objectively definitive and the discussion offers only one of many possible sets of interpretations.

The possibility that the researcher may have influenced the discussion and the views posited by participants other than through directive interventions was also considered. In this regard two possible influences may have been at play in the focus groups. Firstly, it was made known to the participants via the letter of introduction that the researcher was training as a psychologist and had an interest in alternative masculinities. This self disclosure may have led to participants, who had self selected as peer counselors, identifying with the facilitator as psychologist/counselor and adopting a certain way of presenting themselves and their opinions, perhaps even sharing opinions on alternative masculinity which they thought might be helpful to the facilitator rather than being their true conviction. Secondly, and as noted by Frosh et al (2002), male facilitators of young men's groups, whose aim has been to encourage self reflection and exploration of feelings and relationships, tend to have their sexuality questioned and are often considered as gay. Consequently the views and opinions expressed by participants in this research, particularly on issues of normative sexuality, may have been influenced by the participant's fantasies regarding the facilitator's own sexual orientation. However, within these groups it seemed that participants were relatively trusting and open in front of the interviewer and felt able to share a range of views, both traditional and less so. There was no inference that they perceived the researcher as homosexual and their inclusion of the researcher in certain humorous exchanges seemed rather to suggest his inclusion in heteronormativity

As Whitehead (2002) comments, while feminists may desire the eradication of the male and female genders, it is unlikely that the categories of masculinity and femininity are going to disappear within the near future. Indeed, so long as masculine/male/man involves the rejection of feminine/female/woman, the polarity of the genders may be maintained or even strengthened. Perhaps what can be hoped for at best, is the possible adoption by men of behaviours and practices which may be considered less problematic for women, for society as

a whole and indeed for men themselves. The opinions of these young men expressed in the focus groups suggests that there is some space for contestation and reconsideration of traditional versions of masculinity despite the fact that traditional versions are still very clearly operative and influential.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A : INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE



School of Human and Community Development

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559

Email: nick-d@highveldmail.co.za

Cell: 082 560 5286

Dear Potential Participant

My name is Nick Davies and I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a masters degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is masculinity, in particular on how some young men engage in a public behavior which is generally seen as being not typically masculine, for example practicing as a self-selected counselor. I am interested in what young South African men think about their own identity and masculine identity in general and I would like to invite you to participate in my research study.

Taking part in this research will entail two things, namely creating a portfolio of photographs which depict, for you, "What it means to be a man/boy in South Africa", as well as participating in two group discussion on this topic. For the portfolio a disposable camera will be provided for you and processing of the film will be done at no cost to yourself. Some of the photos that you take may be printed in the final research document. All photos will be returned to the respective photographers at the end of the research project.

The discussions you will be asked to attend will last between 90 minutes and two hours and will focus to some extent on the photographs that you and other participants have taken. The group discussions will be at a time and a place convenient to yourself. With your permission this discussion will be recorded and transcribed for later study. All the participants in the group will be asked to sign an agreement to keep the content of the group discussion confidential. However I cannot give you a guarantee that participants will absolutely abide by this agreement although they will be strongly encouraged to do so.

Participation in this research is voluntary and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged for their choice to participate or not. All of your responses will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify you will be included in the research report. However some direct quotes from the discussion may be cited in my research report but this will be without any identification of the source of the comment. The discussion material (tapes and transcripts) will be kept in a safe location and only myself my supervisor and a transcriber bound by confidentiality will have access to them. You may refuse to answer any question and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

All results of my research will be reported in a dissertation and possibly reproduced in a psychological journal. Participants will have free access to the results and may request a summary from myself. The final analysis of the data collected may be included in a wider study on masculinity in young South Africans which is being sponsored by the South Africa Netherlands research program on Alternatives in development (SANPAD).

If you choose to participate in the study please fill in your details on the form below and leave it with me now. I will contact you within two weeks in order to discuss your participation. Alternatively I can be contacted at either the telephone number or e-mail address given above.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards

Nick Davies

**APPENDIX B : CONSENT FORM (FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPAL,
HEAD OR APPROPRIATE AUTHORITY)**



Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa
Email: nick-d@highvldmail.co.za*

I _____, in my capacity as
_____ at St David's Marist Brother's College, Inanda, consent to
allowing Nick Davies to conduct his research, as set out in his proposal, with those
learners at this school who consent to participate and whose parents give assent to
their participation.

Signed _____

Dated _____

APPENDIX C : PARENTS' INFORMATION LETTER



Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa
Email: nick-d@highvldmail.co.za*

Dear Parent

My name is Nick Davies and I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a masters degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is masculinity, in particular on how some young men engage in a public behavior which is generally seen as being not typically masculine, for example practicing as a self-selected counselor. I am interested in what young South African men think about their own identity and masculine identity in general.

The principal of St David's has given his permission for me to approach learners at the school. Your son has indicated that he is interested in participating in my research and I would like to tell you a little more about what this entails.

Participation in the research is on a voluntary basis and there will be no negative repercussions for those who do not volunteer or who volunteer and then withdraw at any stage thereafter prior to submission of the report. Taking part in this research will entail two things for him, namely creating a portfolio of photographs and participating in two group discussion on this topic. A disposable camera will be provided to him for the purpose of the portfolio. The discussions your son will be asked to attend will be between 90 minutes and two hours and will be at a time and a place convenient to the boys who participate. All participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality form at the start of the group discussions. Further, nothing which could lead to any participant being identified or associated with an idea will be reported in the study.

All results of my research will be reported in a dissertation and possibly reproduced in a psychological journal. Participants will have free access to the results and may request a summary from myself. The final analysis of the data collected may be included in a wider study on masculinity in young South Africans which is being sponsored by the South Africa Netherlands research program on Alternatives in development (SANPAD).

Your son has also been given a letter of invitation which contains more specific details of what his involvement in the project entails. If you assent to allowing your son to participate in this research, please indicate this by completing the form below.

Your son's participation in this study would be greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards

Nick Davies

APPENDIX D : PARENTS' ASSENT FORM



Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa
Email: nick-d@highvldmail.co.za*

I _____, in my capacity as parent/guardian of
_____ hereby give my assent to his
participation in the research to be conducted by Nick Davies.

Signed _____

Dated _____